

ALL SHORT STORIES, POETRY, NOVELS, PLAYS & ESSAYS

The Complete Works
of
*Rabindranath
Tagore*

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ALL SHORT STORIES, POETRY,
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Introduction

The Works of Rabindranath Tagore consist of poems, novels, short stories, dramas, and essays that Bengali poet and Brahmo philosopher Rabindranath Tagore created over his lifetime. This ebook presents a collection of all major works of Tagore. A dynamic table of contents allows you to jump directly to the work selected.

Tagore's literary reputation is disproportionately influenced very much by regard for his poetry; however, he also wrote novels, essays, short stories, travelogues, dramas, and thousands of songs. The poems of Rabindranath Tagore are among the most haunting and tender in Indian and in world literature, expressing a profound and passionate human yearning. His ceaselessly inventive works deal with such subjects as the interplay between God and the world, the eternal and transient, and with the paradox of an endlessly changing universe that is in tune with unchanging harmonies. Poems such as 'Earth' and 'In the Eyes of a Peacock' present a picture of natural processes unaffected by human concerns, while others, as in 'Recovery 14', convey the poet's bewilderment about his place in the world.

Tagore introduced new prose and verse forms and the use of colloquial language into Bengali literature, thereby freeing it from traditional models based on classical Sanskrit. He was highly influential in introducing the best of Indian culture to the West and vice versa, and he is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of modern South Asia.

About the Author

Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was the youngest son of Debendranath Tagore, a leader of the Brahmo Samaj. He was educated at home and although at seventeen he was sent to England for formal schooling, he did not finish his studies there. In his mature years, in addition to his many-sided literary activities, he managed the family estates, a project which brought him into close touch with common humanity and increased his interest in social reforms. He also started an experimental school at Shantiniketan where he tried his Upanishadic ideals of education. From time to time he participated in the Indian nationalist movement, though in his own non-sentimental and visionary way; and Gandhi, the political father of modern India, was his devoted friend. Tagore was knighted by the ruling British Government in 1915, but within a few years he resigned the honour as a protest against British policies in India.

Tagore had early success as a writer in his native Bengal. With his translations of some of his poems he became rapidly known in the West. In fact, his fame attained a luminous height, taking him across continents on lecture tours and tours of friendship. For the world he became the voice of India's spiritual heritage; and for India, especially for Bengal, he became a great living institution.

Although, Tagore wrote successfully in all literary genres, he was first of all a poet. Among his fifty and odd volumes of poetry are *Manasi* (1890) {The Ideal One}, *Sonar Tari* (1894) {The Golden Boat}, *Gitanjali* (1910) {Song Offerings}, *Gitimalya* (1914) {Wreath of Songs}, and *Balaka* (1916) {The Flight of Cranes}. The English renderings of his poetry, which include *The Gardener* (1913), *Fruit-Gathering* (1916), and *The Fugitive* (1921), do not generally correspond to particular volumes in the original Bengali; and in spite of its title, *Gitanjali: Song Offerings* (1912), the most acclaimed of them, contains poems from other works besides its namesake. Tagore's major plays are *Raja* (1910) {The King of the Dark Chamber}, *Dakghar* (1912) {The Post Office}, *Achalayatan* (1912) {The Immovable}, *Muktadhara* (1922) {The Waterfall}, and *Raktakaravi* (1926) {Red Oleanders}. He is the author of several volumes of short stories and a number of novels, among them *Gora* (1910), *Ghare-Baire* (1916) {The Home and the

World}, and *Yogayog* (1929) {Crosscurrents}. Besides these, he wrote musical dramas, dance dramas, essays of all types, travel diaries, and two autobiographies, one in his middle years and the other shortly before his death in 1941. Tagore also left numerous drawings and paintings, and songs for which he wrote the music himself.

Poetry

1. Ama and Vinayaka

Night on the battlefield: AMA meets her father VINAYAKA.

AMA : Father!

VINAYAKA : Shameless wanton, you call me “Father”! You who did not shrink from a Mussulman husband!

AMA : Though you have treacherously killed my husband, yet you are my father; and I hold back a widow’s tears, lest they bring God’s curse on you. Since we have met on this battlefield after years of separation, let me bow to your feet and take my last leave!

VINAYAKA : Where will you go, Ama? The tree on which you built your impious nest is hewn down. Where will you take shelter?

AMA : I have my son.

VINAYAKA : Leave him! Cast never a fond look back on the result of a sin expiated with blood! Think where to go.

AMA : Death’s open gates are wider than a father’s love!

VINAYAKA : Death indeed swallows sins as the sea swallows the mud of rivers. But you are to die neither to-night nor here. Seek some solitary shrine of holy Shiva far from shamed kindred and all neighbours; bathe three times a day in sacred Ganges, and, while reciting God’s name, listen to the last bell of evening worship, that Death may look tenderly upon you, as a father on his sleeping child whose eyes are still wet with tears. Let him gently carry you into his own great silence, as the Ganges carries a fallen flower on its stream, washing every stain away to render it, a fit offering, to the sea.

AMA : But my son—— VINAYAKA : Again I bid you not to speak of him. Lay yourself once more in a father’s arms, my child, like a babe fresh from the womb of Oblivion, your second mother.

AMA : To me the world has become a shadow. Your words I hear, but cannot take to heart. Leave me, father, leave me alone! Do not try to bind me with your love, for its bands are red with my husband’s blood.

VINAYAKA : Alas! No flower ever returns to the parent branch it dropped from. How can you call him husband who forcibly snatched you from Jivaji to whom you had been sacredly affianced? I shall never forget that night! In the wedding

hall we sat anxiously expecting the bridegroom, for the auspicious hour was dwindling away. Then in the distance appeared the glare of torches, and bridal strains came floating up the air. We shouted for joy: women blew their conch-shells. A procession of palanquins entered the courtyard: but while we were asking, "Where is Jivaji?" armed men burst out of the litters like a storm, and bore you off before we knew what had happened. Shortly after, Jivaji came to tell us he had been waylaid and captured by a Mussulman noble of the Vijapur court. That night Jivaji and I touched the nuptial fire and swore bloody death to this villain. After waiting long, we have been freed from our solemn pledge tonight; and the spirit of Jivaji, who lost his life in this battle, lawfully claims you for wife.

AMA : Father, it may be that I have disgraced the rites of your house, but my honour is unsullied; I loved him to whom I bore a son. I remember the night when I received two secret messages, one from you, one from my mother; yours said: "I send you the knife; kill him!" My mother's: "I send you the poison; end your life!" Had unholy force dishonoured me, your double bidding had been obeyed. But my body was yielded only after love had given me—love all the greater, all the purer, in that it overcame the hereditary recoil of our blood from the Mussulman.

Enter RAMA, Ama's mother.

AMA : Mother mine, I had not hoped to see you again. Let me take dust from your feet.

RAMA : Touch me not with impure hands!

AMA : I am as pure as yourself.

RAMA : To whom have you surrendered your honour?

AMA : To my husband.

RAMA : Husband? A Mussulman the husband of a Brahmin woman?

AMA : I do not merit contempt: I am proud to say I never despised my husband though a Mussulman. If Paradise will reward your devotion to your husband, then the same Paradise waits for your daughter, who has been as true a wife.

RAMA : Are you indeed a true wife?

AMA : Yes.

RAMA : Do you know how to die without flinching?

AMA : I do.

RAMA : Then let the funeral fire be lighted for you! See, there lies the body of your husband.

AMA : Jivaji?

RAMA : Yes, Jivaji. He was your husband by plighted troth. The baffled fire of the nuptial God has raged into the hungry fire of death, and the interrupted wedding shall be completed now.

VINAYAKA : Do not listen, my child. Go back to your son, to your own nest darkened with sorrow. My duty has been performed to its extreme cruel end, and nothing now remains for you to do.—Wife, your grief is fruitless. Were the branch dead which was violently snapped from our tree, I should give it to the fire. But it has sent living roots into a new soil and is bearing flowers and fruits. Allow her, without regret, to obey the laws of those among whom she has loved. Come, wife, it is time we cut all worldly ties and spent our remainder lives in the seclusion of some peaceful pilgrim shrine.

RAMA : I am ready: but first must tread into dust every sprout of sin and shame that has sprung from the soil of our life. A daughter's infamy stains her mother's honour. That black shame shall feed glowing fire to-night, and raise a true wife's memorial over the ashes of my daughter.

AMA : Mother, if by force you unite me in death with one who was not my husband, then will you bring a curse upon yourself for desecrating the shrine of the Eternal Lord of Death.

RAMA : Soldiers, light the fire; surround the woman!

AMA : Father!

VINAYAKA : Do not fear. Alas, my child, that you should ever have to call your father to save you from your mother's hands!

AMA : Father!

VINAYAKA : Come to me, my darling child! Mere vanity are these man-made laws, splashing like spray against the rock of heaven's ordinance. Bring your son to me, and we will live together, my daughter. A father's love, like God's rain, does not judge but is poured forth from an abounding source.

RAMA : Where would you go? Turn back!—Soldiers, stand firm in your loyalty to your master Jivaji! Do your last sacred duty by him!

AMA : Father!

VINAYAKA : Free her, soldiers! She is my daughter.

SOLDIERS : She is the widow of our master.

VINAYAKA : Her husband, though a Mussulman, was staunch in his own faith.

RAMA : Soldiers, keep this old man under control!

AMA : I defy you, mother!—You, soldiers, I defy!—for through death and love I win to freedom.

A painter was selling pictures at the fair; followed by servants, there passed the son of a minister who in youth had cheated this painter's father so that he had died of a broken heart.

The boy lingered before the pictures and chose one for himself. The painter flung a cloth over it and said he would not sell it.

After this the boy pined heart-sick till his father came and offered a large price. But the painter kept the picture unsold on his shop-wall and grimly sat before it, saying to himself, "This is my revenge."

The sole form this painter's worship took was to trace an image of his god every morning.

And now he felt these pictures grow daily more different from those he used to paint.

This troubled him, and he sought in vain for an explanation till one day he started up from work in horror, the eyes of the god he had just drawn were those of the minister, and so were the lips.

He tore up the picture, crying, "My revenge has returned on my head!"

*

The General came before the silent and angry King and saluting him said: "The village is punished, the men are stricken to dust, and the women cower in their unlit homes afraid to weep aloud."

The High Priest stood up and blessed the King and cried: "God's mercy is ever upon you."

The Clown, when he heard this, burst out laughing and startled the court. The King's frown darkened.

"The honour of the throne," said the minister, "is upheld by the King's prowess and the blessing of Almighty God."

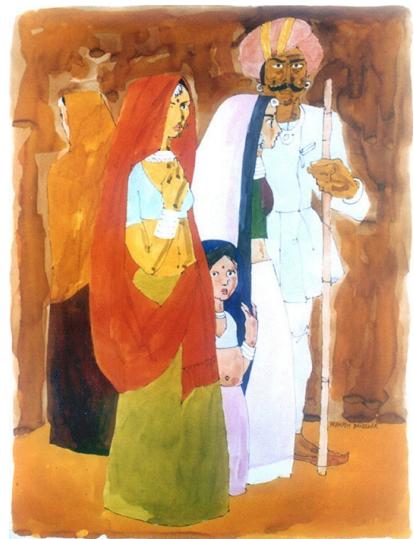
Louder laughed the Clown, and the King growled,—"Unseemly mirth!"

"God has showered many blessings upon your head," said the Clown; "the one he bestowed on me was the gift of laughter."

"This gift will cost you your life," said the King, gripping his sword with his right hand.

Yet the Clown stood up and laughed till he laughed no more.

A shadow of dread fell upon the Court, for they heard that laughter echoing in the depth of God's silence.



2. Baul Songs ¹

1. The Bauls are a sect of religious mendicants in Bengal, unlettered and unconventional, whose songs are loved and sung by the people. The literal meaning of the word “Baul” is “the Mad.”

1

*This longing to meet in the play of love, my Lover, is not only mine but yours.
Your lips can smile, your flute make music, only through delight in my love;
therefore you are importunate even as I.*

2

*I sit here on the road; do not ask me to walk further.
If your love can be complete without mine let me turn back from seeking you.
I refuse to beg a sight of you if you do not feel my need.
I am blind with market dust and mid-day glare, and so wait, in hopes that
your heart, my heart's lover, will send you to find me.*

3

*I am poured forth in living notes of joy and sorrow by your breath.
Mornings and evenings in summer and in rains, I am fashioned to music.
Should I be wholly spent in some flight of song, I shall not grieve, the tune is
so dear to me.*

4

*My heart is a flute he has played on. If ever it fall into other hands let him
fling it away.
My lover's flute is dear to him, therefore if to-day alien breath have entered it
and sounded strange notes, let him break it to pieces and strew the dust*

with them.

5

*In love the aim is neither pain nor pleasure but love only.
While free love binds, division destroys it, for love is what unites.
Love is lit from love as fire from fire, but whence came the first flame?
In your being it leaps under the rod of pain.
Then, when the hidden fire flames forth, the in and the out are one and all
barriers fall in ashes.
Let the pain glow fiercely, burst from the heart and beat back darkness, need
you be afraid?
The poet says, “Who can buy love without paying its price? When you fail to
give yourself you make the whole world miserly.”*



6

*Eyes see only dust and earth, but feel with the heart, and know pure joy.
The delights blossom on all sides in every form, but where is your heart's
thread to make a wreath of them?
My master's flute sounds through all things, drawing me out of my lodgings
wherever they may be, and while I listen I know that every step I take is in
my master's house.
For he is the sea, he is the river that leads to the sea, and he is the landing-
place.*

7

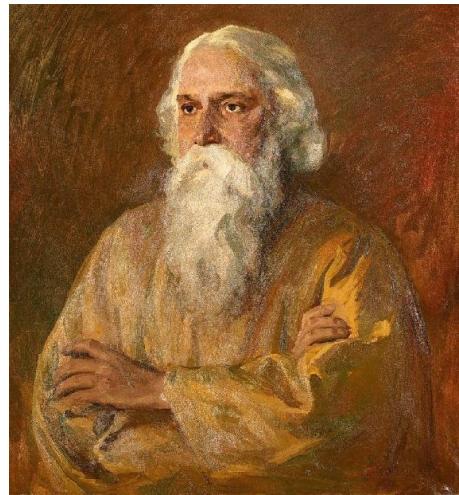
*Strange ways has my guest.
He comes at times when I am unprepared, yet how can I refuse him?
I watch all night with lighted lamp; he stays away; when the light goes out
and the room is bare he comes claiming his seat, and can I keep him
waiting?
I laugh and make merry with friends, then suddenly I start up, for lo! He
passes me by in sorrow, and I know my mirth was vain.
I have often seen a smile in his eyes when my heart ached, then I knew my
sorrow was not real.
Yet I never complain when I do not understand him.*

8

*I am the boat, you are the sea, and also the boatman.
Though you never make the shore, though you let me sink, why should I be
foolish and afraid?
Is reaching the shore a greater prize than losing myself with you?
If you are only the haven, as they say, then what is the sea?
Let it surge and toss me on its waves, I shall be content.
I live in you whatever and however you appear. Save me or kill me as you
wish, only never leave me in other hands.*

9

*Make way, O bud, make way, burst open thy heart and make way.
The opening spirit has overtaken thee, canst thou remain a bud any longer?*



Hari Ki Diye Pujibo Bolo – Baul Song written by Rabindranath Tagore

3. Collected Poems

3.1. Boro-Budur

The sun shone on a far-away morning, while the forest murmured its hymn of praise to light; and the hills, veiled in vapour, dimly glimmered like earth's dream in purple.

The King sat alone in the coconut grove, his eyes drowned in a vision, his heart exultant with the rapturous hope of spreading the chant of adoration along the unending path of time:

'Let Buddha be my refuge.'

His words found utterance in a deathless speech of delight, in an ecstasy of forms.

The island took it upon her heart; her hill raised it to the sky.

Age after age, the morning sun daily illumined its great meaning.

While the harvest was sown and reaped in the near-by fields by the stream, and life, with its chequered light, made pictured shadows on its epochs of changing screen, the prayer, once Uttered in the quiet green of an ancient morning, ever rose in the midst of the hide-and-seek of tumultuous time:

'Let Buddha be my refuge.'

The King, at the end of his days, is merged in the shadow of a nameless night among the unremembered, leaving his salutation in an imperishable rhythm of stone which ever cries:

'Let Buddha be my refuge.'

Generations of pilgrims came on the quest of an immortal voice for their worship; and this sculptured hymn, in a grand symphony of gestures, took up their lowly names and uttered for them:

'Let Buddha be my refuge.'



The spirit of those words has been muffled in mist in this mocking age of unbelief, and the curious crowds gather here to gloat in the gluttony of an irreverent sight.

Man to-day has no peace, his heart arid with pride. He clamours for an ever-increasing speed in a fury of chase for objects that ceaselessly run, but never reach a meaning.

And now is the time when he must come groping at last to the sacred silence, which stands still in the midst of surging centuries of noise, till he feels assured that in an immeasurable love dwells the final meaning of Freedom, whose prayer is:

'Let Buddha be my refuge.'

3.2. The Child

1

'What of the night?' they ask.

No answer comes.

For the blind Time gropes in a maze and knows not its path or purpose.

The darkness in the valley stares like the dead eye-sockets of a giant, the clouds like a nightmare oppress the sky, and the massive shadows lie scattered like the torn limbs of the night.

A lurid glow waxes and wanes on the horizon, is it an ultimate threat from an alien-star, or an elemental hunger licking the sky?

Things are deliriously wild, they are a noise whose grammar is a groan, and words smothered out of shape and sense.

They are the refuse, the rejections, the fruitless failures of life, abrupt ruins of prodigal pride, fragments of a bridge over the oblivion Of a vanished stream, godless shrines that shelter reptiles, marble steps that lead to blankness.

Sudden tumults rise in the sky and wrestle and a startled shudder runs along the sleepless hours.

Are they from desperate floods hammering against their cave walls, or from some fanatic storms whirling and howling incantations?

Are they the cry of an ancient forest flinging up its hoarded fire in a last extravagant suicide, or screams of a paralytic crowd scourged by lunatics blind and deaf?

Underneath the noisy terror a stealthy hum creeps up like bubbling volcanic mud, a mixture of sinister whispers, rumours and slanders, and hisses of derision.

The men gathered there are vague like torn pages of an epic.

Groping in groups or single, their torchlight tattoos their faces in chequered lines, in patterns of frightfulness.

The maniacs suddenly strike their neighbours on suspicion and a hubbub of an indiscriminate fight bursts forth echoing from hill to hill.

The women weep and wail, they cry that their children are lost in a wilderness of contrary paths with confusion at the end.

Others defiantly ribald shake with raucous laughter their lascivious limbs unshrinkingly loud, for they think that nothing matters.

2

There on the crest of the hill stands the Man of faith amid the snow-white silence, He scans the sky for some signal of light, and when the clouds thicken and the night birds scream as they fly he cries, ‘Brothers, despair not, for Man is great.’

But they never heed him, for they believe that the elemental brute is eternal and goodness in its depth is darkly cunning in deception.

When beaten and wounded they cry, ‘Brother, where art thou?’

The answer comes, ‘I am by your side.’

But they cannot see in the dark and they argue that the voice is of their own desperate desire, that men are ever condemned to fight for phantoms in an interminable desert of mutual menace.

3

The clouds part, the morning star appears in the East, a breath of relief springs up from the heart of the earth, the murmur of leaves ripples along the forest path, and the early bird sings.

‘The time has come,’ proclaims the Man of faith.

‘The time for what?’

‘For the pilgrimage.’

They sit and think, they know not the meaning, and yet they seem to understand according to their desires.

The touch of the dawn goes deep into the soil and life shivers along through the roots of all things.

‘To the pilgrimage of fulfilment,’ a small voice whispers, nobody knows whence.

Taken up by the crowd it swells into a mighty meaning.

Men raise their heads and look up, women lift their arms in reverence,

children clap their hands and laugh.

The early glow of the sun shines like a golden garland on the forehead of the Man of faith, and they all cry: ‘Brother, we salute thee!’

4

Men begin to gather from all quarters, from across the, seas, the mountains and pathless wastes, They come from the valley of the Nile and the banks of the Ganges, from the snow-sunk uplands of Thibet, from high-walled cities of glittering towers, from the dense dark—tangle of savage wilderness.

Some walk, some ride on camels, horses and elephants, on chariots with banners vieing with the clouds of dawn, The priests of all creeds burn incense, chanting verses as they go.

The monarchs march at the head of their armies, lances flashing in the sun and drums beating loud.

Ragged beggars and courtiers pompously decorated, agile young scholars and teachers burdened with learned age jostle each other in the crowd.

Women come chatting and laughing, mothers, maidens and brides, with offerings of flowers and fruit, sandal paste and scented water.

Mingled with them is the harlot, shrill of voice and loud in tint and tinsel.

The gossip is there who secretly poisons the well of human sympathy and chuckles.

The maimed and the cripple join the throng with the blind and the sick, the dissolute, the thief and the man who makes a trade of his God for profit and mimics the saint.

‘The fulfilment!’

They dare not talk aloud, but in their minds they magnify their own greed, and dream of boundless power, of unlimited impunity for pilfering and plunder, and eternity of feast for their unclean gluttonous flesh.

5

The man of faith moves on along pitiless paths strewn with flints over scorching sands and steep mountainous tracks.

They follow him, the strong and the weak, the aged and young, the rulers of realms, the tillers of the soil.

Some grow weary and footsore, some angry and suspicious.

*They ask at every dragging step, ‘How much further is the end?’
The Man of faith sings in answer; they scowl and shake their fists and yet
they cannot resist him; the pressure of the moving mass and indefinite hope
push them forward.
They shorten their sleep and curtail their rest, they out-vie each other in their
speed, they are ever afraid lest they may be too late for their chance while
others be more fortunate.
The days pass, the ever-receding horizon tempts them with renewed lure of
the unseen till they are sick.
Their faces harden, their curses grow louder and louder.*

6

*It is night.
The travellers spread their mats on the ground under the banyan tree.
A gust of wind blows out the lamp and the darkness deepens like a sleep into
a swoon.
Someone from the crowd suddenly stands up and pointing to the leader with
merciless finger breaks out: ‘False prophet, thou hast deceived us!’
Others take up the cry one by one, women hiss their hatred and men growl.
At last one bolder than others suddenly deals him a blow.
They cannot see his face, but fall upon him in a fury of destruction and hit
him till he lies prone upon the ground his life extinct.
The night is still, the sound of the distant waterfall comes muffled and a faint
breath of jasmine floats in the air.*

7

*The pilgrims are afraid.
The woman begins to cry, the men in an agony of wretchedness shout at them
to stop.
Dogs break out barking and are cruelly whipped into silence broken by
moans.
The night seems endless and men and women begin to wrangle as to who
among them was to blame.
They shriek and shout and as they are ready to unsheathe their knives the
darkness pales, the morning light overflows the mountain tops.*

Suddenly they become still and gasp for breath as they gaze at the figure lying dead.

The women sob out loud and men hide their faces in their hands.

A few try to slink away unnoticed, but their crime keeps them chained to their victim.

They ask each other in bewilderment, ‘Who will show us the path?’

The old man from the East bends his head and says: ‘The Victim.’

They sit still and silent.

Again speaks the old man, ‘We refused him in doubt, we killed him in anger, now we shall accept him in love, for in his death he lives in the life of us all, the great Victim.’

And they all stand up and mingle their voices and sing, ‘Victory to the Victim.’

8

‘To the pilgrimage’ calls the young, ‘to love, to power, to knowledge, to wealth overflowing,’

‘We shall conquer the world and the world beyond this,’ they all cry exultant in a thundering cataract of voices, The meaning is not the same to them all, but only the impulse, the moving confluence of wills that reck not death and disaster.

No longer they ask for their way, no more doubts are there to burden their minds or weariness to clog their feet.

The spirit of the Leader is within them and ever beyond them the Leader who has crossed death and all limits.

They travel over the fields where the seeds are sown, by the granary where the harvest is gathered, and across the barren soil where famine dwells and skeletons cry for the return of their flesh.

They pass through populous cities humming with life, through dumb desolation bugging its ruined past, and hovels for the unclad and unclean, a mockery of home for the homeless.

They travel through long hours of the summer day, and as the light wanes in the evening they ask the man who reads the sky: ‘Brother, is yonder the tower of our final hope and peace?’

The wise man shakes his head and says: It is the last vanishing cloud of the sunset.’

*'Friends,' exorts the young, 'do not stop.
Through the night's blindness we must struggle into the Kingdom of living
light.'*

*They go on in the dark.
The road seems to know its own meaning and dust underfoot dumbly speaks
of direction.
The stars celestial way farers sing in silent chorus: 'Move on, comrades!'
In the air floats the voice of the Leader: 'The goal is nigh.'*

9

*The first flush of dawn glistens on the dew-dripping leaves of the forest.
The man who reads the sky cries: 'Friends, we have come!'
They stop and look around.
On both sides of the road the corn is ripe to the horizon, the glad golden
answer of the earth to the morning light.
The current of daily life moves slowly between the village near the hill and
the one by the river bank.
The potter's wheel goes round, the woodcutter brings fuel to the market, the
cow-herd takes his cattle to the pasture, and the woman with the pitcher on
her head walks to the well.
But where is the King's castle, the mine of gold, the secret book of magic, the
sage who knows love's utter wisdom?
'The stars cannot be wrong,' assures the reader of the sky.
'Their signal points to that spot.'
And reverently he walks to a wayside spring from which wells up a stream of
water, a liquid light, like the morning melting into a chorus of tears and
laughter.
Near it in a palm grove surrounded by a strange hush stands a leaf—thatched
hut, at whose portal sits the poet of the unknown shore, and sings: 'Mother,
open the gate!'*

10

*A ray of morning sun strikes aslant at the door.
The assembled crowd feel in their blood the primaeval chant of creation:
'Mother, open the gate!'*

The gate opens.

The mother is seated on a straw bed with the babe on her lap, Like the dawn with the morning star.

The sun's ray that was waiting at the door outside falls on the head of the child.

The poet strikes his lute and sings out: 'Victory to Man, the new-born, the ever-living.'

They kneel down, the king and the beggar, the saint and the sinner, the wise and the fool, and cry: 'Victory to Man, the new-born, the ever-living.'

The old man from the East murmurs to himself: 'I have seen!'

3.3. Freedom

Freedom from fear is the freedom I claim for you, my Motherland!—Fear, the phantom demon, shaped by your own distorted dreams; Freedom from the burden of ages, bending your head, breaking your back, blinding your eyes to the beckoning call of the future; Freedom from shackles of slumber wherewith you fasten yourself to night's stillness, mistrusting the star that speaks of truth's adventurous path; Freedom from the anarchy of destiny, whose sails are weakly yielded to blind uncertain winds, and the helm to a hand ever rigid and cold as Death; Freedom from the insult of dwelling in a puppet's world, where movements are started through brainless wires, repeated through mindless habits; where figures wait with patient obedience for a master of show to be stirred into a moment's mimicry of life.

3.4. From Hindi Songs of *Jnanadas*

1

*Where were your songs, my bird, when you spent your nights in the nest?
Was not all your pleasure stored therein?*

What makes you lose your heart to the sky—the sky that is boundless?

Answer

While I rested within bounds I was content. But when I soared into vastness I found I could sing.

2

Messenger, morning brought you, habited in gold.

After sunset your song wore a tune of ascetic grey, and then came night.

Your message was written in bright letters across black.

Why is such splendour about you to lure the heart of one who is nothing?

Answer

Great is the festival hall where you are to be the only guest.

Therefore the letter to you is written from sky to sky, and I, the proud servant, bring the invitation with all ceremony.

3

I had travelled all day and was tired, then I bowed my head towards thy kingly court still far away.

The night deepened, a longing burned in my heart; whatever the words I sang, pain cried through them, for even my songs thirsted. O my Lover, my Beloved, my best in all the world!

When time seemed lost in darkness thy hand dropped its sceptre to take up

the lute and strike the uttermost chords; and my heart sang out, O my Lover, my Beloved, my best in all the world!

Ah, who is this whose arms enfold me?

Whatever I have to leave let me leave, and whatever I have to bear let me bear. Only let me walk with thee, O my Lover, my Beloved, my best in all the world!

Descend at whiles from thine audience hall, come down amid joys and sorrows; hide in all forms and delights, in love and in my heart; there sing thy songs, O my Lover, my Beloved, my best in all the world!

3.5. Fulfilment

The overflowing bounty of thy grace comes down from the heaven to seek my soul only, wherein it can contain itself.

The light that is rained from the sun and stars is fulfilled when it reaches my life.

The colour is like sleep that clings, to the flower which waits for the touch of my mind to be awakened.

The low that tunes the strings of existence breaks out in music when my heart is won.

3.6. Krishnakali

*I call her my Krishna flower though they call her dark in the village.
I remember a cloud-laden day and a glance from her eyes, her veil trailing
down at her feet her braided hair loose on her back.
Ah, you call her dark; let that be, her black gazelle eyes I have seen.
Her cows were lowing in the meadow, when the fading light grew grey.
With hurried steps she came out from her hut near the bamboo grove.
She raised her quick eyes to the sky, where the clouds were heavy with rain.
Ah, you call her dark! Let that be, her black gazelle eyes I have seen.
The East wind in fitful gusts ruffled the young shoots of rice.
I stood at the boundary hedge with none else in the lonely land.
If she espied me in secret or not She only knows and know.
Ah, you call her dark! Let that be, her black gazelle eyes I have seen.
She is the surprise of cloud in the burning heart of May, a tender shadow on
the forest in the stillness of sunset hour, a mystery of dumb delight in the
rain-loud night of June.
Ah, you call her dark! Let that be, her black gazelle eyes I have seen.
I call her my Krishna flower, let all others say what they like.
In the rice-field of Maina village I felt the first glance of her eyes.
She had not a veil on her face, not a moment of leisure for shyness.
Ah, you call her dark! Let that be.*

3.7. The New Year

Like fruit, shaken free by an impatient wind from the veils of its mother flower, thou comest, New Year, whirling in a frantic dance amid the stampede of the wind-lashed clouds and infuriate showers, while trampled by thy turbulence are scattered away the faded and the frail in an eddying agony of death.

Thou art no dreamer afloat on a languorous breeze, lingering among the hesitant whisper and hum of an uncertain season.

Thine is a majestic march, o terrible Stranger, thundering forth an ominous incantation, driving the days on to the perils of a pathless dark, where thou carriest a dumb signal in thy banner, a decree of destiny undeciphered.

3.8. Raidas, the Sweeper

Raidas, the sweeper, sat still, lost in the solitude of his soul, and some songs born of his silent vision found their way to the Rani's heart, the Rani Jhali of Chitore.

Tears flowed from her eyes, her thoughts wandered away from her daily dudes, till she met Raidas who guided her to God's presence.

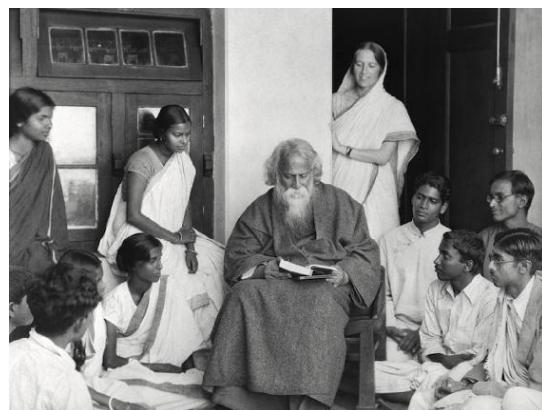
The old Brahmin priest of the King's house rebuked her for her desecration of sacred law by offering homage as a disciple to an outcaste.

'Brahmin,' the Rani answered, 'while you were busy tying your purse—strings of custom ever tighter, love's gold slipped unnoticed to the earth, and my Master in his divine humility has picked it up from the dust.

'Revel in your pride of the unmeaning knots without number, harden your miserly heart, but I, a beggar woman, am glad to receive love's wealth, the gift of the lowly dust, from my Master, the sweeper.'

3.9. Santiniketan Song

*She is our own, the darling of our hearts, Santiniketan.
Our dreams are rocked in her arms.
Her face is a fresh wonder of love every time we see her, for she is our own,
the darling of our hearts.
In the shadows of her trees we meet in the freedom of her open sky.
Her mornings come and her evenings bringing down heaven's kisses, making
us feel anew that she is our own, the darling of our hearts.
The stillness of her shades is stirred by the woodland whisper; her amlaki
groves are aquiver with the rapture of leaves.
She dwells in us and around us, however far we may wander.
She weaves our hearts in a song, making us one in music, tuning our strings
of love with her own fingers; and we ever remember that she is our own, the
darling of our hearts.*



Tagore in Shantiniketan

3.10. Shesher Kobita

.....

*Can you hear the sounds of the journey of time?
Its chariot always in a flight Raises heartbeats in the skies And birth-pangs of
stars In the darkness of space Crushed by its wheels.*

My friend!

*I have been caught in the net Cast by that flying time It has made me its mate
In its intrepid journey And taken me in its speeding chariot Far away from
you.*

*To reach the summit of this morning I seem to have left behind many deaths
My past names seem to stream In the strong wind Born of the chariot's
speed.*

*There is no way to turn back; If you see me from afar You will not recognize
me my friend, Farewell!*

*If in your lazy hours without any work The winds of springtime Brings back
the sighs from the past As the cries of shedding spring flowers Fill the skies
Please see and search If in a corner of your heart You can find any
remnants of my past; In the evening hours of fading memories It may shed
some light Or take some nameless form As if in a dream.*

*Yet it is not a dream It is my truth of truths It is deathless It is my love.
Changeless and eternal I leave it as my offering to you In the ever changing
flow of time Let me drift.*

My friend, farewell!

You have not sustained any loss.

*If you have created an immortal image Out of my mortal frame May you
devote your self In the worship of that idol As the recreation of your
remaining days Let your offerings not be mired By the touch of my earthly
passion.*

*The plate that you will arrange with utmost care For the feast of your mind I
will not mix it with anything That does not endure And is wet with my tears.*

*Now you will perhaps create Some dreamy creation out of my memories
Neither shall I feel its weight Nor will you feel obliged.
My friend, farewell!*

*Do not mourn for me, You have your work, I have my world.
My vessel has not become empty To fill it is my mission.
I shall be pleased If anybody keeps waiting Anxiously for me.
But now I shall offer myself to him Who can brighten the darkness with light
And see me as I am Transcending what is good or bad.
Whatever I gave you It is now your absolute possession.
What I have to give now Are the hourly offerings from my heart.
You are incomparable, you are rich!
Whatever I gave you It was but your gift You made me so much indebted As
much as you took.
My friend, farewell!*

3.11. The Son of Man

From his eternal seat Christ comes down to this earth, where, ages ago, in the bitter cup of death He poured his deathless life for those who came to the call and those who remained away.

He looks about Him, and sees the weapons of evil that wounded His own age. The arrogant spikes and spears, the slim, sly knives, the scimitar in diplomatic sheath, crooked and cruel, are hissing and raining sparks as they are sharpened on monster wheels.

But the most fearful of them all, at the hands of the slaughterers, are those on which has been engraved His own name, that are fashioned from the texts of His own words fused in the fire of hatred and hammered by hypocritical greed.

He presses His hand upon His heart; He feels that the age-long moment of His death has not yet ended, that new nails, turned out in countless numbers by those who are learned in cunning craftsmanship, pierce Him in every joint

They had hurt Him once, standing at the shadow of their temple; they are born anew in crowds.

From before their sacred altar they shout to the soldiers, ‘Strike!’

And the Son of Man in agony cries, ‘My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?’

3.12. This Evil Day

Age after age, hast Thou, O Lord, sent Thy messengers into this pitiless world, who have left their word: ‘Forgive all. Love all. Cleanse your hearts from the blood-red stains of hatred.’

Adorable are they, ever to be remembered; yet from the outer door have I turned them away to-day-this evil day with unmeaning salutation.

Have I not seen secret malignance strike down the helpless under the cover of hypocritical night?

Have I not heard the silenced voice of Justice weeping in solitude at might’s defiant outrages?

Have I not seen in what agony reckless youth, running mad, has vainly shattered its life against insensitive rocks?

Choked is my voice, mute are my songs to-day, and darkly my world lies imprisoned in a dismal dream; and I ask Thee, O Lord, in tears: ‘Hast Thou Thyself forgiven, hast even Thou loved those who are poisoning Thy air, and blotting out Thy light?’

3.13. W.W. Pearson

*Thy nature is to forget thyself; but we remember thee.
Thou shinest in self-concealment revealed by our love.
Thou lendest light from thine own soul to those that are obscure.
Thou seekest neither love nor fame; Love discovers thee.*

4. Fruit-Gathering

.....

I

Bid me and I shall gather my fruits to bring them in full baskets into your courtyard, though some are lost and some not ripe.

For the season grows heavy with its fulness, and there is a plaintive shepherd's pipe in the shade.

Bid me and I shall set sail on the river.

The March wind is fretful, fretting the languid waves into murmurs.

The garden has yielded its all, and in the weary hour of evening the call comes from your house on the shore in the sunset.

II

My life when young was like a flower—a flower that loosens a petal or two from her abundance and never feels the loss when the spring breeze comes to beg at her door.

Now at the end of youth my life is like a fruit, having nothing to spare, and waiting to offer herself completely with her full burden of sweetness.

III

*Is summer's festival only for fresh blossoms and not also for withered leaves
and faded flowers?*

Is the song of the sea in tune only with the rising waves?

Does it not also sing with the waves that fall?

*Jewels are woven into the carpet where stands my king, but there are patient
clods waiting to be touched by his feet.*

*Few are the wise and the great who sit by my Master, but he has taken the
foolish in his arms and made me his servant forever.*

IV

*I woke and found his letter with the morning.
I do not know what it says, for I cannot read.
I shall leave the wise man alone with his books, I shall not trouble him, for
who knows if he can read what the letter says.
Let me hold it to my forehead and press it to my heart.
When the night grows still and stars come out one by one I will spread it on
my lap and stay silent.
The rustling leaves will read it aloud to me, the rushing stream will chant it,
and the seven wise stars will sing it to me from the sky.
I cannot find what I seek, I cannot understand what I would learn; but this
unread letter has lightened my burdens and turned my thoughts into songs.*

V

*A handful of dust could hide your signal when I did not know its meaning.
Now that I am wiser I read it in all that hid it before.
It is painted in petals of flowers; waves flash it from their foam; hills hold it
high on their summits.
I had my face turned from you, therefore I read the letters awry and knew not
their meaning.*

VI

*Where roads are made I lose my way.
In the wide water, in the blue sky there is no line of a track.
The pathway is hidden by the birds' wings, by the star-fires, by the flowers of
the wayfaring seasons.
And I ask my heart if its blood carries the wisdom of the unseen way.*

VII

Alas, I cannot stay in the house, and home has become no home to me, for the eternal Stranger calls, he is going along the road.

The sound of his footfall knocks at my breast; it pains me!

The wind is up, the sea is moaning. I leave all my cares and doubts to follow the homeless tide, for the Stranger calls me, he is going along the road.

VIII

*Be ready to launch forth, my heart! And let those linger who must.
For your name has been called in the morning sky.
Wait for none!
The desire of the bud is for the night and dew, but the blown flower cries for
the freedom of light.
Burst your sheath, my heart, and come forth!*

IX

*When I lingered among my hoarded treasure I felt like a worm that feeds in
the dark upon the fruit where it was born.*

I leave this prison of decay.

*I care not to haunt the mouldy stillness, for I go in search of everlasting
youth; I throw away all that is not one with my life nor as light as my
laughter.*

*I run through time and, O my heart, in your chariot dances the poet who
sings while he wanders.*

X

You took my hand and drew me to your side, made me sit on the high seat before all men, till I became timid, unable to stir and walk my own way; doubting and debating at every step lest I should tread upon any thorn of their disfavour.

I am freed at last!

The blow has come, the drum of insult sounded, my seat is laid low in the dust.

My paths are open before me.

My wings are full of the desire of the sky.

I go to join the shooting stars of midnight, to plunge into the profound shadow.

I am like the storm-driven cloud of summer that, having cast off its crown of gold, hangs as a sword the thunderbolt upon a chain of lightning.

In desperate joy I run upon the dusty path of the despised; I draw near to your final welcome.

The child finds its mother when it leaves her womb.

When I am parted from you, thrown out from your household, I am free to see your face.

XI

*It decks me only to mock me, this jewelled chain of mine.
It bruises me when on my neck, it strangles me when I struggle to tear it off.
It grips my throat, it chokes my singing.
Could I but offer it to your hand, my Lord, I would be saved.
Take it from me, and in exchange bind me to you with a garland, for I am
ashamed to stand before you with this jewelled chain on my neck.*

XII

*Far below flowed the Jumna, swift and clear, above frowned the jutting bank.
Hills dark with the woods and scarred with the torrents were gathered around.*

Govinda, the great Sikh teacher, sat on the rock reading scriptures, when Raghunath, his disciple, proud of his wealth, caine and bowed to him and said, “I have brought my poor present unworthy of your acceptance.”

[Transcriber’s note: In the above verse, the word ‘caine’ does not fit in, the word ‘came’ makes more sense]

Thus saying he displayed before the teacher a pair of gold bangles wrought with costly stones.

The master took up one of them, twirling it round his finger, and the diamonds darted shafts of light.

Suddenly it slipped from his hand and rolled down the bank into the water.

“Alas,” screamed Raghunath, and jumped into the stream.

The teacher set his eyes upon his book, and the water held and hid what it stole and went its way.

The daylight faded when Raghunath came back to the teacher tired and dripping.

He panted and said, “I can still get it back if you show me where it fell.”

The teacher took up the remaining bangle and throwing it into the water said, “It is there.”

XIII

*To move is to meet you every moment, Fellow-traveller!
It is to sing to the falling of your feet.
He whom your breath touches does not glide by the shelter of the bank.
He spreads a reckless sail to the wind and rides the turbulent water.
He who throws his doors open and steps onward receives your greeting.
He does not stay to count his gain or to mourn his loss; his heart beats the
drum for his march, for that is to march with you every step, Fellow-
traveller!*

XIV

*My portion of the best in this world will come from your hands: such was
your promise.*

Therefore your light glistens in my tears.

*I fear to be led by others lest I miss you waiting in some road corner to be my
guide.*

I walk my own wilful way till my very folly tempts you to my door.

*For I have your promise that my portion of the best in this world will come
from your hands.*

XV

*Your speech is simple, my Master, but not theirs who talk of you.
I understand the voice of your stars and the silence of your trees.
I know that my heart would open like a flower; that my life has filled itself at
a hidden fountain.
Your songs, like birds from the lonely land of snow, are winging to build their
nests in my heart against the warmth of its April, and I am content to wait
for the merry season.*

XVI

They knew the way and went to seek you along the narrow lane, but I wandered abroad into the night for I was ignorant.

I was not schooled enough to be afraid of you in the dark, therefore I came upon your doorstep unaware.

The wise rebuked me and bade me be gone, for I had not come by the lane.

I turned away in doubt, but you held me fast, and their scolding became louder every day.

XVII

I brought out my earthen lamp from my house and cried, “Come, children, I will light your path!”

The night was still dark when I returned, leaving the road to its silence, crying, “Light me, O Fire! For my earthen lamp lies broken in the dust!”

XVIII

*No: it is not yours to open buds into blossoms.
Shake the bud, strike it; it is beyond your power to make it blossom.
Your touch soils it, you tear its petals to pieces and strew them in the dust.
But no colours appear, and no perfume.
Ah! It is not for you to open the bud into a blossom.
He who can open the bud does it so simply.
He gives it a glance, and the life-sap stirs through its veins.
At his breath the flower spreads its wings and flutters in the wind.
Colours flush out like heart-longings, the perfume betrays a sweet secret.
He who can open the bud does it so simply.*

XIX

Sudâs, the gardener, plucked from his tank the last lotus left by the ravage of winter and went to sell it to the king at the palace gate.

There he met a traveller who said to him, “Ask your price for the last lotus,— I shall offer it to Lord Buddha.”

Sudâs said, “If you pay one golden mâshâ it will be yours.

The traveller paid it.

At that moment the king came out and he wished to buy the flower, for he was on his way to see Lord Buddha, and he thought, “It would be a fine thing to lay at his feet the lotus that bloomed in winter.”

When the gardener said he had been offered a golden mâshâ the king offered him ten, but the traveller doubled the price.

The gardener, being greedy, imagined a greater gain from him for whose sake they were bidding. He bowed and said, “I cannot sell this lotus.”

In the hushed shade of the mango grove beyond the city wall Sudâs stood before Lord Buddha, on whose lips sat the silence of love and whose eyes beamed peace like the morning star of the dew-washed autumn.

Sudâs looked in his face and put the lotus at his feet and bowed his head to the dust.

Buddha smiled and asked, “What is your wish, my son?”

Sudâs cried, “The least touch of your feet.”

XX

Make me thy poet, O Night, veiled Night!

*There are some who have sat speechless for ages in thy shadow; let me utter
their songs.*

*Take me up on thy chariot without wheels, running noiselessly from world to
world, thou queen in the palace of time, thou darkly beautiful!*

*Many a questioning mind has stealthily entered thy courtyard and roamed
through thy lampless house seeking for answers.*

*From many a heart, pierced with the arrow of joy from the hands of the
Unknown, have burst forth glad chants, shaking the darkness to its
foundation.*

*Those wakeful souls gaze in the starlight in wonder at the treasure they have
suddenly found.*

Make me their poet, O Night, the poet of thy fathomless silence.

XXI

I will meet one day the Life within me, the joy that hides in my life, though the days perplex my path with their idle dust.

I have known it in glimpses, and its fitful breath has come upon me, making my thoughts fragrant for a while.

I will meet one day the Joy without me that dwells behind the screen of light —and will stand in the overflowing solitude where all things are seen as by their creator.

XXII

This autumn morning is tired with excess of light, and if your songs grow fitful and languid give me your flute awhile.

I shall but play with it as the whim takes me,—now take it on my lap, now touch it with my lips, now keep it by my side on the grass.

But in the solemn evening stillness I shall gather flowers, to deck it with wreaths, I shall fill it with fragrance; I shall worship it with the lighted lamp.

Then at night I shall come to you and give you back your flute.

You will play on it the music of midnight when the lonely crescent moon wanders among the stars.

XXIII

The poet's mind floats and dances on the waves of life amidst the voices of wind and water.

Now when the sun has set and the darkened sky draws upon the sea like drooping lashes upon a weary eye it is time to take away his pen, and let his thoughts sink into the bottom of the deep amid the eternal secret of that silence.

XXIV

*The night is dark and your slumber is deep in the hush of my being.
Wake, O Pain of Love, for I know not how to open the door, and I stand outside.
The hours wait, the stars watch, the wind is still, the silence is heavy in my heart.
Wake, Love, wake! Brim my empty cup, and with a breath of song ruffle the night.*

XXV

The bird of the morning sings.

Whence has he word of the morning before the morning breaks, and when the dragon night still holds the sky in its cold black coils?

Tell me, bird of the morning, how, through the twofold night of the sky and the leaves, he found his way into your dream, the messenger out of the east?

The world did not believe you when you cried, “The sun is on his way, the night is no more.”

O sleeper, awake!

Bare your forehead, waiting for the first blessing of light, and sing with the bird of the morning in glad faith.

XXVI

The beggar in me lifted his lean hands to the starless sky and cried into night's ear with his hungry voice.

His prayers were to the blind Darkness who lay like a fallen god in a desolate heaven of lost hopes.

The cry of desire eddied round a chasm of despair, a wailing bird circling its empty nest.

But when morning dropped anchor at the rim of the East, the beggar in me leapt and cried: "Blessed am I that the deaf night denied me—that its coffer was empty."

He cried, "O Life, O Light, you are precious! And precious is the joy that at last has known you!"

XXVII

Sanâtan was telling his beads by the Ganges when a Brahmin in rags came to him and said, "Help me, I am poor!"

"My alms-bowl is all that is my own," said Sanâtan, "I have given away everything I had."

"But my lord Shiva came to me in my dreams," said the Brahmin, "and counselled me to come to you."

Sanâtan suddenly remembered he had picked up a stone without price among the pebbles on the river-bank, and thinking that someone might need it hid it in the sands.

He pointed out the spot to the Brahmin, who wondering dug up the stone.

The Brahmin sat on the earth and mused alone till the sun went down behind the trees, and cowherds went home with their cattle.

Then he rose and came slowly to Sanâtan and said, "Master, give me the least fraction of the wealth that disdains all the wealth of the world."

And he threw the precious stone into the water.

XXVIII

Time after time I came to your gate with raised hands, asking for more and yet more.

You gave and gave, now in slow measure, now in sudden excess.

I took some, and some things I let drop; some lay heavy on my hands; some I made into playthings and broke them when tired; till the wrecks and the hoard of your gifts grew immense, hiding you, and the ceaseless expectation wore my heart out.

Take, oh take—has now become my cry.

Shatter all from this beggar's bowl: put out this lamp of the importunate watcher: hold my hands, raise me from the still-gathering heap of your gifts into the bare infinity of your uncrowded presence.

XXIX

*You have set me among those who are defeated.
I know it is not for me to win, nor to leave the game.
I shall plunge into the pool although but to sink to the bottom.
I shall play the game of my undoing.
I shall stake all I have and when I lose my last penny I shall stake myself, and
then I think I shall have won through my utter defeat.*

XXX

A smile of mirth spread over the sky when you dressed my heart in rags and sent her forth into the road to beg.

She went from door to door, and many a time when her bowl was nearly full she was robbed.

At the end of the weary day she came to your palace gate holding up her pitiful bowl, and you came and took her hand and seated her beside you on your throne.

XXXI

“Who among you will take up the duty of feeding the hungry?” Lord Buddha asked his followers when famine raged at Shravasti.

Ratnâkar, the banker, hung his head and said, “Much more is needed than all my wealth to feed the hungry.”

Jaysen, the chief of the King’s army, said, “I would gladly give my life’s blood, but there is not enough food in my house.”

Dharmapâal, who owned broad acres of land, said with a sigh, “The drought demon has sucked my fields dry. I know not how to pay King’s dues.”

Then rose Supriyâ, the mendicant’s daughter.

She bowed to all and meekly said, “I will feed the hungry.”

“How!” they cried in surprise. “How can you hope to fulfil that vow?”

“I am the poorest of you all,” said Supriyâ, “that is my strength. I have my coffer and my store at each of your houses.”

XXXII

*My king was unknown to me, therefore when he claimed his tribute I was bold to think I would hide myself leaving my debts unpaid.
I fled and fled behind my day's work and my night's dreams.
But his claims followed me at every breath I drew.
Thus I came to know that I am known to him and no place left which is mine.
Now I wish to lay my all before his feet, and gain the right to my place in his kingdom.*

XXXIII

When I thought I would mould you, an image from my life for men to worship, I brought my dust and desires and all my coloured delusions and dreams.

When I asked you to mould with my life an image from your heart for you to love, you brought your fire and force, and truth, loveliness and peace.

XXXIV

“Sire,” announced the servant to the King, “the saint Narottam has never deigned to enter your royal temple.

“He is singing God’s praise under the trees by the open road. The temple is empty of worshippers.

“They flock round him like bees round the white lotus, leaving the golden jar of honey unheeded.”

The King, vexed at heart, went to the spot where Narottam sat on the grass.

He asked him, “Father, why leave my temple of the golden dome and sit on the dust outside to preach God’s love?”

“Because God is not there in your temple,” said Narottam.

The King frowned and said, “Do you know, twenty millions of gold went to the making of that marvel of art, and it was consecrated to God with costly rites?”

“Yes, I know it,” answered Narottam. “It was in that year when thousands of your people whose houses had been burned stood vainly asking for help at your door.

“And God said, ‘The poor creature who can give no shelter to his brothers would build my house!’

“And he took his place with the shelterless under the trees by the road.

“And that golden bubble is empty of all but hot vapour of pride.”

The King cried in anger, “Leave my land.”

Calmly said the saint, “Yes, banish me where you have banished my God.”

XXXV

The trumpet lies in the dust.

The wind is weary, the light is dead.

Ah, the evil day!

Come, fighters, carrying your flags, and singers, with your war-songs!

Come, pilgrims of the march, hurrying on your journey!

The trumpet lies in the dust waiting for us.

I was on my way to the temple with my evening offerings, seeking for a place of rest after the day's dusty toil: hoping my hurts would be healed and the stains in my garment washed white, when I found thy trumpet lying in the dust.

Was it not the hour for me to light my evening lamp?

Had not the night sung its lullaby to the stars?

O thou blood-red rose, my poppies of sleep have paled and faded!

I was certain my wanderings were over and my debts all paid when suddenly I came upon thy trumpet lying in the dust.

Strike my drowsy heart with thy spell of youth!

Let my joy in life blaze up in fire. Let the shafts of awakening fly through the heart of night, and a thrill of dread shake blindness and palsy.

I have come to raise thy trumpet from the dust.

Sleep is no more for me—my walk shall be through showers of arrows.

Some shall run out of their houses and come to my side—some shall weep.

Some in their beds shall toss and groan in dire dreams.

For tonight thy trumpet shall be sounded.

From thee I have asked peace only to find shame.

Now I stand before thee—help me to put on my armour!

Let hard blows of trouble strike fire into my life.

Let my heart beat in pain, the drum of thy victory.

My hands shall be utterly emptied to take up thy trumpet.

XXXVI

When, mad in their mirth, they raised dust to soil thy robe, O Beautiful, it made my heart sick.

I cried to thee and said, “Take thy rod of punishment and judge them.”

The morning light struck upon those eyes, red with the revel of night; the place of the white lily greeted their burning breath; the stars through the depth of the sacred dark stared at their carousing—at those that raised dust to soil thy robe, O Beautiful!

Thy judgment seat was in the flower garden, in the birds’ notes in springtime: in the shady river-banks, where the trees muttered in answer to the muttering of the waves.

O my Lover, they were pitiless in their passion.

They prowled in the dark to snatch thy ornaments to deck their own desires.

When they had struck thee and thou wert pained, it pierced me to the quick, and I cried to thee and said, “Take thy sword, O my Lover, and judge them!”

Ah, but thy justice was vigilant.

A mother’s tears were shed on their insolence; the imperishable faith of a lover hid their spears of rebellion in its own wounds.

Thy judgment was in the mute pain of sleepless love: in the blush of the chaste: in the tears of the night of the desolate: in the pale morning-light of forgiveness.

O Terrible, they in their reckless greed climbed thy gate at night, breaking into thy storehouse to rob thee.

But the weight of their plunder grew immense, too heavy to carry or to remove.

Thereupon I cried to thee and said, “Forgive them, O Terrible!”

Thy forgiveness burst in storms, throwing them down, scattering their thefts in the dust.

Thy forgiveness was in the thunder-stone; in the shower of blood; in the angry red of the sunset.

XXXVII

Upagupta, the disciple of Buddha, lay asleep on the dust by the city wall of Mathura.

Lamps were all out, doors were all shut, and stars were all hidden by the murky sky of August.

*Whose feet were those tinkling with anklets, touching his breast of a sudden?
He woke up startled, and the light from a woman's lamp struck his forgiving eyes.*

*It was the dancing girl, starred with jewels, clouded with a pale-blue mantle,
drunk with the wine of her youth.*

She lowered her lamp and saw the young face, austereley beautiful.

"Forgive me, young ascetic," said the woman; "graciously come to my house. The dusty earth is not a fit bed for you."

The ascetic answered, "Woman, go on your way; when the time is ripe I will come to you."

Suddenly the black night showed its teeth in a flash of lightning.

The storm growled from the corner of the sky, and the woman trembled in fear.

*

The branches of the wayside trees were aching with blossom.

Gay notes of the flute came floating in the warm spring air from afar.

The citizens had gone to the woods, to the festival of flowers.

From the mid-sky gazed the full moon on the shadows of the silent town.

The young ascetic was walking in the lonely street, while overhead the lovesick koels urged from the mango branches their sleepless plaint.

*Upagupta passed through the city gates, and stood at the base of the rampart.
What woman lay in the shadow of the wall at his feet, struck with the black pestilence, her body spotted with sores, hurriedly driven away from the town?*

The ascetic sat by her side, taking her head on his knees, and moistened her lips with water and smeared her body with balm.

"Who are you, merciful one?" asked the woman.

"The time, at last, has come to visit you, and I am here," replied the young ascetic.

XXXVIII

*This is no mere dallying of love between us, my lover.
Again and again have swooped down upon me the screaming nights of storm,
blowing out my lamp: dark doubts have gathered, blotting out all stars from
my sky.
Again and again the banks have burst, letting the flood sweep away my
harvest, and wailing and despair have rent my sky from end to end.
This have I learnt that there are blows of pain in your love, never the cold
apathy of death.*

XXXIX

The wall breaks asunder, light, like divine laughter, bursts in. Victory, O Light!

The heart of the night is pierced!

With your flashing sword cut in twain the tangle of doubt and feeble desires!

Victory!

Come, Implacable!

Come, you who are terrible in your whiteness.

O Light, your drum sounds in the march of fire, and the red torch is held on high; death dies in a burst of splendour!

XL

*O fire, my brother, I sing victory to you.
You are the bright red image of fearful freedom.
You swing your arms in the sky, you sweep your impetuous fingers across the
harp-string, your dance music is beautiful.
When my days are ended and the gates are opened you will burn to ashes this
cordage of hands and feet.
My body will be one with you, my heart will be caught in the whirls of your
frenzy, and the burning heat that was my life will flash up and mingle itself
in your flame.*

XLI

*The Boatman is out crossing the wild sea at night.
The mast is aching because of its full sails filled with the violent wind.
Stung with the night's fang the sky falls upon the sea, poisoned with black
fear.
The waves dash their heads against the dark unseen, and the Boatman is out
crossing the wild sea.
The Boatman is out, I know not for what tryst, startling the night with the
sudden white of his sails.
I know not at what shore, at last, he lands to reach the silent courtyard where
the lamp is burning and to find her who sits in the dust and waits.
What is the quest that makes his boat care not for storm nor darkness?
Is it heavy with gems and pearls?
Ah, no, the Boatman brings with him no treasure, but only a white rose in his
hand and a song on his lips.
It is for her who watches alone at night with her lamp burning.
She dwells in the wayside hut. Her loose hair flies in the wind and hides her
eyes.
The storm shrieks through her broken doors, the light flickers in her earthen
lamp flinging shadows on the walls.
Through the howl of the winds she hears him call her name, she whose name
is unknown.
It is long since the Boatman sailed. It will be long before the day breaks and
he knocks at the door.
The drums will not be beaten and none will know.
Only light shall fill the house, blessed shall be the dust, and the heart glad.
All doubts shall vanish in silence when the Boatman comes to the shore.*

XLII

*I cling to this living raft, my body, in the narrow stream of my earthly years.
I leave it when the crossing is over. And then?
I do not know if the light there and the darkness are the same.
The Unknown is the perpetual freedom:
He is pitiless in his love.
He crushes the shell for the pearl, dumb in the prison of the dark.
You muse and weep for the days that are done, poor heart!
Be glad that days are to come!
The hour strikes, O pilgrim!
It is time for you to take the parting of the ways!
His face will be unveiled once again and you shall meet.*

XLIII

Over the relic of Lord Buddha King Bimbisâr built a shrine, asalutation in white marble.

There in the evening would come all the brides and daughters of the King's house to offer flowers and light lamps.

When the son became king in his time he washed his father's creed away with blood, and lit sacrificial fires with its sacred books.

The autumn day was dying. The evening hour of worship was near.

Shrimati, the queen's maid, devoted to Lord Buddha, having bathed in holy water, and decked the golden tray with lamps and fresh white blossoms, silently raised her dark eyes to the queen's face.

The queen shuddered in fear and said, "Do you not know, foolish girl, that death is the penalty for whoever brings worship to Buddha's shrine?

"Such is the king's will."

Shrimati bowed to the queen, and turning away from her door came and stood before Amitâ, the newlywed bride of the king's son.

A mirror of burnished gold on her lap, the newlywed bride was braiding her dark long tresses and painting the red spot of good luck at the parting of her hair.

Her hands trembled when she saw the young maid, and she cried, "What fearful peril would you bring me! Leave me this instant."

Princess Shuklâ sat at the window reading her book of romance by the light of the setting sun.

She started when she saw at her door the maid with the sacred offerings.

Her book fell down from her lap, and she whispered in Shrimati's ears, "Rush not to death, daring woman!"

Shrimati walked from door to door. She raised her head and cried, "O women of the king's house, hasten!

"The time for our Lord's worship is come!"

Some shut their doors in her face and some reviled her.

The last gleam of daylight faded from the bronze dome of the palace tower.

Deep shadows settled in street corners: the bustle of the city was hushed: the gong at the temple of Shiva announced the time of the evening prayer.

In the dark of the autumn evening, deep as a limpid lake, stars throbbed with light, when the guards of the palace garden were startled to see through the

*trees a row of lamps burning at the shrine of Buddha.
They ran with their swords unsheathed, crying, “Who are you, foolish one,
reckless of death?”
“I am Shrimati,” replied a sweet voice, “the servant of Lord Buddha.”
The next moment her heart’s blood coloured the cold marble with its red.
And in the still hour of stars died the light of the last lamp of worship at the
foot of the shrine.*

XLIV

*The day that stands between you and me makes her last bow of farewell.
The night draws her veil over her face, and hides the one lamp burning in my
chamber.
Your dark servant comes noiselessly and spreads the bridal carpet for you to
take your seat there alone with me in the wordless silence till night is done.*

XLV

My night has passed on the bed of sorrow, and my eyes are tired. My heavy heart is not yet ready to meet morning with its crowd enjoys.

Draw a veil over this naked light, beckon aside from me this glaring flash and dance of life.

Let the mantle of tender darkness cover me in its folds, and cover my pain awhile from the pressure of the world.

XLVI

*The time is past when I could repay her for all that I received.
Her night has found its morning and thou hast taken her to thy arms: and to
thee I bring my gratitude and my gifts that were for her.
For all hurts and offences to her I come to thee for forgiveness.
I offer to thy service those flowers of my love that remained in bud when she
waited for them to open.*

XLVII

I found a few old letters of mine carefully hidden in her box—a few small toys for her memory to play with.

With a timorous heart she tried to steal these trifles from time's turbulent stream, and said, "These are mine only!"

Ah, there is no one now to claim them, who can pay their price with loving care, yet here they are still.

Surely there is love in this world to save her from utter loss, even like this love of hers that saved these letters with such fond care.

XLVIII

Bring beauty and order into my forlorn life, woman, as you brought them into my house when you lived.

Sweep away the dusty fragments of the hours, fill the empty jars, and mend all that has been neglected.

Then open the inner door of the shrine, light the candle, and let us meet there in silence before our God.

XLIX

*The pain was great when the strings were being tuned, my Master!
Begin your music, and let me forget the pain; let me feel in beauty what you
had in your mind through those pitiless days.
The waning night lingers at my doors, let her take her leave in songs.
Pour your heart into my life strings, my Master, in tunes that descend from
your stars.*

L

*In the lightning flash of a moment I have seen the immensity of your creation
in my life—creation through many a death from world to world.
I weep at my unworthiness when I see my life in the hands of the unmeaning
hours,—but when I see it in your hands I know it is too precious to be
squandered among shadows.*

LI

*I know that at the dim end of some day the sun will bid me its farewell.
Shepherds will play their pipes beneath the banyan trees, and cattle graze on
the slope by the river, while my days will pass into the dark.
This is my prayer, that I may know before I leave why the earth called me to
her arms.*

*Why her night's silence spoke to me of stars, and her day light kissed my
thoughts into flower.
Before I go may I linger over my last refrain, completing its music, may the
lamp be lit to see your face and the wreath woven to crown you.*

LII

*What music is that in whose measure the world is rocked?
We laugh when it beats upon the crest of life, we shrink in terror when it
returns into the dark.
But the play is the same that comes and goes with the rhythm of the endless
music.
You hide your treasure in the palm of your hand, and we cry that we are
robbed.
But open and shut your palm as you will, the gain and the loss are the same.
At the game you play with your own self you lose and win at once.*

LIII

I have kissed this world with my eyes and my limbs; I have wrap tit within my heart in numberless folds; I have flooded its days and nights with thoughts till the world and my life have grown one,—and I love my life because I love the light of the sky nonwoven with me.

If to leave this world be as real as to love it—then there must be a meaning in the meeting and the parting of life.

If that love were deceived in death, then the canker of this deceit would eat into all things, and the stars would shrivel and grow black.

LIV

The Cloud said to me, “I vanish”; the Night said, “I plunge into the fiery dawn.”

The Pain said, “I remain in deep silence as his footprint.”

“I die into the fulness,” said my life to me.

The Earth said, “My lights kiss your thoughts every moment.”

“The days pass,” Love said, “but I wait for you.”

Death said, “I ply the boat of your life across the sea.”

LV

Tulsidas, the poet, was wandering, deep in thought, by the Ganges, in that lonely spot where they burn their dead.

He found a woman sitting at the feet of the corpse of her dead husband, gaily dressed as for a wedding.

She rose as she saw him, bowed to him, and said, "Permit me, Master, with your blessing, to follow my husband to heaven."

"Why such hurry, my daughter?" asked Tulsidas. "Is not this earth also His who made heaven?"

"For heaven I do not long," said the woman. "I want my husband."

Tulsidas smiled and said to her, "Go back to your home, my child. Before the month is over you will find your husband."

The woman went back with glad hope. Tulsidas came to her everyday and gave her high thoughts to think, till her heart was filled to the brim with divine love.

When the month was scarcely over, her neighbours came to her, asking, "Woman, have you found your husband?"

The widow smiled and said, "I have."

Eagerly they asked, "Where is he?"

"In my heart is my lord, one with me," said the woman.

LVI

You came for a moment to my side and touched me with the great mystery of the woman that there is in the heart of creation.

She who is ever returning to God his own out flowing of sweetness; she is the ever fresh beauty and youth in nature; she dances in the bubbling streams and sings in the morning light; she with heaving waves suckles the thirsty earth; in her the Eternal One breaks in two in a joy that no longer may contain itself, and overflows in the pain of love.

LVII

*Who is she who dwells in my heart, the woman forlorn forever?
I wooed her and I failed to win her. I decked her with wreath sand sang in
her praise.
A smile shone in her face for a moment, then it faded.
“I have no joy in thee,” she cried, the woman in sorrow.
I bought her jewelled anklets and fanned her with a fangem-studded; I made
her a bed on a bedstead of gold.
There flickered a gleam of gladness in her eyes, then it died.
“I have no joy in these,” she cried, the woman in sorrow.
I seated her upon a car of triumph and drove her from end to end of the
earth.
Conquered hearts bowed down at her feet, and shouts of applause rang in the
sky.
Pride shone in her eyes for a moment, then it was dimmed intears.
“I have no joy in conquest,” she cried, the woman in sorrow.
I asked her, “Tell me whom do you seek?”
She only said, “I wait for him of the unknown name.”
Days pass by and she cries, “When will my beloved come whom I know not,
and be known to me forever?”*

LVIII

Yours is the light that breaks forth from the dark, and the good that sprouts from the cleft heart of strife.

Yours is the house that opens upon the world, and the love that calls to the battlefield.

Yours is the gift that still is a gain when everything is a loss, and the life that flows through the caverns of death.

Yours is the heaven that lies in the common dust, and you are there for me, you are there for all.

LIX

*When the weariness of the road is upon me, and the thirst of the sultry day;
when the ghostly hours of the dusk throw their shadows across my life, then
I cry not for your voice only, my friend, but for your touch.*

*There is an anguish in my heart for the burden of its riches not given to you.
Put out your hand through the night, let me hold it and fill it and keep it; let
me feel its touch along the lengthening stretch of my loneliness.*

LX

The odour cries in the bud, “Ah me, the day departs, the happy day of spring, and I am a prisoner in petals!”

Do not lose heart, timid thing! Your bonds will burst, the bud will open into flower, and when you die in the fulness of life, even then the spring will live on.

The odour pants and flutters within the bud, crying, “Ah me, the hours pass by, yet I do not know where I go, or what it is I seek!”

Do not lose heart, timid thing! The spring breeze has over heard your desire, the day will not end before you have fulfilled your being.

Dark is the future to her, and the odour cries in despair, “Ah me, through whose fault is my life so unmeaning?

“Who can tell me, why I am at all?” Do not lose heart, timid thing! The perfect dawn is near when you will mingle your life with all life and know at last your purpose.

LXI

*She is still a child, my lord.
She runs about your palace and plays, and tries to make of you a plaything as well.
She heeds not when her hair tumbles down and her careless garment drags in the dust.
She falls asleep when you speak to her and answers not—and the flower you give her in the morning slips to the dust from her hands.
When the storm bursts and darkness is over the sky she is sleepless; her dolls lie scattered on the earth and she clings to you in terror.
She is afraid that she may fail in service to you.
But with a smile you watch her at her game.
You know her.
The child sitting in the dust is your destined bride; her play will be stilled and deepened into love.*

LXII

“What is there but the sky, O Sun, that can hold thine image?”

“I dream of thee, but to serve thee I can never hope,” the dewdrop wept and said, “I am too small to take thee unto me, great lord, and my life is all tears.”

“I illumine the limitless sky, yet I can yield myself up to a tiny drop of dew,” thus the Sun said; “I shall become but a sparkle of light and fill you, and your little life will be a laughing orb.”

LXIII

*Not for me is the love that knows no restraint, but like the foaming wine that
having burst its vessel in a moment would run to waste.*

*Send me the love which is cool and pure like your rain that blesses the thirsty
earth and fills the homely earthen jars.*

*Send me the love that would soak down into the centre of being, and from
there would spread like the unseen sap through the branching tree of life,
giving birth to fruits and flowers.*

Send me the love that keeps the heart still with the fulness of peace.

LXIV

The sun had set on the western margin of the river among the tangle of the forest.

The hermit boys had brought the cattle home, and sat round the fire to listen to the master, Guatama, when a strange boy came, and greeted him with fruits and flowers, and, bowing low at his feet, spoke in a bird-like voice —“Lord, I have come to thee to be taken into the path of the supreme Truth.”

“My name is Satyakâma.”

“Blessings be on thy head,” said the master.

“Of what clan art thou, my child? It is only fitting for a Brahmin to aspire to the highest wisdom.”

“Master,” answered the boy, “I know not of what can I am. I shall go and ask my mother.”

Thus saying, Satyakâma took leave, and wading across the shallow stream, came back to his mother’s hut, which stood at the end of the sandy waste at the edge of the sleeping village.

The lamp burnt dimly in the room, and the mother stood at the door in the dark waiting for her son’s return.

She clasped him to her bosom, kissed him on his hair, and asked him of his errand to the master.

“What is the name of my father, dear mother?” asked the boy.

“It is only fitting for a Brahmin to aspire to the highest wisdom, said Lord Guatama to me.”

The woman lowered her eyes, and spoke in a whisper.

“In my youth I was poor and had many masters. Thou didst come to thy mother Jabâlâ’s arms, my darling, who had no husband.”

The early rays of the sun glistened on the tree-tops of the forest hermitage.

The students, with their tangled hair still wet with their morning bath, sat under the ancient tree, before the master.

There came Satyakâma.

He bowed low at the feet of the sage, and stood silent.

“Tell me,” the great teacher asked him, “of what clan art thou?”

“My lord,” he answered, “I know it not. My mother said when I asked her, ‘I had served many masters in my youth, and thou hadst come to thy mother

Jabâlâ's arms, who had no husband.'"

There rose a murmur like the angry hum of bees disturbed in their hive; and the students muttered at the shameless insolence of that outcast.

Master Guatama rose from his seat, stretched out his arms, took the boy to his bosom, and said, "Best of all Brahmins art thou, my child. Thou hast the noblest heritage of truth."

LXV

May be there is one house in this city where the gate opens forever this morning at the touch of the sunrise, where the errand of the light is fulfilled. The flowers have opened in hedges and gardens, and maybe there is one heart that has found in them this morning the gift that has been on its voyage from endless time.

LXVI

Listen, my heart, in his flute is the music of the smell of wildflowers, of the glistening leaves and gleaming water, of shadows resonant with bees' wings.

The flute steals his smile from my friend's lips and spreads it over my life.

LXVII

*You always stand alone beyond the stream of my songs.
The waves of my tunes wash your feet but I know not how to reach them.
This play of mine with you is a play from afar.
It is the pain of separation that melts into melody through my flute.
I wait for the time when your boat crosses over to my shore and you take my
flute into your own hands.*

LXVIII

Suddenly the window of my heart flew open this morning, the window that looks out on your heart.

I wondered to see that the name by which you know me is written in April leaves and flowers, and I sat silent.

The curtain was blown away for a moment between my songs and yours.

I found that your morning light was full of my own mute songs unsung; I thought that I would learn them at your feet—and I sat silent.

LXIX

You were in the centre of my heart, therefore when my heart wandered she never found you; you hid yourself from my loves and hopes till the last, for you were always in them.

You were the inmost joy in the play of my youth, and when I was too busy with the play the joy was passed by.

You sang to me in the ecstasies of my life and I forgot to sing to you.

LXX

When you hold your lamp in the sky it throws its light on my face and its shadow falls over you.

When I hold the lamp of love in my heart its light falls on you and I am left standing behind in the shadow.

LXXI

*O the waves, the sky-devouring waves, glistening with light, dancing with life,
the waves of eddying joy, rushing for ever.
The stars rock upon them, thoughts of every tint are cast up out of the deep
and scattered on the beach of life.
Birth and death rise and fall with their rhythm, and the sea-gull of my heart
spreads its wings crying in delight.*

LXXII

*The joy ran from all the world to build my body.
The lights of the skies kissed and kissed her till she woke.
Flowers of hurrying summers sighed in her breath and voices of winds and
water sang in her movements.
The passion of the tide of colours in clouds and in forests flowed into her life,
and the music of all things caressed her limbs into shape.
She is my bride,—she has lighted her lamp in my house.*

LXXIII

*The spring with its leaves and flowers has come into my body.
The bees hum there the morning long, and the winds idly play with the
shadows.*

*A sweet fountain springs up from the heart of my heart.
My eyes are washed with delight like the dew-bathed morning, and life is
quivering in all my limbs like the sounding strings of the lute.
Are you wandering alone by the shore of my life, where the tide is in flood, O
lover of my endless days?
Are my dreams flitting round you like the moths with their many-coloured
wings?
And are those your songs that are echoing in the dark eaves of my being?
Who but you can hear the hum of the crowded hours that sounds in my veins
to-day, the glad steps that dance in my breast, the clamour of the restless
life beating its wings in my body?*

LXXIV

My bonds are cut, my debts are paid, my door has been opened, I go everywhere.

They crouch in their corner and weave their web of pale hours, they count their coins sitting in the dust and call me back.

But my sword is forged, my armour is put on, my horse is eager to run.

I shall win my kingdom.

LXXV

It was only the other day that I came to your earth, naked and nameless, with a wailing cry.

To-day my voice is glad, while you, my lord, stand aside to make room that I may fill my life.

Even when I bring you my songs for an offering I have the secret hope that men will come and love me for them.

You love to discover that I love this world where you have brought me.

LXXVI

Timidly I cowered in the shadow of safety, but now, when the surge of joy carries my heart upon its crest, my heart clings to the cruel rock of its trouble.

I sat alone in a corner of my house thinking it too narrow for any guest, but now when its door is flung open by an unbidden joy I find there is room for thee and for all the world.

I walked upon tiptoe, careful of my person, perfumed, and adorned—but now when a glad whirlwind has overthrown me in the dust I laugh and roll on the earth at thy feet like a child.

LXXVII

*The world is yours at once and for ever.
And because you have no want, my king, you have no pleasure in your
wealth.
It is as though it were naught. Therefore through slow time you give me what
is yours, and ceaselessly win your kingdom in me.
Day after day you buy your sunrise from my heart, and you find your love
carven into the image of my life.*

LXXVIII

*To the birds you gave songs, the birds gave you songs in return.
You gave me only voice, yet asked for more, and I sing.
You made your winds light and they are fleet in their service.
You burdened my hands that I myself may lighten them, and at last, gain
unburdened freedom for your service.
You created your Earth filling its shadows with fragments of light.
There you paused; you left me empty-handed in the dust to create your
heaven.
To all things else you give; from me you ask.
The harvest of my life ripens in the sun and the shower till I reap more than
you sowed, gladdening your heart, O Master of the golden granary.*

LXXIX

Let me not pray to be sheltered from dangers but to be fearless in facing them.

Let me not beg for the stilling of my pain but for the heart to conquer it.

Let me not look for allies in life's battlefield but to my own strength.

Let me not crave in anxious fear to be saved but hope for the patience to win my freedom.

Grant me that I may not be a coward, feeling your mercy in my success alone; but let me find the grasp of your hand in my failure.

LXXX

*You did not know yourself when you dwelt alone, and there was no crying of
an errand when the wind ran from the hither to the farther shore.*

I came and you woke, and the skies blossomed with lights.

*You made me open in many flowers; rocked me in the cradles of many forms;
hid me in death and found me again in life.*

I came and your heart heaved; pain came to you and joy.

You touched me and tingled into love.

*But in my eyes there is a film of shame and in my breast a flicker of fear; my
face is veiled and I weep when I cannot see you.*

*Yet I know the endless thirst in your heart for sight of me, the thirst that cries
at my door in the repeated knockings of sunrise.*

LXXXI

*You, in your timeless watch, listen to my approaching steps while your gladness gathers in the morning twilight and breaks in the burst of light.
The nearer I draw to you the deeper grows the fervour in the dance of the sea.
Your world is a branching spray of light filling your hands, but your heaven is in my secret heart; it slowly opens its buds in shy love.*

LXXXII

*I will utter your name, sitting alone among the shadows of my silent thoughts.
I will utter it without words, I will utter it without purpose.
For I am like a child that calls its mother an hundred times, glad that it can
say “Mother.”*

LXXXIII

I

I feel that all the stars shine in me. The world breaks into my life like a flood. The flowers blossom in my body. All the youthfulness of land and water smokes like an incense in my heart; and the breath of all things plays on my thoughts as on a flute.

II

When the world sleeps I come to your door.

The stars are silent, and I am afraid to sing.

*I wait and watch, till your shadow passes by the balcony of night and I return
with a full heart.*

*Then in the morning I sing by the roadside; The flowers in the hedge give me
answer and the morning air listens, The travellers suddenly stop and look in
my face, thinking I have called them by their names.*

III

Keep me at your door ever attending to your wishes, and let me go about in your Kingdom accepting your call.

Let me not sink and disappear in the depth of languor.

Let not my life be worn out to tatters by penury of waste.

Let not those doubts encompass me,—the dust of distractions.

Let me not pursue many paths to gather many things.

Let me not bend my heart to the yoke of the many.

Let me hold my head high in the courage and pride of being your servant.

LXXXIV. The Oarsmen

Do you hear the tumult of death afar,

The call midst the fire-floods and poisonous clouds— The Captain’s call to the steersman to turn the ship to a nun named shore, For that time is over—the stagnant time in the port— Where the same old merchandise is bought and sold in an endless round, Where dead things drift in the exhaustion and emptiness of truth.

They wake up in sudden fear and ask, “Comrades, what hour has struck? When shall the dawn begin?”

The clouds have blotted away the stars— Who is there then can see the beckoning finger of the day?

They run out with oars in hand, the beds are emptied, the mother prays, the wife watches by the door; There is a wail of parting that rises to the sky, And there is the Captain’s voice in the dark: “Come, sailors, for the time in the harbour is over!”

All the black evils in the world have overflowed their banks, Yet, oarsmen, take your places with the blessing of sorrow in your souls!

Whom do you blame, brothers? Bow your heads down!

The sin has been yours and ours.

The heat growing in the heart of God for ages— The cowardice of the weak, the arrogance of the strong, the greed of fat prosperity, the rancour of the wronged, pride of race, and insult to man— Has burst God’s peace, raging in storm.

Like a ripe pod, let the tempest break its heart into pieces, scattering thunders.

Stop your bluster of dispraise and of self-praise, And with the calm of silent prayer on your foreheads sail to that unnamed shore.

We have known sins and evils every day and death we have known; They pass over our world like clouds mocking us with their transient lightning laughter.

Suddenly they have stopped, become a prodigy, And men must stand before them saying:

“We do not fear you, O Monster! For we have lived every day by conquering you,”

And we die with the faith that Peace is true, and Good is true, and true is the eternal One!”

If the Deathless dwell not in the heart of death, If glad wisdom bloom not bursting the sheath of sorrow, If sin do not die of its own revealment, If pride break not under its load of decorations, Then whence comes the hope that drives these men from their homes like stars rushing to their death in the morning light?

Shall the value of the martyrs’ blood and mothers’ tears be utterly lost in the dust of the earth, not buying Heaven with their price?

And when Man bursts his mortal bounds, is not the Boundless revealed that moment?

LXXXV. The Song of the Defeated

My Master has bid me while I stand at the roadside, to sing the song of Defeat, for that is the bride whom He woos in secret.

She has put on the dark veil, hiding her face from the crowd, but the jewel glows on her breast in the dark.

She is forsaken of the day, and God’s night is waiting for her with its lamps lighted and flowers wet with dew.

She is silent with her eyes downcast; she has left her home behind her, from her home has come that wailing in the wind.

But the stars are singing the love-song of the eternal to a face sweet with shame and suffering.

The door has been opened in the lonely chamber, the call has sounded, and the heart of the darkness throbs with awe because of the coming tryst.

LXXXVI. Thanksgiving

*Those who walk on the path of pride crushing the lowly life under their tread,
covering the tender green of the earth with their footprints in blood; Let
them rejoice, and thank thee, Lord, for the day is theirs.*

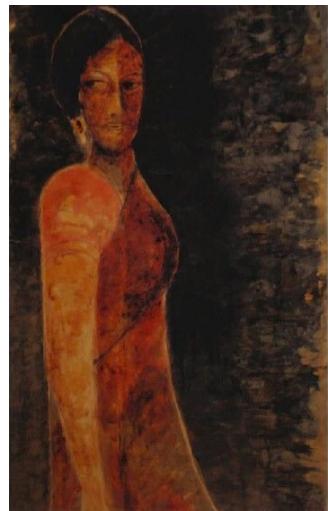
*But I am thankful that my lot lies with the humble who suffer and bear the
burden of power, and hide their faces and stifle their sobs in the dark.*

*For every throb of their pain has pulsed in the secret depth of thy night, and
every insult has been gathered into thy great silence.*

And the morrow is theirs.

*O Sun, rise upon the bleeding hearts blossoming in flowers of the morning,
and the torchlight revelry of pride shrunken to ashes.*

5. The Fugitive



The Fugitive I

1

Darkly you sweep on, Eternal Fugitive, round whose bodiless rush stagnant space frets into eddying bubbles of light.

Is your heart lost to the Lover calling you across his immeasurable loneliness?

Is the aching urgency of your haste the sole reason why your tangled tresses break into stormy riot and pearls of fire roll along your path as from a broken necklace?

Your fleeting steps kiss the dust of this world into sweetness, sweeping aside all waste; the storm centred with your dancing limbs shakes the sacred shower of death over life and freshens her growth.

Should you in sudden weariness stop for a moment, the world would rumble into a heap, an encumbrance, barring its own progress, and even the least speck of dust would pierce the sky throughout its infinity with a unbearable pressure.

My thoughts are quickened by this rhythm of unseen feet round which the anklets of light are shaken.

They echo in the pulse of my heart, and through my blood surges the psalm of the ancient sea.

I hear the thundering flood tumbling my life from world to world and form to form, scattering my being in an endless spray of gifts, in sorrowing sand songs.

The tide runs high, the wind blows, the boat dances like thine own desire, my heart!

Leave the hoard on the shore and sail over the unfathomed dark towards limitless light.

2

We came hither together, friend, and now at the cross-roads I stop to bid you farewell.

Your path is wide and straight before you, but my call comes up by ways from the unknown.

I shall follow wind and cloud; I shall follow the stars to where day breaks behind the hills; I shall follow lovers who, as they walk, twine their days into a wreath on a single thread of song, “I love.”

3

It was growing dark when I asked her, “What strange land have I come to?”

She only lowered her eyes, and the water gurgled in the throat of her jar, as she walked away.

The trees hang vaguely over the bank, and the land appears as though it already belonged to the past.

The water is dumb, the bamboos are darkly still, a wristlet tinkles against the water-jar from down the lane.

Row no more, but fasten the boat to this tree,—for I love the look of this land.

The evening star goes down behind the temple dome, and the pallor of the marble landing haunts the dark water.

Belated wayfarers sigh; for light from hidden windows is splintered into the darkness by intervening wayside trees and bushes. Still that wristlet tinkles against the water-jar, and retreating steps rustle from down the lane littered with leaves.

The night deepens, the palace towers loom spectre—like, and the town hums wearily.

Row no more, but fasten the boat to a tree.

Let me seek rest in this strange land, dimly lying under the stars, where darkness tingles with the tinkle of a wristlet knocking against a water-jar.

4

O that I were stored with a secret, like unshed rain in summer clouds—a

*secret, folded up in silence, that I could wander away with.
O that I had someone to whisper to, where slow waters lap under trees that
doze in the sun.
The hush this evening seems to expect a footfall, and you ask me for the cause
of my tears.
I cannot give a reason why I weep, for that is a secret still withheld from me.*

5

*For once be careless, timid traveller, and utterly lose your way; wide-awake
though you are, be like broad daylight enticed by and netted in mist.
Do not shun the garden of Lost Hearts waiting at the end of the wrong road,
where the grass is strewn with wrecked red flowers, and disconsolate water
heaves in the troubled sea.
Long have you watched over the store gathered by weary years. Let it best
ripped, with nothing remaining but the desolate triumph of losing all.*

6

*Two little bare feet flit over the ground, and seem to embody that metaphor,
“Flowers are the footprints of summer.”
They lightly impress on the dust the chronicle of their adventure, to be erased
by a passing breeze.
Come, stray into my heart, you tender little feet, and leave the everlasting
print of songs on my dreamland path.*

7

*I am like the night to you, little flower.
I can only give you peace and a wakeful silence hidden in the dark.
When in the morning you open your eyes, I shall leave you to a world a—hum
with bees, and songful with birds.
My last gift to you will be a tear dropped into the depth of your youth; it will
make your smile all the sweeter, and be mist your outlook on the pitiless
mirth of day.*

8

Do not stand before my window with those hungry eyes and beg for my secret. It is but a tiny stone of glistening pain streaked with blood-red by passion.

What gifts have you brought in both hands to fling before me in the dust? I fear, if I accept, to create a debt that can never be paid even by the loss of all I have.

Do not stand before my window with your youth and flowers to shame my destitute life.

9

If I were living in the royal town of Ujjain, when Kalidas was the king's poet, I should know some Malwa girl and fill my thoughts with the music of her name. She would glance at me through the slanting shadow of her eyelids, and allow her veil to catch in the jasmine as an excuse for lingering near me.

This very thing happened in some past whose track is lost under time's dead leaves.

The scholars fight to-day about dates that play hide-and-seek.

I do not break my heart dreaming over flown and vanished ages: but alas and alas again, that those Malwa girls have followed them!

To what heaven, I wonder, have they carried in their flower-baskets those days that tingled to the lyrics of the king's poet?

This morning, separation from those whom I was born too late to meet weighs son and saddens my heart.

Yet April carries the same flowers with which they decked their hair, and the same south breeze fluttered their veils as whispers over modern roses.

And, to tell the truth, joys are not lacking to this spring, though Kalidas sing no more; and I know, if he can watch me from the Poets' Paradise, he has reasons to be envious.

10

Be not concerned about her heart, my heart: leave it in the dark.

What if her beauty be of the figure and her smile merely of the face? Let me take without question the simple meaning of her glances and be happy.

I care not if it be a web of delusion that her arms wind about me, for the web itself is rich and rare, and the deceit can be smiled at and forgotten.

Be not concerned about her heart, my heart: be content if the music is true, though the words are not to be believed; enjoy the grace that dances like a lily on the rippling, deceiving surface, whatever may lie beneath.

11

Neither mother nor daughter are you, nor bride, Urvashi. ² Woman you are, to ravish the soul of Paradise.

². The dancing girl of Paradise who rose from the sea.

When weary-footed evening comes down to the folds whither the cattle have returned, you never trim the house lamps nor walk to the bridal bed with a remulous heart and a wavering smile on your lips, glad that the dark hours are so secret.

Like the dawn you are without veil, Urvashi, and without shame.

Who can imagine that aching overflow of splendour which created you!

You rose from the churned ocean on the first day of the first spring, with the cup of life in your right hand and poison in your left. The monster sea, lulled like an enchanted snake, laid down its thousand hoods at your feet.

Your unblemished radiance rose from the foam, white and naked as a jasmine.

Were you ever small, timid or in bud, Urvashi, O Youth everlasting?

Did you sleep, cradled in the deep blue night where the strange light of gems plays over coral, shells and moving creatures of dreamlike form, till day revealed your awful fulness of bloom?

Adored are you of all men in all ages, Urvashi, O endless wonder!

The world throbs with youthful pain at the glance of your eyes, the ascetic lays the fruit of his austerities at your feet, the songs of poets hum and swarm round the perfume of your presence. Your feet, as in careless joy they flit on, wound even the heart of the hollow wind with the tinkle of golden bells.

When you dance before the gods, flinging orbits of novel rhythm into space, Urvashi, the earth shivers, leaf and grass, and autumn fields heave and sway; the sea surges into a frenzy of rhyming waves; the stars drop into the sky—beads from the chain that leaps till it breaks on your breast; and the blood dances in men's hearts with sudden turmoil.

You are the first break on the crest of heaven's slumber, Urvashi, you thrill the air with unrest. The world bathes your limbs in her tears; with colour of her heart's blood are your feet red; lightly you poise on the wave-tossed lotus of desire, Urvashi; you play forever in that limitless mind wherein labours God's tumultuous dream.

12

You, like a rivulet swift and sinuous, laugh and dance, and your steps sing as you trip along.

I, like a bank rugged and steep, stand speechless and stock-still and darkly gaze at you.

I, like a big, foolish storm, of a sudden come rushing on and try to rend my being and scatter it parcelled in a whirl of passion.

You, like the lightning's flash slender and keen, pierce the heart of the turbulent darkness, to disappear in a vivid streak of laughter.

13

You desired my love and yet you did not love me.

Therefore my life clings to you like a chain of which clank and grip grow harsher the more you struggle to be free.

My despair has become your deadly companion, clutching at the faintest of your favours, trying to drag you away into the cavern of tears.

You have shattered my freedom, and with its wreck built your own prison.

14

I am glad you will not wait for me with that lingering pity in your look.

It is only the spell of the night and my farewell words, startled at their own tune of despair, which bring these tears to my eyes. But day will dawn, my eyes will dry and my heart; and there will be no time for weeping.

Who says it is hard to forget?

The mercy of death works at life's core, bringing it respite from its own foolish persistence.

The stormy sea is lulled at last in its rocking cradle; the forest fire falls to sleep on its bed of ashes.

You and I shall part, and the cleavage will be hidden under living grass and flowers that laugh in the sun.

15

*Of all days you have chosen this one to visit my garden.
But the storm passed over my roses last night and the grass is strewn with torn leaves.
I do not know what has brought you, now that the hedges are laid low and rills run in the walks; the prodigal wealth of spring is scattered and the scent and song of yesterday are wrecked.
Yet stay a while; let me find some remnant flowers, though I doubt if your skirt can be filled.
The time will be short, for the clouds thicken and here comes the rain again!*

16

*I forgot myself for a moment, and I came.
But raise your eyes, and let me know if there still linger some shadow of other days, like a pale cloud on the horizon that has been robbed of its rain.
For a moment bear with me if I forget myself.
The roses are still in bud; they do not yet know how we neglect to gather flowers this summer.
The morning star has the same palpitating hush; the early light is enmeshed in the branches that over brow your window, as in those other days.
That times are changed I forget for a little, and have come.
I forget if you ever shamed me by looking away when I bared my heart.
I only remember the words that stranded on the tremor of your lips; I remember in your dark eyes sweeping shadows of passion, like the wings of a home-seeking bird in the dusk.
I forget that you do not remember, and I come.*

17

The rain fell fast. The river rushed and hissed. It licked up and swallowed the island, while I waited alone on the lessening bank with my sheaves of corn

in a heap.

From the shadows of the opposite shore the boat crosses with a woman at the helm.

I cry to her, “Come to my island coiled round with hungry water, and takeaway my year’s harvest.”

She comes, and takes all that I have to the last grain; I ask her to take me. But she says, “No”—the boat is laden with my gift and no room is left for me.

18

The evening beckons, and I would fain follow the travellers who sailed in the last ferry of the ebb-tide to cross the dark.

Some were for home, some for the farther shore, yet all have ventured to sail. But I sit alone at the landing, having left my home and missed the boat: summer is gone and my winter harvest is lost.

I wait for that love which gathers failures to sow them in tears on the dark, that they may bear fruit when day rises anew.

19

On this side of the water there is no landing; the girls do not come here to fetch water; the land along its edge is shaggy with stunted shrubs; a noisy flock of saliks dig their nests in the steep bank under whose frown the fisher-boats find no shelter.

You sit there on the unfrequented grass, and the morning wears on. Tell me what you do on this bank so dry that it is agape with cracks?

She looks in my face and says, “Nothing, nothing whatsoever.”

On this side of the river the bank is deserted, and no cattle come to water.

Only some stray goats from the village browse the scanty grass all day, and the solitary water-hawk watches from an uprooted peepal aslant over the mud.

You sit there alone in the miserly shade of a shimool, and the morning wears on.

Tell me, for whom do you wait?

She looks in my face and says, “No one, no one at all!”

The Fugitive II

I

“Why these preparations without end?”—I said to Mind—“Is someone to come?”

Mind replied, “I am enormously busy gathering things and building towers. I have no time to answer such questions.”

Meekly I went back to my work.

When things were grown to a pile, when seven wings of his palace were complete, I said to Mind, “Is it not enough?”

Mind began to say, “Not enough to contain—” and then stopped.

“Contain what?” I asked.

Mind affected not to hear.

I suspected that Mind did not know, and with ceaseless work smothered the question.

His one refrain was, “I must have more.”

“Why must you?”

“Because it is great.”

“What is great?”

Mind remained silent. I pressed for an answer.

In contempt and anger, Mind said, “Why ask about things that are not? Take notice of those that are hugely before you,—the struggle and the fight, the army and armaments, the bricks and mortar, and labourers without number.”

I thought “Possibly Mind is wise.”

II

Days passed. More wings were added to his palace—more lands to his domain.

The season of rains came to an end. The dark clouds became white and thin, and in the rain-washed sky the sunny hours hovered like butterflies over an unseen flower. I was bewildered and asked everybody I met, “What is that music in the breeze?”

A tramp walked the road whose dress was wild as his manner; he said, “Harkto the music of the Coming!”

I cannot tell why I was convinced, but the words broke from me, “We have not much longer to wait.”

“It is close at hand,” said the mad man.

I went to the office and boldly said to Mind, “Stop all work!”

Mind asked, “Have you any news?”

“Yes,” I answered, “News of the Coming.” But I could not explain.

Mind shook his head and said, “There are neither banners nor pageantry!”

III

The night waned, the stars paled in the sky. Suddenly the touchstone of the morning light tinged everything with gold. A cry spread from mouth to mouth— “Here is the herald!”

I bowed my head and asked, “Is he coming?”

The answer seemed to burst from all sides, “Yes.”

Mind grew troubled and said, “The dome of my building is not yet finished, nothing is in order.”

A voice came from the sky, “Pull down your building!”

“But why?” asked Mind.

“Because to-day is the day of the Coming, and your building is in the way.”

IV

The lofty building lies in the dust and all is scattered and broken.

Mind looked about. But what was there to see?

Only the morning star and the lily washed in dew.

And what else? A child running laughing from its mother’s arms into the open light.

“Was it only for this that they said it was the day of the Coming?”

“Yes, this was why they said there was music in the air and light in the sky.”

“And did they claim all the earth only for this?”

“Yes,” came the answer. “Mind, you build walls to imprison yourself. Your servants toil to enslave themselves; but the whole earth and infinite space are for the child, for the New Life.”

“What does that child bring you?”

“Hope for all the world and its joy.”

Mind asked me, “Poet, do you understand?”

“I lay my work aside,” I said, “for I must have time to understand.”

The Fugitive III

1

Come, Spring, reckless lover of the earth, make the forest's heart pant for utterance!

Come in gusts of disquiet where flowers break open and jostle the new leaves!

Burst, like a rebellion of light, through the night's vigil, through the lake's dark dumbness, through the dungeon under the dust, proclaiming freedom to the shackled seeds!

Like the laughter of lightning, like the shout of a storm, break into the midst of the noisy town; free stifled word and unconscious effort, reinforce our flagging fight, and conquer death!

2

I have looked on this picture in many a month of March when the mustard is in bloom—this lazy line of the water and the grey of the sand beyond, the rough path along the river-bank carrying the comradeship of the field into the heart of the village.

I have tried to capture in rhyme the idle whistle of the wind, the beat of the oar-strokes from a passing boat.

I have wondered in my mind how simply it stands before me, this great world: with what fond and familiar ease it fills my heart, this encounter with the Eternal Stranger.

3

The ferry-boat plies between the two villages facing each other across the narrow stream.

The water is neither wide nor deep—a mere break in the path that enhances

the small adventures of daily life, like a break in the words of a song across which the tune gleefully streams.

While the towers of wealth rise high and crash to ruin, these villages talk to each other across the garrulous stream, and the ferry-boat plies between them, age after age, from seed-time to harvest.

4

In the evening after they have brought their cattle home, they sit on the grass before their huts to know that you are among them unseen, to repeat in their songs the name which they have fondly given you.

While kings' crowns shine and disappear like falling stars, around village huts your name rises through the still night from the simple hearts of your lovers whose names are unrecorded.

5

In Baby's world, the trees shake their leaves at him, murmuring verses in an ancient tongue that dates from before the age of meaning, and the moon feigns to be of his own age—the solitary baby of night.

In the world of the old, flowers dutifully blush at the make—believe of fairy legends, and broken dolls confess that they are made of clay.

6

My world, when I was a child, you were a little girl-neighbour, a loving timid stranger.

Then you grew bold and talked to me across the fence, offering me toys and flowers and shells.

Next you coaxed me away from my work, you tempted me into the land of the dusk or the weedy corner of some garden in mid-day loneliness.

At length you told me stories about bygone times, with which the present ever longs to meet so as to be rescued from its prison in the moment.

7

How often, great Earth, have I felt my being yearn to flow over you, sharing in the happiness of each green blade that raises its signal banner in answer to the beckoning blue of the sky!

I feel as if I had belonged to you ages before I was born. That is why, in the days when the autumn light shimmers on the mellowing ears of rice, I seem to remember a past when my mind was everywhere, and even to hear voices as of playfellows echoing from the remote and deeply veiled past.

When, in the evening, the cattle return to their folds, raising dust from the meadow paths, as the moon rises higher than the smoke ascending from the village huts, I feel sad as for some great separation that happened in the first morning of existence.

8

My mind still buzzed with the cares of a busy day; I sat on without noting how twilight was deepening into dark. Suddenly light stirred across the gloom and touched me as with a finger.

I lifted my head and met the gaze of the full moon widened in wonder like a child's. It held my eyes for long, and I felt as though a love-letter had been secretly dropped in at my window. And ever since my heart is breaking to write for answer something fragrant as Night's unseen flowers—great as her declaration spelt out in nameless stars.

9

The clouds thicken till the morning light seems like a bedraggled fringe to the rainy night.

A little girl stands at her window, still as a rainbow at the gate of a broken-down storm.

She is my neighbour, and has come upon the earth like some god's rebellious laughter. Her mother in anger calls her incorrigible; her father smiles and calls her mad.

She is like a runaway waterfall leaping over boulders, like the top most bamboo twig rustling in the restless wind.

She stands at her window looking out into the sky.

Her sister comes to say, "Mother calls you." She shakes her head.

Her little brother with his toy boat comes and tries to pull her off to play; she

snatches her hand from his. The boy persists and she gives him a slap on the back.

The first great voice was the voice of wind and water in the beginning of earth's creation.

That ancient cry of nature—her dumb call to unborn life—has reached this child's heart and leads it out alone beyond the fence of our times: so there she stands, possessed by eternity!

10

The kingfisher sits still on the prow of an empty boat, while in the shallow margin of the stream a buffalo lies tranquilly blissful, its eyes half closed to savour the luxury of cool mud.

Undismayed by the barking of the village cur, the cow browses on the bank, followed by a hopping group of saliks hunting moths.

I sit in the tamarind grove, where the cries of dumb life congregate—the cattle's lowing, the sparrows' chatter, the shrill scream of a kite overhead, the crickets' chirp, and the splash of a fish in the water.

I peep into the primeval nursery of life, where the mother Earth thrills at the first living clutch near her breast.

11

At the sleepy village the noon was still like a sunny midnight when my holidays came to their end.

My little girl of four had followed me all the morning from room to room, watching my preparations in grave silence, till, wearied, she sat by the doorpost strangely quiet, murmuring to herself, "Father must not go!"

This was the meal hour, when sleep daily overcame her, but her mother had forgotten her and the child was too unhappy to complain.

At last, when I stretched out my arms to her to say farewell, she never moved, but sadly looking at me said, "Father, you must not go!"

And it amused me to tears to think how this little child dared to fight the giant world of necessity with no other resource than those few words, "Father, you must not go!"

12

*Take your holiday, my boy; there are the blue sky and the bare field, the barn
and the ruined temple under the ancient tamarind.*

*My holiday must be taken through yours, finding light in the dance of your
eyes, music in your noisy shouts.*

*To you autumn brings the true holiday freedom: to me it brings the
impossibility of work; for lo! You burst into my room.*

Yes, my holiday is an endless freedom for love to disturb me.

13

*In the evening my little daughter heard a call from her companions below the
window.*

*She timidly went down the dark stairs holding a lamp in her hand, shielding it
behind her veil.*

*I was sitting on my terrace in the star-lit night of March, when at a sudden
cry I ran to see.*

*Her lamp had gone out in the dark spiral staircase. I asked, "Child, why did
you cry?"*

From below she answered in distress, "Father, I have lost myself!"

*When I came back to the terrace under the star-lit night of March, I looked at
the sky, and it seemed that a child was walking there treasuring many lamps
behind her veils.*

*If their light went out, she would suddenly stop and a cry would sound from
sky to sky, "Father, I have lost myself!"*

14

*The evening stood bewildered among street lamps, its gold tarnished by the
city dust.*

*A woman, gaudily decked and painted, leant over the rail of her balcony, a
living fire waiting for its moths.*

*Suddenly an eddy was formed in the road round a street-boy crushed under
the wheels of a carriage, and the woman on the balcony fell to the floor
screaming in agony, stricken with the grief of the great white-robed Mother
who sits in the world's inner shrine.*

15

I remember the scene on the barren heath—a girl sat alone on the grass before the gipsy camp, braiding her hair in the afternoon shade.

Her little dog jumped and barked at her busy hands, as though her employment had no importance.

In vain did she rebuke it, calling it “a pest,” saying she was tired of its perpetual silliness.

She struck it on the nose with her reproving forefinger, which only seemed to delight it the more.

She looked menacingly grave for a few moments, to warn it of impending doom; and then, letting her hair fall, quickly snatched it up in her arms, laughed, and pressed it to her heart.

16

He is tall and lean, withered to the bone with long repeated fever, like a dead tree unable to draw a single drop of sap from anywhere.

In despairing patience, his mother carries him like a child into the sun, where he sits by the roadside in the shortening shadows of each forenoon.

The world passes by—a woman to fetch water, a herd-boy with cattle to pasture, a laden cart to the distant market—and the mother hopes that some least stir of life may touch the awful torpor of her dying son.

17

If the ragged villager, trudging home from the market, could suddenly be lifted to the crest of a distant age, men would stop in their work and shout and run to him in delight.

For they would no longer whittle down the man into the peasant, but find him full of the mystery and spirit of his age.

Even his poverty and pain would grow great, released from the shallow insult of the present, and the paltry things in his basket would acquire pathetic dignity.

18

With the morning he came out to walk a road shaded by a file of deodars,

*that coiled the hill round like importunate love.
He held the first letter from his newly wedded wife in their village home,
begging him to come to her, and come soon.
The touch of an absent hand haunted him as he walked, and the air seemed to
take up the cry of the letter: "Love, my love, my sky is brimming with
tears!"
He asked himself in wonder, "How do I deserve this?"
The sun suddenly appeared over the rim of the blue hills, and four girls from
a foreign shore came with swift strides, talking loud and followed by a
barking dog.
The two elder turned away to conceal their amusement at something strange
in his insignificance, and the younger ones pushed each other, laughed
aloud, and ran off in exuberant mirth.
He stopped and his head sank. Then he suddenly felt his letter, opened and
read it again.*

19

*The day came for the image from the temple to be drawn round the holy town
in its chariot.
The Queen said to the King, "Let us go and attend the festival."
Only one man out of the whole household did not join in the pilgrimage. His
work was to collect stalks of spear-grass to make brooms for the King's
house.
The chief of the servants said in pity to him, "You may come with us."
He bowed his head, saying, "It cannot be."
The man dwelt by the road along which the King's followers had to pass. And
when the Minister's elephant reached this spot, he called to him and said,
"Come with us and see the God ride in his chariot!"
"I dare not seek God after the King's fashion," said the man.
"How should you ever have such luck again as to see the God in his
chariot?" asked the Minister.
"When God himself comes to my door," answered the man.
The Minister laughed loud and said, "Fool! 'When God comes to your door!'
Yet a King must travel to see him!"
"Who except God visits the poor?" said the man.*

20

Days were drawing out as the winter ended, and, in the sun, my dog played in his wild way with the pet deer.

The crowd going to the market gathered by the fence, and laughed to see the love of these playmates struggle with languages so dissimilar.

The spring was in the air, and the young leaves fluttered like flames. Agleam danced in the deer's dark eyes when she started, bent her neck at the movement of her own shadow, or raised her ears to listen to some whisper in the wind.

The message comes floating with the errant breeze, with the rustle and glimmer abroad in the April sky. It sings of the first ache of youth in the world, when the first flower broke from the bud, and love went forth seeking that which it knew not, leaving all it had known.

And one afternoon, when among the amlak trees the shadow grew grave and sweet with the furtive caress of light, the deer set off to run like a meteor in love with death.

It grew dark, and lamps were lighted in the house; the stars came out and night was upon the fields, but the deer never came back.

My dog ran up to me whining, questioning me with his piteous eyes which seemed to say, "I do not understand!"

But who does ever understand?

21

Our Lane is tortuous, as if, ages ago, she started in quest of her goal, vacillated right and left, and remained bewildered forever.

Above in the air, between her buildings, hangs like a ribbon a strip torn out of space: she calls it her sister of the blue town.

She sees the sun only for a few moments at mid-day, and asks herself in wise doubt, "Is it real?"

In June rain sometimes shades her band of daylight as with pencil hatchings. The path grows slippery with mud, and umbrellas collide. Sudden jets of water from spouts overhead splash on her startled pavement. In her dismay, she takes it for the jest of an unmannerly scheme of creation.

The spring breeze, gone astray in her coil of contortions, stumbles like a drunken vagabond against angle and corner, filling the dusty air with scraps of paper and rag. "What fury of foolishness! Are the Gods gone

mad?" she exclaims in indignation.

But the daily refuse from the houses on both sides—scales of fish mixed with ashes, vegetable peelings, rotten fruit, and dead rats—never rouse her to question, "Why should these things be?"

She accepts every stone of her paving. But from between their chinks sometimes a blade of grass peeps up. That baffles her. How can solid facts permit such intrusion?

On a morning when at the touch of autumn light her houses wake up into beauty from their foul dreams, she whispers to herself, "There is a limitless wonder somewhere beyond these buildings."

But the hours pass on; the households are astir; the maid strolls back from the market, swinging her right arm and with the left clasping the basket of provisions to her side; the air grows thick with the smell and smoke of kitchens. It again becomes clear to our Lane that the real and normal consist solely of herself, her houses, and their muck-heaps.

22

The house, lingering on after its wealth has vanished, stands by the wayside like a madman with a patched rag over his back.

Day after day scars it with spiteful scratches, and rainy months leave their fantastic signatures on its bared bricks.

In a deserted upper room one of a pair of doors has fallen from rusty hinges; and the other, widowed, bangs day and night to the fitful gusts.

One night the sound of women wailing came from that house. They mourned the death of the last son of the family, a boy of eighteen, who earned his living by playing the part of the heroine in a travelling theatre.

A few days more and the house became silent, and all the doors were locked.

Only on the north side in the upper room that desolate door would neither drop off to its rest nor be shut, but swung to and fro in the wind like a self-torturing soul.

After a time children's voices echo once more through that house. Over the balcony-rail women's clothes are hung in the sun, a bird whistles from a covered cage, and a boy plays with his kite on the terrace.

A tenant has come to occupy a few rooms. He earns little and has many children. The tired mother beats them and they roll on the floor and shriek.

A maid-servant of forty drudges through the day, quarrels with her mistress,

threatens to, but never leaves.

Every day some small repairs are done. Paper is pasted in place of missing panes; gaps in the railings are made good with split bamboo; an empty box keeps the boltless gate shut; old stains vaguely show through new whitewash on the walls.

The magnificence of wealth had found a fitting memorial in gaunt desolation; but, lacking sufficient means, they try to hide this with dubious devices, and its dignity is outraged.

They have overlooked the deserted room on the north side. And its forlorn door still bangs in the wind, like Despair beating her breast.

23

In the depths of the forest the ascetic practised penance with fast-closed eyes; he intended to deserve Paradise.

But the girl who gathered twigs brought him fruits in her skirt, and water from the stream in cups made of leaves.

The days went on, and his penance grew harsher till the fruits remained untasted, the water untouched: and the girl who gathered twigs was sad.

The Lord of Paradise heard that a man had dared to aspire to be as the Gods. Time after time he had fought the Titans, who were his peers, and kept them out of his kingdom; yet he feared a man whose power was that of suffering.

But he knew the ways of mortals, and he planned a temptation to decoy this creature of dust away from his adventure.

A breath from Paradise kissed the limbs of the girl who gathered twigs, and her youth ached with a sudden rapture of beauty, and her thoughts hummed like the bees of a rifled hive.

The time came when the ascetic should leave the forest for a mountain cave, to complete the rigour of his penance.

When he opened his eyes in order to start on this journey, the girl appeared to him like a verse familiar, yet forgotten, and which an added melody made strange. The ascetic rose from his seat and told her that it was time he left the forest.

“But why rob me of my chance to serve you?” she asked with tears in her eyes.

He sat down again, thought for long, and remained on where he was.

That night remorse kept the girl awake. She began to dread her power and hate her triumph, yet her mind tossed on the waves of turbulent delight.

In the morning she came and saluted the ascetic and asked his blessing, saying she must leave him.

He gazed on her face in silence, then said, "Go, and may your wish be fulfilled."

For years he sat alone till his penance was complete.

The Lord of the Immortals came down to tell him that he had won Paradise.

"I no longer need it," said he.

The God asked him what greater reward he desired.

"I want the girl who gathers twigs."

24

They said that Kabir, the weaver, was favoured of God, and the crowd flocked round him for medicine and miracles. But he was troubled; his low birth had hitherto endowed him with a most precious obscurity to sweeten with songs and with the presence of his God. He prayed that it might be restored.

Envious of the repute of this outcast, the priests leagued themselves with a harlot to disgrace him. Kabir came to the market to sell cloths from his loom; when the woman grasped his hand, blaming him for being faithless, and followed him to his house, saying she would not be forsaken, Kabir said to himself, "God answers prayers in his own way."

Soon the woman felt a shiver of fear and fell on her knees and cried, "Save me from my sin!" To which he said, "Open your life to God's light!"

Kabir worked at his loom and sang, and his songs washed the stains from that woman's heart, and by way of return found a home in her sweet voice.

One day the King, in a fit of caprice, sent a message to Kabir to come and sing before him. The weaver shook his head: but the messenger dared not leave his door till his master's errand was fulfilled.

The King and his courtiers started at the sight of Kabir when he entered the hall. For he was not alone, the woman followed him. Some smiled, some frowned, and the King's face darkened at the beggar's pride and shamelessness.

Kabir came back to his house disgraced, the woman fell at his feet crying, "Why accept such dishonour for my sake, master? Suffer me to go back to

my infamy!"

Kabir said, "I dare not turn my God away when he comes branded with insult."

6. Gitanjali

Introduction

I A few days ago I said to a distinguished Bengali doctor of medicine, “I know no German, yet if a translation of a German poet had moved me, I would go to the British Museum and find books in English that would tell me something of his life, and of the history of his thought. But though these prose translations from Rabindranath Tagore have stirred my blood as nothing has for years, I shall not know anything of his life, and of the movements of thought that have made them possible, if some Indian traveller will not tell me.” It seemed to him natural that I should be moved, for he said, “I read Rabindranath every day, to read one line of his is to forget all the troubles of the world.” I said, “An Englishman living in London in the reign of Richard the Second had he been shown translations from Petrarch or from Dante, would have found no books to answer his questions, but would have questioned some Florentine banker or Lombard merchant as I question you. For all I know, so abundant and simple is this poetry, the new Renaissance has been born in your country and I shall never know of it except by hearsay.” He answered, “We have other poets, but none that are his equal; we call this the epoch of Rabindranath. No poet seems to me as famous in Europe as he is among us. He is as great in music as in poetry, and his songs are sung from the west of India into Burma wherever Bengali is spoken. He was already famous at nineteen when he wrote his first novel; and plays when he was but little older, are still played in Calcutta. I so much admire the completeness of his life; when he was very young he wrote much of natural objects, he would sit all day in his garden; from his twenty-fifth year or so to his thirty-fifth perhaps, when he had a great sorrow, he wrote the most beautiful love poetry in our language”; and then he said with deep emotion, “words can never express what I owed at seventeen to his love poetry. After that his art grew deeper, it became religious and philosophical; all the inspiration of mankind are in his hymns. He is the first among our saints who has not refused to live, but has spoken out of Life itself, and that is why we give him our love.” I may have changed his well-chosen words in my memory but not his thought. “A little while ago

he was to read divine service in one of our churches – we of the Brahma Samaj use your word ‘church’ in English – it was the largest in Calcutta and not only was it crowded, people even standing in the windows, but the streets were all but impassable because of the people.”

Other Indians came to see me and their reverence for this man sounded strange in our world, where we hide great and little things under the same veil of obvious comedy and half-serious depreciation. When we were making the cathedrals had we a like reverence for our great men? “Every morning at three – I know, for I have seen it” – one said to me, “he sits immovable in contemplation, and for two hours does not awake from his reverie upon the nature of God. His father, the Maha Rishi, would sometimes sit there all through the next day; once, upon a river, he fell into contemplation because of the beauty of the landscape, and the rowers waited for eight hours before they could continue their journey.” He then told me of Mr. Tagore’s family and how for generations great men have come out of its cradles. “Today,” he said, “there are Gogonendranath and Abanindranath Tagore, who are artists; and Dwijendranath, Rabindranath’s brother, who is a great philosopher. The squirrels come from the boughs and climb on to his knees and the birds alight upon his hands.” I notice in these men’s thoughts a sense of visible beauty and meaning as though they held that doctrine of Nietzsche that we must not believe in the moral or intellectual beauty which does not sooner or later impress itself upon physical things. I said, “In the East you know how to keep a family illustrious. The other day the curator of a museum pointed out to me a little dark-skinned man who was arranging their Chinese prints and said, ‘That is the hereditary connoisseur of the Mikado, he is the fourteenth of his family to hold the post.’” He answered, “When Rabindranath was a boy he had all round him in his home literature and music.” I thought of the abundance, of the simplicity of the poems, and said, “In your country is there much propagandist writing, much criticism? We have to do so much, especially in my own country, that our minds gradually cease to be creative, and yet we cannot help it. If our life was not a continual warfare, we would not have taste, we would not know what is good, we would not find hearers and readers. Four-fifths of our energy is spent in the quarrel with bad taste, whether in our own minds or in the minds of others.” “I understand,” he replied, “we too have our propagandist writing. In the villages they recite long mythological poems adapted from the Sanskrit in the Middle Ages, and they often insert passages telling the people that they must do their duties.”

II I have carried the manuscript of these translations about with me for

days, reading it in railway trains, or on the top of omnibuses and in restaurants, and I have often had to close it lest some stranger would see how much it moved me. These lyrics – which are in the original, my Indians tell me, full of subtlety of rhythm, of untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention untranslatable delicacies of colour, of metrical invention – display in their thought a world I have dreamed of all my life long. The work of a supreme culture, they yet appear as much the growth of the common soil as the grass and the rushes. A tradition, where poetry and religion are the same thing, has passed through the centuries, gathering from learned and unlearned metaphor and emotion, and carried back again to the multitude the thought of the scholar and of the noble. If the civilization of Bengal remains unbroken, if that common mind which – as one divines – runs through all, is not, as with us, broken into a dozen minds that know nothing of each other, something even of what is most subtle in these verses will have come, in a few generations, to the beggar on the roads. When there was but one mind in England, Chaucer wrote his *Troilus and Cressida*, and though he had written to be read, or to be read out – for our time was coming on apace – he was sung by minstrels for a while. Rabindranath Tagore, like Chaucer's forerunners, writes music for his words, and one understands at every moment that he is so abundant, so spontaneous, so daring in his passion, so full of surprise, because he is doing something which has never seemed strange, unnatural, or in need of defence. These verses will not lie in little well-printed books upon ladies' tables, who turn the pages with indolent hands that they may sigh over a life without meaning, which is yet all they can know of life, or be carried about by students at the university to be laid aside when the work of life begins, but, as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway and men rowing upon the rivers. Lovers, while they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth. At every moment the heart of this poet flows outward to these without derogation or condescension, for it has known that they will understand; and it has filled itself with the circumstance of their lives. The traveller in the read-brown clothes that he wears that dust may not show upon him, the girl searching in her bed for the petals fallen from the wreath of her royal lover, the servant or the bride awaiting the master's home-coming in the empty house, are images

of the heart turning to God. Flowers and rivers, the blowing of conch shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or the parching heat, are images of the moods of that heart in union or in separation; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing upon a lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God Himself. A whole people, a whole civilization, immeasurably strange to us, seems to have been taken up into this imagination; and yet we are not moved because of its strangeness, but because we have met our own image, as though we had walked in Rossetti's willow wood, or heard, perhaps for the first time in literature, our voice as in a dream.

Since the Renaissance the writing of European saints – however familiar their metaphor and the general structure of their thought – has ceased to hold our attention. We know that we must at last forsake the world, and we are accustomed in moments of weariness or exaltation to consider a voluntary forsaking; but how can we, who have read so much poetry, seen so many paintings, listened to so much music, where the cry of the flesh and the cry of the soul seems one, forsake it harshly and rudely? What have we in common with St. Bernard covering his eyes that they may not dwell upon the beauty of the lakes of Switzerland, or with the violent rhetoric of the Book of Revelations? We would, if we might, find, as in this book, words full of courtesy. "I have got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers! I bow to you all and take my departure. Here I give back the keys of my door – and I give up all claims to my house. I only ask for last kind words from you. We were neighbours for long, but I received more than I could give. Now the day has dawned and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out. A summons has come and I am ready for my journey." And it is our own mood, when it is furthest from à Kempis or John of the Cross, that cries, "And because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well." Yet it is not only in our thoughts of the parting that this book fathoms all. We had not known that we loved God, hardly it may be that we believed in Him; yet looking backward upon our life we discover, in our exploration of the pathways of woods, in our delight in the lonely places of hills, in that mysterious claim that we have made, unavailingly on the woman that we have loved, the emotion that created this insidious sweetness. "Entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment." This is no longer the sanctity of the cell and of the scourge; being but a lifting up, as it were, into a greater intensity of the mood of the painter, painting the dust and the sunlight, and we go for a like voice to St. Francis and to William Blake who have seemed so alien in our violent history.

III We write long books where no page perhaps has any quality to make writing a pleasure, being confident in some general design, just as we fight and make money and fill our heads with politics – all dull things in the doing – while Mr. Tagore, like the Indian civilization itself, has been content to discover the soul and surrender himself to its spontaneity. He often seems to contrast his life with that of those who have lived more after our fashion, and have more seeming weight in the world, and always humbly as though he were only sure his way is best for him: “Men going home glance at me and smile and fill me with shame. I sit like a beggar maid, drawing my skirt over my face, and when they ask me, what it is I want, I drop my eyes and answer them not.” At another time, remembering how his life had once a different shape, he will say, “Many an hour I have spent in the strife of the good and the evil, but now it is the pleasure of my playmate of the empty days to draw my heart on to him; and I know not why this sudden call to what useless inconsequence.” An innocence, a simplicity that one does not find elsewhere in literature makes the birds and the leaves seem as near to him as they are near to children, and the changes of the seasons great events as before our thoughts had arisen between them and us. At times I wonder if he has it from the literature of Bengal or from religion, and at other times, remembering the birds alighting on his brother’s hands, I find pleasure in thinking it hereditary, a mystery that was growing through the centuries like the courtesy of a Tristan or a Pelanore. Indeed, when he is speaking of children, so much a part of himself this quality seems, one is not certain that he is not also speaking of the saints, “They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of worlds. They know not how to swim, they know not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.”

—W.B. YEATS
September 1912

Chapter 1

Thou hast made me endless, such is thy pleasure. This frail vessel thou emptiest again and again, and fillest it ever with fresh life.

This little flute of a reed thou hast carried over hills and dales, and hast breathed through it melodies eternally new.

At the immortal touch of thy hands my little heart loses its limits in joy and gives birth to utterance ineffable.

Thy infinite gifts come to me only on these very small hands of mine. Ages pass, and still thou pourest, and still there is room to fill.

Chapter 2

When thou commandest me to sing, it seems that my heart would break with pride; and I look to thy face, and tears come to my eyes.

All that is harsh and dissonant in my life melts into one sweet harmony – and my adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.

I know thou takest pleasure in my singing. I know that only as a singer I come before thy presence.

I touch by the edge of the far-spreading wing of my song thy feet which I could never aspire to reach.

Drunk with the joy of singing I forget myself and call thee friend who art my lord.

Chapter 3

I know not how thou singest, my master! I ever listen in silent amazement.

The light of thy music illumines the world. The life breath of thy music runs from sky to sky. The holy stream of thy music breaks through all stony obstacles and rushes on.

My heart longs to join in thy song, but vainly struggles for a voice. I would speak, but speech breaks not into song, and I cry out baffled. Ah, thou hast made my heart captive in the endless meshes of thy music, my master!

Chapter 4

Life of my life, I shall ever try to keep my body pure, knowing that thy living touch is upon all my limbs.

I shall ever try to keep all untruths out from my thoughts, knowing that thou art that truth which has kindled the light of reason in my mind.

I shall ever try to drive all evils away from my heart and keep my love in flower, knowing that thou hast thy seat in the inmost shrine of my heart.

And it shall be my endeavour to reveal thee in my actions, knowing it is thy power gives me strength to act.

Chapter 5

I ask for a moment's indulgence to sit by thy side. The works that I have in hand I will finish afterwards.

Away from the sight of thy face my heart knows no rest nor respite, and my work becomes an endless toil in a shoreless sea of toil.

To-day the summer has come at my window with its sighs and murmurs; and the bees are plying their minstrelsy at the court of the flowering grove.

Now it is time to sit quiet, face to face with thee, and to sing dedication of life in this silent and overflowing leisure.

Chapter 6

Pluck this little flower and take it. Delay not! I fear lest it droop and drop into the dust.

It may not find a place in thy garland, but honour it with a touch of pain from thy hand and pluck it. I fear lest the day end before I am aware, and the time of offering go by.

Though its colour be not deep and its smell be faint, use this flower in thy service and pluck it while there is time.

Chapter 7

My song has put off her adornments. She has no pride of dress and decoration. Ornaments would mar our union; they would come between thee and me; their jingling would drown thy whispers.

My poet's vanity dies in shame before thy sight. O master poet, I have sat down at thy feet. Only let me make my life simple and straight, like a flute of reed for thee to fill with music.

Chapter 8

The child, who is decked with prince's robes and who has jewelled chains round his neck loses all pleasure in his play; his dress hampers him at every step.

In fear that it may be frayed, or stained with dust he keeps himself from the world, and is afraid even to move.

Mother, it is no gain, thy bondage of finery, if it keep one shut off from the healthful dust of the earth, if it rob one of the right of entrance to the great fair of common human life.

Chapter 9

O fool, to try to carry thyself upon thy own shoulders! O beggar, to come to beg at thy own door!

Leave all thy burdens on his hands who can bear all, and never look behind in regret.

Thy desire at once puts out the light from the lamp it touches with its breath. It is unholy – take not thy gifts through its unclean hands. Accept only what is offered by sacred love.

Chapter 10

Here is thy footstool and there rest thy feet where live the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

When I try to bow to thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth where thy feet rest among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

Pride can never approach to where thou walkest in the clothes of the humble among the poorest, and lowliest, and lost.

My heart can never find its way to where thou keepest company with the companionless among the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost.

Chapter 11

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom dost thou worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open thine eyes and see thy God is not before thee!

He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the pathmaker is breaking stones. He is with them in sun and in shower, and his garment is covered with dust. Put off thy holy mantle and even like him come down on the dusty soil!

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Our master himself has joyfully taken upon him the bonds of creation; he is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of thy meditations and leave aside thy flowers and incense! What harm is there is thy clothes become tattered and stained? Meet him and stand by him in toil and in sweat of thy brow.

Chapter 12

The time that my journey takes is long and the way of it long.

I came out on the chariot of the first gleam of light, and pursued my voyage through the wildernesses of worlds leaving my track on many a star and planet.

It is the most distant course that comes nearest to thyself, and that training is the most intricate which leads to the utter simplicity of a tune.

The traveller has to knock at every alien door to come to his own, and one has to wander through all the outer worlds to reach the innermost shrine at the end.

My eyes strayed far and wide before I shut them and said, "Here art thou!"

The question and the cry, "Oh, where?" melt into tears of a thousand streams and deluge the world with the flood of the assurance, "I am!"

Chapter 13

The song that I came to sing remains unsung to this day.

I have spent my days in stringing and in unstringing my instrument.

The time has not come true, the words have not been rightly set; only there is the agony of wishing in my heart.

The blossom has not opened; only the wind is sighing by.

I have not seen his face, nor have I listened to his voice; only I have heard his gentle footsteps from the road before my house.

The livelong day has passed in spreading his seat on the floor; but the lamp has not been lit and I cannot ask him into my house.

I live in the hope of meeting with him; but this meeting is not yet.

Chapter 14

My desires are many and my cry is pitiful, but ever didst thou save me by hard refusals; and this strong mercy has been wrought into my life through and through.

Day by day thou art making me worthy of the simple, great gifts that thou gavest to me unasked – this sky and the light, this body and the life and the mind – saving me from perils of overmuch desire.

There are times when I languidly linger and times when I awaken and hurry in search of my goal; but cruelly thou hidest thyself from before me.

Day by day thou art making me worthy of thy full acceptance by refusing me ever and anon, saving me from perils of weak, uncertain desire.

Chapter 15

I am here to sing thee songs. In this hall of thine I have a corner seat.

In thy world I have no work to do; my useless life can only break out in tunes without a purpose.

When the hour strikes for thy silent worship at the dark temple of midnight, command me, my master, to stand before thee to sing.

When in the morning air the golden harp is tuned honour me, commanding my presence.

Chapter 16

I have had my invitation to this world's festival, and thus my life has been blessed. My eyes have seen and my ears have heard.

It was my part at this feast to play upon my instrument, and I have done all I could.

Now, I ask, has the time come at last when I may go in and see thy face and offer thee my silent salutation?

Chapter 17

I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands. That is why it is so late and why I have been guilty of such omissions.

They come with their laws and their codes to bind me fast; but I evade them ever, for I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands.

People blame me and call me heedless; I doubt not they are right in their blame.

The market day is over and work is all done for the busy. Those who came to call me in vain have gone back in anger. I am only waiting for love to give myself up at last into his hands.

Chapter 18

Clouds heap upon clouds and it darkens. Ah, love, why dost thou let me wait outside at the door all alone?

In the busy moments of the noontide work I am with the crowd, but on this dark lonely day it is only for thee that I hope.

If thou shonest me not thy face, if thou leavest me wholly aside, I know not how I am to pass these long, rainy hours.

I keep gazing on the far-away gloom of the sky, and my heart wanders wailing with the restless wind.

Chapter 19

If thou speakest not I will fill my heart with thy silence and endure it. I will keep still and wait like the night with starry vigil and its head bent low with patience.

The morning will surely come, the darkness will vanish, and thy voice pour down in golden streams breaking through the sky.

Then thy words will take wing in songs from every one of my birds' nests, and thy melodies will break forth in flowers in all my forest groves.

Chapter 20

On the day when the lotus bloomed, alas, my mind was straying, and I knew it not. My basket was empty and the flower remained unheeded.

Only now and again a sadness fell upon me, and I started up from my dream and felt a sweet trace of a strange fragrance in the south wind.

That vague sweetness made my heart ache with longing and it seemed to me that it was the eager breath of the summer seeking for its completion.

I knew not then that it was so near, that it was mine, and that this perfect sweetness had blossomed in the depth of my own heart.

Chapter 21

I must launch out my boat. The languid hours pass by on the shore – Alas for me!

The spring has done its flowering and taken leave. And now with the burden of faded futile flowers I wait and linger.

The waves have become clamorous, and upon the bank in the shady lane the yellow leaves flutter and fall.

What emptiness do you gaze upon! Do you not feel a thrill passing through the air with the notes of the faraway song floating from the other shore?

Chapter 22

In the deep shadows of the rainy July, with secret steps, thou walkest, silent as night, eluding all watchers.

To-day the morning has closed its eyes, heedless of the insistent calls of the loud east wind, and a thick veil has been drawn over the ever-wakeful blue sky.

The woodlands have hushed their songs, and doors are all shut at every house. Thou art the solitary wayfarer in this deserted street. Oh, my only friend, my best beloved, the gates are open in my house – do not pass by like a dream.

Chapter 23

Art thou abroad on this stormy night on thy journey of love, my friend? The sky groans like one in despair.

I have no sleep to-night. Ever and again I open my door and look out on the darkness, my friend!

I can see nothing before me. I wonder where lies thy path!

By what dim shore of the ink-black river, by what far edge of the frowning forest, through what mazy depth of gloom art thou threading thy course to come to me, my friend?

Chapter 24

If the day is done, if birds sing no more, if the wind has flagged tired, then draw the veil of darkness thick upon me, even as thou hast wrapt the earth with the coverlet of sleep and tenderly closed the petals of the drooping lotus at dusk.

From the traveller, whose sack of provisions is empty before the voyage is ended, whose garment is torn and dust-laden, whose strength is exhausted, remove shame and poverty, and renew his life like a flower under the cover of thy kindly night.

Chapter 25

In the night of weariness let me give myself up to sleep without struggle, resting my trust upon thee.

Let me not force my flagging spirit into a poor preparation for thy worship.

It is thou who drawest the veil of night upon the tired eyes of the day to renew its sight in a fresher gladness of awakening.

Chapter 26

He came and sat by my side but I woke not. What a cursed sleep it was, O miserable me!

He came when the night was still; he had his harp in his hands, and my dreams became resonant with its melodies.

Alas, why are my nights all thus lost? Ah, why do I ever miss his sight whose breath touches my sleep?

Chapter 27

Light, oh, where is the light? Kindle it with the burning fire of desire!

There is the lamp but never a flicker of a flame, – is such thy fate, my heart?
Ah, death were better by far for thee!

Misery knocks at thy door, and her message is that thy lord is wakeful, and he calls thee to the love-tryst through the darkness of night.

The sky is overcast with clouds and the rain is ceaseless. I know not what this is that stirs in me, – I know not its meaning.

A moment's flash of lightning drags down a deeper gloom on my sight, and my heart gropes for the path to where the music of the night calls me.

Light, oh, where is the light? Kindle it with the burning fire of desire! It thunders and the wind rushes screaming through the void. The night is black as a black stone. Let not the hours pass by in the dark. Kindle the lamp of love with thy life.

Chapter 28

Obstinate are the trammels, but my heart aches when I try to break them.

Freedom is all I want, but to hope for it I feel ashamed.

I am certain that priceless wealth is in thee, and that thou art my best friend, but I have not the heart to sweep away the tinsel that fills my room.

The shroud that covers me is a shroud of dust and death; I hate it, yet hug it in love.

My debts are large, my failures great, my shame secret and heavy; yet when I come to ask for my good, I quake in fear lest my prayer be granted.

Chapter 29

He whom I enclose with my name is weeping in this dungeon. I am ever busy building this wall all around; and as this wall goes up into the sky day by day I lose sight of my true being in its dark shadow.

I take pride in this great wall, and I plaster it with dust and sand lest a least hole should be left in this name; and for all the care I take I lose sight of my true being.

Chapter 30

I came out alone on my way to my tryst. But who is this that follows me in the silent dark?

I move aside to avoid his presence but I escape him not.

He makes the dust rise from the earth with his swagger; he adds his loud voice to every word that I utter.

He is my own little self, my lord, he known no shame; but I am ashamed to come to thy door in his company.

Chapter 31

“Prisoner, tell me, who was it that bound you?”

“It was my master,” said the prisoner. “I thought I could outdo everybody in the world in wealth and power, and I amassed in my own treasure-house the money due to my king. When sleep overcame me I lay upon the bed that was for my lord, and on waking up I found I was a prisoner in my own treasure-house.”

“Prisoner, tell me, who was it that wrought this unbreakable chain?”

“It was I,” said the prisoner, “who forged this chain very carefully. I thought my invincible power would hold the world captive leaving me in a freedom undisturbed. Thus night and day I worked at the chain with huge fires and cruel hard strokes. When at last the work was done and the links were complete and unbreakable, I found that it held me in its grip.”

Chapter 32

By all means they try to hold me secure who love me in this world. But it is otherwise with thy love which is greater than theirs, and thou keepest me free.

Lest I forget them they never venture to leave me alone. But day passes by after day and thou art not seen.

If I call not thee in my prayers, if I keep not thee in my heart, thy love for me still waits for my love.

Chapter 33

When it was day they came into my house and said, “We shall only take the smallest room here.”

They said, “We shall help you in the worship of your God and humbly accept only our own share of his grace;” and then they took their seat in a corner and they sat quiet and meek.

But in the darkness of night I find they break into my sacred shrine, strong and turbulent, and snatch with unholy greed the offerings from God’s altar.

Chapter 34

Let only that little be left of me whereby I may name thee my all.

Let only that little be left of my will whereby I may feel thee on every side, and come to thee in everything, and offer to thee my love every moment.

Let only that little be left of me whereby I may never hide thee.

Let only that little of my fetters be left whereby I am bound with thy will, and thy purpose is carried out in my life – and that is the fetter of thy love.

Chapter 35

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;
Where knowledge is free;
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic
walls;
Where words come out from the depth of truth;
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert
sand of dead habit;
Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action –
Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.

Chapter 36

This is my prayer to thee, my lord – strike, strike at the root of penury in my heart.

Give me the strength lightly to bear my joys and sorrows.

Give me the strength to make my love fruitful in service.

Give me the strength never to disown the poor or bend my knees before insolent might.

Give me the strength to raise my mind high above daily trifles.

And give me the strength to surrender my strength to thy will with love.

Chapter 37

I thought that my voyage had come to its end at the last limit of my power, – that the path before me was closed, that provisions were exhausted and the time come to take shelter in a silent obscurity.

But I find that thy will knows no end in me. And when old words die out on the tongue, new melodies break forth from the heart; and where the old tracks are lost, new country is revealed with its wonders.

Chapter 38

That I want thee, only thee – let my heart repeat without end. All desires that distract me, day and night, are false and empty to the core.

As the night keeps hidden in its gloom the petition for light, even thus in the depth of my unconsciousness rings the cry – “I want thee, only thee”.

As the storm still seeks its end in peace when it strikes against peace with all its might, even thus my rebellion strikes against thy love and still its cry is – “I want thee, only thee”.

Chapter 39

When the heart is hard and parched up, come upon me with a shower of mercy.

When grace is lost from life, come with a burst of song.

When tumultuous work raises its din on all sides shutting me out from beyond, come to me, my lord of silence, with thy peace and rest.

When my beggarly heart sits crouched, shut up in a corner, break open the door, my king, and come with the ceremony of a king.

When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust, O thou holy one, thou wakeful, come with thy light and thy thunder.

Chapter 40

The rain has held back for days and days, my God, in my arid heart. The horizon is fiercely naked – not the thinnest cover of a soft cloud, not the vaguest hint of a distant cool shower.

Send thy angry storm, dark with death, if it is thy wish, and with lashes of lightning startle the sky from end to end.

But call back, my lord, call back this pervading silent heat, still and keen and cruel, burning the heart with dire despair.

Let the cloud of grace bend low from above like the tearful look of the mother on the day of the father's wrath.

Chapter 41

Where dost thou stand behind them all, my lover, hiding thyself in the shadows? They push thee and pass thee by on the dusty road, taking thee for naught. I wait here weary hours spreading my offerings for thee, while passers-by come and take my flowers, one by one, and my basket is nearly empty.

The morning time is past, and the noon. In the shade of evening my eyes are drowsy with sleep. Men going home glance at me and smile and fill me with shame. I sit like a beggar maid, drawing my skirt over my face, and when they ask me what it is I want, I drop my eyes and answer them not.

Oh, how, indeed, could I tell them that for thee I wait, and that thou hast promised to come? How could I utter for shame that I keep for my dowry this poverty? Ah, I hug this pride in the secret of my heart.

I sit on the grass and gaze upon the sky and dream of the sudden splendour of thy coming – all the lights ablaze, golden pennons flying over thy car, and they at the roadside standing agape, when they see thee come down from thy seat to raise me from the dust, and set at thy side this ragged beggar girl a-tremble with shame and pride, like a creeper in a summer breeze.

But time glides on and still no sound of the wheels of thy chariot. Many a procession passes by with noise and shouts and glamour of glory. Is it only thou who wouldst stand in the shadow silent and behind them all? And only I who would wait and weep and wear out my heart in vain longing!

Chapter 42

Early in the day it was whispered that we should sail in a boat, only thou and I, and never a soul in the world would know of this our pilgrimage to no country and to no end.

In that shoreless ocean, at thy silently listening smile my songs would swell in melodies, free as waves, free from all bondage of words.

Is the time not come yet? Are there works still to do? Lo, the evening has come down upon the shore and in the fading light the seabirds come flying to their nests.

Who knows when the chains will be off, and the boat, like the last glimmer of sunset , vanish into the night?

Chapter 43

The day was when I did not keep myself in readiness for thee; and entering my heart unbidden even as one of the common crowd, unknown to me, my king, thou didst press the signet of eternity upon many a fleeting moment of my life.

And to-day when by chance I light upon them and see thy signature, I find they have lain scattered in the dust mixed with the memory of joys and sorrows of my trivial days forgotten.

Thou didst not turn in contempt from my childish play among dust, and the steps that I heard in my playroom are the same that are echoing from star to star.

Chapter 44

This is my delight, thus to wait and watch at the wayside where shadow chases light and the rain comes in the wake of the summer.

Messengers, with tidings from unknown skies, greet me and speed along the road. My heart is glad within, and the breath of the passing breeze is sweet.

From dawn till dusk I sit here before my door, and I know that of a sudden the happy moment will arrive when I shall see.

In the meanwhile I smile and I sing all alone. In the meanwhile the air is filling with the perfume of promise.

Chapter 45

Have you not heard his silent steps? He comes, comes, ever comes.

Every moment and every age, every day and every night he comes, comes, ever comes. Many a song have I sung in many a mood of mind, but all their notes have always proclaimed, “He come, come, ever comes”.

In the fragrant days of sunny April through the forest path he comes, comes, ever comes.

In the rainy gloom of July nights on the thundering chariot of clouds he comes, comes, ever comes.

In sorrow after sorrow it is his steps that press upon my heart, and it is the golden touch of his feet that makes my joy to shine.

Chapter 46

I know not from what distant time thou art ever coming nearer to meet me. Thy sun and stars can never keep thee hidden from me for aye.

In many a morning and eve thy footsteps have been heard and thy messenger has come within my heart and called me in secret.

I know not why to-day my life is all astir, and a feeling of tremulous joy is passing through my heart.

It is as if the time were come to wind up my work, and I feel in the air a faint smell of thy sweet presence.

Chapter 47

The night is nearly spent waiting for him in vain. I fear lest in the morning he suddenly come to my door when I have fallen asleep wearied out. Oh, friends, leave the way open to him – forbid him not.

If the sound of his steps does not wake me, do not try to rouse me, I pray. I wish not to be called from my sleep by the clamorous choir, of birds, by the riot of wind at the festival of morning light. Let me sleep undisturbed even if my lord comes of a sudden to my door.

Ah, my sleep, precious sleep, which only waits for his touch to vanish. Ah, my closed eyes that would open their lids only to the light of his smile when he stands before me like a dream emerging from darkness of sleep.

Let him appear before my sight as the first of all lights and all forms. The first thrill of joy to my awakened soul, let it come from his glance. And let my return to myself be immediate return to him.

Chapter 48

The morning sea of silence broke into ripples of bird songs; and the flowers were all merry by the roadside; and the wealth of gold was scattered through the rift of the clouds while we busily went on our way and paid no heed. We sang no glad songs nor played; we went not to the village for barter; we spoke not a word nor smiled; we lingered not on the way. We quickened our pace more and more as the time sped by.

The sun rose to the mid sky and doves cooed in the shade. Withered leaves danced and whirled in the hot air of noon. The shepherd boy drowsed and dreamed in the shadow of the banyan tree, and I laid myself down by the water and stretched my tired limbs on the grass.

My companions laughed at me in scorn; they held their heads high and hurried on; they never looked back nor rested; they vanished in the distant blue haze. They crossed many meadows and hills, and passed through strange, far-away countries. All honour to you, heroic host of the interminable path! Mockery and reproach pricked me to rise, but found no response in me. I gave myself up for lost in the depth of a glad humiliation – in the shadow of a dim delight.

The repose of the sun-embroidered green gloom slowly spread over my heart. I forgot for what I had travelled, and I surrendered my mind without struggle to the maze of shadows and songs.

At last, when I woke from my slumber and opened my eyes, I saw thee standing by me, flooding my sleep with thy smile. How I had feared that the path was long and wearisome, and the struggle to reach thee was hard!

Chapter 49

You came down from your throne and stood at my cottage door.

I was singing and alone in a corner, and the melody caught your ear. You came down and stood at my cottage door.

Masters are many in your hall, and songs are sung there at all hours. But the simple carol of this novice struck at your love. One plaintive little strain mingled with the great music of the world, and with a flower for a prize you came down and stopped at my cottage door.

Chapter 50

I had gone a-begging from door to door in the village path, when thy golden chariot appeared in the distance like a gorgeous dream and I wondered who was this King of all kings!

My hopes rose high and methought my evil days were at an end, and I stood waiting for alms to be given unasked and for wealth scattered on all sides in the dust.

The chariot stopped where I stood. Thy glance fell on me and thou camest down with a smile. I felt that the luck of my life had come at last. Then of a sudden thou didst hold out thy right hand and say, "What hast thou to give to me?"

Ah, what a kingly jest was it to open thy palm to a beggar to beg! I was confused and stood undecided, and then from my wallet I slowly cook out the least little grain of corn and gave it to thee.

But how great my surprise when at the day's end I emptied my bag on the floor to find a least little grain of gold among the poor heap! I bitterly wept and wished that I had had the heart to give thee my all.

Chapter 51

The night darkened. Our day's works had been done. We thought that the last guest had arrived for the night and the doors in the village were all shut. Only some said the King was to come. We laughed and said, "No, it cannot be!"

It seemed there were knocks at the door and we said it was nothing but the wind. We put out the lamps and lay down to sleep. Only some said, "It is the messenger!" We laughed and said, "No, it must be the wind!"

There came a sound in the dead of the night. We sleepily thought it was the distant thunder. The earth shook, the walls rocked, and it troubled us in our sleep. Only some said it was the sound of wheels. We said in a drowsy murmur, "No, it must be the rumbling of clouds!"

The night was still dark when the drum sounded. The voice came, "Wake up! delay not!" We pressed our hands on our hearts and shuddered with fear. Some said, "Lo, there is the King's flag!" We stood up on our feet and cried "There is no time for delay!"

The King has come – but where are lights, where are wreaths? Where is the throne to seat him? Oh, shame! Oh utter shame! Where is the hall, the decorations? Some one has said, "Vain is this cry! Greet him with empty hands, lead him into thy rooms all bare!"

Open the doors, let the conch-shells be sounded! In the depth of the night has come the King of our dark, dreary house. The thunder roars in the sky. The darkness shudders with lightning. Bring out thy tattered piece of mat and spread it in the courtyard. With the storm has came of a sudden our King of the fearful night.

Chapter 52

I thought I should ask of thee – but I dared not – the rose wreath thou hadst on thy neck. Thus I waited for the morning, when thou didst depart, to find a few fragments on the bed. And like a beggar I searched in the dawn only for a stray petal or two.

Ah me, what is it I find? What token left of thy love? It is no flower, no spices, no vase of perfumed water. It is thy mighty sword, flashing as a flame, heavy as a bolt of thunder. The young light of morning comes through the window and spreads itself upon thy bed. The morning bird twitters and asks, “Woman, what hast thou got?” No, it is no flower, nor spices, nor vase of perfumed water – it is thy dreadful sword.

I sit and muse in wonder, what gift is this of thine. I can find no place where to hide it. I am ashamed to wear it, frail as I am, and it hurts me when I press it to my bosom. Yet shall I bear in my heart this honour of the burden of pain, this gift of thine.

From now there shall be no fear left for me in this world, and thou shalt be victorious in all my strife. Thou hast left death for my companion and I shall crown him with my life. Thy sword is with my to cut asunder my bonds, and there shall be no fear left for me in the world.

From now I leave off all petty decorations. Lord of my heart, no more shall there be for me waiting and weeping in corners, no more coyness and sweetness of demeanour. Thou hast given me thy sword for adornment. No more doll’s decorations for me!

Chapter 53

Beautiful is thy wristlet, decked with stars and cunningly wrought in myriad-coloured jewels. But more beautiful to me thy sword with its curve of lightning like the outspread wings of the divine bird of Vishnu, perfectly poised in the angry red light of the sunset.

It quivers like the one last response of life in ecstasy of pain at the final stroke of death; it shines like the pure flame of being burning up earthly sense with one fierce flash.

Beautiful is thy wristlet, decked with starry gems; but thy sword, O lord of thunder, is wrought with uttermost beauty, terrible to behold or to think of.

Chapter 54

I asked nothing from thee; I uttered not my name to thine ear. When thou took'st thy leave I stood silent. I was alone by the well where the shadow of the tree fell aslant, and the women had gone home with their brown earthen pitchers full to the brim. They called me and shouted, "Come with us, the morning is wearing on to noon." But I languidly lingered awhile lost in the midst of vague musings.

I heard not thy steps as thou camest. Thine eyes were sad when they fell on me; thy voice was tired as thou spakest low – "Ah, I am a thirsty traveller." I started up from my day-dreams and poured water from my jar on thy joined palms. The leaves rustled overhead; the cuckoo sang from the unseen dark, and perfume of *babla* flowers came from the bend of the road.

I stood speechless with shame when my name thou didst ask. Indeed, what had I done for thee to keep me in remembrance? But the memory that I could give water to thee to allay thy thirst will cling to my heart and enfold it in sweetness. The morning hour is late, the bird sings in weary notes, *neem* leaves rustle overhead and I sit and think and think.

Chapter 55

Languors upon your heart and the slumber is still on your eyes.

Has not the word come to you that the flower is reigning in splendour among thorns? Wake, oh, awaken! Let not the time pass in vain!

At the end of the stony path, in the country of virgin solitude, my friend is sitting all alone. Deceive him not. Wake, oh, awaken!

What if the sky pants and trembles with the heat of the midday sun – what if the burning sand spreads its mantle of thirst –

Is there no joy in the deep of your heart? At every footfall of yours, will not the harp of the road break out in sweet music of pain?

Chapter 56

Thus it is that thy joy in me is so full. Thus it is that thou hast come down to me.
O thou lord of all heavens, where would be thy love if I were not?

Thou hast taken me as thy partner of all this wealth. In my heart is the endless
play of thy delight. In my life thy will is ever taking shape.

And for this, thou who art the King of kings hast decked thyself in beauty to
captivate my heart. And for this thy love loses itself in the love of thy lover, and
there art thou seen in the perfect union of two.

Chapter 57

Light, my light, the world-filling light, the eye-kissing light, heart-sweetening light!

Ah, the light dances, my darling, at the centre of my life; the light strikes, my darling, the chords of my love; the sky opens, the wind runs wild, laughter passes over the earth.

The butterflies spread their sails on the sea of light. Lilies and jasmines surge up on the crest of the waves of light.

The light is shattered into gold on every cloud, my darling, and it scatters gems in profusion.

Mirth spreads from leaf to leaf, my darling, and gladness without measure. The heaven's river has drowned its banks and the flood of joy is abroad.

Chapter 58

Let all the strains of joy mingle in my last song – the joy that makes the earth flow over in the riotous excess of the grass, the joy that sets the twin brothers, like and death, dancing over the wide world, the joy that sweeps in with the tempest, shaking and waking all life with laughter, the joy that sits still with its tears on the open red lotus of pain, and the joy that throws everything it has upon the dust, and knows not a word.

Chapter 59

Yes, I know, this is nothing but thy love, O beloved of my heart – this golden light that dances upon the leaves, these idle clouds sailing across the sky, this passing breeze leaving its coolness upon my forehead. The morning light has flooded my eyes – this is thy message to my heart. Thy face is bent from above, thy eyes look down on my eyes, and my heart has touched thy feet.

Chapter 60

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. The infinite sky is motionless overhead and the restless water is boisterous. On the seashore of endless worlds the children meet with shouts and dances.

They build their houses with sand and they play with empty shells. With withered leaves they weave their boats and smilingly float them on the vast deep. Children have their play on the seashore of worlds.

They know not how to swim, they now not how to cast nets. Pearl fishers dive for pearls, merchants sail in their ships, while children gather pebbles and scatter them again. They seek not for hidden treasures, they know not how to cast nets.

The sea surges up with laughter and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach. Death-dealing waves sing meaningless ballads to the children, even like a mother while rocking her baby's cradle. The sea plays with children, and pale gleams the smile of the sea beach.

On the seashore of endless worlds children meet. Tempest roams in the pathless sky, ships get wrecked in the trackless water, death is abroad and children play. On the seashore of endless worlds is the great meeting children.

Chapter 61

The sleep that flits on baby's eyes – does anybody know from where it comes? Yes, there is a rumour that it has its dwelling where, in the fairy village among shadows of the forest dimly lit with glow-worms, there hang two timid buds of enchantment. From there it comes to kiss baby's eyes.

The smile that flickers on baby's lips when he sleeps – does anybody know where it was born? Yes there is a rumour that a young pale beam of a crescent moon touched the edge of a vanishing autumn cloud, and there the smile was first born in the dream of a dew-washed morning – the smile that flickers on baby's lips when he sleeps.

The sweet, soft freshness that blooms on baby's limbs – does anybody know where it was hidden so long? Yes, when the mother was a young girl it lay pervading her heart in tender and silent mystery of love – the sweet, soft freshness that has bloomed on baby's limbs.

Chapter 62

When I bring to you coloured toys, my child, I understand why there is such a play of colours on clouds, on water, and why flowers are painted in tints – when I give coloured toys to you, my child.

When I sing to make you dance I truly know why there is music in leaves, and why waves send their chorus of voices to the heart of the listening earth – when I sing to make you dance.

When I bring sweet things to your greedy hands I know why there is honey in the cup of the flower and why fruits are secretly filled with sweet juice – when I bring sweet things to your greedy hands.

When I kiss your face to make you smile, my darling, I surely understand what the pleasure is that streams from the sky in morning light, and what delight that is which the summer breeze brings to my body – when I kiss you to make you smile.

Chapter 63

Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger.

I am uneasy at heart when I have to leave my accustomed shelter; I forget that there abides the old in the new, and that there also thou abidest.

Through birth and death, in this world or in others, wherever thou leadest me it is thou, the same, the one companion of my endless life who ever linkest my heart with bonds of joy to the unfamiliar.

When one knows thee, then alien there is none then no door is shut. Oh, grant me my prayer that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the play of the many.

Chapter 64

On the slope of the desolate river among tall grasses I asked her, “Maiden, where do you go, shading your lamp with your mantle? Me house is all dark and lonesome, – lend me your light!” She raised her dark eyes for a moment and looked at my face through the dusk. “I have come to the river,” she said, “to float my lamp on the stream when the daylight wanes in the west.” I stood alone among tall grasses and watched the timid flame of her lamp uselessly drifting in the tide.

In the silence of gathering night I asked her, “Maiden, your lights are all lit – then where do you go with your lamp? My house is all dark and lonesome, – lend me your light.” She raised her dark eyes on my face and stood for a moment doubtful. “I have come,” she said at last, “to dedicate my lamp to the sky.” I stood and watched her light uselessly burning in the void.

In the moonless gloom of midnight I asked her, “Maiden, what is your quest, holding the lamp near your heart? My house is all dark and lonesome, – lend me your light.” She stopped for a minute and thought and gazed at my face in the dark. “I have brought my light,” she said, “to join the carnival of lamps.” I stood and watched her little lamp uselessly lost among lights.

Chapter 65

What divine drink wouldest thou have, my God, from this overflowing cup of my life?

My poet, is it thy delight to see thy creation through my eyes and to stand at the portals of my ears silently to listen to thine own eternal harmony?

Thy world is weaving words in my mind and thy joy is adding music to them. Thou givest thyself to me in love and then feelest thine own entire sweetness in me.

Chapter 66

She who ever had remained in the depth of my being, in the twilight of gleams and of glimpses; she who never opened her veils in the morning light, will be my last gift to thee, my God, folded in my final song.

Words have wooed yet failed to win her; persuasion has stretched to her its eager arms in vain.

I have roamed from country to country keeping her in the core of my heart, and around her have risen and fallen the growth and decay of my life.

Over my thoughts and actions, my slumbers and dreams, she reigned yet dwelled alone and apart.

Many a man knocked at my door and asked for her and turned away in despair.

There was none in the world who ever saw her face to face, and she remained in her loneliness waiting for thy recognition.

Chapter 67

Thou art the sky and thou art the nest as well.

O thou beautiful, there in the nest it is thy love that encloses the soul with colours and sounds and odours.

There comes the morning with the golden basket in her right hand bearing the wreath of beauty, silently to crown the earth.

And there comes the evening over the lonely meadows deserted by herds, through trackless paths, carrying cool draughts of peace in her golden pitcher from the western ocean of rest.

But there, where spreads the infinite sky for the soul to take her flight in, reigns the stainless white radiance. There is no day nor night, nor form nor colour, and never, never a word.

Chapter 68

Thy sunbeam comes upon this earth of mine with arms outstretched and stands at my door the livelong day to carry back to thy feet clouds made of my tears and sighs and songs.

With fond delight thou wrappest about thy starry breast that mantle of misty cloud, turning it into numberless shapes and folds and colouring it with hues everchanging.

It is so light and so fleeting, tender and tearful and dark, that is why thou lovest it, O thou spotless and serene. And that is why it may cover thy awful white light with its pathetic shadows.

Chapter 69

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures.

It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean-cradle of birth and of death, in ebb and in flow.

I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb of ages dancing in my blood this moment.

Chapter 70

It is beyond thee to be glad with the gladness of this rhythm? to be tossed and lost and broken in the whirl of this fearful joy?

All things rush on, they stop not, they look not behind, no power can hold them back, they rush on.

Keeping steps with that restless, rapid music, seasons come dancing and pass away – colours, tunes, and perfumes pour in endless cascades in the abounding joy that scatters and gives up and dies every moment.

Chapter 71

That I should make much of myself and turn it on all sides, thus casting coloured shadows on thy radiance – such is thy maya. Thou settest a barrier in thine own being and then callest thy severed self in myriad notes. This thy self-separation has taken body in me.

The poignant song is echoed through all the sky in many-coloured tears and smiles, alarms and hopes; waves rise up and sink again, dreams break and form. In me is thy own defeat of self.

This screen that thou hast raised is painted with innumerable figures with the brush of the night and the day. Behind it thy seat is woven in wondrous mysteries of curves, casting away all barren lines of straightness.

The great pageant of thee and me has overspread the sky. With the tune of thee and me all the air is vibrant, and all ages pass with the hiding and seeking of thee and me.

Chapter 72

He it is, the innermost one, who awakens my being with his deep hidden touches.

He it is who puts his enchantment upon these eyes and joyfully plays on the chords of my heart in varied cadence of pleasure and pain.

He it is who weaves the web of this *maya* in evanescent hues of gold and silver, blue and green, and lets peep out through the folds his feet, at whose touch I forget myself.

Days come and ages pass, and it is ever he who moves my heart in many a name, in many a guise, in many a rapture of joy and of sorrow.

Chapter 73

Deliverance is not for me in renunciation. I feel the embrace of freedom in a thousand bonds of delight.

Thou ever pourest for me the fresh draught of thy wine of various colours and fragrance, filling this earthen vessel to the brim.

My world will light its hundred different lamps with thy flame and place them before the altar of thy temple.

No, I will never shut the doors of my senses. The delights of sight and hearing and touch will bear thy delight.

Yes, all my illusions will burn into illumination of joy, and all my desires ripen into fruits of love.

Chapter 74

The day is no more, the shadow is upon the earth. It is time that I go to the stream to fill my pitcher.

The evening air is eager with the sad music of the water. Ah, it calls me out into the dusk. In the lonely lane there is no passer-by, the wind is up, the ripples are rampant in the river.

I know not if I shall come back home. I know not whom I shall chance to meet. There at the fording in the little boat the unknown man plays upon his lute.

Chapter 75

Thy gifts to us mortals fulfil all our needs and yet run back to thee undiminished.

The river has its everyday work to do and hastens through fields and hamlets; yet its incessant stream winds towards the washing of thy feet.

The flower sweetens the air with its perfume; yet its last service is to offer itself to thee.

Thy worship does not impoverish the world.

From the words of the poet men take what meanings please them; yet their last meaning points to thee.

Chapter 76

Day after day, O lord of my life, shall I stand before thee face to face. With folded hands, O lord of all worlds, shall I stand before thee face to face.

Under thy great sky in solitude and silence, with humble heart shall I stand before thee face to face.

In this laborious world of thine, tumultuous with toil and with struggle, among hurrying crowds shall I stand before thee face to face.

And when my work shall be done in this world, O King of kings, alone and speechless shall I stand before thee face to face.

Chapter 77

I know thee as my God and stand apart – I do not know thee as my own and come closer. I know thee as my father and bow before thy feet – I do not grasp thy hand as my friend's.

I stand not where thou comest down and ownest thyself as mine, there to clasp thee to my heart and take thee as my comrade.

Thou art the Brother amongst my brothers, but I heed them not; I divide not my earnings with them, thus sharing my all with thee.

In pleasure and in pain I stand not by the side of men, and thus stand by thee. I shrink to give up my life, and thus do not plunge into the great waters of life.

Chapter 78

When the creation was new and all the stars shone in their first splendour, the gods held their assembly in the sky and sang, “Oh, the picture of perfection! the joy unalloyed!”

But one cried of a sudden – “It seems that somewhere there is a break in the chain of light and one of the stars has been lost.”

The golden string of their harp snapped, their song stopped, and they cried in dismay – “Yes, that lost star was the best, she was the glory of all heavens!”

From that day the search is unceasing for her, and the cry goes on from one to the other that in her the world has lost its one joy!

Only in the deepest silence of night the stars smile and whisper among themselves – “Vain is this seeking! Unbroken perfection is over all!”

Chapter 79

If it is not my portion to meet thee in this my life then let me ever feel that I have missed thy sight – let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours.

As my days pass in the crowded market of this world and my hands grow full with the daily profits, let me ever feel that I have gained nothing – let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours.

When I sit by the roadside, tired and panting, when I spread my bed low in the dust, let me ever feel that the long journey is still before me – let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours.

When my rooms have been decked out and the flutes sound and the laughter there is loud, let me ever feel that I have not invited thee to my house – let me not forget for a moment, let me carry the pangs of this sorrow in my dreams and in my wakeful hours.

Chapter 80

I am like a remnant of a cloud of autumn uselessly roaming in the sky, O my sun ever-glorious! Thy touch has not yet melted my vapour, making me one with thy light, and thus I count months and years separated from thee.

If this be thy wish and if this be thy play, then take this fleeting emptiness of mine, paint it with colours, gild it with gold, float it on the wanton wind and spread it in varied wonders.

And again when it shall be thy wish to end this play at night, I shall melt and vanish away in the dark, or it may be in a smile of the white morning, in a coolness of purity transparent.

Chapter 81

On many an idle day have I grieved over lost time. But it is never lost, my lord. Thou hast taken every moment of my life in thine own hands.

Hidden in the heart of things thou art nourishing seeds into sprouts, buds into blossoms, and ripening flowers into fruitfulness.

I was tired and sleeping on my idle bed and imagined all work had ceased. In the morning I woke up and found my garden full with wonders of flowers.

Chapter 82

Time is endless in thy hands, my lord. There is none to count thy minutes.

Days and nights pass and ages bloom and fade like flowers. Thou knowest how to wait.

Thy centuries follow each other perfecting a small wild flower.

We have no time to lose, and having no time we must scramble for our chances. We are too poor to be late.

And thus it is that time goes by while I give it to every querulous man who claims it, and thine altar is empty of all offerings to the last.

At the end of the day I hasten in fear lest thy gate be shut; but I find that yet there is time.

Chapter 83

Mother, I shall weave a chain of pearls for thy neck with my tears of sorrow.

The stars have wrought their anklets of light to deck thy feet, but mine will hang upon thy breast.

Wealth and face come from thee and it is for thee to give or to withhold them. But this my sorrow is absolutely mine own, and when I bring it to thee as my offering thou rewardest me with thy grace.

Chapter 84

It is the pang of separation that spreads throughout the world and gives birth to shapes innumerable in the infinite sky.

It is this sorrow of separation that gazes in silence all night from star to star and becomes lyric among rustling leaves in rainy darkness of July.

It is this overspreading pain that deepens into loves and desires, into sufferings and joys in human homes; and this it is that ever melts and flows in songs through my poet's heart.

Chapter 85

When the warriors came out first from their master's hall, where had they hid their power? Where were their armour and their arms?

They looked poor and helpless, and the arrows were showered upon them on the day they came out from their master's hall.

When the warriors marched back again to their master's hall, where did they hide their power?

They had dropped the sword and dropped the bow and the arrow; peace was on their foreheads, and they had left the fruits of their life behind them on the day they marched back again to their master's hall.

Chapter 86

Death, thy servant, is at my door. He has crossed the unknown sea and brought thy call to my home.

The night is dark and my hear is fearful – yet I will take up the lamp, open my gates and bow to him my welcome. It is thy messenger who stands at my door.

I will worship him with folded hands, and with tears. I will worship him placing at his feet the treasure of my heart.

He will go back with his errand done, leaving a dark shadow on my morning; and in my desolate home only my forlorn self will remain as my last offering to thee.

Chapter 87

In desperate hope I go and search for her in all the corners of my room; I find her not.

My house is small and what once has gone from it can never be regained.

But infinite is thy mansion, my lord, and seeking her I have come to thy door.

I stand under the golden canopy of thine evening sky and I lift my eager eyes to thy face.

I have come to the brink of eternity from which nothing can vanish – no hope, no happiness, no vision of a face seen through tears.

Oh, dip my emptied life into that ocean, plunge it into the deepest fullness. Let me for once feel that lost sweet touch in the allness of the universe.

Chapter 88

Deity of the ruined temple! The broken strings of *Vina* sing no more your praise. The bells in the evening proclaim not your time of worship. The air is still and silent about you.

In your desolate dwelling comes the vagrant spring breeze. It brings the tidings of flowers – the flowers that for your worship are offered no more.

Your worshipper of old wanders ever longing for favour still refused. In the eventide, when fires and shadows mingle with the gloom of dust, he wearily comes back to the ruined temple with hunger in his heart.

Many a festival day comes to you in silence, deity of the ruined temple. Many a night of worship goes away with lamp unlit.

Many new images are built by masters of cunning art and carried to the holy stream of oblivion when their time is come.

Only the deity of the ruined temple remains un-worshipped in deathless neglect.

Chapter 89

No more noisy, loud words from me – such is my master's will. Henceforth I deal in whispers. The speech of my heart will be carried on in murmurings of a song.

Men hasten to the King's market. All the buyers and sellers are there. But I have my untimely leave in the middle of the day, in the thick of work.

Let then the flowers come out in my garden, though it is not their time; and let the midday bees strike up their lazy hum.

Full many an hour have I spent in the strife of the good and the evil, but now it is the pleasure of my playmate of the empty days to draw my heart on to him; and I know not why is this sudden call to what useless inconsequence!

Chapter 90

On the day when death will knock at thy door what wilt thou offer to him?

Oh, I will set before my guest the full vessel of my life – I will never let him go with empty hands.

All the sweet vintage of all my autumn days and summer nights, all the earnings and gleanings of my busy life will I place before him at the close of my days when death will knock at my door.

Chapter 91

O thou the last fulfilment of life, Death, my death, come and whisper to me!

Day after day have I kept watch for thee; for thee have I borne the joys and pangs of life.

All that I am, that I have, that I hope, and all my love have ever flowed towards thee in depth of secrecy. One final glance from thine eyes and my life will be ever thine own.

The flowers have been woven and the garland is ready for the bridegroom. After the wedding the bride shall leave her home and meet her lord alone in the solitude of night.

Chapter 92

I know that the day will come when my sight of this earth shall be lost, and life will take its leave in silence, drawing the last curtain over my eyes.

Yet stars will watch at night, and morning rise as before, and hours heave like sea waves casting up pleasure and pains.

When I think of this end of my moments, the barrier of the moments breaks and I see by the light of death thy world with its careless treasures. Rare is its lowliest seat, rare is its meanest of lives.

Things that I longed for in vain and things that I got – let them pass. Let me but truly possess the things that I ever spurned and overlooked.

Chapter 93

I have got my leave. Bid me farewell, my brothers! I bow to you all and take my departure.

Here I give back the keys of my door – and I give up all claims to my house. I only ask for last kind words from you.

We were neighbours for long, but I received more than I could give. Now the day has dawned and the lamp that lit my dark corner is out. A summons has come and I am ready for my journey.

Chapter 94

At this time of my parting, wish me good luck, my friends! The sky is flushed with the dawn and my path lies beautiful.

Ask not what I have with me to take there. I start on my journey with empty hands and expectant heart. I shall put on my wedding garland. Mine is not the red-brown dress of the traveller, and though there are dangers on the way I have no fear in my mind.

The evening star will come out when my voyage is done and the plaintive notes of the twilight melodies be struck up from the King's gateway.

Chapter 95

I was not aware of the moment when I first crossed the threshold of this life.

What was the power that made me open out into this vast mystery like a bud in the forest at – midnight?

When in the morning I looked upon the light I felt in a moment that I was no stranger in this world, that the inscrutable without name and form had taken me in its arms in the form of my own mother.

Even so, in death the same unknown will appear as ever known to me. And because I love this life, I know I shall love death as well.

The child cries out when from the right breast the mother takes it away, in the very next moment to find in the left one its consolation.

Chapter 96

When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable.

I have tasted of the hidden honey of this lotus that expands on the ocean of light, and thus am I blessed – let this be my parting word.

In this playhouse of infinite forms I have had my play and here have I caught sight of him that is formless.

My whole body and my limbs have thrilled with his touch who is beyond touch; and if the end comes here, let it come – let this be my parting word.

Chapter 97

When my play was with thee I never questioned who thou wert. I knew nor shyness nor fear, my life was boisterous.

In the early morning thou wouldest call me from my sleep like my own comrade and lead me running from glade to glade.

On those days I never cared to know the meaning of songs thou sangest to me. Only my voice took up the tunes, and my heart danced in their cadence.

Now, when the playtime is over, what is this sudden sight that is come upon me? The world with eyes bent upon thy feet stands in awe with all its silent stars.

Chapter 98

I will deck thee with trophies, garlands of my defeat. It is never in my power to escape unconquered.

I surely know my pride will go to the wall, my life will burst its bonds in exceeding pain, and my empty heart will sob out in music like a hollow reed, and the stone will melt in tears.

I surely know the hundred petals of a lotus will not remain closed for ever and the secret recess of its honey will be bared.

From the blue sky an eye shall gaze upon me and summon me in silence. Nothing will be left for me, nothing whatever, and utter death shall I receive at thy feet.

Chapter 99

When I give up the helm I know that the time has come for thee to take it. What there is to do will be instantly done. Vain this struggle.

Then take away your hands and silently put up with your defeat, my heart, and think it your good fortune to sit perfectly still where you are placed.

These my lamps are blown out at every little puff of wind, and trying to light them I forget all else again and again.

But I shall be wise this time and wait in the dark, spreading my mat on the floor; and whenever it is thy pleasure, my lord, come silently and take thy seat here.

Chapter 100

I dive down into the depth of the ocean of forms, hoping to gain the perfect pearl of the formless.

No more sailing from harbour to with this my weather-beaten boat. The days are long past when my sport was to be tossed on waves.

And now I am eager to die into the deathless.

Into the audience hall by the fathomless abyss where swells up the music of toneless strings I shall take this harp of my life.

I shall tune it to the notes of for ever, and, when it has sobbed out its last utterance, lay down my silent harp at the feet of the silent.

Chapter 101

Ever in my life have I sought thee with my songs. It was they who led me from door to door, and with them have I felt about me, searching and touching my world.

It was my songs that taught me all the lessons I ever learnt; they showed me secret paths, they brought before my sight many a star on the horizon of my heart.

They guided me all the day long to the mysteries of the country of pleasure and pain, and, at last, to what palace gate have they brought me in the evening at the end of my journey?

Chapter 102

I boasted among men that I had known you. They see your pictures in all works of mine. They come and ask me, "Who is he?" I know not how to answer them. I say, "Indeed, I cannot tell." They blame me and they go away in scorn. And you sit there smiling.

I put my tales of you into lasting songs. The secret gushes out from my heart. They come and ask me "Tell me all your meanings." I know not how to answer them. I say, "Ay, who knows what they mean!" They smile and go away in utter scorn. And you sit there smiling.

Chapter 103

In one salutation to thee, my God, let all my sense spread out and touch this world at thy feet.

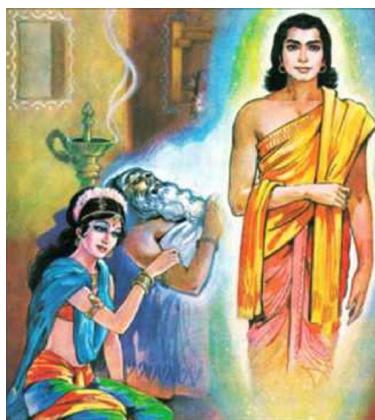
Like a rain-cloud of July hung low with its burden of unshed showers let all my mind bend down at thy door in one salutation to thee.

Let all my songs gather together their diverse strains into a single current and flow to a sea of silence in one salutation to thee.

Like a flock of homesick cranes flying night and day back to their mountain nests let all my life take its voyage to its eternal home in one salutation to thee.

7. Kacha and Devayani

Young Kacha came from Paradise to learn the secret of immortality from a Sage who taught the Titans, and whose daughter Devayani fell in love with him.



KACHA : The time has come for me to take leave, Devayani; I have long sat at your father's feet, but to-day he completed his teaching. Graciously allow me to go back to the land of the Gods whence I came.

DEVAYANI : You have, as you desired, won that rare knowledge coveted by the Gods;—but think, do you aspire after nothing further?

KACHA : Nothing.

DEVAYANI : Nothing at all! Dive into the bottom of your heart; does no timid wish lurk there, fearful lest it be blighted?

KACHA : For me the sun of fulfilment has risen, and the stars have faded in its light. I have mastered the knowledge which gives life.

DEVAYANI : Then you must be the one happy being in creation. Alas! Now for the first time I feel what torture these days spent in an alien land have been to you, though we offered you our best.

KACHA : Not so much bitterness! Smile, and give me leave to go.

DEVAYANI : Smile! But, my friend, this is not your native Paradise. Smiles are not so cheap in this world, where thirst, like a worm in the flower, gnaws at the heart's core; where baffled desire hovers round the desired, and memory never ceases to sigh foolishly after vanished joy.

KACHA : Devayani, tell me how I have offended?

DEVAYANI : Is it so easy for you to leave this forest, which through long years has lavished on you shade and song? Do you not feel how the wind wails through these glimmering shadows, and dry leaves whirl in the air, like ghosts of lost hope;—while you alone, who part from us, have a smile on your lips?

KACHA : This forest has been a second mother to me, for here I have been born again. My love for it shall never dwindle.

DEVAYANI : When you had driven the cattle to graze on the lawn, yonder banyan tree spread a hospitable shade for your tired limbs against the mid-day heat.

KACHA : I bow to thee, Lord of the Forest! Remember me, when under thy shade other students chant their lessons to an accompaniment of bees humming and leaves rustling.

DEVAYANI : And do not forget our Venumati, whose swift water is one stream of singing love.

KACHA : I shall ever remember her, the dear companion of my exile, who, like a busy village girl, smiles on her errand of ceaseless service and croons a simple song.

DEVAYANI : But, friend, let me also remind you that you had another companion whose thoughts were vainly busy to make you forget an exile's cares.

KACHA : The memory of her has become a part of my life.

DEVAYANI : I recall the day when, little more than a boy, you first arrived. You stood there, near the hedge of the garden, a smile in your eyes.

KACHA : And I saw you gathering flowers—clad in white, like the dawn bathed in radiance. And I said, “Make me proud by allowing me to help you!”

DEVAYANI : I asked in surprise who you were, and you meekly answered that you were the son of Vrihaspati, a divine sage at the court of the God Indra, and desired to learn from my father that secret spell which can revive the dead.

KACHA : I feared lest the Master, the teacher of the Titans, those rivals of the Gods, should refuse to accept me for a disciple.

DEVAYANI : But he could not refuse me when I pleaded your cause, so greatly he loves his daughter.

KACHA : Thrice had the jealous Titans slain me, and thrice you prevailed on your father to bring me back to life; therefore my gratitude can never die.

DEVAYANI : Gratitude! Forget all—I shall not grieve. Do you only remember benefits? Let them perish! If after the day's lessons, in the evening solitude, some strange tremor of joy shook your heart, remember that—but not gratitude. If, as someone passed, a snatch of song got tangled among your texts or the swing of a robe fluttered your studies with delight, remember that when at

leisure in your Paradise. What, benefits only!—and neither beauty nor love nor...?

KACHA : Some things are beyond the power of words.

DEVAYANI : Yes, yes, I know. My love has sounded your heart's deepest, and makes me bold to speak in defiance of your reserve. Never leave me! Remain here! Fame gives no happiness. Friend, you cannot now escape, for your secret is mine!

KACHA : No, no, Devayani.

DEVAYANI : How "No"? Do not lie to me! Love's insight is divine. Day after day, in raising your head, in a glance, in the motion of your hands, your love spoke as the sea speaks through its waves. On a sudden my voice would send your heart quivering through your limbs—have I never witnessed it? I know you, and therefore you are my captive forever. The very king of your Gods shall not sever this bond.

KACHA : Was it for this, Devayani, that I toiled, away from home and kindred, all these years?

DEVAYANI : Why not? Is only knowledge precious? Is love cheap? Lay hold on this moment. Have the courage to own that a woman's heart is worth all as much penance as men undergo for the sake of power, knowledge, or reputation.

KACHA : I gave my solemn promise to the Gods that I would bring them this lore of deathless life.

DEVAYANI : But is it true you had eyes for nothing save your books? That you never broke off your studies to pay me homage with flowers, never lay in wait for a chance, of an evening, to help me water my flower-beds? What made you sit by me on the grass and sing songs you brought hither from the assembly of the stars, while darkness stooped over the river bank as love droops over its own sad silence? Were these parts of a cruel conspiracy plotted in your Paradise? Was all for the sake of access to my father's heart?—and after success, were you, departing, to throw some cheap gratitude, like small coins, to the deluded door-keeper?

KACHA : What profit were there, proud woman, in knowing the truth? If I did wrong to serve you with a passionate devotion cherished in secret, I have had ample punishment. This is no time to question whether my love is true or not; my life's work awaits me. Though my heart must henceforth enclose a red flame vainly striving to devour emptiness, still I must go back to that Paradise which will nevermore be Paradise to me. I owe the Gods a new divinity, hard won by my studies, before I may think of happiness. Forgive me, Devayani, and know that my suffering is doubled by the pain I unwillingly inflict on you.

DEVAYANI : Forgiveness! You have angered my heart till it is hard and burning like a thunderbolt! You can go back to your work and your glory, but what is left for me? Memory is a bed of thorns, and secret shame will gnaw at the roots of my life. You came like a wayfarer, sat through the sunny hours in the shade of my garden, and to while time away you plucked all its flowers and wove them into a chain. And now, parting, you snap the thread and let the flowers drop on the dust! Accursed be that great knowledge you have earned!—a burden that, though others share equally with you, will never be lightened. For lack of love may it ever remain as foreign to your life as the cold stars are to the un-espoused darkness of virgin Night!

8. Karna and Kunti

The Pandava Queen Kunti before marriage had a son, Karna, who, in manhood, became the commander of the Kaurava host. To hide her shame she abandoned him at birth, and a charioteer, Adhiratha, brought him up as his son.

KARNA : I am Karna, the son of the charioteer, Adhiratha, and I sit here by the bank of holy Ganges to worship the setting sun. Tell me who you are.

KUNTI : I am the woman who first made you acquainted with that light you are worshipping.

KARNA : I do not understand: but your eyes melt my heart as the kiss of the morning sun melts the snow on a mountain-top, and your voice rouses a blind sadness within me of which the cause may well lie beyond the reach of my earliest memory. Tell me, strange woman, what mystery binds my birth to you?

KUNTI : Patience, my son. I will answer when the lids of darkness come down over the prying eyes of day. In the meanwhile, know that I am Kunti.

KARNA : Kunti! The mother of Arjuna?

KUNTI : Yes, indeed, the mother of Arjuna, your antagonist. But do not, therefore, hate me. I still remember the day of the trial of arms in Hastina when you, an unknown boy, boldly stepped into the arena, like the first ray of dawn among the stars of night. Ah! Who was that unhappy woman whose eyes kissed your bare, slim body through tears that blessed you, where she sat among the women of the royal household behind the arras? Why, the mother of Arjuna! Then the Brahmin, master of arms, stepped forth and said, "No youth of mean birth may challenge Arjuna to a trial of strength." You stood speechless, like a thunder-cloud at sunset flashing with an agony of suppressed light. But who was the woman whose heart caught fire from your shame and anger, and flared up in silence? The mother of Arjuna! Praised be Duryodhana, who perceived your worth, and then and there crowned you King of Anga, thus winning the Kauravas a champion. Overwhelmed at this good fortune, Adhiratha, the charioteer, broke through the crowd; you instantly rushed to him and laid your crown at his feet amid the jeering laughter of the Pandavas and their friends. But there was one woman of the Pandava house whose heart glowed with joy at the

heroic pride of such humility;—even the mother of Arjuna!

KARNA : But what brings you here alone, Mother of kings?

KUNTI : I have a boon to crave.

KARNA : Command me, and whatever manhood and my honour as a Kshatriya permit shall be offered at your feet.

KUNTI : I have come to take you.

KARNA : Where?

KUNTI : To my breast thirsting for your love, my son.

KARNA : Fortunate mother of five brave kings, where can you find place for me, a small chieftain of lowly descent?

KUNTI : Your place is before all my other sons.

KARNA : But what right have I to take it?

KUNTI : Your own God-given right to your mother's love.

KARNA : The gloom of evening spreads over the earth, silence rests on the water, and your voice leads me back to some primal world of infancy lost in twilit consciousness. However, whether this be dream, or fragment of forgotten reality, come near and place your right hand on my forehead. Rumour runs that I was deserted by my mother. Many a night she has come to me in my slumber, but when I cried: "Open your veil, show me your face!" her figure always vanished. Has this same dream come this evening while I wake? See, yonder the lamps are lighted in your son's tents across the river; and on this side behold the tent-domes of my Kauravas, like the suspended waves of a spell-arrested storm at sea. Before the din of tomorrow's battle, in the awful hush of this field where it must be fought, why should the voice of the mother of my opponent, Arjuna, bring me a message of forgotten motherhood? And why should my name take such music from her tongue as to draw my heart out to him and his brothers?

KUNTI : Then delay not, my son, come with me!

KARNA : Yes, I will come and never ask question, never doubt. My soul responds to your call; and the struggle for victory and fame and the rage of hatred have suddenly become untrue to me, as the delirious dream of a night in the serenity of the dawn. Tell me whither you mean to lead?

KUNTI : To the other bank of the river, where those lamps burn across the ghastly pallor of the sands.

KARNA : Am I there to find my lost mother forever?

KUNTI : O my son!

KARNA : Then why did you banish me—a castaway uprooted from my ancestral soil, adrift in a homeless current of indignity? Why set a bottomless chasm between Arjuna and myself, turning the natural attachment of kinship to the

dread attraction of hate? You remain speechless. Your shame permeates the vast darkness and sends invisible shivers through my limbs. Leave my question unanswered! Never explain to me what made you rob your son of his mother's love! Only tell me why you have come to-day to call me back to the ruins of a heaven wrecked by your own hands?

KUNTI : I am dogged by a curse more deadly than your reproaches: for, though surrounded by five sons, my heart shrivels like that of a woman deprived of her children. Through the great rent that yawned for my deserted first-born, all my life's pleasures have run to waste. On that accursed day when I belied my motherhood you could not utter a word; to-day your recreant mother implores you for generous words. Let your forgiveness burn her heart like fire and consume its sin.

KARNA : Mother, accept my tears!

KUNTI : I did not come with the hope of winning you back to my arms, but with that of restoring your rights to you. Come and receive, as a king's son, your due among your brothers.

KARNA : I am more truly the son of a charioteer, and do not covet the glory of greater parentage.

KUNTI : Be that as it may, come and win back the kingdom, which is yours by right!

KARNA : Must you, who once refused me a mother's love, tempt me with a kingdom? The quick bond of kindred which you severed at its root is dead, and can never grow again. Shame were mine should I hasten to call the mother of kings mother, and abandon *my mother in the charioteer's house!*

KUNTI : You are great, my son! How God's punishment invisibly grows from a tiny seed to a giant life! The helpless babe disowned by his mother comes back a man through the dark maze of events to smite his brothers!

KARNA : Mother, have no fear! I know for certain that victory awaits the Pandavas. Peaceful and still though this night be, my heart is full of the music of a hopeless venture and baffled end. Ask me not to leave those who are doomed to defeat. Let the Pandavas win the throne, since they must: I remain with the desperate and forlorn. On the night of my birth you left me naked and unnamed to disgrace: leave me once again without pity to the calm expectation of defeat and death!

*

When like a flaming scimitar the hill stream has been sheathed in gloom by the evening, suddenly a flock of birds passes overhead, their loud-laughing wings hurling their flight like an arrow among stars.

It startles a passion for speed in the heart of all motionless things; the hills seem to feel in their bosom the anguish of storm-clouds, and trees long to break their rooted shackles.

For me the flight of these birds has rent a veil of stillness, and reveals an immense flutter in this deep silence.

I see these hills and forests fly across time to the unknown, and darkness thrill into fire as the stars wing by.

I feel in my own being the rush of the sea-crossing bird, cleaving a way beyond the limits of life and death, while the migrant world cries with a myriad voices, "Not here, but somewhere else, in the bosom of the Faraway."

*

The crowd listens in wonder to Kashi, the young singer, whose voice, like a word in feats of skill, dances amidst hopeless tangles, cuts them to pieces, and exults.

Among the hearers sits old Rajah Pratap in weary endurance. For his own life had been nourished and encircled by Barajlal's songs, like a happy land which a river laces with beauty. His rainy evenings and the still hours of autumn days spoke to his heart through Barajlal's voice, and his festive nights trimmed their lamps and tinkled their bells to those songs.

When Kashi stopped for rest, Pratap smilingly winked at Barajlal and spoke to him in a whisper, "Master, now let us hear music and not this new-fangled singing, which mimics frisky kittens hunting paralysed mice."

The old singer with his spotlessly white turban made a deep bow to the assembly and took his seat. His thin fingers struck the strings of his instrument, his eyes closed, and in timid hesitation his song began. The hall was large, his voice feeble, and Pratap shouted "Bravo!" with ostentation, but whispered in his ear, "Just a little louder, friend!"

The crowd was restless; some yawned, some dozed, some complained of the heat. The air of the hall hummed with many-toned inattention, and the song, like a frail boat, tossed upon it in vain till it sank under the hubbub.

Suddenly the old man, stricken at heart, forgot a passage, and his voice groped in agony, like a blind man at a fair for his lost leader. He tried to fill the gap with any strain that came. But the gap still yawned: and the tortured notes refused to serve the need, suddenly changed their tune, and broke into a sob. The master laid his head on his instrument, and in place of his forgotten music, there broke from him the first cry of life that a child brings into the world.

Pratap touched him gently on his shoulder, and said, "Come away, our meeting is elsewhere. I know, my friend, that truth is widowed without love, and beauty

dwells not with the many, nor in the moment.”

*

In the youth of the world, Himalaya, you sprang from the rent breast of the earth, and hurled your burning challenges to the sun, hill after hill. Then came the mellow time when you said to yourself, “No more, no further!” and your fiery heart, that raged for the freedom of clouds, found its limits, and stood still to salute the limitless. After this check on your passion, beauty was free to play upon your breast, and trust surrounded you with the joy of flowers and birds.

You sit in your solitude like a great reader, on whose lap lies open some ancient book with its countless pages of stone. What story is written there, I wonder?—is it the eternal wedding of the divine ascetic, Shiva, with Bhavani, the divine love?—the drama of the Terrible wooing the power of the Frail?

*

I feel that my heart will leave its own colour in all your scenes, O Earth, when I bid you farewell. Some notes of mine will be added to your seasons’ melody, and my thoughts will breathe unrecognised through the cycle of shadows and sunshine.

In far-distant days summer will come to the lovers’ garden, but they will not know that their flowers have borrowed an added beauty from my songs, nor that their love for this world has been deepened by mine.

*

My eyes feel the deep peace of this sky, and there stirs through me what a tree feels when it holds out its leaves like cups to be filled with sunshine.

A thought rises in my mind, like the warm breath from grass in the sun; it minglest with the gurgle of lapping water and the sigh of weary wind in village lanes,—the thought that I have lived along with the whole life of this world and have given to it my own love and sorrows.

*

I ask no reward for the songs I sang you. I shall be content if they live through the night, until Dawn, like a shepherd-maiden, calls away the stars, in alarm at the sun.

But there were moments when you sang your songs to me, and as my pride knows, my Poet, you will ever remember that I listened and lost my heart.

*

In the morning, when the dew glistened upon the grass, you came and gave a push to my swing; but, sweeping from smiles to tears, I did not know you.

Then came April’s noon of gorgeous light, and I think you beckoned me to follow you.

But when I sought your face, there passed between us the procession of flowers, and men and women flinging their songs to the south wind.

Daily I passed you unheeded on the road.

But on some days full of the faint smell of oleanders, when the wind was wilful among complaining palm leaves, I would stand before you wondering if you ever had been a stranger to me.

*

The day grew dim. The early evening star faltered near the edge of a grey lonely sky.

I looked back and felt that the road lying behind me was infinitely removed; traced through my life, it had only served for a single journey and was never to be re-travelled.

The long story of my coming hither lies there dumb, in one meandering line of dust stretching from the morning hilltop to the brink of bottomless night.

I sit alone, and wonder if this road is like an instrument waiting to give up the day's lost voices in music when touched by divine fingers at nightfall.

*

Give me the supreme courage of love, this is my prayer—the courage to speak, to do, to suffer at thy will, to leave all things or be left alone. Strengthen me on errands of danger, honour me with pain, and help me climb to that difficult mood which sacrifices daily to thee.

Give me the supreme confidence of love, this is my prayer—the confidence that belongs to life in death, to victory in defeat, to the power hidden in frailest beauty, to that dignity in pain which accepts hurt but disdains to return it.

9. Lover's Gift

1

You allowed your kingly power to vanish, Shahajan, but your wish was to make imperishable a tear-drop of love.

Time has no pity for the human heart, he laughs at its sad struggle to remember.

You allured him with beauty, made him captive, and crowned the formless death with fadeless form.

The secret whispered in the hush of night to the ear of your love is wrought in the perpetual silence of stone.

Though empires crumble to dust, and centuries are lost in shadows the marble still sighs to the stars, 'I remember.'

'I remember.'—But life forgets, for she has her call to the Endless and she goes on her voyage unburdened, leaving her memories to the forlorn forms of beauty.

2

Come to my garden walk, my love. Pass by the fervid flowers that press themselves on your sight. Pass them by, stopping at some chance joy, that like a sudden wonder of sunset illumines, yet eludes.

For love's gift is shy, it never tells its name, it flits across the shade, spreading a shiver of joy along the dust. Overtake it or miss it forever. But a gift that can be grasped is merely a frail flower, or a lamp with a flame that will flicker.

3

The fruits come in crowds into my orchard, they jostle each other. They surge up in the light in an anguish of fullness.

Proudly step into my orchard, my queen, sit there in the shade, pluck the ripe fruits from their stems, and let them yield, to the utmost, their burden of sweetness at your lips.

In my orchard the butterflies shake their wings in the sun, the leaves tremble, the fruits clamour to come to completion.

4

She is near to my heart as the meadow-flower to the earth; she is sweet to me as sleep is to tired limbs. My love for her is my life flowing in its fullness, like a river in autumn flood, running with serene abandonment.

My songs are one with my love, like the murmur of a stream, that sings with all its waves and currents.

5

I would ask for still more, if I had the sky with all its stars, and the world with its endless riches; but I would be content with the smallest corner of this earth if only she were mine.

6

In the light of this thriftless day of spring, my poet, sing of those who pass by and do not linger, who laugh as they run and never look back, who blossom in an hour of unreasoning delight, and fade in a moment without regret.

Do not sit down silently, to tell the beads of your past tears and smiles,—do not stop to pick up the dropped petals from the flowers of overnight, do not go to seek things that evade you, to know the meaning that is not plain,—leave the gaps in your life where they are, for the music to come out of their depths.

7

It is little that remains now, the rest was spent in one careless summer. It is just enough to put in a song and sing to you; to weave in a flower-chain gently clasping your wrist; to hang in your ear like a round pink pearl, like a blushing whisper; to risk in a game one evening and utterly lose.

My boat is a frail small thing, not fit for crossing wild waves in the rain. If you but lightly step on it I shall gently row you by the shelter of the shore, where the dark water in ripples are like a dream-ruffled sleep; where the dove's cooing from the drooping branches makes the noonday shadows plaintive. At the day's end, when you are tired, I shall pluck a dripping lily to put in your hair and take my leave.

8

There is room for you. You are alone with your few sheaves of rice. My boat is crowded, it is heavily laden, but how can I turn you away? Your young body is slim and swaying; there is a twinkling smile in the edge of your eyes, and your robe is coloured like the rain-cloud.

The travellers will land for different roads and homes. You will sit for a while on the prow of my boat, and at the journey's end none will keep you back.

Where do you go, and to what home, to garner your sheaves? I will not question you, but when I fold my sails and moor my boat, I shall sit and wonder in the evening,—Where do you go, and to what home, to garner your sheaves?

9

Woman, your basket is heavy, your limbs are tired. For what distance have you set out, with what hunger of profit? The way is long and the dust is hot in the sun.

See, the lake is deep and full, its water dark like a crow's eye. The banks are sloping and tender with grass.

Dip your tired feet into the water. The noon-tide wind will pass its fingers through your hair; the pigeons will croon their sleep songs, the leaves will murmur the secrets that nestle in the shadows.

What matters it if the hours pass and the sun sets; if the way through the desolate land be lost in the waning light.

Yonder is my house, by the hedge of flowering henna; I will guide you.

I will make a bed for you, and light a lamp. In the morning when the birds are roused by the stir of milking the cows, I will waken you.

10

What is it that drives these bees from their home; these followers of unseen trails? What cry is this in their eager wings? How can they hear the music that sleeps in the flower soul? How can they find their way to the chamber where the honey lies shy and silent?

11

It was only the budding of leaves in the summer, the summer that came into the garden by the sea. It was only a stir and rustle in the south wind, a few lazy snatches of songs, and then the day was done.

But let there be flowering of love in the summer to come in the garden by the sea. Let my joy take its birth and clap its hands and dance with the surging songs, and make the morning open its eyes wide in sweet amazement.

12

Ages ago when you opened the south gate of the garden of gods, and came down upon the first youth of the earth, O Spring; men and women rushed out of their houses, laughing and dancing, and pelting each other with flower-dust in a sudden madness of mirth.

Year after year you bring the same flowers that you scattered in your path in that earliest April. Therefore, to-day, in their pervading perfume, they breathe the sigh of the days that are now dreams—the clinging sadness of vanished worlds. Your breeze is laden with love-legends that have faded from all human language.

One day, with fresh wonder, you came into my life that was fluttered with its first love. Since then the tender timidity of that inexperienced joy comes hidden every year in the early green buds of your lemon flowers; your red roses carry in their burning silence all that was unutterable in me; the memory of lyric hours, those days of May, rustles in the thrill of your new leaves born again and again.

13

Last night in the garden I offered you my youth's foaming wine. You lifted the cup to your lips, you shut your eyes and smiled while I raised your veil, unbound your tresses, drawing down upon my breast your face sweet with its silence, last

night when the moon's dream overflowed the world of slumber.

To-day in the dew-cooled calm of the dawn you are walking to God's temple, bathed and robed white, with a basketful of flowers in your hand. I stand aside in the shade under the tree, with my head bent, in the calm of the dawn by the lonely road to the temple.

14

If I am impatient today, forgive me, my love. It is the first summer rain, and the riverside forest is aflutter, and the blossoming kadam trees, are tempting the passing winds with wine-cups of perfume. See, from all corners of the sky lightning's are darting their glances, and winds are rampant in your hair.

If today I bring my homage to you, forgive me, my love. The everyday world is hidden in the dimness of the rain, all work has stopped in the village, the meadows are desolate. In your dark eyes the coming of the rain finds its music, and it is at your door that July waits with jasmines for your hair in its blue skirt.

15

Her neighbours call her dark in the village—but she is a lily to my heart, yes, a lily though not fair. Light came muffled with clouds, when first I saw her in the field; her head was bare, her veil was off, her braided hair hanging loose on her neck. She may be dark as they say in the village, but I have seen her black eyes and am glad.

The pulse of the air boded storm. She rushed out of the hut, when she heard her dappled cow low in dismay. For a moment she turned her large eyes to the clouds, and felt a stir of the coming rain in the sky. I stood at the corner of the rice field,—if she noticed me, it was known only to her (and perhaps I know it). She is dark as the message of shower in summer, dark as the shade of flowering woodland; she is dark as the longing for unknown love in the wistful night of May.

16

She dwelt here by the pool with its landing-stairs in ruins. Many an evening she had watched the moon made dizzy by the shaking of bamboo leaves, and on many a rainy day the smell of the wet earth had come to her over the young

shoots of rice.

Her pet name is known here among those date-palm groves, and in the court-years where girls sit and talk, while stitching their winter quilts. The water in this pool keeps in its depth the memory of her swimming limbs, and her wet feet had left their marks, day after day, on the footpath leading to the village.

The women who come to-day with their vessels to the water, have all seen her smile over simple jests, and the old peasant, taking his bullocks to their bath, used to stop at her door every day to greet her.

Many a sailing boat passes by this village; many a traveller takes rest beneath that banyan tree; the ferry boat crosses to yonder ford carrying crowds to the market; but they never notice this spot by the village road, near the pool with its ruined landing-stairs,—where dwelt she whom I love.

17

While ages passed and the bees haunted the summer gardens, the moon smiled to the lilies of the night, the lightning's flashed their fiery kisses to the clouds and fled laughing, the poet stood in a corner, one with the trees and clouds. He kept his heart silent, like a flower, watched through his dreams as does the crescent moon; and wandered like the summer breeze for no purpose.

One April evening, when the moon rose up like a bubble from the depth of the sunset; and one maiden was busy watering the plants; and one feeding her doe, and one making her peacock dance, the poet broke out singing,—‘O listen to the secrets of the world. I know that the lily is pale for the moon’s love. The lotus draws her veil aside before the morning sun, and the reason is simple if you think. The meaning of the bee’s hum in the ear of the early jasmine has escaped the learned, but the poet knows.’

The sun went down in a blaze of blush, the moon loitered behind the trees, and the south wind whispered to the lotus, that the poet was not as simple as he seemed. The maidens and youths clapped their hands and cried,—‘The world’s secret is out.’ They looked into each other’s yes and sang—‘Let our secret as well be flung into the winds.’

18

Your days will be full of cares, if you must give me your heart. My house by the cross-roads has its doors open and my mind is absent,—for I sing.

I shall never be made to answer for it, if you must give me your heart. If I pledge my word to you in tunes now, and am too much in earnest to keep it when music is silent, you must forgive me; for the law laid in May is best broken in December.

Do not always keep remembering it, if you must give me your heart. When your eyes sing with love, and your voice ripples with laughter, my answers to your questions will be wild, and not miserly accurate in facts,—they are to be believed forever and then forgotten for good.

19

It is written in the book, that Man, when fifty, must leave the noisy world, to go to the forest seclusion. But the poet proclaims that only for the young is the forest hermitage. For it is the birth-place of flowers, and the haunt of birds and bees; and hidden nooks are waiting there for the thrill of lover's whispers. There the moonlight, that is all one kiss for the *malati* flowers, has its deep message, but those who understand it are far below fifty.

And alas, youth is inexperienced and wilful, therefore it is but meet, that the old should take charge of the household, and the young take to the seclusion of forest shades, and the severe discipline of courting.

20

Where is the market for you, my song? Is it there where the learned muddle the summer breeze with their snuff; where dispute is unending if the oil depend upon the cask, or the cask upon the oil; where yellow manuscripts frown upon the fleet-footed frivolousness of life? My song cries out. Ah, no, no, no.

Where is the market for you, my song? Is it there where the man of fortune grows enormous in pride and flesh in his marble palace, with his books on the shelves, dressed in leather, painted in gold, dusted by slaves, their virgin pages dedicated to the god obscure? My song gasped and said, Ah, no, no, no.

Where is the market for you, my song? Is it there where the young student sits, with his head bent upon his books, and his mind straying in youth's dream-land; where prose is prowling on the desk, and poetry hiding in the heart? There among that dusty disorder would you care to play hide-and-seek? My song remains silent in shy hesitation.

Where is the market for you, my song? Is it there where the bride is busy in the

house, where she runs to her bedroom the moment she is free, and snatches, from under her pillows, the book of romance so roughly handled by the baby, so full of the scent of her hair? My song heaves a sigh and trembles with uncertain desire.

Where is the market for you, my song? Is it there where the least of a bird's notes is never missed, where the stream's babbling finds its full wisdom where all the lute-strings of the world shower their music upon two fluttering hearts? My song bursts out and cries, Yes, yes.

21

(From the Bengali of Devendranath Sen) Methinks, MY love, before the daybreak of life you stood under some waterfall of happy dreams, filling your blood with its liquid turbulence. Or, perhaps, your path was through the garden of the gods, where the merry multitude of jasmine, lilies, and oleanders fell in your arms in heaps, and entering your heart became boisterous.

Your laughter is a song whose words are drowned in the clamour of tune, a rapture of odour of flowers that are not seen; it is like the moonlight breaking through your lips' window when the moon is hiding in your heart. I ask for no reason, I forget the cause, I only know that your laughter is the tumult of insurgent life.

22

I shall gladly suffer the pride of culture to die out in my house, if only in some fortunate future I am born a herd boy in the *Brinda* forest.

The herd boy who grazes his cattle sitting under the banyan tree, and idly weaves *gunja* flowers into garlands, who loves to splash and plunge in the Jamuna's cool deep stream.

He calls his companions to wake up when morning dawns, and all the houses in the lane hum with the sound of the churn, clouds of dust are raised by the cattle, the maidens come out in the courtyard to milk the kine.

As the shadows deepen under the *tomal* trees, and the dusk gathers on the river-banks; when the milkmaids, while crossing the turbulent water tremble with fear; and loud peacocks, with tails outspread, dance in the forest, he watches the summer clouds.

When the April night is sweet as a fresh-blown flower, he disappears in the

forest with a peacock's plume in his hair; the swing ropes are twined with flowers on the branches; the south wind throbs with music, and the merry shepherd boys crowd on the banks of the blue river.

No, I will never be the leader, brothers, of this new age of new Bengal; I shall not trouble to light the lamp of culture for the benighted. If only I could be born, under the shady Ashoka groves, in some village of Brinda, where milk is churned by the maidens.

23

I loved the sandy bank where, in the lonely pools, ducks clamoured and turtles basked in the sun; where, with evening, stray fishing-boats took shelter in the shadow by the tall grass.

You loved the wooded bank where shadows were gathered in the arms of the bamboo thickets; where women came with their vessels through the winding lane.

The same river flowed between us, singing the same song to both its banks. I listened to it, lying alone on the sand under the stars; and you listened sitting by the edge of the slope in the early morning light. Only the words I heard from it you did not know and the secret it spoke to you was a mystery for ever to me.

24

Your window half opened and veil half raised you stand there waiting for the bangle-seller to come with his tinsel. You idly watch the heavy cart creak on in the dusty road, and the boat-mast crawling along the horizon across the far-off river.

The world to you is like an old woman's chant at her spinning-wheel, unmeaning rhymes crowded with random images.

But who knows if he is on his way this lazy sultry noon, the Stranger, carrying his basket of strange wares. He will pass by your door with his clear cry, and you shall fling open your window, cast off your veil, come out of the dusk of your dreams and meet your destiny.

25

I clasp your hands, and my heart plunges into the dark of your eyes, seeking you,

who ever evade me behind words and silence.

Yet I know that I must be content in my love, with what is fitful and fugitive. For we have met for a moment in the crossing of the roads. Have I the power to carry you through this crowd of worlds, through this maze of paths? Have I the food that can sustain you, across the dark passage gaping with arches of death?

26

If, by chance you think of me, I shall sing to you when the rainy evening loosens her shadows upon the river, slowly trailing her dim light towards the west,—when the day's remnant is too narrow for work or for play.

You will sit alone in the balcony of the south, and I shall sing from the darkened room. In the growing dusk, the smell of the wet leaves will come through the window; and the stormy winds will become clamorous in the coconut grove.

When the lighted lamp is brought into the room I shall go. And then, perhaps, you will listen to the night, and hear my song when I am silent.

27

I filled my tray with whatever I had, and gave it to you. What shall I bring to your feet tomorrow, I wonder. I am like the tree that, at the end of the flowering summer, gazes at the sky with its lifted branches bare of their blossoms.

But in all my past offerings is there not a single flower made fadeless by the eternity of tears?

Will you remember it and thank me with your eyes when I stand before you with empty hands at the leave-taking of my summer days?

28

I dreamt that she sat by my head, tenderly ruffling my hair with her fingers, playing the melody of her touch. I looked at her face and struggled with my tears, till the agony of unspoken words burst my sleep like a bubble.

I sat up and saw the glow of the milky way above my window, like a world of silence on fire, and I wondered if at this moment she had a dream that rhymed with mine.

29

I thought I had something to say to her when our eyes met across the hedge. But she passed away. And it rocks day and night, like a boat, on every wave of the hours the word that I had to say to her. It seems to sail in the autumn clouds in an endless quest and to bloom into evening flowers seeking its lost moment in the sunset. It twinkles like fireflies in my heart to find its meaning in the dusk of despair the word that I had to say to her.

30

The spring flowers breakout like the passionate pain of unspoken love. With their breath comes the memory of my old day songs. My heart of a sudden has put on green leaves of desire. My love came not but her touch is in my limbs, and her voice comes across the fragrant fields. Her gaze is in the sad depth of the sky, but where are her eyes? Her kisses flit in the air, but where are her lips?

31

(From the Bengali of Satyendranath Datta) My flowers were like milk and honey and wine; I bound them into a posy with a golden ribbon, but they escaped my watchful care and fled away and only the ribbon remains.

My songs were like milk and honey and wine, they were held in the rhythm of my beating heart, but they spread their wings and fled away, the darlings of the idle hours, and my heart beats in silence.

The beauty I loved was like milk and honey and wine, her lips like the rose of the dawn, her eyes bee-black. I kept my heart silent lest it should startle her, but she eluded me like my flowers and like my songs, and my love remains alone.

32

Many a time when the spring day knocked at our door I kept busy with my work and you did not answer. Now when I am left alone and heart-sick the spring day comes once again, but I know not how to turn him away from the door. When he came to crown us with joy the gate was shut, but now when he comes with his gift of sorrow his path must be open.

33

The boisterous spring, who once came into my life with its lavish laughter, burdening her hours with improvident roses, setting skies aflame with the red kisses of new-born Ashoka leaves, now comes stealing into my solitude through the lonely lanes along the breeding shadows heavy with silence, and sits still in my balcony gazing across the fields, where the green of the earth swoons exhausted in the utter paleness of the sky.

34

When our farewell moment came, like a low-hanging rain cloud, I had only time to tie a red ribbon on your wrist, while my hands trembled. Today I sit alone on the grass in the season of *mahua* flowers, with one quivering question in my mind, ‘Do you still keep the little red ribbon tied on your wrist?’

You went by the narrow road that skirted the blossoming field of flax. I saw that my garland of overnight was still hanging loose from your hair. But why did you not wait till I could gather, in the morning, new flowers for my final gift? I wonder if unaware it dropped on your way,—the garland hanging loose from your hair.

Many a song I had sung to you, morning and evening, and the last one you carried in your voice when you went away. You never tarried to hear the one song unsung I had for you alone and forever. I wonder if, at last, you are tired of my song that you hummed to yourself while walking through the field.

35

Last night clouds were threatening and *amlak* branches struggled in the grips of the gusty wind. I hoped, if dreams came to me, they would come in the shape of my beloved, in the lonely night loud with rain.

The winds still moan through the fields, and the tear-stained cheeks of dawn are pale. My dreams have been in vain, for truth is hard, and dreams, too, have their own ways.

Last night when the darkness was drunken with storm, and the rain, like night’s veil, was torn by the winds into shreds, would it make truth jealous, if untruth came to me in the shape of my beloved, in the starless night loud with rain?

36

My fetters, you made music in my heart. I played with you all day long and made you my ornament. We were the best of friends, my fetters. There were times when I was afraid of you, but my fear made me love you the more. You were companions of my long dark night, and I make my bow to you, before I bid you good-bye, my fetters.

37

You had your rudder broken many a time, my boat, and your sails torn to tatters. Often had you drifted towards the sea, dragging anchor and heeded not. But now there has spread a crack in your hull and your hold is heavy. Now is the time for you to end your voyage, to be rocked into sleep by the lapping of the water by the beach.

Alas, I know all warning is vain. The veiled face of dark doom lures you. The madness of the storm and the waves is upon you. The music of the tide is rising high. You are shaken by the fever of that dance.

Then break your chain, my boat, and be free, and fearlessly rush to your wreck.

38

The current in which I drifted ran rapid and strong when I was young. The spring breeze was spendthrift of itself, the trees were on fire with flowers; and the birds never slept from singing.

I sailed with giddy speed, carried away by the flood of passion; I had no time to see and feel and take the world into my being.

Now that youth has ebbed and I am stranded on the bank, I can hear the deep music of all things, and the sky opens to me its heart of stars.

39

There is a looker-on who sits behind my eyes. It seems he has seen things in ages and worlds beyond memory's shore, and those forgotten sights glisten on the grass, and shiver on the leaves. He has seen under new veils the face of the one beloved, in twilight hours of many a nameless star.

Therefore his sky seems to ache with the pain of countless meetings and

partings, and a longing pervades this spring breeze,—the longing that is full of the whisper of ages without beginning.

40

A message came from my youth of vanished days, saying, I wait for you among the quivering of unborn May, where smiles ripen for tears and hours ache with songs unsung.'

It says, 'Come to me across the worn-out track of age, through the gates of death. For dreams fade, hopes fail, the gathered fruits of the year decay, but I am the eternal truth, and you shall meet me again and again in your voyage of life from shore to shore.'

41

The girls are out to fetch water from the river—their laughter comes through the trees, I long to join them in the lane, where goats graze in the shade, and squirrels flit from sun to shadow, across the fallen leaves.

But my day's task is already done, my jars are filled. I stand at my door to watch the glistening green of the areca leaves, and hear the laughing women going to fetch water from the river.

It has ever been dear to me to carry the burden of my full vessel day after day, in the dew-dipped morning freshness and in the tired glimmer of the day fall.

Its gurgling water babbled to me when my mind was idle, it laughed with the silent laughter of my joyous thoughts—it spoke to my heart with tearful sobs when I was sad. I have carried it in stormy days, when the loud rain drowned the anxious cooing of doves.

My day's task is done, my jars are filled, the light wanes in the west, and shadows gather beneath the trees; a sigh comes from the flowering linseed field, and my wistful eyes follow the lane, that runs through the village to the bank of the dark water.

42

Are you a mere picture, and not as true as those stars, true as this dust? They throb with the pulse of things, but you are immensely aloof in your stillness, painted form.

The day was when you walked with me, your breath warm, your limbs singing of life. My world found its speech in your voice, and touched my heart with your face. You suddenly stopped in your walk, in the shadow-side of the Forever, and I went on alone.

Life, like a child, laughs, shaking its rattle of death as it runs; it beckons me on, I follow the unseen; but you stand there, where you stopped behind that dust and those stars; and you are a mere picture.

No, it cannot be. Had the life flood utterly stopped in you, it would stop the river in its flow, and the footfall of dawn in her cadence of colours. Had the glimmering dusk of your hair vanished in the hopeless dark, the woodland shade of summer would die with its dreams.

Can it be true that I forgot you? We haste on without heed, forgetting the flowers on the roadside hedge. Yet they breathe unaware into our forgetfulness, filling it with music. You have moved from my world, to take seat at the root of my life, and therefore is this forgetting-remembrance lost in its own depth.

You are no longer before my songs, but one with them. You came to me with the first ray of dawn. I lost you with the last gold of evening. Ever since I am always finding you through the dark. No, you are no mere picture.

43

Dying, you have left behind you the great sadness of the Eternal in my life. You have painted my thought's horizon with the sunset colours of your departure, leaving a track of tears across the earth to love's heaven.

Clasped in your dear arms, life and death united in me in a marriage bond.

I think I can see you watching there in the balcony with your lamp lighted, where the end and the beginning of all things meet my world went hence through the doors that you opened-you holding the cup of death to my lips, filling it with life from your own.

44

When in your death you died to all that was outside me, vanishing from the thousand things of the world, to be fully reborn in my sorrow, I felt that my life had grown perfect, the man and the woman becoming one in me forever.

45

Bring beauty and order into my forlorn life, woman, as you brought them into my house when you lived. Sweep away the dusty fragments of the hours, fill the empty jars and mend all neglects. Then open the inner door of the shrine, light the candle, and let us meet there in silence before our God.

46

The sky gazes on its own endless blue and dreams. We clouds are its whims, we have no home. The stars shine on the crown of Eternity. Their records are permanent, while ours are penciled, to be rubbed off the next moment.

Our part is to appear on the stage of the air to sound our tambourines and fling flashes of laughter. But from our laughter comes the rain, which is real enough, and thunder which is no jest. Yet we have no claim upon Time for wages, and the breath that blew us into being blows us away before we are given a name.

47

The road is my wedded companion. She speaks to me under my feet all day, she sings to my dreams all night.

My meeting with her had no beginning, it begins endlessly at each daybreak, renewing its summer in fresh flowers and songs, and her every new kiss is the first kiss to me.

The road and I are lovers. I change my dress for her night after night, leaving the tattered cumber of the old in the wayside inns when the day dawns.

48

I travelled the old road every day, I took my fruits to the market, my cattle to the meadows, I ferried my boat across the stream and all the ways were well known to me.

One morning my basket was heavy with wares. Men were busy in the fields, the pastures crowded with cattle; the breast of earth heaved with the mirth of ripening rice.

Suddenly there was a tremor in the air, and the sky seemed to kiss me on my forehead. My mind started up like the morning out of mist.

I forgot to follow the track. I stepped a few paces from the path, and my familiar world appeared strange to me, like a flower I had only known in bud.

My everyday wisdom was ashamed. I went astray in the fairyland of things. It was the best luck of my life, that I lost my path that morning, and found my eternal childhood.

49

Where is heaven? You ask me, my child,—the sages tell us it is beyond the limits of birth and death, unswayed by the rhythm of day and night; it is not of this earth.

But your poet knows that its eternal hunger is for time and space, and it strives evermore to be born in the fruitful dust. Heaven is fulfilled in your sweet body, my child, in your palpitating heart. The sea is beating its drums in joy, the flowers are a-tilt to kiss you. For heaven is born in you, in the arms of the mother-dust.

50

(Translated from the Bengali of Dwijendralal Roy) ‘Come, Moon, come down, kiss my darling on the forehead,’ cries the mother as she holds the baby girl in her lap while the moon smiles as it dreams. There come stealing in the dark the vague fragrance of the summer and the night-bird’s songs from the shadow-laden solitude of the mango-grove. At a far-away village rises from a peasant’s flute a fountain of plaintive notes, and the young mother, sitting on the terrace, baby in her lap, croons sweetly, ‘Come, moon, come down, kiss my darling on the forehead.’ Once she looks up at the light of the sky, and then at the light of the earth in her arms, and I wonder at the placid silence of the moon.

The baby laughs and repeats her mother’s call, ‘Come, moon, come down.’ The mother smiles, and smiles the moonlit night, and I, the poet, the husband of the baby’s mother, watch this picture from behind, unseen.

51

The early autumn day is cloudless. The river is full to the brim, washing the naked roots of the tottering tree by the ford. The long narrow path, like the thirsty tongue of the village, dips down into the stream.

My heart is full, as I look around me and see the silent sky and the flowing water, and feel that happiness is spread abroad, as simply as a smile on a child’s

face.

52

Tired of waiting, you burst your bonds, impatient flowers, before the winter had gone. Glimpses of the unseen comer reached your wayside watch, and you rushed out running and panting, impulsive jasmines, troops of riotous roses.

You were the first to march to the breach of death, your clamour of colour and perfume troubled the air. You laughed and pressed and pushed each other, bared your breast and dropped in heaps.

The Summer will come in its time, sailing in the floodtide of the south wind. But you never counted slow moments to be sure of him. You recklessly spent your all in the road, in the terrible joy of faith.

You heard his footsteps from afar, and flung your mantle of death for him to tread upon. Your bonds break even before the rescuer is seen, you make him your own ere he can come and claim you.

53

(Translated from the Bengali of Satyendranath Datta) I opened my bud when April breathed her last and the summer scorched with kisses the unwilling earth. I came half afraid and half curious, like a mischievous imp peeping at a hermit's cell.

I heard the frightened whispers of the despoiled woodland, and the Kokil gave voice, to the languor of the summer; through the fluttering leaf curtain of my birth-chamber I saw the world grim, grey, and haggard.

Yet boldly I came out strong with the faith of youth, quaffed the fiery wine from the glowing bowl of the sky, and proudly saluted the morning, I, the *champa* flower, who carry the perfume of the sun in my heart.

54

In the beginning of time, there rose from the churning of God's dream two women. One is the dancer at the court of paradise, the desired of men, she who laughs and plucks the minds of the wise from their cold meditations and of fools from their emptiness; and scatters them like seeds with careless hands in the extravagant winds of March, in the flowering frenzy of May.

The other is the crowned queen of heaven, the mother, throned on the fullness of golden autumn; she who in the harvest-time brings straying hearts to the smile sweet as tears, the beauty deep as the sea of silence,—brings them to the temple of the Unknown, at the holy confluence of Life and Death.

55

The noonday air is quivering, like gauzy wings of a dragon-fly. Roofs of the village huts brood birdlike over the drowsy households, while a Kokil sings unseen from its leafy loneliness.

The fresh liquid notes drop upon the tuneless toil of the human crowd, adding music to lovers' whispers, to mothers' kisses, to children's laughter. They flow over our thoughts, like a stream over pebbles, rounding them in beauty every unconscious moment.

56

The evening was lonely for me, and I was reading a book till my heart became dry, and it seemed to me that beauty was a thing fashioned by the traders in words. Tired I shut the book and snuffed the candle. In a moment the room was flooded with moonlight.

Spirit of Beauty, how could you, whose radiance over brims the sky, stand hidden behind a candle's tiny flame? How could a few vain words from a book rise like a mist, and veil her whose voice has hushed the heart of earth into ineffable calm?

57

This autumn is mine, for she was rocked in my heart. The glistening bells of her anklets rang in my blood, and her misty veil fluttered in my breath.

I know the touch of her blown hair in all my dreams. She is abroad in the trembling leaves that danced in my life-throbs, and her eyes that smile from the blue sky drank their light from me.

58

Things throng and laugh loud in the sky; the sands and dust dance and whirl like

children. Man's mind is aroused by their shouts; his thoughts long to be the playmates of things.

Our dreams, drifting in the stream of the vague, stretch their arms to clutch the earth,—their efforts stiffen into bricks and stones, and thus the city of man is built.

Voices come swarming from the past,—seeking answers from the living moments. Beats of their wings fill the air with tremulous shadows, and sleepless thoughts in our minds leave their nests to take flight across the desert of dimness, in the passionate thirst for forms. They are lampless pilgrims, seeking the shore of light, to find themselves in things. They will be lured into poet's rhymes, they will be housed in the towers of the town not yet planned, they have their call to arms from the battlefields of the future, they are bidden to join hands in the strifes of peace yet to come.

59

They do not build high towers in the Land of All-I-Have-Found. A grassy lawn runs by the road, with a stream of fugitive water at its side. The bees haunt the cottage porches abloom with passion flowers. The men set out on their errands with a smile, and in the evening they come home with a song, with no wages, in the Land of All-I-Have-Found.

In the midday, sitting in the cool of their courtyards, the women hum and spin at their wheels, while over the waving harvest comes wafted the music of shepherds' flutes. It rejoices the wayfarers' hearts who walk singing through the shimmering shadows of the fragrant forest in the Land of All-I-Have-Found.

The traders sail with their merchandise down the river, but they do not moor their boats in this land; soldiers march with banners flying, but the king never stops his chariot. Travellers who come from afar to rest here awhile, go away without knowing what there is in the Land of All-I-Have-Found.

Here crowds do not jostle each other in the roads. O poet, set up your house in this land. Wash from your feet the dust of distant wanderings, tune your lute, and at the day's end stretch yourself on the cool grass under the evening star in the Land of All-I-Have-Found.

60

Take back your coins, King's Councillor. I am of those women you sent to the

forest shrine to decoy the young ascetic who had never seen a woman. I failed in your bidding.

Dimly day was breaking when the hermit boy came to bathe in the stream, his tawny locks crowded on his shoulders, like a cluster of morning clouds, and his limbs shining like a streak of sunbeam. We laughed and sang as we rowed in our boat; we jumped into the river in a mad frolic, and danced around him, when the sun rose staring at us from the water's edge in a flush of divine anger.

Like a child-god, the boy opened his eyes and watched our movements, the wonder deepening till his eyes shone like morning stars. He lifted his clasped hands and chanted a hymn of praise in his birdlike young voice, thrilling every leaf of the forest. Never such words were sung to a mortal woman before; they were like the silent hymn to the dawn which rises from the hushed hills. The women hid their mouths with their hands, their bodies swaying with laughter, and a spasm of doubt ran across his face. Quickly came I to his side, sorely pained, and, bowing to his feet, I said, 'Lord, accept my service.'

I led him to the grassy bank, wiped his body with the end of my silken mantle, and, kneeling on the ground, I dried his feet with my trailing hair. When I raised my face and looked into his eyes, I thought I felt the world's first kiss to the first woman,—Blessed am I, blessed is God, who made me a woman. I heard him say to me, 'What God unknown are you? Your touch is the touch of the Immortal, your eyes have the mystery of the midnight.'

Ah, no, not that smile, King's Councillor,—the dust of worldly wisdom has covered your sight, old man. But this boy's innocence pierced the mist and saw the shining truth, the woman divine.

Ah, how the goddess wakened in me, at the awful light of that first adoration. Tears filled my eyes, the morning ray caressed my hair like a sister, and the woodland breeze kissed my forehead as it kisses the flowers.

The women clapped their hands, and laughed their obscene laugh, and with veils dragging on the dust and hair hanging loose, they began to pelt him with flowers.

Alas, my spotless sun, could not my shame weave fiery mist to cover you in its folds? I fell at his feet and cried, 'Forgive me.' I fled like a stricken deer through shade and sun, and cried as I fled, 'Forgive me.' The women's foul laughter pressed me like a crackling fire, but the words ever rang in my ears, 'What God unknown is you?'

10. The Mother's Prayer

Prince Duryodhana, the son of the blind Kaurava King Dhritarashtra, and of Queen Gandhari, has played with his cousins the Pandava Kings for their kingdom, and won it by fraud.

DHRITARASHTRA : You have compassed your end.

DURYODHANA : Success is mine!

DHRITARASHTRA : Are you happy?

DURYODHANA : I am victorious.

DHRITARASHTRA : I ask you again, what happiness have you in winning the undivided kingdom?

DURYODHANA : Sire, a Kshatriya thirsts not after happiness but victory, that fiery wine pressed from seething jealousy. Wretchedly happy we were, like those inglorious stains that lie idly on the breast of the moon, when we lived in peace under the friendly dominance of our cousins. Then these Pandavas milked the world of its wealth, and allowed us a share, in brotherly tolerance. Now that they own defeat and expect banishment, I am no longer happy but exultant.

DHRITARASHTRA : Wretch, you forget that both Pandavas and Kauravas have the same forefathers.

DURYODHANA : It was difficult to forget that, and therefore our inequalities rankled in my heart. At midnight the moon is never jealous of the noonday sun. But the struggle to share one horizon between both orbs cannot last forever. Thank heaven, that struggle is over, and we have at last won solitude in glory.

DHRITARASHTRA : The mean jealousy!

DURYODHANA : Jealousy is never mean—it is in the essence of greatness. Grass can grow in crowded amity, not giant trees. Stars live in clusters, but the sun and moon are lonely in their splendour. The pale moon of the Pandavas sets behind the forest shadows, leaving the new-risen sun of the Kauravas to rejoice.

DHRITARASHTRA : But right has been defeated.

DURYODHANA : Right for rulers is not what is right in the eyes of the people. The

people thrive by comradeship: but for a king, equals are enemies. They are obstacles ahead, they are terrors from behind. There is no place for brothers or friends in a king's polity; its one solid foundation is conquest.

DHRITARASHTRA : I refuse to call a conquest what was won by fraud in gambling.

DURYODHANA : A man is not shamed by refusing to challenge a tiger on equal terms with teeth and nails. Our weapons are those proper for success, not for suicide. Father, I am proud of the result and disdain regret for the means.

DHRITARASHTRA : But justice—— DURYODHANA : Fools alone dream of justice—success is not yet theirs: but those born to rule rely on power, merciless and unhampered with scruples.

DHRITARASHTRA : Your success will bring down on you a loud and angry flood of detraction.

DURYODHANA : The people will take amazingly little time to learn that Duryodhana is king and has power to crush calumny under foot.

DHRITARASHTRA : Calumny dies of weariness dancing on tongue-tips. Do not drive it into the heart to gather strength.

DURYODHANA : Unuttered defamation does not touch a king's dignity. I care not if love is refused us, but insolence shall not be borne. Love depends upon the will of the giver, and the poorest of the poor can indulge in such generosity. Let them squander it on their pet cats, tame dogs, and our good cousins the Pandavas. I shall never envy them. Fear is the tribute I claim for my royal throne. Father, only too leniently you lent your ear to those who slandered your sons: but if you intend still to allow those pious friends of yours to revel in shrill denunciation at the expense of your children, let us exchange our kingdom for the exile of our cousins, and go to the wilderness, where happily friends are never cheap!

DHRITARASHTRA : Could the pious warnings of my friends lessen my love for my sons, then we might be saved. But I have dipped my hands in the mire of your infamy and lost my sense of goodness. For your sakes I have heedlessly set fire to the ancient forest of our royal lineage—so dire is my love. Clasped breast to breast, we, like a double meteor, are blindly plunging into ruin. Therefore doubt not my love; relax not your embrace till the brink of annihilation be reached. Beat your drums of victory, lift your banner of triumph. In this mad riot of exultant evil, brothers and friends will disperse till nothing remain save the doomed father, the doomed son and God's curse.

Enter an Attendant Sire, Queen Gandhari asks for audience.

DHRITARASHTRA : I await her.

DURYODHANA : Let me take my leave. [Exit.

DHRITARASHTRA : Fly! For you cannot bear the fire of your mother's presence.

Enter QUEEN GANDHARI, the mother of DURYODHANA.

GANDHARI : At your feet I crave a boon.

DHRITARASHTRA : Speak, your wish is fulfilled.

GANDHARI : The time has come to renounce him.

DHRITARASHTRA : Whom, my queen?

GANDHARI : Duryodhana!

DHRITARASHTRA : Our own son, Duryodhana?

GANDHARI : Yes!

DHRITARASHTRA : This is a terrible boon for you, his mother, to crave!

GANDHARI : The fathers of the Kauravas, who are in Paradise, join me in beseeching you.

DHRITARASHTRA : The divine Judge will punish him who has broken His laws. But I am his father.

GANDHARI : Am I not his mother? Have I not carried him under my throbbing heart? Yes, I ask you to renounce Duryodhana the unrighteous.

DHRITARASHTRA : What will remain to us after that?

GANDHARI : God's blessing.

DHRITARASHTRA : And what will that bring us?

GANDHARI : New afflictions. Pleasure in our son's presence, pride in a new kingdom, and shame at knowing both purchased by wrong done or connived at, like thorns dragged two ways, would lacerate our bosoms. The Pandavas are too proud ever to accept back from us the lands which they have relinquished; therefore it is only meet that we draw some great sorrow down on our heads so as to deprive that unmerited reward of its sting.

DHRITARASHTRA : Queen, you inflict fresh pain on a heart already rent.

GANDHARI : Sire, the punishment imposed on our son will be more ours than his. A judge callous to the pain that he inflicts loses the right to judge. And if you spare your son to save yourself pain, then all the culprits ever punished by your hands will cry before God's throne for vengeance,—had they not also their fathers?

DHRITARASHTRA : No more of this, Queen, I pray you. Our son is abandoned of God: that is why I cannot give him up. To save him is no longer in my power, and therefore my consolation is to share his guilt and tread the path of destruction, his solitary companion. What is done is done; let follow what must

follow! [Exit.

GANDHARI : *Be calm, my heart, and patiently await God's judgment. Oblivious night wears on, the morning of reckoning nears, I hear the thundering roar of its chariot. Woman, bow your head down to the dust! And as a sacrifice fling your heart under those wheels! Darkness will shroud the sky, earth will tremble, wailing will rend the air and then comes the silent and cruel end,—that terrible peace, that great forgetting, and awful extinction of hatred—the supreme deliverance rising from the fire of death.*

*

Fiercely they rend in pieces the carpet woven during ages of prayer for the welcome of the world's best hope.

The great preparations of love lie a heap of shreds, and there is nothing on the ruined altar to remind the mad crowd that their god was to have come. In a fury of passion they seem to have burnt their future to cinders, and with it the season of their bloom.

The air is harsh with the cry, "Victory to the Brute!" The children look haggard and aged; they whisper to one another that time revolves but never advances, that we are goaded to run but have nothing to reach, that creation is like a blind man's groping.

I said to myself, "Cease thy singing. Song is for one who is to come, the struggle without an end is for things that are."

The road, that ever lies along like someone with ear to the ground listening for footsteps, to-day gleans no hint of coming guest, nothing of the house at its far end.

My lute said, "Trample me in the dust."

I looked at the dust by the roadside. There was a tiny flower among thorns. And I cried, "The world's hope is not dead!"

The sky stooped over the horizon to whisper to the earth, and a hush of expectation filled the air. I saw the palm leaves clapping their hands to the beat of inaudible music, and the moon exchanged glances with the glistening silence of the lake.

The road said to me, "Fear nothing!" and my lute said, "Lend me thy songs!"

12. Somaka and Ritvik

The shade of KING SOMAKA, faring to Heaven in a chariot, passes other shades by the roadside, among them that of RITVIK, his former high-priest.

A VOICE : Where would you go, King?

SOMAKA : Whose voice is that? This turbid air is like suffocation to the eyes; I cannot see.

THE VOICE : Come down, King! Come down from that chariot bound for Heaven.

SOMAKA : Who are you?

THE VOICE : I am Ritvik, who in my earthly life was your preceptor and the chief priest of your house.

SOMAKA : Master, all the tears of the world seem to have become vapour to create this realm of vagueness. What make you here?

SHADES : This hell lies hard by the road to Heaven, whence lights glimmer dimly, only to prove unapproachable. Day and night we listen to the heavenly chariot rumbling by with travellers for that region of bliss; it drives sleep from our eyes and forces them to watch in fruitless jealousy. Farbelow us earth's old forests rustle and her seas chant the primal hymn of creation: they sound like the wail of a memory that wanders void space in vain.

RITVIK : Come down, King!

SHADES : Stop a few moments among us. The earth's tears still cling about you, like dew on freshly culled flowers. You have brought with you the mingled odours of meadow and forest; reminiscence of children, women, and comrades; something too of the ineffable music of the seasons.

SOMAKA : Master, why are you doomed to live in this muffled stagnant world?

RITVIK : I offered up your son in the sacrificial fire: that sin has lodged my soul in this obscurity.

SHADES : King, tell us the story, we implore you; the recital of crime can still bring life's fire into our torpor.

SOMAKA : I was named Somaka, the King of Videha. After sacrificing at innumerable shrines weary year on year, a son was born to my house in my old age, love for whom, like a sudden untimely flood, swept consideration for everything else from my life. He hid me completely, as a lotus hides its stem.

The neglected duties of a king piled up in shame before my throne. One day, in my audience hall, I heard my child cry from his mother's room, and instantly rushed away, vacating my throne.

RITVIK : Just then, it chanced, I entered the hall to give him my daily benediction; in blind haste he brushed me aside and enkindled my anger. When later he came back, shame-faced, I asked him: "King, what desperate alarm could draw you at the busiest hour of the day to the women's apartments, so as to desert your dignity and duty—ambassadors come from friendly courts, the aggrieved who ask for justice, your ministers waiting to discuss matters of grave import? And even lead you to slight a Brahmin's blessing?"

SOMAKA : At first my heart flamed with anger; the next moment I trampled it down like the raised head of a snake and meekly replied: "Having only one child, I have lost my peace of mind. Forgive me this once, and I promise that in future the father's infatuation shall never usurp the King."

RITVIK : But my heart was bitter with resentment, and I said, "If you must be delivered from the curse of having only one child, I can show you the way. But so hard is it that I feel certain you will fail to follow it." This galled the King's pride and he stood up and exclaimed, "I swear, by all that is sacred, as a Kshatriya and a King, I will not shrink, but perform whatever you may ask, however hard." "Then listen," said I. "Light a sacrificial fire, offer up your son: the smoke that rises will bring you progeny, as the clouds bring rain." The King bowed his head upon his breast and remained silent: the courtiers shouted their horror, the Brahmin slapped their hands over their ears, crying, "Sin it is both to utter and listen to such words." After some moments of bewildered dismay the King calmly said, "I will abide by my promise." The day came, the fire was lit, the town was emptied of its people, the child was called for; but the attendants refused to obey, the soldiers rebelliously went off duty, throwing down their arms. Then I, who in my wisdom had soared far above all weakness of heart and to whom emotions were illusory, went myself to the apartment where, with their arms, women fenced the child like a flower surrounded by the menacing branches of a tree. He saw me and stretched out eager hands and struggled to come to me, for he longed to be free from the love that imprisoned him. Crying, "I am come to give you true deliverance, "I snatched him by force from his fainting mother and his nurses wailing in despair. With quivering tongues the fire licked the sky and the King stood beside it, still and silent, like a tree struck dead by lightning. Fascinated by the godlike splendour of the blaze, the child babbled in glee and danced in my arms, impatient to seek an unknown nurse in the free glory of those flames.

SOMAKA : Stop, no more, I pray!

SHADES : Ritvik, your presence is a disgrace to hell itself!

THE CHARIOTEER : This is no place for you, King! Nor have you deserved to be forced to listen to this recital of a deed which makes hell shudder in pity.

SOMAKA : Drive off in your chariot!—Brahmin, my place is by you in this hell. The Gods may forget my sin, but can I forget the last look of agonised surprise on my child's face when, for one terrible moment, he realised that his own father had betrayed his trust?

Enter DHARMA, the Judge of Departed Spirits DHARMA : King, Heaven waits for you.

SOMAKA : No, not for me. I killed my own child.

DHARMA : Your sin has been swept away in the fury of pain it caused you.

RITVIK : No, King, you must never go to Heaven alone, and thus create a second hell for me, to burn both with fire and with hatred of you! Stay here!

SOMAKA : I will stay.

SHADES : And crown the despair and inglorious suffering of hell with the triumph of a soul!

*

The man had no useful work, only vagaries of various kinds.

Therefore it surprised him to find himself in Paradise after a life spent perfecting trifles.

Now the guide had taken him by mistake to the wrong Paradise—one meant only for good, busy souls.

In this Paradise, our man saunters along the road only to obstruct the rush of business.

He stands aside from the path and is warned that he tramples on sown seed. Pushed, he starts up: hustled, he moves on.

A very busy girl comes to fetch water from the well. Her feet run on the pavement like rapid fingers over harp-strings. Hastily she ties a negligent knot with her hair, and loose locks on her forehead pry into the dark of her eyes.

The man says to her, "Would you lend me your pitcher?"

"My pitcher?" she asks, "to draw water?"

"No, to paint patterns on."

"I have no time to waste," the girl retorts in contempt.

Now a busy soul has no chance against one who is supremely idle.

Every day she meets him at the well, and every day he repeats the same

request, till at last she yields.

Our man paints the pitcher with curious colours in a mysterious maze of lines.

The girl takes it up, turns it round and asks, "What does it mean?"

"It has no meaning," he answers.

The girl carries the pitcher home. She holds it up in different lights and tries to con its mystery.

At night she leaves her bed, lights a lamp, and gazes at it from all points of view.

This is the first time she has met with something without meaning.

On the next day the man is again near the well.

The girl asks, "What do you want?"

"To do more work for you."

"What work?" she enquires.

"Allow me to weave coloured strands into a ribbon to bind your hair."

"Is there any need?" she asks.

"None whatever," he allows.

The ribbon is made, and thence-forward she spends a great deal of time over her hair.

The even stretch of well-employed time in that Paradise begins to show irregular rents.

The elders are troubled; they meet in council.

The guide confesses his blunder, saying that he has brought the wrong man to the wrong place.

The wrong man is called. His turban, flaming with colour, shows plainly how great that blunder has been.

The chief of the elders says, "You must go back to the earth."

The man heaves a sigh of relief: "I am ready."

The girl with the ribbon round her hair chimes in: "I also!"

For the first time the chief of the elders is faced with a situation which has no sense in it.

*

It is said that in the forest, near the meeting of river and lake, certain fairies live in disguise who are only recognised as fairies after they have flown away.

A Prince went to this forest, and when he came where river met lake he saw a village girl sitting on the bank ruffling the water to make the lilies dance.

He asked her in a whisper, "Tell me, what fairy art thou?"

The girl laughed at the question and the hillsides echoed her mirth.

The Prince thought she was the laughing fairy of the waterfall.

News reached the King that the Prince had married a fairy: he sent horse and men and brought them to his house.

The Queen saw the bride and turned her face away in disgust, the Prince's sister flushed red with annoyance, and the maids asked if that was how fairies dressed.

The Prince whispered, "Hush! My fairy has come to our house in disguise."

On the day of the yearly festival the Queen said to her son, "Ask your bride not to shame us before our kinsfolk who are coming to see the fairy."

And the Prince said to his bride, "For my love's sake show thy true self to my people."

Long she sat silent, then nodded her promise while tears ran down her cheeks.

The full moon shone, the Prince, dressed in a wedding robe, entered his bride's room.

No one was there, nothing but a streak of moonlight from the window aslant the bed.

The kinsfolk crowded in with the King and the Queen, the Prince's sister stood by the door.

All asked, "Where is the fairy bride?"

The Prince answered, "She has vanished for ever to make herself known to you."

13. Songs of Kabir

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I

I. 13. *mo ko kahân dhûnro bande* O servant, where dost thou seek Me?
Lo! I am beside thee.

*I am neither in temple nor in mosque: I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash:
Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor in Yoga and renunciation.
If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me: thou shalt meet Me in a
moment of time.*

Kabîr says, “O Sadhu! God is the breath of all breath.”

II

I. 16. *Santan jât na pûcho nirguniyân* It is needless to ask of a saint the caste to which he belongs; For the priest, the warrior, the tradesman, and all the thirty-six castes, alike are seeking for God.

It is but folly to ask what the caste of a saint may be; The barber has sought God, the washerwoman, and the carpenter— Even Raidas was a seeker after God.

The Rishi Swapacha was a tanner by caste.

Hindus and Moslems alike have achieved that End, where remains no mark of distinction.

III

I. 57. *sâdho bhâî, jîval hî karo âs'â* O friend! hope for Him whilst you live, know whilst you live, understand whilst you live: for in life deliverance abides.

If your bonds be not broken whilst living, what hope of deliverance in death?

It is but an empty dream, that the soul shall have union with Him because it has passed from the body: If He is found now, He is found then, If not, we do but go to dwell in the City of Death.

If you have union now, you shall have it hereafter.

Bathe in the truth, know the true Guru, have faith in the true Name!

Kabîr says: “It is the Spirit of the quest which helps; I am the slave of this Spirit of the quest.”

IV

I. 58. *bâgo nâ jâ re nâ jâ*

Do not go to the garden of flowers!

O Friend! go not there;

In your body is the garden of flowers.

Take your seat on the thousand petals of the lotus, and there gaze on the Infinite Beauty.

V

I. 63. *avadhû, mâyâ tajî na jây* Tell me, Brother, how can I renounce Maya?
When I gave up the tying of ribbons, still I tied my garment about me: When I
gave up tying my garment, still I covered my body in its folds.
So, when I give up passion, I see that anger remains; And when I renounce
anger, greed is with me still; And when greed is vanquished, pride and
vainglory remain; When the mind is detached and casts Maya away, still it
clings to the letter.
Kabîr says, “Listen to me, dear Sadhu! The true path is rarely found.”

VI

I. 83. *candâ jhalkai yahi ghat mâhîn* The moon shines in my body, but my blind eyes cannot see it: The moon is within me, and so is the sun.

The unstruck drum of Eternity is sounded within me; but my deaf ears cannot hear it.

So long as man clamours for the I and the Mine, his works are as naught: When all love of the I and the Mine is dead, then the work of the Lord is done.

For work has no other aim than the getting of knowledge: When that comes, then work is put away.

The flower blooms for the fruit: when the fruit comes, the flower withers.

The musk is in the deer, but it seeks it not within itself: it wanders in quest of grass.

VII

I. 85. *Sâdho, Brahm alakh lakhâyâ* When He Himself reveals Himself, Brahma brings into manifestation That which can never be seen.

As the seed is in the plant, as the shade is in the tree, as the void is in the sky, as infinite forms are in the void— So from beyond the Infinite, the Infinite comes; and from the Infinite the finite extends.

The creature is in Brahma, and Brahma is in the creature: they are ever distinct, yet ever united.

He Himself is the tree, the seed, and the germ.

He Himself is the flower, the fruit, and the shade.

He Himself is the sun, the light, and the lighted.

He Himself is Brahma, creature, and Maya.

He Himself is the manifold form, the infinite space; He is the breath, the word, and the meaning.

He Himself is the limit and the limitless: and beyond both the limited and the limitless is He, the Pure Being.

He is the Immanent Mind in Brahma and in the creature.

The Supreme Soul is seen within the soul, The Point is seen within the Supreme Soul, And within the Point, the reflection is seen again.

Kabîr is blest because he has this supreme vision!

VIII

I. 101. *is ghat antar bâg bagîce* Within this earthen vessel are bowers and groves, and within it is the Creator: Within this vessel are the seven oceans and the unnumbered stars.

The touchstone and the jewel-appraiser are within; And within this vessel the Eternal soundeth, and the spring wells up.

Kabîr says: “Listen to me, my Friend! My beloved Lord is within.”

IX

I. 104. *aisâ lo nahîn taisâ lo* O How may I ever express that secret word?
O how can I say He is not like this, and He is like that?
If I say that He is within me, the universe is ashamed: If I say that He is without me, it is falsehood.
He makes the inner and the outer worlds to be indivisibly one; The conscious and the unconscious, both are His footstools.
He is neither manifest nor hidden, He is neither revealed nor unrevealed: There are no words to tell that which He is.

X

I. 121. *tohi mori lagan lagâye re phakîr wâ* To Thee Thou hast drawn my love,
O Fakir!

*I was sleeping in my own chamber, and Thou didst awaken me; striking me
with Thy voice, O Fakir!*

*I was drowning in the deeps of the ocean of this world, and Thou didst save
me: upholding me with Thine arm, O Fakir!*

*Only one word and no second—and Thou hast made me tear off all my bonds,
O Fakir!*

Kabîr says, “Thou hast united Thy heart to my heart, O Fakir!”

XI

I. 131. *nis' din khelat rahî sakhiyân sang* I played day and night with my comrades, and now I am greatly afraid.

So high is my Lord's palace, my heart trembles to mount its stairs: yet I must not be shy, if I would enjoy His love.

My heart must cleave to my Lover; I must withdraw my veil, and meet Him with all my body: Mine eyes must perform the ceremony of the lamps of love.

Kabîr says: “Listen to me, friend: he understands who loves. If you feel not love’s longing for your Beloved One, it is vain to adorn your body, vain to put unguent on your eyelids.”

XII

II. 24. *hamsâ, kaho purâtan vât* Tell me, O Swan, your ancient tale.
From what land do you come, O Swan? to what shore will you fly?
Where would you take your rest, O Swan, and what do you seek?
Even this morning, O Swan, awake, arise, follow me!
There is a land where no doubt nor sorrow have rule: where the terror of
Death is no more.
There the woods of spring are a-bloom, and the fragrant scent “He is I” is
borne on the wind: There the bee of the heart is deeply immersed, and
desires no other joy.

XIII

II. 37. *angadhiyâ devâ*

O Lord Increase, who will serve Thee?

Every votary offers his worship to the God of his own creation: each day he receives service— None seek Him, the Perfect: Brahma, the Indivisible Lord.

They believe in ten Avatars; but no Avatar can be the Infinite Spirit, for he suffers the results of his deeds: The Supreme One must be other than this.

The Yogi, the Sanyasi, the Ascetics, are disputing one with another: Kabîr says, “O brother! He who has seen that radiance of love, he is saved.”

XIV

II. 56. *dariyâ kî lahar dariyâo hai jî* The river and its waves are one surf:
where is the difference between the river and its waves?

*When the wave rises, it is the water; and when it falls, it is the same water
again. Tell me, Sir, where is the distinction?*

*Because it has been named as wave, shall it no longer be considered as
water?*

*Within the Supreme Brahma, the worlds are being told like beads: Look upon
that rosary with the eyes of wisdom.*

XV

II. 57. *jānh khelat vasant riturāj* Where Spring, the lord of the seasons, reigneth, there the Unstruck Music sounds of itself, There the streams of light flow in all directions; Few are the men who can cross to that shore!

There, where millions of Krishnas stand with hands folded, Where millions of Vishnus bow their heads, Where millions of Brahmâs are reading the Vedas, Where millions of Shivas are lost in contemplation, Where millions of Indras dwell in the sky, Where the demi-gods and the munis are unnumbered, Where millions of Saraswatis, Goddess of Music, play on the vina— There is my Lord self-revealed: and the scent of sandal and flowers dwells in those deeps.

XVI

II. 59. *jânh, cet acet khambh dôû* Between the poles of the conscious and the unconscious, there has the mind made a swing: Thereon hang all beings and all worlds, and that swing never ceases its sway.

Millions of beings are there: the sun and the moon in their courses are there:

Millions of ages pass, and the swing goes on.

All swing! the sky and the earth and the air and the water; and the Lord Himself taking form: And the sight of this has made Kabîr a servant.

XVII

II. 61. *grah candra tapan jot varat hai* The light of the sun, the moon, and the stars shines bright: The melody of love swells forth, and the rhythm of love's detachment beats the time.

Day and night, the chorus of music fills the heavens; and Kabîr says "My Beloved One gleams like the lightning flash in the sky."

Do you know how the moments perform their adoration?

Waving its row of lamps, the universe sings in worship day and night, There are the hidden banner and the secret canopy: There the sound of the unseen bells is heard.

Kabîr says: "There adoration never ceases; there the Lord of the Universe sitteth on His throne."

The whole world does its works and commits its errors: but few are the lovers who know the Beloved.

The devout seeker is he who mingles in his heart the double currents of love and detachment, like the mingling of the streams of Ganges and Jumna; In his heart the sacred water flows day and night; and thus the round of births and deaths is brought to an end.

Behold what wonderful rest is in the Supreme Spirit! And he enjoys it, who makes himself meet for it.

Held by the cords of love, the swing of the Ocean of Joy sways to and fro; and a mighty sound breaks forth in song.

See what a lotus blooms there without water! And Kabîr says "My heart's bee drinks its nectar."

What a wonderful lotus it is, that blooms at the heart of the spinning wheel of the universe! Only a few pure souls know of its true delight.

Music is all around it, and there the heart partakes of the joy of the Infinite Sea.

Kabîr says: "Dive thou into that Ocean of sweetness: thus let all errors of life and of death flee away."

Behold how the thirst of the five senses is quenched there! And the three forms of misery are no more!

Kabîr says: "It is the sport of the Unattainable One: look within, and behold how the moon-beams of that Hidden One shine in you."

There falls the rhythmic beat of life and death: Rapture wells forth, and all

space is radiant with light.

There the Unstruck Music is sounded; it is the music of the love of the three worlds.

There millions of lamps of sun and of moon are burning; There the drum beats, and the lover swings in play.

There love-songs resound, and light rains in showers; and the worshipper is entranced in the taste of the heavenly nectar.

Look upon life and death; there is no separation between them, The right hand and the left hand are one and the same.

Kabîr says: "There the wise man is speechless; for this truth may never be found in Vadas or in books."

I have had my Seat on the Self-poised One, I have drunk of the Cup of the Ineffable, I have found the Key of the Mystery, I have reached the Root of Union.

Travelling by no track, I have come to the Sorrowless Land: very easily has the mercy of the great Lord come upon me.

They have sung of Him as infinite and unattainable: but I in my meditations have seen Him without sight.

That is indeed the sorrowless land, and none know the path that leads there: Only he who is on that path has surely transcended all sorrow.

Wonderful is that land of rest, to which no merit can win; It is the wise who has seen it, it is the wise who has sung of it.

This is the Ultimate Word: but can any express its marvellous savour?

He who has savoured it once, he knows what joy it can give.

Kabîr says: "Knowing it, the ignorant man becomes wise, and the wise man becomes speechless and silent, The worshipper is utterly inebriated, His wisdom and his detachment are made perfect; He drinks from the cup of the in-breathings and the out-breathings of love."

There the whole sky is filled with sound, and there that music is made without fingers and without strings; There the game of pleasure and pain does not cease.

Kabîr says: "If you merge your life in the Ocean of Life, you will find your life in the Supreme Land of Bliss."

What a frenzy of ecstasy there is in every hour! and the worshipper is pressing out and drinking the essence of the hours: he lives in the life of Brahma.

I speak truth, for I have accepted truth in life; I am now attached to truth, I have swept all tinsel away.

Kabîr says: “Thus is the worshipper set free from fear; thus have all errors of life and of death left him.”

There the sky is filled with music: There it rains nectar:

There the harp-strings jingle, and there the drums beat.

What a secret splendour is there, in the mansion of the sky!

There no mention is made of the rising and the setting of the sun; In the ocean of manifestation, which is the light of love, day and night are felt to be one.

Joy forever, no sorrow,—no struggle!

There have I seen joy filled to the brim, perfection of joy; No place for error is there.

Kabîr says: “There have I witnessed the sport of One Bliss!”

I have known in my body the sport of the universe: I have escaped from the error of this world.

The inward and the outward are become as one sky, the Infinite and the finite are united: I am drunken with the sight of this All!

This Light of Thine fulfils the universe: the lamp of love that burns on the salver of knowledge.

Kabîr says: “There error cannot enter, and the conflict of life and death is felt no more.”

XVIII

II. 77. *maddh âkas' âp jahân baithe* The middle region of the sky, wherein the spirit dwelleth, is radiant with the music of light; There, where the pure and white music blossoms, my Lord takes His delight.

In the wondrous effulgence of each hair of His body, the brightness of millions of suns and of moons is lost.

On that shore there is a city, where the rain of nectar pours and pours, and never ceases.

Kabîr says: “Come, O Dharmadas! and see my great Lord’s Durbar.”

XIX

II. 20. *paramâtam guru nikat virâjatn* O my heart! The Supreme Spirit, the great Master, is near you: wake, oh wake!

*Run to the feet of your Beloved: for your Lord stands near to your head.
You have slept for unnumbered ages; this morning will you not wake?*

XX

II. 22. *man tu pâr utar kânh jaiho* To what shore would you cross, O my heart?
There is no traveller before you, there is no road: Where is the movement,
where is the rest, on that shore?

*There is no water; no boat, no boatman, is there; There is not so much as a
rope to tow the boat, nor a man to draw it.*

No earth, no sky, no time, nothing, is there: no shore, no ford!

*There, there is neither body nor mind: and where is the place that shall still
the thirst of the soul? You shall find naught in that emptiness.*

*Be strong, and enter into your own body: for there your foothold is firm.
Consider it well, O my heart! go not elsewhere, Kabîr says: “Put all
imaginings away, and stand fast in that which you are.”*

XXI

II. 33. *ghar ghar dîpak barai*

Lamps burn in every house, O blind one! and you cannot see them.

One day your eyes shall suddenly be opened, and you shall see: and the fetters of death will fall from you.

There is nothing to say or to hear, there is nothing to do: it is he who is living, yet dead, who shall never die again.

Because he lives in solitude, therefore the Yogi says that his home is far away.

Your Lord is near: yet you are climbing the palm-tree to seek Him.

The Brâhman priest goes from house to house and initiates people into faith:

Alas! The true fountain of life is beside you, and you have set up a stone to worship.

Kabîr says: “I may never express how sweet my Lord is. Yoga and the telling of beads, virtue and vice—these are naught to Him.”

XXII

II. 38. *Sâdho, so satgur mohi bhâwai* O brother, my heart yearns for that true Guru, who fills the cup of true love, and drinks of it himself, and offers it then to me.

He removes the veil from the eyes, and gives the true Vision of Brahma: He reveals the worlds in Him, and makes me to hear the Unstruck Music: He shows joy and sorrow to be one: He fills all utterance with love.

Kabîr says: “Verily he has no fear, who has such a Guru to lead him to the shelter of safety!”

XXIII

II. 40. *tinwir sâñjh kâ gahirâ âwai* The shadows of evening fall thick and deep, and the darkness of love envelops the body and the mind.

Open the window to the west, and be lost in the sky of love; Drink the sweet honey that steeps the petals of the lotus of the heart.

Receive the waves in your body: what splendour is in the region of the sea!

Hark! the sounds of conches and bells are rising.

Kabîr says: “O brother, behold! The Lord is in this vessel of my body.”

XXIV

II. 48. *jis se rahani apâr jagat men* More than all else do I cherish at heart that love which makes me to live a limitless life in this world.

It is like the lotus, which lives in the water and blooms in the water: yet the water cannot touch its petals, they open beyond its reach.

It is like a wife, who enters the fire at the bidding of love. She burns and lets others grieve, yet never dishonours love.

*This ocean of the world is hard to cross: its waters are very deep. Kabîr says:
“Listen to me, O Sadhu! Few there are who have reached its end.”*

XXV

II. 45. *Hari ne apnâ âp chipâyâ* My Lord hides Himself, and my Lord wonderfully reveals Himself: My Lord has encompassed me with hardness, and my Lord has cast down my limitations.

My Lord brings to me words of sorrow and words of joy, and He Himself heals their strife.

I will offer my body and mind to my Lord: I will give up my life, but never can I forget my Lord!

XXVI

II. 75. *ônkâr siwae kôî sirjai* All things are created by the Om; The love-form is His body.

He is without form, without quality, without decay: Seek thou union with Him!

But that formless God takes a thousand forms in the eyes of His creatures: He is pure and indestructible, His form is infinite and fathomless, He dances in rapture, and waves of form arise from His dance.

The body and the mind cannot contain themselves, when they are touched by His great joy.

He is immersed in all consciousness, all joys, and all sorrows; He has no beginning and no end; He holds all within His bliss.

XXVII

II. 81. *satgur sôî dayâ kar dînhâ* It is the mercy of my true Guru that has made me to know the unknown; I have learned from Him how to walk without feet, to see without eyes, to hear without ears, to drink without mouth, to fly without wings; I have brought my love and my meditation into the land where there is no sun and moon, nor day and night.

Without eating, I have tasted of the sweetness of nectar; and without water, I have quenched my thirst.

Where there is the response of delight, there is the fullness of joy. Before whom can that joy be uttered?

Kabîr says: “The Guru is great beyond words, and great is the good fortune of the disciple.”

XXVIII

II. 85. *nirgun âge sargun nâcai* Before the Unconditioned, the Conditioned dances: “Thou and I are one!” this trumpet proclaims.

The Guru comes, and bows down before the disciple: This is the greatest of wonders.

XXIX

II. 87. *Kabîr kab se bhaye vairâgî* Gorakhnath asks Kabîr:
“Tell me, O Kabîr, when did your vocation begin? Where did your love have its rise?”

Kabîr answers:

“When He whose forms are manifold had not begun His play: when there was no Guru, and no disciple: when the world was not spread out: when the Supreme One was alone— Then I became an ascetic; then, O Gorakh, my love was drawn to Brahma.

Brahma did not hold the crown on his head; the god Vishnu was not anointed as king; the power of Shiva was still unborn; when I was instructed in Yoga. I became suddenly revealed in Benares, and Râmânanda illumined me; I brought with me the thirst for the Infinite, and I have come for the meeting with Him.

In simplicity will I unite with the Simple One; my love will surge up. O Gorakh, march thou with His music!”

XXX

II. 95. *yâ tarvar men ek pakherû* On this tree is a bird: it dances in the joy of life.

None knows where it is: and who knows what the burden of its music may be? Where the branches throw a deep shade, there does it have its nest: and it comes in the evening and flies away in the morning, and says not a word of that which it means.

None tell me of this bird that sings within me.

It is neither coloured nor colourless: it has neither form nor outline: It sits in the shadow of love.

It dwells within the Unattainable, the Infinite, and the Eternal; and no one marks when it comes and goes.

Kabîr says: “O brother Sadhu! Deep is the mystery. Let wise men seek to know where rests that bird.”

XXXI

II. 100. *Nis' din sâlai ghâw*

A sore pain troubles me day and night, and I cannot sleep; I long for the meeting with my Beloved, and my father's house gives me pleasure no more.

The gates of the sky are opened, the temple is revealed: I meet my husband, and leave at His feet the offering of my body and my mind.

XXXII

II. 103. *nâco re mero man, matta hoy* Dance, my heart! dance to-day with joy.
The strains of love fill the days and the nights with music, and the world is listening to its melodies: Mad with joy, life and death dance to the rhythm of this music. The hills and the sea and the earth dance. The world of man dances in laughter and tears.

Why put on the robe of the monk, and live aloof from the world in lonely pride?

Behold! My heart dances in the delight of a hundred arts; and the Creator is well pleased.

XXXIII

II. 105. *man mast huâ tab kyon bole* Where is the need of words, when love has made drunken the heart?

I have wrapped the diamond in my cloak; why open it again and again?

When its load was light, the pan of the balance went up: now it is full, where is the need for weighing?

The swan has taken its flight to the lake beyond the mountains; why should it search for the pools and ditches anymore?

Your Lord dwells within you: why need your outward eyes be opened?

Kabîr says: “Listen, my brother! My Lord, who ravishes my eyes, has united Himself with me.”

XXXIV

II. 110. *mohi tohi lâgî kaise chute* How could the love between Thee and me sever?

As the leaf of the lotus abides on the water: so thou art my Lord, and I am Thy servant.

As the night-bird Chakor gazes all night at the moon: so Thou art my Lord and I am Thy servant.

From the beginning until the ending of time, there is love between Thee and me; and how shall such love be extinguished?

Kabîr says: “As the river enters into the ocean, so my heart touches Thee.”

XXXV

II. 113. *vâlam, âwo hamâre geh re* My body and my mind are grieved for the want of Thee; O my Beloved! come to my house.

When people say I am Thy bride, I am ashamed; for I have not touched Thy heart with my heart.

Then what is this love of mine? I have no taste for food, I have no sleep; my heart is ever restless within doors and without.

As water is to the thirsty, so is the lover to the bride. Who is there that will carry my news to my Beloved?

Kabîr is restless: he is dying for sight of Him.

XXXVI

II. 126. *jâg piyârî, ab kân sowai* O friend, awake, and sleep no more!
The night is over and gone, would you lose your day also?
Others, who have wakened, have received jewels; O foolish woman! you have lost all whilst you slept.
Your lover is wise, and you are foolish, O woman!
You never prepared the bed of your husband: O mad one! you passed your time in silly play.
Your youth was passed in vain, for you did not know your Lord; Wake, wake!
See! your bed is empty: He left you in the night.
Kabîr says: “Only she wakes, whose heart is pierced with the arrow of His music.”

XXXVII

I. 36. *sûr parkâs', tanh rain kahân pâïye* Where is the night, when the sun is shining? If it is night, then the sun withdraws its light. Where knowledge is, can ignorance endure?

If there be ignorance, then knowledge must die.

If there be lust, how can love be there? Where there is love, there is no lust.

Lay hold on your sword, and join in the fight. Fight, O my brother, as long as life lasts.

Strike off your enemy's head, and there make an end of him quickly: then come, and bow your head at your King's Durbar.

He who is brave, never forsakes the battle: he who flies from it is no true fighter.

In the field of this body a great war goes forward, against passion, anger, pride, and greed: It is in the kingdom of truth, contentment and purity, that this battle is raging; and the sword that rings forth most loudly is the sword of His Name.

Kabîr says: "When a brave knight takes the field, a host of cowards is put to flight.

It is a hard fight and a weary one, this fight of the truth-seeker: for the vow of the truth-seeker is more hard than that of the warrior, or of the widowed wife who would follow her husband.

For the warrior fights for a few hours, and the widow's struggle with death is soon ended: But the truth-seeker's battle goes on day and night, as long as life lasts it never ceases."

XXXVIII

I. 50. *bhram kâ tâlâ lagâ mahal re* The lock of error shuts the gate, open it with the key of love: Thus, by opening the door, thou shalt wake the Beloved.
Kabîr says: “*O brother! do not pass by such good fortune as this.*”

XXXIX

I. 59. *sâdho, yah tan thâth tanvure ka* O friend! this body is His lyre; He tightens its strings, and draws from it the melody of Brahma.

If the strings snap and the keys slacken, then to dust must this instrument of dust return: Kabîr says: “None but Brahma can evoke its melodies.”

XL

I. 65. *avadhû bhûle ko ghar lâwe* He is dear to me indeed who can call back the wanderer to his home. In the home is the true union, in the home is enjoyment of life: why should I forsake my home and wander in the forest?

If Brahma helps me to realize truth, verily I will find both bondage and deliverance in home.

He is dear to me indeed who has power to dive deep into Brahma; whose mind loses itself with ease in His contemplation.

He is dear to me who knows Brahma, and can dwell on His supreme truth in meditation; and who can play the melody of the Infinite by uniting love and renunciation in life.

Kabîr says: “The home is the abiding place; in the home is reality; the home helps to attain Him Who is real. So stay where you are, and all things shall come to you in time.”

XLI

I. 76. *santo, sahaj samâdh bhalî* O sadhu! the simple union is the best. Since the day when I met with my Lord, there has been no end to the sport of our love.

I shut not my eyes, I close not my ears, I do not mortify my body; I see with eyes open and smile, and behold His beauty everywhere: I utter His Name, and whatever I see, it reminds me of Him; whatever I do., it becomes His worship.

The rising and the setting are one to me; all contradictions are solved.

Wherever I go, I move round Him, All I achieve is His service:

When I lie down, I lie prostrate at His feet.

He is the only adorable one to me: I have none other.

My tongue has left off impure words, it sings His glory day and night: Whether I rise or sit down, I can never forget Him; for the rhythm of His music beats in my ears.

Kabîr says: “My heart is frenzied, and I disclose in my soul what is hidden. I am immersed in that one great bliss which transcends all pleasure and pain.”

XLII

I. 79. *tîrath men to sab pânî hai* There is nothing but water at the holy bathing places; and I know that they are useless, for I have bathed in them.

The images are all lifeless, they cannot speak; I know, for I have cried aloud to them.

The Purana and the Koran are mere words; lifting up the curtain, I have seen.

Kabîr gives utterance to the words of experience; and he knows very well that all other things are untrue.

XLIII

I. 82. *pânî vic mîn piyâsî*

*I laugh when I hear that the fish in the water is thirsty: You do not see that
the Real is in your home, and you wander from forest to forest listlessly!*

*Here is the truth! Go where you will, to Benares or to Mathura; if you do not
find your soul, the world is unreal to you.*

XLIV

I. 93. *gagan math gaib nisân gade* The Hidden Banner is planted in the temple of the sky; there the blue canopy decked with the moon and set with bright jewels is spread.

There the light of the sun and the moon is shining: still your mind to silence before that splendour.

Kabîr says: “He who has drunk of this nectar, wanders like one who is mad.”

XLV

I. 97. *sâdho, ko hai kânh se âyo* Who are you, and whence do you come?
Where dwells that Supreme Spirit, and how does He have His sport with all created things?
The fire is in the wood; but who awakens it suddenly? Then it turns to ashes, and where goes the force of the fire?
The true guru teaches that He has neither limit nor infinitude.
Kabîr says: “Brahma suits His language to the understanding of His hearer.”

XLVI

I. 98. *sâdho, sahajai kâyâ s'odho* O sadhu! purify your body in the simple way.
As the seed is within the banyan tree, and within the seed are the flowers, the fruits, and the shade: So the germ is within the body, and within that germ is the body again.

The fire, the air, the water, the earth, and the aether; you cannot have these outside of Him.

O, Kazi, O Pundit, consider it well: what is there that is not in the soul?

The water-filled pitcher is placed upon water, it has water within and without.

It should not be given a name, lest it call forth the error of dualism.

Kabîr says: “Listen to the Word, the Truth, which is your essence. He speaks the Word to Himself; and He Himself is the Creator.”

XLVII

I. 102. *tarvar ek mûl vin thâdâ* There is a strange tree, which stands without roots and bears fruits without blossoming; It has no branches and no leaves, it is lotus all over.

Two birds sing there; one is the Guru, and the other the disciple: The disciple chooses the manifold fruits of life and tastes them, and the Guru beholds him in joy.

What Kabîr says is hard to understand: “The bird is beyond seeking, yet it is most clearly visible. The Formless is in the midst of all forms. I sing the glory of forms.”

XLVIII

I. 107. *calat mansâ acal kînhî* I have stilled my restless mind, and my heart is radiant: for in Thatness I have seen beyond Thatness. In company I have seen the Comrade Himself.

Living in bondage, I have set myself free: I have broken away from the clutch of all narrowness.

Kabîr says: “I have attained the unattainable, and my heart is coloured with the colour of love.”

XLIX

I. 105. *jo dîsai, so to hai nâhîn* That which you see is not: and for that which is, you have no words.

Unless you see, you believe not: what is told you you cannot accept.

He who is discerning knows by the word; and the ignorant stands gaping.

Some contemplate the Formless, and others meditate on form: but the wise man knows that Brahma is beyond both.

That beauty of His is not seen of the eye: that metre of His is not heard of the ear.

Kabîr says: “He who has found both love and renunciation never descends to death.”

L

I. 126. *muralî bajat akhand sadâye* The flute of the Infinite is played without ceasing, and its sound is love: When love renounces all limits, it reaches truth.
How widely the fragrance spreads! It has no end, nothing stands in its way.
The form of this melody is bright like a million suns: incomparably sounds the vina, the vina of the notes of truth.

LI

I. 129. *sakhiyo, ham hûn bhâî vâlamâs'î* Dear friend, I am eager to meet my Beloved! My youth has flowered, and the pain of separation from Him troubles my breast.

I am wandering yet in the alleys of knowledge without purpose, but I have received His news in these alleys of knowledge.

I have a letter from my Beloved: in this letter is an unutterable message, and now my fear of death is done away.

Kabîr says: “O my loving friend! I have got for my gift the Deathless One.”

LII

I. 130. *sâin vin dard kareje hoy* When I am parted from my Beloved, my heart is full of misery: I have no comfort in the day, I have no sleep in the night. To whom shall I tell my sorrow?

The night is dark; the hours slip by. Because my Lord is absent, I start up and tremble with fear.

Kabîr says: “Listen, my friend! There is no other satisfaction, save in the encounter with the Beloved.”

LIII

I. 122. *kaum muralî s'abd s'un ânand bhayo* What is that flute whose music thrills me with joy?

The flame burns without a lamp; The lotus blossoms without a root; Flowers bloom in clusters;

The moon-bird is devoted to the moon; With all its heart the rain-bird longs for the shower of rain; But upon whose love does the Lover concentrate His entire life?

LIV

I. 112. *s'untâ nahî dhun kî khabar* Have you not heard the tune which the Unstruck Music is playing? In the midst of the chamber the harp of joy is gently and sweetly played; and where is the need of going without to hear it?
If you have not drunk of the nectar of that One Love, what boots it though you should purge yourself of all stains?

The Kazi is searching the words of the Koran, and instructing others: but if his heart be not steeped in that love, what does it avail, though he be a teacher of men?

The Yogi dyes his garments with red: but if he knows naught of that colour of love, what does it avail though his garments be tinted?

Kabîr says: “Whether I be in the temple or the balcony, in the camp or in the flower garden, I tell you truly that every moment my Lord is taking His delight in me.”

LV

I. 73. *bhakti kâ mārag jhînâ re* Subtle is the path of love!

Therein there is no asking and no not-asking, There one loses one's self at His feet, There one is immersed in the joy of the seeking: plunged in the deeps of love as the fish in the water.

The lover is never slow in offering his head for his Lord's service.

Kabîr declares the secret of this love.

LVI

I. 68. *bhāi kōī satguru sant kahāwāī* He is the real Sadhu, who can reveal the form of the Formless to the vision of these eyes: Who teaches the simple way of attaining Him, that is other than rites or ceremonies: Who does not make you close the doors, and hold the breath, and renounce the world: Who makes you perceive the Supreme Spirit wherever the mind attaches itself: Who teaches you to be still in the midst of all your activities.

Ever immersed in bliss, having no fear in his mind, he keeps the spirit of union in the midst of all enjoyments.

The infinite dwelling of the Infinite Being is everywhere: in earth, water, sky, and air: Firm as the thunderbolt, the seat of the seeker is established above the void.

He who is within is without: I see Him and none else.

LVII

I. 66. *sâdho, s'abd sâdhnâ kîjai* Receive that Word from which the Universe springeth!

That word is the Guru; I have heard it, and become the disciple.

How many are there who know the meaning of that word?

O Sadhu! Practise that Word!

The Vedas and the Puranas proclaim it, The world is established in it, The Rishis and devotees speak of it: But none knows the mystery of the Word.

The householder leaves his house when he hears it, The ascetic comes back to love when he hears it, The Six Philosophies expound it, The Spirit of Renunciation points to that Word, From that Word the world-form has sprung, That Word reveals all.

Kabîr says: “But who knows whence the Word cometh?

LVIII

I. 63. *pîle pyâlâ, ho matwâlâ*
Empty the Cup! O be drunken!
Drink the divine nectar of His Name!
Kabîr says: “Listen to me, dear Sadhu!
From the sole of the foot to the crown of the head this mind is filled with
poison.”

LIX

I. 52. *khasm na cînhai bâwari*

O man, if thou dost not know thine own Lord, whereof art thou so proud?

Put thy cleverness away: mere words shall never unite thee to Him.

Do not deceive thyself with the witness of the Scriptures: Love is something other than this, and he who has sought it truly has found it.

LX

I. 56. *sukh sindh kî sair kâ*

The savour of wandering in the ocean of deathless life has rid me of all my asking: As the tree is in the seed, so all diseases are in this asking.

LXI

I. 48. *sukh sâgar men âike*

*When at last you are come to the ocean of happiness, do not go back thirsty.
Wake, foolish man! for Death stalks you. Here is pure water before you;
drink it at every breath.*

*Do not follow the mirage on foot, but thirst for the nectar; Dhruva, Prahlad,
and Shukadeva have drunk of it, and also Raidas has tasted it: The saints
are drunk with love, their thirst is for love.*

Kabîr says: “Listen to me, brother! The nest of fear is broken.

*Not for a moment have you come face to face with the world: You are
weaving your bondage of falsehood, your words are full of deception: With
the load of desires which you hold on your head, how can you be light?”*

Kabîr says: “Keep within you truth, detachment, and love.”

LXII

I. 35. *satî ko kaun s'ikhâwtâ hai* Who has ever taught the widowed wife to burn herself on the pyre of her dead husband?

And who has ever taught love to find bliss in renunciation?

LXIII

I. 39. *are man, dhîraj kâhe na dharai* Why so impatient, my heart?
He who watches over birds, beasts, and insects, He who cared for you whilst
you were yet in your mother's womb, Shall He not care for you now that
you are come forth?
Oh my heart, how could you turn from the smile of your Lord and wander so
far from Him?
You have left Your Beloved and are thinking of others: and this is why all
your work is in vain.

LXIV

I. 117. *sâîn se lagan kathin hai, bhâî* Now hard it is to meet my Lord!
*The rain-bird wails in thirst for the rain: almost she dies of her longing, yet
she would have none other water than the rain.*
*Drawn by the love of music, the deer moves forward: she dies as she listens
to the music, yet she shrinks not in fear.*
*The widowed wife sits by the body of her dead husband: she is not afraid of
the fire.*
Put away all fear for this poor body.

LXV

I. 22. *jab main bhûlâ, re bhâî* O brother! when I was forgetful, my true Guru showed me the Way.

Then I left off all rites and ceremonies, I bathed no more in the holy water:

Then I learned that it was I alone who was mad, and the whole world beside me was sane; and I had disturbed these wise people.

From that time forth I knew no more how to roll in the dust in obeisance: I do not ring the temple bell: I do not set the idol on its throne: I do not worship the image with flowers.

It is not the austeries that mortify the flesh which are pleasing to the Lord, When you leave off your clothes and kill your senses, you do not please the Lord: The man who is kind and who practises righteousness, who remains passive amidst the affairs of the world, who considers all creatures on earth as his own self, He attains the Immortal Being, the true God is ever with him.

Kabîr says: “He attains the true Name whose words are pure, and who is free from pride and conceit.”

LXVI

I. 20. *man na rangâye*

*The Yogi dyes his garments, instead of dyeing his mind in the colours of love:
He sits within the temple of the Lord, leaving Brahma to worship a stone.*

*He pierces holes in his ears, he has a great beard and matted locks, he looks
like a goat: He goes forth into the wilderness, killing all his desires, and
turns himself into an eunuch: He shaves his head and dyes his garments; he
reads the Gîtâ and becomes a mighty talker.*

Kabîr says: “You are going to the doors of death, bound hand and foot!”

LXVII

I. 9. *nâ jâne sâhab kaisâ hai*

I do not know what manner of God is mine.

*The Mullah cries aloud to Him: and why? Is your Lord deaf? The subtle
anklets that ring on the feet of an insect when it moves are heard of Him.*

*Tell your beads, paint your forehead with the mark of your God, and wear
matted locks long and showy: but a deadly weapon is in your heart, and
how shall you have God?*

LXVIII

III. 102. *ham se rahâ na jây*

I hear the melody of His flute, and I cannot contain myself: The flower blooms, though it is not spring; and already the bee has received its invitation.

The sky roars and the lightning flashes, the waves arise in my heart, The rain falls; and my heart longs for my Lord.

*Where the rhythm of the world rises and falls, thither my heart has reached:
There the hidden banners are fluttering in the air.*

Kabîr says: “My heart is dying, though it lives.”

LXIX

III. 2. *jo khodâ masjid vasat hai* If God be within the mosque, then to whom does this world belong?

If Ram be within the image which you find upon your pilgrimage, then who is there to know what happens without?

Hari is in the East: Allah is in the West. Look within your heart, for there you will find both Karim and Ram; All the men and women of the world are His living forms.

Kabîr is the child of Allah and of Ram: He is my Guru, He is my Pir.

LXX

III. 9. *s'îl santosh sadâ samadrishti* He who is meek and contented., he who has an equal vision, whose mind is filled with the fullness of acceptance and of rest; He who has seen Him and touched Him, he is freed from all fear and trouble.

To him the perpetual thought of God is like sandal paste smeared on the body, to him nothing else is delight: His work and his rest are filled with music: he sheds abroad the radiance of love.

Kabîr says: “Touch His feet, who is one and indivisible, immutable and peaceful; who fills all vessels to the brim with joy, and whose form is love.”

LXXI

III. 13. *sâdh sangat pîtam*

Go thou to the company of the good, where the Beloved One has His dwelling place: Take all thy thoughts and love and instruction from thence.

Let that assembly be burnt to ashes where His Name is not spoken!

Tell me, how couldst thou hold a wedding-feast, if the bridegroom himself were not there?

Waver no more, think only of the Beloved; Set not thy heart on the worship of other gods, there is no worth in the worship of other masters.

Kabîr deliberates and says: “Thus thou shalt never find the Beloved!”

LXXII

III. 26. *tor hîrâ hirâilwâ kîcad men* The jewel is lost in the mud, and all are seeking for it; Some look for it in the east, and some in the west; some in the water and some amongst stones.

But the servant Kabîr has appraised it at its true value, and has wrapped it with care in the end of the mantle of his heart.

LXXIII

III. 26. *âyau din gaune kâ ho*

The palanquin came to take me away to my husband's home, and it sent through my heart a thrill of joy; But the bearers have brought me into the lonely forest, where I have no one of my own.

O bearers, I entreat you by your feet, wait but a moment longer: let me go back to my kinsmen and friends, and take my leave of them.

The servant Kabîr sings: "O Sadhu! Finish your buying and selling, have done with your good and your bad: for there are no markets and no shops in the land to which you go."

LXXIV

III. 30. *are dil, prem nagar kä ant na pâyâ* O my heart! You have not known all the secrets of this city of love: in ignorance you came, and in ignorance you return.

O my friend, what have you done with this life? You have taken on your head the burden heavy with stones, and who is to lighten it for you?

Your Friend stands on the other shore, but you never think in your mind how you may meet with Him: The boat is broken, and yet you sit ever upon the bank; and thus you are beaten to no purpose by the waves.

The servant Kabîr asks you to consider; who is there that shall befriend you at the last?

You are alone, you have no companion: you will suffer the consequences of your own deeds.

LXXV

III. 55. *ved kahe sargun ke âge* The Vedas say that the Unconditioned stands beyond the world of Conditions.

O woman, what does it avail thee to dispute whether He is beyond all or in all?

See thou everything as thine own dwelling place: the mist of pleasure and pain can never spread there.

There Brahma is revealed day and night: there light is His garment, light is His seat, light rests on thy head.

Kabîr says: “The Master, who is true, He is all light.”

LXXVI

III. 48. *tû surat nain nihâr*

Open your eyes of love, and see Him who pervades this world I consider it well, and know that this is your own country.

When you meet the true Guru, He will awaken your heart; He will tell you the secret of love and detachment, and then you will know indeed that He transcends this universe.

This world is the City of Truth, its maze of paths enchants the heart: We can reach the goal without crossing the road, such is the sport unending.

Where the ring of manifold joys ever dances about Him, there is the sport of Eternal Bliss.

*When we know this, then all our receiving and renouncing is over;
Thenceforth the heat of having shall never scorch us more.*

He is the Ultimate Rest unbounded: He has spread His form of love throughout all the world.

From that Ray which is Truth, streams of new forms are perpetually springing: and He pervades those forms.

All the gardens and groves and bowers are abounding with blossom; and the air breaks forth into ripples of joy.

There the swan plays a wonderful game, There the Unstruck Music eddies around the Infinite One; There in the midst the Throne of the Unheld is shining, where on the great being sits— Millions of suns are shamed by the radiance of a single hair of His body.

On the harp of the road what true melodies are being sounded! And its notes pierce the heart: There the Eternal Fountain is playing its endless life-streams of birth and death.

They call Him Emptiness who is the Truth of truths, in whom all truths are stored!

*There within Him creation goes forward, which is beyond all philosophy; for philosophy cannot attain to Him: There is an endless world, O my Brother!
And there is the Nameless Being, of whom naught can be said.*

Only he knows it who has reached that region: it is other than all that is heard and said.

No form, no body, no length, no breadth is seen there: how can I tell you that which it is?

*He comes to the Path of the Infinite on whom the grace of the Lord descends:
he is freed from births and deaths who attains to Him.*

*Kabîr says: “It cannot be told by the words of the mouth, it cannot be written
on paper: It is like a dumb person who tastes a sweet thing—how shall it be
explained?”*

LXXVII

III. 60. *cal hamsâ wâ des' jahân* O my heart! Let us go to that country where dwells the Beloved, the ravisher of my heart!

There Love is filling her pitcher from the well, yet she has no rope wherewith to draw water; There the clouds do not cover the sky, yet the rain falls down in gentle showers: O bodiless one! Do not sit on your doorstep; go forth and bathe yourself in that rain!

There it is ever moonlight and never dark; and who speaks of one sun only? that land is illuminate with the rays of a million suns.

LXXVIII

III. 63. *kahain Kabîr, s'uno ho sâdho* Kabîr says: “O Sadhu! Hear my deathless words. If you want your own good, examine and consider them well.

You have estranged yourself from the Creator, of whom you have sprung: you have lost your reason, you have bought death.

All doctrines and all teachings are sprung from Him, from Him they grow: know this for certain, and have no fear.

Hear from me the tidings of this great truth!

Whose name do you sing, and on whom do you meditate? O, come forth from this entanglement!

He dwells at the heart of all things, so why take refuge in empty desolation?

If you place the Guru at a distance from you, then it is but the distance that you honour: If indeed the Master be far away, then who is it else that is creating this world?

When you think that He is not here, then you wander further and further away, and seek Him in vain with tears.

Where He is far off, there He is unattainable: where He is near, He is very bliss.

Kabîr says: “Lest His servant should suffer pain He pervades him through and through.”

Know yourself then, O Kabîr; for He is in you from head to foot.

Sing with gladness, and keep your seat unmoved within your heart.

LXXIX

III. 66. *nâ main dharmî nahîn adharmî* I am neither pious nor ungodly, I live neither by law nor by sense, I am neither a speaker nor hearer, I am neither a servant nor master, I am neither bond nor free, I am neither detached nor attached.

I am far from none: I am near to none.

I shall go neither to hell nor to heaven.

I do all works; yet I am apart from all works.

Few comprehend my meaning: he who can comprehend it, he sits unmoved.

Kabîr seeks neither to establish nor to destroy.

LXXX

III. 69. *satta nâm hai sab ten nyârâ* The true Name is like none other name!
The distinction of the Conditioned from the Unconditioned is but a word: The Unconditioned is the seed, the Conditioned is the flower and the fruit. Knowledge is the branch, and the Name is the root.
Look, and see where the root is: happiness shall be yours when you come to the root.
The root will lead you to the branch, the leaf, the flower, and the fruit: It is the encounter with the Lord, it is the attainment of bliss, it is the reconciliation of the Conditioned and the Unconditioned.

LXXXI

III. 74. *pratham ek jo āpai āp* In the beginning was He alone, sufficient unto Himself: the formless, colourless, and unconditioned Being.

Then was there neither beginning, middle, nor end; Then were no eyes, no darkness, no light; Then were no ground, air, nor sky; no fire, water, nor earth; no rivers like the Ganges and the Jumna, no seas, oceans, and waves.

Then was neither vice nor virtue; scriptures there were not, as the Vedas and Puranas, nor as the Koran.

Kabîr ponders in his mind and says, “Then was there no activity: the Supreme Being remained merged in the unknown depths of His own self.”

The Guru neither eats nor drinks, neither lives nor dies: Neither has He form, line, colour, nor vesture.

He who has neither caste nor clan nor anything else—how may I describe His glory?

*He has neither form nor formlessness, He has no name,
He has neither colour nor colourlessness, He has no dwelling-place.*

LXXXII

III. 76. *kahain Kabîr vicâr ke* Kabîr ponders and says: “He who has neither caste nor country, who is formless and without quality, fills all space.”

The Creator brought into being the Game of Joy: and from the word Om the Creation sprang.

The earth is His joy; His joy is the sky; His joy is the flashing of the sun and the moon; His joy is the beginning, the middle, and the end; His joy is eyes, darkness, and light.

Oceans and waves are His joy: His joy the Sarasvati, the Jumna, and the Ganges.

The Guru is One: and life and death., union and separation, are all His plays of joy!

His play the land and water, the whole universe!

His play the earth and the sky!

In play is the Creation spread out, in play it is established. The whole world, says Kabîr, rests in His play, yet still the Player remains unknown.

LXXXIII

III. 84. *jhî jhî jantar bâjai*

The harp gives forth murmurous music; and the dance goes on without hands and feet.

It is played without fingers, it is heard without ears: for He is the ear, and He is the listener.

The gate is locked, but within there is fragrance: and there the meeting is seen of none.

The wise shall understand it.

LXXXIV

III. 89. *mor phakîrwâ mângi jây* The Beggar goes a-begging, but I could not even catch sight of Him: And what shall I beg of the Beggar He gives without my asking.

Kabîr says: “*I am His own: now let that befall which may befall!*”

LXXXV

III. 90. *naihar se jiyrâ phât re* My heart cries aloud for the house of my lover; the open road and the shelter of a roof are all one to her who has lost the city of her husband.

*My heart finds no joy in anything: my mind and my body are distraught.
His palace has a million gates, but there is a vast ocean between it and me:
How shall I cross it, O friend? for endless is the outstretching of the path.
How wondrously this lyre is wrought! When its strings are rightly strung, it
maddens the heart: but when the keys are broken and the strings are
loosened, none regard it more.
I tell my parents with laughter that I must go to my Lord in the morning;
They are angry, for they do not want me to go, and they say: “She thinks
she has gained such dominion over her husband that she can have
whatever she wishes; and therefore she is impatient to go to him.”
Dear friend, lift my veil lightly now; for this is the night of love.
Kabîr says: “Listen to me! My heart is eager to meet my lover: I lie sleepless
upon my bed. Remember me early in the morning!”*

LXXXVI

III. 96. *jīv mahal men S'iv pahunwâ* Serve your God, who has come into this temple of life!

Do not act the part of a madman, for the night is thickening fast.

He has awaited me for countless ages, for love of me He has lost His heart:

Yet I did not know the bliss that was so near to me, for my love was not yet awake.

But now, my Lover has made known to me the meaning of the note that struck my ear: Now, my good fortune is come.

Kabîr says: “Behold! How great is my good fortune! I have received the unending caress of my Beloved!”

LXXXVII

I. 71. *gagan ghatâ ghaharânî, sâdho* Clouds thicken in the sky! O, listen to the deep voice of their roaring; The rain comes from the east with its monotonous murmur.

Take care of the fences and boundaries of your fields, lest the rains overflow them; Prepare the soil of deliverance, and let the creepers of love and renunciation be soaked in this shower.

It is the prudent farmer who will bring his harvest home; he shall fill both his vessels, and feed both the wise men and the saints.

LXXXVIII

III. 118. *âj din ke main jaun balihârî* This day is dear to me above all other days, for to-day the Beloved Lord is a guest in my house; My chamber and my courtyard are beautiful with His presence.

My longings sing His Name, and they are become lost in His great beauty: I wash His feet, and I look upon His Face; and I lay before Him as an offering my body, my mind, and all that I have.

What a day of gladness is that day in which my Beloved, who is my treasure, comes to my house!

All evils fly from my heart when I see my Lord.

“My love has touched Him; my heart is longing for the Name which is Truth.”

Thus sings Kabîr, the servant of all servants.

LXXXIX

I. 100. *kōi s'untā hai jñānī rāg gagan men* Is there any wise man who will listen to that solemn music which arises in the sky?

For He, the Source of all music, makes all vessels full fraught, and rests in fullness Himself.

He who is in the body is ever athirst, for he pursues that which is in part: But ever there wells forth deeper and deeper the sound “He is this—this is He”; fusing love and renunciation into one.

Kabîr says: “O brother! That is the Primal Word.”

XC

I. 108. *main kâ se bûjhaun*

To whom shall I go to learn about my Beloved?

Kabîr says: “As you never may find the forest if you ignore the tree, so He may never be found in abstractions.”

XCI

III. 12. *samskrit bhâshâ padhi lînhâ* I have learned the Sanskrit language, so let all men call me wise: But where is the use of this, when I am floating adrift, and parched with thirst, and burning with the heat of desire?

To no purpose do you bear on your head this load of pride and vanity.
Kabîr says: “Lay it down in the dust, and go forth to meet the Beloved.
Address Him as your Lord.”

XCII

III. 110. *carkhâ calai surat virahin kâ* The woman who is parted from her lover spins at the spinning wheel.

The city of the body arises in its beauty; and within it the palace of the mind has been built.

The wheel of love revolves in the sky, and the seat is made of the jewels of knowledge: What subtle threads the woman weaves, and makes them fine with love and reverence!

Kabîr says: “I am weaving the garland of day and night. When my Lover comes and touches me with His feet, I shall offer Him my tears.”

XCIII

III. 111. *kotîn bhânu candra târâgan* Beneath the great umbrella of my King
millions of suns and moons and stars are shining!

He is the Mind within my mind: He is the Eye within mine eye.

Ah, could my mind and eyes be one! Could my love but reach to my Lover!

Could but the fiery heat of my heart be cooled!

Kabîr says: “When you unite love with the Lover, then you have love’s perfection.”

XCIV

I. 92. *avadhû begam des' hamârâ* O sadhu! My land is a sorrowless land.
I cry aloud to all, to the king and the beggar, the emperor and the fakir—
Whosoever seeks for shelter in the Highest, let all come and settle in my
land!
Let the weary come and lay his burdens here!
So live here, my brother, that you may cross with ease to that other shore.
It is a land without earth or sky, without moon or stars; For only the
radiance of Truth shines in my Lord's Durbar.
Kabîr says: “O beloved brother! Naught is essential save Truth.”

XCV

I. 109. *sâîn ke sangat sâsur âî* Came with my Lord to my Lord's home: but I lived not with Him and I tasted Him not, and my youth passed away like a dream.

On my wedding night my women-friends sang in chorus, and I was anointed with the unguents of pleasure and pain: But when the ceremony was over, I left my Lord and came away, and my kinsman tried to console me upon the road.

Kabîr says, “I shall go to my Lord’s house with my love at my side; then shall I sound the trumpet of triumph!”

XCVI

I. 75. *samajh dekh man mît piyarwâ* O friend, dear heart of mine, think well! If you love indeed, then why do you sleep?

If you have found Him, then give yourself utterly, and take Him to you.

Why do you loose Him again and again?

If the deep sleep of rest has come to your eyes, why waste your time making the bed and arranging the pillows?

Kabîr says: “I tell you the ways of love! Even though the head itself must be given, why should you weep over it?”

XCVII

II. 90. *sâhab ham men, sâhab tum men* The Lord is in me, the Lord is in you, as life is in every seed. O servant! put false pride away, and seek for Him within you.

A million suns are ablaze with light, The sea of blue spreads in the sky, The fever of life is stilled, and all stains are washed away; when I sit in the midst of that world.

Hark to the unstruck bells and drums! Take your delight in love!

Rains pour down without water, and the rivers are streams of light.

One Love it is that pervades the whole world, few there are who know it fully: They are blind who hope to see it by the light of reason, that reason which is the cause of separation— The House of Reason is very far away!

How blessed is Kabîr, that amidst this great joy he sings within his own vessel.

It is the music of the meeting of soul with soul; It is the music of the forgetting of sorrows; It is the music that transcends all coming in and all going forth.

XCVIII

II. 98. *ritu phâgun niyarânî*

The month of March draws near: ah, who will unite me to my Lover?

How shall I find words for the beauty of my Beloved? For He is merged in all beauty.

His colour is in all the pictures of the world, and it bewitches the body and the mind.

Those who know this, know what is this unutterable play of the Spring.

Kabîr says: “Listen to me, brother’ there are not many who have found this out.”

XCIX

II. 111. *Nârad, pyâr so antar nâhî* Oh Narad! I know that my Lover cannot be far: When my Lover wakes, I wake; when He sleeps, I sleep.

He is destroyed at the root who gives pain to my Beloved.

*Where they sing His praise, there I live; When He moves, I walk before Him:
my heart yearns for my Beloved.*

The infinite pilgrimage lies at His feet, a million devotees are seated there.

Kabîr says: “The Lover Himself reveals the glory of true love.”

C

II. 122. *kôî prem kî peng jhulâo re* Hang up the swing of love to-day! Hang the body and the mind between the arms of the Beloved, in the ecstasy of love's joy: Bring the tearful streams of the rainy clouds to your eyes, and cover your heart with the shadow of darkness: Bring your face nearer to His ear, and speak of the deepest longings of your heart.

Kabîr says: “*Listen to me, brother! bring the vision of the Beloved in your heart.*”

14. Stray Birds

1

*Stray birds of summer come to my window to sing and fly away.
And yellow leaves of autumn, which have no songs, flutter and fall there with
a sigh.*

2

O troupe of little vagrants of the world, leave your footprints in my words.

3

*The world puts off its mask of vastness to its lover.
It becomes small as one song, as one kiss of the eternal.*

4

It is the tears of the earth that keep her smiles in bloom.

5

*The mighty desert is burning for the love of a blade of grass who shakes her
head and laughs and flies away.*

6

If you shed tears when you miss the sun, you also miss the stars.

7

*The sands in your way beg for your song and your movement, dancing water.
Will you carry the burden of their lameness?*

8

Her wistful face haunts my dreams like the rain at night.

9

*Once we dreamt that we were strangers.
We wake up to find that we were dear to each other.*

10

Sorrow is hushed into peace in my heart like the evening among the silent trees.

11

Some unseen fingers, like idle breeze, are playing upon my heart the music of the ripples.

12

“What language is thine, O sea?”
“The language of eternal question.”
“What language is thy answer, O sky?
“The language of eternal silence.”

13

Listen, my heart, to the whispers of the world with which it makes love to you.

14

The mystery of creation is like the darkness of night—it is great. Delusions of knowledge are like the fog of the morning.

15

Do not seat your love upon a precipice because it is high.

16

I sit at my window this morning where the world like a passer-by stops for a

moment, nods to me and goes.

17

These little thoughts are the rustle of leaves; they have their whisper of joy in my mind.

18

What you are you do not see, what you see is your shadow.

19

*My wishes are fools, they shout across thy songs, my Master.
Let me but listen.*

20

*I cannot choose the best.
The best chooses me.*

21

They throw their shadows before them who carry their lantern on their back.

22

That I exist is a perpetual surprise which is life.

23

“We, the rustling leaves, have a voice that answers the storms, but who are you so silent?”

“I am a mere flower.”

24

Rest belongs to the work as the eyelids to the eyes.

25

Man is a born child, his power is the power of growth.

26

God expects answers for the flowers he sends us, not for the sun and the earth.

27

The light that plays, like a naked child, among the green leaves happily knows not that man can lie.

28

O Beauty, find thyself in love, not in the flattery of thy mirror.

29

My heart beats her waves at the shore of the world and writes upon it her signature in tears with the words, “I love thee.”

30

*“Moon, for what do you wait?”
“To salute the sun for whom I must make way.”*

31

The trees come up to my window like the yearning voice of the dumb earth.

32

His own mornings are new surprises to God.

33

Life finds its wealth by the claims of the world, and its worth by the claims of love.

34

The dry river-bed finds no thanks for its past.

35

The bird wishes it were a cloud. The cloud wishes it were a bird.

36

The waterfall sings, "I find my song, when I find my freedom."

37

*I cannot tell why this heart languishes in silence.
It is for small needs it never asks, or knows or remembers.*

38

*Woman, when you move about in your household service your limbs sing like
a hill stream among its pebbles.*

39

The sun goes to cross the Western sea, leaving its last salutation to the East.

40

Do not blame your food because you have no appetite.

41

The trees, like the longings of the earth, stand a-tilttoe to peep at the heaven.

42

*You smiled and talked to me of nothing and I felt that for this I had been
waiting long.*

43

*The fish in the water is silent, the animal on the earth is noisy, the bird in the
air is singing, But Man has in him the silence of the sea, the noise of the*

earth and the music of the air.

44

The world rushes on over the strings of the lingering heart making the music of sadness.

45

He has made his weapons his gods. When his weapons win he is defeated himself.

46

God finds himself by creating.

47

Shadow, with her veil drawn, follows Light in secret meekness, with her silent steps of love.

48

The stars are not afraid to appear like fireflies.

49

I thank thee that I am none of the wheels of power but I am one with the living creatures that are crushed by it.

50

The mind, sharp but not broad, sticks at every point but does not move.

51

Your idol is shattered in the dust to prove that God's dust is greater than your idol.

52

Man does not reveal himself in his history, he struggles up through it.

53

While the glass lamp rebukes the earthen for calling it cousin, the moon rises, and the glass lamp, with a bland smile, calls her, “My dear, dear sister.”

54

Like the meeting of the seagulls and the waves we meet and come near. The seagulls fly off, the waves roll away and we depart.

55

My day is done, and I am like a boat drawn on the beach, listening to the dance-music of the tide in the evening.

56

Life is given to us, we earn it by giving it.

57

We come nearest to the great when we are great in humility.

58

The sparrow is sorry for the peacock at the burden of its tail.

59

Never be afraid of the moments—thus sings the voice of the everlasting.

60

The hurricane seeks the shortest road by the no-road, and suddenly ends its search in the Nowhere.

61

Take my wine in my own cup, friend.

It loses its wreath of foam when poured into that of others.

62

The Perfect decks itself in beauty for the love of the Imperfect.

63

God says to man, “I heal you therefore I hurt, love you therefore punish.”

64

Thank the flame for its light, but do not forget the lamp holder standing in the shade with constancy of patience.

65

Tiny grass, your steps are small, but you possess the earth under your tread.

66

The infant flower opens its bud and cries, “Dear World, please do not fade.”

67

God grows weary of great kingdoms, but never of little flowers.

68

Wrong cannot afford defeat but Right can.

69

“I give my whole water in joy,” sings the waterfall, “though little of it is enough for the thirsty.”

70

Where is the fountain that throws up these flowers in a ceaseless outbreak of ecstasy?

71

*The woodcutter's axe begged for its handle from the tree.
The tree gave it.*

72

*In my solitude of heart I feel the sigh of this widowed evening veiled with mist
and rain.*

73

Chastity is a wealth that comes from abundance of love.

74

*The mist, like love, plays upon the heart of the hills and brings out surprises
of beauty.*

75

We read the world wrong and say that it deceives us.

76

The poet wind is out over the sea and the forest to seek his own voice.

77

Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man.

78

*The grass seeks her crowd in the earth.
The tree seeks his solitude of the sky.*

79

Man barricades against himself.

80

Your voice, my friend, wanders in my heart, like the muffled sound of the sea among these listening pines.

81

What is this unseen flame of darkness whose sparks are the stars?

82

Let life be beautiful like summer flowers and death like autumn leaves.

83

He who wants to do good knocks at the gate; he who loves finds the gate open.

84

*In death the many becomes one; in life the one becomes many.
Religion will be one when God is dead.*

85

The artist is the lover of Nature, therefore he is her slave and her master.

86

*“How far are you from me, O Fruit?”
“I am hidden in your heart, O Flower.”*

87

This longing is for the one who is felt in the dark, but not seen in the day.

88

“You are the big drop of dew under the lotus leaf, I am the smaller one on its upper side,” said the dewdrop to the lake.

89

The scabbard is content to be dull when it protects the keenness of the sword.

90

In darkness the One appears as uniform; in the light the One appears as manifold.

91

The great earth makes herself hospitable with the help of the grass.

92

The birth and death of the leaves are the rapid whirls of the eddy whose wider circles move slowly among stars.

93

*Power said to the world, “You are mine.
The world kept it prisoner on her throne.
Love said to the world, “I am thine.”
The world gave it the freedom of her house.*

94

The mist is like the earth’s desire. It hides the sun for whom she cries.

95

Be still, my heart, these great trees are prayers.

96

The noise of the moment scoffs at the music of the Eternal.

97

I think of other ages that floated upon the stream of life and love and death and are forgotten, and I feel the freedom of passing away.

98

*The sadness of my soul is her bride's veil.
It waits to be lifted in the night.*

99

*Death's stamp gives value to the coin of life; making it possible to buy with
life what is truly precious.*

100

*The cloud stood humbly in a corner of the sky.
The morning crowned it with splendour.*

101

The dust receives insult and in return offers her flowers.

102

*Do not linger to gather flowers to keep them, but walk on, for flowers will
keep themselves blooming all your way.*

103

*Roots are the branches down in the earth.
Branches are roots in the air.*

104

*The music of the far-away summer flutters around the Autumn seeking its
former nest.*

105

Do not insult your friend by lending him merits from your own pocket.

106

*The touch of the nameless days clings to my heart like mosses round the old
tree.*

107

The echo mocks her origin to prove she is the original.

108

God is ashamed when the prosperous boasts of His special favour.

109

I cast my own shadow upon my path, because I have a lamp that has not been lighted.

110

Man goes into the noisy crowd to drown his own clamour of silence.

111

That which ends in exhaustion is death, but the perfect ending is in the endless.

112

The sun has his simple robe of light. The clouds are decked with gorgeousness.

113

The hills are like shouts of children who raise their arms, trying to catch stars.

114

The road is lonely in its crowd for it is not loved.

115

The power that boasts of its mischiefs is laughed at by the yellow leaves that fall, and clouds that pass by.

116

The earth hums to me to-day in the sun, like a woman at her spinning, some ballad of the ancient time in a forgotten tongue.

117

The grass-blade is worth of the great world where it grows.

118

*Dream is a wife who must talk.
Sleep is a husband who silently suffers.*

119

The night kisses the fading day whispering to his ear, “I am death, your mother. I am to give you fresh birth.”

120

I feel, thy beauty, dark night, like that of the loved woman when she has put out the lamp.

121

I carry in my world that flourishes the worlds that have failed.

122

Dear friend, I feel the silence of your great thoughts of may a deepening eventide on this beach when I listen to these waves.

123

The bird thinks it is an act of kindness to give the fish a lift in the air.

124

*“In the moon thou sendest thy love letters to me,” said the night to the sun.
“I leave my answers in tears upon the grass.”*

125

The Great is a born child; when he dies he gives his great childhood to the world.

126

Not hammerstrokes, but dance of the water sings the pebbles into perfection.

127

*Bees sip honey from flowers and hum their thanks when they leave.
The gaudy butterfly is sure that the flowers owe thanks to him.*

128

To be outspoken is easy when you do not wait to speak the complete truth.

129

*Asks the Possible to the Impossible, “Where is your dwelling place?”
“In the dreams of the impotent,” comes the answer.*

130

If you shut your door to all errors truth will be shut out.

131

I hear some rustle of things behind my sadness of heart,—I cannot see them.

132

*Leisure in its activity is work.
The stillness of the sea stirs in waves.*

133

*The leaf becomes flower when it loves.
The flower becomes fruit when it worships.*

134

The roots below the earth claim no rewards for making the branches fruitful.

135

This rainy evening the wind is restless.

I look at the swaying branches and ponder over the greatness of all things.

136

Storm of midnight, like a giant child awakened in the untimely dark, has begun to play and shout.

137

Thou raisest thy waves vainly to follow thy lover. O sea, thou lonely bride of the storm.

138

“I am ashamed of my emptiness,” said the Word to the Work.

“I know how poor I am when I see you,” said the Work to the Word.

139

Time is the wealth of change, but the clock in its parody makes it mere change and no wealth.

140

Truth in her dress finds facts too tight.

In fiction she moves with ease.

141

When I travelled to here and to there, I was tired of thee, O Road, but now when thou leadest me to everywhere I am wedded to thee in love.

142

*Let me think that there is one among those stars that guides my life through
the dark unknown.*

143

*Woman, with the grace of your fingers you touched my things and order
came out like music.*

144

*One sad voice has its nest among the ruins of the years.
It sings to me in the night,— “I loved you.”*

145

*The flaming fire warns me off by its own glow.
Save me from the dying embers hidden under ashes.*

146

I have my stars in the sky, But oh for my little lamp unlit in my house.

147

*The dust of the dead words clings to thee.
Wash thy soul with silence.*

148

Gaps are left in life through which comes the sad music of death.

149

*The world has opened its heart of light in the morning.
Come out, my heart, with thy love to meet it.*

150

*My thoughts shimmer with these shimmering leaves and my heart sings with
the touch of this sunlight; my life is glad to be floating with all things into*

the blue of space, into the dark of time.

151

God's great power is in the gentle breeze, not in the storm.

152

*This is a dream in which things are all loose and they oppress.
I shall find them gathered in thee when I awake and shall be free.*

153

*"Who is there to take up my duties?" asked the setting sun.
"I shall do what I can, my Master," said the earthen lamp.*

154

By plucking her petals you do not gather the beauty of the flower.

155

Silence will carry your voice like the nest that holds the sleeping birds.

156

*The Great walks with the Small without fear.
The Middling keeps aloof.*

157

The night opens the flowers in secret and allows the day to get thanks.

158

Power takes as ingratitude the writhings of its victims.

159

When we rejoice in our fulness, then we can part with our fruits with joy.

160

The raindrops kissed the earth and whispered,—“We are thy homesick children, mother, come back to thee from the heaven.”

161

The cobweb pretends to catch dewdrops and catches flies.

162

Love! when you come with the burning lamp of pain in your hand, I can see your face and know you as bliss.

163

“The learned say that your lights will one day be no more.” said the firefly to the stars.

The stars made no answer.

164

In the dusk of the evening the bird of some early dawn comes to the nest of my silence.

165

*Thoughts pass in my mind like flocks of ducks in the sky.
I hear the voice of their wings.*

166

The canal loves to think that rivers exist solely to supply it with water.

167

The world has kissed my soul with its pain, asking for its return in songs.

168

That which oppresses me, is it my soul trying to come out in the open, or the

soul of the world knocking at my heart for its entrance?

169

Thought feeds itself with its own words and grows.

170

I have dipped the vessel of my heart into this silent hour; it has filled with love.

171

Either you have work or you have not.

When you have to say, “Let us do something,” then begins mischief.

172

The sunflower blushed to own the nameless flower as her kin.

The sun rose and smiled on it, saying, “Are you well, my darling?”

173

“Who drives me forward like fate?”

“The Myself striding on my back.”

174

The clouds fill the water cups of the river, hiding themselves in the distant hills.

175

I spill water from my water jar as I walk on my way, Very little remains for my home.

176

The water in a vessel is sparkling; the water in the sea is dark.

The small truth has words that are clear; the great truth has great silence.

177

Your smile was the flowers of your own fields, your talk was the rustle of your own mountain pines, but your heart was the woman that we all know.

178

It is the little things that I leave behind for my loved ones,—great things are for everyone.

179

Woman, thou hast encircled the world's heart with the depth of thy tears as the sea has the earth.

180

The sunshine greets me with a smile. The rain, his sad sister, talks to my heart.

181

*My flower of the day dropped its petals forgotten.
In the evening it ripens into a golden fruit of memory.*

182

I am like the road in the night listening to the footfalls of its memories in silence.

183

The evening sky to me is like a window, and a lighted lamp, and a waiting behind it.

184

He who is too busy doing good finds no time to be good.

185

I am the autumn cloud, empty of rain, see my fulness in the field of ripened rice.

186

*They hated and killed and men praised them.
But God in shame hastens to hide its memory under the green grass.*

187

Toes are the fingers that have forsaken their past.

188

Darkness travels towards light, but blindness towards death.

189

The pet dog suspects the universe for scheming to take its place.

190

*Sit still my heart, do not raise your dust.
Let the world find its way to you.*

191

The bow whispers to the arrow before it speeds forth—“Your freedom is mine.”

192

Woman, in your laughter you have the music of the fountain of life.

193

*A mind all logic is like a knife all blade.
It makes the hand bleed that uses it.*

194

God loves man's lamp lights better than his own great stars.

195

This world is the world of wild storms kept tame with the music of beauty.

196

"My heart is like the golden casket of thy kiss," said the sunset cloud to the sun.

197

By touching you may kill, by keeping away you may possess.

198

The cricket's chirp and the patter of rain come to me through the dark, like the rustle of dreams from my past youth.

199

"I have lost my dewdrop," cries the flower to the morning sky that has lost all its stars.

200

The burning log bursts in flame and cries,—“This is my flower, my death.”

201

The wasp thinks that the honey-hive of the neighbouring bees is too small. His neighbours ask him to build one still smaller.

202

*"I cannot keep your waves," says the bank to the river.
"Let me keep your footprints in my heart."*

203

The day, with the noise of this little earth, drowns the silence of all worlds.

204

The song feels the infinite in the air, the picture in the earth, the poem in the air and the earth; For its words have meaning that walks and music that soars.

205

When the sun goes down to the West, the East of his morning stands before him in silence.

206

Let me not put myself wrongly to my world and set it against me.

207

Praise shames me, for I secretly beg for it.

208

Let my doing nothing when I have nothing to do become untroubled in its depth of peace like the evening in the seashore when the water is silent.

209

Maiden, your simplicity, like the blueness of the lake, reveals your depth of truth.

210

The best does not come alone. It comes with the company of the all.

211

God's right hand is gentle, but terrible is his left hand.

212

My evening came among the alien trees and spoke in a language which my morning stars did not know.

213

Night's darkness is a bag that bursts with the gold of the dawn.

214

Our desire lends the colours of the rainbow to the mere mists and vapours of life.

215

God waits to win back his own flowers as gifts from man's hands.

216

My sad thoughts tease me asking me their own names.

217

The service of the fruit is precious, the service of the flower is sweet, but let my service be the service of the leaves in its shade of humble devotion.

218

My heart has spread its sails to the idle winds for the shadowy island of Anywhere.

219

Men are cruel, but Man is kind.

220

Make me thy cup and let my fulness be for thee and for thine.

221

The storm is like the cry of some god in pain whose love the earth refuses.

222

The world does not leak because death is not a crack.

223

Life has become richer by the love that has been lost.

224

My friend, your great heart shone with the sunrise of the East like the snowy summit of a lonely hill in the dawn.

225

The fountain of death makes the still water of life play.

226

Those who have everything but thee, my God, laugh at those who have nothing but thyself.

227

The movement of life has its rest in its own music.

228

Kicks only raise dust and not crops from the earth.

229

Our names are the light that glows on the sea waves at night and then dies without leaving its signature.

230

Let him only see the thorns who has eyes to see the rose.

231

Set bird's wings with gold and it will never again soar in the sky.

232

The same lotus of our clime blooms here in the alien water with the same sweetness, under another name.

233

In heart's perspective the distance looms large.

234

The moon has her light all over the sky, her dark spots to herself.

235

Do not say, "It is morning," and dismiss it with a name of yesterday. See it for the first time as a new-born child that has no name.

236

Smoke boasts to the sky, and Ashes to the earth, that they are brothers to the fire.

237

*The raindrop whispered to the jasmine, "Keep me in your heart forever."
The jasmine sighed, "Alas," and dropped to the ground.*

238

*Timid thoughts, do not be afraid of me.
I am a poet.*

239

The dim silence of my mind seems filled with crickets' chirp—the grey twilight of sound.

240

Rockets, your insult to the stars follows yourself back to the earth.

241

Thou hast led me through my crowded travels of the day to my evening's loneliness.

I wait for its meaning through the stillness of the night.

242

*This life is the crossing of a sea, where we meet in the same narrow ship.
In death we reach the shore and go to our different worlds.*

243

The stream of truth flows through its channels of mistakes.

244

My heart is homesick to-day for the one sweet hour across the sea of time.

245

The bird-song is the echo of the morning light back from the earth.

246

“Are you too proud to kiss me?” the morning light asks the buttercup.

247

*“How may I sing to thee and worship, O Sun?” asked the little flower.
“By the simple silence of thy purity,” answered the sun.*

248

Man is worse than an animal when he is an animal.

249

Dark clouds become heaven’s flowers when kissed by light.

250

Let not the sword-blade mock its handle for being blunt.

251

The night's silence, like a deep lamp, is burning with the light of its milky way.

252

Around the sunny island of Life swells day and night death's limitless song of the sea.

253

Is not this mountain like a flower, with its petals of hills, drinking the sunlight?

254

The real with its meaning read wrong and emphasis misplaced is the unreal.

255

Find your beauty, my heart, from the world's movement, like the boat that has the grace of the wind and the water.

256

The eyes are not proud of their sight but of their eyeglasses.

257

I live in this little world of mine and am afraid to make it the least less. Lift me into thy world and let me have the freedom gladly to lose my all.

258

The false can never grow into truth by growing in power.

My heart, with its lapping waves of song, longs to caress this green world of the sunny day.

260

Wayside grass, love the star, then your dreams will come out in flowers.

261

Let your music, like a sword, pierce the noise of the market to its heart.

262

The trembling leaves of this tree touch my heart like the fingers of an infant child.

263

*This sadness of my soul is her bride's veil.
It waits to be lifted in the night.*

264

*The little flower lies in the dust.
It sought the path of the butterfly.*

265

I am in the world of the roads. The night comes. Open thy gate, thou world of the home.

266

I have sung the songs of thy day. In the evening let me carry thy lamp through the stormy path.

267

I do not ask thee into the house.

Come into my infinite loneliness, my Lover.

268

Death belongs to life as birth does. The walk is in the raising of the foot as in the laying of it down.

269

I have learnt the simple meaning of thy whispers in flowers and sunshine—teach me to know thy words in pain and death.

270

The night's flower was late when the morning kissed her, she shivered and sighed and dropped to the ground.

271

Through the sadness of all things I hear the crooning of the Eternal Mother.

272

I came to your shore as a stranger, I lived in your house as a guest, I leave your door as a friend, my earth.

273

Let my thoughts come to you, when I am gone, like the afterglow of sunset at the margin of starry silence.

274

Light in my heart the evening star of rest and then let the night whisper to me of love.

275

I am a child in the dark.

I stretch my hands through the coverlet of night for thee, Mother.

*The day of work is done. Hide my face in your arms, Mother.
Let me dream.*

The lamp of meeting burns long; it goes out in a moment at the parting.

One word keep for me in thy silence, O World, when I am dead, “I have loved.”

We live in this world when we love it.

Let the dead have the immortality of fame, but the living the immortality of love.

I have seen thee as the half-awakened child sees his mother in the dusk of the dawn and then smiles and sleeps again.

I shall die again and again to know that life is inexhaustible.

While I was passing with the crowd in the road I saw thy smile from the balcony and I sang and forgot all noise.

Love is life in its fulness like the cup with its wine.

*They light their own lamps and sing their own words in their temples.
But the birds sing thy name in thine own morning light,—for thy name is joy.*

286

Lead me in the centre of thy silence to fill my heart with songs.

287

*Let them live who choose in their own hissing world of fireworks.
My heart longs for thy stars, my God.*

288

*Love's pain sang round my life like the unplumbed sea, and love's joy sang
like birds in its flowering groves.*

289

*Put out the lamp when thou wishest.
I shall know thy darkness and shall love it.*

290

*When I stand before thee at the day's end thou shalt see my scars and know
that I had my wounds and also my healing.*

291

*Someday I shall sing to thee in the sunrise of some other world, "I have seen
thee before in the light of the earth, in the love of man."*

292

*Clouds come floating into my life from other days no longer to shed rain or
usher storm but to give colour to my sunset sky.*

293

Truth raises against itself the storm that scatters its seeds broadcast.

294

The storm of the last night has crowned this morning with golden peace.

295

Truth seems to come with its final word; and the final word gives birth to its next.

296

Blessed is he whose fame does not outshine his truth.

297

Sweetness of thy name fills my heart when I forget mine—like thy morning sun when the mist is melted.

298

The silent night has the beauty of the mother and the clamorous day of the child.

299

The world loved man when he smiled. The world became afraid of him when he laughed.

300

God waits for man to regain his childhood in wisdom.

301

Let me feel this world as thy love taking form, then my love will help it.

302

Thy sunshine smiles upon the winter days of my heart, never doubting of its

spring flowers.

303

God kisses the finite in his love and man the infinite.

304

Thou crossest desert lands of barren years to reach the moment of fulfilment.

305

God's silence ripens man's thoughts into speech.

306

Thou wilt find, Eternal Traveller, marks of thy footsteps across my songs.

307

Let me not shame thee, Father, who displayest thy glory in thy children.

308

Cheerless is the day, the light under frowning clouds is like a punished child with traces of tears on its pale cheeks, and the cry of the wind is like the cry of a wounded world. But I know I am travelling to meet my Friend.

309

To-night there is a stir among the palm leaves, a swell in the sea, Full Moon, like the heart throb of the world. From what unknown sky hast thou carried in thy silence the aching secret of love?

310

I dream of a star, an island of light, where I shall be born and in the depth of its quickening leisure my life will ripen its works like the ricefield in the autumn sun.

311

The smell of the wet earth in the rain rises like a great chant of praise from the voiceless multitude of the insignificant.

312

That love can ever lose is a fact that we cannot accept as truth.

313

We shall know some day that death can never rob us of that which our soul has gained, for her gains are one with herself.

314

God comes to me in the dusk of my evening with the flowers from my past kept fresh in his basket.

315

When all the strings of my life will be tuned, my Master, then at every touch of thine will come out the music of love.

316

Let me live truly, my Lord, so that death to me become true.

317

Man's history is waiting in patience for the triumph of the insulted man.

318

I feel thy gaze upon my heart this moment like the sunny silence of the morning upon the lonely field whose harvest is over.

319

I long for the Island of Songs across this heaving Sea of Shouts.

320

The prelude of the night is commenced in the music of the sunset, in its solemn hymn to the ineffable dark.

321

I have scaled the peak and found no shelter in fame's bleak and barren height. Lead me, my Guide, before the light fades, into the valley of quiet where life's harvest mellows into golden wisdom.

322

Things look phantastic in this dimness of the dusk—the spires whose bases are lost in the dark and tree tops like blots of ink. I shall wait for the morning and wake up to see thy city in the light.

323

I have suffered and despaired and known death and I am glad that I am in this great world.

324

There are tracts in my life that are bare and silent. They are the open spaces where my busy days had their light and air.

325

Release me from my unfulfilled past clinging to me from behind making death difficult.

326

Let this be my last word, that I trust in thy love.

15. Vaishnava Songs

I

1

Oh Sakhi, ³ my sorrow knows no bounds.

^{3.} The woman friend of a woman.

August comes laden with rain clouds and my house is desolate.

*The stormy sky growls, the earth is flooded with rain, my love is far away,
and my heart is torn with anguish.*

The peacocks dance, for the clouds rumble and frogs croak.

The night brims with darkness flicked with lightning.

Vidyapati ⁴ asks, “Maiden, how are you to spend your days and nights
without your lord?”

^{4.} The name of the poet.

2

Lucky was my awakening this morning, for I saw my beloved.

The sky was one piece of joy, and my life and youth were fulfilled.

To-day my house becomes my house in truth, and my body my body.

Fortune has proved a friend, and my doubts are dispelled.

Birds, sing your best; moon, shed your fairest light!

Let fly your darts, Love-God, in millions!

I wait for the moment when my body will grow golden at his touch.

Vidyapati says, “*Immense is your good fortune, and blessed is your love.*”

3

I feel my body vanishing into the dust whereon my beloved walks.

I feel one with the water of the lake where he bathes.

Oh Sakhi, my love crosses death’s boundary when I meet him.

My heart melts in the light and merges in the mirror whereby he views his face.

I move with the air to kiss him when he waves his fan, and wherever he wanders I enclose him like the sky.

Govindadas says, “You are the gold-setting, fair maiden, he is the emerald.”

4

My love, I will keep you hidden in my eyes; I will thread your image like a gem on my joy and hang it on my bosom.

You have been in my heart ever since I was a child, throughout my youth, throughout my life, even through all my dreams.

You dwell in my being when I sleep and when I wake.

Know that I am a woman, and bear with me when you find me wanting.

For I have thought and thought and know for certain that all that is left for me in this world is your love, and if I lose you for a moment I die.

Chandidas says, “Be tender to her who is yours in life and death.”

5

“Fruit to sell, Fruit to sell,” cried the woman at the door.

The Child came out of the house.

“Give me some fruit,” said he, putting a handful of rice in her basket.

The fruit-seller gazed at his face and her eyes swam with tears.

“Who is the fortunate mother,” she cried, “that has clasped you in her arms and fed you at her breast, and whom your dear voice called ‘Mother’?”

“Offer your fruit to him,” says the poet, “and with it your life. ”

II

1

Endlessly varied art thou in the exuberant world, Lady of Manifold Magnificence. Thy path is strewn with lights, thy touch thrills into flowers; that trailing skirt of thine sweeps the whirl of a dance among the stars, and thy many-toned music is echoed from innumerable worlds through signs and colours.

Single and alone in the unfathomed stillness of the soul, art thou, Lady of Silence and Solitude, a vision thrilled with light, a lonely lotus blossoming on the stem of love.

2

Behind the rusty iron gratings of the opposite window sits a girl, dark and plain of face, like a boat stranded on a sand-bank when the river is shallow in the summer.

I come back to my room after my day's work, and my tired eyes are lured to her.

She seems to me like a lake with its dark lonely waters edged by moonlight. She has only her window for freedom: there the morning light meets her musings, and through it her dark eyes like lost stars travel back to their sky.

3

I remember the day.

The heavy shower of rain is slackening into fitful pauses, renewed gusts of wind startle it from a first lull.

I take up my instrument. Idly I touch the strings, till, without my knowing, the music borrows the mad cadence of that storm.

I see her figure as she steals from her work, stops at my door, and retreats

with hesitating steps. She comes again, stands outside leaning against the wall, then slowly enters the room and sits down. With head bent, she plies her needle in silence; but soon stops her work, and looks out of the window through the rain at the blurred line of trees.

Only this—one hour of a rainy noon filled with shadows and song and silence.

4

While stepping into the carriage she turned her head and threw me a swift glance of farewell.

This was her last gift to me. But where can I keep it safe from the trampling hours?

Must evening sweep this gleam of anguish away, as it will the last flicker of fire from the sunset?

Ought it to be washed off by the rain, as treasured pollens are from heart-broken flowers?

Leave kingly glory and the wealth of the rich to death. But may not tears keep ever fresh the memory of a glance flung through a passionate moment?

“Give it to me to keep,” said my song; “I never touch kings’ glory or the wealth of the rich, but these small things are mine forever.”

5

You give yourself to me, like a flower that blossoms at night, whose presence is known by the dew that drips from it, by the odour shed through the darkness, as the first steps of Spring are by the buds that thicken the twigs.

You break upon my thought like waves at the high tide, and my heart is drowned under surging songs.

My heart knew of your coming, as the night feels the approach of dawn. The clouds are aflame and my sky fills with a great revealing flood.

6

I was to go away; still she did not speak. But I felt, from a slight quiver, her yearning arms would say: “Ah no, not yet.”

I have often heard her pleading hands vocal in a touch, though they knew not

what they said.

I have known those arms to stammer when, had they not, they would have become youth's garland round my neck.

Their little gestures return to remembrance in the covert of still hours, like truants they playfully reveal things she had kept secret from me.

7

My songs are like bees; they follow through the air some fragrant trace—some memory—of you, to hum around your shyness, eager for its hidden store.

When the freshness of dawn droops in the sun, when in the noon the air hangs low with heaviness and the forest is silent, my songs return home, their languid wings dusted with gold.

8

I believe you had visited me in a vision before we ever met, like some foretaste of April before the spring broke into flower.

That vision must have come when all was bathed in the odour of sal blossom; when the twilight twinkle of the river fringed its yellow sands, and the vague sounds of a summer afternoon were blended; yes, and had it not laughed and evaded me in many a nameless gleam at other moments?

9

I think I shall stop startled if ever we meet after our next birth, walking in the light of a far-away world.

I shall know those dark eyes then as morning stars, and yet feel that they have belonged to some unremembered evening sky of a former life.

I shall know that the magic of your face is not all its own, but has stolen the passionate light that was in my eyes at some immemorial meeting, and then gathered from my love a mystery that has now forgotten its origin.

10

*Lay down your lute, my love, leave your arms free to embrace me.
Let your touch bring my overflowing heart to my body's utmost brink.
Do not bend your neck and turn away your face, but offer up a kiss to me,
which has been like some perfume long closed in a bud.
Do not smother this moment under vain words, but let our hearts quake in a
rush of silence sweeping all thoughts to the shoreless delight.*

11

You have made me great with your love, though I am but one among the many, drifting in the common tide, rocking in the fluctuant favour of the world.

You have given me a seat where poets of all time bring their tribute, and lovers with deathless names greet one another across the ages.

Men hastily pass me in the market,—never noting how my body has grown precious with your caress, how I carry your kiss within, as the sun carries in its orb the fire of the divine touch and shines forever.

12

Like a child that frets and pushes away its toys, my heart to-day shakes its head at every phrase I suggest, and says, "No, not this."

Yet words, in the agony of their vagueness, haunt my mind, like vagrant clouds hovering over hills, waiting for some chance wind to relieve them of their rain.

But leave these vain efforts, my soul, for the stillness will ripen its own music in the dark.

My life to-day is like a cloister during some penance, where the spring is afraid to stir or to whisper.

This is not the time, my love, for you to pass the gate; at the mere thought of your anklet bells tinkling down the path, the garden echoes are ashamed.

Know that to-morrow's songs are in bud to-day, and should they see you walk by they would strain to breaking their immature hearts.

13

Whence do you bring this disquiet, my love?

*Let my heart touch yours and kiss the pain out of your silence.
The night has thrown up from its depth this little hour, that love may build a
new world within these shut doors, to be lighted by this solitary lamp.
We have for music but a single reed which our two pairs of lips must play on
by turns—for crown, only one garland to bind my hair after I have put it on
your forehead.
Tearing the veil from my breast I shall make our bed on the floor; and one
kiss and one sleep of delight shall fill our small boundless world.*

14

*All that I had I gave to you, keeping but the barest veil of reserve.
It is so thin that you secretly smile at it and I feel ashamed.
The gust of the spring breeze sweeps it away unawares, and the flutter of my
own heart moves it as the waves move their foam.
My love, do not grieve if I keep this flimsy mist of distance round me.
This frail reserve of mine is no mere woman's coyness, but a slender stem on
which the flower of my self-surrender bends towards you with reticent
grace.*

15

*I have donned this new robe to-day because my body feels like singing.
It is not enough that I am given to my love once and for ever, but out of that I
must fashion new gifts every day; and shall I not seem a fresh offering,
dressed in a new robe?
My heart, like the evening sky, has its endless passion for colour, and
therefore I change my veils, which have now the green of the cool young
grass and now that of the winter rice.
To-day my robe is tinted with the rain-rimmed blue of the sky. It brings to my
limbs the colour of the boundless, the colour of the oversea hills; and it
carries in its folds the delight of summer clouds flying in the wind.*

16

*I thought I would write love's words in their own colour; but that lies deep in
the heart, and tears are pale.*

*Would you know them, friend, if the words were colourless?
I thought I would sing love's words to their own tune, but that sounds only in
my heart, and my eyes are silent.
Would you know them, friend, if there were no tune?*

17

*In the night the song came to me; but you were not there.
It found the words for which I had been seeking all day. Yes, in the stillness a
moment after dark they throbbed into music, even as the stars then began to
pulse with light; but you were not there. My hope was to sing it to you in the
morning; but, try as I might, though the music came, the words hung back,
when you were beside me.*

18

*The night deepens and the dying flame flickers in the lamp.
I forgot to notice when the evening—like a village girl who has filled her
pitcher at the river a last time for that day—closed the door on her cabin.
I was speaking to you, my love, with mind barely conscious of my voice—tell
me, had it any meaning? Did it bring you any message from beyond life's
borders?
For now, since my voice has ceased, I feel the night throbbing with thoughts
that gaze in awe at the abyss of their dumbness.*

19

*When we two first met my heart rang out in music, “She who is eternally afar
is beside you forever.”
That music is silent, because I have grown to believe that my love is only
near, and have forgotten that she is also far, far away.
Music fills the infinite between two souls. This has been muffled by the mist of
our daily habits.
On shy summer nights, when the breeze brings a vast murmur out of the
silence, I sit up in my bed and mourn the great loss of her who is beside me.
I ask myself, “When shall I have another chance to whisper to her words
with the rhythm of eternity in them?”*

*Wake up, my song, from thy languor, rend this screen of the familiar, and fly
to my beloved there, in the endless surprise of our first meeting!*

20

*Lovers come to you, my Queen, and proudly lay their riches at your feet: but
my tribute is made up of unfulfilled hopes.*

*Shadows have stolen across the heart of my world and the best in me has lost
light.*

*While the fortunate laugh at my penury, I ask you to lend my failings your
tears, and so make them precious.*

I bring you a voiceless instrument.

*I strained to reach a note which was too high in my heart, and the string
broke.*

*While masters laugh at the snapped cord, I ask you to take my lute in your
hands and fill its hollowness with your songs.*

21

The father came back from the funeral rites.

*His boy of seven stood at the window, with eyes wide open and a golden
amulet hanging from his neck, full of thoughts too difficult for his age.*

His father took him in his arms and the boy asked him, “Where is mother?”

“In heaven,” answered his father, pointing to the sky.

At night the father groaned in slumber, weary with grief.

*A lamp dimly burned near the bedroom door, and a lizard chased moths on
the wall.*

*The boy woke up from sleep, felt with his hands the emptiness in the bed, and
stole out to the open terrace.*

*The boy raised his eyes to the sky and long gazed in silence. His bewildered
mind sent abroad into the night the question, “Where is heaven?”*

*No answer came: and the stars seemed like the burning tears of that ignorant
darkness.*

22

*She went away when the night was about to wane.
My mind tried to console me by saying, "All is vanity."
I felt angry and said, "That unopened letter with her name on it, and this palm-leaf fan bordered with red silk by her own hands, are they not real?"
The day passed, and my friend came and said to me, "Whatever is good is true, and can never perish."
"How do you know?" I asked impatiently; "was not this body good which is now lost to the world?"
As a fretful child hurting its own mother, I tried to wreck all the shelters that ever I had, in and about me, and cried, "This world is treacherous."
Suddenly I felt a voice saying—"Ungrateful!"
I looked out of the window, and a reproach seemed to come from the star-sprinkled night,—"You pour out into the void of my absence your faith in the truth that I came!"*

23

*The river is grey and the air dazed with blown sand.
On a morning of dark disquiet, when the birds are mute and their nests shake in the gust, I sit alone and ask myself, "Where is she?"
The days have flown wherein we sat too near each other; we laughed and jested, and the awe of love's majesty found no words at our meetings.
I made myself small, and she trifled away every moment with pelting talk.
To-day I wish in vain that she were by me, in the gloom of the coming storm, to sit in the soul's solitude.*

24

*The name she called me by, like a flourishing jasmine, covered the whole seventeen years of our love. With its sound mingled the quiver of the light through the leaves, the scent of the grass in the rainy night, and the sad silence of the last hour of many an idle day.
Not the work of God alone was he who answered to that name; she created him again for herself during those seventeen swift years.
Other years were to follow, but their vagrant days, no longer gathered within the fold of that name uttered in her voice, stray and are scattered.
They ask me, "Who should fold us?"*

I find no answer and sit silent, and they cry to me while dispersing, “We seek a shepherdess!”

Whom should they seek?

That they do not know. And like derelict evening clouds they drift in the trackless dark, and are lost and forgotten.

25

I feel that your brief days of love have not been left behind in those scanty years of your life.

I seek to know in what place, away from the slow-thieving dust, you keep them now. I find in my solitude some song of your evening that died, yet left a deathless echo; and the sighs of your unsatisfied hours I find nestled in the warm quiet of the autumn noon.

Your desires come from the hive of the past to haunt my heart, and I sit still to listen to their wings.

26

You have taken a bath in the dark sea. You are once again veiled in a bride’s robe, and through death’s arch you come back to repeat our wedding in the soul.

Neither lute nor drum is struck, no crowd has gathered, not a wreath is hung on the gate.

Your unuttered words meet mine in a ritual unillumined by lamps.

27

I was walking along a path overgrown with grass, when suddenly I heard from someone behind, “See if you know me?”

I turned round and looked at her and said, “I cannot remember your name.”

She said, “I am that first great Sorrow whom you met when you were young.”

Her eyes looked like a morning whose dew is still in the air.

I stood silent for some time till I said, “Have you lost all the great burden of your tears?”

She smiled and said nothing. I felt that her tears had had time to learn the language of smiles.

“Once you said,” she whispered, “that you would cherish your grief forever.”

I blushed and said, “Yes, but years have passed and I forget.”

Then I took her hand in mine and said, “But you have changed.”

“What was sorrow once has now become peace,” she said.

28

Our life sails on the uncrossed sea whose waves chase each other in an eternal hide-and-seek.

It is the restless sea of change, feeding its foaming flocks to lose them over and over again, beating its hands against the calm of the sky.

Love, in the centre of this circling wardance of light and dark, yours is that green island, where the sun kisses the shy forest shade and silence is wooed by birds’ singing.

Short Stories

1. A Feast for Rats

"It is very unfair, we will not study under a new teacher," the boys said.

The new teacher, who is arriving, has the name Kalikumar Tarkalankar. Even though the boys had not seen him yet, they had nicknamed the teacher as "Black pumpkin fresh chilli", a ridiculous translation of the teacher's name.

The vacations had ended and the boys were returning back to school from their homes in a train. Among them was a jolly fellow who had composed a poem entitled "The black pumpkin's sacrifice" and the boys were reciting the poem at the top of their voice. Just then, when the train stopped at the Adkhola station, an old man entered their coach. With him was his sleeping bag all folded up, few pots that were closed at their mouths by pieces of cloth, a tin trunk and few bundles. One bully-type of boy, who was called Bichkun by the others, roared, "There is no place here, old man. Get into another coach."

The old man said, "There is a tremendous rush and there is no place elsewhere. I will adjust myself in this corner and will not cause you any trouble." So saying, the old man vacated the seat among the boys and sat down after spreading his sleeping bag on the floor in a corner.

He asked the boys, "Where are all of you going and what for?"

Bichkun promptly replied that they were going for a "shraddha (a religious rite performed after the death of a person)."

"Whose shraddha?" the old man wanted to know.

Black pumpkin fresh chilli's, he heard in reply.

The boys once again chanted at the top of their voice, "Black pumpkin fresh chilli, we will show you your place."

The train halted at Asansol and the old man alighted to bathe at the station. When he returned after taking a bath, Bichkun sounded him at once, "Do not remain in this coach, mister."

"Do tell me why," the old man requested to know.

"There are a lot of rats here," was the answer.

"Rats! What is all this talk of rats?"

"Just see what the rats have done after removing the covers of your pots."

The gentleman saw that the pots that had contained sweets and other eatables, were absolutely empty.

"The rats even scurried away carrying away one of your bundles," Bichkun said. The bundle had contained five or six luscious mangoes from the old man's own garden.

The gentlemen laughed and remarked that the rats must have been hungry indeed.

Bichkun said that rats are like that. They eat even if they are not hungry.

The other boys joined in the fun and laughed out aloud. "Yes mister, had there been more eatables, they would have finished that too," they said.

The gentleman said he had made a mistake. "Had I known there would be so many rats traveling together in the train, I would have brought more good things to eat," he said.

The boys were disappointed that the old man was not angry at their prank. It would have been fun if he had lost his temper.

The train came to halt at the Bardhaman station. It will stop for an hour and the passengers have to board another train for the onward journey.

The gentleman said, "Boys, I will not trouble you anymore. I will find a seat for myself in a separate coach."

"No, no," the boys cried out in unison, "you must complete the rest of the journey with us. If you have anything left in the pots, we will guard them and nothing will go missing this time."

"Alright boys, you get into the train. I will join you in a moment," the gentleman said.

The boys jumped into the train. After some time, a confectioner approached their coach while pushing his cart and halted by the window. Along came the gentleman too. He handed over a packet of sweets to each of the boys and said, "This time, the rats will not face any impediments in their feast." The boys jumped in joy. Shortly, a mango seller also came by and delicious mangoes were passed around.



"Where are you going and for what purpose?" the boys demanded to know.

He said, “I am going in search of employment. I will get down wherever I find work.”

“What sort of work do you do?” the boys demanded to know again.

“I am a teacher. I teach Sanskrit,” the gentleman replied.

The boys clapped their hands in delight and said, “Then, you come to our school.”

“Why will your school employ me?” he asked.

“The school will have to employ you; we will not allow Black pumpkin fresh chilli to enter the school premises under any circumstance,” the boys cried out in unison.

“You have put me in a dilemma. What if the school secretary takes a dislike for me?” the old man wanted to know.

He has to like you—else, all of us will leave school and go away, they said.

“Okay boys, then take me to your school.”

The train came to a halt at their destination. The school secretary was himself present at the station. On seeing the old man, he said, “Come, come, come Tarkalankar Sir. Your room has been readied and spruced up.” The secretary then bent down and touched the old man’s feet in reverence.

2. The Auspicious Vision

Kantichandra was young; yet after his wife's death he sought no second partner, and gave his mind to the hunting of beasts and birds. His body was long and slender, hard and agile; his sight keen; his aim unerring. He dressed like a countryman, and took with him Hira Singh the wrestler, Chakkanlal, Khan Saheb the musician, Mian Saheb, and many others. He had no lack of idle followers.

In the month of *Agrahayan* Kanti had gone out shooting near the swamp of Nydighi with a few sporting companions. They were in boats, and an army of servants, in boats also, filled the bathing-ghats. The village women found it well-nigh impossible to bathe or to draw water. All day long, land and water trembled to the firing of the guns; and every evening musicians killed the chance of sleep.

One morning as Kanti was seated in his boat cleaning a favourite gun, he suddenly started at what he thought was the cry of wild duck. Looking up, he saw a village maiden, coming to the water's edge, with two white ducklings clasped to her breast. The little stream was almost stagnant. Many weeds choked the current. The girl put the birds into the water, and watched them anxiously. Evidently the presence of the sportsmen was the cause of her care and not the wildness of the ducks.

The girl's beauty had a rare freshness—as if she had just come from Vishwakarma's ¹ workshop. It was difficult to guess her age. Her figure was almost a woman's, but her face was so childish that clearly the world had left no impression there. She seemed not to know herself that she had reached the threshold of youth.

¹. The divine craftsman in Hindu mythology.

Kanti's gun-cleaning stopped for a while. He was fascinated. He had not expected to see such a face in such a spot. And yet its beauty suited its surroundings better than it would have suited a palace. A bud is lovelier on the bough than in a golden vase. That day the blossoming reeds glittered in the autumn dew and morning sun, and the fresh, simple face set in the midst was like a picture of festival to Kanti's enchanted mind. Kalidos has forgotten to sing how Siva's Mountain-Queen herself sometimes has come to the young Ganges, with just such ducklings in her breast. As he gazed, the maiden started in terror,

and hurriedly took back the ducks into her bosom with a half-articulate cry of pain. In another moment, she had left the river-bank and disappeared into the bamboo thicket hard by. Looking round, Kanti saw one of his men pointing an unloaded gun at the ducks. He at once went up to him, wrenched away his gun, and bestowed on his cheek a prodigious slap. The astonished humourist finished his joke on the floor. Kanti went on cleaning his gun.

But curiosity drove Kanti to the thicket wherein he had seen the girl disappear. Pushing his way through, he found himself in the yard of a well-to-do householder. On one side was a row of conical thatched barns, on the other a clean cow-shed, at the end of which grew a *zizyph* bush. Under the bush was seated the girl he had seen that morning, sobbing over a wounded dove, into whose yellow beak she was trying to wring a little water from the moist corner of her garment. A grey cat, its fore-paws on her knee, was looking eagerly at the bird, and every now and then, when it got too forward, she kept it in its place by a warning tap on the nose.

This little picture, set in the peaceful mid-day surroundings of the householder's yard, instantly impressed itself on Kanti's sensitive heart. The checkered light and shade, flickering beneath the delicate foliage of the *zizyph*, played on the girl's lap. Not far off a cow was chewing the cud, and lazily keeping off the flies with slow movements of its head and tail. The north wind whispered softly in the rustling bamboo thickets. And she who at dawn on the river-bank had looked like the Forest Queen, now in the silence of noon showed the eager pity of the Divine Housewife. Kanti, coming in upon her with his gun, had a sense of intrusion. He felt like a thief caught red-handed. He longed to explain that it was not he who had hurt the dove. As he wondered how he should begin, there came a call of 'Sudha!' from the house. The girl jumped up. 'Sudha!' came the voice again. She took up her dove, and ran within. 'Sudha,'² thought Kanti, 'what an appropriate name!'

² Sudha means nectar, ambrosia.

Kanti returned to the boat, handed his gun to his men, and went over to the front door of the house. He found a middle-aged Brahmin, with a peaceful, clean-shaven face, seated on a bench outside, and reading a devotional book. Kanti saw in his kindly, thoughtful face something of the tenderness which shone in the face of the maiden.

Kanti saluted him, and said: 'May I ask for some water, sir? I am very thirsty.' The elder man welcomed him with eager hospitality, and, offering him a seat on the bench, went inside and fetched with his own hands a little brass plate of sugar wafers and a bell-metal vessel full of water.

After Kanti had eaten and drunk, the Brahmin begged him to introduce himself. Kanti gave his own name, his father's name, and the address of his home, and then said in the usual way: 'If I can be of any service, sir, I shall deem myself fortunate.'

'I require no service, my son,' said Nabin Banerji; 'I have only one care at present.'

'What is that, sir?' said Kanti.

'It is my daughter, Sudha, who is growing up' (Kanti smiled as he thought of her babyish face), 'and for whom I have not yet been able to find a worthy bridegroom. If I could only see her well married, all my debt to this world would be paid. But there is no suitable bridegroom here, and I cannot leave my charge of Gopinath here, to search for a husband elsewhere.'

'If you would see me in my boat, sir, we would have a talk about the marriage of your daughter.' So saying, Kanti repeated his salute and went back. He then sent some of his men into the village to inquire, and in answer heard nothing but praise of the beauty and virtues of the Brahmin's daughter.

When next day the old man came to the boat on his promised visit, Kanti bent low in salutation, and begged the hand of his daughter for himself. The Brahmin was so much overcome by this undreamed-of piece of good fortune—for Kanti not only belonged to a well-known Brahmin family, but was also a landed proprietor of wealth and position—that at first he could hardly utter a word in reply. He thought there must have been some mistake, and at length mechanically repeated: 'You desire to marry my daughter?'

'If you will deign to give her to me,' said Kanti.

'You mean Sudha?' he asked again.

'Yes,' was the reply.

'But will you not first see and speak to her——?'

Kanti, pretending he had not seen her already, said: 'Oh, that we shall do at the moment of the Auspicious Vision.'³

³. After betrothal the prospective bride and bridegroom are not supposed to see each other again till that part of the wedding ceremony which is called the Auspicious Vision.

In a voice husky with emotion the old man said: 'My Sudha is indeed a good girl, well skilled in all the household arts. As you are so generously taking her on trust, may she never cause you a moment's regret. This is my blessing!'

The brick-built mansion of the Mazumdars had been borrowed for the wedding ceremony, which was fixed for next *Magh*, as Kanti did not wish to delay. In due time the bridegroom arrived on his elephant, with drums and music and with a torchlight procession, and the ceremony began.

When the bridal couple were covered with the scarlet screen for the rite of the Auspicious Vision, Kanti looked up at his bride. In that bashful, downcast face, crowned with the wedding coronet and bedecked with sandal paste, he could scarcely recognise the village maiden of his fancy, and in the fulness of his emotion a mist seemed to becloud his eyes.

At the gathering of women in the bridal chamber, after the wedding ceremony was over, an old village dame insisted that Kanti himself should take off his wife's bridal veil. As he did so he started back. It was not the same girl.

Something rose from within his breast and pierced into his brain. The light of the lamps seemed to grow dim, and darkness to tarnish the face of the bride herself.

At first he felt angry with his father-in-law. The old scoundrel had shown him one girl, and married him to another. But on calmer reflection he remembered that the old man had not shown him any daughter at all—that it was all his own fault. He thought it best not to show his arrant folly to the world, and took his place again with apparent calmness.

He could swallow the powder; he could not get rid of its taste. He could not bear the merry-makings of the festive throng. He was in a blaze of anger with himself as well as with everybody else.

Suddenly he felt the bride, seated by his side, give a little start and a suppressed scream; a leveret, scampering into the room, had brushed across her feet. Close upon it followed the girl he had seen before. She caught up the leveret into her arms, and began to caress it with an affectionate murmuring. ‘Oh, the mad girl!’ cried the women as they made signs to her to leave the room. She heeded them not, however, but came and unconcernedly sat in front of the wedded pair, looking into their faces with a childish curiosity. When a maid-servant came and took her by the arm to lead her away, Kanti hurriedly interposed, saying, ‘Let her be.’

‘What is your name?’ he then went on to ask her.

The girl swayed backwards and forwards but gave no reply. All the women in the room began to titter.

Kanti put another question: ‘Have those ducklings of yours grown up?’

The girl stared at him as unconcernedly as before.

The bewildered Kanti screwed up courage for another effort, and asked tenderly after the wounded dove, but with no avail. The increasing laughter in the room betokened an amusing joke.

At last Kanti learned that the girl was deaf and dumb, the companion of all the animals and birds of the locality. It was but by chance that she rose the other day

when the name of Sudha was called.

Kanti now received a second shock. A black screen lifted from before his eyes. With a sigh of intense relief, as of escape from calamity, he looked once more into the face of his bride. Then came the true Auspicious Vision. The light from his heart and from the smokeless lamps fell on her gracious face; and he saw it in its true radiance, knowing that Nabin's blessing would find fulfilment.

3. The Babus of Nayanjore

Once upon a time the Babus of Nayanjore were famous landholders. They were noted for their princely extravagance. They would tear off the rough border of their Dacca muslin, because it rubbed against their delicate skin. They would spend many thousands of rupees over the wedding of a kitten. And on a certain grand occasion it is alleged that in order to turn night into day, they lighted countless lamps and showered silver threads from the sky to imitate sunlight.

Those were the days before the flood. The flood came. The line of succession among these old-world Babus, with their lordly habits, could not continue for long. Like a lamp, with too many wicks burning, the oil flared away quickly, and the light went out.

Kailas Babu, our neighbour, is the last flicker of this extinct magnificence. Before he grew up, his family had very nearly burned itself out. When his father died, there was one dazzling outburst of funeral extravagance, and then insolvency. The property was sold to liquidate the debt. What little ready money was left was altogether insufficient to keep up the ancestral splendours.

Kailas Babu left Nayanjore and came to Calcutta. His son did not remain long in this world of faded glory. He died, leaving behind him an only daughter.

In Calcutta we are Kailas Babu's neighbours. Curiously enough our own family history is just the opposite of his. My father made his money by his own exertions, and prided himself on never spending a penny more than was necessary. His clothes were those of a working man, and his hands also. He never had any inclination to earn the title of Babu by extravagant display; and I, this only son, am grateful to him for that. He gave me the very best education, and I was able to make my way in the world. I am not ashamed of the fact that I am a self-made man. Crisp notes in my safe are dearer to me than a long pedigree in an empty family chest.

I believe this was why I disliked seeing Kailas Babu drawing his heavy cheques on the public credit from the bankrupt bank of his ancient Babu reputation. I used to fancy that he looked down on me, because my father had earned money by manual labour.

I ought to have noticed that no one but myself showed any vexation towards Kailas Babu. Indeed it would have been difficult to find an old man who did less

harm than he. He was always ready with his kindly little acts of courtesy in times of sorrow or joy. He would join in all the ceremonies and religious observances of his neighbours. His familiar smile would greet young and old alike. His politeness in asking details about domestic affairs was untiring. The friends who met him in the street were ready perforce to be button-holed, while a long string of remarks of this kind followed one another from his lips:

'I am delighted to see you, my dear friend. Are you quite well? How is Sashi? And Dada—is he all right? Do you know, I've only just heard that Madhu's son has got fever. How is he? Have you heard? And Hari Charan Babu—I have not seen him for a long time—I hope he is not ill. What's the matter with Rakhal? And er—er, how are the ladies of your family?'

Kailas Babu was neat and spotless in his dress on all occasions though his supply of clothes was sorely limited. Every day he used to air his shirts and vests and coats and trousers carefully, and put them out in the sun, along with his bed-quilt, his pillow-case, and the small carpet on which he always sat. After airing them he would shake them, and brush them, and put them carefully away. His little bits of furniture made his small room presentable, and hinted that there was more in reserve if needed. Very often, for want of a servant, he would shut up his house for a while. Then he would iron out his shirts and linen, and do other little menial tasks. He would then open his door and receive his friends again.

Though Kailas Babu, as I have said, had lost all his land, he had still some family heirlooms left. There was a silver cruet for sprinkling scented water, a filigree box for otto-of-roses, a small gold salver, a costly antique shawl, and the old-fashioned ceremonial dress and ancestral turban. These he had rescued with the greatest difficulty from the moneylenders' clutches. On every suitable occasion he would bring them out in state, and thus try to save the world-famed dignity of the Babus of Nayanjore. At heart the most modest of men, in his daily speech he regarded it as a sacred offering, due to his rank, to give free play to his family pride. His friends would encourage this with kindly good-humour, and it gave them great amusement.

The people of the neighbourhood soon learnt to call him their Thakur Dada. They would flock to his house and sit with him for hours together. To prevent his incurring any expense, one or other of his friends would bring him tobacco and say: 'Thakur Dada, this morning some tobacco was sent to me from Gaya. Do try it and see how you like it.'

Thakur Dada would smoke it and say it was excellent. He would then proceed to tell of a certain exquisite tobacco which they once smoked in the old days at Nayanjore that cost a guinea an ounce.

'I wonder,' he used to say, 'if anyone would like to try it now. I have some left, and can get it at once.'

Everyone knew that, if they asked for it, then somehow or other the key of the cupboard would be missing; or else Ganesh, his old family servant, had put it away somewhere.

'You never can be sure,' he would add, 'where things go to when servants are about. Now, this Ganesh of mine—I can't tell you what a fool he is, but I haven't the heart to dismiss him.'

Ganesh, for the credit of the family, was quite ready to bear all the blame without a word.

One of the company usually said at this point: 'Never mind, Thakur Dada. Please don't trouble to look for it. The tobacco we're smoking will do quite well. The other would be too strong.'

Then Thakur Dada would be relieved and settle down again, and the talk would go on.

When his guests got up to go away, Thakur Dada would accompany them to the door and say to them on the doorstep: 'Oh, by the way, when are you all coming to dine with me?'

One or other of us would answer: 'Not just yet Thakur Dada, not just yet. We'll fix a day later.'

'Quite right,' he would answer. 'Quite right. We had much better wait till the rains come. It's too hot now. And a grand dinner, such as I should want to give you, would upset us in weather like this.'

But when the rains did come, everyone was very careful not to remind him of his promise. If the subject was brought up, some friend would suggest gently, that it was very inconvenient to get about when the rains were so severe, and therefore it would be much better to wait till they were over. Thus the game went on.

Thakur Dada's poor house was much too small for his position, and we used to condole with him about it. His friends would assure him they quite understood his difficulties: it was next to impossible to get a decent house in Calcutta. Indeed, they had all been looking out for years for a house to suit him. But, I need hardly add, no friend had been foolish enough to find one. Thakur Dada used to say, with a sigh of resignation: 'Well, well, I suppose I shall have to put up with this house after all.' Then he would add with a genial smile: 'But, you know, I could never bear to be away from my friends. I must be near you. That really compensates for everything.'

Somehow I felt all this very deeply indeed. I suppose the real reason was that,

when a man is young, stupidity appears to him the worst of crimes. Kailas Babu was not really stupid. In ordinary business matters everyone was ready to consult him. But with regard to Nayanjore his utterances certainly seemed void of common sense. Since, out of amused affection for him, no one contradicted his impossible statements, he refused to keep them within bounds. When people recounted in his hearing the glorious history of Nayanjore, with absurd exaggerations, he would accept all they said with the utmost gravity, and never doubted even in his dreams, that anyone could disbelieve it.

When I sit down and try to analyse the thoughts and feelings that I had towards Kailas Babu, I see that there was a still deeper reason for my dislike; which I shall now explain.

Though I am the son of a rich man, and might have wasted time at college, my industry was such that I took my M.A. degree at Calcutta University when quite young. My moral character was flawless. In addition, my outward appearance was so handsome, that if I were to call myself beautiful, it might be thought a mark of self-esteem but could not be considered an untruth.

There could be no question that I was regarded by parents generally as a very eligible match among the young men of Bengal. I myself was quite clear on the point and had determined to obtain my full value in the marriage market. When I pictured my choice, I had before my mind's eye a wealthy father's only daughter, extremely beautiful and highly educated. Proposals came pouring into me from far and near; large sums in cash were offered. I weighed these offers with rigid impartiality in the delicate scales of my own estimation. But there was no one fit to be my partner. I became convinced with the poet Bhabavuti, that:

*In this world's endless time and boundless space
One may be born at last to match my sovereign grace.*

But in this puny modern age, and this contracted space of modern Bengal, it was doubtful whether the peerless creature existed.

Meanwhile my praises were sung in many tunes, and in different metres, by designing parents.

Whether I was pleased with their daughters or not, this worship which they offered was never unpleasing. I used to regard it as my proper due, because I was so good. We are told that when the gods withhold their boons from mortals, they still expect their worshippers to pay them fervent honour and are angry if it is withheld. I had that divine expectancy strongly developed.

I have already mentioned that Thakur Dada had an only grand-daughter. I had

seen her many times, but had never thought her beautiful. No idea had ever entered my mind that she would be a possible partner for me. All the same it seemed quite certain to me that some day or other Kailas Babu would offer her, with all due worship, as an oblation at my shrine. Indeed—this was the inner secret of my dislike—I was thoroughly annoyed that he had not done so already.

I heard that Thakur Dada had told his friends that the Babus of Nayanjore never craved a boon. Even if the girl remained unmarried, he would not break the family tradition. It was this arrogance of his that made me angry. My indignation smouldered for some time. But I remained perfectly silent and bore it with the utmost patience, because I was so good.

As lightning accompanies thunder, so in my character a flash of humour was mingled with the mutterings of my wrath. It was, of course, impossible for me to punish the old man merely in order to give vent to my rage; and for a long time I did nothing at all. But suddenly one day such an amusing plan came into my head, that I could not resist the temptation to carry it into effect.

I have already said that many of Kailas Babu's friends used to flatter the old man's vanity without stint. One, who was a retired Government servant, had told him that whenever he saw the Chota Lât Sahib he asked for the latest news about the Babus of Nayanjore and the Chota Lât had been heard to say that in all Bengal the only really respectable families were those of the Maharaja of Cossipore and the Babus of Nayanjore. When the monstrous falsehood was told to Kailas Babu, he was very proud and often repeated the story. And wherever after that he met this Government servant in company, he would ask, among other things:

'Oh! Er—by the way, how is the Chota Lât Sahib? Quite well, did you say? Ah yes, I am so delighted to hear it! And the dear Mem Sahib, is she quite well too? Ah, yes! And the little children—are they quite well also? Ah yes! that's very good news! Be sure and give them my compliments when you see them.'

Kailas Babu frequently expressed his intention of going some day and paying a visit to the Lât Sahib. But it may be taken for granted that many Chota Lâts and Burra Lâts also would come and go, and much water would flow under the Hooghly bridges, before the family coach of Nayanjore would be furbished up to take Kailas Babu to Government House.

One day I took him aside and whispered to him: 'Thakur Dada, I was at the Levee yesterday, and the Chota Lât Sahib happened to mention the Babus of Nayanjore. I told him that Kailas Babu had come to town. Do you know, he was terribly hurt because you hadn't called? He told me he was going to put etiquette on one side and pay you a private visit this very afternoon.'

Anybody else would have seen through this plot of mine in a moment. And, if it had been directed against another person, Kailas Babu would have understood the joke. But after all that he had heard from his friend, the Government servant, and after all his own exaggerations, a visit from the Lieutenant-Governor seemed the most natural thing in the world. He became very nervous and excited at my news. Each detail of the coming visit exercised him greatly—most of all his own ignorance of English. How on earth was that difficulty to be met? I told him there was no difficulty at all; it was an aristocratic foible not to know English; besides, the Lieutenant-Governor always brought an interpreter with him, and he had expressly mentioned that this visit was to be private.

About midday, when most of our neighbours were at work, and the rest were asleep, a carriage and pair stopped before the lodging of Kailas Babu. Two flunkeys in livery came up the stairs, and announced in a loud voice: ‘The Chota Lât Sahib!’ Kailas Babu was ready, waiting for him, in his old-fashioned ceremonial robes and ancestral turban, with Ganesh by his side, dressed for the occasion in his master’s best clothes.

When the Chota Lât Sahib was announced, Kailas Babu ran panting, puffing and trembling to the door, and led in with repeated salaams, a friend of mine, in disguise. As he did so, he bowed low at each step and walked backwards as well as he could. He had spread his old family shawl over a hard wooden chair on which he asked the Lât Sahib to be seated. He then made a high-flown speech in Urdu, the ancient court language of the Sahibs, and presented on the golden salver a string of gold mohurs, the last relics of his broken fortune. The old family servant Ganesh, with an expression of awe bordering on terror, stood behind with the scent-sprinkler, simply drenching the Lât Sahib, and touching him gingerly from time to time with the otto-of-roses from the filigree box.

Kailas Babu repeatedly expressed his regret at not being able to receive His Honour Bahadur with all the ancestral magnificence of his family estate at Nayanjore. There he could have welcomed him with due ceremonial. But in Calcutta, he said, he was a mere stranger and sojourner—in fact, a fish out of water.

My friend, with his tall silk hat on, very gravely nodded. I need hardly say that according to English custom the hat ought to have been removed inside the room. But my friend dared not take it off for fear of detection; and Kailas and his old servant Ganesh were sublimely unconscious of this breach of etiquette.

After a ten minutes’ interview, which on his part consisted chiefly of nodding the head, my friend rose to depart. The two flunkeys in livery, as had been planned beforehand, carried off in state the string of gold mohurs, the gold

salver, the gold ancestral shawl, the silver scent-sprinkler, and the otto-of-roses filigree box; they placed them ceremoniously in the carriage. Kailas Babu regarded this as the usual habit of Chota Lât Sahibs.

I was watching all the while from the next room. My sides were aching with suppressed laughter. When I could hold myself in no longer, I rushed into a room further off, suddenly to discover, in a corner, a young girl sobbing as though her heart would break. When she heard my uproarious laughter, she stood tense in passion, flashing the lightning of her big dark eyes in mine and said with a tear choked voice: 'Tell me! What harm has my grandfather done to you! Why have you come to deceive him? Why have you come here? Why—'

She could say no more. She covered her face with her hands and broke into sobs.

My laughter stopped instantly. It had never occurred to me that there was anything but a supremely funny joke in this act of mine, and here I discovered that I had given the cruellest pain to this tender little heart. All the ugliness of my cruelty rose up to condemn me. I slunk out of the room in silence, like a whipped dog.

Hitherto I had only looked upon Kusum, the grand-daughter of Kailas Babu, as a somewhat worthless commodity in the marriage market, waiting in vain to attract a husband. But now I found, with surprise, that in the corner of that room a human heart was beating.

The whole night through I had very little sleep. My mind was in a tumult. Very early next morning, I took all those stolen goods back to Kailas Babu's lodgings, to hand them over in secret to the servant Ganesh. I waited outside the door, and, finding no one, went upstairs to Kailas Babu's room. I heard from the passage Kusum asking her grandfather in the most winning voice: 'Dada dearest, do tell me all that the Chota Lât Sahib said to you yesterday. Don't leave out a single word. I am dying to hear it all over again.'

And Dada needed no encouragement. His face beamed with pride as he related all the compliments that the Lât Sahib had been good enough to utter concerning the ancient families of Nayanjore. The girl was seated before him looking up into his face, and listening with rapt attention. She was determined, out of love for the old man, to play her part so well as to allow no suspicion to enter his mind.

My heart was deeply touched, and tears came to my eyes. I stood there in silence in the passage, while Thakur Dada finished his account, with embellishments, of the Chota Lât Sahib's wonderful visit. When at last, he left the room, I took the stolen goods, laid them at the feet of the girl and came away

without a word.

Later in the day I called again to see him. According to our ugly modern custom, I had been in the habit of making no greeting at all to this old man when I came into the room. But today I made a low bow and touched his feet. I am convinced the old man thought that the coming of the Chota Lât Sahib to his house was the cause of my new politeness. He was very much gratified by it, and benign serenity shone from his eyes. His friends had looked in, and he had already begun to tell again at full length the story of the Lieutenant-governor's visit with still further adornments of a most fantastic kind. The story of the interview was already becoming epic, both in quality and in length.

When the other visitors had taken their leave, I humbly made my proposal to the old man. I told him that, 'though I could never for a moment hope to be worthy of being received into such an illustrious family in marriage, yet...etc. etc.'

When I made my proposal clear, the old man embraced me and broke out in an excess of joy: 'I am a poor man, and could never have expected such great good fortune.'

That was the first and last time in his life that Kailas Babu confessed his poverty. It was also the first and last time in his life that he forgot, if only for a single moment, the ancestral dignity of the Babus of Nayanjore.

4. The Cabuliwallah

My five-year old daughter Mini cannot live without chattering. I really believe that in all her life she has not wasted a minute in silence. Her mother is often vexed at this, and would like to stop her prattle, but I would not. For Mini to be quiet is unnatural, and I cannot bear it long. And so my own talk with her is always lively.

One morning, for instance, when I was in the midst of the seventeenth chapter of my new novel, my little Mini stole into the room, and putting her hand into mine, said: ‘Father! Ramdayal, the door-keeper, calls a crow a krow! He doesn’t know anything, does he?’

Before I could explain to her the difference between one language and another in this world, she had embarked on the full tide of another subject. ‘What do you think, Father? Bhola says there is an elephant in the clouds, blowing water out of his trunk, and that is why it rains!’

And then, darting off anew, while I sat still, trying to think of some reply to this: ‘Father! What relation is Mother to you?’

With a grave face I contrived to say: ‘Go and play with Bhola, Mini! I am busy!’

The window of my room overlooks the road. The child had seated herself at my feet near my table, and was playing softly, drumming on her knees. I was hard at work on my seventeenth chapter, in which Pratap Singh, the hero, has just caught Kanchanlata, the heroine, in his arms, and is about to escape with her by the third-storey window of the castle, when suddenly Mini left her play, and ran to the window, crying: ‘A Cabuliwallah! A Cabuliwallah!’ And indeed, in the street below, there was a Cabuliwallah, walking slowly along. He wore the loose, soiled clothing of his people, and a tall turban; he carried a bag on his back, and boxes of grapes in his hand.

I cannot tell what my daughter’s feelings were when she saw this man, but she began to call him loudly. ‘Ah!’ thought I; ‘he will come in, and my seventeenth chapter will never be finished!’ At that very moment the Cabuliwallah turned, and looked up at the child. When she saw this, she was overcome by terror, and running to her mother’s protection, disappeared. She had a blind belief that inside the bag, which the big man carried, there were perhaps two or three other

children like herself. The pedlar meanwhile entered my doorway and greeted me with a smile.

So precarious was the position of my hero and my heroine, that my first impulse was to stop and buy something, since Mini had called the man to the house. I made some small purchases, and we began to talk about Abdur Rahman, the Russians, the English, and the Frontier Policy.

As he was about to leave, he asked: ‘And where is the little girl, sir?’

And then, thinking that Mini must get rid of her false fear, I had her brought out.

She stood by my chair, and looked at the Cabuliwallah and his bag. He offered her nuts and raisins, but she would not be tempted, and only clung closer to me, with all her doubts increased.

This was their first meeting.

A few mornings later, however, as I was leaving the house, I was startled to find Mini, seated on a bench near the door, laughing and talking, with the great Cabuliwallah at her feet. In all her life, it appeared, my small daughter had never found so patient a listener, save her father. And already the corner of her little *sari* was stuffed with almonds and raisins, the gift of her visitor. ‘Why did you give her those?’ I said, and taking out an eight-anna piece, I handed it to him. The man accepted the money without demur, and put it into his pocket.

Alas, on my return, an hour later, I found the unfortunate coin had made twice its own worth of trouble! For the Cabuliwallah had given it to Mini; and her mother, catching sight of the bright round object, had pounced on the child with: ‘Where did you get that eight-anna piece?’

‘The Cabuliwallah gave it me,’ said Mini cheerfully.

‘The Cabuliwallah gave it you!’ cried her mother greatly shocked. ‘O Mini! How could you take it from him?’

I entered at that moment, and saving her from impending disaster, proceeded to make my own inquiries.

It was not the first or the second time, I found, that the two had met. The Cabuliwallah had overcome the child’s first terror by a judicious bribe of nuts and almonds, and the two were now great friends.

They had many quaint jokes, which amused them greatly. Mini would seat herself before him, look down on his gigantic frame in all her tiny dignity, and with her face rippling with laughter would begin: ‘O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah! What have you got in your bag?’

And he would reply, in the nasal accents of the mountaineer: ‘An elephant!’ Not much cause for merriment, perhaps; but how they both enjoyed the fun! And

for me, this child's talk with a grown-up man had always in it something strangely fascinating.

Then the Cabuliwallah, not to be behindhand would take his turn: 'Well, little one, and when are you going to your father-in-law's house?'

Now nearly every small Bengali maiden had heard long ago about her father-in-law's house; but we were a little new-fangled, and had kept these things from our child, so that Mini at this question must have been a trifle bewildered. But she would not show it, and with ready tact replied: 'Are you going there?'

Amongst men of the Cabuliwallah's class, however, it is well known that the words *father-in-law's house* have a double meaning. It is a euphemism for *jail*, the place where we are well cared for, at no expense to ourselves. In this sense would the sturdy pedlar take my daughter's question. 'Oh,' he would say, shaking his fist at an invisible policeman, 'I will thrash my father-in-law!' Hearing this, and picturing the poor discomfited relative, Mini would go off into peals of laughter in which her formidable friend would join.

These were autumn mornings, the very time of year when kings of old went forth to conquest; and I, without stirring from my little corner in Calcutta, would let my mind wander over the whole world. At the very name of another country, my heart would go out to it, and at the sight of a foreigner in the streets, I would fall to weaving a network of dreams—the mountains, the glens, and the forests of his distant land, with his cottage in their midst, and the free and independent life, or far away wilds. Perhaps scenes of travel are conjured up before me and pass and re-pass in my imagination all the more vividly, because I lead an existence so like a vegetable that a call to travel would fall upon me like a thunder-bolt. In the presence of this Cabuliwallah, I was immediately transported to the foot of arid mountain peaks, with narrow little defiles twisting in and out amongst their towering heights. I could see the string of camels bearing the merchandise, and the company of turbaned merchants, some carrying their queer old firearms, and some their spears, journeying downward towards the plains. I could see—. But at some such point Mini's mother would intervene, and implore me to 'beware of that man'.

Mini's mother is unfortunately very timid. Whenever she hears a noise in the streets, or sees people coming towards the house, she always jumps to the conclusion that they are either thieves, or drunkards, or snakes, or tigers, or malaria, or cockroaches, or caterpillars. Even after all these years of experience, she is not able to overcome her terror. So she was full of doubts about the Cabuliwallah, and used to beg me to keep a watchful eye on him.

If I tried to laugh her fear gently away, she would turn round seriously, and ask

me solemn questions: Were children never kidnapped?

Was it not true that there was slavery in Cabul?

Was it so very absurd that this big man should be able to carry off a tiny child?

I urged that, though not impossible, it was very improbable. But this was not enough, and her dread persisted. But as it was a very vague dread, it did not seem right to forbid the man to the house, and the intimacy went on unchecked.

Once a year, in the middle of January, Rahman, the Cabuliwallah, used to return to his own country, and as the time approached, he would be very busy, going from house to house collecting his debts. This year, however, he could always find time to come and see Mini. It might have seemed to a stranger that there was some conspiracy between the two, for when he could not come in the morning, he would appear in the evening.

Even to me it was a little startling now and then, suddenly to surprise this tall, loose-garmented man laden with his bags, in the corner of a dark room; but when Mini ran in smiling, with her, 'O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!' and the two friends, so far apart in age, subsided into their old laughter and their old jokes, I felt reassured.

One morning, a few days before he had made up his mind to go, I was correcting proof-sheets in my study. The weather was chilly. Through the window the rays of the sun touched my feet, and the slight warmth was very welcome. It was nearly eight o'clock, and early pedestrians were returning home with their heads covered. Suddenly I heard an uproar in the street, and, looking out saw Rahman being led away bound between two policemen, and behind them a crowd of inquisitive boys. There were bloodstains on his clothes, and one of the policemen carried a knife. I hurried out, and stopping them, inquired what it all meant. Partly from one, partly from another, I gathered that a certain neighbour had owed the pedlar something for a Rampuri shawl, but had denied buying it, and that in the course of the quarrel Rahman had struck him. Now, in his excitement, the prisoner began calling his enemy all sorts of names, when suddenly in a verandah of my house appeared my little Mini, with her usual exclamation: 'O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!' Rahman's face lighted up as he turned to her. He had no bag under his arm today, so that she could not talk about the elephant with him. She therefore at once proceeded to the next question: 'Are you going to your father-in-law's house?' Rahman laughed and said: 'That is just where I am going, little one!' Then seeing that the reply did not amuse the child, he held up his fettered hands. 'Ah!' he said, 'I would have thrashed that old father-in-law, but my hands are bound!'

On a charge of murderous assault, Rahman was sentenced to several years'

imprisonment.

Time passed, and he was forgotten. Our accustomed work in the accustomed place went on, and the thought of the once free mountaineer spending his years in prison seldom or never occurred to us. Even my light-hearted Mini, I am ashamed to say, forgot her old friend. New companions filled her life. As she grew older, she spent more of her time with girls. So much, indeed, did she spend with them that she came no more, as she used to do, to her father's room, so that I rarely had any opportunity of speaking to her.

Years had passed away. It was once more autumn, and we had made arrangements for our Mini's marriage. It was to take place during the Puja holidays. With Durga returning to Kailas, the light of our home also would depart to her husband's house, and leave her father's in shadow.

The morning was bright. After the rains, it seemed as though the air had been washed clean and the rays of the sun looked like pure gold. So bright were they, that they made even the sordid brick-walls of our Calcutta lanes radiant. Since early dawn the wedding-pipes had been sounding, and at each burst of sound my own heart throbbed. The wail of the tune, *Bhairavi*, seemed to intensify the pain I felt at the approaching separation. My Mini was to be married that night.

From early morning noise and bustle had pervaded the house. In the courtyard there was the canopy to be slung on its bamboo poles; there were chandeliers with their tinkling sound to be hung in each room and verandah. There was endless hurry and excitement. I was sitting in my study, looking through the accounts, when someone entered, saluting respectfully, and stood before me. It was Rahman, the Cabuliwallah. At first I did not recognise him. He carried no bag, his long hair was cut short and his old vigour seemed to have gone. But he smiled, and I knew him again.

'When did you come, Rahman?' I asked him.

'Last evening,' he said, 'I was released from jail.'

The words struck harshly upon my ears. I had never before talked with one who had wounded his fellow-man, and my heart shrank within itself when I realised this; for I felt that the day would have been better-omened had he not appeared.

'There are ceremonies going on,' I said, 'and I am busy. Perhaps you could come another day?'

He immediately turned to go; but as he reached the door he hesitated, and said, 'May I not see the little one, sir, for a moment?' It was his belief that Mini was still the same. He had pictured her running to him as she used to do, calling 'O Cabuliwallah! Cabuliwallah!' He had imagined too that they would laugh and

talk together, just as of old. Indeed, in memory of former days, he had brought, carefully wrapped up in a paper, a few almonds and raisins and grapes, obtained somehow or other from a countryman; for what little money had, had gone.

I repeated: 'There is a ceremony in the house, and you will not be able to see anyone today.'

The man's face fell. He looked wistfully at me for a moment, then said, 'Good morning,' and went out.

I felt a little sorry, and would have called him back, but I found he was returning of his own accord. He came close up to me and held out his offerings with the words: 'I have brought these few things, sir, for the little one. Will you give them to her?'

I took them, and was going to pay him, but he caught my hand and said: 'You are very kind, sir! Keep me in your memory. Do not offer me money! You have a little girl: I too have one like her in my own home. I think of her, and bring this fruit to your child—not to make a profit for myself.'

Saying this, he put his hand inside his big loose robe, and brought out a small and dirty piece of paper. Unfolding it with great care, he smoothed it out with both hands on my table. It bore the impression of a little hand. Not a photograph. Not a drawing. Merely the impression of an ink-smeared hand laid flat on the paper. This touch of the hand of his own little daughter he had carried always next to his heart, as he had come year after year to Calcutta to sell his wares in the streets.

Tears came to my eyes. I forgot that he was a poor Cabuli fruit-seller, while I was—. But no, what was I more than he? He also was a father.

That impression of the hand of his little Parvati in her distant mountain home reminded me of my own little Mini.

I sent for Mini immediately from the inner apartment. Many difficulties were raised, but I swept them aside. Clad in the red silk of her wedding-day, with the sandal paste on her forehead, and adorned as a young bride, Mini came and stood modestly before me.

The Cabuliwallah seemed amazed at the apparition. He could not revive their old friendship. At last he smiled and said: 'Little one, are you going to your father-in-law's house?'

But Mini now understood the meaning of the word 'father-in-law', and she could not answer him as of old. She blushed at the question, and stood before him with her bride-like face bowed down.

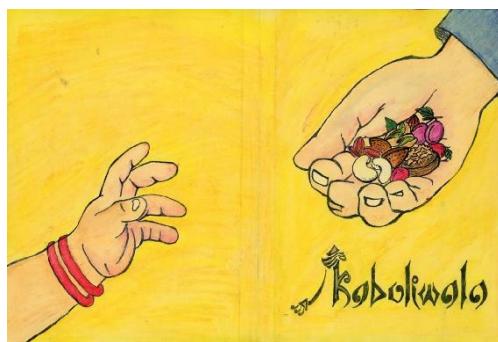
I remembered the day when the Cabuliwallah and my Mini had first met, and I felt sad. When she had gone, Rahman, sighed deeply and sat down on the floor.

The idea had suddenly come to him that his daughter too must have grown up, while he had been away so long, and that he would have to make friends anew with her also. Assuredly he would not find her as she was when he left her. And besides, what might not have happened to her in these eight years?

The marriage-pipes sounded, and the mild autumn sunlight streamed round us. But Rahman sat in the little Calcutta lane, and saw before him the barren mountains of Afghanistan.

I took out a currency-note, gave it to him, and said: ‘Go back to your daughter, Rahman, in your own country, and may the happiness of your meeting bring good fortune to my child!’

Having made this present, I had to curtail some of the festivities. I could not have the electric lights I had intended, nor the military band, and the ladies of the house were despondent about it. But to me the wedding-feast was all the more brighter for the thought that in a distant land a long-lost father had met again his only child.



5. The Castaway

As evening drew on, the storm rose to its height. From the terrific downpour of rain, the crash of thunder, and the repeated flashes of lightning, you might think that a battle of gods and demons was raging in the skies. Black clouds waved like the flags of Doom. The Ganges was lashed into fury, and the trees in the gardens on either bank swayed from side to side, sighing and groaning.

In a closed room of one of the riverside houses at Chandernagore, a husband and wife were seated on a bed spread on the floor, discussing intently an important question. Beside them an earthen lamp burned.

The husband, Sharat, was young: 'I wish you would stay a few more days; you would then be able to return home quite strong again.'

The wife, Kiran, was saying: 'I have quite recovered already. It will not, cannot possibly, do me any harm to go home now.'

Every married person will at once understand that the conversation was not quite so brief as I have reported it. The matter was not difficult, but the arguments for and against did not advance it towards a conclusion. Like a rudderless boat, the discussion kept turning round and round the same point: and at last it threatened to be overwhelmed in a flood of tears.

Sharat said: 'The doctor thinks you should stop here a few days longer.'

Kiran replied. 'Your doctor knows everything!'

'Well,' said Sharat, 'you know that just now all kinds of sickness are abroad. You would do well to stop here a month or two more.'

'And I suppose at this moment everyone here is perfectly well!'

What had happened was this: Kiran was universal favourite with her family and neighbours, so that, when she fell seriously ill, they were all very anxious about her. The village wiseacres thought it shameless for her husband to make so much fuss about a mere wife and for him even to suggest a change of air. They asked Sharat whether he supposed that no woman had ever been ill before, or whether he had found out that the folk of the place to which he meant to take her were immortal. Did he imagine that the writ of Fate did not run there? But Sharat and his mother turned a deaf ear to them, thinking that the little life of their darling was of greater importance than the united wisdom of a village. People are wont to reason thus when danger threatens their loved ones. So Sharat went

to Chandernagore, and Kiran recovered, though she was still very weak. There was a pinched look on her face which filled the beholder with pity, and it wrung his heart to think how narrowly she had escaped death.

Kiran was fond of society and amusement; the loneliness of her riverside villa did not suit her at all.

There was nothing to do, there were no interesting neighbours, and she hated to be busy all day with medicine and diet. There was no fun measuring doses and making fomentations. Such was the subject discussed in their closed room this stormy evening.

So long as Kiran deigned to argue, there was a chance of a fair fight. When she ceased to reply, and with a toss of her head disconsolately looked the other way, the poor man was disarmed. He was on the point of surrendering unconditionally, when a servant called out a message through the closed door.

Sharat got up and on opening the door learnt that a boat had been upset in the storm, and that one of the occupants, a young Brahmin boy and succeeded in swimming ashore at their garden steps.

Kiran was at once her own sweet self and set to work to get out some dry clothes for the boy. She then warmed a cup of milk and invited him to her room.

The boy had long curly hair, big expressive eyes, and as yet no sign of hair on his face. Kiran, after getting him to drink some milk, asked him all about himself.

He told her that his name was Nilkanta, and that he belonged to a theatrical company. They were coming to play in a neighbouring villa, when the boat had suddenly foundered in the storm. He had no idea what had become of his companions. He was a good swimmer and had just managed to reach the bank.

The boy stayed with them. His narrow escape from a terrible death made Kiran take a warm interest in him. Sharat thought the boy's arrival at this moment rather a good thing, as his wife would now have something to amuse her, and might be persuaded to stay for some time longer. Her mother-in-law, too, was pleased at the prospect of benefiting their Brahmin guest by her kindness. And Nilkanta himself was delighted at this double escape from his master and from the other world, as well as at finding a home in this wealthy family.

But very soon Sharat and his mother changed their opinion, and longed for his departure. The boy found a secret pleasure in smoking Sharat's hookahs; he would calmly go off in pouring rain with Sharat's best silk umbrella for a stroll through the village, and make friends with all he met. Moreover, he had adopted a mongrel cur which he petted so recklessly that it came indoors with muddy paws, and left tokens of its visit on Sharat's spotless bed. Then he gathered about

him a devoted band of boys of all sorts and sizes, and the result was that not a single mango in the neighbourhood had a chance of ripening that season.

There is no doubt that Kiran had a hand in spoiling the boy. Sharat often warned her about it, but she would not listen to him. She made a dandy of him with Sharat's cast-off clothes, and also gave him new ones. And because she felt drawn towards him, and was curious to know more about him, she was constantly calling him to her own room. After her bath and midday meal, Kiran would seat herself on the bedstead with her betel-leaf box by her side; and while her maid combed and dried her hair, Nilkanta would stand in front and recite pieces out of his repertory with appropriate gesture and song, his elf-locks waving wildly. Thus the long afternoon hours passed merrily away. Kiran would often try to persuade Sharat to sit with her as one of the audience, but Sharat, who had taken a cordial dislike to the boy, refused; nor could Nilkanta play his part half so well when Sharat was there. His mother would sometimes be lured by the hope of hearing sacred names in the recitation; but the love of her midday sleep speedily overcame devotion, and she lay wrapped in dreams.

The boy often had his ears boxed and pulled by Sharat, but as this was nothing to what he had been used to as a member of the troupe, he did not mind it in the least. In his short experience of the world he had come to the conclusion that, as the earth consisted of land and water, so human life was made up of eatings and beatings. And that the beatings largely predominated.

It was hard to tell Nilkanta's age. If it was about fourteen or fifteen, then his face was too old for his years; if seventeen or eighteen, then it was too young. He had either become a man too early or had remained a boy too long. The fact was that, joining the theatrical band when very young, he had played the parts of Radhika, Damayanti, and Sita, and a thoughtful Providence had so arranged things that he grew to the exact stature that his manager required and then growth ceased.

Since everyone saw how small Nilkanta was, and since he himself felt small, he did not receive the respect due to his years. Causes, natural and artificial, combined to make him sometimes seem immature for seventeen years, and at other times appear a mere lad of fourteen—but a lad far too knowing even for seventeen. And as no sign of hair appeared on his face, the confusion became greater. Either because he smoked or because he used language beyond his years, his lips puckered into lines that showed him to be old and hard; but innocence and youth shone in his large eyes. I fancy that his heart remained young, but the hot glare of publicity had been a forcing-house that ripened untimely his outward aspect.

In the quiet shelter of Sharat's house and garden at Chandernagore, Nature had leisure to work her way unimpeded. Nilkanta had lingered in a kind of unnatural youth, but now he silently and swiftly developed beyond that stage. His seventeen or eighteen years were fully revealed. No one observed the change, and its first sign was this, that when Kiran treated him like a boy, he felt ashamed. When she one day gaily proposed that he should play the part of lady's companion, the idea of dressing as a woman hurt him, though he could not say why. So now, when she called for him to act over again his old characters, he disappeared.

It never occurred to Nilkanta that he was even now not much more than a lad-of-all-work in a strolling company. He even made up his mind to pick up a little education from Sharat's agent. But, because Nilkanta was the pet of his master's wife, the agent could not endure the sight of him. In addition, his restless training made it impossible for him to keep his mind long engaged; sooner or later, the alphabet seemed to dance a misty dance before his eyes. He would sit for hours with an open book on his lap, leaning against a *champak* bush beside the Ganges. Below, the waves sighed, boats floated past, above his head birds flitted and twittered restlessly. What thoughts passed through his mind as he looked down on that book he alone knew, if indeed he did know. He never advanced from one word to another, but the glorious thought, that he was actually reading a book, filled his soul with exultation. Whenever a boat went by, he lifted his book, and pretended to be reading hard, shouting at the top of his voice. But his fit of energy passed off as soon as the audience was gone.

Formerly he sang his songs automatically but now their tunes stirred in his mind. Their words were of little import and full of trifling alliteration. Even the feeble meaning they had was beyond his comprehension; yet when he sang—

*Twice-born bird! Ah! Wherfore stirred
To wrong our royal lady?
Goose, ah, say why wilt thou slay
Her in forest shady?*

he felt transported to another world and to far different folk. This familiar earth and his own poor life became music, and he was transformed. That tale of the goose and the king's daughter flung upon the mirror of his mind a picture of surpassing beauty. It is impossible to say what he imagined himself to be, but the destitute little slave of the theatrical company faded from his memory.

When at even-tide the child of want lies down, dirty and hungry, in his squalid home, and hears of prince and princess and fabled gold, then in the dark hovel

lighted by its dim flickering candle, his mind springs free from its bonds of poverty and misery and walks in fresh beauty and glowing raiment, strong beyond all fear of hindrance, through that fairy realm where all is possible.

In this way also, this drudge of wandering players fashioned himself and his world anew, as he moved in spirit amid his songs. The lapping water, rustling leaves, and calling birds; the goddess who had given shelter to him, helpless and forsaken of God; her gracious, lovely face, her exquisite arms with their shining bangles, her rosy feet as flower-petals—all these by some mágic became one with the music of his song. When the singing ended, the mirage faded, and the Nilkanta of the stage appeared again, with his wild elf-locks. Then Sharat fresh from the complaints of his neighbours, the owner of the despoiled mango-orchard, would come and box his ears and cuff him. The boy Nilkanta, the leader astray of adoring youth, went forth once more, to make ever new mischief by land and water and in the branches that are above the earth.

Shortly after the advent of Nilkanta, Sharat's younger brother, Satish, came to spend his college vacation with them. Kiran was hugely pleased at finding fresh occupation. She and Satish were of the same age, and the time passed pleasantly in games and quarrels and reconciliations and laughter and even tears. She would suddenly clasp him over the eyes from behind with vermillion-stained hands, or she would write 'monkey' on his back, or else she would bolt the door on him from the outside amidst peals of laughter. Satish in his turn did not take things lying down. He would steal her keys and rings, he would put pepper among her betel, he would tie her to the bed when she was not looking.

Meanwhile, heaven only knows what possessed poor Nilkanta. He was suddenly filled with a bitterness which he felt must be avenged on somebody or something. He thrashed his devoted boy-followers for no fault of theirs, and sent them away crying. He would kick his pet mongrel till it made the skies resound with its whinings. When he went out for a walk, he would litter his path with twigs and leaves beaten from the road-side shrubs with his cane.

Kiran liked to see people enjoying good fare. Nilkanta had an immense capacity for eating, and never refused a good thing, however frequently it might be offered. So Kiran liked to send for him to have his meals in her presence, and ply him with delicacies, happy in the bliss of seeing this Brahmin boy eat his fill. But when Satish joined them, she had much less spare time on her hands and was seldom present to see Nilkanta's meals served. Before, her absence made no difference to the boy's appetite, and he would not rise till he had drained his cup of milk and rinsed it thoroughly with water.

But now, if Kiran was not there to ask him to try this and that, he was

miserable, and nothing tasted right. He would get up, without eating much, and say to the serving-maid with tears in his voice: 'I am not hungry.' He thought that the news of his repeated refusal, 'I am not hungry,' would reach Kiran; he pictured her concern, and hoped that she would send for him and press him to eat. But nothing of the sort happened. Kiran never knew and never sent for him; and the maid finished whatever he left. He would then put out the lamp in his room, throw himself on his bed in the darkness, and bury his head in the pillow in a paroxysm of weeping. What was his grievance? Against whom? And from whom did he expect redress? At last, when no one else came, Mother Sleep soothed with her soft caresses the wounded heart of the motherless lad.

Nilkanta came to the unshakable conviction that Satish was poisoning Kiran's mind against him. If Kiran was absent-minded and had not her usual smile, he would jump to the conclusion that some trick of Satish had made her angry. He took to praying to the gods, with all the fervour of his hate, to make him at the next rebirth Satish, and Satish him. He had an idea that a Brahmin's wrath could never be in vain; and the more he tried to consume Satish with the fire of his curses, the more did his own heart burn within him. And, upstairs, he would hear Satish laughing and joking with his sister-in-law.

Nilkanta never dared to show his enmity to Satish openly. But he would contrive a hundred petty ways of causing him annoyance. When Satish went for a swim in the river and left his soap on the steps of the bathing-place, he would find on coming back for it that it had gone. Once he found his favourite striped tunic floating past him on the water, and thought it had been blown away by the wind.

One day Kiran wished to entertain Satish, so she sent for Nilkanta to recite as usual, but he stood there in gloomy silence. In great surprise, Kiran asked him what was the matter. But he would not answer. And when again pressed by her to repeat some favourite piece of hers, he answered 'I don't remember it,' and walked away.

At last, the time came for their return home. Everybody was busy packing up. Satish was going with them. But to Nilkanta no one said a word. The question whether he was to go or not seemed to be nobody's concern.

The subject, as a matter of fact, had been raised by Kiran, who had proposed to take him with them. But her husband and his mother and brother had all objected so strenuously that she had let the matter drop. A couple of days before they were to start, she sent for the boy, and with kind words advised him to go back to his home.

He had felt neglected for so long that this touch of kindness was too much for

him; he burst into tears. Kiran's eyes were also brimming over. She was filled with remorse at the thought that she had created a tie of affection, which had to be broken.

But Satish was greatly annoyed at the blubbering of this overgrown boy. 'Why does the fool stand there howling instead of speaking?' said he. When Kiran scolded him for an unfeeling creature, he replied: 'My dear sister, you do not understand. You are too good and trustful. This fellow turns up from the Lord knows where, and is treated like a king. Naturally the tiger has no wish to become a mouse again. And he has evidently discovered that there is nothing like a tear or two to soften your heart.'

Nilkanta hurriedly left them. He felt that he would like to be a knife to cut Satish to pieces; a needle to pierce him through and through; a fire to burn him to ashes. But Satish was not even scared. It was only his own heart that bled and bled.

Satish had brought with him from Calcutta a very fine inkstand. The inkpot was set in a mother-of-pearl boat drawn by a German-silver goose supporting a pen-holder. It was a great favourite of his, and he cleaned it carefully every day with an old silk handkerchief. Kiran would laugh, and tapping the silver bird's beak would say—

*Twice-born bird, ah! Wherefore stirred
To wrong our royal lady?*

and the usual war of words would break out between her and her brother-in-law.

The day before they were to start, the inkstand was missing and was to be found nowhere. Kiran smiled, and said: 'Brother-in-law, your goose has flown off to look for your Damayanti.'

But Satish was in a great rage. He was certain that Nilkanta had stolen it—for several people said they had seen him prowling round the room the night before. He had the accused brought before him, in Kiran's presence. 'You have stolen my inkstand, you thief!' he burst out, 'bring it back at once.' Nilkanta had always taken punishment from Sharat, deserved or undeserved, with perfect equanimity. But, when he was called a thief before Kiran, his eyes blazed with fierce anger, his breast swelled and his throat choked. If Satish had said another word, he would have flown at him like a wild cat and used his nails like claws.

Kiran was greatly distressed at the scene, and taking the boy into another room said in her sweet, kind way: 'Nilu, if you really have taken that inkstand, give it to me quickly, and I shall see that no one says another word to you about it.' Big

tears coursed down the boy's cheeks, till at last he hid his face in his hands, and wept bitterly. Kiran came back from the room and said: 'I am sure Nilkanta has not taken the inkstand.' Sharat and Satish were equally positive that no other than Nilkanta could have done it.

But Kiran steadily refused to believe it.

Sharat wanted to cross-examine the boy, but his wife would not allow it.

Then Satish suggested that his room and box should be searched. But Kiran said: 'If you dare do such a thing, I will never forgive you. You shall not spy on the poor innocent boy.' And as she spoke, her wonderful eyes filled with tears. That settled the matter and effectually prevented any further molestation of Nilkanta.

Kiran's heart overflowed with pity at this attempted outrage on a homeless lad. She got two new suits of clothes and a pair of shoes, and with these and a currency note in her hand, she went quietly into Nilkanta's room in the evening. She intended to put these parting presents into his box as a surprise. The box itself had been her gift.

From her bunch of keys she selected one that fitted and noiselessly opened the box. It was so jumbled up with odds and ends that the new clothes would not go in. So she thought she had better take everything out and pack the box for him. At first knives, tops, kite-flying reels, bamboo twigs, polished shells for peeling green mangoes, bottoms of broken tumblers and such things as appeal to a boy's heart were discovered. Then there came a layer of linen, clean and otherwise. And from under the linen there emerged the missing inkstand, goose and all.

Kiran, with flushed face, sat down helplessly with the inkstand in her hand, puzzled and wondering.

In the meantime, unknown to Kiran, Nilkanta had come into the room from behind. He had seen the whole thing and thought that Kiran had come like a thief to catch him in his thieving—and that his crime was discovered. How could he ever hope to convince her that he was not a thief, and that only revenge had prompted him to take the inkstand, which he meant to throw into the river at the first opportunity? In a weak moment he had put it in his box instead. 'I am not a thief,' his heart cried out, 'not a thief!' Then what was he? What could he say? That he had stolen, and that he was still not a thief? He could never explain to Kiran how grievously wrong she was. And then, how could he bear the thought that she had tried to spy on him?

At last, Kiran with a deep sigh replaced the inkstand in the box, and, as if she were the thief herself, covered it up with the linen and the trinkets as she had found them; and at the top she placed the presents, together with the currency

note which she had brought for him.

Next day the boy was nowhere to be found. The villagers had not seen him; the police could discover no trace of him. Said Sharat: 'Now, as a matter of curiosity, let us have a look at his box.' But Kiran was obstinate in her refusal to allow such a thing.

She had the box brought up to her own room; and taking out the inkstand, she threw it into the river.

The whole family went home. In a day the garden became desolate. And only that starving mongrel of Nilkanta's remained prowling along the river-banks, whining and whining as if its heart would break.

6. The Child's Return

1

Raicharan was twelve years old when he came as a servant to his master's house. He belonged to the same caste as his master and was given his master's little son to nurse. As time went on, the boy left Raicharan's arms to go to school. From school he went to college, and after college he entered the judicial service. Until the time of the boy's marriage, Raicharan was his sole attendant.

But when a mistress came into the house, Raicharan found that he had two masters instead of one. All his former influence passed to the new mistress. This was compensated for by a fresh arrival. Anukul had a son born to him and Raicharan by his unsparing attentions soon obtained complete hold over the child. He would toss him up in his arms, call to him in absurd baby language, put his face close to the baby's and withdraw it again with a laugh.

Presently the child was able to crawl and venture outside the house. When Raicharan went to catch him, he would scream with mischievous laughter and try to evade him. Raicharan was amazed at the profound skill and exact judgement the baby showed when pursued. He would say to his mistress with a look of awe and mystery: 'You son will be a judge some day.'

New wonders came in their turn. It was to Raicharan an epoch in human history when the baby began to toddle. When he called his father Ba-ba and his mother Ma-ma and Raicharan Chan-na, then Raicharan's joy was boundless. He wanted to let the whole world know.

After a while Raicharan was asked to show his ingenuity in other ways. He had, for instance, to play the part of a horse, holding the reins between his teeth, and prancing with his feet. He had also to wrestle with his little charge; and if he could not, by a wrestler's trick, fall on his back defeated at the end, a great outcry was certain.

About this time Anukul was transferred to a district on the banks of the Padma. On his way through Calcutta, he bought his son a little go-cart, and at the same time a yellow satin waist-coat, a gold-laced cap, and gold bracelets and anklets. Raicharan loved to take this finery out and put it on his little charge whenever

they went for a walk, and this he did with great pride and ceremony.

Then came the rainy season, and day after day the rain poured down. The hungry river, like an enormous serpent, swallowed terraces, villages, and cornfields, covering with its flood the tall grasses and wild casuarinas on the sandbanks. From time to time there was a deep thud as the river-banks crumbled. The unceasing roar of the main current could be heard from far away. Masses of foam, carried swiftly past, proved to the eye the swiftness of the stream.

One afternoon the rain stopped. It was cloudy, but cool and bright. Raicharan's little despot did not want to stay indoors on such a fine afternoon. His lordship climbed into the go-cart. Raicharan, between the shafts, dragged him slowly along till he reached the rice-fields on the banks of the river. There was no one in the fields, and no boat on the steam. Across the water, on the farther side, the clouds were rifted in the west. The silent ceremonial of the setting sun was revealed in all its glowing splendour. In the midst of that stillness, the child suddenly pointed in front of him and cried—'Chan-na! Pitty fow.'

On a mud-flat closeby stood a large *Kadamba* tree in full flower. My lord the baby looked at it with greedy eyes, and Raicharan knew immediately what he wanted. Only a short time before he had made, out of the flower-balls of this tree, a small go-cart and the child had been so happy dragging it about by a string, that for the whole day Raicharan was not asked to put on the reins at all. He was promoted from being a horse to being a groom.

But Raicharan had no wish that evening to go splashing knee-deep through the mud to reach the flowers. So he quickly pointed in the opposite direction, and cried: 'Look, baby look! Look at the bird!' And with all sorts of curious noises he pushed the go-cart rapidly away from the tree.

But a child, destined to be a judge, cannot be put off so easily. And besides, there was at the time nothing to attract his eyes. And you cannot keep up for ever the pretence of an imaginary bird.

The little Master's mind was made up, and Raicharan was at his wit's end. 'Very well, baby,' he said at last, 'you sit still in the cart, and I'll go and get you the pretty flower. Only mind you, don't go near the water.'

As he said this, he bared his legs to the knee, and waded through the oozing mud towards the tree.

The moment Raicharan had gone, his little Master's thoughts raced off to the forbidden water. The baby saw the river rushing by, splashing and gurgling as it went. It seemed as though the disobedient wavelets themselves were running away from some greater Raicharan with the laughter of a thousand children. At the sight of their mischievous sport, the heart of the human child grew excited

and restless. He got down stealthily from the go-cart and toddled off towards the river. On his way he picked up a small stick and leant over the bank of the stream, pretending to fish. The mischievous fairies of the river with their mysterious voices seemed to be inviting him to enter their play-house.

Raicharan had plucked a handful of flowers from the tree and was carrying them back in a fold of his cloth, his face wreathed in smiles. But when he reached the go-cart, it was empty. He looked round on all sides, but there was no one there. He looked back at the cart, and there was no one there.

In that first terrible moment, his blood froze within him. Before his eyes the whole universe swam round like a dark mist. From the depths of his broken heart he gave one piercing cry: 'Master, Master, little Master!'

But no voice answered, 'Chan-na.' No child laughed mischievously back: no scream of baby delight welcomed his return. Only the river ran on with its splashing, gurgling noise as before, as though it knew nothing at all, and had no time to attend to such a tiny human event as the death of a child.

As the evening crept on, Raicharan's mistress became more and more anxious. She sent men out everywhere to search. They went with lanterns in their hands and reached at last the banks of the Padma. There they found Raicharan rushing up and down the fields, like a stormy wind, shouting in a voice of despair: 'Master, Master, little Master!'

When they got Raicharan home at last, he fell prostrate at the feet of his mistress. They shook him, and questioned him, and asked him repeatedly where he had left the child: but all he could say was that he knew nothing.

Though everyone held the opinion that the Padma had swallowed the child, there was still a lurking doubt left. For a band of gipsies had been noticed outside the village that afternoon, and some suspicion rested on them. The mother went so far in her wild grief as to think it possible that Raicharan himself had stolen the child. She called him aside with piteous entreaty and said: 'Raicharan, give me back my baby. Give me back my child. Take from me any money you want, but give me back my child!'

Raicharan only beat his forehead in reply. His mistress in her anger ordered him out of the house.

Anukul tried to reason his wife out of this wholly unjust suspicion: 'Why on earth', he said, 'should he commit such a crime as that?'

The mother only replied: 'The baby was wearing gold ornaments. Who knows?'

It was impossible to reason with her after that.

Raicharan went back to the village of his birth. He had no son, and there was no hope that a child would now be born to him. But it came about before the end of a year that his wife gave birth to a son and died.

An overwhelming resentment at first grew up in Raicharan's heart at the sight of this new baby. At the back of his mind was an indignant suspicion that it had come as an usurper in place of the little Master. He also thought that it would be a grave offence to be happy with a son of his own after what had happened to his master's little child. Indeed, if it had not been for a widowed sister, who mothered the new baby, it would not have lived long.

But gradually a change came over Raicharan's mind. A wonderful thing happened. This new baby in turn began to crawl about, and venture outside the house, bent on mischief. It also showed an amusing cleverness in making its escape to safety. Its voice, its laughter and tears, its gestures, were those of the little Master. Sometimes, when Raicharan listened to its crying, his heart suddenly began thumping wildly against his ribs, and it seemed to him that his former little Master was crying somewhere in the unknown land of death because he had lost his Chan-na.

Phailna (for that was the name Raicharan's sister gave to the new baby) soon began to talk. It learnt to say Ba-ba and Ma-ma with a baby accent. When Raicharan heard those familiar sounds, the mystery suddenly became clear. The little Master could not cast off the spell of his Chan-na and therefore he had been reborn in his house.

The three arguments in favour of this were, to Raicharan, altogether beyond dispute:

The new baby was born soon after his little Master's death.

His wife could never have accumulated such merit as to give birth to a son in middle age.

The new baby walked with toddling steps and called out Ba-ba and Ma-ma. There was no sign lacking—this was certainly the future judge.

Then suddenly Raicharan remembered that terrible accusation of the mother. 'Ah,' he said to himself in amazement, 'the mother's heart was right. She knew I had stolen her child.'

When once he had come to this conclusion, he was filled with remorse for his past neglect. He now gave himself over, body and soul, to the new baby and became its devoted attendant. He began to bring it up as if it were the son of a rich man. He bought a go-cart, a yellow satin waist-coat, and a gold-embroidered

cap. He melted down the ornaments of his dead wife and made gold bangles and anklets. He refused to let the little one play with any child in the neighbourhood and became himself its sole companion day and night. As the baby grew to boyhood, he was so petted and spoilt and clad in such finery that the village children would call him ‘Your Lordship’, and jeer at him; and older people regarded Raicharan as unaccountably crazy about the child.

At last the time came for the boy to go to school. Raicharan sold his small piece of land and went to Calcutta. There with great difficulty he found employment as a servant and sent Phailna to school. He spared no pains to give him the best education, the best clothes, the best food. Meanwhile, he himself lived on a mere handful of rice and would say in secret: ‘Ah, my little Master, my dear little Master, you loved me so much that you came back to my house. You will never suffer from any neglect of mine.’

In this way twelve years passed away. The boy could now read and write well. He was bright, good-looking, and in perfect health. He paid a great deal of attention to his personal appearance and took great care in the parting of his hair. He was inclined to extravagance, and spent money freely in finery and enjoyment. He could never quite regard Raicharan as a father because, though he had the affection of a father, his manner was that of a servant. A further fault was this, that Raicharan kept secret from everyone the fact that he himself was the father of the child.

The students of the hostel in which Phailna was a boarder, were greatly amused by Raicharan’s country-manners, and I am afraid that behind his father’s back, Phailna joined in their fun. But, in the bottom of their hearts, all the students loved the innocent and tender-hearted old man, and Phailna also was very fond of him. But, as I have said before, he loved him with a kind condescension.

As Raicharan grew older and older, his employer was continually finding fault with him for his incompetence. He starved himself for the boy’s sake, so that he grew weaker in body and was no longer up to his daily task. He began to forget things and became dull and stupid. But his employer expected the work of a fully capable servant, and would listen to no excuse. The money that Raicharan had brought with him from the sale of his land was now exhausted and the boy continually grumbled about the state of his clothes and continually asked for more money.

3

At last Raicharan made up his mind. He threw up his work as a servant, and left

some money with Phailna. Before leaving, he promised Phailna that after seeing to some necessary business in his native village, he would immediately return.

He went off at once to Baraset where Anukul was magistrate. Anukul's wife was still broken down with grief for she had no other child.

One evening Anukul was resting after a long and weary day in court. His wife was buying from a mendicant quack at an exorbitant price, a herb which, so the quack assured her, would ensure the birth of a child. Suddenly, in the courtyard, Anukul heard a voice raised in greeting, and he went out to see who was there. There before him stood Raicharan, and when he saw his old servant, Anukul's heart was softened. He asked him many questions, and offered to take him back into his employ.

But Raicharan only smiled faintly and said in reply: 'I merely want to make obeisance to my mistress.'

Anukul accompanied Raicharan into the house, but the mistress did not receive him as warmly as his old master had done. Raicharan took no notice, but with his hand clasped in appeal, said: 'It was not the Padma that stole your baby. It was I.'

'Great God!' Anukul exclaimed: 'What! Where is he?'

Raicharan replied: 'He is with me. I will bring him the day after tomorrow.'

It was Sunday, and so the magistrate's court was not sitting. From early morning both husband and wife were gazing expectantly along the road, waiting for Raicharan's appearance. At ten o'clock he came, leading Phailna by the hand.

Anukul's wife, without questioning his identity, took the boy on her lap and was wild with excitement, laughing, weeping, touching him, kissing his hair, and his forehead, and gazing into his face with hungry, eager eyes. The boy was very good-looking and was dressed like a gentleman's son. The heart of Anukul brimmed over with a sudden gush of affection.

Nevertheless the magistrate in him asked: 'Have you any proofs that he is my son?'

Raicharan said: 'Proof? How could there be any proof of such a deed? God alone knows that I and no one else in the world stole your boy.'

When Anukul saw how eagerly his wife clung to the boy, he realised how futile it was to ask for proofs. It would be wiser to believe. And then—where could an old man like Raicharan get such a boy? And why should his faithful servant deceive him? He could surely hope for no gain from such deceit!

Still, he could not forget his old servant's lapse from duty, so he exclaimed: 'Raicharan, you must not remain any longer here.'

'Where shall I go, Master?' said Raicharan, in a voice choking with grief. Then with hands clasped imploringly, he added: 'I am old. Who will take an old man as a servant?'

The mistress said: 'Let him stay. My child will be pleased, and I forgive him.'

But Anukul's magisterial conscience would not let him permit this. 'No,' he said, 'he cannot be forgiven for what he has done.'

Raicharan bowed to the ground and clasped Anukul's feet. 'Master,' he cried, 'let me stay. It was not I that did it. It was God.'

Anukul's conscience was more shocked than ever when Raicharan tried to put the blame on God.

'No,' he said, 'I cannot allow it. I can trust you no longer. You have acted treacherously.'

Raicharan rose to his feet and said: 'It was not I that did it.'

'Who was it then?' asked Anukul.

Raicharan replied: 'It was my fate.'

But no educated man could take this for an excuse, and Anukul remained obdurate.

When Phailna saw that he was the wealthy magistrate's son, and not Raicharan's, he was at first angry, for the thought that he had been cheated all this time of his birthright. But seeing Raicharan in distress, he generously said to his father: 'Father, forgive him. Even if you don't let him live with us, let him at least have a small monthly pension.'

On hearing this, Raicharan was speechless. He looked for the last time on the face of his son. He made obeisance to his old master and mistress. Then he went out and mingled with the numberless people of the world.

At the end of the month Anukul sent some money to his village. But the money came back, for no person of the name of Raicharan could be found there.

7. The Devotee

At a time, when my unpopularity with a part of my readers had reached the nadir of its glory, and my name had become the central orb of the journals, to be attended through space with a perpetual rotation of revilement, I felt the necessity to retire to some quiet place and endeavour to forget my own existence.

I have a house in the country some miles away from Calcutta, where I can remain unknown and unmolested. The villagers there have not, as yet, come to any conclusion about me. They know I am no mere holiday-maker or pleasure-seeker; for I never outrage the silence of the village nights with the riotous noises of the city. Nor do they regard me as ascetic, because the little acquaintance they have of me carries the savour of comfort about it. I am not, to them, a traveller; for, though I am a vagabond by nature, my wandering through the village fields is aimless. They are hardly even quite certain whether I am married or single; for they have never seen me with my children. So, not being able to classify me in any animal or vegetable kingdom that they know, they have long since given me up and left me stolidly alone.

But quite lately I have come to know that there is one person in the village who is deeply interested in me. Our acquaintance began on a sultry afternoon in July. There had been rain all the morning, and the air was still wet and heavy with mist, like eyelids when weeping is over.

I sat lazily watching a dappled cow grazing on the high bank of the river. The afternoon sun was playing on her glossy hide. The simple beauty of this dress of light made me wonder idly at man's deliberate waste of money in setting up tailors' shops to deprive his own skin of its natural clothing.

While I was thus watching and lazily musing, a woman of middle age came and prostrated herself before me, touching the ground with her forehead. She carried in her robe some bunches of flowers, one of which she offered to me with folded hands. She said to me, as she offered it: "This is an offering to my God."

She went away. I was so taken aback as she uttered these words, that I could hardly catch a glimpse of her before she was gone. The whole incident was entirely simple, but it left a deep impression on my mind; and as I turned back once more to look at the cattle in the field, the zest of life in the cow, who was

munching the lush grass with deep breaths, while she whisked off the flies, appeared to me fraught with mystery. My readers may laugh at my foolishness, but my heart was full of adoration. I offered my worship to the pure joy of living, which is God's own life. Then, plucking a tender shoot from the mango tree, I fed the cow with it from my own hand, and as I did this I had the satisfaction of having pleased my God.

The next year when I returned to the village it was February. The cold season still lingered on. The morning sun came into my room, and I was grateful for its warmth. I was writing, when the servant came to tell me that a devotee, of the Vishnu cult, wanted to see me. I told him, in an absent way, to bring her upstairs, and went on with my writing. The Devotee came in, and bowed to me, touching my feet. I found that she was the same woman whom I had met, for a brief moment, a year ago.

I was able now to examine her more closely. She was past that age when one asks the question whether a woman is beautiful or not. Her stature was above the ordinary height, and she was strongly built; but her body was slightly bent owing to her constant attitude of veneration. Her manner had nothing shrinking about it. The most remarkable of her features were her two eyes. They seemed to have a penetrating power which could make distance near.

With those two large eyes of hers, she seemed to push me as she entered.

"What is this?" she asked. "Why have you brought me here before your throne, my God? I used to see you among the trees; and that was much better. That was the true place to meet you."

She must have seen me walking in the garden without my seeing her. For the last few clays, however, I had suffered from a cold, and had been prevented from going out. I had, perforce, to stay indoors and pay my homage to the evening sky from my terrace. After a silent pause the Devotee said to me: "O my God, give me some words of good."

I was quite unprepared for this abrupt request, and answered her on the spur of the moment: "Good words I neither give nor receive. I simply open my eyes and keep silence, and then I can at once both hear and see, even when no sound is uttered. Now, while I am looking at you, it is as good as listening to your voice."

The Devotee became quite excited as I spoke, and exclaimed: "God speaks to me, not only with His mouth, but with His whole body."

I said to her: "When I am silent I can listen with my whole body. I have come away from Calcutta here to listen to that sound."

The Devotee said: "Yes, I know that, and therefore 1 have come here to sit by you."

Before taking her leave, she again bowed to me, and touched my feet. I could see that she was distressed, because my feet were covered. She wished them to be bare.

Early next morning I came out, and sat on my terrace on the roof. Beyond the line of trees southward I could see the open country chill and desolate. I could watch the sun rising over the sugar-cane in the East, beyond the clump of trees at the side of the village. Out of the deep shadow of those dark trees the village road suddenly appeared. It stretched forward, winding its way to some distant villages on the horizon, till it was lost in the grey of the mist.

That morning it was difficult to say whether the sun had risen or not. A white fog was still clinging to the tops of the trees. I saw the Devotee walking through the blurred dawn, like a mist-wraith of the morning twilight. She was singing her chant to God, and sounding her cymbals.

The thick haze lifted at last; and the sun, like the kindly grandsire of the village, took his seat amid all the work that was going on in home and field.

When I had just settled down at my writing-table, to appease the hungry appetite of my editor in Calcutta, there came a sound of footsteps on the stair, and the Devotee, humming a tune to herself, entered, and bowed before me. I lifted my head from my papers.

She said to me: "My God, yesterday I took as sacred food what was left over from your meal."

I was startled, and asked her how she could do that.

"Oh," she said, "I waited at your door in the evening, while you were at dinner, and took some food from your plate when it was carried out."

This was a surprise to me, for everyone in the village knew that I had been to Europe, and had eaten with Europeans. I was a vegetarian, no doubt, but the sanctity of my cook would not bear investigation, and the orthodox regarded my food as polluted.

The Devotee, noticing my sign of surprise, said: "My God, why should I come to you at all, if I could not take your food?"

I asked her what her own caste people would say. She told me she had already spread the news far and wide all over the village. The caste people had shaken their heads, but agreed that she must go her own way.

I found out that the Devotee came from a good family in the country, and that her mother was well to-do, and desired to keep her daughter. But she preferred to be a mendicant. I asked her how she made her living. She told me that her followers had given her a piece of land, and that she begged her food from door to door. She said to me: "The food which I get by begging is divine."

After I had thought over what she said, I understood her meaning. When we get our food precariously as alms, we remember God the giver. But when we receive our food regularly at home, as a matter of course, we are apt to regard it as ours by right.

I had a great desire to ask her about her husband. But as she never mentioned him even indirectly, I did not question her.

I found out very soon that the Devotee had no respect at all for that part of the village where the people of the higher castes lived.

"They never give," she said, "a single farthing to God's service; and yet they have the largest share of God's glebe. But the poor worship and starve."

I asked her why she did not go and live among these godless people, and help them towards a better life. "That," I said with some unction, "would be the highest form of divine worship."

I had heard sermons of this kind from time to time, and I am rather fond of copying them myself for the public benefit, when the chance comes.

But the Devotee was not at all impressed. She raised her big round eyes, and looked straight into mine, and said:

"You mean to say that because God is with the sinners, therefore when you do them any service you do it to God? Is that so?"

"Yes," I replied, "that is my meaning."

"Of course," she answered almost impatiently, "of course, God is with them: otherwise, how could they go on living at all? But what is that to me? My God is not there. My God cannot be worshipped among them; because I do not find Him there. I seek Him where I can find Him."

As she spoke, she made obeisance to me. What she meant to say was really this. A mere doctrine of God's omnipresence does not help us. That God is all-pervading,—this truth may be a mere intangible abstraction, and therefore unreal to ourselves. Where I can see Him, there is His reality in my soul.

I need not explain that all the while she showered her devotion on me she did it to me not as an individual. I was simply a vehicle of her divine worship. It was not for me either to receive it or to refuse it: for it was not mine, but God's.

When the Devotee came again, she found me once more engaged with my books and papers.

"What have you been doing," she said, with evident vexation, "that my God should make you undertake such drudgery? Whenever I come, I find you reading and writing."

"God keeps his useless people busy," I answered; "otherwise they would be bound to get into mischief. They have to do all the least necessary things in life.

It keeps them out of trouble."

The Devotee told me that she could not bear the encumbrances, with which, day by day, I was surrounded. If she wanted to see me, she was not allowed by the servants to come straight upstairs. If she wanted to touch my feet in worship, there were my socks always in the way. And when she wanted to have a simple talk with me, she found my mind lost in a wilderness of letters.

This time, before she left me, she folded her hands, and said: "My God! I felt your feet in my breast this morning. Oh, how cool! And they were bare, not covered. I held them upon my head for a long time in worship. That filled my very being. Then, after that, pray what was the use of my coming to you yourself? Why did I come? My Lord, tell me truly,—wasn't it a mere infatuation?"

There were some flowers in my vase on the table. While she was there, the gardener brought some new flowers to put in their place. The Devotee saw him changing them.

"Is that all?" she exclaimed. "Have you done with the flowers? Then give them to me."

She held the flowers tenderly in the cup of her hands, and began to gaze at them with bent head. After a few moments' silence she raised her head again, and said to me: "You never look at these flowers; therefore they become stale to you. If you would only look into them, then your reading and writing would go to the winds."

She tied the flowers together in the end of her robe, and placed them, in an attitude of worship, on the top of her head, saying reverently: "Let me carry my God with me."

While she did this, I felt that flowers in our rooms do not receive their due meed of loving care at our hands. When we stick them in vases, they are more like a row of naughty schoolboys standing on a form to be punished.

The Devotee came again the same evening, and sat by my feet on the terrace of the roof.

"I gave away those flowers," she said, "as I went from house to house this morning, singing God's name. Beni, the head man of our village, laughed at me for my devotion, and said: 'Why do you waste all this devotion on Him? Don't you know He is reviled up and down the countryside?' Is that true, my God? Is it true that they are hard upon you?"

For a moment I shrank into myself. It was a shock to find that the stains of printers' ink could reach so far.

The Devotee went on: "Beni imagined that he could blow out the flame of my

devotion at one breath! But this is no mere tiny flame: it is a burning fire. Why do they abuse you, my God?"

I said: "Because I deserved it. I suppose in my greed I was loitering about to steal people's hearts in secret."

The Devotee said: "Now you see for yourself how little their hearts are worth. They are full of poison, and this will cure you of your greed."

"When a man," I answered, "has greed in his heart, he is always on the verge of being beaten. The greed itself supplies his enemies with poison."

"Our merciful God," she replied, "beats us with His own hand, and drives away all the poison. He who endures God's beating to the end is saved."

II

That evening the Devotee told me the story of her life. The stars of evening rose and set behind the trees, as she went on to the end of her tale.

"My husband is very simple. Some people think that he is a simpleton; but I know that those who understand simply, understand truly. In business and household management he was able to hold his own. Because his needs were small, and his wants few, he could manage carefully on what we had. He would never meddle in other matters, nor try to understand them."

"Both my husband's parents died before we had been married long, and we were left alone. But my husband always needed someone to be over him. I am ashamed to confess that he had a sort of reverence for me, and looked upon me as his superior. But I am sure that he could understand things better than I, though I had greater powers of talking."

"Of all the people in the world he held his Guru Thakur (spiritual master) in the highest veneration. Indeed it was not veneration merely but love; and such love as his is rare."

"Guru Thakur was younger than my husband. Oh! How beautiful he was!"

"My husband had played games with him when he was a boy; and from that time forward he had dedicated his heart and soul to this friend of his early days. Thakur knew how simple my husband was, and used to tease him mercilessly."

"He and his comrades would play jokes upon him for their own amusement; but he would bear them all with long suffering."

"When I married into this family, Guru Thakur was studying at Benares. My husband used to pay all his expenses. I was eighteen years old when he returned home to our village."

"At the age of fifteen I had my child. I was so young I did not know how to take care of him. I was fond of gossip, and liked to be with my village friends for hours together. I used to get quite cross with my boy when I was compelled to stay at home and nurse him. Alas! My child-God came into my life, but His playthings were not ready for Him. He came to the mother's heart, but the mother's heart lagged behind. He left me in anger; and ever since I have been searching for Him up and down the world.

"The boy was the joy of his father's life. My careless neglect used to pain my husband. But his was a mute soul. He has never been able to give expression to his pain.

"The wonderful thing was this, that in spite of my neglect the child used to love me more than anyone else. He seemed to have the dread that I would one day go away and leave him. So even when I was with him, he would watch me with a restless look in his eyes. He had me very little to himself, and therefore his desire to be with me was always painfully eager. When I went each day to the river, he used to fret and stretch out his little arms to be taken with me. But the bathing ghat was my place for meeting my friends, and I did not care to burden myself with the child.

"It was an early morning in August. Fold after fold of grey clouds had wrapped the mid-day round with a wet clinging robe. I asked the maid to take care of the boy, while I went down to the river. The child cried after me as I went away.

"There was no one there at the bathing ghat when I arrived. As a swimmer, I was the best among all the village women. The river was quite full with the rains. I swam out into the middle of the stream some distance from the shore.

"Then I heard a cry from the bank, 'Mother!' I turned my head and saw my boy coming down the steps, calling me as he came. I shouted to him to stop, but he went on, laughing and calling. My feet and hands became cramped with fear. I shut my eyes, afraid to see. When I opened them, there, at the slippery stairs, my boy's ripple of laughter had disappeared forever.

"I got back to the shore. I raised him from the water. I took him in my arms, my boy, and my darling, who had begged so often in vain for me to take him. I took him now, but he no more looked in my eyes and called 'Mother.'

"My child-God had come. I had ever neglected Him. I had ever made Him cry. And now all that neglect began to beat against my own heart, blow upon blow, blow upon blow. When my boy was with me, I had left him alone. I had refused to take him with me. And now, when he is dead, his memory clings to me and never leaves me.

"God alone knows all that my husband suffered. If he had only punished me

for my sin, it would have been better for us both. But he knew only how to endure in silence, not how to speak.

“When I was almost mad with grief, Guru Thakur came back. In earlier days, the relation between him and my husband had been that of boyish friendship. Now, my husband’s reverence for his sanctity and learning was unbounded. He could hardly speak in his presence, his awe of him was so great.

“My husband asked his Guru to try to give me some consolation. Guru Thakur began to read and explain to me the scriptures. But I do not think they had much effect on my mind. All their value for me lay in the voice that uttered them. God makes the draught of divine life deepest in the heart for man to drink, through the human voice. He has no better vessel in His hand than that; and He Himself drinks His divine draught out of the same vessel.

“My husband’s love and veneration for his Guru filled our house, as incense fills a temple shrine. I showed that veneration, and had peace. I saw my God in the form of that Guru. He used to come to take his meal at our house every morning. The first thought that would come to my mind on waking from sleep was that of his food as a sacred gift from God. When I prepared the things for his meal, my fingers would sing for joy.

“When my husband saw my devotion to his Guru, his respect for me greatly increased. He noticed his Guru’s eager desire to explain the scriptures to me. He used to think that he could never expect to earn any regard from his Guru himself, on account of his stupidity; but his wife had made up for it.

“Thus another five years went by happily, and my whole life would have passed like that; but beneath the surface some stealing was going on somewhere in secret. I could not detect it; but it was detected by the God of my heart. Then came a day when, in a moment our whole life was turned upside down.

“It was a morning in midsummer. I was returning home from bathing, my clothes all wet, down a shady lane. At the bend of the road, under the mango tree, I met my Guru Thakur. He had his towel on his shoulder and was repeating some Sanskrit verses as he was going to take his bath. With my wet clothes clinging all about me I was ashamed to meet him. I tried to pass by quickly, and avoid being seen. He called me by my name.

“I stopped, lowering my eyes, shrinking into myself. He fixed his gaze upon me, and said: ‘How beautiful is your body!’

“All the universe of birds seemed to break into song in the branches overhead. All the bushes in the lane seemed ablaze with flowers. It was as though the earth and sky and everything had become a riot of intoxicating joy.

“I cannot tell how I got home. I only remember that I rushed into the room

where we worship God. But the room seemed empty. Only before my eyes those same gold spangles of light were dancing which had quivered in front of me in that shady lane on my way back from the river.

“Guru Thakur came to take his food that day, and asked my husband where I had gone. He searched for me, but could not find me anywhere.

“Ah! I have not the same earth now any longer. The same sunlight is not mine. I called on my God in my dismay, and He kept His face turned away from me.

“The day passed, I know not how. That night I had to meet my husband. But the night is dark and silent. It is the time when my husband’s mind comes out shining, like stars at twilight. I had heard him speak things in the dark, and I had been surprised to find how deeply he understood.

“Sometimes I am late in the evening in going to rest on account of household work. My husband waits for me, seated on the floor, without going to bed. Our talk at such times had often begun with something about our Guru.

That night, when it was past midnight, I came to my room, and found my husband sleeping on the floor. Without disturbing him I lay down on the ground at his feet, my head towards him. Once he stretched his feet, while sleeping, and struck me on the breast. That was his last bequest.

“Next morning, when my husband woke up from his sleep, I was already sitting by him. Outside the window, over the thick foliage of the jack—fruit tree, appeared the first pale red of the dawn at the fringe of the night. It was so early that the crows had not yet begun to call.

“I bowed, and touched my husband’s feet with my forehead. He sat up, starting as if waking from a dream, and looked at my face in amazement. I said:

“‘I have made up my mind. I must leave the world. I cannot belong to you any longer. I must leave your home.’

“Perhaps my husband thought that he was still dreaming. He said not a word.

“Ah! Do hear me I pleaded with infinite pain. ‘Do hear me and understand I You must marry another wife. I must take my leave.’

“My husband said: ‘What is all this wild, mad talk? Who advises you to leave the world?’

“I said: ‘My Guru Thakur.’

“My husband looked bewildered. Guru Thakur!” he cried. ‘When did he give you this advice?’

“‘In the morning,’ I answered, ‘yesterday, when I met him on my way back from the river.’

“His voice trembled a little. He turned, and looked in my face, and asked me: ‘Why did he give you such a behest?’

'I do not know,' I answered. 'Ask him! He will tell you himself, if he can.'

"My husband said: 'It is possible to leave the world, even when continuing to live in it. You need not leave my home. I will speak to my Guru about it.'

'Your Guru,' I said, 'may accept your petition; but my heart will never give its consent. I must leave your home. From henceforth, the world is no more to me.'

"My husband remained silent, and we sat there on the floor in the dark. When it was light, he said to me: 'Let us both come to him.'

"I folded my hands and said: 'I shall never meet him again.'

"He looked into my face. I lowered my eyes. He said no more. I knew that, somehow, he had seen into my mind, and understood what was there. In this world of mine, there were only two who loved me best-my boy and my husband. That love was my God, and therefore it could brook no falsehood. One of these two left me, and I left the other. Now I must have truth, and truth alone."

She touched the ground at my feet, rose and bowed to me, and departed.

8. The Editor

As long as my wife was alive, I did not pay much attention to Probha. As a matter of fact, I thought a great deal more about Probha's mother than I did of the child herself.

At that time my dealing with her was superficial, limited to a little petting, listening to her lisping chatter, and occasionally watching her laugh and play. As long as it was agreeable to me I used to fondle her, but as soon as it threatened to become tiresome I would surrender her to her mother with the greatest readiness.

At last, on the untimely death of my wife, the child dropped from her mother's arms into mine, and I took her to my heart.

But it is difficult to say whether it was I who considered it my duty to bring up the motherless child with twofold care, or my daughter who thought it her duty to take care of her wifeless father with a superfluity of attention. At any rate, it is a fact that from the age of six she began to assume the role of housekeeper. It was quite clear that this little girl constituted herself the sole guardian of her father.

I smiled inwardly but surrendered myself completely to her hands. I soon saw that the more inefficient and helpless I was the better pleased she became. I found that even if I took down my own clothes from the peg, or went to get my own umbrella, she put on such an air of offended dignity that it was clear that she thought I had usurped her right. Never before had she possessed such a perfect doll as she now had in her father, and so she took the keenest pleasure in feeding him, dressing him, and even putting him to bed. Only when I was teaching her the elements of arithmetic or the First Reader had I the opportunity of summoning up my parental authority.

Every now and then the thought troubled me as to where I should be able to get enough money to provide her with a dowry for a suitable bridegroom. I was giving her a good education, but what would happen if she fell into the hands of an ignorant fool?

I made up my mind to earn money. I was too old to get employment in a Government office, and I had not the influence to get work in a private one. After a good deal of thought I decided that I would write books.

If you make holes in a bamboo tube, it will no longer hold either oil or water,

in fact its power of receptivity is lost; but if you blow through it, then, without any expenditure it may produce music. I felt quite sure that the man who is not useful can be ornamental, and he who is not productive in other fields can at least produce literature. Encouraged by this thought, I wrote a farce. People said it was good, and it was even acted on the stage.

Once having tasted of fame, I found myself unable to stop pursuing it farther. Days and days together I went on writing farces with an agony of determination.

Probha would come with her smile, and remind me gently: ‘Father, it is time for you to take your bath.’

And I would growl out at her: ‘Go away, go away; can’t you see that I am busy now? Don’t vex me.’

The poor child would leave me, unnoticed, with a face dark like a lamp whose light has been suddenly blown out.

I drove the maid-servants away, and beat the men-servants, and when beggars came and sang at my door I would get up and run after them with a stick. My room being by the side of the street, passers-by would stop and ask me to tell them the way, but I would request them to go to Jericho. Alas, no one took it into serious consideration that I was engaged in writing a screaming farce.

Yet I never got money in the measure that I got fun and fame. But that did not trouble me, although in the meantime all the potential bridegrooms were growing up for other brides whose parents did not write farces.

But just then an excellent opportunity came my way. The landlord of a certain village, Jahirgram, started a newspaper, and sent a request that I would become its editor. I agreed to take the post.

For the first few days I wrote with such fire and zest that people used to point at me when I went out into the street, and I began to feel a brilliant halo about my forehead.

Next to Jahirgram was the village of Ahirgram. Between the landlords of these two villages there was a constant rivalry and feud. There had been a time when they came to blows not infrequently. But now, since the magistrate had bound them both over to keep the peace, I took the place of the hired ruffians who used to act for one of the rivals. Everyone said that I lived up to the dignity of my position.

My writings were so strong and fiery that Ahirgram could no longer hold up its head. I blackened with my ink the whole of their ancient clan and family.

All this time I had the comfortable feeling of being pleased with myself. I even became fat. My face beamed with the exhilaration of a successful man of genius. I admired my own delightful ingenuity of insinuation, when at some excruciating

satire of mine, directed against the ancestry of Ahirgram, the whole of Jahirgram would burst its sides with laughter like an over-ripe melon. I enjoyed myself thoroughly.

But at last Ahirgram started a newspaper. What it published was starkly naked, without a shred of literary urbanity. The language it used was of such undiluted colloquialism that every letter seemed to scream in one's face. The consequence was that the inhabitants of both villages clearly understood its meaning.

But as I was hampered in my style by my sense of decency, my subtlety of sarcasm very often made but a feeble impression upon the power of understanding of both my friends and my enemies.

The result was that even when I won decidedly in this war of infamy my readers were not aware of my victory. At last in desperation I wrote a sermon on the necessity of good taste in literature, but found that I had made a fatal mistake. For things that are solemn offer more surface for ridicule than things that are truly ridiculous. And therefore my effort at the moral betterment of my fellow-beings had the opposite effect to that which I had intended.

My employer ceased to show me such attention as he had done. The honour to which I had grown accustomed dwindled in its quantity, and its quality became poor. When I walked in the street people did not go out of their way to carry off the memory of a word with me. They even went so far as to be frivolously familiar in their behaviour towards me—such as slapping my shoulders with a laugh and giving me nicknames.

In the meantime my admirers had quite forgotten the farces which had made me famous. I felt as if I was a burnt-out match, charred to its very end.

My mind became so depressed that, no matter how I racked my brains, I was unable to write one line. I seemed to have lost all zest for life.

Probha had now grown afraid of me. She would not venture to approach me unless summoned. She had come to understand that a commonplace doll is a far better companion than a genius of a father who writes comic pieces.

One day I saw that the Ahirgram newspaper, leaving my employer alone for once, had directed its attack on me. Some very ugly imputations had been made against myself. One by one all my friends and acquaintances came and read to me the spiciest bits, laughing heartily. Some of them said that however one might disagree with the subject-matter, it could not be denied that it was cleverly written. In the course of the day at least twenty people came and said the same thing, with slight variations to break its monotony.

In front of my house there is a small garden. I was walking there in the evening with a mind distracted with pain. When the birds had returned to their nests, and

surrendered themselves to the peace of the evening, I understood quite clearly that amongst the birds at any rate there were no writers of journalism, nor did they hold discussions on good taste.

I was thinking only of one thing, namely, what answer I could make. The disadvantage of politeness is that it is not intelligible to all classes of people. So I had decided that my answer must be given in the same strain as the attack. I was not going to allow myself to acknowledge defeat.

Just as I had come to this conclusion, a well-known voice came softly through the darkness of the evening, and immediately afterwards I felt a soft warm touch in the palm of my hand. I was so distracted and absent-minded that even though that voice and touch were familiar to me, I did not realise that I knew them.

But the next moment, when they had left me, the voice sounded in my ear, and the memory of the touch became living. My child had slowly come near to me once more, and had whispered in my ear, ‘Father,’ but not getting any answer she had lifted my right hand, and with it had gently stroked her forehead, and then silently gone back into the house.

For a long time Probha had not called me like that, nor caressed me with such freedom. Therefore it was that today at the touch of her love my heart suddenly began to yearn for her.

Going back to the house a little later, I saw that Probha was lying on her bed. Her eyes were half closed, and she seemed to be in pain. She lay like a flower which has dropped on the dust at the end of the day.

Putting my hand on her forehead, I found that she was feverish. Her breath was hot, and her pulse was throbbing.

I realised that the poor child, feeling the first symptoms of fever, had come with her thirsty heart to get her father’s love and caresses, while he was trying to think of some stinging reply to send to the newspaper.

I sat beside her. The child, without speaking a word, took my hand between her two fever-heated palms, and laid it upon her forehead, lying quite still.

All the numbers of the Jahirgram and Ahirgram papers which I had in the house I burnt to ashes. I wrote no answer to the attack. Never had I felt such joy as I did, when I thus acknowledged defeat.

I had taken the child to my arms when her mother had died, and now, having cremated this rival of her mother, again I took her to my heart.

9. The Elder Sister

I Having described at length the misdeeds of an unfortunate woman's wicked, tyrannical husband, Tara, the woman's neighbour in the village, very shortly declared her verdict: 'Fire be to such a husband's mouth.'

At this Joygopal Babu's wife felt much hurt; it did not become womankind to wish, in any circumstances whatever, a worse species of fire than that of a cigar in a husband's mouth.

When, therefore, she mildly disapproved the verdict, hard-hearted Tara cried with redoubled vehemence: 'Twere better to be a widow seven births over than the wife of such a husband,' and saying this she broke up the meeting and left.

Sasi said within herself: 'I can't imagine any offence in a husband that could so harden the heart against him.' Even as she turned the matter over in her mind, all the tenderness of her loving soul gushed forth towards her own husband now abroad. Throwing herself with outstretched arms on that part of the bed whereon her husband was wont to lie, she kissed the empty pillow, caught the smell of her husband's head, and, shutting the door, brought out from a wooden box an old and almost faded photograph with some letters in his handwriting, and sat gazing upon them. Thus she passed the hushed noontide alone in her room, musing of old memories and shedding tears of sadness.

It was no new yoke this between Sasikala and Joygopal. They had been married at an early age and had children. Their long companionship had made the days go by in an easy, commonplace sort of way. On neither side had there been any symptoms of excessive passion. They had lived together nearly sixteen years without a break, when her husband was suddenly called away from home on business, and then a great impulse of love awoke in Sasi's soul. As separation strained the tie, love's knot grew tighter, and the passion, whose existence Sasi had not felt, now made her throb with pain.

So it happened that after so many long years, and at such an age, and being the mother of children, Sasi, on this spring noon, in her lonely chamber, lying on the bed of separation, began to dream the sweet dream of a bride in her budding youth. That love of which hitherto she had been unconscious suddenly aroused her with its murmuring music. She wandered a long way up the stream, and saw many a golden mansion and many a grove on either bank; but no foothold could

she find now amid the vanished hopes of happiness. She began to say to herself that, when next she met her husband, life should not be insipid nor should the spring come in vain. How very often, in idle disputation or some petty quarrel, had she teased her husband! With all the singleness of a penitent heart she vowed that she would never show impatience again, never oppose her husband's wishes, bear all his commands, and with a tender heart submit to whatever he wished of good or ill; for the husband was all-in-all, the husband was the dearest object of love, the husband was divine.

Sasikala was the only and much-petted daughter of her parents. For this reason, though he had only a small property of his own, Joygopal had no anxieties about the future. His father-in-law had enough to support them in a village with royal state.

And then in his old age a son was born untimely to Sasikala's father. To tell the truth, Sasi was very sore in her mind at this unlooked-for, improper, and unjust action of her parents; nor was Joygopal particularly pleased.

The parents' love centred in this son of their advanced years, and when the newly arrived, diminutive, sleepy brother-in-law seized with his two weak tiny fists all the hopes and expectations of Joygopal, Joygopal found a place in a tea-garden in Assam.

His friends urged him to look for employment hard-by, but whether out of a general feeling of resentment, or knowing the chances of rapid rise in a tea-garden, Joygopal would not pay heed to anybody. He sent his wife and children to his father-in-law's, and left for Assam. It was the first separation between husband and wife in their married life.

This incident made Sasikala very angry with her baby brother. The soreness which may not pass the lips is felt the more keenly within. When the little fellow sucked and slept at his ease, his big sister found a hundred reasons, such as the rice is cold, the boys are too late for school, to worry herself and others, day and night, with her petulant humours.

But in a short time the child's mother died. Before her death, she committed her infant son to her daughter's care.

Then did the motherless child easily conquer his sister's heart. With loud whoops he would fling himself upon her, and with right good-will try to get her mouth, nose, eyes within his own tiny mouth; he would seize her hair within his little fists and refuse to give it up; awaking before the dawn, he would roll over to her side and thrill her with his soft touch, and babble like a noisy brook; later on, he would call her *jiji* and *jijima*, and in hours of work and rest, by doing forbidden things, eating forbidden food, going to forbidden places, would set up

a regular tyranny over her; then Sasi could resist no longer. She surrendered herself completely to this wayward little tyrant. Since the child had no mother, his influence over her became the greater.

II The child was named Nilmani. When he was two years old his father fell seriously ill. A letter reached Joygopal asking him to come as quickly as possible. When after much trouble he got leave and arrived, Kaliprasanna's last hour had come.

Before he died Kaliprasanna entrusted Joygopal with the charge of his son, and left a quarter of his estate to his daughter.

So Joygopal gave up his appointment, and came home to look after his property.

After a long time husband and wife met again. When a material body breaks it may be put together again. But when two human beings are divided, after a long separation, they never re-unite at the same place, and to the same time; for the mind is a living thing, and moment by moment it grows and changes.

In Sasi reunion stirred a new emotion. The numbness of age-long habit in their old marriage was entirely removed by the longing born of separation, and she seemed to win her husband much more closely than before. Had she not vowed in her mind that whatever days might come, and how long soever they might be, she would never let the brightness of this glowing love for her husband be dimmed.

Of this reunion, however, Joygopal felt differently. When they were constantly together before he had been bound to his wife by his interests and idiosyncrasies. His wife was then a living truth in his life, and there would have been a great rent in the web of his daily habit if she were left out. Consequently Joygopal found himself in deep waters at first when he went abroad. But in time this breach in habit was patched up by a new habit.

And this was not all. Formerly his days went by in the most indolent and careless fashion. For the last two years, the stimulus of bettering his condition had stirred so powerfully in his breast that he had nothing else in his thoughts. As compared with the intensity of this new passion, his old life seemed like an unsubstantial shadow. The greatest changes in a woman's nature are wrought by love; in a man's, by ambition.

Joygopal, when he returned after two years, found his wife not quite the same as of old. To her life his infant brother-in-law had added a new breadth. This part of her life was wholly unfamiliar to him—here he had no communion with his

wife. His wife tried hard to share her love for the child with him, but it cannot be said that she succeeded. Sasi would come with the child in her arms, and hold him before her husband with a smiling face—Nilmani would clasp Sasi's neck, and hide his face on her shoulder, and admit no obligation of kindred. Sasi wished that her little brother might show Joygopal all the arts he had learnt to capture a man's mind. But Joygopal was not very keen about it. How could the child show any enthusiasm? Joygopal could not at all understand what there was in the heavy-pated, grave-faced, dusky child that so much love should be wasted on him.

Women quickly understand the ways of love. Sasi at once understood that Joygopal did not care for Nilmani. Henceforth she used to screen her brother with the greatest care—to keep him away from the unloving, repelling look of her husband. Thus the child came to be the treasure of her secret care, the object of her isolated love.

Joygopal was greatly annoyed when Nilmani cried; so Sasi would quickly press the child to her breast, and with her whole heart and soul try to soothe him. And when Nilmani's cry happened to disturb Joygopal's sleep at night, and Joygopal with an expression of displeasure, and in a tortured spirit, growled at the child, Sasi felt humbled and fluttered like a guilty thing. Then she would take up the child in her lap, retire to a distance, and in a voice of pleading love, with such endearments as 'my gold, my treasure, my jewel,' lull him to sleep.

Children will fall out for a hundred things. Formerly in such cases, Sasi would punish her children, and side with her brother, for he was motherless. Now the law changed with the judge. Nilmani had often to bear heavy punishment without fault and without inquiry. This wrong went like a dagger to Sasi's heart; so she would take her punished brother into her room, and with sweets and toys, and by caressing and kissing him, solace as much as she could his stricken heart.

Thus the more Sasi loved Nilmani, the more Joygopal was annoyed with him. On the other hand, the more Joygopal showed his contempt for Nilmani, the more would Sasi bathe the child with the nectar of her love.

And when the fellow Joygopal behaved harshly to his wife, Sasi would minister to him silently, meekly, and with loving-kindness. But inwardly they hurt each other, moment by moment, about Nilmani.

The hidden clash of a silent conflict like this is far harder to bear than an open quarrel.

III Nilmani's head was the largest part of him. It seemed as if the Creator had blown through a slender stick a big bubble at its top. The

doctors feared sometimes that the child might be as frail and as quickly evanescent as a bubble. For a long time he could neither speak nor walk.

Looking at his sad grave face, you might think that his parents had unburdened all the sad weight of their advanced years upon the head of this little child.

With his sister's care and nursing, Nilmani passed the period of danger, and arrived at his sixth year.

In the month of Kartik, on the *bhaiphoto* ⁴ day, Sasi had dressed Nilmani up as a little Babu, in coat and *chadar* and red-bordered *dhoti*, and was giving him the 'brother's mark,' when her outspoken neighbour Tara came in and, for one reason or another, began a quarrel.

⁴. Lit. the 'brother's mark.' A beautiful and touching ceremony in which a Hindu sister makes a mark of sandalwood paste on the forehead of her brother and utters a formula, 'putting the barrier in Yama's doorway' (figurative for wishing long life). On these occasions, the sisters entertain their brothers and make them presents of clothes, etc.

'Tis no use,' cried she, 'giving the "brother's mark" with so much show and ruining the brother in secret.'

At this Sasi was thunderstruck with astonishment, rage, and pain. Tara repeated the rumour that Sasi and her husband had conspired together to put the minor Nilmani's property up for sale for arrears of rent, and to purchase it in the name of her husband's cousin. When Sasi heard this, she uttered a curse that those who could spread such a foul lie might be stricken with leprosy in the mouth. And then she went weeping to her husband, and told him of the gossip. Joygopal said: 'Nobody can be trusted in these days. Open is my aunt's son, and I felt quite safe in leaving him in charge of the property. He could not have allowed the *taluk* Hasilpur to fall into arrears and purchase it himself in secret, if I had had the least inkling about it.'

'Won't you sue then?' asked Sasi in astonishment.

'Sue one's cousin!' said Joygopal. 'Besides, it would be useless, a simple waste of money.'

It was Sasi's supreme duty to trust her husband's word, but Sasi could not. At last her happy home, the domesticity of her love seemed hateful to her. That home life which had once seemed her supreme refuge was nothing more than a cruel snare of self-interest, which had surrounded them, brother and sister, on all sides. She was a woman, single-handed, and she knew not how she could save the helpless Nilmani. The more she thought, the more her heart filled with terror, loathing, and an infinite love for her imperilled little brother. She thought that, if she only knew how, she would appear before the *Lat Saheb*, ⁵ nay, write to the

Maharani herself, to save her brother's property. The Maharani would surely not allow Nilmani's *taluk* ⁶ of Hasilpur, with an income of seven hundred and fifty-eight rupees a year, to be sold.

5. The Viceroy.

6. Land.

When Sasi was thus thinking of bringing her husband's cousin to book by appealing to the Maharani herself, Nilmani was suddenly seized with fever and convulsions.

Joygopal called in the village doctor. When Sasi asked for a better doctor, Joygopal said: 'Why, Matilal isn't a bad sort.'

Sasi fell at his feet, and charged him with an oath on her own head; whereupon Joygopal said: 'Well, I shall send for the doctor from town.'

Sasi lay with Nilmani in her lap, nor would Nilmani let her out of his sight for a minute; he clung to her lest by some pretence she should escape; even while he slept he would not loosen his hold of her dress.

Thus the whole day passed, and Joygopal came after nightfall to say that the doctor was not at home; he had gone to see a patient at a distance. He added that he himself had to leave that very day on account of a lawsuit, and that he had told Matilal, who would regularly call to see the patient.

At night Nilmani wandered in his sleep. As soon as the morning dawned, Sasi, without the least scruple, took a boat with her sick brother, and went straight to the doctor's house. The doctor was at home—he had not left the town. He quickly found lodgings for her, and having installed her under the care of an elderly widow, undertook the treatment of the boy.

The next day Joygopal arrived. Blazing with fury, he ordered his wife to return home with him at once.

'Even if you cut me to pieces, I won't return,' replied his wife. 'You all want to kill my Nilmani, who has no father, no mother, none other than me, but I will save him.'

'Then you remain here, and don't come back to my house,' cried Joygopal indignantly.

Sasi at length fired up. 'Your house! Why, 'tis my brother's!'

'All right, we'll see,' said Joygopal. The neighbours made a great stir over this incident. 'If you want to quarrel with your husband,' said Tara, 'do so at home. What is the good of leaving your house? After all, Joygopal is your husband.'

By spending all the money she had with her, and selling her ornaments, Sasi saved her brother from the jaws of death. Then she heard that the big property which they had in Dwarigram, where their dwelling-house stood, the income of

which was more than Rs. 1500 a year, had been transferred by Joygopal into his own name with the help of the Jemindar. And now the whole property belonged to them, not to her brother.

When he had recovered from his illness, Nilmani would cry plaintively: ‘Let us go home, sister.’ His heart was pining for his nephews and nieces, his companions. So he repeatedly said: ‘Let us go home, sister, to that old house of ours.’ At this Sasi wept. Where was their home?

But it was no good crying. Her brother had no one else besides herself in the world. Sasi thought of this, wiped her tears, and, entering the Zenana of the Deputy Magistrate, Tarini Babu, appealed to his wife. The Deputy Magistrate knew Joygopal. That a woman should forsake her home, and engage in a dispute with her husband regarding matters of property, greatly incensed him against Sasi. However, Tarini Babu kept Sasi diverted, and instantly wrote to Joygopal. Joygopal put his wife and brother-in-law into a boat by force, and brought them home.

Husband and wife, after a second separation, met again for the second time!
The decree of Prajapati! ⁷

⁷. The Hindu god of marriage.

Having got back his old companions after a long absence, Nilmani was perfectly happy. Seeing his unsuspecting joy, Sasi felt as if her heart would break.

IV

The Magistrate was touring in the Mofussil during the cold weather and pitched his tent within the village to shoot. The Saheb met Nilmani on the village *maidan*. The other boys gave him a wide berth, varying Chanakya’s couplet a little, and adding the Saheb to the list of ‘the clawed, the toothed, and the horned beasts.’ But grave-natured Nilmani in imperturbable curiosity serenely gazed at the Saheb.

The Saheb was amused and came up and asked in Bengali: ‘You read at the *pathsala*?’

The boy silently nodded. ‘What *pustaks* ⁸ do you read?’ asked the Saheb.

⁸. A literary word for books. The colloquial will be boi.

As Nilmani did not understand the word *pustak*, he silently fixed his gaze on the Magistrate’s face. Nilmani told his sister the story of his meeting the Magistrate with great enthusiasm.

At noon, Joygopal, dressed in trousers, *chapkan*, ⁹ and *pagri*, ¹⁰ went to pay his salams to the Saheb. A crowd of suitors, *chaprasies*, ¹¹ and constables stood about him. Fearing the heat, the Saheb had seated himself at a court-table outside the tent, in the open shade, and placing Joygopal in a chair, questioned him about the state of the village. Having taken the seat of honour in open view of the community, Joygopal swelled inwardly, and thought it would be a good thing if any of the Chakrabartis or Nandis came and saw him there.

^{9.} A chapkan is a long coat.

^{10.} Turban.

^{11.} Servants.

At this moment, a woman, closely veiled, and accompanied by Nilmani, came straight up to the Magistrate. She said: ‘Saheb, into your hands I resign my helpless brother. Save him.’ The Saheb, seeing the large-headed, solemn boy, whose acquaintance he had already made, and thinking that the woman must be of a respectable family, at once stood up and said: ‘Please enter the tent.’

The woman said: ‘What I have to say I will say here.’

Joygopal writhed and turned pale. The curious villagers thought it capital fun, and pressed closer. But the moment the Saheb lifted his cane they scampered off.

Holding her brother by the hand, Sasi narrated the history of the orphan from the beginning. As Joygopal tried to interrupt now and then, the Magistrate thundered with a flushed face, ‘*Chup rao*,’ and with the tip of his cane motioned to Joygopal to leave the chair and stand up.

Joygopal, inwardly raging against Sasi, stood speechless. Nilmani nestled up close to his sister, and listened awe-struck.

When Sasi had finished her story, the Magistrate put a few questions to Joygopal, and on hearing his answers, kept silence for a long while, and then addressed Sasi thus: ‘My good woman, though this matter may not come up before me, still rest assured I will do all that is needful about it. You can return home with your brother without the least misgiving.’

Sasi said: ‘Saheb, so long as he does not get back his own home, I dare not take him there. Unless you keep Nilmani with you, none else will be able to save him.’

‘And what would you do?’ queried the Saheb.

‘I will retire to my husband’s house,’ said Sasi; ‘there is nothing to fear for me.’

The Saheb smiled a little, and, as there was nothing else to do, agreed to take charge of this lean, dusty, grave, sedate, gentle Bengali boy whose neck was ringed with amulets.

When Sasi was about to take her leave, the boy clutched her dress. ‘Don’t be frightened, *baba*,—come,’ said the Saheb. With tears streaming behind her veil, Sasi said: ‘Do go, my brother, my darling brother—you will meet your sister again!’

Saying this she embraced him and stroked his head and back, and releasing her dress, hastily withdrew; and just then the Saheb put his left arm round him. The child wailed out: ‘Sister, oh, my sister!’ Sasi turned round at once, and with outstretched arm made a sign of speechless solace, and with a bursting heart withdrew.

Again in that old, ever-familiar house husband and wife met. The decree of Prajapati!

But this union did not last long. For soon after the villagers learnt one morning that Sasi had died of cholera in the night, and had been instantly cremated.

None uttered a word about it. Only neighbour Tara would sometimes be on the point of bursting out, but people would shut up her mouth, saying, ‘Hush!’

At parting, Sasi gave her word to her brother they would meet again. Where that word was kept none can tell.

10. Emancipation

‘Theft from the king’s treasury!’ The cry ran through the town. The thief must be found, or there will be trouble for the officer of the guards.

Vajrasen, a stranger from a foreign port, came to sell horses in the town, and, robbed by a band of robbers of all his earnings, was lying in a ruined temple outside the walls. They charged him with the theft, chained him, and led him through the streets to the prison.

Proud Shyama, of a perilous charm, sat in her balcony idly watching the passing crowd. Suddenly she shuddered, and cried to her attendant: ‘Alas, who is that godlike young man with a noble face, led in chains like a common thief? Ask the officer in my name to bring him in before me.’

The chief of the guards came with the prisoner, and said to Shyama: ‘Your favour is untimely, my lady; I must hasten to do the king’s bidding.’ Vajrasen quickly raised his head, and broke out: ‘What caprice is this of yours, woman, to bring me in from the street to mock me with your cruel curiosity?’

‘Mock you!’ cried Shyama; ‘I could gladly take your chains upon my limbs in exchange for my jewels.’

Then turning to the officer, she said: ‘Take all the money I have, and set him free.’

He bowed, and said: ‘It cannot be. A victim we must have to stay the king’s wrath.’

‘I ask only two days’ respite for the prisoner,’ urged Shyama. The officer smiled, and consented.

On the end of his second night in prison, Vajrasen said his prayers, and sat waiting for his last moment, when suddenly the door opened, and the woman appeared with a lamp in her hand, and at her signal the guard unchained the prisoner.

‘You have come to me with that lamp, merciful woman,’ said he, ‘like the dawn with her morning star after a night of delirious fever.’

‘Merciful indeed,’ Shyama cried, and broke out in wild laughter, till tears came with a burst, and she sobbed, and said: ‘There is no stone brick in this prison-tower harder than this woman’s heart.’ And clutching the prisoner’s hand she dragged him out of the gates.

On the Varuna's bank the sun rose. A boat was waiting at the landing. 'Come to the boat with me, stranger youth,' Shyama said. 'Only know that I have cut all bonds, and I drift in the same boat with you.'

Swiftly the boat glided on. Merrily sang the birds. 'Tell me, my love,' asked Vajrasen, 'what untold wealth did you spend to buy my freedom?'

'Hush, not now,' said Shyama.

Morning wore on to noon. Village women had gone back home with their clothes dripping from their bath, and pitchers filled with water. Marketing was over. The village path glared in the sun all lonely.

In the warm gusts of the noontide wind Shyama's veil dropped from her face. Vajrasen murmured in her ears: 'You freed me from a bond that was brief to bind me in a bond everlasting. Let me know how it was done.' The woman drew her veil over her face, and said: 'Not now, my beloved.'

The day waned, and it darkened. The breeze died away. The crescent moon glimmered feebly at the edge of the steel-black water.

Shyama sat in the dark, resting her head on the youth's shoulder. Her hair fell loose on his arms.

'What I did for you was hard, beloved,' she said in a faint whisper, 'but it is harder to tell you. I shall tell it in a few words. It was the love-sick boy Uttiya who took your place, charging himself with the theft, and making me a present of his life. My greatest sin has been committed for the love of you, my best beloved.'

While she spoke the crescent moon had set. The stillness of the forest was heavy with the sleep of countless birds.

Slowly the youth's arm slipped from the woman's waist. Silence round them became hard and cold as stone.

Suddenly the woman fell at his feet, and clung to his knee crying: 'Forgive me, my love. Leave it to my God to punish me for my sin.'

Snatching his feet away, Vajrasen hoarsely cried: 'That my life should be bought by the price of a sin! That every breath of mine should be accursed!'

He stood up, and leapt from the boat on the bank, and entered the forest. He walked on and on till the path closed and the dense trees, tangled with creepers, stopped him with fantastic gestures.

Tired, he sat on the ground. But who was it that followed him in silence, the long dark way, and stood at his back like a phantom?

'Will you not leave me?' shouted Vajrasen.

In a moment the woman fell upon him with an impetuous flood of caresses; with her tumbling hair and trailing robes, with her showering kisses and panting

breath she covered him all over.

In a voice choked with pent-up tears, she said: 'No, no; I shall never leave you. I have sinned for you. Strike me, if you will; kill me with your own hands.'

The still blackness of the forest shivered for a moment; a horror ran through the twisting roots of trees underground. A groan and a smothered breath rose through the night, and a body fell down upon the withered leaves.

The morning sun flashed on the far-away spire of the temple when Vajrasen came out of the woods. He wandered in the hot sun the whole day by the river on the sandy waste, and never rested for a moment.

In the evening he went back aimlessly to the boat. There on the bed lay an anklet. He clutched it, and pressed it to his heart till it bruised him. He fell prone upon the blue mantle left lying in a heap in the corner, hid his face in its folds, and from its silken touch and evasive fragrance struggled to absorb into his being the memory of a dear living body.

The night shook with a tense and tingling silence. The moon disappeared behind the trees. Vajrasen stood up, and stretched out his arms towards the woods, and called: 'Come, my love, come.'

Suddenly a figure came out of the darkness, and stood on the brink of the water.

'Come, love, come.'

'I have come, my beloved. Your dear hands failed to kill me. It is my doom to live.'

Shyama came, and stood before the youth. He looked at her face, he moved a step to take her in his arms—then thrust her away with both hands, and cried: 'Why, oh why did you come back?'

He shut his eyes, turning his face, and said: 'Go, go; leave me.'

For a minute the woman stood silent before she knelt at his feet and bowed low. Then she rose, and went up the river-bank, and vanished in the vague of the woods like a dream merging into sleep; and Vajrasen, with aching heart, sat silent in the boat.

11. Exercise-book

Little Uma was considered a troublesome person by her family when she started learning how to write. She scribbled on every wall of the house with a piece of coal words from a Bengali nursery rhyme. Finding a copy of the novel Haridas's Secrets, she wrote a phrase "Black water, red flower" on every page. She wrote on the pages of the family almanac, as well as in her father's account book.

Initially, she was not scolded or checked for writing here-and-there. But one day Uma made the mistake of writing on her brother Gobindlal's essays. Gobindlal used to frequently write for newspapers.

Though he did not appear to be capable of deep thought, nor did he use much logic in his writing, nevertheless, using the power of rhetoric, he often wrote and published.

Uma's brother was beside himself with rage. He beat her and then took away from her writing tools. Deeply hurt and humiliated, Uma wept and rightly felt that the punishment she received was much more than she deserved.

After a period of time, Gobindlal returned her writing tools and also gifted her Exercise Book. From that day, this exercise book assumed great importance in Uma's life. Many of her individual thoughts, lines from poems and prose found a place in this exercise book.

Very soon however, such opportunities for reading, writing and quietly expressing herself came to an abrupt end when Uma was married off at the tender age of nine to Pyarimohan, a friend and literary associate of her brother. Child marriage was a prominent social evil of the times. The parting advice that Uma received from her mother and brother was to refrain from reading and writing. Such statements point to a clear gender bias in society at the turn of the nineteenth century in India, when literacy in females was considered an offence. The child-bride's heart was full of fear and misgivings as she left her parent's house. Her trusted servant Jashi accompanied her to her in-laws house, and stayed there for a few days to settle Uma in a new environment. The days Jashi returned to Uma's parents' house, Uma shut the door of her room and poured out her heart in her previous exercise book: "Jashi has gone home, I want to go back to mother too." This little act reveals several facets of the girl-child's plight—shutting the door shows how much a simple act of literacy was forbidden for girls, that is why she had to write secretly. Also, her longing to go back to her

parents as soon as her servant went back, shows how little emotionally and psychologically prepared was this child for marriage. Through such a presentation of a child-bride's point of view, Tagore exposes the social evil of child-marriage and holds it up for social scrutiny and reform.

Her heart-rending outpourings in the exercise-book, such as, "If *Dada* comes to take me home just once, I will never spoil his writings again", "*Dada*, I beg of you, take me home just once, I'll never make you angry again", demonstrate the child's deep longing for her parents as well as for her parental home, and the curtailment of the child's freedom and basic human rights.

Writing the exercise book became a source of creative self-expression for Uma. Being literate was virtually a taboo for women in those days. One-day Uma's three sisters-in-law observed her through a crack in the door when she was writing. Reading and writing amongst women was so frowned upon at the turn of the nineteenth century in India that the writer ironically comments, "The goddess of learning Saraswati, had never made even so secret a visit to the women's quarters of their house." Uma's husband was duly informed about her "misdeed". Pyare Mohan, the typical male chauvinist, was very disturbed to know what had happened. He believed in the viewpoint that education was solely the prerogative of the male sex.

After the scolding and mockery she received from her husband, Uma did not write in her exercise book for a long time. However, one autumn morning, when she heard a beggar woman singing an "Agamani" song, the homesick little girl was so emotionally moved that she could not restrain herself from writing. According to Hindu mythology, goddess Durga visits her parental home once during autumn. A traditional Bengali song called "Agamani" is sung to welcome her. Uma identified her longing to be with her mother with the goddess Uma's (another name of goddess Durga) reunion with her mother. Calling the singer to her room secretly, she wrote down the words of the song in her exercise book. Her sisters-in-law again observed what she was doing through the crack in the door and, despite Uma's pleadings to the contrary, her husband was informed about it. Pyare Mohan took a very serious view of what was regarded as a grave offence by the community. He snatched the exercise book from her and humiliated the little girl by mockingly reading aloud from it while his three sisters laughed.

Subsequently, Uma did not receive her exercise book back. Pyare Mohan too had an exercise book in which he wrote his lopsided views about life. But, says the writer regretfully: "there was no benefactor of human kind to seize that book and destroy it." In other words, the gender bias against women in society gave

men the prerogative to demand and snatch away a woman's writing (which was a mode of intelligent self-expression). But there was nobody to snatch and destroy a man's writings, which may be full of nonsense and prejudices. Rabindranath Tagore strongly felt the need for social reforms, particularly in the areas of education, gender equality and child marriage. The short story exposes inequality between men and women in pre-independent India. Women were denied education and treated as being intellectually inferior to men. They were expected to stay at home and have no say in the outside world.

12. Finally

Part I

Apurbakrishna is on his way home from Calcutta with his newfangled B.A. degree.

The river is narrow and tends to dry up after the rainy season. But it is mid-August and it is full to the brim, its water kissing the foundation of the village's fencing and the earth beneath the bamboo thicket.

The sky is cloudless and the sun has shone brightly after days of deluge.

If we could peek into the mind of Apurbakrishna sailing on that boat we would have seen a similar sight, for his soul-river is full to the brink, glimmering and laved.

The boat moors at the jetty. The concrete roof of Apurba's home is visible through the trees. He hadn't informed anyone of his arrival. So there is no one to receive him at the riverside. The boatman comes forward to help Apurba with his luggage but Apurba motions him and takes the bag himself and disembarks quickly. There's a spring in his step.

The moment he gets down Apurba slips and falls on the slippery mud with his bag. As he falls, the shore erupts with a melodious high-pitched laughter startling the birds on the nearby banyan tree.

A visibly embarrassed Apurba regains poise and looks about himself. He spies a girl seated on a pile of fresh bricks unloaded from the money lender's boat, in splits of laughter.

He knew her as Mrinmayee, the daughter of their new neighbor. They had a home far away by a walloping river and had migrated here two or three years back when their river banks breached.

Her name had been associated with an amount of infamy. The menfolk called her moonstruck, but the wives of the village were worried sick by her feral disposition. She always played with the boys and looked down upon the lasses no end and she came across like a free-booting Maratha cavalry upon the village kids.

Her boldness stemmed from her father's indulgences and her mother never missed an opportunity to complain about this to her own friends. But Mrinmayee's mother never hurt her feelings mindful of her expat husband's affection for his daughter and how he could not stand to see her cry.

Mrinmayee is dark-skinned. Her somewhat short curls stroke her back. She has a boyish countenance and her two dark fulsome eyes betray neither modesty, nor

fear, nor dalliance. She is tall, able-bodied, healthful and strong, but no one thinks twice about her age, for if they did they would have found fault with her parents for not marrying her off. When perchance a feudal lord from a far off place arrives in his boat, the villagers get all worked up and women who happen to be at the river bank draw veils over their faces like a set of curtains hanging down to the ends of their nares. Mrinmayee nevertheless rushes to the riverside holding a naked child, waltzing her curls over her back and observes the new arrival with curiosity like a fearless fawn of a land sans hunters and predators and finally returning to her own band of boys gives an elaborate account of the nuances of this newly-arrived creature.

Our Apurba has looked upon this free spirit on several prior occasions during his vacations and has meditated on her not only in his leisure but at other times as well. Each day we come across so many faces, but a few of them manage to plant themselves right inside our minds. And that is not just by virtue of beauty, they have some attendant talent. I suppose that talent is lucidity. Human nature fails to mirror itself amply in most faces. But the face that abundantly draws out the mystic cave-dwelling inner being is most noticeable and forthwith leaves its mark on the observer's mind. A romping nonconforming feminine nature bespeaks itself and pulsates unceasingly in the eyes and aspect of this girl like a swift free-roaming wild antelope and makes her vibrant face unforgettable.

Readers, it goes without saying that however mellifluous Mrinmayee's frolicking laughter may have sounded it made our hapless Apurba feel awkward. He quickly handed over his bag to the boatman and made for his home, red-faced.

The frame-up was near-perfect. Riverside, overshadowed by trees, birds singing, the morning sun, of twenty years age; agreed that the pile of bricks wasn't as much praiseworthy but the personage who occupied that seat pleasantly cast her grace on its hard arid constitution. Alas, what can be more ironical than this twist of fate from poetry to the downright burlesque at the very first step.

Part II

Apurba reached his home walking along a path shaded by trees with an earful of that laughter emanating from the summit over the pile of bricks, his shawl and luggage daubed in mud.

Apurba's unexpected arrival gladdened his widowed mother. At once servants were sent out far and near to fetch dense sweetened milk, yogurt and rohu and the neighborhood was abuzz.

After dining, Apurba's mother broached the topic of his marriage. Apurba was all prepared for it for such a topic had been broached earlier too. Just that the son in question had courted neoteric ways and vowed not to wed till he obtained his bachelor's degree in arts. His mother had been patient so long owing to this reason, and so he had no more excuses left.

Said Apurba, "It will be decided after I meet the girl" to which his mother replied, "We have seen the girl, don't trouble yourself with that." Apurba was quite eager to trouble himself with that and said, "I won't marry a girl without first meeting her." What unheard of outlandish nonsense thought the mother but she gave in nonetheless.

That night, as Apurba put out the lamp and retired, he lay awake cloistered in his bed and a free-flowing melodious high-pitched laughter seemed to fill his ears from across the sounds and silence of the rainy night. And his mind tormented itself looking for a way to prevent his foot from slipping in the morning's incident. The girl did not even get an opportunity to know that I, Apurbakrishna have assimilated considerable learning, have lived in Calcutta city for a long time and despite having somehow slipped on slippery ground and fallen over, I am no ordinary village youth to be laughed at scornfully.

The following day Apurba is all set to visit a prospective bride. The place is not far, their home is situated in the neighborhood. He dresses up going for a silken gown, a roundish turban, and a pair of varnished shoes and a silken umbrella, instead of his habitual loincloth and shawl and sets out in the morning.

The moment he steps into his prospective in-laws' house they crowd around him to give him a grand welcome. At long last, the nervous girl is brought before the groom all painted and polished and wrapped in a colorful sari made of fine cloth, her hair done up with brocaded cloth. She sits silently at a corner bringing her head somewhat close to her knees and an aged servant-woman appears behind her to provide encouragement. A kid brother of the prospective bride observed the turban, watch guard and even the newly-grown beard of this

intruder to their family. Apurba stroked his mustache for some time and finally asked in a demure tone, "What do you study?" The pyramid of modesty clad in cloth and ornaments did not answer. Following a few repetitions of the question and after much patting from the servant the girl answered softly and swiftly without stopping to breathe, "Elegant Reader—Part Two, The Essence of Bengali Grammar—Part One, An Account of Geography, Arithmetic, The History of India." At that moment there was some commotion outside and in an instant Mrinmayee entered the room running and panting, her locks swinging freely. She started pulling the bride's brother Rakhal by his arm without even glancing at Apurbakrishna. Rakhal was engrossed in his observation and refused to get up. The servant started censuring Mrinmayee as severely as possible without screaming. Apurbakrishna mustered as much demureness and glory as he possibly could and sat tall with his turban-clad head and stroked his watch guard close to his belly. Unable to persuade her companion, Mrinmayee slapped his back and quickly pulled the veil off the bride's face before running out. The servant growled at her and Rakhal starting laughing seeing his sister's veil suddenly removed. He had no grievance at being slapped on the back, being used to these kinds of exchanges. In fact in the past Mrinmayee's hair was long enough to cover half of her back and it was Rakhal who had stuck a pair scissors into it. As this happened, Mrinmayee herself snatched the scissors and mercilessly cut off a considerable length of her long hair in a fit of anger. Her locks fell to the ground like a heap of dark grapes. These were the terms of their child's play.

Hereafter this silent examination did not last long. The girl who was the heap of modesty rose laboriously and returned to the inner chambers of the house assisted by the servant. Apurba got up content in his demureness and stroking his faint mustache. But when he arrived at the exit door, he found his varnished pair of shoes missing and none could tell where they were.

This greatly embarrassed the hosts who were therefore very vocal in their criticism of the offender. After a failed search Apurba was forced to borrow a pair of old oversized worn-out shoes belonging to the host and headed for home walking gingerly on the muddy village road neatly dressed in his pantaloons, gown and turban.

When he reached the pondside, he once again heard that abundant high-pitched laughter. It was as if the lighthearted lady of the forest suddenly could not help laughing at Apurba's incongruous footwear.

Apurba stopped abruptly and looked around himself unobstructed when all of a sudden the shameless offender emerged from the dense foliage and took to her

heels after placing his shoes before him. But Apurba swiftly grabbed her arms and took her captive.

Mrinmayee twisted and turned and did her best to free herself but could not. Reflected sunlight shone on her amused mischievous and rotund face surrounded by her curly hair, from beyond the branches. Just as a curious traveler bends down to gaze intently at the bottom of a clear stream brightened by sun-rays, Apurba looked deep into Mrinmayee's upturned face and her two restless eyes reminiscent of lightning and gradually released his grasp as if failing in his responsibility by letting go of his prisoner. Had Apurba thrashed Mrinmayee, she would not have been the least surprised, but she could not fathom the meaning of this gentle comeuppance in the middle of a secluded road.

And the restless laughter seemed to fill the skies like the jingling of anklets of prancing nature. Apurbakrishna returned home slowly, engrossed in thought.

Part III

All day long Apurba fought shy of his mother on various pretexts and did not enter the inner chambers of their home. He had an invitation and lunched there. It isn't easy to savvy why an educated reserved and thoughtful individual like Apurba would torment himself so much trying to recover his lost grandeur, to fully lay out his inner glory in the eyes of a plebeian lass. What does it matter what a crazed rustic girl thinks of him. What has he to lose if for a moment she considers him laughable and on the next she goes out to play with a dull illiterate child named Rakhal, oblivious of him. What need has he to prove to her that he is a literary critic associated with a monthly named A Lamp to the World and that his possessions include perfumes, shoes, Rubini's camphor, colored stationery, a book named Learning to Play the Harmonium and a filled up notebook waiting to be published like the morning sun waiting in the night's womb. But it is difficult to argue with feelings and therefore Apurbakrishna Roy, B.A. refused to be vanquished by this loony village girl.

Apurba entered the inner chambers of his home in the evening and his mother asked him, "Well Apu, what do you think of the girl? Don't you like her?"

Apurba replied somewhat boldly, "Yes Ma, I have seen the girls, and I like one of them."

Surprised, she says, "How many girls did you meet!"

After plenty of stalling it transpired that her son wishes to wed Mrinmayee, the daughter of their neighbor, Sarat. What an outcome of so much education!

Apurba was initially quite shy but when his mother objected to his choice vehemently, he displayed resoluteness saying that if she didn't allow him to wed Mrinmayee, he wouldn't wed at all. The more he tried to think of the other girl who looked and behaved like an inanimate puppet is the emptier the prospect of getting married appeared to him.

After two or three days of arguments, fasts and lost sleep, Apurba prevailed over his mother. His mother consoled herself thinking Mrinmayee is just a little girl whose mother lacks the capacity to educate her and that she herself would successfully counsel her daughter-in-law to eschew her wayward ways. She also convinced herself that Mrinmayee had a pretty face. But when she achieved this her heart filled up with despair as she came across Mrinmayee's short hair in her train of thought, but she hoped that this too could be corrected by the application of hair oil and by tying up her hair tightly into a bun.

The neighbors termed this choice a wonderful choice, the groom's name

meaning wonderful. Many of them loved Mrinmayee, loony as she was, but none of them would be willing to have her as a daughter-in-law.

Mrinmayee's father, Ishan Majumdar was informed in good time. He worked as a clerk for a steamer company at a far-away station by a river bank and his job involved selling tickets and supervising the loading and unloading of goods which he did from a tiny cottage with a tin roof.

Teardrops descended from his eyes as he received news of his Mrinmayee's wedding proposal and it is impossible to tell what proportion of his tears stemmed from the apprehension that he would miss his daughter or which ones were the teardrops of joy.

Ishan requested his employer abroad for leave but the latter regarded it as a thing of no consequence and refused him. So he requested that the wedding be deferred till the festival of worshiping goddess Durga when he was likely to get a week's leave anyway. But Apurba's mother was unwilling to wait and she decided that the wedding would have to take place in that very month, there being an auspicious date.

When both his prayers were refused, Ishan cheerlessly continued in his role of weighing goods and selling tickets.

Thereafter Mrinmayee's mother and all the elderly women in the village took to counseling her on her future duties day in and day out. And they very successfully gave the whole affair a monstrous mien by severely discounting sporting ability, swift movement, laughter, the habit of playing with boys and eating according to one's appetite. And Mrinmayee was ill at ease wondering whether she had been awarded a life sentence with a death sentence to be executed following the completion of the former.

She stepped back like a wild pony and insisted, "I won't marry."

13. The Fugitive Gold

I

After his father's death, Baidyanath settled down on the proceeds of the Government stock which had been left to him. It never even occurred to him to look for work. His manner of spending time was to cut off branches of trees, and with minute care and skill he would polish them into walking-sticks. The boys and young men of the neighbourhood were candidates for these, and his supply of them never fell short of the demand.

By the blessing of the God of Fruition, Baidyanath had two boys and one daughter who had been given in marriage at the proper time.

But his wife Sundari bore a grievance against her lot, because there was not the same surplus in the resources of her husband as in those of their cousin across the road. The dispensation of Providence struck her as unnecessarily imperfect, when she could not show the same glitter of gold in her house, and tilt her nose as superciliously as her neighbour.

The condition of her own house gave her continual annoyance, where things were not only inconvenient but humiliating. Her bedstead, she was sure, was not decent enough to carry a corpse, and even an orphan bat who for seven generations had been without relatives would have scorned to accept an invitation within such dilapidated walls; while as for the furniture, why, it would have brought tears to the eyes of the most hardened of ascetics. It is impossible for a cowardly sex like man to argue against such palpable exaggerations, so Baidyanath merely retired on to his veranda, and worked with redoubled energy at polishing his walking-sticks.

But the rampart of silence is not the surest means of self-defence. Sometimes the wife would break upon her husband at his work, and, without looking at him, say: 'Please tell the milkman to stop delivering milk.'

At which Baidyanath, after his first shock of speechlessness, might possibly stammer out: 'Milk? How can you get on if you stop the supply? What will the children drink?'

To this his wife would answer: 'Rice water.' On another day she would use quite the opposite method of attack, and, suddenly bursting into the room, would exclaim: 'I give it up, you manage your own household.'

Baidyanath would mutter in despair: ‘What do you wish me to do?’

His wife would reply: ‘You do the marketing for this month,’ and then give him a list of materials sufficient for reckless orgies of feasting.

If Baidyanath could summon up courage to ask: ‘What is the necessity of so much?’ he would get the reply:

‘Indeed it will be cheaper for you to let the children die of starvation, and me also for that matter.’

II

One day after finishing his morning meal Baidyanath was sitting alone, preparing the thread for a kite, when he saw one of those wandering mendicants, who are reputed to know the secret of transmuting the baser metals into gold. In a moment there flashed to his mind the surest chance of unearned increment to his funds. He took the mendicant into his house, and was surprised at his own cleverness when he secured the consent of his guest to teach him the art of making gold. After having swallowed an alarming amount of nourishment, and a considerable portion of Baidyanath’s paternal inheritance, the ascetic at last encouraged Baidyanath and his wife with the hope that the next day they would see their dream realised.

That night no one had any sleep. The husband and wife, with astounding prodigality, began to build golden castles in the air and discuss the details of the architecture. Their conjugal harmony was so unusually perfect for that night that in spite of disagreements they were willing to allow compromises in their plans for each other’s sake.

Next day the magician had mysteriously disappeared, and with him the golden haze from the atmosphere in which they had been living. The sunlight itself appeared dark, and the house and its furniture seemed to its mistress to be four times more disgraceful than before.

Henceforth, if Baidyanath ventured even a truism on the most trifling or household matters, his wife would advise him with withering sarcasm to be careful of the last remnant of his intelligence after the reckless expenditure from which it had suffered.

Sundari in the meantime was showing her hand to every palmist that came her way, and also her horoscope. She was told that in the matter of children she would be fortunate, and that her house would soon be filled with sons and daughters. But such prospect of overgrowth of population in her house did not produce any exhilaration in her mind.

At last one day an astrologer came and said that if within a year her husband did not come upon some hidden treasure, then he would throw his science to the winds and go about begging. Hearing him speak with such desperate certainty, Sundari could not entertain a moment's doubt as to the truth of his prophecy.

There are certain recognised methods for acquiring wealth, such as agriculture, service, trade, and the legal and illegal professions. But none of these points out the direction of hidden wealth. Therefore, while his wife spurred him on, it more and more perplexed him to decide upon the particular mound which he should excavate, or the part of the river-bed where he should send down a diver to search.

In the meantime the Poojah Festival was approaching. A week before the day, boats began to arrive at the village landing laden with passengers returning home with their purchases: baskets full of vegetables, tin trunks filled with new shoes, umbrellas and clothes for the children, scents and soap, the latest story-books, and perfumed oil for the wives.

The light of the autumn sun filled the cloudless sky with the gladness of festival, and the ripe paddy fields shimmered in the sun, while the cocoa-nut leaves washed by the rains rustled in the fresh cool breeze.

The children, getting up very early, went to see the image of the goddess which was being prepared in the courtyard of the neighbouring house. When it was their meal-time, the maidservant had to come and drag them away by force. At that time Baidyanath was brooding over the futility of his own life, amidst this universal stir of merriment in the neighbourhood. Taking his two children from the servant, he drew them towards him, and asked the elder one: 'Well, Obu, tell me what do you want for a present this time?'

Obu replied without a moment's hesitation: 'Give me a toy boat, father.'

The younger one, not wishing to be behindhand with his brother, said: 'Oh, father, do give me a toy boat too.'

III

At this time an uncle of Sundari's had come to his house from Benares, where he was working as an advocate, and Sundari spent a great part of her time going round to see him.

At last one day she said to her husband: 'Look here, you will have to go to Benares.'

Baidyanath at once concluded that his wife had received from an astrologer a positive assurance of his impending death, and was anxious for him to die in that

holy place, to secure better advantage in the next world.

Then he was told that at Benares there was a house in which rumour said there was some hidden treasure. Surely it was destined for him to buy that house and secure the treasure.

Baidyanath, in a fit of desperation, tried to assert his independence, and exclaimed: ‘Good heavens, I cannot go to Benares.’

Two days passed, during which Baidyanath was busily engaged in making toy boats. He fixed masts in them, and fastened sails, hoisted a red flag, and put in rudders and oars. He did not even forget steersmen and passengers to boot. It would have been difficult to find a boy, even in these modern times, cynical enough to despise such a gift. And when Baidyanath, the night before the festival, gave these boats to his boys, they became wild with delight.

On hearing their shouts Sundari came in, and at the sight of these gifts flew into a fury of rage, and, seizing the toys, threw them out of the window.

The younger child began to scream with disappointment, and his mother, giving him a resounding box on the ears, said: ‘Stop your silly noise.’

The elder boy, when he saw his father’s face, forgot his own disappointment, and with an appearance of cheerfulness said: ‘Never mind, father, I will go and fetch them first thing in the morning.’

Next day Baidyanath agreed to go to Benares. He took the children in his arms, and kissing them good-bye, left the house.

IV

The house at Benares belonged to a client of his wife’s uncle, and for that reason perhaps the price was fairly high. Baidyanath took possession of it, and began to live there alone. It was situated right on the river-bank, and its walls were washed by the current.

At night Baidyanath began to have an eerie feeling, and he drew his sheet over his head, but could not sleep. When in the depth of night all was still he was suddenly startled to hear a clanking sound from somewhere. It was faint but clear—as though in the nether regions the treasurer of the god Mammon was counting out his money.

Baidyanath was terrified, but with the fear there mingled curiosity and the hope of success. With trembling hand he carried the lamp from room to room, to discover the place where the sound had its origin, till in the morning it became inaudible among the other noises.

The next day at midnight the sound was heard again, and Baidyanath felt like a traveller in a desert, who can hear the gurgle of water without knowing from which direction it is coming, hesitating to move a step, for the fear of taking a wrong path and going farther away from the spring.

Many days passed in this anxious manner, until his face, usually so serenely content, became lined with anxiety and care. His eyes were sunk in their sockets, and had a hungry look, with a glow like that of the burning sand of the desert under the mid-day sun.

At last one night a happy thought came to him, and locking all the doors, he began to strike the floors of all the rooms with a crowbar. From the floor of one small room came a hollow sound. He began to dig. It was nearly dawn when the digging was completed.

Through the opening made Baidyanath saw that underneath there was a chamber, but in the darkness he had not the courage to take a jump into the unknown. He placed his bedstead over the entrance, and lay down. So morning came. That day, even in the day-time, the sound could be heard. Repeating the name of Durga, he dragged his bedstead away from the cavity in the floor. The splash of lapping water and the clank of metal became louder. Fearfully peeping through the hole into the darkness, he could see that the chamber was full of flowing water, which, when examined with a stick, was found to be about a couple of feet deep. Taking a box of matches and a lantern in his hand, he easily jumped into the shallow room. But lest in one moment all his hopes should collapse, his trembling hand found it difficult to light the lantern. After striking almost a whole box of matches, he at last succeeded.

He saw by its light a large copper cauldron, fastened to a thick iron chain. Every now and then, when the current came with a rush, the chain clanked against the side, and made the metallic sound which he had heard.

Baidyanath waded quickly through the water, and went up to this vessel, only to find that it was empty.

He could not believe his eyes, and with both hands he took the cauldron up and shook it furiously. He turned it upside down, but in vain. He saw that its mouth was broken, as though at one time this vessel had been closed and sealed, and someone had broken it open.

Baidyanath began to grope about in the water. Something struck against his hand, which on lifting he found to be a skull. He held it up to his ear, and shook it violently—but it was empty. He threw it down.

He saw that on one side of the room towards the river the wall was broken. It was through this opening that the water entered, and he felt sure that it had been

made by his unknown predecessor, who had a more reliable horoscope than his own.

At last, having lost all hope, he heaved a deep sigh, which seemed to mingle with the innumerable sighs of despair coming from some subterranean inferno of everlasting failures.

His whole body besmeared with mud, Baidyanath made his way up into the house. The world, full of its bustling population, seemed to him empty as that broken vessel and chained to a meaningless destiny.

Once more to pack his things, to buy his ticket, to get into the train, to return again to his home, to have to wrangle with his wife, and to endure the burden of his sordid days, all this seemed to him intolerably unreasonable. He wished that he could just slide into the water, as the broken-down bank of a river into the passing current.

Still he did pack his things, buy his ticket, get into the train, and one evening at the end of a winter day arrive at his home.

On entering the house, he sat like one dazed in the courtyard, not venturing to go into the inner apartments. The old maid-servant was the first to catch sight of him, and at her shout of surprise the children came running to see him with their glad laughter. Then his wife called him.

Baidyanath started up as if from sleep, and once more woke into the life which he had lived before. With sad face and wan smile, he took one of the boys in his arms and the other by the hand and entered the room. The lamps had just been lighted, and although it was not yet night, it was a cold evening, and everything was as quiet as if night had come.

Baidyanath remained silent for a little, and then in a soft voice said to his wife: 'How are you?'

His wife, without making any reply, asked him: 'What has happened?'

Baidyanath, without speaking, simply struck his forehead. At this Sundari's face hardened. The children, feeling the shadow of a calamity, quietly slipped away, and going to the maid-servant asked her to tell them a story.

Night fell, but neither husband nor wife spoke a word. The whole atmosphere of the house seemed to palpitate with silence, and gradually Sundari's lips set hard like a miser's purse. Then she got up, and leaving her husband went slowly into her bedroom, locking the door behind her. Baidyanath remained standing silently outside. The watchman's call was heard as he passed. The tired world was sunk in deep sleep.

When it was quite late at night the elder boy, wakened from some dream, left his bed, and coming out on to the veranda whispered: 'Father.'

But his father was not there. In a slightly raised voice he called from outside the closed door of his parents' bedroom, 'Father,' but he got no answer. And in fear he went back to bed.

Next morning early the maidservant, according to her custom, prepared her master's tobacco, and went in search of him, but could find him nowhere.

14. The Gift of Vision

I've been told that many Bengali girls these days have to secure husbands through their own efforts. I have done the same, but with the assistance of the gods. Since childhood, I had performed many a penance, offered many a prayer.

I was married by the time I had turned eight. But owing to my sins in a previous life, even after getting a husband as wonderful as mine, I was unable to have him fully. The goddess Durga, with the Third Eye, took away my eyesight. She did not afford me the bliss of seeing my husband till my last day on earth.

My trials by fire began in infancy. Barely had I turned fourteen when I give birth to a stillborn child. I was at death's door too, but it would not do if someone destined to suffer were to die. The lamp that has been made to burn is never endowed with insufficient oil; it shall be released only after it has glowed all night.

I did survive, but because of physical weakness, or the grief in my heart, or some other reason, my vision was affected.

My husband was a medical student at the time. Because of his enthusiasm for his new learning, he was delighted at the opportunity to practise medicine. He proceeded to treat me himself.

My elder brother was in college that year, reading for a Bachelor of Law degree. 'What do you think you're doing?' he told my husband one day. 'Kumu's about to lose her eyes. Let a good doctor have a look at her.'

'What new treatment can a good doctor offer,' my husband responded. 'I know the medicine perfectly well.'

'Obviously there's no difference between you and the principal of your college,' my brother proclaimed in some anger.

'You're a student of law, what do you know of medicine,' countered my husband. 'If you are in litigation against your wife over property after you get married, will you come to me for advice?'

When elephants fight, I mused, the grass is trampled. The argument was between my husband and my brother, but I was at the receiving end of both their barbs. Since my brother had already given me away in marriage, I wondered, too, why there should be a battle now over responsibility. My joys and sorrows, illness and recovery, were all my husband's concern now.

My husband appeared to develop some bad blood with my brother that day over the trivial matter of treatment for my eyes, which were already streaming with tears frequently; now the flow became stronger, neither my husband nor my brother fathomed the real cause.

Out of the blue, my brother brought a doctor home one afternoon while my husband was away at college. After examining my eyes, the doctor warned that unless I was careful, the affliction could worsen. He prescribed some medicine I was not familiar with, which my brother sent for immediately.

After the doctor had left, I told my brother, ‘I beg of you *Dada*, do not disrupt my current course of treatment.’

I used to be in great awe of my brother since childhood; it was unthinkable for me to make such an explicit request to him. But I could clearly see that the arrangement for my treatment, which my brother was making behind my husband’s back, boded ill rather than well for me.

My brother too was probably taken aback by my candour. ‘Very well, I shall not bring the doctor to your home anymore,’ he said after a pause, ‘but let us see what effect the medicine has if you apply it as prescribed.’ When the medicine had arrived, he explained how to use it and left. Before my husband could return, I flung the bottles, vials, brushes and rules into the draw-well in the front yard.

Seemingly inspired by his altercation with my brother, my husband devoted himself to treating my eye with twice as much zeal. He proceeded to change medicines constantly. I put on eye-patches, tried glasses, applied medicated drops, put medicated powder on my eyelids, even suppressed the urge to expel my intestines after consuming malodorous fish-oil. My husband would ask how I was feeling. Much better, I would respond. I tried to convince myself that I was indeed improving. When my eyes watered too much, I concluded that this was a good sign; when my eyes stopped streaming, I assumed I was on my way to recovery.

But the agony became unbearable after some time. My vision became blurred and the pain in my head would not allow me to stay still. My husband appeared to be somewhat on the defensive now. He was unable to think of a pretext on which to fetch a doctor after all this time.

‘Where’s the harm in calling a doctor just to keep *Dada* happy,’ I told him. ‘He is needlessly upset about this, it makes me unhappy. You’re the one who will treat me, after all, but having a doctor as a figurehead is useful.’

‘You’re right,’ said my husband. And proceeded to fetch a British doctor that very same day. I was not privy to their conversation, but the Englishman appeared to be berating my husband, who stood in silence with his head bowed.

When the doctor had left, I took my husband's hand and told him, 'Where did you get this ass of a British doctor, an Indian doctor would have been better. Is he going to diagnose what's wrong with my eye better than you do.'

'Your eye needs surgery,' he said hesitantly.

'You knew all along that it does,' I pretended anger, 'but you hid it from me all this time. Do you think I'm afraid?'

His embarrassment was mitigated. 'How many men are brave enough not to feel afraid on hearing of eye-surgery?' he asked.

'The valour of the man is only for his wife,' I joked.

'That is true,' he turned sombre. 'Men can only flaunt their vanity.'

'Do you think you can compete with women on that score,' I said, dismissing his solemnity. 'We'll beat you there too.'

Meanwhile, when my brother came visiting, I drew him aside and told him, 'My eyes were improving once I started following your doctor's prescription, but after I mistakenly applied a medicine to my eyes instead of taking it, things have taken a turn for the worse. My husband says I need surgery.'

'I was under the impression your husband was treating you,' answered my brother, 'which made me so angry I did not come all this time.'

'No, I was following your doctor's prescription in secret,' I said, 'though I did not tell my husband in case he became angry.'

How many lies one has to tell when one is born a woman! I could not hurt my brother, nor undermine my husband's importance. As a mother she has to keep the child in her arms happy; as a wife she has to keep the father of the child happy—such are the deceptions that women have to resort to.

The outcome of the ruse was that I was able to see my husband and brother reunited before I went blind. My brother surmised that the secret treatment had caused this mishap; my husband concluded that it would have been better to have followed my brother's counsel from the beginning. With these thoughts the two repentant souls sought to make amends and came closer to each other. My husband began to seek my brother's advice; my brother also began to defer to my husband's opinion on every subject.

Eventually, on the basis of their consultations with each other, a British doctor operated on my left eye. Already weak, the eye could not survive this assault, the light in it died suddenly. Then the remaining eye was also gradually shrouded in darkness with every passing day. The curtain was drawn forever on the young figure adorned in sandalwood paste whom I had seen for the first time on my wedding day in childhood.

One day my husband came to my bedside, saying, 'I shall not brag to you any

more, I am the one responsible for you losing your eyes.'

I realized his voice was choking with tears. Seeking his right hand with both of mine, I said, 'I don't care, you have claimed what is yours. Think about it, how I would have consoled myself had I lost my vision because of a doctor's treatment. Since no one can ward off destiny, no one could have saved my eyes, the only joy of my blindness is that I lost my eyes to you. Ramachandra had plucked out his own eyes as an offering to the gods when he had run out of flowers. I offer my vision to my own god—I give you everything, my moonlit nights, my morning light, the blue of my sky, the green of my earth; tell me of whatever appears beautiful to your eyes, I shall accept it as the holy image of what you have seen.'

But I had been unable to say all this, for they cannot be said; I had been thinking of all this for a long time. When I felt weary at times, when my commitment and spirit dimmed, when I thought of myself as deprived, wretched and a victim of misfortune, I used to force such thoughts into my head; I tried to use my devotion to rise above my misery. Through a mixture of words and silence, I may have been able to convey the state of mind to him that way. 'I cannot restore what I have made you lose out of my foolishness, Kumu,' he said, 'but I shall stay by your side to compensate for your lack of vision as much as I possibly can.'

'That is not practical,' I replied. 'I shall simply not allow you to turn your home into a hospital for the blind. You must marry again.'

My voice was close to choking before I could explain in detail why it was absolutely necessary for him to marry. Controlling myself a little after a coughing fit, I was about to continue, when my husband said in an outburst of emotion, 'I may be obtuse, I may be vain, but that does not mean I am heartless. I have blinded you with my own hands, if I forsake you for that handicap and take another wife, I swear by our family deity Gopinath that I shall be branded a sinner who killed a Brahmin, who killed his father.'

I would not have permitted such a dire vow, I would have prevented it, but my tears were threatening to overflow my heart, my throat and my eyes and roll down my face; in trying to restrain them, I was unable to speak. Listening to my husband, I buried my face in my pillow in a tumult of happiness and wept. I was blind, and yet he would not forsake me! He would hold me to his heart like the suffering man embraces his plight! I did not want such fortune, but the heart is selfish, after all.

Finally, when the first torrent of tears had spent itself, I pressed his head to my breast, saying, 'Why did you make such a terrible vow! Do you suppose I was

entreating you to marry for your own pleasure? I would have fulfilled my objective through my rival. I would have got her to do the things I cannot do for you because I cannot see!'

'Even maids can do all that. Can I possibly marry a maid for my convenience and put her on the same pedestal as my goddess.' Raising my face with his fingers, he planted a pure kiss on my forehead; this kiss seemed to open a third eye, I was anointed a goddess on the spot. This is better, I told myself. Now that I have gone blind, I can no longer be the housewife, I shall ascend to the position of goddess to ensure my husband's well-being. No more lies, no more deception, I banished all the meanness and pretence of the housewife from my life.

All day long I was in conflict with myself. The joy of the certainty that my husband was prevented by his momentous oath from marrying a second time seemed to gnaw at me; I simply could not shake it off. A day might dawn when it would be more beneficial for your husband to remarry instead of adhering to his vow, suggested the goddess who had arrived that day within my being. So what, the woman of old within me responded, since he has taken this oath, he cannot marry again. Perhaps, said the goddess, but that is no reason to rejoice. That is all very well, the human being countered, but since he has vowed etcetera. The same argument over and over again. The goddess only frowned without answering and my heart and soul were shrouded in the darkness of a terrible fear.

My repentant husband dismissed the servants and maids from my presence and prepared to personally look after all my needs. Initially I revelled in my helpless dependence on him even for the slightest thing. For, in this way I would have him to myself constantly. Because I could not see him, my desire to have him by my side all the time grew inordinately. My eyes' share of the pleasure of my husband's company now became disputed property between the remaining sense organs, each of them trying to increase their own allocation. If my husband happened to be engaged elsewhere for a long time, I felt suspended in mid-air, unable to hold on to anything, as though I had lost my moorings. Earlier, if my husband was late on his way back from college, I used to go up to the window facing the road he took back home and open it a crack to wait for him. With my eyes I had connected myself to the world that he moved around in. Today every part of my sightless body was in search of him. The primary bridge between his world and mine had been destroyed. Now there was an unbridgeable blindness between us; all I could do now was to wait in helpless eagerness for him to cross over of his own volition from his side to mine. That was why, when he left my side for even a moment, I attempted with all of my sightless body to hold on to

him, distraught, praying for his return.

But such yearning, so much dependence, was not good. The burden of the wife on the husband was heavy enough, I could not possibly add on the enormous weight of my blindness. I would bear this universal darkness in my life on my own. I took a single-minded oath not to tie down my husband with this eternal blindness of mine.

I learnt to perform all my duties in the darkness, aided by sounds and scents and touch. In fact, I succeeded in accomplishing many of my household chores with greater felicity than before. Now I began to feel that sight distracts us more than it helps. The eyes see a great deal more than is necessary to go about one's activities efficiently. And when the eyes act as sentries, the ears become indolent, hearing far less than they should. In the absence of my restless eyes, all my other sense organs began to perform their tasks with quite efficiency.

I no longer allowed my husband to look after me, and I began to take care of all his needs as I once had.

'You are depriving me of my atonement,' my husband told me one day.

'I do not know what you are atoning for, but why should I increase the burden of my sins.'

Say what he might, he breathed a sigh of relief when I set him free. No man is fit for the mission of tending to his blind wife all his life.

After passing his medical examinations, my husband took me to live in a village.

Moving to the countryside made me feel as though I had come back home to my mother. I had left my village for the city at the age of eight. Over the past ten years the memories of my land of birth had become as indistinct as a shadow. As long as I had my eyesight, the city of Calcutta had obscured all my other memories. As soon as I lost my vision, I realized that Calcutta could only keep the eyes busy, it could not fulfil the heart. Once my vision was gone, the village of my childhood days became brighter in my mind, just like the stars in the sky at close of day.

We went to Hashimpur in the middle of December. The place was new to me, I could not surmise what it looked like, but the scents and sensations of my childhood wrapped themselves around me. The same morning breeze from the freshly-ploughed earth moistened by the dew, the same sweet fragrance rising from the fields of cascading gold arhar and of mustard to encompass the sky, the same cowherds' songs, even the sound of the bullock-cart trundling along the unrepaired road delighted me. With its indescribable smells and sounds, the bygone memories of my earliest years enveloped me like the palpable present;

my blind eyes could not protest. I returned to the same childhood, only, my mother was missing. In my mind's eye I could see my grandmother, her sparse hair let loose as she sat in the yard with her back to the sun, putting homemade delicacies out to dry, but I was unable to hear the bawdy songs of Bhajandas, the village hermit, in her slightly quavering, ancient, weak murmur; the same harvest festival came alive in the dew-soaked sky of winter, but there was no longer a gathering of those little girls, my childhood friends, amongst the crowds husking the newly reaped rice! In the evening I could hear a cow mooing close by, I was reminded of my mother taking the evening lamp into the cowshed; the smell of moistened fodder and the smoke from burning straw seemed to seep into my heart and I could hear the sound of brass bells from the temple of the Vidyalankar family who lived by the village tank. Everything corporeal from the eight years of my childhood seemed to have been filtered out, with only the essence and the fragrances having been gathered and heaped around me.

I remembered too, the vows of my childhood and the prayers at dawn to the gods after picking flowers for them. It had to be admitted that the confusion of incursions and intrusions in Calcutta definitely distorted the reasoning of the mind. The innocent purity of prayers and devotion could no longer be maintained. I remembered the day a friend of mine from the neighbourhood told me after I went blind, 'Doesn't it make you angry, Kumu? I wouldn't have set eyes on my husband again if I were you.' 'I certainly do not set eyes on him,' I told her, 'for which I blame these accursed eyes, but why should I be angry with my husband.' Labanya was furious with him for not having consulted a doctor well in time, she was trying to instigate me to anger too. I explained to her that living together meant all kinds of joys and sorrows, sins of omission and commission, deliberate and inadvertent; but if the respect remained intact there was a kind of peace even in unhappiness, else life went by in a spate of temper, competition and conflict. It was bad enough being blind, why increase my load of unhappiness by loathing my husband. Enraged at such an old-fashioned viewpoint from a child like me, Labanya left, jerking her head in contempt. But whatever I might have told her, words are poisonous, they never entirely fail in meeting their objectives. Labanya's angry statements had cast a few embers into my heart, although I had ground them out under my heel, they had left a mark or two behind. That was why I was saying that there was so much advice, so many suggestions when in Calcutta that one's reasoning matured and hardened prematurely.

In the village, the fragrance of the cool night-flowering jasmine used for worshipping the gods turned all my hope and trust as fresh and bright as in my childhood. Both my heart and my household were fulfilled by the gods. I

prostrated myself, saying, ‘No matter that my eyes are gone, O Lord, for you are with me.’

Alas, I was wrong, to claim your proximity was arrogance too. All I was entitled to aver was that I belonged to you. Oh yes, one day my god will force these words out of my throat. I may have nothing of my own that day, but I must be his. I had no claim on anyone, only on myself.

A few months passed happily. My husband acquired a reputation as a doctor. We saved some money too.

But money isn’t good. It sucks the mind into itself. When the mind is in control it can create its own happiness, but when wealth takes the responsibility for building happiness, the mind is left with nothing to do. Material objects and furniture and so on occupy the space that was once filled by a happy heart. Joy is exchanged for possessions.

I cannot cite any particular instance or incident, but because the blind sense more, or for some reason I do not know, I could clearly discern the changes that came to my husband with our growing affluence. The sensitivity that he had once had to right and wrong, to morality and immorality, seemed to be dwindling by the day. I remember him saying once, ‘I am not studying medicine just to make a living, I shall serve poor people this way.’ His voice used to be stifled with loathing whenever he referred to those doctors who would not even check the pulse of an impoverished dying man without taking their fees in advance. I realized that those days were gone. Once, a destitute woman clung to his feet, entreating him to save her son, but he ignored her. Eventually I forced him to go and treat him, but he did not give the patient his full attention. I know what view he had held about illicit income when we were not well off. But now the bank account had swollen, an official representing a wealthy man arrived for two days of secret confabulation. I had no idea what they discussed, but when he came to me the next day, it was to talk about a great many other things with a good deal of cheerfulness. My intuition told me he had disgraced himself that day.

Where was the husband whom I had seen for the last time before going blind! What had I done for the person who had kissed between my sightless eyes and anointed me his goddess. Those who succumb unexpectedly to a tempestuous passion can still rise again under the force of a new fervour, but I could find no antidote to this constant hardening—every moment, every day—in every fibre of his being, this continuous suppression of the conscience under the trappings of external achievements.

The separation that blindness had wrought between my husband and me was

immaterial, but I felt things closing in on me when I realized that he was no longer where I was; I was blind, I lived in an internal world, devoid of light, clutching the first love of my green years, my untrammelled devotion, my undimmed faith—the dew had not yet dried on the sapling in the temple to which I had made sacred offerings with my little girl's hands at the beginning of my life; but my husband had now vanished somewhere in the desert of life in his pursuit of money, abandoning this cool, shaded, evergreen land! All that I believed in, all that I thought of as moral, all that I considered greater than every joy and possession in the world were the very things that he looked askance at, laughing at them from a remote distance. But once upon a time there had been no rift between us, in our younger days we had begun our journey on the same road, neither he nor I had realized that our paths had diverged; and now, finally, he no longer responded when I called out to him.

Sometimes I wondered whether I made too much of things because I was blind. If my eyesight were intact, perhaps I would have been able to see the world as it really was.

My husband conveyed as much to me. An old Muslim man had come one morning to request him to treat his granddaughter for cholera. ‘I am poor, my son, but Allah will bless you,’ I heard him say. ‘Allah’s blessings will not be enough,’ my husband replied, ‘first tell me what you will do for me.’ My first thought was, why had God only blinded me, why had he not made me deaf as well? The old man sighed deeply, exclaiming ‘Allah!’ and left. I got the maid to fetch him to the back door at once, telling him, ‘Here’s some money for your granddaughter’s treatment, Baba, please bless my husband and ask Doctor Hari next door to go with you.’

But I could not bring myself to eat the entire day. ‘Why do you look so mournful,’ my husband asked on awaking from his afternoon nap. I was about to give my customary answer of the past—nothing’s the matter. But the time of deception was over, I spoke my mind. ‘I keep thinking of telling you, but I simply cannot determine what exactly there is to say. I don’t know if I can explain what’s in my heart, but I am sure you can sense in yours that although we had started our lives in unison, we walk on different paths today.’ ‘Change is the principle on which the world runs,’ my husband smiled. ‘Everyone goes through change when it comes to wealth or beauty or youth, but is nothing meant to be constant?’ I asked. Turning grave, he replied, ‘Look, other women complain about real things lacking in their lives—some of husbands who don’t earn enough, some of husbands who don’t love them; you pluck problems out of the sky.’ I realized at once that blindness had placed a layer over my eyes and

planted me outside this ever-changing world; I was not like other women; my husband wouldn't understand me.

Meanwhile an aunt of my husband's arrived from her village to enquire after my husband. The first thing she said after both of us greeted her was, 'Ill luck has robbed you of your eyesight, Bouma, now how will our Avinash manage his home and household with a blind wife. Get him married again.' Had my husband joked, 'Very well Pishima, why don't you arrange something,' everything would have been clarified. But he said irresolutely, 'What on earth are you saying, Pishima.' 'Have I said anything wrong,' she said. 'Isn't that right, Bouma, what do you think?' 'You're asking the right person for advice, Pishima,' I laughed. 'Does anyone seek the victim's consent before picking his pocket.' 'Yes, that's true,' she responded. 'You and I will plan this in secret, Avinash,. But I must tell you, Bouma, the more wives a high-caste man has, the more his wives can revel in his glory. If our boy had got married instead of becoming a doctor, would he have lacked for an income. Patients inevitably die when they consult doctors, and when they die they cannot pay their fees, but by the curse of God the wives of high-caste men never die, and the longer they live the more their husbands stand to gain.'

Two days later my husband asked his aunt in my presence, 'Can you find a girl from a decent home who can help my wife as a member of the family will, Pishima? She cannot see, if she had a companion by her side constantly I would be relieved.' This might have been applicable when I had become newly blind, but I did not know how either the household or I suffered now because of my blindness; however, I remained silent without protesting. 'That's easy,' my husband's aunt responded. 'My husband's elder brother has a daughter who's as well-behaved as she's pretty. She has come of age, now all she's waiting for is a suitable husband; with a high-caste groom like you, her family will give her in marriage immediately.' 'Who's talking of marriage,' said my husband, startled. 'Do you suppose a girl from a decent family will just come and live in your home unless you marry her.' This was a valid argument, which my husband could not refute suitably.

Standing alone amidst the eternal darkness of my shuttered eyes, I sent my prayers into the sky, protect my husband, O Lord.

A few days later, when I emerged after my morning prayers, my husband's aunt said, 'Hemangini, the niece I was telling you about, has arrived from my village. Himu, this is your elder sister.'

My husband appeared suddenly, but prepared to retreat at the sight of an unknown lady. 'Don't go, Avinash,' said my aunt. 'Who is this,' my husband

enquired. ‘This is my niece Hemangini,’ answered my husband’s aunt. My husband proceeded to express repeated and superfluous consternation over who had fetched her and when, and other such details.

‘I can clearly understand what’s going on,’ I said to myself, ‘but now the deception begins on top of it. Hide-and-seek, cat-and-mouse, lies! If you wish to break your principles, go ahead and satisfy your wild tendencies, but why abase yourself for my sake. Why these tricks to deceive me.’

Taking Hemangini’s hand, I took her to my bedroom. I ran my hands over her face and body; she appeared to be beautiful, and not less than fourteen or fifteen years old.

‘What are you doing?’ Suddenly the girl laughed sweetly and loudly. ‘Are you trying to exorcise me.’

The sound of her free, simple laughter dispelled the dark cloud between us in an instant. Putting my right arm around her neck, I said, ‘I’m looking at you, my dear,’ and ran my hand over her soft face once more.

‘Looking at me?’ she said, laughing again. ‘Am I an eggplant or cauliflower from your kitchen garden that you’re examining to see how well it’s grown?’

It occurred to me suddenly that Hemangini did not know that I was blind. ‘I am blind, you see,’ I told her. She turned solemn for a few minutes at this. I could clearly make out that she examined my sightless eyes and expression with her own young and curious eyes before saying, ‘Oh, is that why you’ve got Kaki here with you?’

‘I didn’t ask her to come,’ I answered. ‘Your aunt is here by her own choice.’

‘As a favour?’ The girl laughed again as she spoke. ‘Then Lady Favour won’t budge in a hurry. But why did my father send me here.’

My husband’s aunt entered the room. She had been talking to my husband all this while. ‘When are we going back home, Kaki,’ Hemangini asked her as soon as she came in.

‘But you just got here. Why do you want to leave so soon? Never seen a girl so restless.’

‘I don’t see any sign of your leaving soon, Kaki,’ Hemangini said. ‘But then these are your relatives, you can stay here as long as you like; but I shall leave, I’m warning you.’ Taking my hand, she added, ‘Don’t you agree, my dear, you people are not my family, after all.’ Without answering, I drew her to myself. I observed that no matter how formidable my husband’s aunt might be, she was not capable of controlling this girl. Without openly displaying displeasure, my husband’s aunt tried to be nice to her; the girl appeared to shake her off. Laughing off the entire thing as though a spoilt child were having a little fun, my

husband's aunt was about to leave. But a thought struck her, and she returned to tell Hemangini, 'Come along Himu, it's time for your bath.' Coming up to me, Hemangini said, 'Let's go together, shall we.' My husband's aunt gave up reluctantly; she knew that insisting would only lead to Hemangini's getting her way, and the conflict between them would be inappropriately revealed to me.

'Why don't you have any children,' Hemangini asked on our way to the tank at the back of the house. 'How would I know,' I said with a smile, 'God did not see it fit to give me any.' 'There must be something sinful about you then,' Hemangini responded. 'Only the Almighty knows whether there is,' I replied. As proof, she said, 'Don't you see, Kaki is so twisted that she is unable to have children.' I neither understood the theories of good deeds and bad or joy and sorrow or reward and punishment myself, nor did I try to explain them to the girl; I only sighed and said to Him in my head, no one but you knows! Hemangini put her arms around me at once, saying, 'But you're sighing because of what I said! As if anyone bothers with what I say!'

I observed that my husband's medical practice was being disrupted. Attending to calls from distant places was out of the question, he even attended to nearby calls in a big hurry and returned swiftly. Earlier, when he worked at home, he came into the women's part of the house only for his meals and to sleep. Now my husband's aunt sent for him every now and then, he came often on his own too, asking after her. Whenever she called out, 'Get my paan, will you, Himu,' it was obvious that my husband was visiting her. Hemangini would take her the paan, or the hair-oil, or the sindoor, as directed, for the first two or three days. But thereafter, she simply refused to go when summoned, directing the maid to provide whatever her aunt had asked for. 'Hemangini, Himi, Himu,' her aunt would call—the girl would cling to me tightly as though overcome by compassion; anxiety and melancholy subsumed her. After that she did not refer to my husband even by mistake.

Meanwhile my brother came to visit me. I knew his eyes were sharp. It would be virtually impossible to conceal from him the way things were developing. My brother was a stern judge. He did not know how to forgive the slightest of transgressions. My biggest fear was that my husband would appear a sinner to none other than him. I kept everything hidden under a layer of extra good cheer. I talked incessantly, bustled about, and made elaborate arrangements—all to raise a covering dust-storm, as it were. But this was so uncharacteristic of me that it increased the chances of being caught out. However, my brother was unable to stay very long, for my husband began to express such impatience that it took the form of rudeness. He left. Before his departure, he placed a trembling,

affectionate hand on my head, keeping it there for the longest time; I understood the blessings he heaped upon me with all his heart; his tears fell on my tear-stained cheeks.

I remember people were on their way back home in the evening on a market-day in April. A rain-bearing storm was on its way from the distance, the smell of damp earth and a moisture-laden wind were spreading across the sky; companions separated from one another were calling out loudly and desperately to each other in the darkened fields. As long as I was alone with my blinded eyes in my bedroom, the lamps were never lit, lest the flames sear my garments or some other accident take place. Sitting on the floor of my room in that desolate darkness I was praying to the emperor of my eternally blind world with folded hands, saying, ‘When I cannot feel your compassion, Lord, when I cannot fathom your intentions, I hold on to the rudder of my orphaned broken heart with all my might; I bleed but I cannot contain the tempest within me; how many more tests will you subject me to, what power do I have in any case.’ Tears welled in my eyes as I spoke, I sobbed with my head on the bed. I had to do household chores all day. Hemangini stayed by my side like my shadow, I had no opportunity to shed the tears that gathered in my heart; I was weeping that day after a long time, suddenly I sensed the bed shake, there was a rustle of movement from someone, and a moment later Hemangini silently put her arms around me, wiping away my tears with the end of her sari. I had not even realized when and why she had lain down on my bed in the early part of the evening. She asked me no questions, nor did I say anything to her. She ran her cooling hand over my brow. I did not realise when the thunderstorm struck, accompanied by torrential rain; after a long time a pleasant sense of serenity brought peace to my fevered heart.

‘If you don’t come home with me now, Kaki,’ Hemangini told my husband’s aunt the next day, ‘I’m going back by myself with Kaibarta-Dada, I’m warning you.’ ‘Don’t do that,’ my husband’s aunt intervened, ‘I’m going tomorrow, we can all go together. Here, Himu, take a look at the pearl ring my Avinash has got for you.’ She handed over the ring proudly to Hemangini. ‘See how good my aim is, Kaki,’ said Hemangini, flinging the ring though the window at the middle of the tank at the back of the house. My husband’s aunt bristled with rage and displeasure. Taking my hand, she told me repeatedly, ‘You must not tell Avinash about this childishness, Bouma, my son will be very upset. Promise me you won’t!’ ‘There’s no need to entreat me over and over again, Pishima, I won’t tell him a thing.’

‘Don’t forget me, *Didi*,’ Hemangini told me the next day as she was about to

leave. ‘The blind never forget, my dear,’ I told her, running my hands over her face repeatedly. ‘I have no world, all I have is my own heart.’ Breathing in the fragrance of her hair, I kissed her head. My tears streamed down on her tresses.

My world became arid with Hemangini’s departure—when the fragrance, the beauty, the music, the lustre and the tender greenness she had brought into my heart had all dissipated, I stretched my arms out to my home, to my surroundings, to find out how things stood for me. ‘Thank goodness they’ve left,’ my husband said with extra good cheer, ‘I can get down to work now.’ Shame, shame on me. Why this sham on my account. Did I fear the truth? Had I ever feared turmoil. Didn’t my husband know? Had I not accepted eternal darkness calmly when I gave up my eyes.

All this time my husband and I were only separated by blindness, now another gulf was created. My husband never mentioned Hemangini to me, not even by mistake, as though she had been obliterated completely from the world related to him, as though she had never made the slightest impression on it. Yet I could easily discern that he kept himself informed through letters; just as the stalk of the lotus feels a tug as soon as the floodwater enters the lake, in the same way I could sense something in my heart when he became even a little more animated than usual. I was not unaware of the occasions on which he heard from her, nor of those when he did not. But I could not ask him about her. I used to yearn for some news of—or to talk about—the frenzied, tempestuous, dazzling star that had risen briefly in my darkened heart, but I did not have the right to mention her name even once to my husband. This silence, pregnant with words and with pain, reigned unwaveringly between us.

Around the end of April, the maid appeared to ask, ‘The boat is being readied with great attention, Mathakrun, where is Babamashai going.’ I knew that some preparations were afoot; the oppressive silence that precedes a storm, followed by the scattered clouds signalling imminent destruction, had been gathering in my fate; I had realized that the divine destroyer Shiva had been silently amassing devastating forces of annihilation. ‘I haven’t heard anything,’ I told the maid. She left with a sigh, not daring to ask any more questions.

Late that night my husband appeared to tell me, ‘I have been called away somewhere, I have to leave early in the morning. It may be two or three days before I am back.’

‘Why are you lying to me,’ I asked, rising from my bed.

‘Lying to you?’ said my husband indistinctly, his voice trembling.

‘You are going to get married,’ I told him.

He remained silent. I stood without a word. There was no sound in the room

for a long time. Eventually I said, ‘Answer me. Say, yes, I am going to get married.’

‘Yes, I am going to get married,’ he repeated like an echo.

‘No, you cannot go,’ I told him. ‘I shall protect you from this terrible danger, this terrible sin. What kind of a wife am I if I cannot do this, what are all those prayers worth?’

The room was silent again for a long time. Slumping to the floor and clutching my husband’s feet, I asked, ‘What sin have I committed, where have I gone wrong, why do you need another wife? Tell me the truth, swear by me.’

‘I am telling you the truth,’ he answered gently, ‘I am afraid of you. Your blindness has wrapped you in an impenetrable covering, I have no right of entry. You are my god, you are as fearsome as a god, I cannot live my life every day with you. I want an ordinary woman, someone I can scold, someone I can be angry with, someone I can love, someone I can buy jewellery.’

‘Carve my heart and look inside. I am an ordinary woman, deep inside I’m nothing but your young bride; I want to trust you, I want to depend on you, I want to worship you; do not raise me to a higher pedestal than yourself—you make me suffer intolerably when you humiliate yourself, let me languish at your feet all the time.’

Could I possibly remember all that I said? Can the agitated sea possibly hear itself roar? All I remembered saying was, ‘As God is my witness, if I have been a pious wife, you shall not violate your sacred vow in any circumstances. Before you can commit such a dreadful sin, either I shall be widowed, or Hemangini shall not live.’ After that, I fainted on the floor.

When I recovered, the birds had not yet begun chirping at daybreak and my husband had left.

I sat down to pray behind the closed doors of my puja room. I did not leave the room all day. In the evening the house shook under the impact of a nor’wester. I did not say, ‘My husband is on the river, protect him, o God.’ All I kept saying with all my heart was, ‘Let my fate bring what it may, but make my husband desist from sinning.’ The entire night passed. I did not abandon my position even the day after. I do not know who gave me strength through my fasting, sleepless hours, but I sat like stone before the stone idol.

In the evening people began knocking on the door. When they finally broke it open, they found me unconscious on the floor.

The first word I heard when I regained consciousness was ‘*Didi!*’ I found myself lying with my head in Hemangini’s lap. Her bridal dress rustled as she moved her head. So you have rejected my prayers, o God. My husband has

fallen.

'I have come for your blessings, *Didi*,' Hemangini said softly, her head bowed. As stiff as a block of wood for a moment, I sat up the very next instant, saying, 'Why should I not, my sister! You are not to blame.'

'Blame!' Hemangini laughed in her sweet, high voice. 'You are not to be blamed for getting married, but I am?'

Putting my arms around Hemangini, I laughed too. 'As if my prayers make the world go round,' I thought to myself. 'It's His will that's the last word, not mine. Let this attack assail me physically, but I shall not let it assail my heart, where my faith and my trust reside. I shall remain as I was.' Planting herself near my feet, Hemangini touched them with her hands and raised her hands to her brow. 'May you always have good fortune and eternal happiness,' I said.

'Your blessings alone won't do,' said Hemangini, 'you must escort your sister's husband and your sister in with your own chaste hands. You must not feel embarrassed to see him. I shall bring him in here if you will permit me.'

'Do,' I answered.

I heard fresh footsteps enter my room after a while. 'How are you, Kumu?' I heard someone ask lovingly.

'*Dada!*' I jumped out of bed hurriedly and touched his feet with my hands.

'What do you mean, *Dada*,' said Hemangini. 'Box his ears, he's your sister's husband.'

I understood everything then. I knew that my brother had vowed not to marry; with our mother dead, there was no one to coax him either. Now it was I who had arranged for him to be married. Tears streamed from my eyes, I simply could not staunch them. My brother ran his hand through my hair gently; Hemangini just put her arms around me and laughed.

I could not sleep that night; I awaited my husband's return anxiously. I could not imagine how he would conceal his disgrace and disappointment.

Extremely late at night, the door opened very slowly. I sat up in bed, startled. My husband's footsteps. My heart hammered in my breast.

'Your brother has saved me,' he said, coming to bed and taking my hand. 'I was about to succumb to temporary infatuation. The Almighty alone knows the burden I was weighed down by when I climbed into the boat the other day; when the storm struck us in mid-river, I was afraid for my life, but I also wished that I could perish in the waves, for that would save me. When I reached Mathurganj, I heard that your brother had married Hemangini the previous day. I cannot explain with what humiliation and joy I returned to the boat. I have become convinced over these past few days that I shall never be happy if I am parted

from you. You are my goddess.'

'No, I do not wish to be a goddess,' I smiled. 'I am the mistress of your house, I am merely an ordinary woman.'

'You must honour my request too,' my husband said. 'Do not embarrass me ever again by turning me into a god.'

The next day the neighbourhood was roused by the sound of ululation and conch shells. While he ate and while he slept, in the morning and at night, Hemangini began to mock at my husband, there was no end to his travails; but no one made the slightest mention of where he had been and what had transpired.

15. Giribala

1

Giribala is overflowing with exuberance of youth that seems spilling over in spray all around her,—in the folds of her soft dress, the turning of her neck, the motion of her hands, in the rhythm of her steps, now quick now languid, in her tinkling anklets and ringing laughter, in her voice and glances. She would often been seen, wrapt in a blue silk, walking on her terrace, in an impulse of unaccountable restlessness. Her limbs seem eager to dance to the time of an inner music unceasing and unheard. She takes pleasure in merely moving her body, causing ripples to break out in the flood of her young life. She would suddenly pluck a leaf from a plant in the flower-pot and throw it up in the sky, and her bangles would give a sudden tinkle, and the careless grace of her hand, like a bird freed from its cage, would fly unseen in the air. With her swift fingers she would brush away from her dress a mere nothing; standing on tiptoe she would peep over her terrace walls for no cause whatever, and then with a rapid motion turn round to go to another direction, swinging her bunch of keys tied to a corner of her garment. She would loosen her hair in an untimely caprice, sitting before her mirror to do it up again, and then in a fit of laziness would fling herself upon her bed, like a line of stray moonlight slipping through some opening of the leaves, idling in the shadow.

She has no children and, having been married in a wealthy family, has very little work to do. Thus she seems to be daily accumulating her own self without expenditure, till the vessel is brimming over with the seething surplus. She has her husband, but not under her control. She has grown up from a girl into a woman, yet escaping, through familiarity, her husband's notice.

When she was newly married and her husband, Gopinath, was attending his college, he would often play the truant and under cover of the midday siesta of his elders secretly come to make love to Giribala. Though they lived under the same roof, he would create occasions to send her letters on tinted paper perfumed with rosewater, and would even gloat upon some exaggerated grievances of imaginary neglect of love.

Just then his father died and he became the sole owner of his property. Like an unseasoned piece of timber, the immature youth of Gopinath attracted parasites

which began to bore into his substance. From now his movements took the course that led him in a contrary direction from his wife.

There is a dangerous fascination to be leaders of men, to which many strong minds have succumbed. To be accepted as the leader of a small circle of sycophants, in his own parlour, has the same fearful attraction for a man who suffers from a scarcity of brains and character. Gopinath assumed the part of a hero among his friends and acquaintances, and tried daily to invent new wonders in all manner of extravagance. He won a reputation among his followers for his audacity of excesses, which goaded him not only to keep up his fame, but to surpass himself at all costs.

In the meanwhile, Giribala, in the seclusion of her lonely youth, felt like a queen who had her throne, but no subjects. She knew she had the power in her hand which could make the world of men her captive; only that world itself was wanting.

Giribala has a maid-servant whose name is Sudha. She can sing and dance and improvise verses, and she freely gives expression to her regret that such a beauty as that of her mistress should be dedicated to a fool who forgets to enjoy what he owns. Giribala is never tired of hearing from her the details of her charms, while at the same time contradicting her, calling her a liar and a flatterer, exciting her to swear by all that is sacred that she is earnest in her admiration, which statement, even without the accompaniment of a solemn oath, is not difficult for Giribala to believe.

Sudha used to sing to her a song beginning with the line, ‘Let me write myself a slave upon the soles of thy feet,’ and Giribala in her imagination could feel that her beautiful feet were fully worthy of bearing inscriptions of everlasting slavery from conquered hearts, if only they could be free in their career of conquest.

But the woman to whom her husband Gopinath has surrendered himself as a slave is Lavanga, the actress, who has the reputation of playing to perfection the part of a maiden languishing in hopeless love and swooning on the stage with an exquisite naturalness. When her husband had not altogether vanished from her sphere of influence, Giribala had often heard from him about the wonderful histrionic powers of this woman and in her jealous curiosity had greatly desired to see Lavanga on the stage. But she could not secure her husband’s consent, because Gopinath was firm in his opinion that the theatre was a place not fit for any decent woman to visit.

At last she paid for a seat and sent Sudha to see this famous actress in one of her best parts. The account that she received from her on her return was far from flattering to Lavanga, both as to her personal appearance and her stage

accomplishments. As, for obvious reasons, she had great faith in Sudha's power of appreciation, where it was due, Giribala did not hesitate to believe her in her description of Lavanga, which was accompanied by a mimicry of a ludicrous mannerism.

When at last her husband deserted her in his infatuation for this woman, she began to feel qualms of doubt. But as Sudha repeatedly asserted her former opinion with ever greater vehemence, comparing Lavanga to a piece of burnt log dressed up in a woman's clothes, Giribala determined secretly to go to the theatre herself and settle this question for good.

And she did go there one night with all the excitement of a forbidden entry. Her very trepidation of heart lent a special charm to what she saw. She gazed at the faces of the spectators, lit up with an unnatural shine of lamplight; and, with the magic of its music and the painted canvas of its scenery, the theatre seemed to her like a world where society was suddenly freed from its law of gravitation.

Coining from her walled up terrace and joyless home, she had entered a region where dreams and reality had clasped their hands in friendship, over the wine cup of art.

The bell rang, the orchestra music stopped, the audience sat still in their seats, the stage-lights shone brighter, and the curtain was drawn up. Suddenly appeared in the light, from the mystery of the unseen, the shepherd girls of the Vrinda forest, and with the accompaniment of songs commenced their dance, punctuated with the uproarious applause of the audience. The blood began to throb all over Giribala's body, and she forgot for the moment that her life was limited to the circumstances and that she was not free in a world where all laws had melted in music.

Sudha came occasionally to interrupt her with her anxious whispers urging her to hasten back home for the fear of being detected. But she paid no heed to her warning, for her sense of fear had gone.

The play goes on. Krishna has given offence to his beloved Radha and she in her wounded pride refuses to recognize him. He is entreating her, abasing himself at her feet, but in vain. Giribala's heart seems to swell. She imagines herself as offended Radha; and feels that she also has in her this woman's power to vindicate her pride. She had heard what a force was woman's beauty in the world but tonight it became to her palpable.

At last the curtain dropped, the light grew dim, the audience got ready to leave the theatre, but Giribala sat still like one in a dream. The thought that she would have to go home had vanished from her mind. She waited for the curtain to rise again and the eternal theme of Krishna's humiliation at the feet of Radha to

continue. But Sudha came to remind her that the play had ended and the lamps would soon be put out.

It was late when Giribala came back home. A kerosene lamp was dimly burning in the melancholy solitude and silence of her room. Near the window upon her lonely bed a mosquito curtain was gently moving in the breeze. Her world seemed to her distasteful and mean like a rotten fruit swept into the dustbin.

From now she regularly visited the theatre every Saturday. The fascination of her first sight of it lost much of its glamour. The painted vulgarity of the actresses and the falseness of their affectation became more and more evident, yet the habit grew upon her. Every time the curtain rose the window of her life's prison-house seemed to open before her and the stage, bordered off from the world of reality by its gilded frame and scenic display, by its array of lights and even its flimsiness of conventionalism, appeared to her like a fairyland where it was not impossible for herself to occupy the throne of the fairy queen.

When for the first time she saw her husband among the audience shouting his drunken admiration for a certain actress she felt an intense disgust and prayed in her mind that a day might come when she might have an opportunity to spurn him away with her contempt. But the opportunity became rarer every day, for Gopinath was hardly ever to be seen at his home now, being carried away, one knew not where, in the centre of a dust-storm of dissipation.

One evening in the month of March, in the light of the full moon, Giribala was sitting on her terrace dressed in her cream-coloured robe. It was her habit daily to deck herself with jewellery as if for some festive occasion. For these cosily gems were like wine to her—they sent heightened consciousness of beauty to her limbs; she felt like a plant in spring tingling with the impulse of flowers in all its branches. She wore a pair of diamond bracelets on her arms, a necklace of rubies and pearls on her neck, and a ring with a big sapphire on the little finger of her left hand. Sudha was sitting near her bare feet admiringly touching them with her hand and expressing her wish that she were a man privileged to offer her life as homage to such a pair of feet.

Sudha gently hummed a lovesong to her and the evening wore on to night. Everybody in the household had finished their evening meal, and gone to sleep. When suddenly Gopinath appeared reeking with scent and liquor, and Sudha drawing for cloth-end over her face, hastily ran away from the terrace.

Giribala thought for a moment that her day had come at last. She turned away her face and sat silent.

But the curtain in her stage did not rise and no song of entreaty came from her

hero, with the words—'Listen to the pleading of the moonlight, my love, and hide not thy face.'

In his dry unmusical voice Gopinath said, 'Give me your keys.'

A gust of south wind like a sigh of the insulted romance of the poetic world scattered all over the terrace the smell of the night-blooming jasmines and loosened some wisp of hair on Giribala's cheek. She let go her pride, and got up and said, 'You shall have your keys if you listen to what I have to say.' Gopinath said, I cannot delay. Give me your keys.'

Giribala said, I will give you the keys and everything that is in the safe, but you must not leave me.'

Gopinath said, 'That cannot be. I have urgent business.'

'Then you shan't have the keys,' said Giribala.

Gopinath began to search for them. He opened the drawers of the dressing table, broke open the lid of the box that contained Giribala's toilet requisites, smashed the glass panes of her almirah, groped under the pillows and mattress of the bed, but the keys he could not find. Giribala stood near the door stiff and silent like a marble image gazing at vacancy. Trembling with rage Gopinath came to her and said with an angry growl, 'Give me your keys or you will repent.' Giribala did not answer and Gopinath, pinning her to the wall, snatched away by force her bracelets, necklace and ring, and, giving her a parting kick, went away.

Nobody in the house woke up from his sleep, none in the neighbourhood knew of this outrage, the moonlight remained placid and the peace of the night undisturbed. Hearts can be rent never to heal again amidst such serene silence.

The next morning Giribala said she was going to see her father and left home. As Gopinath's present destination was not known and she was not responsible to anybody else in the house her absence was not noticed.

2

The new play of 'Manorama' was on rehearsal in the theatre where Gopinath was a constant visitor. Lavanga was practising for the part of the heroine Manorama, and Gopinath, sitting in the front seat with his rabble of followers, would vociferously encourage his favourite actress with his approbation. This greatly disturbed the rehearsal but the proprietors of the theatre did not dare to annoy their patron of whose vindictiveness they were afraid. But one day he went so far as to molest an actress in the greenroom and he had to be turned away by the aid of the police.

Gopinath determined to take his revenge,—and when, after a great deal of preparation and shrieking advertisements, the new play ‘Manorama’ was about to be produced, Gopinath took away the principal actress Lavanga with him and disappeared. It was a great shock to the manager, who had to postpone the opening night, and, getting hold of a new actress, taught her the part, and brought out the play before the public with considerable misgivings in his mind.

But the success was as unexpected as it was unprecedented. When its news reached Gopinath he could not resist his curiosity to come and see the performance.

The play opens with Manorama living in her husband’s house neglected and hardly noticed. Near the end of the drama her husband deserts her and concealing his first marriage manages to marry a millionaire’s daughter. When the wedding ceremony is over and the bridal veil is raised from her face she is discovered to be the same Manorama, only no longer the former drudge, but queenly in her beauty and splendour of dress and ornaments. In her infancy she had been brought up in a poor home being kidnapped from the house of her rich father, who having traced her to her husband’s home, has brought her back to him and celebrates her marriage once again in a fitting manner.

In the concluding scene, when the husband is going through his period of penitence and humiliation, as is fit in a play which has its moral, a sudden disturbance arose among the audience. So long as Manorama appeared obscured in her position of drudgery Gopinath showed no sign of perturbation. But when after the wedding ceremony she came out dressed in her red bridal robe and took her veil off, when with a majestic pride of her overwhelming beauty she turned her face towards the audience and, slightly bending her neck, shot a fiery glance of exultation at Gopinath, applause broke out in wave after wave and the enthusiasm of the spectators became unbounded.

Suddenly Gopinath cried out in a thick voice, ‘Giribala’, and like madman tried to rush upon the stage. The audience shouted, ‘Turn him out,’ the police came to drag him away and he struggled and screamed, ‘I will kill her,’ while the curtain dropped.

16. Haimanti: Of Autumn

The bride's father could have waited but the father of the groom was unwilling to tarry. In the latter's observation the girl was already past marriageable age and if any more time was wasted it would be impossible to conceal this fact from the world by means gentle or intrepid. Despite her age, the dowry was too substantial to be ignored and so the great hurry.

I was the bridegroom. Naturally my opinion was of least consequence. I had passed F.A. with distinction and my work was done. Due to this, both wings of the nuptial butterfly, that is, the bride's wing and that of the groom went into fervent activity.

In our country, a man who has been through marriage once is no longer daunted by the prospect. His attitude towards women resembles the disposition of a tiger who has once tasted human flesh. He is keen to contradict his lack of a wife the moment he loses her, without hesitation or regard for his own age or financial position. Dread and hesitation are the lot of the newcomer to the institution of marriage. As the proposals pour in, the gray hairs of his father and uncles keep looking younger thanks to black hair dye magic. And he in turn gets so worked up that his youthful mane gives indications of losing color in the first heat of matchmaking.

But to tell you the truth, I was not overcome with such trepidation. On the contrary, the prospect of getting married made me buoyant and the waving shoots of my fanciful imagination seemed to whisper amongst themselves. Such a tendency is vicious for one who must commit to memory at least five volumes of handwritten notes on Burke's exposition of the French Revolution. I would have been cautious here if there were any chances of this writing ever being approved by a textbook committee.

But what am I doing. Is this a made-up story that I should start off in the fashion of writing a novel. I least expected to begin my account in this tune. My intent was to shed the dark clouds of despair that I had piled up over the years much like how the nor'westerlies shed rain clouds on a stormy evening in the month of April. I have neither succeeded in writing textbooks for kids, since I've never studied grammar based on knowledge of Sanskrit; nor have I had success with poetry since my knowledge of the mother tongue has not so flowered within me to enable me to express my true emotions. And so the solitary

mendicant inside me mocks himself with clamorous laughter. What else would he do, for his supply of tears is spent. The month of May weeps with its scorching sunbeams, sans tears.

I do not wish to disclose the real name of the woman I had married. The issue is the least likely to induce archaeologists to engage in heated debates. But the copper plaque bearing her etched name is also the canvas of my heart. I have difficulty imagining that that canvas or the name on it will someday cease to exist. But the eternal abode where it abides is beyond the reach of historians.

In this account I need a name for her—any name. So I'll call her Sisir or drops of dew because dewdrops are reminiscent of laughter as well as tears and because in dewdrops dawn's tidings melt into the morning.

Sisir was just a couple of years younger than me despite my father being in no way opposed to marriage of pre-pubescent girls.

Grandfather was staunchly opposed to the diktats of society, he had no faith in conventional religion; for he had studied loads of English. My father is aggressively in favor of society's diktats; it would be difficult to find anything at all in our society, at home or outdoors, at the porch or by the rear door that he has difficulty coming to terms with; for he too had studied loads of English. Thus my father and grandfather came across as two completely opposite pictures of revolution as far as their opinions were concerned. Neither have been simple people or even normal. Yet the reason why father had me wed a girl past marriageable age was the dowry which was proportional to the bride's age. Sisir was the only daughter of my father-in-law. It was father's belief that everything her father owned would eventually belong to the future son-in-law.

My father-in-law was impartial in his views. He held an important post under a king in the highlands of the west. Sisir's mother died when she was a baby in arms. The man hadn't noticed that his daughter was getting a year older every year. Where they lived there was none from his own ilk to point it out to him.

Sisir turned sixteen in good time; but it was nature's sixteen, not that of society. No one advised her to watch out for her age, and she too took no special precaution.

It was during my third year at college that I got married at the age of nineteen. Let society and the social reformer shed each other's blood over the aptness of such an age; it is my opinion that the said age is no less suitable for matchmaking than it is for passing examinations.

It all started with a photograph. I was memorizing my lessons when a female relative of about my own age placed Sisir's photograph on my table and said, "Here's your new set of lessons!"

The snap had been taken by some novice photographer. She was motherless, so there wasn't anyone to tie and put up her hair in a nice bun decorated with glittering metallic threads, nor anyone to dress her up in an elaborate jacket manufactured by the Saha or Mullick companies. In short there was no one to cheat us with such eyewashes. A rather plain face with a pair of simple-looking eyes and her body draped in a simple sari. But the combined effect stirred something deep within me which I cannot express in words. She was seated on an ordinary bench with a striped mattress hanging behind her. There was a bouquet of flowers on a tripod placed on one side. Over the carpet below the meandering hemline of her sari were her two bare feet.

The girl in that picture woke up and entered my life the moment I touched her with my fancy's golden wand. Those black eyes gazed at me through my thoughts. And those bare feet beneath the meandering hemline of the sari graced the lotus-throne of my heart.

Several pages of the almanac were flipped and we missed two or three auspicious dates, yet my father-in-law could not secure leave from his office. This time-warp went on through four to five months threatening to extend my bachelorhood beyond my twentieth birthday for no good reason. I started feeling angry with my father-in-law and his employer.

Anyway, the danger was barely averted and our marriage date was fixed. I can recall each and every melody the clarinet played. I had experienced each and every moment of that auspicious day with all my consciousness. May that age of nineteen years remain ever resplendent in my memory.

In that assemblage and amid the din the delicate hand of the bride was placed on mine. What can be more surprising than this! My mind sang out to me, "I have received, I have received! She is mine!"

And who is she? She is hard to get. She is a woman. Her secrets are boundless.

My father-in-law was named Gaurishankar. He was a friend of the hills where he lived. Over his demureness he wore a constant sparkling smile. In his heart was a fountain of love and those who knew this refused to let go of him.

Before he went back to his place of work my father-in-law took me aside and said to me, "My dear young man, I have known my daughter for seventeen years and I've known you for just these few days. Yet I leave her in your hands. I hope you will understand the true value of this treasure. There is nothing greater that I can wish for you."

And my parents repeatedly assured him saying, "Do not worry brother-in-law. Just as your daughter has taken leave of you to come here she has gained a father and a mother in the two of us."

Then my father-in-law smiled and said to my wife, "Farewell child. You have only one father. From now on do not blame me if something belonging to him is lost or stolen."

In reply she said, "How can that be? If my father incurs any loss you will be required to compensate for it."

Finally she reminded her father repeatedly of all the things he habitually forgot. He was not sufficiently reserved in his food habits; he was easily tempted by what he was not supposed to consume. It had been his daughter's constant job to keep him away from those. Therefore she took his hand in hers and said, "You will keep my word, won't you?"

He smiled and said, "People make promises only to break them. It is safest not to promise."

When my father-in-law left the doors closed and no one knows what followed.

The women in my family had observed the tearless leave-taking of the father and daughter. They expressed surprise. What upcountry culture! Not a drop of tear!

Bonomali, a friend of my father-in-law had played our matchmaker. He was also known to my family. Bonomali had advised him, "This daughter is all you have in all the wide world. Why not buy a house near hers and spend the rest of your life here?"

He had replied, "What I have given away, I've given away for good. Why look back? I'd rather not make a mockery of my gift."

My father-in-law had asked me in isolation, "My daughter likes to read. She also likes to invite people and cook for them. I don't wish to trouble your father for this. I'll send you money from time to time. Will this anger your father?"

I had been somewhat surprised to hear this question. My father had never been so ill-tempered as to be angered by gifts of money arriving from any direction.

Before taking leave of me, my father-in-law tucked a hundred-rupee note into my hands as if he were bribing me and left in a hurry. He did not even wait for me to touch his feet. And now he took his handkerchief out as I could see from behind.

I sat down and started thinking. These are people of an entirely different kind.

I've observed many of my friends getting married. Past the vows, they cease the first opportunity to feast on their wives. Consequently, what reaches the stomach starts producing its various effects frequently causing internal tensions. But nothing strange happens on the way. I had however realized on the day of my marriage that the incantation of beneficence with which wedlock is sealed however suitable for the world at large leaves much wanting. I suspect that most

men merely wed their wives, they never win their hearts, and they never find out; nor does the wife find this out in all their lives for as long as they live. But she was the realization of all my prayers; she was not my property, she was my wealth!

Sisir—no I mustn't use this name any more. On the one hand this isn't her name, on the other it isn't her true identity. She is constant like the sun; she is not the parting teardrop of the short-lived morning sun. It is not worth hiding that her real name was Haimanti.

17. Holiday

Phatik Chakraborty, the unopposed leader of all the children in the neighbourhood, suddenly hit upon a new idea on seeing the massive log of wood lying on the banks of the river. It was decided that the log should be rolled away so that the owner, upon finding the log missing, would be perplexed. The vision of the owner's perplexed face, egged Phatik's followers and they immediately rushed forward to execute the plan.

But, before the plan could be executed, there arose an obstacle. Phatik's younger brother, Makhanlal, appeared from nowhere. He appeared to be contemplating some worldly problem. Makhanlal sat on the log and, unmindful of the others around him, engaged in some serious thinking.

Phatik's followers were in a dilemma. The log could not be rolled with Makhanlal sitting on it. A few of the followers prodded Makhanlal in order to budge him from the seat. But Makhanlal was lost in his own thoughts and did not heed the attempts to dislodge him.

Phatik came over and sounded, "Go away, else you will get a slap."

The response was undesirable. Instead of getting up, Makhanlal made himself all the more comfortable.

Now, this was an insult which Phatik should not have tolerated. Phatik should have carried out his threat and slapped Makhanlal. However, Phatik did not do so. A still better idea had clicked in his mind.

"Let us roll the log with Makhanlal sitting on it," he told the others.

The followers were all for it. Even Makhanlal decided it was a good idea as he would get a free ride. What Makhanlal did not realise was that there were inherent dangers in the plan.

Phatik and gang girded their loins and gave the log a good push.

Facilitated by its geometrical shape, the log rolled and so did Makhanlal.

Makhanlal was soon rolling on the ground. The followers were delighted.

But, soon, Makhanlal found his feet and, rushing towards Phatik, attacked him with relish. Thereafter, he turned his back and went home crying with the intention of complaining to mother.

The gravity of the situation dawned upon Phatik and he sat on an upturned boat on the banks, chewing a blade of grass while trying to figure out how he could

escape his mother's wrath.

A boat arrived then and a middle-aged man with greying hair alighted.
"Which way do I go to reach the home of the Chakraborty's?" he asked Phatik.
"That way," Phatik replied without pointing towards anywhere in particular.
The stranger was confused.
"Where?" he wanted to know.
"I don't know," Phatik said.

Realising that he was unlikely to get a proper reply from the boy, the stranger sought help of other people nearby and went his way.

Who should arrive then, but Bagha who helped in the house.
"Your mother is calling you, come let us go home," Bagha told Phatik.
"I don't want to come," Phatik replied.

Bagha was a giant of a man who did not like to take a "no" for an answer. He picked up Phatik as if he were a ball of cotton and marched towards home. All that poor Phatik could do was to thrash his arms and legs in the air.

Upon laying her eyes on Phatik, his mother immediately accosted him.
"How dare you beat up Makhan again?" she asked.
"I did not beat him," Phatik answered.
"Again, you are lying!"
"I am not lying, you may ask Makhan."

Makhan stood his ground and reiterated that he had indeed been beaten by Phatik.

At this, mother gave Phatik a resounding slap.

While this scene was unfolding, a stranger, the same one who had sought directions from Phatik, entered the house and gently inquired, "What's happening?"

Upon sighting the gentleman, Phatik's mother was overjoyed.

"Oh my!" she exclaimed, "When did you arrive, *Dada* (elder brother)?" And so saying she touched his feet in deep respect.

Dada, or Bishambarbabu, had left home long time back to seek his fortune in the western parts of the country. In the meanwhile, Phatik's mother had given birth to her two children, they had grown big while her husband had passed away. But *Dada* had never come home. After many years, he had returned back to the village to meet his sister.

The next few days were like festive occasions in the Chakraborty household. Finally, only a couple of days remained before Bishambarbabu was to leave. He had settled in Kolkata. He inquired after the children's education and learnt that

Phatik was not good at studies but Makhan was a gentle and obedient child.

“Phatik gives me a lot of trouble,” his sister told him.

After listening to this, Bishambarbabu proposed that he would like to take Phatik with him to Kolkata and give him a good education there. The widow readily agreed to the proposal.

“What do you want to do, Phatik? Would you like to go to Kolkata with your uncle?” she asked the mischievous boy.

“I want to go,” Phatik replied without a moment’s hesitation.

Although the mother was willing enough to send Phatik away because she was always afraid that Phatik might cause some harm to Makhan, she was however saddened by the boy’s eagerness to leave.

“When do we leave? Let us leave at once,” Phatik began pestering his uncle. In his excitement, he did not sleep well that night.

In his joy, Phatik became the epitome of munificence and he gifted away his fishing rod, kite and spool to Makhan.

Phatik was introduced to his aunt when he reached Kolkata. But the aunt did not appear to be very happy with this new addition to the family. She had three children of her own and was finding it difficult to cope. Her husband, she thought to herself, had not become sensible with age.

Boys between the ages of 13 and 14 are a nuisance. They are of no use. Their company is undesirable. they tend to grow very fast without any heed to the size of their clothes. They develop a hoarseness in their voice which is no longer sweet to listen. The boy also feels that somehow he cannot fit into the society and, so, feels ashamed of himself. At the same time, he craves for love and sympathy, but no one dares love him in the belief that it would amount to undue indulgence. So his state is almost like that of a pup which has become separated from its master. Under such a situation, any home other than his mother’s is like hell to the boy. The loveless environment pricks him like a thorn.

The aunt’s scorn was intolerable to Phatik and to win some love from her, he would go to great extent to do her bidding. If the aunt told him to do something for her, with great enthusiasm he would overdo it. But the aunt would repress his enthusiasm by saying, “Enough, enough! You do not have to do anything more. Concentrate on your own work and go and study.”

Such utter lack of sympathy made the boy feel like a prisoner within the four walls. He craved for those days when he could run around the playground trying to fly his huge kite, the incessant strolling on the banks of the river, going for a swim whenever he felt like it, his friends, and his independence.

There was no worse an inattentive student in school than Phatik. When the

teacher asked him a question, he would only stare blankly. The teacher would then start caning him, and he silently tolerated the torture. During the recess when other children engaged themselves in playing games, Phatik stood by the window and stared at the rooftops of the houses in the distance.

One day he picked up enough courage to ask his uncle when he could go to meet his mother. "Let the school close for the puja festival, and then you may go," his uncle said. But there were still many months left before the vacations.

One day he lost his textbook. Feeling guilty, he however approached his aunt and told her the truth. The aunt was annoyed. "I cannot buy new books for you every five months," she said. Phatik said no more but the thought that he was wasting the money of others troubled him.

When Phatik returned from school that day, he had a headache and felt feverish. But he also realised that if he revealed about his illness, it would unnecessarily create a burden for his aunt. Only a mother can care for a sick child, and Phatik felt ashamed to expect care from somebody else.

Next day, Phatik was nowhere to be found. Despite searching for him everywhere in the neighbourhood, the boy was not seen. It had started raining heavily and the people, who had gone out in search of him, came back wet. Finally, Bishambarbabu felt it appropriate to call the police.

Late that evening, a police van halted near Bishambarbabu's house and two policemen alighted while supporting Phatik between them. He was drenched, covered in mud, and had blood-shot eyes. Phatik was shivering. Bishambarbabu lifted him and carried the boy indoors.

"Why do you have to go to all this trouble for a boy who does not belong to us? Send him home," Phatik's aunt told her husband. Actually, she had been distressed by the boy's disappearance, and had neglected her meals. Besides, she had a little trouble with her own children as well.

Phatik was sobbing. "I was going to mother but they brought me back," he said.

The fever rose sharply. Phatik became delirious and kept mumbling incoherently all through the night. Bishambarbabu brought the doctor home.

Phatik stared blankly before him and mumbled, "Uncle, have my vacations begun?" Bishambarbabu wiped the tears that were blurring his vision and, taking Phatik's burning hands in his own, sat by his side.

But, Phatik kept mumbling. "Ma, don't beat me. I am telling you the truth, I have done nothing wrong."

Next day, Phatik gained some consciousness and looked around as if expecting to see someone in particular. However, upon not finding the person he was

looking for, Phatik turned away his face towards the wall in disappointment. Bishambarbabu realised what was troubling the boy and bringing his mouth close to Phatik's ears, gently whispered, "Phatik I have sent someone to fetch your mother."

The next day also passed, and the doctor appeared very concerned. The boy's condition was serious, he informed. Bishambarbau constantly remained by the sick person's side and waited for the boy's mother to arrive.

Phatik became delirious once again and, this time, intoning the sailors he mumbled, "By the mark one. By the mark two." Phatik had come to Kolkata in a steamer and at that time he had heard the sailors chant in such a manner while measuring the depth of the water. Phatik too was measuring the depth, but could not find the bottom.

It was then that Phatik's mother rushed into the room, wailing. "Phatik, my precious Phatik!" she cried out inconsolably.

Phatik very simply replied, "Yes."

Mother again called out, "Oh Phatik, my darling."

Phatik very slowly turned around and, without addressing anyone in particular, gently said, "Ma, my holidays have begun. Now I am going home."

18. The Home-Coming

Phatik Chakravarti was the ringleader among the boys of the village. One day a plan for new mischief entered his head. There was a heavy log lying on the mud-flat of the river, waiting to be shaped into a mast for a boat. His plan was that they should all work together to shift the log by main force from its place and roll it away. The owner of the log would be angry and surprised, while they would all enjoy the fun. Everyone supported the proposal, and it was carried unanimously.

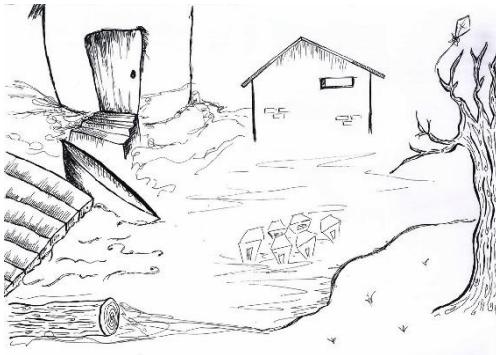
But just as the fun was about to begin, Makhan, Phatik's young brother, sauntered up without a word and sat down on the log in front of them all. The boys were puzzled for a moment. One of them pushed him rather timidly, and told him to get up; but he remained quite unconcerned. He appeared like a young philosopher meditating on the futility of games. Phatik was furious. 'Makhan,' he cried, 'if you don't get up this minute, I'll thrash you!'

Makhan only moved to a more comfortable position.

Now, if Phatik was to keep his real dignity before the public, it was clear that he must carry out his threat. But his courage failed him at the crisis. His fertile brain, however, rapidly seized upon a new manoeuvre which would discomfort his brother and afford his followers added amusement. He gave the word of command to roll the log and Makhan over together. Makhan heard the order and made it a point of honour to stick on. But like those who attempt earthly fame in other matters, he over-looked the fact that there was peril in it.

The boys began to heave at the log with all their might, calling out, 'One, two, three, go!' At the word 'go' the log went; and with it went Makhan's philosophy, glory and all.

The other boys shouted themselves hoarse with delight. But Phatik was a little frightened. He knew what was coming. And he was not mistaken, for Makhan rose from Mother Earth blind as Fate and screaming like the Furies. He rushed at Phatik, scratched his face, beat him and kicked him, and then went crying home. The first act of the drama was over.



Phatik wiped his face, and sitting down on the edge of a sunken barge by the river-bank, began to nibble a piece of grass. A boat came up to the landing and a middle-aged man, with grey hair and dark moustache, stepped on shore. He saw the boy sitting there, doing nothing and asked him where the Chakravartis lived. Phatik went on nibbling the grass and said: 'Over there;' but it was quite impossible to tell where he pointed. The stranger asked him again. He swung his legs to and fro on the side of the barge and said: 'Go and find out,' and continued to nibble the grass.

But, at that moment, a servant came down from the house and told Phatik that his mother wanted him. Phatik refused to move. But on this occasion the servant was the master. He roughly took Phatik up and carried him, kicking and struggling in impotent rage.

When Phatik entered the house, his mother saw him and called out angrily: 'So you have been hitting Makhan again?'

Phatik answered indignantly: 'No, I haven't! Who told you that I had?'

His mother shouted: 'Don't tell lies! You have.'

Phatik said sullenly: 'I tell you, I haven't. You ask Makhan!' But Makhan thought it best to stick to his previous statement. He said: 'Yes, mother, Phatik did hit me.'

Phatik's patience was already exhausted. He could not bear this injustice. He rushed at Makhan and rained on him a shower of blows: 'Take that,' he cried, 'and that, and that, for telling lies.'

His mother took Makhan's side in a moment, and pulled Phatik away, returning his blows with equal vigour. When Phatik pushed her aside, she shouted out: 'What! You little villain! Would you hit your own mother?'

It was just at this critical moment that the grey-haired stranger arrived. He asked what had occurred. Phatik looked sheepish and ashamed.

But when his mother stepped back and looked at the stranger, her anger was changed into surprise. For she recognised her brother and cried: 'Why, Dada!

Where have you come from?’

As she said these words, she bowed to the ground and touched his feet. Her brother Bishambar had gone away soon after she had married, and had started business in Bombay. She herself had lost her husband while he was there. Bishambar had now come back to Calcutta, and had at once made inquiries concerning his sister. As soon as he found out where she was, he had hastened to see her.

The next few days were full of rejoicing. The brother asked how the two boys were being brought up. He was told by his sister that Phatik was a perpetual nuisance. He was lazy, disobedient, and wild. But Makhan was as good as gold, as quiet as a lamb, and very fond of reading. Bishambar kindly offered to take Phatik off his sister’s hands and educate him with his own children in Calcutta. The widowed mother readily agreed. When his uncle asked Phatik if he would like to go to Calcutta with him, his joy knew no bounds, and he said: ‘Oh, yes, yes, uncle!’ in a way that made it quite clear that he meant it.

It was an immense relief to the mother to get rid of Phatik. She had a prejudice against the boy, and no love was lost between the two brothers. She was in daily fear that he would some day either drown Makhan in the river, or break his head in a fight, or urge him on into some danger. At the same time she was a little distressed to see Phatik’s extreme eagerness to leave his home.

Phatik, as soon as all was settled, kept asking his uncle every minute when they were to start. He was on pins all day long with excitement and lay awake most of the night. He bequeathed to Makhan, in perpetuity, his fishing-rod, his big knife, and his marbles. Indeed, at this time of departure, his generosity towards Makhan was unbounded.

When they reached Calcutta, Phatik met his aunt for the first time. She was by no means pleased with this unnecessary addition to her family. She found her own three boys quite enough to manage without taking anyone else. And to bring a village lad of fourteen into their midst was terribly upsetting. Bishambar should really have thought twice before committing such an indiscretion.

In this world there is no worse nuisance than a boy at the age of fourteen. He is neither ornamental nor useful. It is impossible to shower affection on him as on a smaller boy; and he is always getting in the way. If he talks with a childish lisp he is called a baby, and if in a grownup way he is called impertinent. In fact, talk of any kind from him is resented. Then he is at the unattractive, growing age. He grows out of his clothes with indecent haste; his voice grows hoarse and breaks and quavers; his face grows suddenly angular and unsightly. It is easy to excuse the shortcomings of early childhood, but it is hard to tolerate even unavoidable

lapses in a boy of fourteen. He becomes painfully self-conscious, and when he talks with elderly people he is either unduly forward, or else so unduly shy that he appears ashamed of his own existence.

Yes, it is at this age that in his heart of hearts, a young lad most craves recognition and love and he becomes the devoted slave of anyone who shows him consideration. But none dare openly love him, for that would be regarded as undue indulgence and therefore bad for the boy. So, what with scolding and chiding, he becomes very much like a stray dog that has lost its master.

His own home is the only paradise that a boy of fourteen can know. To live in a strange house with strange people is little short of torture; while it is the height of bliss to receive the kind looks of women and never to suffer their slights.

It was anguish to Phatik to be an unwelcome guest in his aunt's house, constantly despised and slighted by this elderly woman. If she ever asked him to do anything for her, he would be so overjoyed that his joy would seem exaggerated; and then she would tell him not to be so stupid, but to get on with his lessons.

This constant neglect gave Phatik a feeling of almost physical oppression. He wanted to go out into the open country and fill his lungs with fresh air. But there was no open country to go to. Surrounded on all sides by Calcutta houses and walls, he would dream night after night of his village home and long to be back there. He remembered the glorious meadow where he used to fly his kite all day long; the broad river-banks where he would wander the livelong day, singing and shouting for joy; the narrow brooks where he could dive and swim whenever he liked. He thought of the band of boy companions over whom he was despot; and, above all, thoughts of even that tyrant mother of his, who had such a prejudice against him, filled his mind day and night. A kind of physical love like that of animals, a longing to be in the presence of the loved one, an inexpressible wistfulness during absence, a silent cry of the inmost heart for the mother, like the lowing of a calf in the twilight—this love, which was almost an animal instinct, stirred the heart of this shy, nervous, thin, uncouth and ugly boy. No one could understand it, but it preyed upon his mind continually.

There was no more backward boy in the whole school than Phatik. He gaped and remained silent when the teacher asked him a question, and like an overladen ass patiently suffered the many thrashings that were meted out to him. When other boys were out at play, he stood wistfully by the window and gazed at the roofs of the distant houses. And if by chance he espied children playing on the open terrace of a roof, his heart would ache with longing.

One day he summoned up all his courage and asked his uncle: 'Uncle, when

can I go home?’

His uncle answered: ‘Wait till the holidays come.’

But the holidays would not come till October and there was still a long time to wait.

One day Phatik lost his lesson book. Even with the help of books he had found it very difficult to prepare his lesson. But, now, it became impossible. Day after day the teacher caned him unmercifully. He became so abjectly miserable that even his cousins were ashamed to own him. They began to jeer and insult him more than even the other boys did. At last he went to his aunt and told her that he had lost his book.

With an expression of the greatest contempt she burst out: ‘You great, clumsy, country lout! How can I afford to buy you new books five times a month, when I have my own family to look after?’

That night, on his way back from school, Phatik had a bad headache and a shivering-fit. He felt that he was going to have an attack of malaria. His one great fear was that he might be a nuisance to his aunt.

The next morning Phatik was nowhere to be seen. Search in the neighbourhood proved futile. The rain had been pouring in torrents all night, and those who went out to look for the boy were drenched to the skin. At last Bishambar asked the police to help him.

At nightfall a police van stopped at the door of the house. It was still raining and the streets were flooded. Two constables carried Phatik out in their arms and placed him before Bishambar. He was wet through from head to foot, covered with mud, while his face and eyes were flushed with fever and his limbs were trembling. Bishambar carried him in his arms and took him inside the house. When his wife saw him she exclaimed: ‘What a heap of trouble this boy has given us! Hadn’t you better send him home?’

Phatik heard her words and sobbed aloud: ‘Uncle, I was just going home; but they dragged me back again.’

The fever rapidly increased, and throughout the night the boy was delirious. Bishambar brought in a doctor. Phatik opened his eyes, and looking up to the ceiling said vacantly: ‘Uncle, have the holidays come yet?’

Bishambar wiped the tears from his eyes and took Phatik’s thin burning hands in his own and sat by his side through the night. Again the boy began to mutter, till at last his voice rose almost to a shriek: ‘Mother!’ he cried, ‘don’t beat me like that.....Mother! I am telling the truth!’

The next day Phatik for a short time became conscious. His eyes wandered round the room, as if he expected someone to come. At last, with an air of

disappointment, his head sank back on the pillow.

With a deep sigh he turned his face to the wall.

Bishambar read his thoughts, and bending down his head, whispered: 'Phatik, I have sent for your mother.'

The day dragged on. The doctor said in a troubled voice that the boy's condition was very critical.

Phatik began to cry out: 'By the mark—three fathoms. By the mark—four fathoms. By the mark—' Many times had he heard the sailors on the river steamers calling out the mark on the leadline. Now he was himself plumbing an unfathomable sea.

Later in the day Phatik's mother burst into the room like a whirlwind, and rocking herself to and fro from side to side began to moan and cry.

Bishambar tried to calm her, but she flung herself on the bed, and cried: 'Phatik, my darling, my darling.'

Phatik stopped his restless movements for a moment. His hands ceased beating up and down. He said: 'Eh?'

The mother cried again: 'Phatik, my darling, my darling.'

Very slowly Phatik's eyes wandered, but he could no longer see the people round his bed. At last he murmured: 'Mother, the holidays have come.'

19. The Hungry Stones

My kinsman and myself were returning to Calcutta from our Puja trip when we met the man in a train. From his dress and bearing we took him at first for an up-country Mahomedan, but we were puzzled as we heard him talk. He discoursed upon all subjects so confidently that you might think the Disposer of All Things consulted him at all times in all that He did. Hitherto we had been perfectly happy, as we did not know that secret and unheard-of forces were at work, that the Russians had advanced close to us, that the English had deep and secret policies, that confusion among the native chiefs had come to a head. But our newly-acquired friend said with a sly smile: "There happen more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are reported in your newspapers." As we had never stirred out of our homes before, the demeanour of the man struck us dumb with wonder. Be the topic ever so trivial, he would quote science, or comment on the Vedas, or repeat quatrains from some Persian poet; and as we had no pretence to a knowledge of science or the Vedas or Persian, our admiration for him went on increasing, and my kinsman, a theosophist, was firmly convinced that our fellow-passenger must have been supernaturally inspired by some strange magnetism" or "occult power," by an "astral body" or something of that kind. He listened to the tritest saying that fell from the lips of our extraordinary companion with devotional rapture, and secretly took down notes of his conversation. I fancy that the extraordinary man saw this, and was a little pleased with it.

When the train reached the junction, we assembled in the waiting room for the connection. It was then 10 P.M., and as the train, we heard, was likely to be very late, owing to something wrong in the lines, I spread my bed on the table and was about to lie down for a comfortable doze, when the extraordinary person deliberately set about spinning the following yarn. Of course, I could get no sleep that night.

When, owing to a disagreement about some questions of administrative policy, I threw up my post at Junagarh, and entered the service of the Nizam of Hydria, they appointed me at once, as a strong young man, collector of cotton duties at Barich.

Barich is a lovely place. The Susta "chatters over stony ways and babbles on the pebbles," tripping, like a skilful dancing girl, in through the woods below the

lonely hills. A flight of 150 steps rises from the river, and above that flight, on the river's brim and at the foot of the hills, there stands a solitary marble palace. Around it there is no habitation of man—the village and the cotton mart of Barich being far off.



About 250 years ago the Emperor Mahmud Shah II. had built this lonely palace for his pleasure and luxury. In his days jets of rose-water spurted from its fountains, and on the cold marble floors of its spray-cooled rooms young Persian damsels would sit, their hair dishevelled before bathing, and, splashing their soft naked feet in the clear water of the reservoirs, would sing, to the tune of the guitar, the ghazals of their vineyards.

The fountains play no longer; the songs have ceased; no longer do snow-white feet step gracefully on the snowy marble. It is but the vast and solitary quarters of cess-collectors like us, men oppressed with solitude and deprived of the society of women. Now, Karim Khan, the old clerk of my office, warned me repeatedly not to take up my abode there. "Pass the day there, if you like," said he, "but never stay the night." I passed it off with a light laugh. The servants said that they would work till dark and go away at night. I gave my ready assent. The house had such a bad name that even thieves would not venture near it after dark.

At first the solitude of the deserted palace weighed upon me like a nightmare. I would stay out, and work hard as long as possible, then return home at night jaded and tired, go to bed and fall asleep.

Before a week had passed, the place began to exert a weird fascination upon me. It is difficult to describe or to induce people to believe; but I felt as if the

whole house was like a living organism slowly and imperceptibly digesting me by the action of some stupefying gastric juice.

Perhaps the process had begun as soon as I set my foot in the house, but I distinctly remember the day on which I first was conscious of it.

It was the beginning of summer, and the market being dull I had no work to do. A little before sunset I was sitting in an arm-chair near the water's edge below the steps. The Susta had shrunk and sunk low; a broad patch of sand on the other side glowed with the hues of evening; on this side the pebbles at the bottom of the clear shallow waters were glistening. There was not a breath of wind anywhere, and the still air was laden with an oppressive scent from the spicy shrubs growing on the hills close by.

As the sun sank behind the hilltops a long dark curtain fell upon the stage of day, and the intervening hills cut short the time in which light and shade mingle at sunset. I thought of going out for a ride, and was about to get up when I heard a footfall on the steps behind. I looked back, but there was no one.

As I sat down again, thinking it to be an illusion, I heard many footfalls, as if a large number of persons were rushing down the steps. A strange thrill of delight, slightly tinged with fear, passed through my frame, and though there was not a figure before my eyes, methought I saw a bevy of joyous maidens coming down the steps to bathe in the Susta in that summer evening. Not a sound was in the valley, in the river, or in the palace, to break the silence, but I distinctly heard the maidens' gay and mirthful laugh, like the gurgle of a spring gushing forth in a hundred cascades, as they ran past me, in quick playful pursuit of each other, towards the river, without noticing me at all. As they were invisible to me, so I was, as it were, invisible to them. The river was perfectly calm, but I felt that its still, shallow, and clear waters were stirred suddenly by the splash of many an arm jingling with bracelets, that the girls laughed and dashed and spattered water at one another, that the feet of the fair swimmers tossed the tiny waves up in showers of pearl.

I felt a thrill at my heart—I cannot say whether the excitement was due to fear or delight or curiosity. I had a strong desire to see them more clearly, but naught was visible before me; I thought I could catch all that they said if I only strained my ears; but however hard I strained them, I heard nothing but the chirping of the cicadas in the woods. It seemed as if a dark curtain of 250 years was hanging before me, and I would fain lift a corner of it tremblingly and peer through, though the assembly on the other side was completely enveloped in darkness.

The oppressive closeness of the evening was broken by a sudden gust of wind, and the still surface of the Suista rippled and curled like the hair of a nymph, and

from the woods wrapt in the evening gloom there came forth a simultaneous murmur, as though they were awakening from a black dream. Call it reality or dream, the momentary glimpse of that invisible mirage reflected from a far-off world, 250 years old, vanished in a flash. The mystic forms that brushed past me with their quick unbodied steps, and loud, voiceless laughter, and threw themselves into the river, did not go back wringing their dripping robes as they went. Like fragrance wafted away by the wind they were dispersed by a single breath of the spring.

Then I was filled with a lively fear that it was the Muse that had taken advantage of my solitude and possessed me—the witch had evidently come to ruin a poor devil like myself making a living by collecting cotton duties. I decided to have a good dinner—it is the empty stomach that all sorts of incurable diseases find an easy prey. I sent for my cook and gave orders for a rich, sumptuous moghlai dinner, redolent of spices and *ghi*.

Next morning the whole affair appeared a queer fantasy. With a light heart I put on a sola hat like the sahebs, and drove out to my work. I was to have written my quarterly report that day, and expected to return late; but before it was dark I was strangely drawn to my house—by what I could not say—I felt they were all waiting, and that I should delay no longer. Leaving my report unfinished I rose, put on my sola hat, and startling the dark, shady, desolate path with the rattle of my carriage, I reached the vast silent palace standing on the gloomy skirts of the hills.

On the first floor the stairs led to a very spacious hall, its roof stretching wide over ornamental arches resting on three rows of massive pillars, and groaning day and night under the weight of its own intense solitude. The day had just closed, and the lamps had not yet been lighted. As I pushed the door open a great bustle seemed to follow within, as if a throng of people had broken up in confusion, and rushed out through the doors and windows and corridors and verandas and rooms, to make its hurried escape.

As I saw no one I stood bewildered, my hair on end in a kind of ecstatic delight, and a faint scent of attar and unguents almost effected by age lingered in my nostrils. Standing in the darkness of that vast desolate hall between the rows of those ancient pillars, I could hear the gurgle of fountains plashing on the marble floor, a strange tune on the guitar, the jingle of ornaments and the tinkle of anklets, the clang of bells tolling the hours, the distant note of nahabat, the din of the crystal pendants of chandeliers shaken by the breeze, the song of bulbuls from the cages in the corridors, the cackle of storks in the gardens, all creating round me a strange unearthly music.

Then I came under such a spell that this intangible, inaccessible, unearthly vision appeared to be the only reality in the world—and all else a mere dream. That I, that is to say, Srijut So-and-so, the eldest son of So-and-so of blessed memory, should be drawing a monthly salary of Rs. 450 by the discharge of my duties as collector of cotton duties, and driving in my dog-cart to my office every day in a short coat and soia hat, appeared to me to be such an astonishingly ludicrous illusion that I burst into a horse-laugh, as I stood in the gloom of that vast silent hall.

At that moment my servant entered with a lighted kerosene lamp in his hand. I do not know whether he thought me mad, but it came back to me at once that I was in very deed Srijut So-and-so, son of So-and-so of blessed memory, and that, while our poets, great and small, alone could say whether inside of or outside the earth there was a region where unseen fountains perpetually played and fairy guitars, struck by invisible fingers, sent forth an eternal harmony, this at any rate was certain, that I collected duties at the cotton market at Banch, and earned thereby Rs. 450 per mensem as my salary. I laughed in great glee at my curious illusion, as I sat over the newspaper at my camp-table, lighted by the kerosene lamp.

After I had finished my paper and eaten my moghlai dinner, I put out the lamp, and lay down on my bed in a small side-room. Through the open window a radiant star, high above the Avalli hills skirted by the darkness of their woods, was gazing intently from millions and millions of miles away in the sky at Mr. Collector lying on a humble camp-bedstead. I wondered and felt amused at the idea, and do not knew when I fell asleep or how long I slept; but I suddenly awoke with a start, though I heard no sound and saw no intruder—only the steady bright star on the hilltop had set, and the dim light of the new moon was stealthily entering the room through the open window, as if ashamed of its intrusion.

I saw nobody, but felt as if someone was gently pushing me. As I awoke she said not a word, but beckoned me with her five fingers bedecked with rings to follow her cautiously. I got up noiselessly, and, though not a soul save myself was there in the countless apartments of that deserted palace with its slumbering sounds and waiting echoes, I feared at every step lest anyone should wake up. Most of the rooms of the palace were always kept closed, and I had never entered them.

I followed breathless and with silent steps my invisible guide—I cannot now say where. What endless dark and narrow passages, what long corridors, what silent and solemn audience-chambers and close secret cells I crossed!

Though I could not see my fair guide, her form was not invisible to my mind's eye,—an Arab girl, her arms, hard and smooth as marble, visible through her loose sleeves, a thin veil falling on her face from the fringe of her cap, and a curved dagger at her waist! Methought that one of the thousand and one Arabian Nights had been wafted to me from the world of romance, and that at the dead of night I was wending my way through the dark narrow alleys of slumbering Bagdad to a trysting-place fraught with peril.

At last my fair guide stopped abruptly before a deep blue screen, and seemed to point to something below. There was nothing there, but a sudden dread froze the blood in my heart—methought I saw there on the floor at the foot of the screen a terrible negro eunuch dressed in rich brocade, sitting and dozing with outstretched legs, with a naked sword on his lap. My fair guide lightly tripped over his legs and held up a fringe of the screen. I could catch a glimpse of a part of the room spread with a Persian carpet—someone was sitting inside on a bed—I could not see her, but only caught a glimpse of two exquisite feet in gold-embroidered slippers, hanging out from loose saffron-coloured pajamas and placed idly on the orange-coloured velvet carpet. On one side there was a bluish crystal tray on which a few apples, pears, oranges, and bunches of grapes in plenty, two small cups and a gold-tinted decanter were evidently waiting the guest. A fragrant intoxicating vapour, issuing from a strange sort of incense that burned within, almost overpowered my senses.

As with trembling heart I made an attempt to step across the outstretched legs of the eunuch, he woke up suddenly with a start, and the sword fell from his lap with a sharp clang on the marble floor. A terrific scream made me jump, and I saw I was sitting on that camp-bedstead of mine sweating heavily; and the crescent moon looked pale in the morning light like a weary sleepless patient at dawn; and our crazy Meher Ali was crying out, as is his daily custom, “Stand back! Stand back!!” while he went along the lonely road.

Such was the abrupt close of one of my Arabian Nights; but there were yet a thousand nights left.

Then followed a great discord between my days and nights. During the day I would go to my work worn and tired, cursing the bewitching night and her empty dreams, but as night came my daily life with its bonds and shackles of work would appear a petty, false, ludicrous vanity.

After nightfall I was caught and overwhelmed in the snare of a strange intoxication, I would then be transformed into some unknown personage of a bygone age, playing my part in unwritten history; and my short English coat and tight breeches did not suit me in the least. With a red velvet cap on my head,

loose pajamas, an embroidered vest, a long flowing silk gown, and coloured handkerchiefs scented with attar, I would complete my elaborate toilet, sit on a high-cushioned chair, and replace my cigarette with a many-coiled nargileh filled with rose-water, as if in eager expectation of a strange meeting with the beloved one.

I have no power to describe the marvellous incidents that unfolded themselves, as the gloom of the night deepened. I felt as if in the curious apartments of that vast edifice the fragments of a beautiful story, which I could follow for some distance, but of which I could never see the end, flew about in a sudden gust of the vernal breeze. And all the same I would wander from room to room in pursuit of them the whole night long.

Amid the eddy of these dream-fragments, amid the smell of henna and the twanging of the guitar, amid the waves of air charged with fragrant spray, I would catch like a flash of lightning the momentary glimpse of a fair damsel. She it was who had saffron-coloured pajamas, white ruddy soft feet in gold-embroidered slippers with curved toes, a close-fitting bodice wrought with gold, a red cap, from which a golden frill fell on her snowy brow and cheeks.

She had maddened me. In pursuit of her I wandered from room to room, from path to path among the bewildering maze of alleys in the enchanted dreamland of the nether world of sleep.

Sometimes in the evening, while arraying myself carefully as a prince of the blood-royal before a large mirror, with a candle burning on either side, I would see a sudden reflection of the Persian beauty by the side of my own. A swift turn of her neck, a quick eager glance of intense passion and pain glowing in her large dark eyes, just a suspicion of speech on her dainty red lips, her figure, fair and slim crowned with youth like a blossoming creeper, quickly uplifted in her graceful tilting gait, a dazzling flash of pain and craving and ecstasy, a smile and a glance and a blaze of jewels and silk, and she melted away. A wild glist of wind, laden with all the fragrance of hills and woods, would put out my light, and I would fling aside my dress and lie down on my bed, my eyes closed and my body thrilling with delight, and there around me in the breeze, amid all the perfume of the woods and hills, floated through the silent gloom many a caress and many a kiss and many a tender touch of hands, and gentle murmurs in my ears, and fragrant breaths on my brow; or a sweetly-perfumed kerchief was wafted again and again on my cheeks. Then slowly a mysterious serpent would twist her stupefying coils about me; and heaving a heavy sigh, I would lapse into insensibility, and then into a profound slumber.

One evening I decided to go out on my horse—I do not know who implored

me to stay—but I would listen to no entreaties that day. My English hat and coat were resting on a rack, and I was about to take them down when a sudden whirlwind, crested with the sands of the Susta and the dead leaves of the Avalli hills, caught them up, and whirled them round and round, while a loud peal of merry laughter rose higher and higher, striking all the chords of mirth till it died away in the land of sunset.

I could not go out for my ride, and the next day I gave up my queer English coat and hat for good.

That day again at dead of night I heard the stifled heart-breaking sobs of someone—as if below the bed, below the floor, below the stony foundation of that gigantic palace, from the depths of a dark damp grave, a voice piteously cried and implored me: “Oh, rescue me! Break through these doors of hard illusion, deathlike slumber and fruitless dreams, place by your side on the saddle, press me to your heart, and, riding through hills and woods and across the river, take me to the warm radiance of your sunny rooms above!”

Who am I? Oh, how can I rescue thee? What drowning beauty, what incarnate passion shall I drag to the shore from this wild eddy of dreams? O lovely ethereal apparition! Where didst thou flourish and when?” By what cool spring, under the shade of what date-groves, wast thou born—in the lap of what homeless wanderer in the desert? What Bedouin snatched thee from thy mother’s arms, an opening bud plucked from a wild creeper, placed thee on a horse swift as lightning, crossed the burning sands, and took thee to the slave-market of what royal city? And there, what officer of the Badshah, seeing the glory of thy bashful blossoming youth, paid for thee in gold, placed thee in a golden palanquin, and offered thee as a present for the seraglio of his master? And O, the history of that place! The music of the sareng, the jingle of anklets, the occasional flash of daggers and the glowing wine of Shiraz poison, and the piercing flashing glance! What infinite grandeur, what endless servitude!

The slave-girls to thy right and left waved the chamar as diamonds flashed from their bracelets; the Badshah, the king of kings, fell on his knees at thy snowy feet in bejewelled shoes, and outside the terrible Abyssinian eunuch, looking like a messenger of death, but clothed like an angel, stood with a naked sword in his hand! Then, O, thou flower of the desert, swept away by the blood-stained dazzling ocean of grandeur, with its foam of jealousy, its rocks and shoals of intrigue, on what shore of cruel death wast thou cast, or in what other land more splendid and more cruel?

Suddenly at this moment that crazy Meher Ali screamed out: “Stand back! Stand back!! All is false! All is false!!” I opened my eyes and saw that it was

already light. My chaprasi came and handed me my letters, and the cook waited with a *salam* for my orders.

I said; "No, I can stay here no longer." That very day I packed up, and moved to my office. Old Karim Khan smiled a little as he saw me. I felt nettled, but said nothing, and fell to my work.

As evening approached I grew absent-minded; I felt as if I had an appointment to keep; and the work of examining the cotton accounts seemed wholly useless; even the Nizamat of the Nizam did not appear to be of much worth. Whatever belonged to the present, whatever was moving and acting and working for bread seemed trivial, meaningless, and contemptible.

I threw my pen down, closed my ledgers, got into my dog-cart, and drove away. I noticed that it stopped of itself at the gate of the marble palace just at the hour of twilight. With quick steps I climbed the stairs, and entered the room.

A heavy silence was reigning within. The dark rooms were looking sullen as if they had taken offence. My heart was full of contrition, but there was no one to whom I could lay it bare, or of whom I could ask forgiveness. I wandered about the dark rooms with a vacant mind. I wished I had a guitar to which I could sing to the unknown: "O fire, the poor moth that made a vain effort to fly away has come back to thee! Forgive it but this once, burn its wings and consume it in thy flame!"

Suddenly two tear-drops fell from overhead on my brow. Dark masses of clouds overcast the top of the Avalli hills that day. The gloomy woods and the sooty waters of the Susta were waiting in terrible suspense and in an ominous calm. Suddenly land, water, and sky shivered, and a wild tempest-blast rushed howling through the distant pathless woods, showing its lightning-teeth like a raving maniac who had broken his chains. The desolate halls of the palace banged their doors, and moaned in the bitterness of anguish.

The servants were all in the office, and there was no one to light the lamps. The night was cloudy and moonless. In the dense gloom within I could distinctly feel that a woman was lying on her face on the carpet below the bed—clasping and tearing her long dishevelled hair with desperate fingers. Blood was tricking down her fair brow, and she was now laughing a hard, harsh, mirthless laugh, now bursting into violent wringing sobs, now rending her bodice and striking at her bare bosom, as the wind roared in through the open window, and the rain poured in torrents and soaked her through and through.

All night there was no cessation of the storm or of the passionate cry. I wandered from room to room in the dark, with unavailing sorrow. Whom could I console when no one was by? Whose was this intense agony of sorrow? Whence

arose this inconsolable grief?

And the mad man cried out: "Stand back! Stand back!! All is false! All is false!!"

I saw that the day had dawned, and Meher Ali was going round and round the palace with his usual cry in that dreadful weather. Suddenly it came to me that perhaps he also had once lived in that house, and that, though he had gone mad, he came there every day, and went round and round, fascinated by the weird spell cast by the marble demon.

Despite the storm and rain I ran to him and asked: "Ho, Meher Ali, what is false?"

The man answered nothing, but pushing me aside went round and round with his frantic cry, like a bird flying fascinated about the jaws of a snake, and made a desperate effort to warn himself by repeating: "Stand back! Stand back!! All is false! All is false!!"

I ran like a mad man through the pelting rain to my office, and asked Karim Khan: "Tell me the meaning of all this!"

What I gathered from that old man was this: That at one time countless unrequited passions and unsatisfied longings and lurid flames of wild blazing pleasure raged within that palace, and that the curse of all the heart-aches and blasted hopes had made its every stone thirsty and hungry, eager to swallow up like a famished ogress any living man who might chance to approach. Not one of those who lived there for three consecutive nights could escape these cruel jaws, save Meher Ali, who had escaped at the cost of his reason.

I asked: "Is there no means whatever of my release?" The old man said: "There is only one means, and that is very difficult. I will tell you what it is, but first you must hear the history of a young Persian girl who once lived in that pleasure-dome. A stranger or a more bitterly heart-rending tragedy was never enacted on this earth."

Just at this moment the coolies announced that the train was coming. So soon? We hurriedly packed up our luggage, as the tram steamed in. An English gentleman, apparently just aroused from slumber, was looking out of a first-class carriage endeavouring to read the name of the station. As soon as he caught sight of our fellow-passenger, he cried, "Hallo," and took him into his own compartment. As we got into a second-class carriage, we had no chance of finding out who the man was nor what was the end of his story.

I said; "The man evidently took us for fools and imposed upon us out of fun. The story is pure fabrication from start to finish." The discussion that followed ended in a lifelong rupture between my theosophist kinsman and myself.

20. In the Night

‘Doctor, Doctor!’

I was startled out of my sleep in the very depth of night. On opening my eyes I saw it was our landlord Dokhin Babu. Hurriedly getting up and drawing out a broken chair, I made him sit down, and looked anxiously in his face. I saw by the clock that it was after half-past two.

Dokhin Babu’s face was pale, and his eyes wide open, as he said: ‘Tonight those symptoms returned—that medicine of yours has done me no good at all.’ I said rather timidly: ‘I am afraid you have been drinking again.’ Dokhin Babu got quite angry, and said: ‘There you make a great mistake. It is not the drink. You must hear the whole story in order to be able to understand the real reason.’

In the niche there was a small tin kerosene lamp burning dimly. This I turned up slightly; the light became a little brighter, and at the same time it began to smoke. Pulling my cloth over my shoulders, I spread a piece of newspaper over a packing-case, and sat down. Dokhin Babu began his story: ‘About four years ago I was attacked by a serious illness; just when I was on the point of death my disease took a better turn, until, after nearly a month, I recovered.

‘During my illness my wife did not rest for a moment, day or night. For those months that weak woman fought with all her might to drive Death’s messenger from the door. She went without food and sleep, and had no thought for anything else in this world.

‘Death, like a tiger cheated of its prey, threw me from its jaws, and went off, but in its retreat it dealt my wife a sharp blow with its paw.

‘Not long after my wife gave birth to a dead child. Then came my turn to nurse her. But she got quite troubled at this, and would say: “For heaven’s sake, don’t keep fussing in and out of my room like that.”

‘If I went to her room at night when she had fever, and, on the pretence of fanning myself, would try to fan her, she would get quite excited. And if, on account of serving her, my meal-time was ten minutes later than usual, that also was made the occasion for all sorts of entreaties and reproaches. If I went to do her the smallest service, instead of helping her it had just the opposite effect. She would exclaim: “It’s not good for a man to fuss so much.”

‘I think you have seen my garden-house. In front of it is the garden, at the foot

of which the river Ganges flows. Towards the south, just below our bedroom, my wife had made a garden according to her own fancy, and surrounded it with a hedge of henna. It was the one bit of the garden that was simple and unpretentious. In the flower-pots you did not see wooden pegs with long Latin names flying pretentious flags by the side of the most unpretentious-looking plants. Jasmine, tuberose, lemon flowers, and all kinds of roses were plentiful. Under a large *bokul* tree there was a white marble slab, which my wife used to wash twice a day when she was in good health. It was the place where she was in the habit of sitting on summer evenings, when her work was finished. From there she could see the river, but was herself invisible to the travellers on the passing steamers.

'One moonlight evening in the month of April, after having been confined to her bed for many days, she expressed a desire to get out of her close room, and sit in her garden.

'I lifted her with great care, and laid her down on that marble seat under the *bokul* tree. One or two *bokul* flowers fluttered down, and through the branches overhead the chequered moonlight fell on her worn face. All around was still and silent. As I looked down on her face, sitting by her side in that shadowy darkness, filled with the heavy scent of flowers, my eyes became moist.

'Slowly drawing near her, I took one of her hot thin hands between my own. She made no attempt to prevent me. After I had sat like this in silence for some time, my heart began to overflow, and I said: "Never shall I be able to forget your love."

'My wife gave a laugh in which there were mingled some happiness, a trace of distrust, and also the sharpness of sarcasm. She said nothing in the way of an answer, and yet gave me to understand by her laugh that she thought it unlikely that I would never forget her, nor did she herself wish it.

'I had never had the courage to make love to my wife simply out of fear of this sweet sharp laugh of hers. All the speeches which I made up when I was absent from her seemed to be very commonplace as soon as I found myself in her presence.

'It is possible to talk when you are contradicted, but laughter cannot be met by argument; so I had simply to remain silent. The moonlight became brighter, and a cuckoo began to call over and over again till it seemed to be demented. As I sat still, I wondered how on such a night the cuckoo's bride could remain indifferent.

'After a great deal of treatment, my wife's illness showed no signs of improvement. The doctor suggested a change of air, and I took her to

Allahabad.'

At this point Dokhin Babu suddenly stopped, and sat silent. With a questioning look on his face he looked towards me, and then began to brood with his head resting in his hands. I too kept silence. The kerosene lamp flickered in the niche, and in the stillness of the night the buzzing of the mosquitoes could be heard distinctly. Suddenly breaking the silence, Dokhin Babu resumed his story: 'Doctor Haran treated my wife, and after some time I was told that the disease was an incurable one, and my wife would have to suffer for the rest of her life.

'Then one day my wife said to me: "Since my disease is not going to leave me, and there does not seem much hope of my dying soon, why should you spend your days with this living death? Leave me alone, and go back to your other occupations."

'Now it was my turn to laugh. But I had not got her power of laughter. So, with all the solemnity suitable to the hero of a romance, I asserted: "So long as there is life in this body of mine———"

'She stopped me, saying: "Now, now. You don't need to say any more. Why, to hear you makes me want to give up the ghost."

'I don't know whether I had actually confessed it to myself then, but now I know quite well that I had, even at that time, in my heart of hearts, got tired of nursing the hopeless invalid.

'It was clear that she was able to detect my inner weariness of spirit, in spite of my devoted service. I did not understand it then, but now I have not the least doubt in my mind that she could read me as easily as a Children's First Reader in which there are no compound letters.

'Doctor Haran was of the same caste as myself. I had a standing invitation to his house. After I had been there several times he introduced me to his daughter. She was unmarried, although she was over fifteen years old. Her father said that he had not married her as he had not been able to find a suitable bridegroom of the same caste, but rumour said that there was some bar sinister in her birth.

'But she had no other fault, for she was as intelligent as she was beautiful. For that reason I used sometimes to discuss with her all sorts of questions, so that it was often late at night before I got back home, long past the time when I should have given my wife her medicine. She knew quite well that I had been at Doctor Haran's house, but she never once asked me the cause of my delay.

'The sick-room seemed to me doubly intolerable and joyless. I now began to neglect my patient, and constantly forgot to give her the medicine at the proper time.

'The doctor used sometimes to say to me: "For those who suffer from some

incurable disease death would be a happy release. As long as they remain alive they get no happiness themselves, and make others miserable.”

‘To say this in the ordinary course might be tolerated, but, with the example of my wife before us, such a subject ought not to have been mentioned. But I suppose doctors grow callous about the question of life and death of men.

‘Suddenly one day, as I was sitting in the room next to the sick chamber, I heard my wife say to the doctor: “Doctor, why do you go on giving me so many useless medicines? When my whole life has become one continuous disease, don’t you think that to kill me is to cure me?”

‘The doctor said: “You shouldn’t talk like that.”

‘As soon as the doctor had gone, I went into my wife’s room, and seating myself beside her began to stroke her forehead gently. She said: “This room is very hot, you go out for your usual walk. If you don’t get your evening exercise, you will have no appetite for your dinner.”

‘My evening walk meant going to Doctor Haran’s house. I had myself explained that a little exercise is necessary for one’s health and appetite. Now I am quite sure that every day she saw through my excuse. I was the fool, and I actually thought that she was unconscious of this deception.’

Here Dokhin Babu paused and, burying his head in his hands, remained silent for a time. At last he said: ‘Give me a glass of water,’ and having drunk the water he continued: ‘One day the doctor’s daughter Monorama expressed a desire to see my wife. I don’t quite know why, but this proposal did not altogether please me. But I could find no excuse for refusing her request. So she arrived one evening at our house.

‘On that day my wife’s pain had been rather more severe than usual. When her pain was worse she would lie quite still and silent, occasionally clenching her fists. It was only from that one was able to guess what agony she was enduring. There was no sound in the room, and I was sitting silently at the bedside. She had not requested me to go out for my usual walk. Either she had not the power to speak, or she got some relief from having me by her side when she was suffering very much. The kerosene lamp had been placed near the door lest it should hurt her eyes. The room was dark and still. The only sound that could be heard was an occasional sigh of relief when my wife’s pain became less for a moment or two.

‘It was at this time that Monorama came, and stood at the door. The light, coming from the opposite direction, fell on her face.

‘My wife started up, and, grasping my hand, asked: “O ke [12](#)?” In her feeble condition, she was so startled to see a stranger standing at the door that she asked

two or three times in a hoarse whisper: "O ke? O ke? O ke?"

12. 'O ke?' is the Bengali for 'Who is that?'

'At first I answered weakly: "I do not know"; but the next moment I felt as though someone had whipped me, and I hastily corrected myself and said: "Why, it's our doctor's daughter."

'My wife turned and looked at me. I was not able to look her in the face. Then she turned to the new-comer, and said in a weak voice: "Come in," and turning to me added: "Bring the lamp."

'Monorama came into the room, and began to talk a little to my wife. While she was talking the doctor came to see his patient.

'He had brought with him from the dispensary two bottles of medicine. Taking these out he said to my wife: "See, this blue bottle is for outward application, and the other is to be taken. Be careful not to mix the two, for this is a deadly poison."

'Warning me also, he placed the two bottles on the table by the bedside. When he was going the doctor called his daughter.

'She said to him: "Father, why should I not stay? There is no woman here to nurse her."

'My wife got quite excited and sat up saying: "No, no, don't you bother yourself. I have an old maidservant who takes care of me as if she were my mother."

'Just as the doctor was going away with his daughter, my wife said to him: "Doctor, he has been sitting too long in this close and stuffy room. Won't you take him out for some fresh air?"

'The doctor turned to me, and said: "Come along, I'll take you for a stroll along the bank of the river."

'After some little show of unwillingness I agreed. Before going the doctor again warned my wife about the two bottles of medicine.

'That evening I took my dinner at the doctor's house, and was late in coming home. On getting back I found that my wife was in extreme pain. Feeling deeply repentant, I asked her: "Has your pain increased?"

'She was too ill to answer, but only looked up in my face. I saw that she was breathing with difficulty.

'I at once sent for the doctor.

'At first he could not make out what was the matter. At last he asked: "Has that pain increased? Haven't you used that liniment?"

'Saying which, he picked up the blue bottle from the table. It was empty!

'Showing signs of agitation, he asked my wife: "You haven't taken this

medicine by mistake, have you?" Nodding her head, she silently indicated that she had.

'The doctor ran out of the house to bring his stomach pump, and I fell on the bed like one insensible.'

'Then, just as a mother tries to pacify a sick child, my wife drew my head to her breast, and with the touch of her hands attempted to tell me her thoughts. Merely by that tender touch, she said to me again and again: "Do not sorrow, all is for the best. You will be happy, and knowing that I die happily."

'By the time the doctor returned, all my wife's pains had ceased with her life.'

Dokhin Babu, taking another gulp of water, exclaimed: 'Ugh, it's terribly hot,' and then, going on to the veranda, he paced rapidly up and down two or three times. Coming back he sat down, and began again. It was clear enough that he did not want to tell me; but it seemed as if, by some sort of magic, I was dragging the story out of him. He went on: 'After my marriage with Monorama, whenever I tried to talk effusively to her, she looked grave. It seemed as if there was in her mind some hint of suspicion which I could not understand.'

'It was at this time that I began to have a fondness for drink.'

'One evening in the early autumn, I was strolling with Monorama in our garden by the river. The darkness had the feeling of a phantom world about it, and there was not even the occasional sound of the birds rustling their wings in their sleep. Only on both sides of the path along which we were walking the tops of the casuarina trees sighed in the breeze.'

'Feeling tired, Monorama went and lay down on that marble slab, placing her hands behind her head, and I sat beside her.'

'There the darkness seemed to be even denser, and the only patch of sky that could be seen was thick with stars. The chirping of the crickets under the trees was like a thin hem of sound at the lowest edge of the skirt of silence.'

'That evening I had been drinking a little, and my heart was in a melting mood. When my eyes had got used to the darkness, the grey outline of the loosely clad and languid form of Monorama, lying in the shadow of the trees, awakened in my mind an undefinable longing. It seemed to me as if she were only an unsubstantial shadow which I could never grasp in my arms.'

'Suddenly the tops of the casuarina trees seemed to be on fire. I saw the jagged edge of the old moon, golden in her harvest hue, rise gradually above the tops of the trees. The moonlight fell on the face of the white-clad form lying on the white marble. I could contain myself no longer. Drawing near her and taking her hand in mine, I said: "Monorama, you may not believe me, but never shall I be able to forget your love."

'The moment the words were out of my mouth I started, for I remembered that I had used the very same to someone else long before. And at the same time, from over the top of the casuarina trees, from under the golden crescent of the old moon, from across the wide stretches of the flowing Ganges, right to its most distant bank—Ha ha—Ha ha—Ha ha—came the sound of laughter passing swiftly overhead. Whether it was a heart-breaking laugh or a sky-rending wail, I cannot say. But on hearing it I fell to the ground in a swoon.

'When I recovered consciousness, I saw that I was lying on my bed in my own room. My wife asked me: "Whatever happened to you?" I replied, trembling with terror: "Didn't you hear how the whole sky rang with the sound of laughter—Ha ha—Ha ha—Ha ha?" My wife laughed, as she answered: "Laughter? What I heard was the sound of a flock of birds flying past overhead. You are easily frightened!"

'Next day I knew quite well that it was a flock of ducks migrating, as they do at that time of year, to the south. But when evening came I began to doubt again, and in my imagination the whole sky rang with laughter, piercing the darkness on the least pretext. It came to this at last that after dark I was not able to speak a word to Monorama.

'Then I decided to leave my garden-house, and took Monorama for a trip on the river. In the keen November air all my fear left me, and for some days I was quite happy.

'Leaving the Ganges, and crossing the river Khore, we at last reached the Padma. This terrible river lay stretched out like a huge serpent taking its winter sleep. On its north side were the barren, solitary sand-banks, which lay blazing in the sun; and on the high banks of the south side the mango groves of the villages stood close to the open jaws of this demoniac river, which now and again turned in its sleep, whereupon the cracked earth of the banks fell with a thud into its waters.

'Finding a suitable place, I moored the boat to the bank.

'One day we went out for a walk, on and on, till we were far away from our boat. The golden light of the setting sun gradually faded, and the sky was flooded with the pure silver light of the moon. As the moonlight fell on that limitless expanse of white sand, and filled the vast sky with its flood of brilliance, I felt as if we two were all alone, wandering in an uninhabited, unbounded dreamland, and without purpose. Monorama was wearing a red shawl, which she pulled over her head, and wrapped round her shoulders, leaving only her face visible. When the silence became deeper, and there was nothing but a vastness of white solitude all around us, then Monorama slowly

put out her hand and took hold of mine. She seemed so close to me that I felt as if she had surrendered into my hands her body and mind, her life and youth. In my yearning and happy heart, I said to myself: "Is there room enough anywhere else than under such a wide, open sky to contain the hearts of two human beings in love?" Then I felt as if we had no home to return to, that we could go on wandering thus, hand in hand, free from all cares and obstacles, along a road which had no end, through the moonlit immensity.

'As we went on, we came at last to a place where I could see a pool of water surrounded by hillocks of sand.

'Through the heart of this still water a long beam of moonlight pierced, like a flashing sword. Arriving at the edge of the pool, we stood there in silence, and Monorama looked up into my face. Her shawl slipped from off her head, and I stooped down and kissed her.

'Just then there came, from somewhere in the midst of that silent and solitary desert, a voice, saying three times in solemn tones: "O ke? O ke? O ke?"

'I started back, and my wife also trembled. But the next moment both of us realised that the sound was neither human nor superhuman—it was the call of some water-fowl, startled from its sleep at the sound of strangers so late at night near its nest.

'Recovering from our fright, we returned as fast as we could to the boat. Being late, we went straight to bed, and Monorama was soon fast asleep.

'Then in the darkness it seemed as if someone, standing by the side of the bed, was pointing a long, thin finger towards the sleeping Monorama, and with a hoarse whisper was asking me over and over again: "O ke? O ke? O ke?"

'Hastily getting up, I seized a box of matches, and lighted the lamp. Just as I did so, the mosquito net began to flutter in the wind, and the boat began to rock. The blood in my veins curdled, and the sweat came in heavy drops as I heard an echoing laugh, "Ha ha, Ha ha, Ha ha," sound through the dark night. It travelled over the river, across the sand-banks on the other side, and after that it passed over all the sleeping country, the villages and the towns, as though forever crossing the countries of this and other worlds. Fainter and fainter it grew, passing into limitless space, gradually becoming fine as the point of a needle. Never had I heard such a piercingly faint sound, never had I imagined such a ghost of a sound possible. It was as if within my skull there was the limitless sky of space, and no matter how far the sound travelled it could not get outside my brain.

'At last, when it was almost unbearable, I thought, unless I extinguished the light, I should not be able to sleep. No sooner had I put out the lamp than once

more, close to my mosquito curtain, I heard in the darkness that hoarse voice saying: "O ke? O ke? O ke?" My heart began to beat in unison with the words, and gradually began to repeat the question: "O ke? O ke? O ke?" In the silence of the night, from the middle of the boat my round clock began to be eloquent, and, pointing its hour hand towards Monorama, ticked out the question: "O ke? O ke? O ke?" As he spoke, Dokhin Babu became ghastly pale, and his voice seemed to be choking him. Touching him on the shoulder, I said: 'Take a little water.' At the same moment the kerosene lamp flickered and went out, and I saw that outside it was light. A crow cawed, and a yellow-hammer whistled. On the road in front of my house the creaking of a bullock-cart was heard.

The expression on Dokhin Babu's face was altogether changed. There was no longer the least trace of fear. That he had told me so much under the intoxication of an imaginary fear, and deluded by the sorcery of night, seemed to make him very much ashamed, and even angry with me. Without any formality of farewell he jumped up, and shot out of the house.

Next night, when it was quite late, I was again wakened from my sleep by a voice calling: 'Doctor, Doctor.'

21. The Kingdom of Cards

I

Once upon a time there was a lonely island in a distant sea where lived the Kings and Queens, the Aces and the Knaves, in the Kingdom of Cards. The Tens and Nines, with the Twos and Threes, and all the other members, had long ago settled there also. But these were not twice-born people, like the famous Court Cards.

The Ace, the King, and the Knave were the three highest castes. The fourth Caste was made up of a mixture of the lower Cards. The Twos and Threes were lowest of all. These inferior Cards were never allowed to sit in the same row with the great Court Cards.

Wonderful indeed were the regulations and rules of that island kingdom. The particular rank of each individual had been settled from time immemorial. Everyone had his own appointed work, and never did anything else. An unseen hand appeared to be directing them wherever they went,—according to the Rules.

No one in the Kingdom of Cards had any occasion to think: no one had any need to come to any decision: no one was ever required to debate any new subject. The citizens all moved along in a listless groove without speech. When they fell, they made no noise. They lay down on their backs, and gazed upward at the sky with each prim feature firmly fixed forever.

There was a remarkable stillness in the Kingdom of Cards. Satisfaction and contentment were complete in all their rounded wholeness. There was never any uproar or violence. There was never any excitement or enthusiasm.

The great ocean, crooning its lullaby with one unceasing melody, lapped the island to sleep with a thousand soft touches of its wave's white hands. The vast sky, like the outspread azure wings of the brooding mother-bird, nestled the island round with its downy plume. For on the distant horizon a deep blue line betokened another shore. But no sound of quarrel or strife could reach the Island of Cards, to break its calm repose.

II

In that far-off foreign land, across the sea, there lived a young Prince whose mother was a sorrowing queen. This queen had fallen from favour, and was living with her only son on the seashore. The Prince passed his childhood alone and forlorn, sitting by his forlorn mother, weaving the net of his big desires. He longed to go in search of the Flying Horse, the Jewel in the Cobra's hood, the Rose of Heaven, the Magic Roads, or to find where the Princess Beauty was sleeping in the Ogre's castle over the thirteen rivers and across the seven seas.

From the Son of the Merchant at school the young Prince learnt the stories of foreign kingdoms. From the Son of the Kotwal he learnt the adventures of the Two Genii of the Lamp. And when the rain came beating down, and the clouds covered the sky, he would sit on the threshold facing the sea, and say to his sorrowing mother: "Tell me, mother, a story of some very far-off land."

And his mother would tell him an endless tale she had heard in her childhood of a wonderful country beyond the sea where dwelt the Princess Beauty. And the heart of the young Prince would become sick with longing, as he sat on the threshold, looking out on the ocean, listening to his mother's wonderful story, while the rain outside came beating down and the grey clouds covered the sky.

One day the Son of the Merchant came to the Prince, and said boldly: "Comrade, my studies are over. I am now setting out on my travels to seek my fortunes on the sea. I have come to bid you good-bye."

The Prince said; "I will go with you."

And the Son of Kotwal said also: "Comrades, trusty and true, you will not leave me behind. I also will be your companion."

Then the young Prince said to his sorrowing mother; "Mother, I am now setting out on my travels to seek my fortune. When I come back once more, I shall surely have found some way to remove all your sorrow."

So the Three Companions set out on their travels together. In the harbour were anchored the twelve ships of the merchant, and the Three Companions got on board. The south wind was blowing, and the twelve ships sailed away, as fast as the desires which rose in the Prince's breast.

At the Conch Shell Island they filled one ship with conchs. At the Sandal Wood Island they filled a second ship with sandal-wood, and at the Coral Island they filled a third ship with coral.

Four years passed away, and they filled four more ships, one with ivory, one with musk, one with cloves, and one with nutmegs.

But when these ships were all loaded a terrible tempest arose. The ships were all of them sunk, with their cloves and nutmeg, and musk and ivory, and coral and sandal-wood and conchs. But the ship with the Three Companions struck on

an island reef, buried them safe ashore, and itself broke in pieces.

This was the famous Island of Cards, where lived the Ace and King and Queen and Knave, with the Nines and Tens and all the other Members—according to the Rules.

III

Up till now there had been nothing to disturb that island stillness. No new thing had ever happened. No discussion had ever been held.

And then, of a sudden, the Three Companions appeared, thrown up by the sea,—and the Great Debate began. There were three main points of dispute.

First, to what caste should these unclassed strangers belong? Should they rank with the Court Cards? Or were they merely lower-caste people, to be ranked with the Nines and Tens? No precedent could be quoted to decide this weighty question.

Secondly, what was their clan? Had they the fairer hue and bright complexion of the Hearts, or was theirs the darker complexion of the Clubs? Over this question there were interminable disputes. The whole marriage system of the island, with its intricate regulations, would depend on its nice adjustment.

Thirdly, what food should they take? With whom should they live and sleep? And should their heads be placed south-west, north-west, or only north-east? In all the Kingdom of Cards a series of problems so vital and critical had never been debated before.

But the Three Companions grew desperately hungry. They had to get food in some way or other. So while this debate went on, with its interminable silence and pauses, and while the Aces called their own meeting, and formed themselves into a Committee, to find some obsolete dealing with the question, the Three Companions themselves were eating all they could find, and drinking out of every vessel, and breaking all regulations.

Even the Twos and Threes were shocked at this outrageous behaviour. The Threes said; “Brother Twos, these people are openly shameless!” And the Twos said: “Brother Threes, they are evidently of lower caste than ourselves!” After their meal was over, the Three Companions went for a stroll in the city.

When they saw the ponderous people moving in their dismal processions with prim and solemn faces, then the Prince turned to the Son of the Merchant and the Son of the Kotwal, and threw back his head, and gave one stupendous laugh.

Down Royal Street and across Ace Square and along the Knave Embankment

ran the quiver of this strange, unheard-of laughter, the laughter that, amazed at itself, expired in the vast vacuum of silence.

The Son of the Kotwal and the Son of the Merchant were chilled through to the bone by the ghost-like stillness around them. They turned to the Prince, and said: "Comrade, let us away. Let us not stop for a moment in this awful land of ghosts."

But the Prince said: "Comrades, these people resemble men, so I am going to find out, by shaking them upside down and outside in, whether they have a single drop of warm living blood left in their veins."

IV

The days passed one by one, and the placid existence of the Island went on almost without a ripple. The Three Companions obeyed no rules nor regulations. They never did anything correctly either in sitting or standing or turning themselves round or lying on their back. On the contrary, wherever they saw these things going on precisely and exactly according to the Rules, they gave way to inordinate laughter. They remained unimpressed altogether by the eternal gravity of those eternal regulations.

One day the great Court Cards came to the Son of the Kotwal and the Son of the Merchant and the Prince.

"Why," they asked slowly, "are you not moving according to the Rules?"

The Three Companions answered: "Because that is our Ichcha (wish)."

The great Court Cards with hollow, cavernous voices, as if slowly awakening from an age-long dream, said together: "Ich-cha! And pray who is Ich-cha?"

They could not understand who Ichcha was then, but the whole island was to understand it by-and-by. The first glimmer of light passed the threshold of their minds when they found out, through watching the actions of the Prince, that they might move in a straight line in an opposite direction from the one in which they had always gone before. Then they made another startling discovery, that there was another side to the Cards which they had never yet noticed with attention. This was the beginning of the change.

Now that the change had begun, the Three Companions were able to initiate them more and more deeply into the mysteries of Ichcha. The Cards gradually became aware that life was not bound by regulations. They began to feel a secret satisfaction in the kingly power of choosing for themselves.

But with this first impact of Ichcha the whole pack of cards began to totter

slowly, and then tumble down to the ground. The scene was like that of some huge python awaking from a long sleep, as it slowly unfolds its numberless coils with a quiver that runs through its whole frame.

V

Hitherto the Queens of Spades and Clubs and Diamonds and Hearts had remained behind curtains with eyes that gazed vacantly into space, or else remained fixed upon the ground.

And now, all of a sudden, on an afternoon in spring the Queen of Hearts from the balcony raised her dark eyebrows for a moment, and cast a single glance upon the Prince from the corner of her eye.

“Great God,” cried the Prince, “I thought they were all painted images. But I am wrong. They are women after all.”

Then the young Prince called to his side his two Companions, and said in a meditative voice; “My comrades! There is a charm about these ladies that I never noticed before. When I saw that glance of the Queen’s dark, luminous eyes, brightening with new emotion, it seemed to me like the first faint streak of dawn in a newly created world.”

The two Companions smiled a knowing smile, and said: “Is that really so, Prince?”

And the poor Queen of Hearts from that day went from bad to worse. She began to forget all rules in a truly scandalous manner. If, for instance, her place in the row was beside the Knave, she suddenly found herself quite accidentally standing beside the Prince instead. At this, the Knave, with motionless face and solemn voice, would say: “Queen, you have made a mistake.”

And the poor Queen of Hearts’ red cheeks would get redder than ever. But the Prince would come gallantly to her rescue and say: “No! There is no mistake. From today I am going to be Knave!”

Now it came to pass that, while everyone was trying to correct the improprieties of the guilty Queen of Hearts, they began to make mistakes themselves. The Aces found themselves elbowed out by the Kings. The Kings got muddled up with the Knaves. The Nines and Tens assumed airs as though they belonged to the Great Court Cards. The Twos and Threes were found secretly taking the places specially resented for the Fours and Fives. Confusion had never been so confounded before.

Many spring seasons had come and gone in that Island of Cards. The Kokil, the bird of Spring, had sung its song year after year. But it had never stirred the

blood as it stirred it now. In days gone by the sea had sung its tireless melody. But, then, it had proclaimed only the inflexible monotony of the Rule. And suddenly its waves were telling, through all their flashing light and luminous shade and myriad voices, the deepest yearnings of the heart of love!

VI

Where are vanished now their prim, round, regular, complacent features? Here is a face full of love-sick longing. Here is a heart heating wild with regrets. Here is a mind racked sore with doubts. Music and sighing, and smiles and tears, are filling the air. Life is throbbing; hearts are breaking; passions are kindling.

Everyone is now thinking of his own appearance, and comparing himself with others. The Ace of Clubs is musing to himself, that the King of Spades may be just passably good-looking. "But," says he, "When I walk down the street you have only to see how people's eyes turn towards me." The King of Spades is saying; "Why on earth is that Ace of Clubs always straining his neck and strutting about like a peacock? He imagines all the Queens are dying of love for him, while the real fact is—" Here he pauses, and examines his face in the glass.

But the Queens were the worst of all. They began to spend all their time in dressing themselves up to the Nines. And the Nines would become their hopeless and abject slaves. But their cutting remarks about one another were more shocking still.

So the young men would sit listless on the leaves under the trees, lolling with outstretched limbs in the forest shade. And the young maidens, dressed in pale-blue robes, would come walking accidentally to the same shade of the same forest by the same trees, and turn their eyes as though they saw no one there, and look as though they came out to see nothing at all. And then one young man more forward than the rest in a fit of madness would dare to go near to a maiden in blue. But, as he drew near, speech would forsake him. He would stand there tongue-tied and foolish, and the favourable moment would pass.

The Kokil birds were singing in the boughs overhead. The mischievous South wind was blowing; it disarrayed the hair, it whispered in the ear, and stirred the music in the blood. The leaves of the trees were murmuring with rustling delight. And the ceaseless sound of the ocean made all the mute longings of the heart of man and maid surge backwards and forwards on the full springtide of love.

The Three Companions had brought into the dried-up channels of the Kingdom of Cards the full flood-tide of a new life.

VII

And, though the tide was full, there was a pause as though the rising waters would not break into foam but remain suspended forever. There were no outspoken words, only a cautious going forward one step and receding two. All seemed busy heaping up their unfulfilled desires like castles in the air, or fortresses of sand. They were pale and speechless, their eyes were burning, their lips trembling with unspoken secrets.

The Prince saw what was wrong. He summoned everyone on the Island and said: "Bring hither the flutes and the cymbals, the pipes and drums. Let all be played together, and raise loud shouts of rejoicing. For the Queen of Hearts this very night is going to choose her Mate!"

So the Tens and Nines began to blow on their flutes and pipes; the Eights and Sevens played on their sackbuts and viols; and even the Twos and Threes began to beat madly on their drums.

When this tumultuous gust of music came, it swept away at one blast all those sighings and mopings. And then what a torrent of laughter and words poured forth! There were daring proposals and locking refusals, and gossip and chatter, and jests and merriment. It was like the swaying and shaking, and rustling and soughing, in a summer gale, of a million leaves and branches in the depth of the primeval forest.

But the Queen of Hearts, in a rose-red robe, sat silent in the shadow of her secret bower, and listened to the great uproarious sound of music and mirth, that came floating towards her. She shut her eyes, and dreamt her dream of lore. And when she opened them she found the Prince seated on the ground before her gazing up at her face. And she covered her eyes with both hands, and shrank back quivering with an inward tumult of joy.

And the Prince passed the whole day alone, walking by the side of the surging sea. He carried in his mind that startled look, that shrinking gesture of the Queen, and his heart beat high with hope.

That night the serried, gaily-dressed ranks of young men and maidens waited with smiling faces at the Palace Gates. The Palace Hall was lighted with fairy lamps and festooned with the flowers of spring. Slowly the Queen of Hearts entered, and the whole assembly rose to greet her. With a jasmine garland in her hand, she stood before the Prince with downcast eyes. In her lowly bashfulness she could hardly raise the garland to the neck of the Mate she had chosen. But the Prince bowed his head, and the garland slipped to its place. The assembly of youths and maidens had waited her choice with eager, expectant hush. And when

the choice was made, the whole vast concourse rocked and swayed with a tumult of wild delight. And the sound of their shouts was heard in every part of the island, and by ships far out at sea. Never had such a shout been raised in the Kingdom of Cards before.

And they carried the Prince and his Bride, and seated them on the throne, and crowned them then and there in the Ancient Island of Cards.

And the sorrowing Mother Queen, on the ‘far-off island shore on the other side of the sea, came sailing to her son’s new kingdom in a ship adorned with gold.

And the citizens are no longer regulated according to the Rules, but are good or bad, or both, according to their Ichcha.

22. Living or Dead?

I

The widow in the house of Saradasankar, the Ranihat *zemindar*, had no kinsmen of her father's family. One after another all had died. Nor had she in her husband's family anyone she could call her own, neither husband nor son. The child of her brother-in-law Saradasankar was her darling. Far a long time after his birth, his mother had been very ill, and the widow, his aunt Kadambini, had fostered him. If a woman fosters another's child, her love for him is all the stronger because she has no claim upon him-no claim of kinship, that is, but simply the claim of love. Love cannot prove its claim by any document which society accepts, and does not wish to prove it; it merely worships with double passion its life's uncertain treasure. Thus all the widow's thwarted love went out to wards this little child. One night in Sraban Kadambini died suddenly. For some reason her heart stopped beating. Everywhere else the world held on its course; only in this gentle little breast, suffering with love, the watch of time stood still forever.

Lest they should be harassed by the poike, four of the zemindar's Brahmin servants took away the body, without ceremony, to be burned. The burning-ground of Ranihat was very far from the village. There was a hut beside a tank, a huge banian near it, and nothing more. Formerly a river, now completely dried up, ran through the ground, and part of the watercourse had been dug out to make a tank for the performance of funeral rites. The people considered the tank as part of the river and reverenced it as such.

Taking the body into the hut, the four men sat down to wait for the wood. The time seemed so long that two of the four grew restless, and went to see why it did not come. Nitai and Gurucharan being gone, Bidhu and Banamali remained to watch over the body.

It was a dark night of Sraban. Heavy clouds hung in a starless sky. The two men sat silent in the dark room. Their matches and lamp were useless. The matches were damp, and would not light, for all their efforts, and the lantern went out.

After a long silence, one said: "Brother, it would be good if we had a bowl of tobacco. In our hurry we brought none."

The other answered: "I can run and bring all we want."

Understanding why Banarnali wanted to go (From fear of ghosts, the burning-ground being considered haunted.), Bidhu said: "I daresay! Meanwhile, I suppose I am to sit here alone!"

Conversation ceased again. Five minutes seemed like an hour. In their minds they cursed the two, who had gone to fetch the wood, and they began to suspect that they sat gossiping in some pleasant nook. There was no sound anywhere, except the incessant noise of frogs and crickets from the tank. Then suddenly they fancied that the bed shook slightly, as if the dead body had turned on its side. Bidhu and Banamali trembled, and began muttering: "Ram, Ram." A deep sigh was heard in the room. In a moment the watchers leapt out of the hut, and raced for the village.

After running about three miles, they met their colleagues coming back with a lantern. As a matter of fact, they had gone to smoke, and knew nothing about the wood. But they declared that a tree had been cut down, and that, when it was split up, it would be brought along at once. Then Bidhu and Banamali told them what had happened in the hut. Nitai and Gurucharan scoffed at the story, and abused Bidhu and Banamali angrily for leaving their duty.

Without delay all four returned to the hut. As they entered, they saw at once that the body was gone; nothing but an empty bed remained. They stared at one another. Could a jackal have taken it? But there was no scrap of clothing anywhere. Going outside, they saw that on the mud that had collected at the door of the hut there were a woman's tiny footprints, newly made. Saradasankar was no fool, and they could hardly persuade him to believe in this ghost story. So after much discussion the four decided that it would be best to say that the body had been burnt.

Towards dawn, when the men with the wood arrived they were told that, owing to their delay, the work had been done without them; there had been some wood in the hut after all. No one was likely to question this, since a dead body is not such a valuable property that anyone would steal it.

II

Everyone knows that, even when there is no sign, life is often secretly present, and may begin again in an apparently dead body. Kadambini was not dead; only the machine of her life had for some reason suddenly stopped.

When consciousness returned, she saw dense darkness on all sides. It occurred to her that she was not lying in her usual place. She called out "Sister," but no answer came from the darkness. As she sat up, terror-stricken, she remembered her death-bed, the sudden pain at her breast, the beginning of a choking sensation. Her elder sister-in-law was warming some milk for the child, when Kadambini became faint, and fell on the bed, saying with a choking voice: "Sister, bring the child here. I am worried." After that everything was black, as when an inkpot is upset over an exercise-book. Kadambini's memory and consciousness, all the letters of the world's book, in a moment became formless. The widow could not remember whether the child, in the sweet voice of love, called her "Auntie," as if for the last time, or not; she could not remember whether, as she left the world she knew for death's endless unknown journey, she had received a parting gift of affection, love's passage-money for the silent land. At first, I fancy, she thought the lonely dark place was the House of Yama, where there is nothing to see, nothing to hear, nothing to do, only an eternal watch. But when a cold damp wind drove through the open door, and she heard the croaking of frogs, she remembered vividly and in a moment all the rains of her short life, and could feel her kinship with the earth. Then came a flash of lightning, and she saw the tank, the banian, the great plain, the far-off trees. She remembered how at full moon she had sometimes come to bathe in this tank, and how dreadful death had seemed when she saw a corpse on the burning-ground.

Her first thought was to return home. But then she reflected: "I am dead. How can I return home? That would bring disaster on them. I have left the kingdom of the living; I am my own ghost!" If this were not so, she reasoned, how could she have got out of Saradasankar's well-guarded zenana, and come to this distant burning ground at midnight? Also, if her funeral rites had not been finished, where had the men gone who should burn her? Recalling her death-moment in Saradasankar's brightly-lit house, she now found herself alone in a distant, deserted, dark burning ground. Surely she was no member of earthly society! Surely she was a creature of horror, of ill-omen, her own ghost!

At this thought, all the bonds were snapped which bound her to the world. She felt that she had marvellous strength, endless freedom. She could do what she liked, go where she pleased. Mad with the inspiration of this new idea, she rushed from the hut like a gust of wind, and stood upon the burning ground. All trace of shame or fear had left her.

But as she walked on and on, her feet grew tired, her body weak. The plain stretched on endlessly; here and there were paddy-fields; sometimes she found herself standing knee-deep in water.

At the first glimmer of dawn she heard one or two birds cry from the bamboo-clumps by the distant houses. Then terror seized her. She could not tell in what new relation she stood to the earth and to living folk. So long as she had been on the plain, on the burning-ground, covered by the dark night of Sraban, so long she had been fearless, a denizen of her own kingdom. By daylight the homes of men filled her with fear. Men and ghosts dread each other, for their tribes inhabit different banks of the river of death.

III

Her clothes were clotted in the mud; strange thoughts and walking by night had given her the aspect of a madwoman; truly, her apparition was such that folk might have been afraid of her, and children might have stoned her or run away. Luckily, the first to catch sight of her was a traveller. He came up, and said: "Mother, you look a respectable woman. Wherever are you going, alone and in this guise?"

Kadambini, unable to collect her thoughts, stared at him in silence. She could not think that she was still in touch with the world, that she looked like a respectable woman, that a traveller was asking her questions.

Again the man said: "Come, mother, I will see you home. Tell me where you live."

Kadambini thought. To return to her father-in-law's house would be absurd, and she had no father's house. Then she remembered the friend of her childhood. She had not seen Jogmaya since the days of her youth, but from time to time they had exchanged letters. Occasionally there had been quarrels between them, as was only right, since Kadambini wished to make it dear that her love for Jogmaya was unbounded, while her friend complained that Kadambini did not return a love equal to her own. They were both sure that, if they once met, they would be inseparable.

Kadambini said to the traveller: "I will go to Sripati's house at Nisindapur."

As he was going to Calcutta, Nisindapur, though not near, was on his way. So he took Kadambini to Sripati's house, and the friends met again. At first they did not recognise one another, but gradually each recognised the features of the other's childhood.

"What luck!" said Jogmaya. "I never dreamt that I should see you again. But how hate you come here, sister? Your father-in-law's folk surely didn't let you go!"

Kadambini remained silent, and at last said: "Sister, do not ask about my

father-in-law. Give me a corner, and treat me as a servant: I will do your work."

"What?" cried Jogmaya. "Keep you like a servant! Why, you are my closest friend, you are my—" and so on and so on.

Just then Sripati came in. Kadambini stared at him for some time, and then went out very slowly. She kept her head uncovered, and showed not the slightest modesty or respect. Jogmaya, fearing that Sripati would be prejudiced against her friend, began an elaborate explanation. But Sripati, who readily agreed to anything Jogmaya said, cut short her story, and left his wife uneasy in her mind.

Kadambini had come, but she was not at one with her friend: death was between them. She could feel no intimacy for others so long as her existence perplexed her and consciousness remained. Kadambini would look at Jogmaya, and brood. She would think: "She has her husband and her work, she lives in a world far away from mine. She shares affection and duty with the people of the world; I am an empty shadow. She is among the living; I am in eternity."

Jogmaya also was uneasy, but could not explain why. Women do not love mystery, because, though uncertainty may be transmuted into poetry, into heroism, into scholarship, it cannot be turned to account in household work. So, when a woman cannot understand a thing, she either destroys and forgets it, or she shapes it anew for her own use; if she fails to deal with it in one of these ways, she loses her temper with it. The greater Kadambini's abstraction became, the more impatient was Jogmaya with her, wondering what trouble weighed upon her mind.

Then a new danger arose. Kadambini was afraid of herself; yet she could not flee from herself. Those who fear ghosts fear those who are behind them; wherever they cannot see there is fear. But Kadambini's chief terror lay in herself, for she dreaded nothing external. At the dead of night, when alone in her room, she screamed; in the evening, when she saw her shadow in the lamp-light, her whole body shook. Watching her fearfulness, the rest of the house fell into a sort of terror. The servants and Jogmaya herself began to see ghosts.

One midnight, Kadambini came out from her bedroom weeping, and wailed at Jogmaya's door: "Sister, sister, let me lie at your feet! Do not put me by myself!"

Jogmaya's anger was no less than her fear. She would have liked to drive Kadambini from the house that very second. The good-natured Sripati, after much effort, succeeded in quieting their guest, and put her in the next room.

Next day Sripati was unexpectedly summoned to his wife's apartments. She began to upbraid him: "You, do you call yourself a man? A woman runs away from her father-in-law, and enters your house; a month passes, and you haven't

hinted that she should go away, nor have I heard the slightest protest from you. I should take it as a favour if you would explain yourself. You men are all alike."

Men, as a race, have a natural partiality for womankind in general, for which women themselves hold them accountable. Although Sripati was prepared to touch Jogmaya's body, and swear that his kind feeling towards the helpless but beautiful Kadambini was no whit greater than it should be, he could not prove it by his behaviour. He thought that her father-in-law's people must have treated this forlorn widow abominably, if she could bear it no longer, and was driven to take refuge with him. As she had neither father nor mother, how could he desert her? So saying, he let the matter drop, far he had no mind to distress Kadambini by asking her unpleasant questions.

His wife, then, tried other means of her sluggish lord, until at last he saw that for the sake of peace he must send word to Kadambini's father-in-law. The result of a letter, he thought, might not be satisfactory; so he resolved to go to Ranihat, and act on what he learnt.

So Sripati went, and Jogmaya on her part said to Kadambini, "Friend, it hardly seems proper for you to stop here any longer. What will people say?"

Kadambini stared solemnly at Jogmaya, and said: "What have I to do with people?"

Jogmaya was astounded. Then she said sharply: "If you have nothing to do with people, we have. How can we explain the detention of a woman belonging to another house?"

Kadambini said: "Where is my father-in-law's house?"

"Confound it!" thought Jogmaya. "What will the wretched woman say next?"

Very slowly Kadambini said: "What have I to do with you? Am I of the earth? You laugh, weep, love; each grips and holds his own; I merely look. You are human, I a shadow. I cannot understand why God has kept me in this world of yours."

So strange were her look and speech that Jogmaya understood something of her drift, though not all. Unable either to dismiss her, or to ask her any more questions, she went away, oppressed with thought.

IV

It was nearly ten o'clock at night when Sripati returned from Ranihat. The earth was drowned in torrents of rain. It seemed that the downpour would never stop, that the night would never end.

Jogmaya asked: "Well?"

"I've lots to say, presently."

So saying, Sripati changed his clothes, and sat down to supper; then he lay down for a smoke. His mind was perplexed.

His wife stilled her curiosity for a long time; then she came to his couch and demanded: "What did you hear?"

"That you have certainly made a mistake."

Jogmaya was nettled. Women never make mistakes, or, if they do, a sensible man never mentions them; it is better to take them on his own shoulders. Jogmaya snapped: "May I am permitted to hear how?"

Sripati replied: "The woman you have taken into your house is not your Kadambini."

Hearing this, she was greatly annoyed, especially since it was her husband who said it. "What! I don't know my own friend? I must come to you to recognise her! You are clever, indeed!"

Sripati explained that there was no need to quarrel about his cleverness. He could prove what he said. There was no doubt that Jogmaya's Kadambini was dead.

Jogmaya replied: "Listen! You've certainly made some huge mistake. You've been to the wrong house, or are confused as to what you have heard. Who told you to go yourself? Write a letter, and everything will be cleared up."

Sripati was hurt by his wife's lack of faith in his executive ability; he produced all sorts of proof, without result. Midnight found them still asserting and contradicting. Although they were both agreed now that Kadambini should be got out of the house, although Sripati believed that their guest had deceived his wife all the time by a pretended acquaintance, and Jogmaya that she was a prostitute, yet in the present discussion neither would acknowledge defeat. By degrees their voices became so loud that they forgot that Kadambini was sleeping in the next room.

The one said: "We're in a nice fix! I tell you, I heard it with my own ears!" And the other answered angrily: "What do I care about that? I can see with my own eyes, surely."

At length Jogmaya said: "Very well. Tell me when Kadambini died." She thought that if she could find a discrepancy between the day of death and the date of some letter from Kadambini, she could prove that Sripati erred.

He told her the date of Kadambini's death, and they both saw that it fell on the very day before she came to their house. Jogmaya's heart trembled, even Sripati was not unmoved.

Just then the door flew open; a damp wind swept in and blew the lamp out. The darkness rushed after it, and filled the whole house. Kadambini stood in the room. It was nearly one o'clock, the rain was pelting outside.

Kadambini spoke: "Friend, I am your Kadambini, but I am no longer living. I am dead."

Jogmaya screamed with terror; Sripati could speak.

"But, save in being dead, I have done you no wrong. If I have no place among the living, I have none among the dead. Oh! Whither shall I go?"

Crying as if to wake the sleeping Creator in the dense night of rain, she asked again: "Oh! whither shall I go?"

So saying Kadambini left her friend fainting in the dark house, and went out into the world, seeking her own place.

V

It is hard to say how Kadambini reached Ranihat. At first she showed herself to no one, but spent the whole day in a ruined temple, starving. When the untimely afternoon of the rains was pitch-black, and people huddled into their houses for fear of the impending storm, then Kadambini came forth. Her heart trembled as she reached her father-in-law's house; and when, drawing a thick veil over her face, she entered, none of the doorkeepers objected, since they took her for a servant. And the rain was pouring down, and the wind howled.

The mistress, Saradasankar's wife, was playing cards with her widowed sister. A servant was in the kitchen, the sick child was sleeping in the bedroom. Kadambini, escaping everyone's notice, entered this room. I do not know why she had come to her father-in-law's house; she herself did not know; she felt only that she wanted to see her child again. She had no thought where to go next, or what to do.

In the lighted room she saw the child sleeping, his fists clenched, his body wasted with fever. At sight of him, her heart became parched and thirsty. If only she could press that tortured body to her breast! Immediately the thought followed: "I do not exist. Who would see it? His mother loves company, loves gossip and cards. All the time that she left me in charge, she was herself free from anxiety, nor was she troubled about him in the least. Who will look after him now as I did?"

The child turned on his side, and cried, half-asleep: "Auntie, give me water." Her darling had not yet forgotten his auntie! In a fever of excitement, she poured out some water, and, taking him to her breast, she gave it him.

As long as he was asleep, the child felt no strangeness in taking water from the accustomed hand. But when Kadambini satisfied her long-starved longing, and kissed him and began rocking him asleep again, he awoke and embraced her. "Did you die, Auntie?" he asked.

"Yes, darling."

"And you have come back? Do not die again."

Before she could answer disaster overtook her. One of the maidservants coming in with a cup of sago dropped it, and fell down. At the crash the mistress left her cards, and entered the room. She stood like a pillar of wood, unable to flee or speak. Seeing all this, the child, too, became terrified, and burst out weeping: "Go away, Auntie," he said, "go away!"

Now at last Kadambini understood that she had not died. The old room, the old things, the same child, the same love, all returned to their living state, without change or difference between her and them. In her friend's house she had felt that her childhood's companion was dead. In her child's room she knew that the boy's "Auntie" was not dead at all. In anguished tones she said: "Sister, why do you dread me? See, I am as you knew me."

Her sister-in-law could endure no longer, and fell into a faint. Saradasankar himself entered the zenana. With folded hands, he said piteously: "Is this right? Satis is my only son. Why do you show yourself to him? Are we not your own kin? Since you went, he has wasted away daily; his fever has been incessant; day and night he cries: 'Auntie, Auntie.' You have left the world; break these bonds of maya (Illusory affection binding a soul to the world). We will perform all funeral honours."

Kadambini could bear no more. She said: "Oh, I am not dead, I am not dead. Oh, how can I persuade you that I am not dead? I am living, living!" She lifted a brass pot from the ground and dashed it against her forehead. The blood ran from her brow. "Look!" she cried, "I am living!" Saradasankar stood like an image; the child screamed with fear, the two fainting women lay still.

Then Kadambini, shouting "I am not dead, I am not dead," went down the steps to the zenana well, and plunged in. From the upper storey Saradasankar heard the splash.

All night the rain poured; it poured next day at dawn, was pouring still at noon. By dying, Kadambini had given proof that she was not dead.

23. The Lost Jewels

My boat was moored beside an old bathing *ghat* of the river, almost in ruins. The sun had set.

On the roof of the boat the boatmen were at their evening prayer. Against the bright background of the western sky their silent worship stood out like a picture. The waning light was reflected on the still surface of river in every delicate shade of colour from gold to steel-blue.

A huge house with broken windows, tumbledown verandas, and all the appearance of old age was in front of me. I sat alone on the steps of the *ghat*, which were cracked by the far-reaching roots of a banyan tree. A feeling of sadness began to come over me, when suddenly I was startled to hear a voice asking: 'Sir, where have you come from?'

I looked up, and saw a man who seemed half-starved and out of fortune. His face had a dilapidated look such as is common among my countrymen who take up service away from home. His dirty coat of Assam silk was greasy and open at the front. He appeared to be just returning from his day's work, and to be taking a walk by the side of the river at a time when he should have been eating his evening meal.

The new-comer sat beside me on the steps. I said in answer to his question: 'I come from Ranchi.'

'What occupation?'

'I am a merchant.'

'What sort?'

'A dealer in cocoons and timber.'

'What name?'

After a moment's hesitation I gave a name, but it was not my own.

Still the stranger's curiosity was not satisfied. Again he questioned me: 'What have you come here for?' I replied: 'For a change of air.'

My cross-examiner seemed a little astonished. He said: 'Well, sir, I have been enjoying the air of this place for nearly six years, and with it I have taken a daily average of fifteen grains of quinine, but I have not noticed that I have benefited much.'

I replied: 'Still, you must acknowledge that, after Ranchi, I shall find the air of

this place sufficient of a change.'

'Yes, indeed,' said he. 'More than you bargain for. But where will you stay here?'

Pointing to the tumbledown house above the *ghat*, I said: 'There.'

I think my friend had a suspicion that I had come in search of hidden treasure. However, he did not pursue the subject. He only began to describe to me what had happened in this ruined building some fifteen years before.

I found that he was the schoolmaster of the place. From beneath an enormous bald head, his two eyes shone out from their sockets with an unnatural brightness in a face that was thin with hunger and illness.

The boatmen, having finished their evening prayer, turned their attention to their cooking. As the last light of the day faded, the dark and empty house stood silent and ghostly above the deserted *ghat*.

The schoolmaster said: 'Nearly ten years ago, when I came to this place, Bhusan Saha used to live in this house. He was the heir to the large property and business of his uncle Durga Saha, who was childless.

'But he was modern. He had been educated, and not only spoke faultless English, but actually entered sahibs' offices with his shoes on. In addition to that he grew a beard; thus he had not the least chance of bettering himself so far as the sahibs were concerned. You had only to look at him to see that he was a modernised Bengali.

'In his own home, too, he had another drawback. His wife was beautiful. With his college education on the one hand, and on the other his beautiful wife, what chance was there of his preserving our good old traditions in his home? In fact, when he was ill, he actually called in the assistant surgeon. And his style of food, dress, and his wife's jewels were all on the same extravagant scale.

'Sir, you are certainly a married man, so that it is hardly necessary to tell you that the ordinary female is fond of sour green mangoes, hot chillies, and a stern husband. A man need not necessarily be ugly or poor to be cheated of his wife's love; but he is sure to lose it if he is too gentle.

'If you ask me why this is so, I have much to say on this subject, for I have thought a good deal about it. A deer chooses a hardwood tree on which to sharpen its horns, and would get no pleasure in rubbing its horns against the soft stem of a plantain tree. From the very moment that man and woman became separate sexes, woman has been exercising all her faculties in trying by various devices to fascinate and bring man under her control. The wife of a man who is, of his own accord, submissive is altogether out of employment. All those weapons which she has inherited from her grandmothers of untold centuries are

useless in her hands: the force of her tears, the fire of her anger, and the snare of her glances lie idle.

'Under the spell of modern civilisation man has lost the God-given power of his barbaric nature, and this has loosened the conjugal ties. The unfortunate Bhusan had been turned out of the machine of modern civilisation an absolutely faultless man. He was therefore neither successful in business nor in his own home.

'Mani was Bhusan's wife. She used to get her caresses without asking, her Dacca muslin saris without tears, and her bangles without being able to pride herself on a victory. In this way her woman's nature became atrophied, and with it her love for her husband. She simply accepted things without giving anything in return. Her harmless and foolish husband used to imagine that to give is the way to get. The fact was just the contrary.

'The result of this was that Mani looked upon her husband as a mere machine for turning out her Dacca muslins and her bangles—so perfect a machine, indeed, that never for a single day did she need to oil its wheels.

'Though Bhusan's birthplace was Phulbere, here was his place of business, where, for the sake of his work, he spent most of his time. At his Phulbere house he had no mother, but had plenty of aunts and uncles and other relatives, from which distraction he brought away his wife to this house and kept her to himself alone. But there is this difference between a wife and one's other possessions, that by keeping her to oneself one may lose her beyond recovery.

'Bhusan's wife did not talk very much, nor did she mix much with her neighbours. To feed Brahmans in obedience to a sacred vow, or to give a few pice to a religious mendicant, was not her way. In her hands nothing was ever lost; whatever she got she saved up most carefully, with the one exception of the memory of her husband's caresses. The extraordinary thing was that she did not seem to lose the least atom of her youthful beauty. People said that whatever her age was, she never looked older than sixteen. I suppose youth is best preserved with the aid of a heart that is an ice-box.

'But as far as work was concerned Mani was very efficient. She never kept more servants than were absolutely necessary. She thought that to pay wages to anyone to do work which she herself could do was like playing the pickpocket with her own money.

'Not being anxious about anyone, never being distracted by love, always working and saving, she was never sick nor sorry.

'For the majority of husbands this is quite sufficient,—not only sufficient, but fortunate. For the loving wife is a wife who makes it difficult for her husband to

forget her, and the fatigue of perpetual remembrance wears out life's bloom. It is only when a man has lumbago that he becomes conscious of his waist. And lumbago in domestic affairs is to be made conscious, by the constant imposition of love, that you have such a thing as a wife. Excessive devotion to her husband may be a merit for the wife but not comfortable for the husband,—that is my candid opinion.

'I hope I am not tiring you, sir? I live alone, you see; I am banished from the company of my wife, and there are many important social questions which I have leisure to think about, but cannot discuss with my pupils. In course of conversation you will see how deeply I have thought of them.'

Just as he was speaking, some jackals began to howl from a neighbouring thicket. The schoolmaster stopped for a moment the torrent of his talk. When the sound had ceased, and the earth and the water relapsed into a deeper silence, he —opened his glowing eyes wide in the darkness of the night, and resumed the thread of his story.

'Suddenly a tangle occurred in Bhusan's complicated business. What exactly happened it is not possible for a layman like myself either to understand or to explain. Suffice it to say that, for some sudden reason, he found it difficult to get credit in the market. If only he could, by hook or by crook, raise a lakh and a half of rupees, and only for a few days rapidly flash it before the market, then his credit would be restored, and he would be able to sail fair again.

'But the money did not come easily. If the rumour got about that he was borrowing in the market where he was known, then he feared that his business would suffer even more seriously. So he began to cast about to see whether he could not raise a loan from some stranger. But, in that case, he would be bound to give some satisfactory security.

'The best security of all is jewelry, for that saves the signing of all sorts of complicated documents. It not only saves time but is a simple process.

'So Bhusan went to his wife. But unfortunately he was not able to face his wife as easily as most men are. His love for his wife was of that kind which has to tread very carefully, and cannot speak out plainly what is in the mind; it is like the attraction of the sun for the earth, which is strong, yet which leaves immense space between them.

'Still, even the hero of a high-class romance does sometimes, when hard pressed, have to mention to his beloved such things as mortgage deeds and promissory notes. But the words stick, and the tune does not seem right, and the shrinking of reluctance makes itself felt. The unfortunate Bhusan was totally powerless to say: "Look here, I am in need of money; bring out your jewels."

'He did broach the subject to his wife at last, but with such extreme delicacy that it only excited her opposition without bending it to his own purpose. When Mani set her face hard, and said nothing, he was deeply hurt, yet he was incapable of returning the hurt back to her. The reason was that he had not even a trace of that barbarity which is the gift of the male. If anyone had upbraided him for this, then most probably he would have expressed some such subtle sentiment as the following: "If my wife, of her own free choice, is unwilling to trust me with her jewelry, then I have no right to take them from her by force."

'Has God given to man such forcefulness only for him to spend his time in delicate measurement of fine-spun ideals?

'However this may be, Bhusan, being too proud to touch his wife's jewels, went to Calcutta to try some other way of raising the money.

'As a general rule in this world, the wife knows the husband far better than the husband ever knows the wife; but extremely modern men in their subtlety of nature are altogether beyond the range of those unsophisticated instincts which womankind has acquired through ages. These men are a new race, and have become as mysterious as women themselves. Ordinary men can be divided roughly into three main classes; some of them are barbarians, some are fools, and some are blind; but these modern men do not fit into any of them.

'So Mani called her counsellor for consultation. Some cousin of hers was engaged as assistant steward on Bhusan's estate. He was not the kind of man to profit himself by dint of hard work, but by help of his position in the family he was able to save his salary, and even a little more.

'Mani called him and told him what had happened. She ended up by asking him: "Now what is your advice?"

'He shook his head wisely and said: "I don't like the look of things at all." The fact is that wise men never like the look of things. Then he added: "Babu will never be able to raise the money, and in the end he will have to fall back upon that jewelry of yours."

'From what she knew of humanity she thought that this was not only possible but likely. Her anxiety became keener than ever. She had no child to love, and though she had a husband she was almost unable to realise his very existence. So her blood froze at the very thought that her only object of love, the wealth which like a child had grown from year to year, was to be in a moment thrown into the bottomless abyss of trade. She gasped: "What, then, is to be done?"

'Modhu said: "Why not take your jewels and go to your father's house?" In his heart of hearts he entertained the hope that a portion, and possibly the larger portion, of that jewelry would fall to his lot.

'Mani at once agreed. It was a rainy night towards the end of summer. At this very ghat a boat was moored. Mani, wrapped from head to foot in a thick shawl, stepped into the boat. The frogs croaked in the thick darkness of the cloudy dawn. Modhu, waking up from sleep, roused himself from the boat, and said: "Give me the box of jewels."

'Mani replied: "Not now, afterwards. Now let us start."

'The boat started, and floated swiftly down the current. Mani had spent the whole night in covering every part of her body with her ornaments. She was afraid that if she put her jewels into a box they might be snatched away from her hands. But if she wore them on her person, then no one could take them away without murdering her. Mani did not understand Bhusan, it is true; but there was no doubt about her understanding of Modhu.

'Modhu had written a letter to the chief steward to the effect that he had started to take his mistress to her father's house. The steward was an ancient retainer of Bhusan's father. He was furiously angry, and wrote a lengthy epistle, full of misspellings, to his master. Although the letter was weak in its grammar, yet it was forcible in its language, and clearly expressed the writer's disapproval of giving too much indulgence to womankind. Bhusan on receiving it understood what was the motive of Mani's secret departure. What hurt him most was the fact that, in spite of his having given way to the unwillingness of his wife to part with her jewels in this time of his desperate straits, his wife should still suspect him.

'When he ought to have been angry, Bhusan was only distressed. Man is the rod of God's justice, to him has been entrusted the thunderbolt of the divine wrath, and if at wrong done to himself or another it does not at once break out into fury, then it is a shame. God has so arranged it that man, for the most trifling reason, will burst forth in anger like a forest fire, and woman will burst into tears like a rain-cloud for no reason at all. But the cycle seems to have changed, and this appears no longer to hold good.

'The husband bent his head, and said to himself: "Well, if this is your judgment, let it be so. I will simply do my own duty." Bhusan, who ought to have been born five or six centuries hence, when the world will be moved by psychic forces, was unfortunate enough not only to be born in the nineteenth century, but also to marry a woman who belonged to that primitive age which persists through all time. He did not write a word on the subject to his wife, and determined in his mind that he would never mention it to her again. What an awful penalty!

'Ten or twelve days later, having secured the necessary loan, Bhusan returned

to his home. He imagined that Mani, after completing her mission, had by this time come back from her father's house. And so he approached the door of the inner apartments, wondering whether his wife would show any signs of shame or penitence for the undeserved suspicion with which she had treated him.

'He found that the door was shut. Breaking the lock, he entered the room, and saw that it was empty.

'It seemed to him that the world was a huge cage from which the bird of love had flown away, leaving behind it all the decorations of the blood-red rubies of our hearts, and the pearl pendants of our tear-drops.

'At first Bhusan did not trouble about his wife's absence. He thought that if she wanted to come back she would do so. His old Brahman steward, however, came to him, and said: "What good will come of taking no notice of it? You ought to get some news of the mistress." Acting on this suggestion, messengers were sent to Mani's father's house. The news was brought that up to that time neither Mani nor Modhu had turned up there.

'Then a search began in every direction. Men went along both banks of the river making inquiries. The police were given a description of Modhu, but all in vain. They were unable to find out what boat they had taken, what boatman they had hired, or by what way they had gone.

'One evening, when all hope had been abandoned of ever finding his wife, Bhusan entered his deserted bedroom. It was the festival of Krishna's birth, and it had been raining incessantly from early morning. In celebration of the festival there was a fair going on in the village, and in a temporary building a theatrical performance was being given. The sound of distant singing could be heard mingling with the sound of pouring rain. Bhusan was sitting alone in the darkness at the window there which hangs loose upon its hinges. He took no notice of the damp wind, the spray of the rain, and the sound of the singing. On the wall of the room were hanging a couple of pictures of the goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswati, painted at the Art Studio; on the clothes-rack a towel, and a bodice, and a pair of *saris* were laid out ready for use. On a table in one corner of the room there was a box containing betel leaves prepared by Mani's own hand, but now quite dry and uneatable. In a cupboard with a glass door all sorts of things were arranged with evident care—her china dolls of childhood's days, scent bottles, decanters of coloured glass, a sumptuous pack of cards, large brightly polished shells, and even empty soapboxes. In a niche there was a favourite little lamp with its round globe. Mani had been in the habit of lighting it with her own hands every evening. One who goes away, leaving everything empty, leaves the imprint of his living heart even on lifeless objects. Come,

Mani, come back again, light your lamp, fill your room with light once more, and, standing before your mirror, put on your *sari* which has been prepared with such care. See, all your things are waiting for you. No one will claim anything more from you, but only ask you to give a living unity once more to these scattered and lifeless things, by the mere presence of your imperishable youth and unfading beauty. Alas, the inarticulate cry of these mute and lifeless objects has made this room into a realm of things that have lost their world.

'In the dead of night, when the heavy rain had ceased, and the songs of the village opera troupe had become silent, Bhusan was sitting in the same position as before. Outside the window there was such an impenetrable darkness that it seemed to him as if the very gates of oblivion were before him reaching to the sky,—as if he had only to cry out to be able to recover sight of those things which seemed to have been lost forever.

'Just as he was thinking thus, a jingling sound as of ornaments was heard. It seemed to be advancing up the steps of the *ghat*. The water of the river and the darkness of the night were indistinguishable. Thrilling with excitement, Bhusan tried to pierce and push through the darkness with his eager eyes, till they ached, —but he could see nothing. The more anxious he was to see, the denser the darkness became, and the more shadowy the outer world. Nature, seeing an intruder at the door of her hall of death, seemed suddenly to have drawn a still thicker curtain of darkness.

'The sound reached the top step of the bathing *ghat*, and now began to come towards the house. It stopped in front of the door, which had been locked by the porter before he went to the fair. Then upon that closed door there fell a rain of jingling blows, as if with some ornaments. Bhusan was not able to sit still another moment, but, making his way through the unlighted rooms and down the dark staircase, he stood before the closed door. It was padlocked from the outside, so he began to shake it with all his might. The force with which he shook the door and the sound which he made woke him suddenly. He found he had been asleep, and in his sleep he had made his way down to the door of the house. His whole body was wet with sweat, his hands and feet were icy cold, and his heart was fluttering like a lamp just about to go out. His dream being broken, he realised that there was no sound outside except the patterning of the rain which had commenced again.

'Although the whole thing was a dream, Bhusan felt as if for some very small obstacle he had been cheated of the wonderful realisation of his impossible hope. The incessant patter of the rain seemed to say to him: "This awakening is a dream. This world is vain."

'The festival was continued on the following day, and the doorkeeper again had leave. Bhusan gave orders that the hall-door was to be left open all night, but the porter objected that there were all sorts of suspicious characters about who had come from other places to the fair, and that it would not be safe to leave the door open. But Bhusan would not listen, whereupon the porter said that he would himself stay on guard. But Bhusan refused to allow him to remain. The porter was puzzled, but did not press the point.

'That night, having extinguished the light, Bhusan took his seat at the open window of his bedroom as before. The sky was dark with rain-clouds, and there was a silence as of something indefinite and impending. The monotonous croaking of the frogs and the sound of the distant songs were not able to break that silence, but only seemed to add an incongruity to it.

'Late at night the frogs and the crickets and the boys of the opera party became silent, and a still deeper darkness fell upon the night. It seemed that now the time had come.

'Just as on the night before, a clattering and jingling sound came from the *ghat* by the river. But this time Bhusan did not look in that direction, lest, by his over-anxiety and restlessness, his power of sight and hearing would become overwhelmed. He made a supreme effort to control himself, and sat still.

'The sound of the ornaments gradually advanced from the *ghat*, and entered the open door. Then it came winding up the spiral staircase which led to the inner apartments. It became difficult for Bhusan to control himself, his heart began to thump wildly, and his throat was choking with suppressed excitement. Having reached the head of the spiral stairs, the sound came slowly along the veranda towards the door of the room, where it stopped just outside with a clanking sound. It was now only just on the other side of the threshold.

'Bhusan could contain himself no longer, and his pent-up excitement burst forth in one wild cry of "Mani," and he sprang up from his chair with lightning rapidity. Thus startled out of his sleep, he found that the very window-panes were rattling with the vibration of his cry. And outside he could hear the croaking of the frogs and patter of rain. 'Bhusan struck his forehead in despair.

'Next day the fair broke up, and the stall-keepers and the players' party went away. Bhusan gave orders that that night no one should sleep in the house except himself. The servants came to the conclusion that their master was going to practise some mystic rites. All that day Bhusan fasted.

'In the evening, he took his seat at the window of that empty house. That day there were breaks in the clouds, showing the stars twinkling through-the rain-washed air. The moon was late in rising, and, as the fair was over, there was not

a single boat on the flooded river. The villagers, tired out by two nights' dissipation, were sound asleep.

'Bhusan, sitting with his head resting on the back of his chair, was gazing up at the stars. He was thinking of the time when he was only nineteen years old, and was reading in Calcutta; how in the evening he used to lie in College Square, with his hands behind his head, gazing up at those eternal stars, and thinking of the sweet face of Mani in his father-in-law's house. The very separation from her was like an instrument whose tense-drawn strings those stars used to touch and waken into song.

'As he watched them, the stars one by one disappeared. From the sky above, and from the earth beneath, screens of darkness met like tired eyelids upon weary eyes. Tonight Bhusan's mind was full of peace. He felt certain that the moment had come when his heart's desire would be fulfilled, and that Death would reveal his mysteries to his devotee.

'The sound came from the river *ghat* just as on the previous nights and advanced up the steps. Bhusan closed his eyes, and sat in deep meditation. The sound reached the empty hall. It came winding up the spiral stairs. Then it crossed the long veranda, and paused for a long while at the bedroom door.

'Bhusan's heart beat fast; his whole body trembled. But this time he did not open his eyes. The sound crossed the threshold. It entered the room. Then it went slowly round the room, stopping before the rack where the clothes were hanging, the niche with its little lamp, the table where the dried betel leaves were lying, the *almirah* with its various knick-knacks, and, last of all, it came and stood close to Bhusan himself.

'Bhusan opened his eyes. He saw by the faint light of the crescent moon that there was a skeleton standing right in front of his chair. It had rings on all its fingers, bracelets on its wrists and armlets on its arms, necklaces on its neck, and a golden tiara on its head,—in fact its whole body glittered and sparkled with gold and diamonds. The ornaments hung loosely on the limbs, but did not fall off. Most dreadful of all was the fact that the two eyes which shone out from the bony face were living—two dark moist eyeballs looking out with a fixed and steady stare from between the long thick eyelashes. As he looked his blood froze in his veins. He tried hard to close his eyes but could not; they remained open, staring like those of a dead man.

'Then the skeleton, fixing its gaze upon the face of the motionless Bhusan, silently beckoned with its outstretched hand, the diamond rings on its bony fingers glittering in the pale moonlight.

'Bhusan stood up, as one who had lost his senses, and followed the skeleton,

which left the room, its bones and ornaments rattling with a hollow sound. The skeleton crossed the veranda and, winding down the pitch-dark spiral staircase, reached the bottom of the stairs. Crossing the lower veranda, they entered the empty lampless hall and, passing through it, came out on to the brick-paved path of the garden. The bricks crunched under the tread of the bony feet. The faint moonlight struggled through the thick network of branches, and the path was difficult to discern. Making their way through the flitting fireflies, which haunted the dark shadowy path, they reached the river *ghat*.

'By those very steps, up which the sound had come, the bejeweled skeleton went down step by step, with a stiff gait and hard sound. On the swift current of the river, flooded by the heavy rain, a faint streak of moonlight was visible.

'The skeleton descended to the river, and Bhusan, following it, placed one foot in the water. The moment he touched the water he woke with a start. His guide was no longer to be seen. Only the trees on the opposite bank of the river were standing still and silent, and overhead the half moon was staring as if astonished. Starting from head to foot, Bhusan slipped and fell headlong into the river. Although he knew how to swim, he was powerless to do so, for his limbs were not under his control. From the midst of dreams he had stepped, for a moment only, into the borderland of waking life—the next moment to be plunged into eternal sleep.'

Having finished his story, the schoolmaster was silent for a little. Suddenly, the moment he stopped, I realised that except for him the whole world had become silent and still. For a long time I also remained speechless, and in the darkness he was unable to see from my face what was its expression.

At last he asked me: 'Don't you believe this story?'

I asked: 'Do you?'

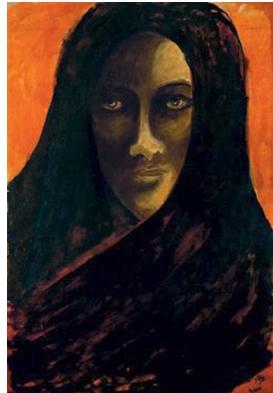
He said: 'No; and I can give you one or two reasons why. In the first place, Dame Nature does not write novels, she has enough to do without——'

I interrupted him and said: 'And, in the second place, my name happens to be Bhusan Saha.'

The schoolmaster, without the least sign of discomfiture, said: 'I guessed as much. And what was your wife's name?'

I answered: 'Nitya Kali.'

24. Mashi



I

‘Mashi!’ [13](#)

[13](#). The maternal aunt is addressed as Mashi.

‘Try to sleep, Jotin, it is getting late.’

‘Never mind if it is. I have not many days left. I was thinking that Mani should go to her father’s house.—I forget where he is now.’

‘Sitarampur.’

‘Oh yes! Sitarampur. Send her there. She should not remain any longer near a sick man. She herself is not strong.’

‘Just listen to him! How can she bear to leave you in this state?’

‘Does she know what the doctors——?’

‘But she can see for herself! The other day she cried her eyes out at the merest hint of having to go to her father’s house.’

We must explain that in this statement there was a slight distortion of truth, to say the least of it. The actual talk with Mani was as follows:— ‘I suppose, my child, you have got some news from your father? I thought I saw your cousin Anath here.’

‘Yes! Next Friday will be my little sister’s *annaprashan* [14](#) ceremony. So I’m thinking——’

[14](#). The *annaprashan* ceremony takes place when a child is first given rice. Usually it receives its name on that day.

‘All right, my dear. Send her a gold necklace. It will please your mother.’

‘I’m thinking of going myself. I’ve never seen my little sister, and I want to

ever so much.'

'Whatever do you mean? You surely don't think of leaving Jotin alone? Haven't you heard what the doctor says about him?'

'But he said that just now there's no special cause for——'

'Even if he did, you can see his state.'

'This is the first girl after three brothers, and she's a great favourite.—I have heard that it's going to be a grand affair. If I don't go, mother will be very——'

'Yes, yes! I don't understand your mother. But I know very well that your father will be angry enough if you leave Jotin just now.'

'You'll have to write a line to him saying that there is no special cause for anxiety, and that even if I go, there will be no——'

'You're right there; it will certainly be no great loss if you do go. But remember, if I write to your father, I'll tell him plainly what is in my mind.'

'Then you needn't write. I shall ask my husband, and he will surely——'

'Look here, child, I've borne a good deal from you, but if you do that, I won't stand it for a moment. Your father knows you too well for you to deceive him.'

When Mashi had left her, Mani lay down on her bed in a bad temper.

Her neighbour and friend came and asked what was the matter.

'Look here! What a shame it is! Here's my only sister's *annaprasan* coming, and they don't want to let me go to it!'

'Why! Surely you're never thinking of going, are you, with your husband so ill?'

'I don't do anything for him, and I couldn't if I tried. It's so deadly dull in this house, that I tell you frankly I can't bear it.'

'You are a strange woman!'

'But I can't pretend, as you people do, and look glum lest anyone should think ill of me.'

'Well, tell me your plan.'

'I must go. Nobody can prevent me.'

'Isss! What an imperious young woman you are!'

II Hearing that Mani had wept at the mere thought of going to her father's house, Jotin was so excited that he sat up in bed. Pulling his pillow towards him, he leaned back, and said: 'Mashi, open this window a little, and take that lamp away.'

The still night stood silently at the window like a pilgrim of eternity; and the

stars gazed in, witnesses through untold ages of countless death-scenes.

Jotin saw his Mani's face traced on the background of the dark night, and saw those two big dark eyes brimming over with tears, as it were for all eternity.

Mashi felt relieved when she saw him so quiet, thinking he was asleep.

Suddenly he started up, and said: 'Mashi, you all thought that Mani was too frivolous ever to be happy in our house. But you see now——'

'Yes, I see now, my Baba,¹⁵ I was mistaken—but trial tests a person.'

^{15.} Baba literally means Father, but is often used by elders as a term of endearment. In the same way 'Ma' is used.

'Mashi!'

'Do try to sleep, dear!'

'Let me think a little, let me talk. Don't be vexed, Mashi!'

'Very well.'

'Once, when I used to think I could not win Mani's heart, I bore it silently. But you——'

'No, dear, I won't allow you to say that; I also bore it.'

'Our minds, you know, are not clods of earth which you can possess by merely picking up. I felt that Mani did not know her own mind, and that one day at some great shock——'

'Yes, Jotin, you are right.'

'Therefore I never took much notice of her waywardness.'

Mashi remained silent, suppressing a sigh. Not once, but often she had seen Jotin spending the night on the verandah wet with the splashing rain, yet not caring to go into his bedroom. Many a day he lay with a throbbing head, longing, she knew, that Mani would come and soothe his brow, while Mani was getting ready to go to the theatre. Yet when Mashi went to fan him, he sent her away petulantly. She alone knew what pain lay hidden in that distress. Again and again she had wanted to say to Jotin: 'Don't pay so much attention to that silly child, my dear; let her learn to want,—to cry for things.' But these things cannot be said, and are apt to be misunderstood. Jotin had in his heart a shrine set up to the goddess Woman, and there Mani had her throne. It was hard for him to imagine that his own fate was to be denied his share of the wine of love poured out by that divinity. Therefore the worship went on, the sacrifice was offered, and the hope of a boon never ceased.

Mashi imagined once more that Jotin was sleeping, when he cried out suddenly: 'I know you thought that I was not happy with Mani, and therefore you were angry with her. But, Mashi, happiness is like those stars. They don't cover all the darkness; there are gaps between. We make mistakes in life and we

misunderstand, and yet there remain gaps through which truth shines. I do not know whence comes this gladness that fills my heart tonight.'

Mashi began gently to soothe Jotin's brow, her tears unseen in the dark.

'I was thinking, Mashi, she's so young! What will she do when I am——?'

'Young, Jotin? She's old enough. I too was young when I lost the idol of my life, only to find him in my heart forever. Was that any loss, do you think? Besides, is happiness absolutely necessary?'

'Mashi, it seems as if just when Mani's heart shows signs of awakening I have to——'

'Don't you worry about that, Jotin. Isn't it enough if her heart awakes?'

Suddenly Jotin recollected the words of a village minstrel's song which he had heard long before: O my heart! You woke not when the man of my heart came to my door.

At the sound of his departing steps you woke up.

Oh, you woke up in the dark!

'Mashi, what is the time now?'

'About nine.'

'So early as that! Why, I thought it must be at least two or three o'clock. My midnight, you know, begins at sundown. But why did you want me to sleep, then?'

'Why, you know how late last night you kept awake talking; so today you must get to sleep early.'

'Is Mani asleep?'

'Oh no, she's busy making some soup for you.'

'You don't mean to say so, Mashi? Does she——?'

'Certainly! Why, she prepares all your food, the busy little woman.'

'I thought perhaps Mani could not——'

'It doesn't take long for a woman to learn such things. With the need it comes of itself.'

'The fish soup, that I had in the morning, had such a delicate flavour, I thought you had made it.'

'Dear me, no! Surely you don't think Mani would let me do anything for you? Why, she does all your washing herself. She knows you can't bear anything dirty about you. If only you could see your sitting-room, how spick and span she keeps it! If I were to let her haunt your sick-room, she would wear herself out. But that's what she really wants to do.'

'Is Mani's health, then——?'

'The doctors think she should not be allowed to visit the sick-room too often. She's too tender-hearted.'

'But, Mashi, how do you prevent her from coming?'

'Because she obeys me implicitly. But still I have constantly to be giving her news of you.'

The stars glistened in the sky like tear-drops. Jotin bowed his head in gratitude to his life that was about to depart, and when Death stretched out his right hand towards him through the darkness, he took it in perfect trust.

Jotin sighed, and, with a slight gesture of impatience, said: 'Mashi, if Mani is still awake, then, could I—if only for a——?'

'Very well! I'll go and call her.'

'I won't keep her long, only for five minutes. I have something particular to tell her.'

Mashi, sighing, went out to call Mani. Meanwhile Jotin's pulse began to beat fast. He knew too well that he had never been able to have an intimate talk with Mani. The two instruments were tuned differently and it was not easy to play them in unison. Again and again, Jotin had felt pangs of jealousy on hearing Mani chattering and laughing merrily with her girl companions. Jotin blamed only himself,—why couldn't he talk irrelevant trifles as they did? Not that he could not, for with his men friends he often chatted on all sorts of trivialities. But the small talk that suits men is not suitable for women. You can hold a philosophical discourse in monologue, ignoring your inattentive audience altogether, but small talk requires the co-operation of at least two. The bagpipes can be played singly, but there must be a pair of cymbals. How often in the evenings had Jotin, when sitting on the open verandah with Mani, made some strained attempts at conversation, only to feel the thread snap. And the very silence of the evening felt ashamed. Jotin was certain that Mani longed to get away. He had even wished earnestly that a third person would come. For talking is easy with three, when it is hard for two.

He began to think what he should say when Mani came. But such manufactured talk would not satisfy him. Jotin felt afraid that this five minutes of tonight would be wasted. Yet, for him, there were but few moments left for intimate talk.

III 'What's this, child, you're not going anywhere, are you?'

'Of course, I'm going to Sitarampur.'

'What do you mean? Who is going to take you?'

‘Anath.’

‘Not today, my child, some other day.’

‘But the compartment has already been reserved.’

‘What does that matter? That loss can easily be borne. Go tomorrow, early in the morning.’

‘Mashi, I don’t hold by your inauspicious days. What harm if I do go today?’

‘Jotin wants to have a talk with you.’

‘All right! There’s still some time. I’ll just go and see him.’

‘But you mustn’t say that you are going.’

‘Very well, I won’t tell him, but I shan’t be able to stay long. Tomorrow is my sister’s *annaprasan*, and I must go today.’

‘Oh, my child! I beg you to listen to me this once. Quiet your mind for a while and sit by him. Don’t let him see your hurry.’

‘What can I do? The train won’t wait for me. Anath will be back in ten minutes. I can sit by him till then.’

‘No, that won’t do. I shall never let you go to him in that frame of mind... Oh, you wretch! The man you are torturing is soon to leave this world; but I warn you, you will remember this day till the end of your days! That there is a God! That there is a God! You will someday understand!’

‘Mashi, you mustn’t curse me like that.’

‘Oh, my darling boy! My darling! Why do you go on living longer? There is no end to this sin, yet I cannot check it!’

Mashi after delaying a little returned to the sick-room, hoping by that time Jotin would be asleep. But Jotin moved in his bed when she entered. Mashi exclaimed: ‘Just look what she has done!’

‘What’s happened? Hasn’t Mani come? Why have you been so long, Mashi?’

‘I found her weeping bitterly because she had allowed the milk for your soup to get burnt! I tried to console her, saying, “Why, there’s more milk to be had!” But that she could be so careless about the preparation of *your* soup made her wild. With great trouble I managed to pacify her and put her to bed. So I haven’t brought her today. Let her sleep it off.’

Though Jotin was pained when Mani didn’t come, yet he felt a certain amount of relief. He had half feared that Mani’s bodily presence would do violence to his heart’s image of her. Such things had happened before in his life. And the gladness of the idea that Mani was miserable at burning *his* milk filled his heart to overflowing.

‘Mashi!’

‘What is it, Baba?’

‘I feel quite certain that my days are drawing to a close. But I have no regrets. Don’t grieve for me.’

‘No, dear, I won’t grieve. I don’t believe that only life is good and not death.’

‘Mashi, I tell you truly that death seems sweet.’

Jotin, gazing at the dark sky, felt that it was Mani herself who was coming to him in Death’s guise. She had immortal youth and the stars were flowers of blessing, showered upon her dark tresses by the hand of the World-Mother. It seemed as if once more he had his first sight of his bride under the veil of darkness. [16](#) The immense night became filled with the loving gaze of Mani’s dark eyes. Mani, the bride of this house, the little girl, became transformed into a world-image,—her throne on the altar of the stars at the confluence of life and death. Jotin said to himself with clasped hands: ‘At last the veil is raised, the covering is rent in this deep darkness. Ah, beautiful one! How often have you wrung my heart, but no longer shall you forsake me!’

[16](#). The bride and the bridegroom see each other’s face for the first time at the marriage ceremony under a veil thrown over their heads.

IV

‘I’m suffering, Mashi, but nothing like you imagine. It seems to me as if my pain were gradually separating itself from my life. Like a laden boat, it was so long being towed behind, but the rope has snapped, and now it floats away with all my burdens. Still I can see it, but it is no longer mine... But, Mashi, I’ve not seen Mani even once for the last two days!’

‘Jotin, let me give you another pillow.’

‘It almost seems to me, Mashi, that Mani also has left me like that laden boat of sorrow which drifts away.’

‘Just sip some pomegranate juice, dear! Your throat must be getting dry.’

‘I wrote my will yesterday; did I show it to you? I can’t recollect.’

‘There’s no need to show it to me, Jotin.’

‘When mother died, I had nothing of my own. You fed me and brought me up. Therefore I was saying——’

‘Nonsense, child! I had only this house and a little property. You earned the rest.’

‘But this house——?’

‘That’s nothing. Why, you’ve added to it so much that it’s difficult to find out

where my house was!'

'I'm sure Mani's love for you is really——'

'Yes, yes! I know that, Jotin. Now you try to sleep.'

'Though I have bequeathed all my property to Mani, it is practically yours, Mashi. She will never disobey you.'

'Why are you worrying so much about that, dear?'

'All I have I owe to you. When you see my will don't think for a moment that _____,'

'What do you mean, Jotin? Do you think I shall mind for a moment because you give to Mani what belongs to you? Surely I'm not so mean as that?'

'But you also will have——'

'Look here, Jotin, I shall get angry with you. You want to console me with money!'

'Oh, Mashi, how I wish I could give you something better than money!'

'That you have done, Jotin!—more than enough. Haven't I had you to fill my lonely house? I must have won that great good-fortune in many previous births! You have given me so much that now, if my destiny's due is exhausted, I shall not complain. Yes, yes! Give away everything in Mani's name,—your house, your money, your carriage, and your land—such burdens are too heavy for me!'

'Of course I know you have lost your taste for the enjoyments of life, but Mani is so young that——'

'No! You mustn't say that. If you want to leave her your property, it is all right, but as for enjoyment——'

'What harm if she does enjoy herself, Mashi?'

'No, no, it will be impossible. Her throat will become parched, and it will be dust and ashes to her.'

Jotin remained silent. He could not decide whether it was true or not, and whether it was a matter of regret or otherwise, that the world would become distasteful to Mani for want of him. The stars seemed to whisper in his heart: 'Indeed it is true. We have been watching for thousands of years, and know that all these great preparations for enjoyment are but vanity.'

Jotin sighed and said: 'We cannot leave behind us what is really worth giving.'

'It's no trifle you are giving, dearest. I only pray she may have the power to know the value of what is given her.'

'Give me a little more of that pomegranate juice, Mashi, I'm thirsty. Did Mani come to me yesterday, I wonder?'

'Yes, she came, but you were asleep. She sat by your head, fanning you for a

long time, and then went away to get your clothes washed.'

'How wonderful! I believe I was dreaming that very moment that Mani was trying to enter my room. The door was slightly open, and she was pushing against it, but it wouldn't open. But, Mashi, you're going too far,—you ought to let her see that I am dying; otherwise my death will be a terrible shock to her.'

'Baba, let me put this shawl over your feet; they are getting cold.'

'No, Mashi, I can't bear anything over me like that.'

'Do you know, Jotin, Mani made this shawl for you? When she ought to have been asleep, she was busy at it. It was finished only yesterday.'

Jotin took the shawl, and touched it tenderly with his hands. It seemed to him that the softness of the wool was Mani's own. Her loving thoughts had been woven night after night with its threads. It was not made merely of wool, but also of her touch. Therefore, when Mashi drew that shawl over his feet, it seemed as if, night after night, Mani had been caressing his tired limbs.

'But, Mashi, I thought Mani didn't know how to knit,—at any rate she never liked it.'

'It doesn't take long to learn a thing. Of course I had to teach her. Then there are a good many mistakes in it.'

'Let there be mistakes; we're not going to send it to the Paris Exhibition. It will keep my feet warm in spite of its mistakes.'

Jotin's mind began to picture Mani at her task, blundering and struggling, and yet patiently going on night after night. How sweetly pathetic it was! And again he went over the shawl with his caressing fingers.

'Mashi, is the doctor downstairs?'

'Yes, he will stay here tonight.'

'But tell him it is useless for him to give me a sleeping draught. It doesn't bring me real rest and only adds to my pain. Let me remain properly awake. Do you know, Mashi, that my wedding took place on the night of the full moon in the month of *Baisakh*? Tomorrow will be that day, and the stars of that very night will be shining in the sky. Mani perhaps has forgotten. I want to remind her of it today; just call her to me for a minute or two... Why do you keep silent? I suppose the doctor has told you I am so weak that any excitement will—but I tell you truly, Mashi, tonight, if I can have only a few minutes' talk with her, there will be no need for any sleeping draughts. Mashi, don't cry like that! I am quite well. Today my heart is full as it has never been in my life before. That's why I want to see Mani. No, no, Mashi, I can't bear to see you crying! You have been so quiet all these last days. Why are you so troubled tonight?'

'Oh, Jotin, I thought that I had exhausted all my tears, but I find there are

plenty left. I can't bear it any longer.'

'Call Mani. I'll remind her of our wedding night, so that tomorrow she may _____,'

'I'm going, dear. Shombhu will wait at the door. If you want anything, call him.'

Mashi went to Mani's bedroom and sat down on the floor crying,—'Oh come, come once, you heartless wretch! Keep his last request who has given you his all! Don't kill him who is already dying!'

Jotin hearing the sound of footsteps started up, saying, 'Mani!'

'I am Shombhu. Did you call me?'

'Ask your mistress to come?'

'Ask whom?'

'Your mistress.'

'She has not yet returned.'

'Returned? From where?'

'From Sitarampur.'

'When did she go?'

'Three days ago.'

For a moment Jotin felt numb all over, and his head began to swim. He slipped down from the pillows, on which he was reclining, and kicked off the woollen shawl that was over his feet.

When Mashi came back after a long time, Jotin did not mention Mani's name, and Mashi thought he had forgotten all about her.

Suddenly Jotin cried out: 'Mashi, did I tell you about the dream I had the other night?'

'Which dream?'

'That in which Mani was pushing the door, and the door wouldn't open more than an inch. She stood outside unable to enter. Now I know that Mani has to stand outside my door till the last.'

Mashi kept silent. She realised that the heaven she had been building for Jotin out of falsehood had toppled down at last. If sorrow comes, it is best to acknowledge it.—When God strikes, we cannot avoid the blow.

'Mashi, the love I have got from you will last through all my births. I have filled this life with it to carry it with me. In the next birth, I am sure you will be born as my daughter, and I shall tend you with all my love.'

'What are you saying, Jotin? Do you mean to say I shall be born again as a woman? Why can't you pray that I should come to your arms as a son?'

'No, no, not a son! You will come to my house in that wonderful beauty which you had when you were young. I can even imagine how I shall dress you.'

'Don't talk so much, Jotin, but try to sleep.'

'I shall name you "Lakshmi."'

'But that is an old-fashioned name, Jotin!'

'Yes, but you are my old-fashioned Mashi. Come to my house again with those beautiful old-fashioned manners.'

'I can't wish that I should come and burden your home with the misfortune of a girl-child!'

'Mashi, you think me weak, and are wanting to save me all trouble.'

'My child, I am a woman, so I have my weakness. Therefore I have tried all my life to save you from all sorts of trouble,—only to fail.'

'Mashi, I have not had time in this life to apply the lessons I have learnt. But they will keep for my next birth. I shall show then what a man is able to do. I have learnt how false it is always to be looking after oneself.'

'Whatever you may say, darling, you have never grasped anything for yourself, but given everything to others.'

'Mashi, I can boast of one thing at any rate. I have never been a tyrant in my happiness, or tried to enforce my claims by violence. Because lies could not content me, I have had to wait long. Perhaps truth will be kind to me at last.—Who is that, Mashi, who is that?'

'Where? There's no one there, Jotin!'

'Mashi, just go and see in the other room. I thought I——'

'No, dear! I don't see anybody.'

'But it seemed quite clear to me that——'

'No, Jotin, it's nothing. So keep quiet! The doctor is coming now.'

When the doctor entered, he said: 'Look here, you mustn't stay near the patient so much, you excite him. You go to bed, and my assistant will remain with him.'

'No, Mashi, I can't let you go.'

'All right, Baba! I will sit quietly in that corner.'

'No, no! You must sit by my side. I can't let go your hand, not till the very end. I have been made by your hand, and only from your hand shall God take me.'

'All right,' said the doctor, 'you can remain there. But, Jotin Babu, you must not talk to her. It's time for you to take your medicine.'

'Time for my medicine? Nonsense! The time for that is over. To give medicine now is merely to deceive; besides I am not afraid to die. Mashi, Death is busy with his physic; why do you add another nuisance in the shape of a doctor? Send

him away, send him away! It is you alone I need now! No one else, none whatever! No more falsehood!’

‘I protest, as a doctor, this excitement is doing you harm.’

‘Then go, doctor, don’t excite me anymore!—Mashi, has he gone? That’s good! Now come and take my head in your lap.’

‘All right, dear! Now, Baba, try to sleep!’

‘No, Mashi, don’t ask me to sleep. If I sleep, I shall never wake. I still need to keep awake a little longer. Don’t you hear a sound? Somebody is coming.’

V

‘Jotin dear, just open your eyes a little. She has come. Look once and see!’

‘Who has come? A dream?’

‘Not a dream, darling! Mani has come with her father.’

‘Who are you?’

‘Can’t you see? This is your Mani!’

‘Mani? Has that door opened?’

‘Yes, Baba, it is wide open.’

‘No, Mashi, not that shawl! Not *that* shawl! That shawl is a fraud!’

‘It is not a shawl, Jotin! It is our Mani, who has flung herself on your feet. Put your hand on her head and bless her. Don’t cry like that, Mani! There will be time enough for that. Keep quiet now for a little.’

25. Master Mashai

1

Adhar Babu lived upon the interest of the capital left him by his father. Only brokers, negotiating loans, came to his drawing room and smoked the silver-chased hookah, or clerks from the attorney's office came to discuss the terms of some mortgage or the amount of certain stamp fees. He was so careful with his money that even the most dogged efforts of the boys from the local football club failed to make any inroads upon his pocket.

At the time this story opens, a new guest came into his household. After a long period of despair, his wife, Nanibala, bore him a son.

The child resembled his mother—he had large eyes, a well-formed nose, and a fair complexion. Ratikanta, Adharlal's protégé summed up the general opinion—'He is worthy of his noble house.' They named him Venugopal.

Never before had Adharlal's wife expressed any opinion on household expenses differing from her husband's. There had been a hot discussion now and then about the propriety of some necessary item, but before this new arrival, she had merely acknowledged defeat with silent contempt. But now Adharlal could no longer maintain his supremacy. He had to give way, little by little, when it was a question of things to be bought for his son.

2

As Venugopal grew up, his father gradually became accustomed to spend money on him. He engaged an old teacher, with a considerable reputation for learning and also for his success in dragging boys through their examinations, who otherwise would inevitably have failed. But such a training does not lead to the cultivation of amiability. This man tried his best to win the boy's heart, but the little that was left in him of the milk of human kindness had turned sour from the very beginning, and the child repulsed his advances. The mother, in consequence, objected to him strongly, and complained that the very sight of him made her boy ill. In consequence the teacher left.

Just then Haralal made his appearance in dirty clothes and a torn pair of old

canvas shoes. Haralal's mother, who was a widow, had kept him with great difficulty at a district school out of the scanty earnings which she made by cooking in strange houses and by husking rice. He had managed to pass the Matriculation examination and had determined to go to college. As a result of semi-starvation, his pinched face tapered unnaturally to a point—like Cape Comorin on the map of India—and the only broad portion of it was his forehead which resembled the range of the Himalayas.

The servant asked Haralal what he wanted, and he answered timidly that he wished to see the master.

The servant answered sharply: 'You can't see him.' When Haralal, at a loss what to do next, was hesitating, Venugopal, who had finished his game in the garden, came suddenly to the door. The servant shouted at Haralal to go away. Quite unaccountably Venugopal grew excited and cried: 'No, he shan't go away.' And he dragged the stranger to his father.

Adharlal had just risen from his midday sleep and was sitting quietly on the upper verandah in his cane-chair, swinging his legs. Ratikanta seated in a chair next to him was enjoying his hookah. He asked Haralal how far he had got in his reading. The young man bent his head and answered that he had passed the Matriculation examination. Ratikanta with a stern look expressed surprise that a boy of his age should be so backward. Haralal kept silent. It was Ratikanta's special pleasure to torture his patron's dependants, whether actual or potential.

Suddenly it struck Adharlal that he would be able to employ this youth for next to nothing as a tutor for his son. He agreed, there and then, to take him on a salary of five rupees a month with board and lodging free.

3

This time the post of tutor was occupied longer than ever before. From the very beginning of their acquaintance Haralal and his pupil became great friends. Never before had Haralal been given such an opportunity of loving a young human creature. His mother had been so poor and dependent, that he had never had the privilege of playing with the children at the houses where she was employed. Hitherto he had not suspected the hidden stores of love which lay accumulating in his heart.

Venu also was glad to find a companion in Haralal. He was the only boy in the house. His two younger sisters were looked down upon, as unworthy of being his playmates. So his new tutor became his only companion, patiently bearing the undivided weight of the tyranny of his child friend.

Venu was now eleven. Haralal had passed the Intermediate examination, and won a scholarship. He was working hard for his B.A. degree. After college lectures were over, he would take Venu out into the public park and tell him stories about the heroes from Greek history and from Victor Hugo's romances. The child, in spite of his mother's attempt to keep him by her side, used to get quite impatient to run to Haralal after school hours.

This displeased Nanibala. She thought that it was a deep-laid plot of Haralal's to captivate her boy, so that he might remain indefinitely in his post as tutor. One day she talked to him behind the purdah: 'It is your duty to teach my son for an hour or two only in the morning and evening. But why are you always with him? The child has nearly forgotten his own parents. You must understand that a man of your position is no companion for a boy of this house.'

Haralal's voice choked a little as he answered that in future he would be Venu's teacher merely, and would keep away from him at other times.

It was Haralal's usual practice to begin his college study long before dawn. The child would come to him as soon as he had washed. There was a small pool in the garden where they used to feed the fish with puffed rice. Venu was also engaged in building a miniature garden-house, at the corner of the garden, with Lilliputian gates and hedges and gravel paths. When the sun became too hot, they used to go back into the house, where Venu would have his morning lesson from Haralal.

On the day in question Venu had risen earlier than usual, because he wished to hear the end of the story which Haralal had begun the evening before. But he could not find his teacher. When asked about him, the servant at the door said that he had gone out. At lesson time Venu sat unnaturally quiet. He never even asked Haralal why he had gone out, but went on mechanically with his lessons. When the child was with his mother at breakfast, she asked him what had happened to make him so gloomy, and why he could not eat. Venu did not answer. After his meal his mother caressed him and questioned him repeatedly, Venu burst out crying and said, 'Master Mashai.' His mother asked him, 'What about Master Mashai?' But Venu found it difficult to say in what way his teacher had offended.

So his mother asked him: 'Has your Master Mashai been saying anything to you against *me*?'

But Venu could not understand her question and went away.

Soon after this, there was a theft in Adhar Babu's house. The police were called in to investigate. Even Haralal's trunks were searched. Ratikanta said with meaning: 'The man who steals anything does not hide his ill-gotten gains in his own box.'

Adharlal called his son's tutor and said to him: 'It will not be convenient for me to keep you in this house. From today you will have to live elsewhere, and only come in to teach my son at the usual time.'

At this, Ratikanta drawing at his hookah remarked sagely: 'This is a good proposal—good for both parties.'

Haralal said not a word, but he sent a letter saying that he could no longer remain as tutor to Venu.

When Venu came back from school, he found his tutor's room empty. Even that broken steel trunk of his had vanished. The rope was stretched across the corner, but there were no clothes or towels hanging on it. But on the table, which formerly was strewn with books and papers, stood a bowl containing some gold-fish. On the bowl was a label inscribed with the word 'Venu' in Haralal's handwriting. At once the boy ran up to his father and asked him what had happened. His father told that Haralal had resigned his post. Venu went to his room, flung himself down and began to cry so bitterly that Adharlal could in no way comfort him.

Next day, Haralal was sitting on his wooden bedstead in the hostel, debating whether he should attend his college lectures, when suddenly he saw Adhar Babu's servant coming into his room followed by Venu. Venu at once ran up to him, threw his arms round his neck and asked him to come back to the house.

Haralal could not explain why it was absolutely impossible for him to go back, but, whenever he thought later of those clinging arms and that pleading voice, a lump seemed to rise in his throat.

Haralal, after his sad parting from his little friend, found that his mind was unsettled, and that he had but little chance of winning a scholarship, even if he could pass the examination. At the same time, he knew that without the scholarship, he could not continue his studies. So he tried to obtain employment in some office.

Fortunately for him, the English manager of a big mercantile firm took a fancy

to him at first sight. After a brief exchange of words, the manager asked him whether he had had any experience, and whether he could bring any testimonials. Haralal could only answer 'No'; nevertheless a post was offered him on a salary of twenty rupees a month, and a sum of fifteen rupees was allowed him in advance to enable him to come properly dressed to the office.

The manager made Haralal work extremely hard. He had to stay on after office hours and sometimes go to his master's house late in the evening. But, in this way, he learnt his work quicker than others and his fellow clerks became jealous of him and tried to injure him, but without effect. As soon as his salary was raised to forty rupees a month, he took a small house in a narrow lane and brought his mother to live with him. Thus happiness came back to his mother after weary years of waiting.

7

Haralal's mother frequently said that she would like to see Venugopal, of whom she had heard so much. She wished to prepare some dishes with her own hand and to ask him to come just once to dine with her son. Haralal avoided the subject by saying that his house was not big enough to invite him to.

The news reached Haralal that Venu's mother was dead. He could not wait a moment, but went at once to Adharlal's house to see Venu and from that time onwards they began to see each other frequently.

But times had changed. Venu, stroking his budding moustache, had grown quite the young man of fashion. His friends were numerous, and they suited well his present position. The old dilapidated study chair and ink-stained desk had vanished, and the room now seemed to be bursting with pride at its new acquisitions—its looking-glasses, oleographs, and other furniture. Venu had entered college, but showed no haste to cross the boundary of the Intermediate examination.

Haralal remembered his mother's request to invite Venu to dinner. After great hesitation, he did so. Venugopal, with his handsome face, at once won the mother's heart. But as soon as the meal was over, he became impatient to go, and looking at his gold watch he explained that he had pressing engagements elsewhere. Then he jumped into his carriage, which was waiting at the door, and drove away. Haralal with a sigh said to himself that he would never invite him again.

8

One day, on returning from office, Haralal noticed a man sitting in the dark room on the ground floor of his house. He would perhaps have passed him by, had not the heavy scent of some foreign perfume attracted his attention. Haralal asked who was there, and the answer came:

'It is I, Master Mashai.'

'What is the matter, Venu?' said Haralal. 'When did you come here?'

'I came hours ago,' said Venu. 'I did not know that you returned so late.'

They went upstairs together and Haralal lighted the lamp and asked Venu how he was getting on. Venu replied that his college classes were becoming a fearful bore, and his father did not realise how dreadfully hard it was for him to go in the same class year after year, with students much younger than himself. Haralal asked him what he wished to do. Venu then told him that he wanted to go to England and become a barrister. He gave an instance of a student, much less advanced in his college course, who was getting ready to go. Haralal asked him if he had received his father's permission. Venu replied that his father would not hear a word of it until he had passed the Intermediate examination, and that was an impossibility in his present frame of mind. Haralal suggested that he himself might go and try to talk over Venu's father.

'No,' said Venu, 'I can never allow that!'

Haralal asked Venu to stay to dinner, and while they were waiting he gently placed his hand on Venu's shoulder and said: 'Venu, you should not quarrel with your father, or leave home.'

Venu jumped up angrily and said that if he was not welcome, he would go elsewhere. Haralal caught him by the hand and implored him not go away without dining. But Venu snatched his hand away and was on the point of leaving the room when Haralal's mother brought the food in on a tray. Seeing Venu about to leave, she pressed him to remain, and he did so, but with bad grace.

While he was seated at dinner, the sound of a carriage was heard stopping at the door. First a servant entered the room with creaking shoes and then Adhar Babu himself. At the sight of his father, Venu's face became pale. The mother left the room as soon as she saw strangers enter. Adhar Babu began to abuse Haralal in a voice thick with anger: 'Ratikanta gave me full warning, but I could not believe that you were a man of such devilish cunning. So, you think you're going to live upon Venu? This is sheer kidnapping, and I shall prosecute you in the Police Court.'

Venu silently followed his father out of the house.

The firm in which Haralal was employed, began to buy up large quantities of rice and *dal* from the country districts. To purchase this produce, Haralal had to take the cash every Saturday morning by the early train and pay it out. There were special centres where the brokers and middlemen used to come with their receipt and account for settlement. Some discussion had taken place in the office about Haralal being entrusted with this work without any security, but the manager undertook all the responsibility and said that security was not needed. This special work used to go on from the middle of December to the middle of April, and Haralal frequently returned from it very late at night.

One day, after his return from work, his mother told him that Venu had called and that she had persuaded him to dine with them. This had happened more than once. The mother said that it was because Venu missed his own mother, and tears came into her eyes as she spoke about it.

On one such occasion Venu waited for Haralal to return and had a long talk with him.

'Master Mashai!' he said, 'Father has lately become so irritable that I can no longer live with him. And, besides, I know that he is thinking of marrying again. Ratikanta is seeking a suitable match, and they are always conspiring about it. There used to be a time when my father would be anxious if I were absent from home even for a few hours. Now, if I am away for more than a week, he takes no notice, indeed, he is greatly relieved. If his marriage takes place, I feel that I cannot live in the house any longer. You must show me a way out of this. I want to become independent.'

Haralal felt deeply grieved, but he could not see how he could help his former pupil. Venu said that he was determined to go to England and become a barrister. Somehow or other he must get the passage money out of his father: he might borrow it on a note of hand and then his father would have to pay when the creditors filed a suit. With this borrowed money he might get away, and when he was in England his father was bound to send money to meet his expenses.

'But,' Haralal asked, 'who is there that would advance you the money?'

'You!' said Venu.

'I,' exclaimed Haralal in amazement.

'Yes,' said Venu, 'I've seen the servant bringing heaps of money here in bags.'

'The servant and the money belong to someone else.'

Haralal explained why the money came to his house at night, like birds to their

nest, to be scattered next morning.

'But can't the manager advance the sum?' Venu asked.

'He may do so,' said Haralal, 'if your father stands security.'

At this point the discussion ended.

10

One Friday night a carriage and pair stopped before Haralal's lodging house. When Venu was announced, Haralal was sitting on the floor of his bedroom, counting some money. Venu entered dressed in an unaccustomed manner. He had discarded his Bengali dress and was wearing a Parsee coat and trousers and on his head was a cap. Rings glittered on most of the fingers of both hands, and a thick gold chain was hanging round his neck; there was a gold watch in his pocket, and diamond studs could be seen peeping from his shirt sleeves. Haralal at once asked him what was the matter and why he was wearing such clothes.

Venu replied: 'My father is to be married tomorrow. He tried hard to keep it from me, but I found it out. I asked him to allow me to go to our garden-house at Barrackpore for a few days, and he was only too glad to get rid of me so easily. I am going there, and I wish to God I never had to come back.'

Venu, seeing that Haralal looked pointedly at the rings on his fingers, explained that they had belonged to his mother. Haralal then asked him if he had already had dinner. He answered, 'Yes, haven't you?'

'No,' said Haralal, 'I cannot leave this room until I have safely locked up all the money in this iron chest.'

'Go and have dinner,' said Venu, 'while I keep guard here; your mother will be waiting for you.'

For a moment Haralal hesitated, and then he went out and dined. In a short time he came back with his mother and the three of them sat talking among the bags of money. When it was nearly midnight, Venu looked at his watch and jumped up, saying that he would miss his train. He then asked Haralal to keep his rings and his watch and chain until he asked for them again. Haralal put them all together in a leather bag which he placed in the iron safe, whereupon Venu left the house.

The canvas bags containing the currency notes had already been placed in the safe: only the loose coins remained to be counted over and put away with the rest.

Haralal lay down near the door of the room, placed the key under his pillow, and went to sleep. He dreamt that from behind the curtain Venu's mother was loudly reproaching him. Her words were indistinct, but rays of different colours from the jewels which she wore kept piercing the curtain like violently vibrating needles. Haralal struggled to call Venu, but his cry seemed to stick in his throat. At last, the curtain fell noisily down. Haralal started up from his sleep and found that all was dark around him. A sudden gust of wind had flung the window open and blow out the light. Haralal was covered with perspiration. He re-lighted the lamp and saw, by the clock, that it was four in the morning. There was no time to go to sleep again; for he had to get ready to start.

He had just washed his face and hands, when his mother called from her own room, 'Baba, why are you up so early?'

It was a habit of Haralal to see his mother's face the first thing in the morning in order to bring a blessing on the day. His mother said to him: 'I was dreaming that you were going out to bring home a bride.' Haralal then went back to his bedroom and began to take out the bags containing the silver and the currency notes.

Suddenly his heart seemed to stop beating. Three of the bags appeared to be empty. He knocked them against the iron safe, but this only proved his fear to be true. Nevertheless he opened them and shook them with all his might. But he could find nothing in them but two letters from Venu, one of which was addressed to his father and the other to himself.

Haralal tore open his own letter and tried to read it. But the words seemed to run into one another. He trimmed the lamp, but felt that he could not understand what he read. Yet the purport of the letter was clear. Venu had taken three thousand rupees in currency notes, and had started for England. The steamer was to sail before daybreak that very morning. The letter ended with the words: 'I am explaining everything in a letter to my father. He will pay off the debt; and then, again, my mother's ornaments, which I have left in your care, will more than cover the amount I have taken.'

Haralal locked up his room and hiring a carriage hurried to the jetty. But he did not know even the name of the steamer which Venu had taken. He ran the whole length of the wharves from Prinsep's Ghat to Metiaburuj. He found two steamers had sailed for England early that morning. It was impossible for him to find out which of them carried Venu, or how to reach him.

When Haralal returned home the sun was strong and the whole of Calcutta was awake. Everything before his eyes seemed blurred. He felt as if he were pushing

against a fearful obstacle, unembodies but pitiless. His mother came on to the verandah and asked him anxiously where he had been. With a strained laugh he said to her, ‘To bring home a bride for myself!’ And then he fainted away.

After some time, Haralal recovered consciousness, and opening his eyes asked his mother to leave him. Entering his room he shut the door, while his mother sat at the door of the verandah in the fierce glare of the sun. She kept calling to him fitfully, almost mechanically, ‘Baba, Baba!’

As usual, the servant came from the manager’s office and knocked at the door, saying that they would miss the train if they did not start at once. Haralal called from inside: ‘Cannot start this morning.’

‘Then, when are we to go, sir?’

‘I will tell you later on.’

The servant went downstairs with a gesture of impatience.

Suddenly Heralal thought of the ornaments which Venu had left behind. He had completely forgotten about them, but with the thought came instant relief. He took he leather bag containing them, and also Venu’s letter to his father, and left the house.

Before he reached Adharlal’s house he could hear the band, playing for the wedding, yet on entering could feel that there had been some disturbance. Haralal was told that there had been a theft the night before and that some of the servants were suspected. Adhar Babu was sitting in the upper verandah, flushed with anger and Ratikanta was sitting near him smoking his hookah. Haralal said to Adhar Babu, ‘I have something to tell you in private.’ Adharlal’s anger flared up, and he shouted: ‘I have no time now!’ He was afraid that Haralal had come to borrow money or to ask his help. Ratikanta suggested that if Haralal felt uncomfortable in making any request in his presence he would leave. Adharlal told him angrily to sit where he was. Then Haralal handed over the bag which Venu had left behind. Adharlal asked what was inside, so Haralal opened it and gave him the contents.

Then Adhar Babu said with a sneer: ‘It’s a praying business that you two have started—you and your former pupil! You were certain that the stolen property would be traced, and so you bring it to me to claim a reward!’

Haralal presented the letter which Venu had written to his father, but this only made Adharlal the more furious.

‘What’s all this?’ he shouted, ‘I’ll call the police! My son has not yet come of age, and you have smuggled him out of the country! I’ll bet my soul you’ve lent him a few hundred rupees, and then taken a note of hand for three thousand! But I am not going to be bound by *this!*’

'I have not advanced him a single pice,' protested Haralal.

'Then how did he find it?' asked Adharlal. 'Do you mean to tell me he broke open your safe and stole it.'

Haralal stood silent, while Ratikanta sarcastically remarked: 'I don't believe this fellow ever set hands on so much as three thousand rupees in his life.'

When Haralal left the house, it seemed to him that he had passed beyond all possibility of fear or anxiety. His mind seemed to refuse to work. As soon as he entered the lane he saw a carriage waiting before his house. For a moment he felt certain that it was Venu's. It was impossible to believe that his calamity could be so hopelessly final.

Haralal went quickly up to the carriage, but found an English assistant from the firm sitting inside it. The man got down when he saw Haralal, seized him by the wrist and asked him: 'Why didn't you leave by the train this morning? The servant had told the manager his suspicions and he had sent this man to find out.'

Haralal answered: 'Because I found that notes to the value of three thousand rupees were missing.'

The man asked how that could have happened, but Haralal was silent.

Seeing his embarrassment, the assistant said to Haralal: 'Let us go upstairs together and see where you keep your money.' So they went up to the room, counted the money and made a thorough search of the house.

When Haralal's mother saw this she could contain herself no longer. She therefore came up to the stranger and asked her son what had happened. The man answered in broken Hindustani that some money had been stolen.

'Stolen!' the mother cried, 'Why! How could it be stolen? Who would do such a dastardly thing?' But Haralal forbade her to speak.

The man collected the remainder of the money and told Haralal to come with him to the manager. The mother barred the way and said:

'Sir, where are you taking my son? I have done everything in my power, I have even starved myself so that he might be brought up to do honest work. My son would never touch money that was not his own.'

The Englishman, not knowing Bengali, could only reply, 'Achcha! Achcha!' Haralal entreated his mother not to be anxious; he would explain it all to the manager and soon be back again. His mother, distressed by the fact that her son had eaten nothing all morning, begged him to remain a moment to break his fast, but Haralal disregarding her appeal, stepped into the carriage and drove away, and the mother in the anguish of her heart sank to the ground.

When Haralal came into the manager's presence, he was asked: 'Tell me the truth, what did happen?' But Haralal could only reply, 'I haven't taken any

money.'

'I fully believe it,' said the manager, 'but surely you know who has taken it.'

Haralal remained silent, with his eyes on the ground.

'Somebody,' said the manager, 'must have taken it with your connivance.'

'Nobody,' replied Haralal, 'could take it away with my knowledge unless he first took my life.'

'Look here, Haralal,' said the manager, 'I trusted you completely. I took no security. I employed you in a post of great responsibility. Every one in the office was against me for doing so. The three thousand rupees is a small concern, but the shame of all this to me is a great matter. I will do one thing. I will give you the whole day to bring back this money. If you do so, I shall say nothing about it and I shall keep you on in your post.'

It was eleven o'clock, when Haralal with bent head walked out of the office, and left his fellow-clerks to exult meanly over his disgrace.

'What can I do? What can I do?' Haralal repeated to himself, the sun's heat pouring down as he walked along like one dazed. At last his mind ceased to think at all about what could be done, but he continued to walk mechanically.

This city of Calcutta, which offered its shelter to thousands upon thousands of men, had become like a steel-trap. He could see no way out. The whole body of people was conspiring to surround and hold him captive—this most insignificant of men, whom no one knew. Nobody had any special grudge against him, yet everybody was his enemy. The crowd passed by, brushing against him: clerks from different offices ate their lunch on the roadside out of plates made of leaves: a tired wayfarer on the Maidan was lying under the shade of a tree, with one hand beneath his head and one leg crossed over the other: up-country women, crowded into hackney carriages, were on their way to the temple: a chuprassi came up with a letter and asked him the address on the envelope—so the afternoon went by, till one by one the offices began to close. Carriages started off in all directions, carrying people back to their homes. The clerks, packed tightly on the seats of the trams, looked at the theatre advertisements as they returned home. It came into his mind that he was no longer a unit in this throng.—no work would engage him all day long, and there would come no pleasant evening release from toil. He had no need to hurry to catch the homeward tram. All the busy occupations of the city—the buildings—the horses and carriages—the incessant traffic—seemed sometimes to swell into dreadful reality, and at other times, to subside into the shadowy unreal.

Haralal had eaten no food, taken no rest, nor sheltered from the sun all that day.

The lamps in one street after another were lighted till it seemed to him that a pervading darkness, like some demon, was keeping its eyes wide open to watch every movement of its victim. Haralal had not the energy even to enquire how late it was. The veins on his forehead throbbed, and he felt as if his head must burst. Through paroxysms of pain, which alternated with the apathy of dejection, one thought came again and again from among the innumerable multitudes in that vast city, the image of only one person rose before his mental vision, and one name alone found its way through his dry throat—‘Mother?’

He said to himself, ‘In the depth of night when no one is awake to arrest me—me, the least of all men—I will silently creep to my mother’s arms and fall asleep, and may I never wake again!’

Haralal’s one trouble was lest some police officer should molest him in the presence of his mother and thus prevent him from going home. When at last it became an agony for him to walk further, he hailed a carriage. The driver asked him where he wanted to go. He said: ‘Nowhere. I want to drive across the Maidan to breathe some fresh air.’ The man at first did not believe him and was about to drive on, when Haralal put a rupee into his hand as earnest of payment. Thereupon the driver crossed, and then recrossed the Maidan from one side to the other, by different roads.

Heralal laid his throbbing head on the side of the open window of the carriage and closed his eyes. Slowly all the pain abated. A deep and intense peace filled his heart and supreme deliverance seemed to embrace him on every side. It was *not* true—this day’s despair which threatened to drag him into utter helplessness. It was *not* true, it was false. He knew now that it was only a vain fear that his mind had conjured up from nothing. Deliverance was in the infinite sky and there was no end to peace. No King or Emperor in the world had the power to keep captive his nonentity, this Haralal. In the sky, surrounding his emancipated heart on every side, he felt the presence of his mother, that one poor woman. She seemed to grow and grow till she filled the infinity of darkness. All the roads and buildings and shops of Calcutta gradually became enveloped by her. In her presence all his pain vanished; thought, consciousness itself, closed. It seemed as though a bubble filled with the hot vapour of pain had burst, and now there was neither darkness nor light, but only one tensefulness.

The Cathedral clock struck one. The driver called out impatiently: ‘Babu, my horse can’t go on any longer. Where do you want to go?’

There came no answer.

The driver came down and shook Haralal and asked him again where he wanted to go.

There came no answer.

And this was a question that never received its answer from Haralal.

26. My Fair Neighbour

My feelings towards the young widow who lived in the next house to mine were feelings of worship; at least, that is what I told to my friends and myself. Even my nearest intimate, Nabin, knew nothing of the real state of my mind. And I had a sort of pride that I could keep my passion pure by thus concealing it in the inmost recesses of my heart. She was like a dew-drenched *sephali*-blossom, untimely fallen to earth. Too radiant and holy for the flower-decked marriage-bed, she had been dedicated to Heaven.

But passion is like the mountain stream, and refuses to be enclosed in the place of its birth; it must seek an outlet. That is why I tried to give expression to my emotions in poems; but my unwilling pen refused to desecrate the object of my worship.

It happened curiously that just at this time my friend Nabin was afflicted with a madness of verse. It came upon him like an earthquake. It was the poor fellow's first attack, and he was equally unprepared for rhyme and rhythm. Nevertheless he could not refrain, for he succumbed to the fascination, as a widower to his second wife.

So Nabin sought help from me. The subject of his poems was the old, old one, which is ever new: his poems were all addressed to the beloved one. I slapped his back in jest, and asked him: 'Well, old chap, who is she?'

Nabin laughed, as he replied: 'That I have not yet discovered!'

I confess that I found considerable comfort in bringing help to my friend. Like a hen brooding on a duck's egg, I lavished all the warmth of my pent-up passion on Nabin's effusions. So vigorously did I revise and improve his crude productions, that the larger part of each poem became my own.

Then Nabin would say in surprise: 'That is just what I wanted to say, but could not. How on earth do you manage to get hold of all these fine sentiments?'

Poet-like, I would reply: 'They come from my imagination; for, as you know, truth is silent, and it is imagination only which waxes eloquent. Reality represses the flow of feeling like a rock; imagination cuts out a path for itself.'

And the poor puzzled Nabin would say: 'Y-e-s, I see, yes, of course'; and then after some thought would murmur again: 'Yes, yes, you are right!'

As I have already said, in my own love there was a feeling of reverential

delicacy which prevented me from putting it into words. But with Nabin as a screen, there was nothing to hinder the flow of my pen; and a true warmth of feeling gushed out into these vicarious poems.

Nabin in his lucid moments would say: ‘But these are yours! Let me publish them over your name.’

‘Nonsense!’ I would reply. ‘They are yours, my dear fellow; I have only added a touch or two here and there.’

And Nabin gradually came to believe it.

I will not deny that, with a feeling akin to that of the astronomer gazing into the starry heavens, I did sometimes turn my eyes towards the window of the house next door. It is also true that now and again my furtive glances would be rewarded with a vision. And the least glimpse of the pure light of that countenance would at once still and clarify all that was turbulent and unworthy in my emotions.

But one day I was startled. Could I believe my eyes? It was a hot summer afternoon. One of the fierce and fitful nor'-westers was threatening. Black clouds were massed in the north-west corner of the sky; and against the strange and fearful light of that background my fair neighbour stood, gazing out into empty space. And what a world of forlorn longing did I discover in the far-away look of those lustrous black eyes! Was there then, perchance, still some living volcano within the serene radiance of that moon of mine? Alas! that look of limitless yearning, which was winging its way through the clouds like an eager bird, surely sought—not heaven—but the nest of some human heart!

At the sight of the unutterable passion of that look I could hardly contain myself. I was no longer satisfied with correcting crude poems. My whole being longed to express itself in some worthy action. At last I thought I would devote myself to making widow-remarriage popular in my country. I was prepared not only to speak and write on the subject, but also to spend money on its cause.

Nabin began to argue with me. ‘Permanent widowhood,’ said he, ‘has in it a sense of immense purity and peace; a calm beauty like that of the silent places of the dead shimmering in the wan light of the eleventh moon.¹⁷ Would not the mere possibility of remarriage destroy its divine beauty?’

¹⁷. The eleventh day of the moon is a day of fasting and penance.

Now this sort of sentimentality always makes me furious. In time of famine, if a well-fed man speaks scornfully of food, and advises a starving man at point of death to glut his hunger on the fragrance of flowers and the song of birds, what are we to think of him? I said with some heat: ‘Look here, Nabin, to the artist a ruin may be a beautiful object; but houses are built not only for the

contemplation of artists, but that people may live therein; so they have to be kept in repair in spite of artistic susceptibilities. It is all very well for you to idealise widowhood from your safe distance, but you should remember that within widowhood there is a sensitive human heart, throbbing with pain and desire.'

I had an impression that the conversion of Nabin would be a difficult matter, so perhaps I was more impassioned than I need have been. I was somewhat surprised to find at the conclusion of my little speech that Nabin after a single thoughtful sigh completely agreed with me. The even more convincing peroration which I felt I might have delivered was not needed!

After about a week Nabin came to me, and said that if I would help him he was prepared to lead the way by marrying a widow himself.

I was overjoyed. I embraced him effusively, and promised him any money that might be required for the purpose. Then Nabin told me his story.

I learned that Nabin's loved one was not an imaginary being. It appeared that Nabin, too, had for some time adored a widow from a distance, but had not spoken of his feelings to any living soul. Then the magazines in which Nabin's poems, or rather *my* poems, used to appear had reached the fair one's hands; and the poems had not been ineffective.

Not that Nabin had deliberately intended, as he was careful to explain, to conduct love-making in that way. In fact, said he, he had no idea that the widow knew how to read. He used to post the magazine, without disclosing the sender's name, addressed to the widow's brother. It was only a sort of fancy of his, a concession to his hopeless passion. It was flinging garlands before a deity; it is not the worshipper's affair whether the god knows or not, whether he accepts or ignores the offering.

And Nabin particularly wanted me to understand that he had no definite end in view when on diverse pretexts he sought and made the acquaintance of the widow's brother. Any near relation of the loved one needs must have a special interest for the lover.

Then followed a long story about how an illness of the brother at last brought them together. The presence of the poet himself naturally led to much discussion of the poems; nor was the discussion necessarily restricted to the subject out of which it arose.

After his recent defeat in argument at my hands, Nabin had mustered up courage to propose marriage to the widow. At first he could not gain her consent. But when he had made full use of my eloquent words, supplemented by a tear or two of his own, the fair one capitulated unconditionally. Some money was now wanted by her guardian to make arrangements.

'Take it at once,' said I.

'But,' Nabin went on, 'you know it will be some months before I can appease my father sufficiently for him to continue my allowance. How are we to live in the meantime?' I wrote out the necessary cheque without a word, and then I said: 'Now tell me who she is. You need not look on me as a possible rival, for I swear I will not write poems to her; and even if I do I will not send them to her brother, but to you!'

'Don't be absurd,' said Nabin; 'I have not kept back her name because I feared your rivalry! The fact is, she was very much perturbed at taking this unusual step, and had asked me not to talk about the matter to my friends. But it no longer matters, now that everything has been satisfactorily settled. She lives at No. 19, the house next to yours.'

If my heart had been an iron boiler it would have burst. 'So she has no objection to remarriage?' I simply asked.

'Not at the present moment,' replied Nabin with a smile.

'And was it the poems alone which wrought the magic change?'

'Well, my poems were not so bad, you know,' said Nabin, 'were they?'

I swore mentally.

But at whom was I to swear? At him? At myself? At Providence? All the same, I swore.

27. My Lord, the Baby

I

Raicharan was twelve years old when he came as a servant to his master's house. He belonged to the same caste as his master, and was given his master's little son to nurse. As time went on the boy left Raicharan's arms to go to school. From school he went on to college, and after college he entered the judicial service. Always, until he married, Raicharan was his sole attendant.

But, when a mistress came into the house, Raicharan found two masters instead of one. All his former influence passed to the new mistress. This was compensated for by a fresh arrival. Anukul had a son born to him, and Raicharan by his unsparing attentions soon got a complete hold over the child. He used to toss him up in his arms, call to him in absurd baby language, put his face close to the baby's and draw it away again with a grin.

Presently the child was able to crawl and cross the doorway. When Raicharan went to catch him, he would scream with mischievous laughter and make for safety. Raicharan was amazed at the profound skill and exact judgment the baby showed when pursued. He would say to his mistress with a look of awe and mystery: "Your son will be a judge some day."

New wonders came in their turn. When the baby began to toddle, that was to Raicharan an epoch in human history. When he called his father Ba-ba and his mother Ma-ma and Raicharan Chan-na, then Raicharan's ecstasy knew no bounds. He went out to tell the news to all the world.

After a while Raicharan was asked to show his ingenuity in other ways. He had, for instance, to play the part of a horse, holding the reins between his teeth and prancing with his feet. He had also to wrestle with his little charge, and if he could not, by a wrestler's trick, fall on his back defeated at the end, a great outcry was certain.

About this time Anukul was transferred to a district on the banks of the Padma. On his way through Calcutta he bought his son a little go-cart. He bought him also a yellow satin waistcoat, a gold-laced cap, and some gold bracelets and anklets. Raicharan was wont to take these out, and put them on his little charge with ceremonial pride, whenever they went for a walk.

Then came the rainy season, and day after day the rain poured down in

torrents. The hungry river, like an enormous serpent, swallowed down terraces, villages, cornfields, and covered with its flood the tall grasses and wild casuarinas on the sand-banks. From time to time there was a deep thud, as the river-banks crumbled. The unceasing roar of the rain current could be heard from far away. Masses of foam, carried swiftly past, proved to the eye the swiftness of the stream.

One afternoon the rain cleared. It was cloudy, but cool and bright. Raicharan's little despot did not want to stay in on such a fine afternoon. His lordship climbed into the go-cart. Raicharan, between the shafts, dragged him slowly along till he reached the rice-fields on the banks of the river. There was no one in the fields, and no boat on the stream. Across the water, on the farther side, the clouds were rifted in the west. The silent ceremonial of the setting sun was revealed in all its glowing splendour. In the midst of that stillness the child, all of a sudden, pointed with his finger in front of him and cried: "Chan-nal Pitty fow."

Close by on a mud-flat stood a large Kadamba tree in full flower. My lord, the baby, looked at it with greedy eyes, and Raicharan knew his meaning. Only a short time before he had made, out of these very flower balls, a small go-cart; and the child had been so entirely happy dragging it about with a string, that for the whole day Raicharan was not made to put on the reins at all. He was promoted from a horse into a groom.

But Raicharan had no wish that evening to go splashing knee-deep through the mud to reach the flowers. So he quickly pointed his finger in the opposite direction, calling out: "Oh, look, baby, look! Look at the bird." And with all sorts of curious noises he pushed the go-cart rapidly away from the tree.

But a child, destined to be a judge, cannot be put off so easily. And besides, there was at the time nothing to attract his eyes. And you cannot keep up forever the pretence of an imaginary bird.

The little Master's mind was made up, and Raicharan was at his wits' end. "Very well, baby," he said at last, "you sit still in the cart, and I'll go and get you the pretty flower. Only mind you don't go near the water."

As he said this, he made his legs bare to the knee, and waded through the oozing mud towards the tree.

The moment Raicharan had gone, his little Master went off at racing speed to the forbidden water. The baby saw the river rushing by, splashing and gurgling as it went. It seemed as though the disobedient wavelets themselves were running away from some greater Raicharan with the laughter of a thousand children. At the sight of their mischief, the heart of the human child grew excited and restless. He got down stealthily from the go-cart and toddled off towards the

river. On his way he picked up a small stick, and leant over the bank of the stream pretending to fish. The mischievous fairies of the river with their mysterious voices seemed inviting him into their play-house.

Raicharan had plucked a handful of flowers from the tree, and was carrying them back in the end of his cloth, with his face wreathed in smiles. But when he reached the go-cart, there was no one there. He looked on all sides and there was no one there. He looked back at the cart and there was no one there.

In that first terrible moment his blood froze within him. Before his eyes the whole universe swam round like a dark mist. From the depth of his broken heart he gave one piercing cry; "Master, Master, little Master."

But no voice answered "Chan-na." No child laughed mischievously back; no scream of baby delight welcomed his return. Only the river ran on, with its splashing, gurgling noise as before,—as though it knew nothing at all, and had no time to attend to such a tiny human event as the death of a child.

As the evening passed by Raicharan's mistress became very anxious. She sent men out on all sides to search. They went with lanterns in their hands, and reached at last the banks of the Padma. There they found Raicharan rushing up and down the fields, like a stormy wind, shouting the cry of despair: "Master, Master, little Master!"

When they got Raicharan home at last, he fell prostrate at his mistress's feet. They shook him, and questioned him, and asked him repeatedly where he had left the child; but all he could say was, that he knew nothing.

Though everyone held the opinion that the Padma had swallowed the child, there was a lurking doubt left in the mind. For a band of gipsies had been noticed outside the village that afternoon, and some suspicion rested on them. The mother went so far in her wild grief as to think it possible that Raicharan himself had stolen the child. She called him aside with piteous entreaty and said: "Raicharan, give me back my baby. Oh! Give me back my child. Take from me any money you ask, but give me back my child!"

Raicharan only beat his forehead in reply. His mistress ordered him out of the house.

Artukul tried to reason his wife out of this wholly unjust suspicion: "Why on earth," he said, "should he commit such a crime as that?"

The mother only replied: "The baby had gold ornaments on his body. Who knows?"

It was impossible to reason with her after that.

Raicharan went back to his own village. Up to this time he had had no son, and there was no hope that any child would now be born to him. But it came about before the end of a year that his wife gave birth to a son and died.

All overwhelming resentment at first grew up in Raicharan's heart at the sight of this new baby. At the back of his mind was resentful suspicion that it had come as a usurper in place of the little Master. He also thought it would be a grave offence to be happy with a son of his own after what had happened to his master's little child. Indeed, if it had not been for a widowed sister, who mothered the new baby, it would not have lived long.

But a change gradually came over Raicharan's mind. A wonderful thing happened. This new baby in turn began to crawl about, and cross the doorway with mischief in its face. It also showed an amusing cleverness in making its escape to safety. Its voice, its sounds of laughter and tears, its gestures, were those of the little Master. On some days, when Raicharan listened to its crying, his heart suddenly began thumping wildly against his ribs, and it seemed to him that his former little Master was crying somewhere in the unknown land of death because he had lost his Chan-na.

Phailna (for that was the name Raicharan's sister gave to the new baby) soon began to talk. It learnt to say Ba-ba and Ma-ma with a baby accent. When Raicharan heard those familiar sounds the mystery suddenly became clear. The little Master could not cast off the spell of his Chan-na, and therefore he had been reborn in his own house.

The arguments in favour of this were, to Raicharan, altogether beyond dispute:

- (i) The new baby was born soon after his little master's death.
- (ii) His wife could never have accumulated such merit as to give birth to a son in middle age.

(iii) The new baby walked with a toddle and called out Ba-ba and Ma-ma. There was no sign lacking which marked out the future judge.

Then suddenly Raicharan remembered that terrible accusation of the mother. "Ah," he said to himself with amazement, "the mother's heart was right. She knew I had stolen her child." When once he had come to this conclusion, he was filled with remorse for his past neglect. He now gave himself over, body and soul, to the new baby, and became its devoted attendant. He began to bring it up, as if it were the son of a rich man. He bought a go-cart, a yellow satin waistcoat, and a gold-embroidered cap. He melted down the ornaments of his dead wife, and made gold bangles and anklets. He refused to let the little child play with anyone of the neighbourhood, and became himself its sole companion day and

night. As the baby grew up to boyhood, he was so petted and spoilt and clad in such finery that the village children would call him "Your Lordship," and jeer at him; and older people regarded Raicharan as unaccountably crazy about the child.

At last the time came for the boy to go to school. Raicharan sold his small piece of land, and went to Calcutta. There he got employment with great difficulty as a servant, and sent Phailna to school. He spared no pains to give him the best education, the best clothes, the best food. Meanwhile he lived himself on a mere handful of rice, and would say in secret: "Ah! My little Master, my dear little Master, you loved me so much that you came back to my house. You shall never suffer from any neglect of mine."

Twelve years passed away in this manner. The boy was able to read and write well. He was bright and healthy and good-looking. He paid a great deal of attention to his personal appearance, and was specially careful in parting his hair. He was inclined to extravagance and finery, and spent money freely. He could never quite look on Raicharan as a father, because, though fatherly in affection, he had the manner of a servant. A further fault was this, that Raicharan kept secret from everyone that himself was the father of the child.

The students of the hostel, where Phailna was a boarder, were greatly amused by Raicharan's country manners, and I have to confess that behind his father's back Phailna joined in their fun. But, in the bottom of their hearts, all the students loved the innocent and tender-hearted old man, and Phailna was very fond of him also. But, as I have said before, he loved him with a kind of condescension.

Raicharan grew older and older, and his employer was continually finding fault with him for his incompetent work. He had been starving himself for the boy's sake. So he had grown physically weak, and no longer up to his work. He would forget things, and his mind became dull and stupid. But his employer expected a full servant's work out of him, and would not brook excuses. The money that Raicharan had brought with him from the sale of his land was exhausted. The boy was continually grumbling about his clothes, and asking for more money.

Raicharan made up his mind. He gave up the situation where he was working as a servant, and left some money with Phailna and said: "I have some business to do at home in my village, and shall be back soon."

He went off at once to Baraset where Anukul was magistrate. Anukul's wife was still broken down with grief. She had had no other child.

One day Anukul was resting after a long and weary day in court. His wife was buying, at an exorbitant price, a herb from a mendicant quack, which was said to

ensure the birth of a child. A voice of greeting was heard in the courtyard. Anukul went out to see who was there. It was Raicharan. Anukul's heart was softened when he saw his old servant. He asked him many questions, and offered to take him back into service.

Raicharan smiled faintly, and said in reply; "I want to make obeisance to my mistress."

Anukul went with Raicharan into the house, where the mistress did not receive him as warmly as his old master. Raicharan took no notice of this, but folded his hands, and said: "It was not the Padma that stole your baby. It was I."

Anukul exclaimed: "Great God! Eh! What! Where is he? "Raicharan replied: "He is with me, I will bring him the day after tomorrow."

It was Sunday. There was no magistrate's court sitting. Both husband and wife were looking expectantly along the road, waiting from early morning for Raicharan's appearance. At ten o'clock he came, leading Phailna by the hand.

Anukul's wife, without a question, took the boy into her lap, and was wild with excitement, sometimes laughing, sometimes weeping, touching him, kissing his hair and his forehead, and gazing into his face with hungry, eager eyes. The boy was very good-looking and dressed like a gentleman's son. The heart of Anukul brimmed over with a sudden rush of affection.

Nevertheless the magistrate in him asked: "Have you any proofs? "Raicharan said: "How could there be any proof of such a deed? God alone knows that I stole your boy, and no one else in the world."

When Anukul saw how eagerly his wife was clinging to the boy, he realised the futility of asking for proofs. It would be wiser to believe. And then—where could an old man like Raicharan get such a boy from? And why should his faithful servant deceive him for nothing?

"But," he added severely, "Raicharan, you must not stay here."

"Where shall I go, Master?" said Raicharan, in a choking voice, folding his hands; "I am old. Who will take in an old man as a servant?"

The mistress said: "Let him stay. My child will be pleased. I forgive him."

But Anukul's magisterial conscience would not allow him. "No," he said, "he cannot be forgiven for what he has done."

Raicharan bowed to the ground, and clasped Anukul's feet. "Master," he cried, "let me stay. It was not I who did it. It was God."

Anukul's conscience was worse stricken than ever, when Raicharan tried to put the blame on God's shoulders.

"No," he said, "I could not allow it. I cannot trust you anymore. You have done an act of treachery."

Raicharan rose to his feet and said: "It was not I who did it."

"Who was it then?" asked Anukul.

Raicharan replied: "It was my fate."

But no educated man could take this for an excuse. Anukul remained obdurate.

When Phailna saw that he was the wealthy magistrate's son, and not Raicharan's, he was angry at first, thinking that he had been cheated all this time of his birthright. But seeing Raicharan in distress, he generously said to his father: "Father, forgive him. Even if you don't let him live with us, let him have a small monthly pension."

After hearing this, Raicharan did not utter another word. He looked for the last time on the face of his son; he made obeisance to his old master and mistress. Then he went out, and was mingled with the numberless people of the world.

At the end of the month Anukul sent him some money to his village. But the money came back. There was no one there of the name of Raicharan.

28. Once there was a King

‘Once upon a time there was a king.’

When we were children there was no need to know who the king in the fairy story was. It didn’t matter whether he was called Siladitya or Salivahan, whether he lived at Kashi or Kanauj. The thing that made a seven-year-old boy’s heart go thump with delight was this one sovereign truth, this reality of all realities: ‘Once there was a king.’

But the readers of this modern age are far more exact and exacting. When they hear such an opening to a story, they are at once critical and suspicious. They apply the searchlight of science to its legendary haze and ask: ‘Which king?’

The story-tellers also have become more precise. They are no longer content with the old indefinite, ‘There was a king,’ but assume instead a look of profound learning and begin: ‘Once there was a king named Ajatasatru.’

The modern reader’s curiosity, however, is not so easily satisfied. He blinks at the author through his scientific spectacles and asks again: ‘Which Ajatasatru?’

When we were young, we understood all sweet things; and we could detect the sweets of a fairy story by an unerring science of our own. We never cared for such useless things as knowledge. We only cared for truth. And our unsophisticated little hearts knew well where the Crystal Palace of Truth lay and how to reach it. But today we are expected to write pages of facts, while the truth is simply this:

‘There was a king.’

I remember vividly that evening in Calcutta when the fairy story began. It had been raining all day long. The whole city was flooded. In our lane the water was knee-deep. I had a straining hope, which was almost a certainty, that my tutor would be prevented from coming that evening. I sat on the stool in the far corner of the verandah looking down the lane, and my heart beat faster and faster. Every minute I kept my eye on the rain, and when it began to abate, I prayed with all my might: ‘Please, God, let it keep on raining till after half-past seven.’ For I was quite ready to believe that the only need for rain was to protect one helpless boy one evening in a certain corner of Calcutta from the deadly clutches of his tutor.

If not in answer to my prayer, at least according to some grosser law of nature,

the rain did not give over. But, alas, neither did my teacher!

Exactly to the minute, in the turn of the lane, I saw his umbrella approaching. The great bubble of hope burst in my breast, and my heart collapsed. Truly, if there is, after death, a punishment to fit the crime, then my tutor will be born again in my place, and I shall be born in my tutor's.

As soon as I saw his umbrella, I ran as hard as I could to my mother's room. My mother and my grandmother were sitting opposite each other, playing cards by the light of a lamp. I ran into the room, flung myself on the bed beside my mother and said:

'Mother, my tutor has come, and I have such a bad headache; could I do without my lesson today?'

I hope no child will be allowed to read this story and I sincerely trust it will not be used in textbooks, or primers, for junior classes. For what I did was dreadfully bad, and I received no punishment whatever. On the contrary my wicked request was granted.

Mother said to me: 'All right,' and turning to the servant added: 'Tell the tutor that he can go back home.'

It was quite plain that she did not think my illness very serious, for she went on with her game and took no further notice. And I, burying my head in the pillow, laughed to my heart's content. We understood one another, perfectly, my mother and I.

But everyone must know how hard it is for a boy seven years old to keep up the illusion of illness for long. After about a minute I caught hold of grandmother and said: 'Granny, do tell me a story.'

I had to ask many times. Granny and Mother went on playing cards and took no notice. At last Mother said to me: 'Child, don't bother. Wait till we've finished our game.' But I persisted: 'Granny, do tell me a story.' I told Mother she could finish her game tomorrow, that she must let Granny tell me a story there and then.

At last, Mother threw down the cards and said: 'You had better do what he wants. I can't manage him.' Perhaps she remembered that she would have no tiresome tutor the following day, while I should have to be back at those stupid lessons.

As soon as Mother had given way, I rushed at Granny. I seized her hand, and dancing with delight, dragged her inside my mosquito curtain on to the bed. I clutched the bolster with both hands in my excitement, and jumped up and down with joy, and when at last I had become a little quieter, said: 'Now, Granny let's have the story!'

Granny went on, ‘And the king had a queen.’

That was good to begin with. He had only one!

It is usual for kings in fairy stories to be extravagant in the number of queens they have. And whenever we hear that there are two queens, our hearts begin to sink. One of them is sure to be unhappy. But in Granny’s story there was no danger of that. He had only one queen.

The next detail of Granny’s story was that the king had no son. At the age of seven I did not think one need bother if a man had no son. He might only have been in the way.

Nor was I greatly excited when I heard that the king had gone into the forest to practise austerities in order to obtain a son. There was only one thing that would have made me go into the forest, and that was to get away from my tutor!

But the king had left behind with his queen a little girl, who grew up into a beautiful princess.

Twelve years passed away, and the king went on practising austerities, and never thought of his beautiful daughter. The princess had reached the full bloom of her youth. The age of marriage had passed, but the king had not returned. And the queen pined away with grief and cried: ‘Is my golden daughter destined to die unmarried? Ah me, what a fate is mine!’

Then the queen sent men to the king, entreating him to come back if only for a single night, and to eat one meal in the palace. And the king consented.

With the greatest care, the queen cooked with her own hand sixty-four dishes. She made a seat for him of sandalwood and arranged the food in plates of gold and cups of silver. The princess stood behind his seat with the peacock-tail fan in her hand. After his twelve years’ absence, the king entered the house, and the princess, waving the fan, lighted up all the room with her beauty. The king looked in his daughter’s face and forgot even to eat.

At last he asked his queen: ‘Pray, who is this girl whose beauty shines as the golden image of the goddess? Whose daughter is she?’

The queen beat her forehead and cried: ‘Ah, how evil is my fate! Do you not recognise your own daughter?’

For some time the king remained in silent amazement, but at last he exclaimed: ‘My tiny daughter has grown to be a woman.’

‘How could it be otherwise?’ the queen asked with a sigh. ‘Do you not know that twelve years have passed?’

‘But why did you not give her in marriage?’ asked the king.

‘You were away,’ the queen replied. ‘And how could I find her a suitable husband?’

At this the king, strangely excited, vowed that the first man he saw the following day when he went out of the palace, should marry her.

But the princess merely went on waving her fan of peacock feathers and the king finished his meal.

The next morning, as the king went out of his palace, he saw the son of a Brahman gathering sticks in the forest outside the palace gates. He was about seven or eight years old.

The king said: 'I will marry my daughter to him.'

Who can interfere with a king's command? At once the boy was called, and the marriage garlands were exchanged between him and the princess.

At this point I came up close to my wise Granny and asked her eagerly: 'What then?'

In the bottom of my heart there was a devout wish that I might be that fortunate seven-year-old wood-gatherer. The night resounded with the patter of rain. The earthen lamp by my bedside was burning low. My grandmother's voice droned on as she told the story. And all these things served to create in a corner of my credulous heart the belief that I had been gathering sticks in the dawn of some indefinite time in the kingdom of some unknown king, and that in a moment garlands had been exchanged between me and the princess, beautiful as the Goddess of Grace. She had a gold band on her hair and gold earrings in her ears. She wore a necklace and bracelets of gold, and a golden waist-chain round her waist, and a pair of golden anklets tinkled with the movements of her feet.

If my grandmother had been an author, how many explanations would she not have had to offer of this little story! First of all, everyone would ask why the king remained twelve years in the forest? And then, why should the king's daughter remain unmarried all that time? Such a delay would be regarded as absurd.

Even if my Granny could have got so far without quarrelling with her critics, still there would have been a great hue and cry about the marriage itself. In the first place, it never happened. And in the second, how could there be a marriage between a princess of the warrior caste and a boy of the priestly Brahman caste? Her readers would have imagined at once that the writer was preaching against our social customs in an indirect and unfair way. And they would write letters to the papers.

So I pray with all my heart that my grandmother may be born a grandmother again, and not through some cursed fate be born again in the person of her luckless grandson.

With a throb of joy and delight, I asked Granny: 'What then?'

Granny went on: Then the princess took her little husband away, and built for him a large palace with seven wings, and cherished him there.

I jumped up and down in my bed, clutched the bolster tighter than ever and said: 'What then?'

Granny continued: The little boy went to school and learnt many lessons from his teachers, and as he grew up, the boys in his class began to ask him: 'Who is that beautiful lady living with you in the palace with the seven wings?'

The Brahman's son was eager to know who she was. He could only remember how one day he had been gathering sticks and how a great disturbance had arisen. But all this was so long ago that he had no clear recollection of it.

In this way, four or five years passed. His companions were always asking him: 'Who is that beautiful lady in the palace with the seven wings?' And the Brahman's son would come back from school and sadly say to the princess: 'My school companions always ask me who that beautiful lady is in the palace with the seven wings, and I cannot answer them. Tell me, oh, tell me, who you are!'

The princess said: 'Let it pass untold today. I will tell you some other day.' And every day the Brahman's son would ask: 'Who are you?' and the princess would reply: 'Let it pass untold today. I will tell you some other day.' And so four or five years more went by.

At last the Brahman's son became very impatient and said: 'If you do not tell me today who you are, O beautiful lady, I will leave this palace with the seven wings.' Then the princess said: 'I will certainly tell you tomorrow.'

Next day the Brahman's son, as soon as he came home from school, said: 'Now, tell me who you are.' The princess said: 'Tonight after supper I will tell you when you are in bed.'

The Brahman's son agreed. And he began to count the hours in expectation of the night. And the princess spread white flowers over the golden bed, filled a golden lamp with fragrant oil and lighted it, adorned her hair, and dressing herself in a beautiful robe of blue, began also to count the hours in expectation of the night.

That evening her husband, the Brahman's son, was almost too excited to eat, but when he had finished his supper, he went to the golden bed in the bed-chamber strewn with flowers, and said to himself: 'Tonight I shall surely know who this beautiful lady is in the palace with the seven wings.'

The princess ate what was left over from her husband's supper, and slowly entered the bed-chamber. She had to reveal that very night the identity of the beautiful lady that lived in the palace with the seven wings. And as she went up to the bed to tell him, she found a serpent had crept out of the flowers and had

bitten the Brahman's son. Her boy-husband was lying on the bed of flowers, his face pale in death.

My heart suddenly ceased to throb, and I asked with a voice choking with tears: 'What then?'

Granny said: 'Then.....'

But what is the use of going on any further with the story? It would only lead to what was more and more impossible. The boy of seven did not know that even though there were some 'What then?' after death, not even the grandmother of a grandmother could tell us all about it.

But the child's faith never admits defeat, and it would snatch at the mantle of Death himself in an attempt to prevent his approach. It would be outrageous for him to think that such a story told on an evening when his teacher was away could come so suddenly to a stop. Therefore the grandmother has to call back her fairy tale from the ever-shut chamber of the great End. And she does it so simply—merely by floating the dead body down the river on a banana stem, and having some incantations read by a magician. But on that rainy night and in the dim light of a lamp, death in the mind of the boy loses all its horror, and seems nothing more than the deep slumber of a single night. When the story ends, the tired eyelids are weighed down with sleep. Thus it is that we send the little body of the child floating on the back of sleep over the still water of time, and then in the morning read a few verses of incantation to restore him to the world of life and light.

29. The Parrot's Training

Once upon a time there was a bird. It was ignorant. It sang all right, but never recited scriptures. It hopped pretty frequently, but lacked manners.

Said the Raja to himself: 'Ignorance is costly in the long run. For fools consume as much food as their betters, and yet give nothing in return.'

He called his nephews to his presence and told them that the bird must have a sound schooling.

The pundits were summoned, and at once went to the root of the matter.

They decided that the ignorance of birds was due to their natural habit of living in poor nests. Therefore, according to the pundits, the first thing necessary for this bird's education was a suitable cage.

The pundits had their rewards and went home happy.

A golden cage was built with gorgeous decorations. Crowds came to see it from all parts of the world. 'Culture, captured and caged!' exclaimed some, in a rapture of ecstasy, and burst into tears. Others remarked: 'Even if culture be missed, the cage will remain, to the end, a substantial fact. How fortunate for the bird!'

The goldsmith filled his bag with money and lost no time in sailing homewards.

The pundit sat down to educate the bird. With proper deliberation he took his pinch of snuff, as he said: 'Text-books can never be too many for our purpose!'

The nephews brought together an enormous crowd of scribes. They copied from books, and copied from copies, till the manuscripts were piled up to an unreachable height. Men murmured in amazement: 'Oh, the tower of culture, egregiously high! The end of it lost in the clouds!'

The scribes, with light hearts, hurried home, their pockets heavily laden.

The nephews were furiously busy keeping the cage in proper trim. As their constant scrubbing and polishing went on, the people said with satisfaction: 'This is progress indeed!'

Men were employed in large numbers, and supervisors were still more numerous. These, with their cousins of all different degrees of distance, built a

palace for themselves and lived there happily ever after.

Whatever may be its other deficiencies, the world is never in want of fault-finders; and they went about saying that every creature remotely connected with the cage flourished beyond words, excepting only the bird.

When this remark reached the Raja's ears, he summoned his nephews before him and said: 'My dear nephews, what is this that we hear?'

The nephews said in answer: 'Sire, let the testimony of the goldsmiths and the pundits, the scribes and the supervisors, be taken, if the truth is to be known. Food is scarce with the fault-finders, and that is why their tongues have gained in sharpness.'

The explanation was so luminously satisfactory that the Raja decorated each one of his nephews with his own rare jewels.

The Raja at length, being desirous of seeing with his own eyes how his Education Department busied itself with the little bird, made his appearance one day at the great Hall of Learning.

From the gate rose the sounds of conch-shells and gongs, horns, bugles and trumpets, cymbals, drums and kettle-drums, tomtoms, tambourines, flutes, fifes, barrel-organs and bagpipes. The pundits began chanting mantras with their topmost voices, while the goldsmiths, scribes, supervisors, and their numberless cousins of all different degrees of distance, loudly raised a round of cheers.

The nephews smiled and said: 'Sire, what do you think of it all?'

The Raja said: 'It does seem so fearfully like a sound principle of Education!'

Mightily pleased, the Raja was about to remount his elephant, when the fault-finder, from behind some bush, cried out: 'Maharaja, have you seen the bird?'

'Indeed, I have not!' exclaimed the Raja, 'I completely forgot about the bird.'

Turning back, he asked the pundits about the method they followed in instructing the bird. It was shown to him. He was immensely impressed. The method was so stupendous that the bird looked ridiculously unimportant in comparison. The Raja was satisfied that there was no flaw in the arrangements. As for any complaint from the bird itself, that simply could not be expected. Its throat was so completely choked with the leaves from the books that it could neither whistle nor whisper. It sent a thrill through one's body to watch the process.

This time, while remounting his elephant, the Raja ordered his State ear-puller to give a thorough good pull at both the ears of the fault-finder.

The bird thus crawled on, duly and properly, to the safest verge of insanity. In fact, its progress was satisfactory in the extreme. Nevertheless, nature occasionally triumphed over training, and when the morning light peeped into

the bird's cage it sometimes fluttered its wings in a reprehensible manner. And, though it is hard to believe, it pitifully pecked at its bars with its feeble beak.

'What impertinence!' growled the *kotwal*.

The blacksmith, with his forge and hammer, took his place in the Raja's Department of Education. Oh, what resounding blows! The iron chain was soon completed, and the bird's wings were clipped.

The Raja's brothers-in-law looked black, and shook their heads, saying: 'These birds not only lack good sense, but also gratitude!'

With text-book in one hand and baton in the other, the pundits gave the poor bird what may fitly be called lessons!

The *kotwal* was honoured with a title for his watchfulness, and the blacksmith for his skill in forging chains.

The bird died.

Nobody had the least notion how long ago this had happened. The fault-finder was the first man to spread the rumour.

The Raja called his nephews and asked them. 'My dear nephews, what is this that we hear?'

The nephews said: 'Sire, the bird's education has been completed.'

'Does it hop?' the Raja enquired.

'Never!' said the nephews.

'Does it fly?'

'No.'

'Bring me the bird,' said the Raja.

The bird was brought to him, guarded by the *kotwal* and the sepoys and the sowars. The Raja poked its body with his finger. Only its inner stuffing of book-leaves rustled.

Outside the window, the murmur of the spring breeze amongst the newly budded asoka leaves made the April morning wistful.

30. The Patriot

I am sure that Chitragupta, who keeps strict record at the gate of Death, must have noted down in big letters accusations against me, which had escaped my attention altogether. On the other hand many of my sins, that have passed unnoticed by others, loom large in my own memory. The story of my transgression, that I am going to relate, belongs to the latter kind, and I hope that a frank confession of it, before it is finally entered in the Book of Doom, may lessen its culpability.

It all happened yesterday afternoon, on a day of festival for the Jains in our neighbourhood. I was going out with my wife, Kalika, to tea at the house of my friend Nayanmohan.

My wife's name means literally a 'bud.' It was given by my father-in-law, who is thus solely responsible for any discrepancy between its implication and the reality to which it is attached. There is not the least tremor of hesitancy in my wife's nature; her opinions on most subjects have reached their terminus. Once, when she had been vigorously engaged in picketing against British cloth in Burrabazar, the awe-struck members of her party in a fit of excessive admiration gave her the name, Dhruva-vrata, the woman of unwavering vows.

My name is Girindra, the Lord of the Rocks, so common among my countrymen, whose character generally fails to act up to it. Kalika's admirers simply know me as the husband of my wife and pay no heed to my name. By good luck inherited from my ancestors I have, however, some kind of significance, which is considered to be convenient by her followers at the time of collecting subscriptions.

There is a greater chance of harmony between husband and wife, when they are different in character, like the shower of rain and the dry earth, than when they are of a uniform constitution. I am somewhat slipshod by nature, having no grip over things, while my wife has a tenacity of mind which never allows her to let go the thing which it has in its clutches. This very dissimilarity helps to preserve peace in our household.

But there is one point of difference between us, regarding which no adjustment has yet become possible. Kalika believes that I am unpatriotic.

This is very disconcerting, because according to her, truth is what she

proclaims to be true. She has numerous internal evidences of my love for my country; but as it disdains to don the livery of the brand of nationalism, professed by her own party, she fiercely refuses to acknowledge it.

From my younger days, I have continued to be a confirmed book-lover: indeed, I am hopelessly addicted to buying books. Even my enemies would not dare to deny that I read them; and my friends know only too well how fond I am of discussing their contents. This had the effect of eliminating most of my friends, till I have left to me Banbihari, the sole companion of my lonely debates. We have just passed through a period, when our police authorities, on the one hand, have associated the worst form of sedition with the presence of the Gita in our possession; and our patriots, on their side, have found it impossible to reconcile appreciation of foreign literature with devotion to one's Motherland. Our traditional Goddess of culture, Saraswati, because of her white complexion, has come to be regarded with-suspicion by our young nationalists. It was openly declared, when the students shunned their College lectures, that the water of the divine lake, on which Saraswati had her white lotus seat, had no efficacy in extinguishing the fire of ill-fortune that has been raging for centuries round the throne of our Mother, Bharat-Lakshmi. In any case, intellectual culture was considered to be a superfluity in the proper growth of our political life.

In spite of my wife's excellent example and powerful urgings I do not wear Khaddar,—not because there is anything wrong in it, nor because I am too fastidious in the choice of my wardrobe. On the contrary, among those of my traits, which are not in perfect consonance with our own national habits, I cannot include a scrupulous care as to how I dress. Once upon a time, before Kalika had her modern transformation, I used to wear broad-toed shoes from Chinese shops and forgot to have them polished. I had a dread of putting on socks: I preferred Punjabis to English shirts, and overlooked their accidental deficiency in buttons. These habits of mine constantly produced domestic cataclysms, threatening our permanent separation. Kalika declared that she felt ashamed to appear before the public in my company. I readily absolved her from the wifely duty of accompanying me to those parties where my presence would be discordant.

The times have changed, but my evil fortune persists. Kalika still has the habit of repeating: 'I am ashamed to go out with you.' Formerly, I hesitated to adopt the uniform of her set, when she belonged to the pre-nationalist age; and I still feel reluctant to adopt the uniform of the present regime, to which she owns her allegiance.

The fault lies deep in my own nature. I shrink from all conscious display of sectarian marks about my person. This shyness on my part leads to incessant

verbal explosions in our domestic world, because of the inherent incapacity of Kalika to accept as final any natural difference, which her partner in life may possess. Her mind is like a mountain stream, that boisterously goes round and round a rock, pushing against it in a vain effort to make it flow with its own current. Her contact with a different point of view from her own seems to exercise an irresistible reflex action upon her nerves, throwing her into involuntary convulsions.

While getting ready to go out yesterday, the tone with which Kalika protested against my non-Khaddar dress was anything but sweet. Unfortunately, I had my inveterate pride of intellect, that forced me into a discussion with my wife. It was unpleasant, and what more, futile.

'Women find it convenient,' I said to her, 'to veil their eyes and walk tied to the leading strings of authority. They feel safe when they deprive their thoughts of all freedom, and confine them in the strict Zenana of conformity. Our ladies today have easily developed their devotion to Khaddar, because it has added to the over-burdened list of our outward criterion's of propriety, which seem to comfort them.'

Kalika replied with almost fanatical fury: 'It will be a great day for my country, when the sanctity of wearing Khaddar is as blindly believed in as a dip in the holy water of the Ganges. Reason crystallised becomes custom. Free thoughts are like ghosts, which find their bodies in convention. Then alone they have their solid work, and no longer float about in a thin atmosphere of vacillation.'

I could see that these were the wise sayings of Nayanmohan, with the quotation marks worn out; Kalika found no difficulty in imagining that they were her own.

The man who invented the proverb, 'The silent silence all antagonist', must have been unmarried. It made my wife all the more furious, when I offered her no answer. 'Your protest against caste,' she explained, 'is only confined to your mouth. We, on the contrary, carry it out in practice by imposing a uniformly white cover over all colour distinctions.'

I was about to reply, that my protest against caste did truly have its origin in my mouth, whenever I accepted with relish the excellent food cooked by a Muhammadan. It was certainly oral, but not verbal; and its movements were truly inward. An external cover hides distinctions, but does not remove them.

I am sure my argument deserved utterance, but being a helpless male, I timidly sought safety in a speechless neutrality; for, I knew, from repeated experience, that such discussions, started in our domestic seclusion, are invariably carried by my wife, like soiled linen, to her friendly circle to be ruthlessly beaten and mangled. She has the unpleasant habit of collecting counter-arguments from the

mouth of Professor Nayanmohan, exultantly flinging them in my face, and then rushing away from the arena without waiting for my answer.

I was perfectly certain about what was in store for me at the Professor's tea-table. There would be some abstruse dissertation on the relative position in Hindu culture of tradition and free thought, the inherited experience of ages and reason which is volatile, inconclusive, and colourlessly universal. In the meanwhile, the vision floated before my mind's eye of the newly-brought books, redolent of Morocco leather, mysteriously veiled in a brown paper cover, waiting for me by my cushions, with their shy virginity of uncut pages.

All the same, I was compelled to keep my engagement by the dread of words, uttered and unuttered, and gestures suggestive of trouble.

We had travelled only a short distance from our house. Passing by the street-hydrant, we had reached the tiled hut occupied by an up-country shopkeeper, who was giving various forms to indigestibility in his cauldron of boiling mustard oil, when we were obstructed by a fearful uproar.

The Marwaris, proceeding to their temple, carrying their costly paraphernalia of worship, had suddenly stopped at this place. There were angry shouts, mingled with the sound of thrashing, and I thought that the crowd was dealing with some pickpocket, enjoying the vigour of their own indignation, which gave them—the delightful freedom to be merciless towards one of their own fellow beings. When, by dint of impatient footing of horn, our motor car reached the centre of the excited crowd, we found that the old municipal sweeper of our district was being beaten. He had just taken his afternoon bath and was carrying a bucket of clean water in his right hand with a broom under his arm. Dressed in a check-patterned vest, with carefully combed hair still wet, he was walking home, holding his seven-year-old grandson by his left hand, when accidentally he came in contact with somebody, or something, which gave rise to this violent outburst. The boy was piteously imploring everybody not to hurt his grandfather; and the old man himself with joined hands uplifted, was asking forgiveness for his unintentional offence. Tears were streaming from his frightened eyes, and blood was smeared across his grey beard.

The sight was intolerable to me. I decided at once to take up the sweeper into my car and thereby demonstrate to the pious party, that I was not of their cult.

Noticing my restlessness, Kalika guessed what was in my mind. Gripping my arm, she whispered: 'What are you doing? Don't you see he is a sweeper?'

'He maybe a sweeper,' said I, 'but those people have no right to beat him in this brutal manner.'

'It's his own fault.' Kalika answered, 'Would it have hurt his dignity, if he had

avoided the middle of the road?’

‘I don’t know,’ I said impatiently. ‘Anyhow, I am going to take him into my car.’

‘Then I leave your car this moment,’ said Kalika angrily. ‘I refuse to travel with a sweeper.’

‘Can’t you see,’ I argued, ‘that he was just bathed, and his clothes are clean,—in fact, much cleaner than those of the people who are beating him?’

“He’s a sweeper!” She said decisively. Then she called to the chauffeur, ‘Gangadin, drive on’.

I was defeated. It was my cowardice.

Nayanmohan, I am told, brought out some very profound sociological arguments, at the tea-table, specially dealing with the inevitable inequality imposed upon men by their profession and the natural humiliation which is inherent in the scheme of things. But his words did not reach my ears, and I sat silent all through the evening.

31. The Postmaster

The postmaster took up his duties first in the village of Ulapur. Though the village was small, there was an indigo factory near it, and the proprietor, an Englishman, had managed to get a post office established.

Our postmaster belonged to Calcutta. He felt like a fish out of water in this remote village. His office and living-room were in a dark thatched shed, not far from a green, slimy pond, surrounded on all sides by a dense growth.

The man employed in the indigo factory had no leisure; moreover, they were hardly desirable companions for decent folk. Nor is a Calcutta boy an adept in the art of associating with others. Among strangers he appears either proud or ill at ease. At any rate, the postmaster had but little company; nor had he much work to do.

At times he tried his hand at writing verse. That the movement of the leaves and the clouds of the sky were enough to fill life with joy—such were the sentiments to which he sought to give expression. But God knows that the poor fellow would have felt it as the gift of a new life, if some genie of the *Arabian Nights* had in one night swept away the trees, leaves and all, and substituted for them a macadamised road, and had hidden the clouds from view with rows of tall houses.

The postmaster's salary was small. He had to cook his own meals, which he used to share with Ratan, an orphan girl of the village, who did odd jobs for him.

When in the evening, the smoke began to curl upwards from the village cow-sheds, and the cicadas chirped in every bush; when the mendicants of the Baul sect sang their shrill songs in their daily meeting place; when any poet, who had attempted to watch the movement of the leaves in the dense bamboo thickets, would have felt a ghostly shiver run down his back, the postmaster would light his little lamp, and call out 'Ratan.'

Ratan would sit outside, waiting for his call, and instead of coming in at once, would reply, 'Did you call me sir?'



'What are you doing?' the postmaster would ask.

'I must go and light the kitchen fire,' she would reply.

And the postmaster would say: 'Oh let the kitchen fire wait for a while; light me my pipe first.'

At last Ratan would enter, with puffed-out cheeks, vigorously blowing into a flame a live coal to light the tobacco. This would give the postmaster an opportunity of chatting with her. 'Well, Ratan,' perhaps he would begin, 'do you remember anything of your mother?' That was a fertile subject. Ratan partly remembered, and partly forgot. Her father had been fonder of her than her mother: him she recollects more vividly. He used to come home in the evening after his works, and one or two evenings stood out more clearly than others, like pictures in her memory. Ratan would sit on the floor near the postmaster's feet as memories crowded in upon her. She called to mind a little brother that she had—and how on some bygone cloudy day she had played at fishing with him on the edge of the pond, with a twig for a fishing-rod. Such little incidents would drive out greater events from her mind. Thus, as they talked, it would often get very late, and the postmaster would feel too lazy to do any cooking at all. Ratan would then hastily light the fire, and toast some unleavened bread, which, with the cold remnants of the morning meal, was enough for their supper.

On some evenings, seated at his desk in the corner of the big empty shed, the postmaster too would call up memories of his own home, of his mother and his sister, of those for whom in his exile his heart was sad—memories which were always haunting him, but which he could not reveal to the men of the factory, though he found himself naturally recalling them aloud in the presence of the simple little girl. And so it came about that the girl would allude to his people as mother, brother, and sister, as if she had known them all her life. Indeed, she had a complete picture of each one of them painted in her heart.

One day at noon, during a break in the rains, there was a cool soft breeze blowing; the smell of the damp grass and leaves in the hot sun felt like the warm breathing on one's body of the tired earth. A persistent bird repeated all the

afternoon the burden of its one complaint in Nature's audience chamber.

The postmaster had nothing to do. The shimmer of freshly washed leaves, and the banked-up remnants of the retreating rain-clouds were sights to see; and the postmaster was watching them and thinking to himself: 'Oh, if only some kindred soul were near—just one loving human being whom I could hold near my heart!' This was exactly, he went on to think, what that bird was trying to say, and it was the same feeling which the murmuring leaves were striving to express. But no one knows, or would believe, that such an idea might also take possession of an ill-paid village postmaster in the deep, silent midday interval in his work.

The postmaster sighed, and called out 'Ratan.' Ratan was then stretched at full length beneath the guava-tree, busily engaged in eating unripe guavas. At the voice of her master, she ran up breathlessly, saying: 'Did you call me, Dada?' 'I was thinking of teaching you to read,' said the postmaster. And then for the rest of the afternoon he taught her the alphabet.

Thus, in a very short time, Ratan had got as far as the double consonants.

It seemed as though the rains would never end. Canals, ditches, and hollows were all flooded with water. Day and night the patter of rain was heard and the croaking of frogs. The village roads became impassable, and marketing had to be done in punts.

One heavily clouded morning, the postmaster's little pupil had been waiting for long outside the door to be called, but as the usual summons did not come, she took up her dogeared book, and slowly entered the room. She found her master lying on his bed, and thinking he was resting, she was about to retire on tiptoe, when she suddenly heard her name—'Ratan!' She turned at once and asked: 'Were you asleep, Dada?' The postmaster in a weak voice replied: 'I am not well. Feel my head; is it very hot?'

In the loneliness of his exile, and in the gloom of the rains, he needed a little tender nursing. He longed to call to mind the touch on his forehead of soft hands with tinkling bracelets, to imagine the presence of loving womanhood, the nearness of mother and sister. And the exile was not disappointed. Ratan ceased to be a little girl. She at once stepped into the post of mother, called in the village doctor, gave the patient his pills at the proper intervals, sat up all night by his pillow, cooked his gruel for him, and every now and then asked: 'Are you feeling a little better, Dada?'

It was some time before the postmaster, though still weak, was able to leave his sick-bed. 'No more of this,' said he with decision, 'I must apply for a transfer from this place.' He wrote off at once to Calcutta an application for a transfer, on

the ground of the unhealthiness of the spot.

Relieved from her duties as nurse, Ratan again took up her former place outside the door. But she no longer heard the same old call. She would sometimes furtively peep inside to find the postmaster sitting on his chair, or stretched on his bed, and gazing absently into the air. While Ratan was awaiting her call, the postmaster was awaiting a reply to his application. The girl read her old lessons over and over again—her great fear was lest, when the call came, she might be found wanting in the double consonants. After a week's waiting, one evening her summons came. With an overflowing heart Ratan rushed into the room and cried, as she used to cry: ‘Did you call me, Dada?’

The postmaster said: ‘I am going away tomorrow, Ratan.’

‘Where are you going, Dada?’

‘I am going home.’

‘When will you come back?’

‘I am not coming back.’

Ratan asked no more. The postmaster, of his own accord, went on to tell her that his application for a transfer had been rejected, so he had resigned his post and was going home.

For a long time neither of them spoke. The lamp burned dimly, and from a leak in one corner of the thatch, water dripped steadily into an earthen vessel on the floor beneath.

After a while Ratan rose, and went off to the kitchen to prepare the meal; but she was not so quick about it as before. Many new things to think of had entered her little brain. When the postmaster had finished his supper, the girl suddenly asked him ‘Dada, will you take me home with you?’

The postmaster laughed. ‘What an idea!’ said he. But he did not think it necessary to explain to the girl wherein lay the absurdity of such a course.

The whole night, awake and asleep, the postmaster's laughing reply haunted her—‘What an idea!’

When he woke up in the morning, the postmaster found his bath ready. He had continued his Calcutta habit of bathing in water drawn and kept in pitchers, instead of taking a plunge in the river as was the custom of the village. For some reason or other, the girl could not ask him the time of his departure, she had therefore fetched the water from the river long before sunrise, so that it should be ready as soon as he might want it. After the bath came a call for Ratan. She entered without a sound, and looked silently into her master's face for orders. The master said: ‘You need not be anxious about my going away, Ratan: I shall tell my successor to look after you.’ These words were kindly meant, no doubt

but inscrutable are the ways of a woman's heart!

Ratan had borne many a scolding from her master without complaint, but these kind words she could not bear. She burst out weeping, and said: 'No, no, you need not tell anybody anything at all about me; I don't want to stay here any longer.'

The postmaster was dumbfounded. He had never seen Ratan like this before.

The new man duly arrived, and the postmaster gave over charge, and prepared to depart. Just before starting he called Ratan and said: 'Here is something for you: I hope it will keep you for some little time.' He brought out from his pocket the whole of his month's salary, retaining only a trifle for the journey. Then Ratan fell at this feet and cried: 'O, Dada pray don't give me anything, don't in any way trouble about me,' and then she ran away out of sight.

The postmaster heaved a sigh, took up his bag, put his umbrella over his shoulder, and, accompanied by a man carrying his many-coloured tin trunk, slowly made for the boat.

When he got in and the boat was under way, and the rain-swollen river, like a stream of tears welling up from the earth, swirled and sobbed at her bows, then he felt grieved at heart; the sorrow-stricken face of a village girl seemed to represent for him the great unspoken pervading grief of Mother Earth herself. At one moment he felt an impulse to go back and bring away with him that lonely waif, forsaken of the world. But the wind had just filled the sails, the boat had got well into the middle of the turbulent current, and already the village was left behind, and its outlying burning-ground had come into sight.

So the traveller, borne on the breast of the swift-flowing river, consoled himself with philosophical reflections on the numberless meetings and partings in the world, and on death, the great parting, from which there is no return.

But Ratan had no philosophy. She was wandering about the post office with the tears streaming from her eyes. It may be that she had still a hope lurking in some corner of her heart that her Dada would return, and perhaps that is why she could not tear herself away. Alas, for our foolish human nature! Its fond mistakes are persistent. The dictates of reason take a long time to assert their sway.

The surest proofs meanwhile are disbelieved. One clings desperately to some vain hope, till a day comes when it has sucked the heart dry and then it breaks through its bonds and departs. After that comes the misery of awakening, and then once again the longing to get back into the maze of the same mistakes.

32. Raja and Rani

Bipin Kisore was born ‘with a golden spoon in his mouth’; hence he knew how to squander money twice as well as how to earn it. The natural result was that he could not live long in the house where he was born.

He was a delicate young man of comely appearance, an adept in music, a fool in business, and unfit for life’s handicap. He rolled along life’s road like the wheel of Jagannath’s car. He could not long command his wonted style of magnificent living.

Luckily, however, Raja Chittaranjan, having got back his property from the Court of Wards, was intent upon organising an Amateur Theatre Party. Captivated by the prepossessing looks of Bipin Kisore and his musical endowments, the Raja gladly ‘admitted him of his crew.’

Chittaranjan was a B.A. He was not given to any excesses. Though the son of a rich man, he used to dine and sleep at appointed hours and even at appointed places. And he suddenly became enamoured of Bipin like one unto drink. Often did meals cool and nights grow old while he listened to Bipin and discussed with him the merits of operatic compositions. The Dewan remarked that the only blemish in the otherwise perfect character of his master was his inordinate fondness for Bipin Kisore.

Rani Basanta Kumari raved at her husband, and said that he was wasting himself on a luckless baboon. The sooner she could do away with him, the easier she would feel.

The Raja was much pleased in his heart at this seeming jealousy of his youthful wife. He smiled, and thought that women-folk know only one man upon the earth—him whom they love; and never think of other men’s deserts. That there may be many, whose merits deserve regard, is not recorded in the scriptures of women. The only good man and the only object of a woman’s favours is he who has blabbered into her ears the matrimonial incantations. A little moment behind the usual hour of her husband’s meals is a world of anxiety to her, but she never cares a brass button if her husband’s dependents have a mouthful or not. This inconsiderate partiality of the softer sex might be cavilled at, but to Chittaranjan it did not seem unpleasant. Thus, he would often indulge in hyperbolic laudations of Bipin in his wife’s presence, just to provoke a display of her delightful fulminations.

But what was sport to the ‘royal’ couple, was death to poor Bipin. The servants of the house, as is their wont, took their cue from the Rani’s apathetic and wilful neglect of the wretched hanger-on, and grew more apathetic and wilful still. They contrived to forget to look after his comforts, to Bipin’s infinite chagrin and untold sufferings.

Once the Rani rebuked the servant Puté, and said: ‘You are always shirking work; what do you do all through the day?’ ‘Pray, madam, the whole day is taken up in serving Bipin Babu under the Maharaja’s orders,’ stammered the poor valet.

The Rani retorted: ‘Your Bipin Babu is a great Nawab, eh?’ This was enough for Puté. He took the hint. From the very next day he left Bipin Babu’s orts as they were, and at times forgot to cover the food for him. With unpractised hands Bipin often scoured his own dishes and not unfrequently went without meals. But it was not in him to whine and report to the Raja. It was not in him to lower himself by petty squabbings with menials. He did not mind it; he took everything in good part. And thus while the Raja’s favours grew, the Rani’s disfavour intensified, and at last knew no bounds.

Now the opera of *Subhadraharan* was ready after due rehearsal. The stage was fitted up in the palace court-yard. The Raja acted the part of ‘Krishna,’ and Bipin that of ‘Arjuna.’ Oh, how sweetly he sang! how beautiful he looked! The audience applauded in transports of joy.

The play over, the Raja came to the Rani and asked her how she liked it. The Rani replied: ‘Indeed, Bipin acted the part of “Arjuna” gloriously! He does look like the scion of a noble family. His voice is rare!’ The Raja said jocosely: ‘And how do I look? Am I not fair? Have I not a sweet voice?’ ‘Oh, yours is different case!’ added the Rani, and again fell to dilating on the histrionic abilities of Bipin Kisore.

The tables were now turned. He who used to praise, now began to deprecate. The Raja, who was never weary of indulging in high-sounding panegyrics of Bipin before his consort, now suddenly fell reflecting that, after all, unthinking people made too much of Bipin’s actual merits. What was extraordinary about his appearance or voice? A short while before he himself was one of those unthinking men, but in a sudden and mysterious way he developed symptoms of thoughtfulness!

From the day following, every good arrangement was made for Bipin’s meals. The Rani told the Raja: ‘It is undoubtedly wrong to lodge Bipin Babu with the petty officers of the Raj in the Kachari; for all he now is, he was once a man of means.’ The Raja ejaculated curtly: ‘Ha!’ and turned the subject. The Rani

proposed that there might be another performance on the occasion of the first-rice ceremony of the ‘royal’ weanling. The Raja heard and heard her not.

Once on being reprimanded by the Raja for not properly laying his cloth, the servant Puté replied: ‘What can I do? According to the Rani’s behests I have to look after Bipin Babu and wait on him the livelong day.’ This angered the Raja, and he exclaimed, highly nettled: ‘Pshaw! Bipin Babu is a veritable Nawab, I see! Can’t he cleanse his own dishes himself?’ The servant, as before, took his cue, and Bipin lapsed back into his former wretchedness.

The Rani liked Bipin’s songs—they were sweet—there was no gainsaying it. When her husband sat with Bipin to the wonted discourses of sweet music of an evening, she would listen from behind the screen in an adjoining room. Not long afterwards, the Raja began again his old habit of dining and sleeping at regular hours. The music came to an end. Bipin’s evening services were no more needed.

Raja Chittaranjan used to look after his *zemindari* affairs at noon. One day he came earlier to the zenana, and found his consort reading something. On his asking her what she read, the Rani was a little taken aback, but promptly replied: ‘I am conning over a few songs from Bipin Babu’s song-book. We have not had any music since you tired abruptly of your musical hobby.’ Poor woman! It was she who had herself made no end of efforts to eradicate the hobby from her husband’s mind.

On the morrow the Raja dismissed Bipin—without a thought as to how and where the poor fellow would get a morsel henceforth!

Nor was this the only matter of regret to Bipin. He had been bound to the Raja by the dearest and most sincere tie of attachment. He served him more for affection than for pay. He was fonder of his friend than of the wages he received. Even after deep cogitation, Bipin could not ascertain the cause of the Raja’s sudden estrangement. ‘Tis Fate! All is Fate!’ Bipin said to himself. And then, silently and bravely, he heaved a deep sigh, picked up his old guitar, put it up in the case, paid the last two coins in his pocket as a farewell *bakshish* to Puté, and walked out into the wide wide world where he had not a soul to call his friend.

33. The Renunciation

I

It was a night of full moon early in the month of Phalgun. The youthful spring was everywhere sending forth its breeze laden with the fragrance of mango-blossoms. The melodious notes of an untiring papiya (One of the sweetest songsters in Bengal. Anglo-Indian writers have nicknamed it the “brain-fever bird,” which is a sheer libel.), concealed within the thick foliage of an old lichi tree by the side of a tank, penetrated a sleepless bedroom of the Mukerji family. There Hemanta now restlessly twisted a lock of his wife’s hair round his finger, now beat her churl against her wristlet until it tinkled, now pulled at the chaplet of flowers about her head, and left it hanging over hex face. His mood was that of as evening breeze which played about a favourite flowering shrub, gently shaking her now this side, now that, in the hope of rousing her to animation.

But Kusum sat motionless, looking out of the open window, with eyes immersed in the moonlit depth of never-ending space beyond. Her husband’s caresses were lost on her.

At last Hemanta clasped both the hands of his wife, and, shaking them gently, said: “Kusum, where are you? A patient search through a big telescope would reveal you only as a small speck—you seem to have receded so far away. O, do come closer to me, dear. See how beautiful the night is.”

Kusum turned her eyes from the void of space towards her husband, and said slowly: “I know a mantra (A set of magic words.), which could in one moment shatter this spring night and the moon into pieces.”

“If you do,” laughed Hemanta, “pray don’t utter it. If any mantra of yours could bring three or four Saturdays during the week, and prolong the nights till 5 P.M. the next day, say it by all means.”

Saying this, he tried to draw his wife a little closer to him. Kusum, freeing herself from the embrace, said: “Do you know, tonight I feel a longing to tell you what I promised to reveal only on my death-bed. Tonight I feel that I could endure whatever punishment you might inflict on me.”

Hemanta was on the point of making a jest about punishments by reciting a verse from Jayadeva, when the sound of an angry pair of slippers was heard approaching rapidly. They were the familiar footsteps of his father, Haribar

Mukerji, and Hemanta, not knowing what it meant, was in a flutter of excitement.

Standing outside the door Harihar roared out: "Hemanta, turn your wife out of the house immediately."

Hemanta looked at his wife, and detected no trace of surprise in her features. She merely buried her face within the palms of her hands, and, with all the strength and intensity of her soul, wished that she could then and there melt into nothingness. It was the same papiya whose song floated into the room with the south breeze, and no one heard it. Endless are the beauties of the earth—but alas, how easily everything is twisted out of shape.

II

Returning from without, Hemanta asked his wife: "Is it true?"

"It is," replied Kusum.

"Why didn't you tell me long ago?"

"I did try many a time, and I always failed. I am a wretched woman."

"Then tell me everything now."

Kusum gravely told her story in a firm unshaken voice. She waded barefooted through fire, as it were, with slow unflinching steps, and nobody knew how much she was scorched. Having heard her to the end, Hemanta rose and walked out.

Kusum thought that her husband had gone, never to return to her again. It did not strike her as strange. She took it as naturally as any other incident of everyday life—so dry and apathetic had her mind become during the last few moments. Only the world and love seemed to her as a void and make-believe from beginning to end. Even the memory of the protestations of love, which her husband had made to her in days past, brought to her lips a dry, hard, joyless smile, like a sharp cruel knife which had cut through her heart. She was thinking, perhaps, that the love which seemed to fill so much of one's life, which brought in its train such fondness and depth of feeling, which made even the briefest separation so exquisitely painful and a moment's union so intensely sweet, which seemed boundless in its extent and eternal in its duration, the cessation of which could not be imagined even in births to come—that this was that love! So feeble was its support! No sooner does the priesthood touch it than your "eternal" love crumbles into a handful of dust! Only a short while ago Hemanta had whispered to her: "What a beautiful night!" The same night was not yet at an end, the same yapiya was still warbling, the same south breeze still blew into the

roam, making the bed-curtain shiver; the same moonlight lay on the bed next the open window, sleeping like a beautiful heroine exhausted with gaiety. All this was unreal! Love was more falsely dissembling than she herself!

III

The next morning Hemanta, fagged after a sleepless night, and looking like one distracted, called at the house of Peari Sankar Ghosal. "What news, my son?" Peari Sankar greeted him.

Hemanta, flaring up like a big fire, said in a trembling voice: "You have defiled our caste. You have brought destruction upon us. And you will have to pay for it." He could say no more; he felt choked.

"And you have preserved my caste, presented my ostracism from the community, and patted me on the back affectionately!" said Peari Sankar with a slight sarcastic smile.

Hemanta wished that his Brahmin-fury could reduce Peari Sankar to ashes in a moment, but his rage burnt only himself. Peari Sankar sat before him unscathed, and in the best of health.

"Did I ever do you any harm?" demanded Hemanta in a broken voice.

"Let me ask you one question," said Peari Sankar. "My daughter—my only child—what harm had she done your father? You were very young then, and probably never heard. Listen, then. Now, don't you excite yourself. There is much humour in what I am going to relate."

"You were quite small when my son-in-law Nabakanta ran away to England after stealing my daughter's jewels. You might truly remember the commotion in the village when he returned as a barrister five years later. Or, perhaps, you were unaware of it, as you were at school in Calcutta at the time. Your father, arrogating to himself the headship of the community, declared that if I sent my daughter to her husband's home, I must renounce her for good, and never again allow her to cross my threshold. I fell at your father's feet, and implored him, saying: 'Brother, save me this once. I will make the boy swallow cow-dung, and go through the prayaschittam ceremony. Do take him back into caste.' But your father remained obdurate. For my part, I could not disown my only child, and, bidding good-bye to my village and my kinsmen, I betook myself to Calcutta. There, too, my troubles followed me. When I had made every arrangement for my nephew's marriage, your father stirred up the girl's people, and they broke the match off. Then I took a solemn vow that, if there was a drop of Brahmin blood flowing in my veins, I would avenge myself. You understand the business

to some extent now, don't you? But wait a little longer. You will enjoy it, when I tell you the whole story; it is interesting.

"When you were attending college, one Bipradas Chatterji used to live next door to your lodgings. The poor fellow is dead now. In his house lived a child-widow called Kusum, the destitute orphan of a Kayestha gentleman. The girl was very pretty, and the old Brahmin desired to shield her from the hungry gaze of college students. But for a young girl to throw dust in the eyes of her old guardian was not at all a difficult task. She often went to the top of the roof, to hang her washing out to dry, and, I believe, you found your own roof best suited for your studies. Whether you two spoke to each other, when on your respective roofs, I cannot tell, but the girl's behaviour excited suspicion in the old man's mind. She made frequent mistakes in her household duties, and, like Parbati (The wife of Shiva the Destroyer), engaged in her devotions, began gradually to renounce food and sleep. Some evenings she would burst into tears in the presence of the old gentleman, without any apparent reason.

"At last he discovered that you two saw each other from the roofs pretty frequently, and that you even went the length of absenting yourself from college to sit on the roof at mid-day with a book in your hand, so fond had you grown suddenly of solitary study. Bipradas came to me for advice, and told me everything. 'Uncle,' said I to him, 'for a long while you have cherished a desire to go on a pilgrimage to Benares. You had better do it now, and leave the girl in my charge. I will take care of her.'

"So he went. I lodged the girl in the house of Sripati Chatterji, passing him off as her father. What happened next is known to you. I feel a great relief today, having told you everything from the beginning. It sounds like a romance, doesn't it? I think of turning it into a book, and getting it printed. But I am not a writing-man myself. They say my nephew has some aptitude that way—I will get him to write it for me. But the best thing would be, if you would collaborate with him, because the conclusion of the story is not known to me so well."

Without paying much attention to the concluding remarks of Peari Sankar, Hemanta asked: "Did not Kusum object to this marriage?"

"Well," said Peari Sankar, "it is very difficult to guess. You know, my boy, how women's minds are constituted. When they say 'no,' they mean 'yes.' During the first few days after her removal to the new home, she went almost crazy at not seeing you. You, too, seemed to have discovered her new address somehow, as you used to lose your way after starting for college, and loiter about in front of Sripati's house. Your eyes did not appear to be exactly in search of the Presidency College, as they were directed towards the barred windows of

a private house, through which nothing but insects and the hearts of moon-struck young men could obtain access. I felt very sorry for you both. I could see that your studies were being seriously interrupted, and that the plight of the girl was pitiable also.

“One day I called Kusum to me, and said: ‘Listen to me, my daughter. I am an old man, and you need feel no delicacy in my presence. I know whom you desire at heart. The young man’s condition is hopeless too. I wish I could bring about your union.’ At this Kusum suddenly melted into tears, and ran away. On several evenings after that, I visited Sripati’s house, and, calling Kusum to me, discussed with her matters relating to you, and so I succeeded in gradually overcoming her shyness. At last, when I said that I would try to bring about a marriage, she asked me: ‘How can it be?’ ‘Never mind,’ I said, ‘I would pass you off as a Brahmin maiden.’ After a good deal of argument, she begged me to find out whether you would approve of it. ‘What nonsense,’ replied I, ‘the boy is well-nigh mad as it were, what’s the use of disclosing all these complications to him? Let the ceremony be over smoothly and then—all’s well that ends well. Especially, as there is not the slightest risk of its ever leaking out, why go out of the way to make a fellow miserable for life?’

“I do not know whether the plan had Kusum’s assent or not. At times she wept, and at other times she remained silent. If I said, ‘Let us drop it then,’ she would become very restless. When things were in this state, I sent Sripati to you with the proposal of marriage; you consented without a moment’s hesitation. Everything was settled.

“Shortly before the day fixed, Kusum became so obstinate that I had the greatest difficulty in bringing her round again. ‘Do let it drop, uncle,’ she said to me constantly. ‘What do you mean, you silly child,’ I rebuked her, ‘how can we back out now, when everything has been settled?’

“‘Spread a rumour that I am dead,’ she implored. ‘Send me away somewhere.’

“‘What would happen to the young man then?’ said I. ‘He is now in the seventh heaven of delight, expecting that his long cherished desire would be fulfilled tomorrow; and today you want me to send him the news of your death. The result would be that tomorrow I should have to bear the news of his death to you, and the same evening your death would be reported to me. Do you imagine, child, that I am capable of committing a girl-murder and a Brahmin-murder at my age?’

“Eventually the happy marriage was celebrated at the auspicious moment, and I felt relieved of a burdensome duty which I owed to myself. What happened afterwards you know best.”

"Couldn't you stop after having done us an irreparable injury?" burst out Hemanta after a short silence. "Why have you told the secret now?"

With the utmost composure, Peari Sankar replied: "When I saw that all arrangements had been made for the wedding of your sister, I said to myself: 'Well, I have fouled the caste of one Brahmin, but that was only from a sense of duty. Here, another Brahmin's caste is imperilled, and this time it is my plain duty to prevent it.' So I wrote to them saying that I was in a position to prove that you had taken the daughter of a sudra to wife."

Controlling himself with a gigantic effort, Hemanta said: "What will become of this girl whom I shall abandon now? Would you give her food and shelter?"

"I have done what was mine to do," replied Peari Sankar calmly. "It is no part of my duty to look after the discarded wives of other people. Anybody there? Get a glass of coconut milk for Hemanta Babu with ice in it. And some pan too."

Hemanta rose, and took his departure without waiting for this luxurious hospitality.

IV

It was the fifth night of the waning of the moon—and the night was dark. No birds were singing. The lichi tree by the tank looked like a smudge of ink on a background a shade less deep. The south wind was blindly roaming about in the darkness like a sleep-walker. The stars in the sky with vigilant unblinking eyes were trying to penetrate the darkness, in their effort to fathom some profound mystery.

No light shone in the bedroom. Hemanta was sitting on the side of the bed next the open window, gazing at the darkness in front of him. Kusum lay on the floor, clasping her husband's feet with both her arms, and her face resting on them. Time stood like an ocean hushed into stillness. On the background of eternal night, Fate seemed to have painted this one single picture for all time—annihilation on every side, the judge in the centre of it, and the guilty one at his feet.

The sound of slippers was heard again. Approaching the door, Harihar Mukerji said: "You have had enough time,—I can't allow you more. Turn the girl out of the house."

Kusum, as she heard this, embraced her husband's feet with all the ardour of a lifetime, covered them with kisses, and touching her forehead to them reverentially, withdrew herself.

Hemanta rose, and walking to the door, said: "Father, I won't forsake my

wife."

"What!" roared out Harihar, "would you lose your caste, sir?"

"I don't care for caste," was Hemanta's calm reply.

"Then you too I renounce."

34. The Riddle Solved

I Krishna Gopal Sircar, zemindar of Jhikrakota, made over his estates to his eldest son, and retired to Kasi, as befits a good Hindu, to spend the evening of his life in religious devotion. All the poor and the destitute of the neighbourhood were in tears at the parting. Everyone declared that such piety and benevolence were rare in these degenerate days.

His son, Bipin Bihari, was a young man well educated after the modern fashion, and had taken the degree of Bachelor of Arts. He sported a pair of spectacles, wore a beard, and seldom mixed with others. His private life was unsullied. He did not smoke, and never touched cards. He was a man of stern disposition, though he looked soft and pliable. This trait of his character soon came home to his tenantry in diverse ways. Unlike his father, he would on no account allow the remission of one single pice out of the rents justly due to him. In no circumstances would he grant any tenant one single day's grace in paying up.

On taking over the management of the property, Bipin Bihari discovered that his father had allowed a large number of Brahmins to hold land entirely rent-free, and a larger number at rents much below the prevailing rates. His father was incapable of resisting the importunate solicitation of others—such was the weakness of his character.

Bipin Bihari said this could never be. He could not abandon the income of half his property—and he reasoned with himself thus: *Firstly*, the persons who were in actual enjoyment of the concessions and getting fat at his expense were a lot of worthless people, and wholly undeserving of charity. Charity bestowed on such objects only encouraged idleness. *Secondly*, living nowadays had become much costlier than in the days of his ancestors. Wants had increased apace. For a gentleman to keep up his position had become four times as expensive as in days past. So he could not afford to scatter gifts right and left as his father had done. On the contrary, it was his bounden duty to call back as many of them as he possibly could.

So Bipin Bihari lost no time in carrying into effect what he conceived to be his duty. He was a man of strict principles.

What had gone out of his grasp, returned to him little by little. Only a very

small portion of his father's grants did he allow remaining undisturbed, and he took good care to arrange that even those should not be deemed permanent.

The wails of the tenants reached Krishna Gopal at Benares through the post. Some even made a journey to that place to represent their grievances to him in person. Krishna Gopal wrote to his son intimating his displeasure. Bipin Bihari replied, pointing out that the times had changed. In former days, he said, the *zemindar* was compensated for the gifts he made by the many customary presents he received from his tenantry. Recent statutes had made all such impositions illegal. The *zemindar* had now to rest content with just the stipulated rent, and nothing more. 'Unless,' he continued, 'we keep a strict watch over the payment of our just dues, what will be left to us? Since the tenants won't give us anything extra now, how can we allow them concessions? Our relations must henceforth be strictly commercial. We shall be ruined if we go on making gifts and endowments, and the preservation of our property and the keeping up of our position will be rendered very difficult.'

Krishna Gopal became uneasy at finding that times should have changed so much. 'Well, well,' he murmured to himself, 'the younger generation knows best, I suppose. Our old-fashioned methods won't do now. If I interfere, my son might refuse to manage the property, and insist on my going back. No, thank you—I would rather not. I prefer to devote the few days that are left me to the service of my God.'

II So things went on. Bipin Bihari put his affairs in order after much litigation in the Courts, and by less constitutional methods outside. Most of the tenants submitted to his will out of fear. Only a fellow called Asimuddin, son of Mirza Bibi, remained refractory.

Bipin's displeasure was keenest against this man. He could quite understand his father having granted rent-free lands to Brahmins, but why this Mohammedan should be holding so much land, some free and some at rents lower than the prevailing rates, was a riddle to him. And what was he? The son of a low Mohammedan widow, giving himself airs and defying the whole world, simply because he had learnt to read and write a little at the village school. To Bipin it was intolerable.

He made inquiries of his clerks about Asimuddin's holdings. All that they could tell him was that Babu Krishna Gopal himself had made these grants to the family many years back, but they had no idea as to what his motive might have been. They imagined, however, that perhaps the widow won the compassion of

the kind-hearted *zemindar*, by representing to him her woe and misery.

To Bipin these favours seemed to be utterly undeserved. He had not seen the pitiable condition of these people in days gone by. Their comparative ease at the present day and their arrogance drove him to the conclusion that they had impudently swindled his tender-hearted father out of a part of his lawful income.

Asimuddin was a stiff-necked sort of a fellow, too. He vowed that he would lay down his life sooner than give up an inch of his land. Then came open hostilities.

The poor old widow tried her best to pacify her son. ‘It is no good fighting with the *zemindar*,’ she would often say to him. ‘His kindness has kept us alive so long; let us depend upon him still, though he may curtail his favours. Surrender to him part of the lands as he desires.’

‘Oh, mother!’ protested Asimuddin. ‘What do you know of these matters, pray?’

One by one, Asimuddin lost the cases instituted against him. The more he lost, the more his obstinacy increased. For the sake of his all, he staked all that was his.

One afternoon, Mirza Bibi collected some fruits and vegetables from her little garden, and unknown to her son went and sought an interview with Bipin Babu. She looked at him with a tenderness maternal in its intensity, and spoke: ‘May Allah bless you, my son. Do not destroy Asim—it wouldn’t be right of you. To your charge I commit him. Take him as though he were one whom it is your duty to support—as though he were a ne’er-do-well younger brother of yours. Vast is your wealth—don’t grudge him a small particle of it, my son.’

This assumption of familiarity on the part of the garrulous old woman annoyed Bipin not a little. ‘What do you know of these things, my good woman?’ he condescended to say. ‘If you have any representations to make, send your son to me.’

Being assured for the second time that she knew nothing about these affairs, Mirza Bibi returned home, wiping her eyes with her apron all the way, and offering her silent prayers to Allah.

III The litigation dragged its weary length from the Criminal to the Civil Courts, and thence to the High Court, where at last Asimuddin met with a partial success. Eighteen months passed in this way. But he was a ruined man now—plunged in debts up to his very ears. His creditors took this opportunity to execute the decrees they had obtained against him. A date was fixed for putting up to auction every stick and stone that he had left

It was Monday. The village market had assembled by the side of a tiny river, now swollen by the rains. Buying and selling were going on, partly on the bank and partly in the boats moored there. The hubbub was great. Among the commodities for sale jack-fruits preponderated, it being the month of *Asadh*. *Hilsa* fish were seen in large quantities also. The sky was cloudy. Many of the stall-holders, apprehending a downpour, had stretched a piece of cloth overhead, across bamboo poles put up for the purpose.

Asimuddin had come too—but he had not a copper with him. No shopkeepers allowed him credit nowadays. He therefore had brought a brass *thali* with him. These he would pawn, and then buy what he needed.

Towards evening, Bipin Babu was out for a walk attended by two or three retainers armed with *lathis*. Attracted by the noise, he directed his steps towards the market. On his arrival, he stopped awhile before the stall of Dwari, the oilman, and made kindly inquiries about his business. All on a sudden, Asimuddin raised his *dao* and ran towards Bipin Babu, roaring like a tiger. The market people caught hold of him half-way, and quickly disarmed him. He was forthwith given in custody to the police. Business in the market then went on as usual.

We cannot say that Bipin Babu was not inwardly pleased at this incident. It is intolerable that the creature we are hunting down should turn and show fight. ‘The *badmash*,’ Bipin chuckled; ‘I have got him at last.’

The ladies of Bipin Babu’s house, when they heard the news, exclaimed with horror: ‘Oh, the ruffian! What a mercy they seized him in time!’ They found consolation in the prospect of the man being punished as he richly deserved.

In another part of the village the same evening the widow’s humble cottage, devoid of bread and bereft of her son, became darker than death. Others dismissed the incident of the afternoon from their minds, sat down to their meals, retired to bed and went to sleep, but to the widow the event loomed larger than anything else in this wide world. But, alas, who was there to combat it? Only a bundle of wearied bones and a helpless mother’s heart trembling with fear.

IV

Three days have passed in the meanwhile. Tomorrow the case would come up for trial before a Deputy Magistrate. Bipin Babu would have to be examined as a witness. Never before this did a *zemindar* of Jhikrakota appear in the witness-

box, but Bipin did not mind.

The next day at the appointed hour, Bipin Babu arrived at the Court in a palanquin in great state. He wore a turban on his head, and a watch-chain dangled on his breast. The Deputy Magistrate invited him to a seat on the daïs, beside his own. The Court-room was crowded to suffocation. So great a sensation had not been witnessed in this Court for many years.

When the time for the case to be called drew near, a *chaprassi* came and whispered something in Bipin Babu's ear. He got up very agitated and walked out, begging the Deputy Magistrate to excuse him for a few minutes.

Outside he saw his old father a little way off, standing under a *banian* tree, barefooted and wrapped in a piece of *namabali*. A string of beads was in his hand. His slender form shone with a gentle lustre, and tranquil compassion seemed to radiate from his forehead.

Bipin, hampered by his close-fitting trousers and his flowing *chapkan*, touched his father's feet with his forehead. As he did this his turban came off and kissed his nose, and his watch, popping out of his pocket, swung to and fro in the air. Bipin hurriedly straightened his turban, and begged his father to come to his pleader's house close by.

'No, thank you,' Krishna Gopal replied, 'I will tell you here what I have got to say.'

A curious crowd had gathered by this time. Bipin's attendants pushed them back.

Then Krishna Gopal said: 'You must do what you can to get Asim acquitted, and restore him the lands that you have taken away from him.'

'Is it for this, father,' said Bipin, very much surprised, 'that you have come all the way from Benares? Would you tell me why you have made these people the objects of your special favour?'

'What would you gain by knowing it, my boy?'

But Bipin persisted. 'It is only this, father,' he went on; 'I have revoked many a grant because I thought the tenants were not deserving. There were many Brahmins among them, but of them you never said a word. Why are you so keen about these Mohammedans now? After all that has happened, if I drop this case against Asim, and give him back his lands, what shall I say to people?'

Krishna Gopal kept silence for some moments. Then, passing the beads through his shaky fingers with rapidity, he spoke with a tremulous voice: 'Should it be necessary to explain your conduct to people, you may tell them that Asimuddin is my son—and your brother.'

'What?' exclaimed Bipin in painful surprise. 'From a Musalman's womb?'

'Even so, my son,' was the calm reply.

Bipin stood there for some time in mute astonishment. Then he found words to say: 'Come home, father; we will talk about it afterwards.'

'No, my son,' replied the old man, 'having once relinquished the world to serve my God, I cannot go home again. I return hence. Now I leave you to do what your sense of duty may suggest.' He then blessed his son, and, checking his tears with difficulty, walked off with tottering steps.

Bipin was dumbfounded, not knowing what to say nor what to do. 'So, such was the piety of the older generation,' he said to himself. He reflected with pride how much better he was than his father in point of education and morality. This was the result, he concluded, of not having a principle to guide one's actions.

Returning to the Court, he saw Asimuddin outside between two constables, awaiting his trial. He looked emaciated and worn out. His lips were pale and dry, and his eyes unnaturally bright. A dirty piece of cloth worn to shreds covered him. 'This my brother!' Bipin shuddered at the thought.

The Deputy Magistrate and Bipin were friends, and the case ended in a fiasco. In a few days Asimuddin was restored to his former condition. Why all this happened, he could not understand. The village people were greatly surprised also.

However, the news of Krishna Gopal's arrival just before the trial soon got abroad. People began to exchange meaning glances. The pleaders in their shrewdness guessed the whole affair. One of them, Ram Taran Babu, was beholden to Krishna Gopal for his education and his start in life. Somehow or other he had always suspected that the virtue and piety of his benefactor were shams. Now he was fully convinced that, if a searching inquiry were made, all 'pious' men might be found out. 'Let them tell their beads as much as they like,' he thought with glee, 'everybody in this world is just as bad as myself. The only difference between a good and a bad man is that the good practise dissimulation while the bad don't.' The revelation that Krishna Gopal's far-famed piety, benevolence, and magnanimity were nothing but a cloak of hypocrisy, settled a difficulty that had oppressed Ram Taran Babu for many years. By what process of reasoning, we do not know, the burden of gratitude was greatly lifted off his mind. It was a vast relief to him!

35. The River Stairs

If you wish to hear of days gone by, sit on this step of mine, and lend your ears to the murmur of the rippling water.

The month of *Ashwin* (September) was about to begin. The river was in full flood. Only four of my steps peeped above the surface. The water had crept up to the lowlying parts of the bank, where the *kachu* plant grew dense beneath the branches of the mango grove. At that bend of the river, three old brick-heaps towered above the water around them. The fishing-boats, moored to the trunks of the *bābla* trees on the bank, rocked on the heaving flow-tide at dawn. The path of tall grasses on the sandbank had caught the newly risen sun; they had just begun to flower, and were not yet in full bloom.

The little boats puffed out their tiny sails on the sunlit river. The Brahmin priest had come to bathe with his ritual vessels. The women arrived in twos and threes to draw water. I knew this was the time of Kusum's coming to the bathing-stairs.

But that morning I missed her. Bhuban and Swarno mourned at the *ghāt*. They said that their friend had been led away to her husband's house, which was a place far away from the river, with strange people, strange houses, and strange roads.

In time she almost faded out of my mind. A year passed. The women at the *ghāt* now rarely talked of Kusum. But one evening I was startled by the touch of the long familiar feet. Ah, yes, but those feet were now without anklets, they had lost their old music.

Kusum had become a widow. They said that her husband had worked in some far-off place, and that she had met him only once or twice. A letter brought her the news of his death. A widow at eight years old, she had rubbed out the wife's red mark from her forehead, stripped off her bangles, and come back to her old home by the Ganges. But she found few of her old playmates there. Of them, Bhuban, Swarno, and Amala were married, and gone away; only Sarat remained, and she too, they said, would be wed in December next.

As the Ganges rapidly grows to fulness with the coming of the rains, even so did Kusum day by day grow to the fulness of beauty and youth. But her dull-coloured robe, her pensive face, and quiet manners drew a veil over her youth,

and hid it from men's eyes as in a mist. Ten years slipped away, and none seemed to have noticed that Kusum had grown up.

One morning such as this, at the end of a far-off September, a tall, young, fair-skinned Sanyasi, coming I know not whence, took shelter in the Shiva temple, in front of me. His arrival was noised abroad in the village. The women left their pitchers behind, and crowded into the temple to bow to the holy man.

The crowd increased day by day. The Sanyasi's fame rapidly spread among the womenkind. One day he would recite the *Bhágbat*, another day he would expound the *Gita*, or hold forth upon a holy book in the temple. Some sought him for counsel, some for spells, some for medicines.

So months passed away. In April, at the time of the solar eclipse, vast crowds came here to bathe in the Ganges. A fair was held under the *bābla* tree. Many of the pilgrims went to visit the Sanyasi, and among them were a party of women from the village where Kusum had been married.

It was morning. The Sanyasi was counting his beads on my steps, when all of a sudden one of the women pilgrims nudged another, and said: 'Why! He is our Kusum's husband!' Another parted her veil a little in the middle with two fingers and cried out: 'Oh dear me! So it is! He is the younger son of the Chattergu family of our village!' Said a third, who made little parade of her veil: 'Ah! He has got exactly the same brow, nose, and eyes!' Yet another woman, without turning to the Sanyasi, stirred the water with her pitcher, and sighed: 'Alas! That young man is no more; he will not come back. Bad luck to Kusum!'

But, objected one, 'He had not such a big beard'; and another, 'He was not so thin'; or 'He was most probably not so tall.' That settled the question for the time, and the matter spread no further.

One evening, as the full moon arose, Kusum came and sat upon my last step above the water, and cast her shadow upon me.

There was no other at the *ghāt* just then. The crickets were chirping about me. The din of brass gongs and bells had ceased in the temple—the last wave of sound grew fainter and fainter, until it merged like the shade of a sound in the dim groves of the farther bank. On the dark water of the Ganges lay a line of glistening moonlight. On the bank above, in bush and hedge, under the porch of the temple, in the base of ruined houses, by the side of the tank, in the palm grove, gathered shadows of fantastic shape. The bats swung from the *chhatim* boughs. Near the houses the loud clamour of the jackals rose and sank into silence.

Slowly the Sanyasi came out of the temple. Descending a few steps of the *ghāt* he saw a woman sitting alone, and was about to go back, when suddenly

Kusum raised her head, and looked behind her. The veil slipped away from her. The moonlight fell upon her face, as she looked up.

The owl flew away hooting over their heads. Starting at the sound, Kusum came to herself and put the veil back on her head. Then she bowed low at the Sanyasi's feet.

He gave her blessing and asked: 'Who are you?'

She replied: 'I am called Kusum.'

No other word was spoken that night. Kusum went slowly back to her house which was hard by. But the Sanyasi remained sitting on my steps for long hours that night. At last when the moon passed from the east to the west, and the Sanyasi's shadow, shifting from behind, fell in front of him, he rose up and entered the temple.

Henceforth I saw Kusum come daily to bow at his feet. When he expounded the holy books, she stood in a corner listening to him. After finishing his morning service, he used to call her to himself and speak on religion. She could not have understood it all; but, listening attentively in silence, she tried to understand it. As he directed her, so she acted implicitly. She daily served at the temple—ever alert in the god's worship—gathering flowers for the *puja*, and drawing water from the Ganges to wash the temple floor.

The winter was drawing to its close. We had cold winds. But now and then in the evening the warm spring breeze would blow unexpectedly from the south; the sky would lose its chilly aspect; pipes would sound, and music be heard in the village after a long silence. The boatmen would set their boats drifting down the current, stop rowing, and begin to sing the songs of Krishna. This was the season.

Just then I began to miss Kusum. For some time she had given up visiting the temple, the *ghāt*, or the Sanyasi.

What happened next I do not know, but after a while the two met together on my steps one evening.

With downcast looks, Kusum asked: 'Master, did you send for me?'

'Yes, why do I not see you? Why have you grown neglectful of late in serving the gods?'

She kept silent.

'Tell me your thoughts without reserve.'

Half averting her face, she replied: 'I am a sinner, Master, and hence I have failed in the worship.'

The Sanyasi said: 'Kusum, I know there is unrest in your heart.'

She gave a slight start, and, drawing the end of her sári over her face, she sat

down on the step at the Sanyasi's feet, and wept.

He moved a little away, and said: 'Tell me what you have in your heart, and I shall show you the way to peace.'

She replied in a tone of unshaken faith, stopping now and then for words: 'If you bid me, I must speak out. But, then, I cannot explain it clearly. You, Master, must have guessed it all. I adored one as a god, I worshipped him, and the bliss of that devotion filled my heart to fulness. But one night I dreamt that the lord of my heart was sitting in a garden somewhere, clasping my right hand in his left, and whispering to me of love. The whole scene did not appear to me at all strange. The dream vanished, but its hold on me remained. Next day when I beheld him he appeared in another light than before. That dream-picture continued to haunt my mind. I fled far from him in fear, and the picture clung to me. Thenceforth my heart has known no peace,—all has grown dark within me!'

While she was wiping her tears and telling this tale, I felt that the Sanyasi was firmly pressing my stone surface with his right foot.

Her speech done, the Sanyasi said: 'You must tell me whom you saw in your dream.'

With folded hands, she entreated: 'I cannot.'

He insisted: 'You must tell me who he was.'

Wringing her hands she asked: 'Must I tell it?'

He replied: 'Yes, you must.'

Then crying, 'You are he, Master!' she fell on her face on my stony bosom, and sobbed.

When she came to herself, and sat up, the Sanyasi said slowly: 'I am leaving this place tonight that you may not see me again. Know that I am a Sanyasi, not belonging to this world. You must forget me.'

Kusum replied in a low voice: 'It will be so, Master.'

The Sanyasi said: 'I take my leave.'

Without a word more Kusum bowed to him, and placed the dust of his feet on her head. He left the place.

The moon set; the night grew dark. I heard a splash in the water. The wind raved in the darkness, as if it wanted to blow out all the stars of the sky.

36. Saved

Gouri was the beautiful, delicately nurtured child of an old and wealthy family. Her husband, Paresh, had recently by his own efforts improved his straitened circumstances. So long as he was poor, Gouri's parents had kept their daughter at home, unwilling to surrender her to privation; so she was no longer young when at last she went to her husband's house. And Paresh never felt quite that she belonged to him. He was an advocate in a small western town, and had no close kinsman with him. All his thought was about his wife, so much so that sometimes he would come home before the rising of the Court. At first Gouri was at a loss to understand why he came back suddenly. Sometimes, too, he would dismiss one of the servants without reason; none of them ever suited him long. Especially if Gouri desired to keep any particular servant because he was useful, that man was sure to be got rid of forthwith. The high-spirited Gouri greatly resented this, but her resentment only made her husband's behaviour still stranger.

At last when Paresh, unable to contain himself any longer, began in secret to cross-question the maid about her, the whole thing reached his wife's ears. She was a woman of few words; but her pride raged within like a wounded lioness at these insults, and this mad suspicion swept like a destroyer's sword between them. Paresh, as soon as he saw that his wife understood his motive, felt no more delicacy about taxing Gouri to her face; and the more his wife treated it with silent contempt, the more did the fire of his jealousy consume him.

Deprived of wedded happiness, the childless Gouri betook herself to the consolations of religion. She sent for Paramananda Swami, the young preacher of the Prayer-House hard by, and, formally acknowledging him as her spiritual preceptor, asked him to expound the *Gita* to her. All the wasted love and affection of her woman's heart was poured out in reverence at the feet of her Guru.

No one had any doubts about the purity of Paramananda's character. All worshipped him. And because Paresh did not dare to hint at any suspicion against him, his jealousy ate its way into his heart like a hidden cancer.

One day some trifling circumstance made the poison overflow. Paresh reviled Paramananda to his wife as a hypocrite, and said: 'Can you swear that you are not in love with this crane that plays the ascetic?'

Gouri sprang up like a snake that has been trodden on, and, maddened by his suspicion, said with bitter irony: ‘And what if I am?’ At this Paresh forthwith went off to the Court-house, and locked the door on her.

In a white heat of passion at this last outrage, Gouri got the door open somehow, and left the house.

Paramananda was poring over the scriptures in his lonely room in the silence of noon. All at once, like a flash of lightning out of a cloudless sky, Gouri broke in upon his reading.

‘You here?’ questioned her Guru in surprise.

‘Rescue me, O my lord Guru,’ said she, ‘from the insults of my home life, and allow me to dedicate myself to the service of your feet.’

With a stern rebuke, Paramananda sent Gouri back home. But I wonder whether he ever again took up the snapped thread of his reading.

Paresh, finding the door open, on his return home, asked: ‘Who has been here?’

‘No one!’ his wife replied. ‘I have been to the house of my Guru.’

‘Why?’ asked Paresh, pale and red by turns.

‘Because I wanted to.’

From that day Paresh had a guard kept over the house, and behaved so absurdly that the tale of his jealousy was told all over the town.

The news of the shameful insults that were daily heaped on his disciple disturbed the religious meditations of Paramananda. He felt he ought to leave the place at once; at the same time he could not make up his mind to forsake the tortured woman. Who can say how the poor ascetic got through those terrible days and nights?

At last one day the imprisoned Gouri got a letter. ‘My child,’ it ran, ‘it is true that many holy women have left the world to devote themselves to God. Should it happen that the trials of this world are driving your thoughts away from God, I will with God’s help rescue his handmaid for the holy service of his feet. If you desire, you may meet me by the tank in your garden at two o’clock tomorrow afternoon.’

Gouri hid the letter in the loops of her hair. At noon next day when she was undoing her hair before her bath she found that the letter was not there. Could it have fallen on to the bed and got into her husband’s hands, she wondered. At first, she felt a kind of fierce pleasure in thinking that it would enrage him; and then she could not bear to think that this letter, worn as a halo of deliverance on her head, might be defiled by the touch of insolent hands.

With swift steps she hurried to her husband’s room. He laid groaning on the

floor, with eyes rolled back and foaming mouth. She detached the letter from his clenched fist, and sent quickly for a doctor.

The doctor said it was a case of apoplexy. The patient had died before his arrival.

That very day, as it happened, Paresh had an important appointment away from home. Paramananda had found this out, and accordingly had made his appointment with Gouri. To such a depth had he fallen!

When the widowed Gouri caught sight from the window of her Guru stealing like a thief to the side of the pool, she lowered her eyes as at a lightning flash. And in that flash she saw clearly what a fall his had been.

The Guru called: 'Gouri.'

'I am coming,' she replied.

When Paresh's friends heard of his death, and came to assist in the last rites, they found the dead body of Gouri lying beside that of her husband. She had poisoned herself. All were lost in admiration of the wifely loyalty she had shown in her *sati*, a loyalty rare indeed in these degenerate days.

37. The Skeleton

In the room next to the one in which we boys used to sleep, there hung a human skeleton. In the night it would rattle in the breeze which played about its bones. In the day these bones were rattled by us. We were taking lessons in osteology from a student in the Campbell Medical School, for our guardians were determined to make us masters of all the sciences. How far they succeeded we need not tell those who know us; and it is better hidden from those who do not.

Many years have passed since then. In the meantime the skeleton has vanished from the room, and the science of osteology from our brains, leaving no trace behind.

The other day, our house was crowded with guests, and I had to pass the night in the same old room. In these now unfamiliar surroundings, sleep refused to come, and, as I tossed from side to side, I heard all the hours of the night chimed, one after another, by the church clock nearby. At length the lamp in the corner of the room, after some minutes of choking and spluttering, went out altogether. One or two bereavements had recently happened in the family, so the going out of the lamp naturally led me to thoughts of death. In the great arena of nature, I thought, the light of a lamp losing itself in eternal darkness, and the going out of the light of our little human lives, by day or by night, were much the same thing.

My train of thought recalled to my mind the skeleton. While I was trying to imagine what the body which had clothed it could have been like, it suddenly seemed to me that something was walking round and round my bed, groping along the walls of the room. I could hear its rapid breathing. It seemed as if it was searching for something which it could not find, and pacing round the room with ever-hastier steps. I felt quite sure that this was a mere fancy of my sleepless, excited brain; and that the throbbing of the veins in my temples was really the sound which seemed like running footsteps. Nevertheless, a cold shiver ran all over me. To help to get rid of this hallucination, I called out aloud: ‘Who is there?’ The footsteps seemed to stop at my bedside, and the reply came: ‘It is I. I have come to look for that skeleton of mine.’

It seemed absurd to show any fear before the creature of my own imagination; so, clutching my pillow a little more tightly, I said in a casual sort of way: ‘A nice business for this time of night! Of what use will that skeleton be to you

now?’

The reply seemed to come almost from my mosquito-curtain itself. ‘What a question! In that skeleton were the bones that encircled my heart; the youthful charm of my six-and-twenty years bloomed about it. Should I not desire to see it once more?’

‘Of course,’ said I, ‘a perfectly reasonable desire. Well, go on with your search, while I try to get a little sleep.’

Said the voice: ‘But I fancy you are lonely. All right; I’ll sit down a while, and we will have a little chat. Years ago I used to sit by men and talk to them. But during the last thirty-five years I have only moaned in the wind in the burning-places of the dead. I would talk once more with a man as in the old times.’

I felt that someone sat down just near my curtain. Resigning myself to the situation, I replied with as much cordiality as I could summon: ‘That will be very nice indeed. Let us talk of something cheerful.’

‘The funniest thing I can think of is my own life-story. Let me tell you that.’

The church clock chimed the hour of two.

‘When I was in the land of the living, and young, I feared one thing like death itself, and that was my husband. My feelings can be likened only to those of a fish caught with a hook. For it was as if a stranger had snatched me away with the sharpest of hooks from the peaceful calm of my childhood’s home—and from him I had no means of escape. My husband died two months after my marriage, and my friends and relations moaned pathetically on my behalf. My husband’s father, after scrutinising my face with great care, said to my mother-in-law: “Do you not see, she has the evil eye?”—Well, are you listening? I hope you are enjoying the story?’

‘Very much indeed!’ said I. ‘The beginning is extremely humorous.’

‘Let me proceed then. I came back to my father’s house in great glee. People tried to conceal it from me, but I knew well that I was endowed with a rare and radiant beauty. What is your opinion?’

‘Very likely,’ I murmured. ‘But you must remember that I never saw you.’

‘What! Not seen me? What about that skeleton of mine? Ha! Ha! Ha! Never mind. I was only joking. How can I ever make you believe that those two cavernous hollows contained the brightest of dark, languishing eyes? And that the smile which was revealed by those ruby lips had no resemblance whatever to the grinning teeth which you used to see? The mere attempt to convey to you some idea of the grace, the charm, the soft, firm, dimpled curves, which in the fulness of youth were growing and blossoming over those dry old bones makes me smile; it also makes me angry. The most eminent doctors of my time could

not have dreamed of the bones of that body of mine as materials for teaching osteology. Do you know, one young doctor that I knew of, actually compared me to a golden *champak* blossom. It meant that to him the rest of humankind was fit only to illustrate the science of physiology, that I was a flower of beauty. Does anyone think of the skeleton of a *champak* flower?

'When I walked, I felt that, like a diamond scattering splendour, my every movement set waves of beauty radiating on every side. I used to spend hours gazing on my hands—hands which could gracefully have reined the liveliest of male creatures.

'But that stark and staring old skeleton of mine has borne false-witness to you against me, while I was unable to refute the shameless libel. That is why of all men I hate you most! I feel I would like once for all to banish sleep from your eyes with a vision of that warm rosy loveliness of mine, to sweep out with it all the wretched osteological stuff of which your brain is full.'

'I could have sworn by your body,' cried I, 'if you had it still, that no vestige of osteology has remained in my head, and that the only thing that it is now full of is a radiant vision of perfect loveliness, glowing against the black background of night. I cannot say more than that.'

'I had no girl-companions,' went on the voice. 'My only brother had made up his mind not to marry. In the zenana I was alone. Alone I used to sit in the garden under the shade of the trees, and dream that the whole world was in love with me; that the stars with sleepless gaze were drinking in my beauty; that the wind was languishing in sighs as on some pretext or other it brushed past me; and that the lawn on which my feet rested, had it been conscious, would have lost consciousness again at their touch. It seemed to me that all the young men in the world were as blades of grass at my feet; and my heart, I know not why, used to grow sad.'

'When my brother's friend, Shekhar, had passed out of the Medical College, he became our family doctor. I had already often seen him from behind a curtain. My brother was a strange man, and did not care to look on the world with open eyes. It was not empty enough for his taste; so he gradually moved away from it, until he was quite lost in an obscure corner. Shekhar was his one friend, so he was the only young man I could ever get to see. And when I held my evening court in my garden, then the host of imaginary young men whom I had at my feet were each one a Shekhar.—Are you listening? What are you thinking of?'

I sighed as I replied: 'I was wishing I was Shekhar!'

'Wait a bit. Hear the whole story first. One day, in the rains, I was feverish. The doctor came to see me. That was our first meeting. I was reclining opposite

the window, so that the blush of the evening sky might temper the pallor of my complexion. When the doctor, coming in, looked up into my face, I put myself into his place, and gazed at myself in imagination. I saw in the glorious evening light that delicate wan face laid like a drooping flower against the soft white pillow, with the unrestrained curls playing over the forehead, and the bashfully lowered eyelids casting a pathetic shade over the whole countenance.

‘The doctor, in a tone bashfully low, asked my brother: “Might I feel her pulse?”

‘I put out a tired, well-rounded wrist from beneath the coverlet. “Ah!” thought I, as I looked on it, “if only there had been a sapphire bracelet.” I have never before seen a doctor so awkward about feeling a patient’s pulse. His fingers trembled as they felt my wrist. He measured the heat of my fever, I gauged the pulse of his heart.—Don’t you believe me?’

‘Very easily,’ said I; ‘the human heart-beat tells its tale.’

‘After I had been taken ill and restored to health several times, I found that the number of the courtiers who attended my imaginary evening reception began to dwindle till they were reduced to only one! And at last in my little world there remained only one doctor and one patient.

‘In these evenings I used to dress myself secretly in a canary-coloured *sari*; twine about the braided knot into which I did my hair a garland of white jasmine blossoms; and with a little mirror in my hand betake myself to my usual seat under the trees.

‘Well! Are you perhaps thinking that the sight of one’s own beauty would soon grow wearisome? Ah no! for I did not see myself with my own eyes. I was then one and also two. I used to see myself as though I were the doctor; I gazed, I was charmed, I fell madly in love. But, in spite of all the caresses I lavished on myself, a sigh would wander about my heart, moaning like the evening breeze.

‘Anyhow, from that time I was never alone. When I walked I watched with downcast eyes the play of my dainty little toes on the earth, and wondered what the doctor would have felt had he been there to see. At mid-day the sky would be filled with the glare of the sun, without a sound, save now and then the distant cry of a passing kite. Outside our garden-walls the hawker would pass with his musical cry of “Bangles for sale, crystal bangles.” And I, spreading a snow-white sheet on the lawn, would lie on it with my head on my arm. With studied carelessness the other arm would rest lightly on the soft sheet, and I would imagine to myself that someone had caught sight of the wonderful pose of my hand, that someone had clasped it in both of his and imprinted a kiss on its rosy palm, and was slowly walking away.—What if I ended the story here? How

would it do?’

‘Not half a bad ending,’ I replied thoughtfully. ‘It would no doubt remain a little incomplete, but I could easily spend the rest of the night putting in the finishing touches.’

‘But that would make the story too serious. Where would the laugh come in? Where would be the skeleton with its grinning teeth?’

‘So let me go on. As soon as the doctor had got a little practice, he took a room on the ground-floor of our house for a consulting-chamber. I used then sometimes to ask him jokingly about medicines and poisons, and how much of this drug or that would kill a man. The subject was congenial and he would wax eloquent. These talks familiarised me with the idea of death; and so love and death were the only two things that filled my little world. My story is now nearly ended—there is not much left.’

‘Not much of the night is left either,’ I muttered.

‘After a time I noticed that the doctor had grown strangely absent-minded, and it seemed as if he were ashamed of something which he was trying to keep from me. One day he came in, somewhat smartly dressed, and borrowed my brother’s carriage for the evening.

‘My curiosity became too much for me, and I went up to my brother for information. After some talk beside the point, I at last asked him: “By the way, *Dada*, where is the doctor going this evening in your carriage?”

‘My brother briefly replied: “To his death.”

“Oh, do tell me,” I importuned. “Where is he really going?”

“To be married,” he said, a little more explicitly.

“Oh, indeed!” said I, as I laughed long and loudly.

I gradually learnt that the bride was an heiress, who would bring the doctor a large sum of money. But why did he insult me by hiding all this from me? Had I ever begged and prayed him not to marry, because it would break my heart? Men are not to be trusted. I have known only one man in all my life, and in a moment I made this discovery.

‘When the doctor came in after his work and was ready to start, I said to him, rippling with laughter the while: “Well, doctor, so you are to be married tonight?”

‘My gaiety not only made the doctor lose countenance; it thoroughly irritated him.

“How is it,” I went on, “that there is no illumination, no band of music?”

‘With a sigh he replied: “Is marriage then such a joyful occasion?”

‘I burst out into renewed laughter. “No, no,” said I, “this will never do. Who

ever heard of a wedding without lights and music?"

'I bothered my brother about it so much that he at once ordered all the trappings of a gay wedding.

'All the time I kept on gaily talking of the bride, of what would happen, of what I would do when the bride came home. "And, doctor," I asked, "will you still go on feeling pulses?" Ha! ha! ha! Though the inner workings of people's, especially men's, minds are not visible, still I can take my oath that these words were piercing the doctor's bosom like deadly darts.

'The marriage was to be celebrated late at night. Before starting, the doctor and my brother were having a glass of wine together on the terrace, as was their daily habit. The moon had just risen.

'I went up smiling, and said: "Have you forgotten your wedding, doctor? It is time to start."

'I must here tell you one little thing. I had meanwhile gone down to the dispensary and got a little powder, which at a convenient opportunity I had dropped unobserved into the doctor's glass.

'The doctor, draining his glass at a gulp, in a voice thick with emotion, and with a look that pierced me to the heart, said: "Then I must go."

'The music struck up. I went into my room and dressed myself in my bridal-robies of silk and gold. I took out my jewellery and ornaments from the safe and put them all on; I put the red mark of wifehood on the parting in my hair. And then under the tree in the garden I prepared my bed.

'It was a beautiful night. The gentle south wind was kissing away the weariness of the world. The scent of jasmine and *bela* filled the garden with rejoicing.

'When the sound of the music began to grow fainter and fainter; the light of the moon to get dimmer and dimmer; the world with its lifelong associations of home and kin to fade away from my perceptions like some illusion;—then I closed my eyes, and smiled.

'I fancied that when people came and found me they would see that smile of mine lingering on my lips like a trace of rose-coloured wine, that when I thus slowly entered my eternal bridal-chamber I should carry with me this smile, illuminating my face. But alas for the bridal-chamber! Alas for the bridal-robies of silk and gold! When I woke at the sound of a rattling within me, I found three urchins learning osteology from my skeleton. Where in my bosom my joys and griefs used to throb, and the petals of youth to open one by one, there the master with his pointer was busy naming my bones. And as to that last smile, which I had so carefully rehearsed, did you see any sign of that?

‘Well, well, how did you like the story?’

‘It has been delightful,’ said I.

At this point the first crow began to caw. ‘Are you there?’ I asked. There was no reply.

The morning light entered the room.

38. The Son of Rashmani

1

Kalipada's mother was Rashmani, but she had to do the duty of the father as well, because when both of the parents have too motherly a feeling, then it is bad for the child. Bhavani, her husband, was wholly incapable of keeping children under discipline. To know why he was bent on spoiling his son, you must hear something of the former history of the family.

Bhavani was born in the famous house of Saniari. His father, Abhaya Charan, had a son, Shyama Charan, by his first wife. When he married again after her death, he had himself passed the marriageable age, and his new father-in-law took advantage of the weakness of his position to have a special portion of the family estate settled on his daughter. In this way he was satisfied that proper provision had been made, in case his daughter should become a young widow. She would be independent of the charity of Shyama Charan.

The first part of his anticipation came true. For very soon after the birth of a son, who was named Bhavani, Abhaya Charan died. It gave the father of the widow great peace and consolation, as he looked forward to his own death, to know that this daughter was properly looked after.

When Bhavani was born, Shyama Charan was quite grown up. In fact his own eldest boy was a year older than Bhavani. He brought up the latter with his own son. In doing this, he never took a farthing from the property allotted to his stepmother, and every year he obtained a receipt from her after submitting detailed accounts. His honesty in this affair surprised the neighbourhood. In fact, they thought that he was a fool to be so honest. They did not like the idea of a division being made in the hitherto undivided ancestral property. If Shyama Charan in some underhand manner had been able to annul the dowry, his neighbours would have admired his sagacity; and there were plenty of people ready to give both advice and material aid in the attainment of such an object. But Shyama Charan, in spite of the risk of crippling his patrimony, strictly set aside the portion allotted to his stepmother and the widow, Vraja Sundari, being by nature affectionate and trustful, trusted Shyama Charan as if he had been her own son. More than once had she chided him for being so particular about her portion of the property. She would tell him that, as she was not going to take her

property with her when she died, and as it would in any case revert to the family, it was not necessary to be so very strict in rendering accounts. But he never listened to her.

Shyama Charan was a severe disciplinarian by habit, and his children were perfectly aware of the fact. But Bhavani had every possible freedom, and this gave rise to the impression that he was too partial to his step-brother. But Bhavani's education was sadly neglected and he completely relied on Shyama Charan for the management of his share of the property. He merely had to sign occasional documents without ever giving a thought to their contents. On the other hand, Tarapada, the eldest son of Shyama Charan, was quite an expert in the management of the estate, for he had to act as assistant to his father.

After the death of Shyama Charan, Tarapada said to Bhavani: 'Uncle, we must not live together as we have done for so long, because some trifling misunderstanding might come at any moment and cause a complete break between us.'

Bhavani never imagined, even in his dreams, that a day might come when he would have to manage his own affairs. The world in which he had been born and bred ever appeared to him complete and entire in itself. It was an incomprehensible calamity to him that there could be a dividing line somewhere and that this world of his could be split in two. When he found that Tarapada was immovable and indifferent to the grief and dishonour that such a step would bring to the family, he began to rack his brains to find out how the property could be divided with the least possible disturbance.

Tarapada was surprised at his uncle's anxiety and said that there was no need to trouble about the matter because the division had already been made in the life-time of his grandfather. In amazement, Bhavani exclaimed: 'But I know nothing of this!' Tarapada replied: 'Then you must be the only one in the whole neighbourhood who does not. For, lest there should be ruinous litigation after his death, my grandfather had already given a portion of the property to your mother.' Bhavani thought this not unlikely and asked: 'What about the house?' Tarapada said: 'If you wish, you can keep this house yourself and we shall be contented with the other house in the district town.'

As Bhavani had never been in this town-house, he had neither knowledge of it, nor affection for it. He was astounded at the magnanimity of Tarapada in so easily relinquishing his right to the house in the village where they had been brought up. But when Bhavani told everything to his mother, she struck her forehead with her hand and exclaimed: 'This is preposterous! What I got from my husband was my own dowry and the income from it is very small. I do not

see why you should be deprived of your share in your father's property.'

Bhavani said: 'Tarapada is quite positive that his grandfather never gave us anything except this land.'

Vraja Sundari was astonished at this piece of information and informed her son that her husband had made two copies of his will, one of which was still lying in her own box. The box was opened but it was found that there was only the deed of gift for the property belonging to the mother and nothing else. The copy of the will had been taken out.

In their difficulty, they sought advice, and the man who came to their rescue was Bagala, the son of their family *guru*. The father had charge of the spiritual needs of the village; the material side was left to the son. The two of them had as it were divided between themselves the next world and this. Whatever might be the result for others, they themselves had nothing to complain of from this division. Bagala said that, if the will was missing, the ancestral property must be equally divided between the brothers.

Just as this time, a copy of a will appeared supporting the claims of the other side. In this document there was no mention of Bhavani and the whole property was given to the grandsons at the time when no son was born to Bhavani. With Bagala at the helm Bhavani set out on his voyage across the perilous sea of litigation. When his vessel at last reached harbour, his funds were nearly exhausted and the ancestral property was in the hands of the opposite party. The land which was given to his mother had dwindled to such an extent, that it could barely shelter them, much less keep up the family dignity. Then Tarapada went away to the district town and they never met again.

2

This act of treachery pierced the heart of the widow like an assassin's knife. To the end of her life, almost daily she would heave a sigh and say that God would never suffer such injustice. She was quite firm in her faith when she said to Bhavani: 'I do not know your law or your law courts, but I am certain that my husband's true will and testament will some day be recovered. You will find it again.'

Bhavani was so helpless in worldly matters that assurances such as these gave him great consolation. He settled down in his inactivity, certain in his own mind that his pious mother's prophecy was bound to be fulfilled. After his mother's death, his faith became all the stronger, since the memory of her piety became more radiant through death's mystery. He never felt the stress of their poverty

which as the years went by became more and more acute. The obtaining of the necessaries of life and the maintenance of family traditions—those seemed to him like play-acting on a temporary stage, not real things. When the expensive clothing of his earlier days was worn out and he had to buy cheaper materials, it merely amused him. He smiled and said to himself—‘These people do not know that this is only a passing phase of my future. Their surprise will be all the greater, when some day I shall celebrate the Puja festival with a magnificence they never dreamt of.’

This certainty of future prodigality was so clear to his mind’s eye that present penury escaped his attention. His servant, Noto, was the principal companion with whom he discussed these things. They used to have animated conversations, in which sometimes the servant’s opinion differed from the master’s as to the propriety of bringing down a theatrical troupe from Calcutta for these future occasions. Frequently Bhavani would reprimand Noto for his natural miserliness in these items of future expenditure.

Bhavani’s one anxiety, the absence of an heir to inherit his vast possible wealth, was dissipated by the birth of his son. The horoscope plainly indicated that the lost property would come back to this boy.

From this time onwards, Bhavani’s attitude was changed. It became cruelly difficult for him now to bear his poverty with his old amused equanimity, because he felt that he had a duty towards this new representative of the illustrious house of Saniari, whose future was destined to be so glorious. That the traditional extravagance could not be indulged in on the occasion of the birth of his child gave him the keenest sorrow. He felt as if he were cheating his own son. To compensate for this he spoiled the boy inordinately with an inordinate amount of spoiling.

Bhavani’s wife Rashmani, had a different temperament from her husband. She never felt any anxiety about keeping up the family tradition of the Chowdhuris of Saniari. Bhavani was quite aware of the fact and smiled indulgently to himself, as though nothing better could be expected from a woman who came from a Vaishnava family of very humble lineage. Rashmani frankly acknowledged that she could not share the family sentiments; what concerned her most was the welfare of her child.

There was hardly an acquaintance in the neighbourhood with whom Bhavani did not discuss the question of the lost will; but he never spoke a word about it to his wife. Once or twice he had tried, but her perfect unconcern had made him drop the subject. She neither paid attention to the past greatness of the family, nor to its future glories—she kept her mind busy with the actual needs of the

present, and those needs were not small.

When the Goddess of Fortune deserts a house, she usually leaves some of her burdens behind, and this ancient family was still encumbered with its host of dependants, though its own shelter was nearly crumbling to dust. These parasites take it as an insult if they are asked to do anything in return. Their heads ache at the mere smell of kitchen smoke. They are afflicted with sudden rheumatism the moment they are asked to run as errand. Therefore all the responsibilities of maintaining the family were laid upon Rashmani herself. Women lose their delicacy and refinement, when they are compelled night and day to haggle with their destiny over things pitifully small, and for this they are blamed by those whom their toil supports.

Besides her household affairs Rashmani had to keep all the accounts of the little landed property which remained and also to make arrangements for collecting the rents. Never before was the estate managed with such strictness. Bhavani had been quite incapable of collecting his dues: Rashmani never made any remission of the least fraction of rent. The tenants, and even her own agents, reviled her behind her back for the meanness of the family from which she came. Even her husband occasionally used to protest against her harsh economy which was contrary to the practice of the world-famed house of Saniari.

Rashmani quite ungrudgingly took all the blame upon herself and openly confessed the poverty of her parents. Tying the end of her *sari* tightly round her waist, she went on with her household duties in her own vigorous fashion and made herself thoroughly disagreeable, both to the inmates of the house and to her neighbours. But nobody ever had the courage to interfere. Only one thing she carefully avoided. She never asked her husband to help her in any work and she was nervously afraid of his taking any responsibility. Indeed she was always strenuously engaged in keeping her husband idle; and as he had received the best possible training in this direction, her object was completely fulfilled.

Rashmani was middle-aged before her son came. Before this all the pent-up tenderness of the mother in her and all the love of the wife had their centre of devotion in her simple-hearted, good-for-nothing husband. Bhavani was merely an overgrown child. This was the reason why, after the death of her husband's mother, she had to assume the position of mother and master in one.

In order to protect her husband from the invasions of Bagala, the son of the *guru*, and other calamities, Rashmani adopted such a stern demeanour, that her husband's companions used to be terribly afraid of her. She never had the opportunity, which a woman usually has, of keeping her fierceness hidden and of softening the keen edge of her words, or of maintaining that dignified reserve

towards men which is proper for a woman.

Bhavani meekly accepted his wife's authority with regard to himself, but it became extremely hard for him to obey her in matters that concerned Kalipada, his son. The reason was, that Rashmani never regarded Bhavani's son from the point of view of Bhavani himself. In her heart she pitied her husband and said: 'Poor man, it was his misfortune, not his fault, to be born into a rich family.' That is why she never could expect her husband to deprive himself of any of his accustomed comforts. Whatever might be the condition of the household finances, she tried hard to keep him in the ease and luxury he was accustomed to. Under the regime all expense was strictly limited except in the case of Bhavani. She would never allow him to notice if there was something unavoidably missing in his meals, or if his clothes wore out without her being able to replace them. She would blame some imaginary dog for spoiling dishes that were never made and would blame herself for her carelessness. She would attack Noto for letting some garments be stolen or lost. This had the usual effect of rousing Bhavani's sympathy on behalf of his favourite servant and he would try to defend him. Indeed it often happened that Bhavani confessed with bare-faced shamelessness that he had used some article that had never been bought, and for whose loss Noto was blamed; but had not the power to invent the conclusion of the story and was obliged to rely upon the fertile imagination of his wife who was also the accuser!

Although Rashmani treated her husband in this way, she acted very differently towards her son. For he was her own child and why should he be allowed to give himself airs? Kalipada had to be content with a few handfuls of puffed rice and some treacle for his breakfast. During the cold weather he had to wrap his body as well as his head with a thick rough cotton *chaddar*. She would call his teacher before her and warn him never to spare her boy, if he were the least neglectful with his lessons. This treatment of his own son was the hardest blow that Bhavani Charan had suffered during the days of his destitution. But as he had always acknowledged defeat at the hands of the powerful, he had not the spirit to stand up against his wife in her method of bringing the boy up.

The clothes which Rashmani provided for her son, during the Puja festivities, were made of such poor material that in former days the very servants of the house would have rebelled if such had been offered to them. But Rashmani more than once tried her best to explain to her husband that Kalipada, being the most recent addition to the Chowdhury family, had never known their former splendour and so would be quite glad to get what was given to him. But this pathetic ignorance of the boy concerning his own destiny hurt Bhavani more

than anything else, and he could not forgive himself for deceiving the child. Sometimes Kalipada would dance for joy and rush to him to show him some trivial present from his mother, and then Bhavani's heart would suffer torture.

Bagala, the *guru*'s son, was now very rich owing to his agency in the lawsuit that had brought about Bhavani's ruin. With the money which he had in hand he used to buy cheap tinsel wares from Calcutta before the Puja holidays. Invisible ink, absurd combinations of stick, fishing rod and umbrella—letter-paper with pictures in the corner—silk fabrics bought at auctions, and other things of this kind, attractive to the simple villagers—these were his stock in trade. All the forward young men of the village vied with one another in rising above their rusticity by purchasing these sweepings of the Calcutta market, which, they were told, were absolutely necessary for the city gentry.

Once Bagala had bought a wonderful toy—a doll dressed as a foreign woman—which, when wound up, would rise from its chair and begin to fan itself with sudden energy. Kalipada was fascinated by it. He had a very good reason to avoid asking his mother about the toy; so he went straight to his father and begged him to buy it for him. Bhavani instantly agreed, but when he heard the price his face fell. Rashmani kept all the money and Bhavani went to her like a timid beggar. He began with all sorts of irrelevant remarks and then took a desperate plunge into the subject with startling incoherence.

Rashmani's only remark was 'Are you mad?' Bhavani Charan sat silent, wondering what to say next.

'Look here,' he exclaimed, 'I don't think I need milk pudding daily with my dinner.'

'Who told you that?' said Rashmani sharply.

'The doctor says it's very bad for biliousness.'

'The doctor's a fool!'

'But I'm sure that rice agrees with me better than your *luchis*. They are so indigestible.'

'I've never seen the least sign of indigestion in you. You have been accustomed to them all your life!'

Bhavani Charan was ready enough to make sacrifices, but in this case he was not allowed to make them. Butter might rise in price, but the number of his *luchis* never decreased. Milk was quite enough for him at his midday meal, but curds had also to be supplied because that was the family tradition. Rashmani could not have borne to see him sit down to a meal, without curds. Therefore, all his attempts to cut down his daily provisions, so that the fanning foreign woman might enter his house, were an utter failure.

Then Bhavani paid an apparently purposeless visit to Bagala, and after a great deal of round-about talk asked about the foreign doll. Of course his straitened circumstances had long been known to Bagala, yet Bhavani was perfectly miserable when he had to think twice about buying this doll for his son. But what could he do with empty pockets? Swallowing his pride, he produced an expensive old Kashmir shawl, and said in a husky voice: 'I am very hard up at present and I haven't got much cash. So I am determined to part with this shawl to buy that doll for Kalipada.'

If the object offered had been less valuable than this Kashmir shawl, Bagala would at once have closed the bargain. But knowing that he could not take possession of this shawl in face of village opinion, and still more in face of Rashmani's watchfulness, he refused to accept it; and Bhavani had to go back disappointed, with the Kashmir shawl under his arm.

Kalipada asked every day for that foreign fanning toy, and Bhavani smiled every day and said—'Wait a bit, my boy, till the seventh day of the moon comes.' But every day it became more and more difficult to keep up that smile.

On the fourth day of the moon, Bhavani suddenly made up his mind to broach the subject to his wife, and said: 'I've noticed that there's something wrong with Kalipada—he is not looking well.'

'Nonsense,' said Rashmani, 'he's in the best of health.'

'Haven't you noticed him sitting silent for hours together?'

'I should be very greatly relieved if he could sit still for as many minutes.'

When all his sorrows had missed their mark, and no impression had been made, Bhavani Charan heaved a deep sigh and, passing his fingers through his hair, went away and sat down on the verandah and began to smoke with fearful vigour.

On the fifth day, at his breakfast, Bhavani refused the curds and the milk pudding without touching them. In the evening, he only took a single piece of *sandesh*. The *luchis* were left unheeded. He complained of want of appetite. This time a considerable breach was made in the fortifications.

On the sixth day, Rashmani took Kalipada into the room and calling him by his pet name, said, 'Betu, you are old enough to know that it is the half-way house to stealing, to desire what you can't have.'

Kalipada whimpered and said: 'What is that to me? Father promised to give me that doll.'

Rashmani tried to explain to him how much lay behind his father's promise—how much pain, how much affection, how much loss and privation. Rashmani had never in her life talked thus to Kalipada, because it was her habit to give

short and sharp commands. It filled the boy with amazement when he found his mother coaxing him and explaining things at such length, and child though he was, he could fathom something of the deep suffering of his mother's heart. Yet at the same time, it will be easily understood that it was hard for him to turn his mind away altogether from that captivating foreign fanning woman. He pulled a long face and began to scratch the ground with his foot.

This hardened Rashmani's heart at once, and she said severely: 'Yes, you may weep and cry, or be angry but you shall never get what I do not mean you to have.' And she hastened away without another word.

Kalipada went out, and Bhavani Charan who was still smoking his hookah noticed him from a distance. So he got up and walked in the opposite direction as if he had some urgent business. Kalipada ran to him and said, 'But what about that doll?' Bhavani could not raise a smile that day. He put his arm round Kalipada's neck and said: 'Babu, wait a little. I have some pressing business to get through. Let me finish it first, and then we will talk about it.' Saying this, he went out of the house.

Kalipada saw him brush a tear from his eyes. He stood at the door and watched his father, and it was quite apparent, even to him, that he was going nowhere in particular, and that he was dragging with him the weight of a hopeless despair.

Kalipada at once went back to his mother and said, 'Mother, I don't want that foreign doll.'

That morning Bhavani Charan returned late. When he sat down to eat, after his bath, it was evident by the look on his face, that the curds and the milk pudding would fare no better with him than on the day before, and that the best part of the fish would go to the cat.

Just at this moment, Rashmani brought in a cardboard box, tied up with string, and set it before her husband. Her intention had been to reveal the mystery of this packet to him, when he went to take a nap after his meal. But in order that the curds and the milk and the fish might not again be neglected, she had to disclose its contents before she had intended. So the foreign doll came out of the box, and without more ado began to fan itself vigorously.

And so the cat had to go away disappointed. Bhavani remarked to his wife that the cooking was the best he had ever tasted. The fish soup was incomparable, the curds had set with a firmness that was rarely attained and the milk pudding was superb.

On the seventh day of the moon, Kalipada got the toy for which he had been pining. During the whole of that day, he allowed the foreigner to go on fanning herself, and thereby made his boy companions jealous. In any other case, this

performance would have seemed to him monotonous and tiresome, but knowing that on the following day he would have to give the toy back, his constancy to it on that single occasion was unabated. At a fee of two rupees per diem Rashmani had hired it from Bagala.

On the eighth day of the moon, Kalipada heaved a deep sigh and returned the toy, along with the box and twine, to Bagala. From that day forward, Kalipada began to share the confidences of his mother, and it became so absurdly easy for Bhavani to give expensive presents every year, that it surprised even himself.

When, with the help of his mother, Kalipada came to know that nothing in this world would be gained without paying for it with the inevitable price of suffering, his character rapidly matured and he became a valued assistant to his mother in her daily tasks. It came to be the natural rule of life with him, that no one should add to the burden of the world, but that each should try to lighten it.

When Kalipada won a scholarship at the Vernacular Examination, Bhavani proposed that he should give up his studies and take in hand the supervision of the estate. Kalipada went to his mother and said: 'I shall never be a man, if I do not complete my education.'

His mother said: 'You are right, Baba, you must go to Calcutta.'

Kalipada explained to her, that it would not be necessary to spend a single pice on him; his scholarship would be sufficient, and he would try to get some work to supplement it.

But it was necessary to convince Bhavani of the wisdom of the course. Rashmani did not wish to employ the argument that there was very little of the estate remaining to require supervision, for she knew how it would hurt him. She said that Kalipada must become a man whom everyone could respect. But all the members of the Chowdhury family had attained their respectability without ever going a step outside the limits of Saniari. The outer world was as unknown to them as the world beyond the grave. Bhavani, therefore, could not conceive how anybody could think of a boy like Kalipada going to Calcutta. But the cleverest man in the village, Bagala, fortunately agreed with Rashmani.

'It is perfectly clear,' he said, 'that one day Kalipada will become a lawyer; and then he will set matters right concerning the property of which the family has been deprived.'

This was a great consolation to Bhavani Charan, and he brought out the file of records concerning the stolen will and tried to explain the whole thing to Kalipada by daily discussion. But his son had no proper enthusiasm and merely echoed his father's sentiment about the solemn wrong.

The day before Kalipada left for Calcutta, Rashmani hung round his neck an

amulet containing mantras to protect him from all evils. She gave him at the same time a fifty-rupee note, advising him to keep it for any special emergency. This note, the symbol of his mother's numberless daily acts of self-denial, was the truest amulet of all for Kalipada. He determined to keep it by him and never to spend it, whatever might happen.

3

From this time onward, Bhavani indulged less and less in the old interminable discussions about the theft of the will. His one topic of conversation was the marvellous adventure of Kalipada in search of education. Kalipada was actually engaged in his studies in the city of Calcutta! Kalipada knew Calcutta as well as the palm of his hand! Kalipada had been the first to hear the great news that another bridge was going to be built over the Ganges near Hooghly! The day on which the father received his son's regular letter, he used to go to every house in the village to read it to his neighbours, and he could scarcely find time even to take his spectacles from his nose. On arriving at each house, he would remove them from their case with the utmost deliberation; then he would wipe them carefully with the end of his *dhoti*, then, word by word, he would slowly read the letter through to one neighbour after another with something like the following comment: 'Brother, just listen! What is the world coming to? Even dogs and the jackals are to cross the holy Ganges without washing the dust from their feet! Who could imagine such sacrilege?'

No doubt it was very deplorable; but all the same it gave Bhavani Charan a peculiar pleasure to communicate at first hand such important news from his son's letter, and this more than compensated for the spiritual disaster which must surely overtake the numberless creatures of this present age. To everyone he met, he solemnly nodded his head and prophesied, that the days were soon coming when Mother Ganges would disappear altogether; all the while cherishing the hope, that the news of such a momentous event—when it happened—would come to him, by letter from his son.

Kalipada, with very great difficulty scraped together just enough money to pay his expenses till he passed the Matriculation Examination and again he won a scholarship. Bhavani at once made up his mind to invite all the village to a feast, for he imagined that his son's good ship of fortune had now reached its haven, and that there would be no more need for economy. But he received no encouragement from Rashmani.

Kalipada was fortunate enough to secure a corner in a students' lodging-house

near his college. The proprietor allowed him to occupy a small room on the ground-floor, which was absolutely useless for other lodgers. In exchange for this and his board, he had to coach the son of the owner of the house. The one great advantage was that there would be no chance of any fellow-lodger ever sharing his quarters. So, although the place was badly ventilated, his studies were uninterrupted.

Those of the students who paid their rent and lived in the upper storey had no concern with Kalipada; but soon it became painfully evident that those who live up above have the power to hurl missiles at those below with the more deadly force because of their height. The leader of those above was Sailen.

Sailen was the scion of a rich family. It was unnecessary for him to live in students' mess, but he successfully convinced his guardians that this would be best for his studies. The real reason was that Sailen was naturally fond of company, and the students' lodging-house was an ideal place where he could have all the pleasure of companionship without any of its responsibilities. It was the firm conviction of Sailen that he was a good fellow and a man of feeling. The advantage of harbouring such a conviction was that it needed no proof in practice. Vanity, unlike a horse or an elephant, requires no expensive fodder.

Nevertheless, as Sailen had plenty of money, he did not allow his vanity merely to graze at large; he took special pride in keeping it stall-fed. It must be said to his credit that he had a genuine desire to help people in their need; but the desire in him was of such a character, that if a man in difficulty refused to come to him for help, he would turn round on him and do his best to add to his trouble. His mess-mates had their tickets for the theatre bought for them by Sailen, and it cost them nothing to have occasional feasts. They could borrow money from him with no intention of paying it back. When a newly married youth was in doubt about the choice of some gift for his wife, he could fully rely on Sailen's good taste. On these occasions, the love-lorn youth would take Sailen to the shop and pretend to select the cheapest and least suitable presents: then Sailen with a contemptuous laugh would intervene and select the right thing. At the mention of the price, the young husband would pull a long face, but Sailen would always be ready to abide by his own superior choice and to pay for it.

In this manner, Sailen became the acknowledged patron of the students upstairs. It made him intolerant of the insolence of anyone who refused to accept his help. Indeed, to help others in this way had become his hobby.

Kalipada, in his tattered jersey, used to sit on a dirty mat in his damp room below and recite his lessons, swinging himself from side to side to the rhythm of the sentence. It was a sheer necessity for him to get that scholarship next year.

Kalipada's mother had made him promise, before he left home for Calcutta, that he would avoid the company of rich young men. He, therefore, bore the burden of his indigence alone, strictly keeping himself from those who had been more favoured by fortune. But to Sailen, it seemed a sheer impertinence that a student as poor as Kalipada should yet have the pride to avoid his patronage. Besides this, in his food and dress and everything, Kalipada's poverty was so blatantly exposed, it hurt Sailen's sense of decency. Every time he looked down into Kalipada's room, he was offended by the sight of the cheap clothing, the dingy mosquito net and the tattered bedding. Whenever he passed on his way to his own room in the upper storey, he could not avoid the sight of these things. To crown it all, there was that absurd amulet which Kalipada always had hanging round his neck, and those daily rites of devotion which were so ridiculously out of fashion!

One day Sailen and his followers condescended to invite Kalipada to a feast, thinking that his gratitude would know no bounds. But Kalipada sent an answer saying that his habits were not the same as theirs and it would not be good for him to accept the invitation. Sailen was unaccustomed to such a refusal, and it roused in him all the ferocity of his insulted benevolence. For some days after this, the noise in the upper storey became so loudly insistent that, Kalipada, try as he might, could not go on with his studies. He was compelled to spend the greater part of his days studying in the park, and to get up very early and sit down to his work long before it was light.

Owing to his half-starved condition, his mental overwork, and his badly-ventilated room, Kalipada began to suffer from continual headaches. There were times when he was obliged to lie on his bed for three or four days together. But he made no mention of his illness in his letters to his father. Bhavani himself was certain that, just as vegetation grew rank in his village surroundings, so comforts of all kinds sprang up of themselves from the soil of Calcutta. Kalipada never for a moment disabused his mind of that misconception. He did not fail to write to his father, even when suffering from one of these sharp attacks of pain. The deliberate rowdiness of the students in the upper storey at such times added to his distress.

Kalipada tried to make himself as unobtrusive as possible, in order to avoid notice; but this did not bring him relief. One day, he found that a cheap shoe of his own had been taken away, and replaced by one of an expensive foreign make. It was impossible for him to go to college in such an incongruous pair. He made no complaint, however, but bought some old second-hand shoes from the cobbler. One day, a student from the upper storey came into his room and asked

him: ‘Have you, by any mistake, taken away my silver cigarette case?’

Kalipada was very annoyed and answered: ‘I have never been inside your room.’

The student stooped down. ‘Hullo!’ he said, ‘here it is!’ And he picked up a valuable cigarette case from the corner of the room.

Kalipada determined to leave this lodging-house as soon as ever he had passed the Intermediate Examination, provided he could only get a scholarship to enable him to do so.

Every year the students of the house used to celebrate the Saraswati Puja. Though the greater part of the expenses were borne by Sailen, everyone else contributed according to his means. The year before, they had contemptuously left out Kalipada from the list of contributors, but this year, merely to tease him, they came with their subscription book. Kalipada instantly paid five rupees to the fund, though he had no intention of participation in the feast. His penury had long brought on him the contempt of his fellow-lodgers, but this unexpected gift of five rupees became to them insufferable. The Saraswati Puja was performed with great magnificence and the five rupees could easily have been spared. It had been hard indeed for Kalipada to part with such a sum. While he ate the food given him in his landlord’s house he had no control over the time at which it was served. Besides this, since the servants brought him the food, he did not like to criticise the dishes. He preferred to provide himself with some extras; and after the forced extravagance of his five-rupee subscription, he had to forego all this and suffer in consequence. His headaches became more frequent, and though he passed his examination, he failed to obtain the scholarship that he desired.

The loss of the scholarship drove Kalipada to do extra work as a private tutor, and would not allow him to change his unhealthy room in the lodging-house. The students overhead had hoped that they would be relieved of his presence, but punctually to the day, the room on the lower floor was unlocked. Kalipada entered, clad in the same old dirty check Parsee coat. A coolie from Sealdah Station took down from his head a steel trunk and other miscellaneous packages, and laid them on the floor of the room; and a long wrangle ensued as to the proper amount due to the coolie.

In the depths of those packages, there were mango chutnies and other condiments which his mother had specially prepared. Kalipada was aware that, in his absence, the upper-storey students, on mischief bent, would not scruple to come by stealth into his room. He was especially anxious to keep these home gifts from their cruel scrutiny. As tokens of home affection they were supremely precious to him; but to the town students they denoted merely the boorishness of

poverty-stricken villagers. The earthen vessels were crude, and were covered by earthen lids fixed on with flour-paste. They were neither glass nor porcelain and were therefore sure to be regarded with insolent disdain by rich town-bred people.

Formerly Kalipada used to keep these stores hidden under his bed, covering them up with old newspapers. But this time he took the precaution of always locking the door, even if he went out for a few minutes. This still further roused the spleen of Sailen and his party. It seemed to them preposterous that the room, which was poor enough to draw tears from the eyes of the most hardened burglar, should be as carefully guarded as if it were a second Bank of Bengal.

'Does he actually believe,' they said among themselves, 'that the temptation will be irresistible for us to steal that Parsee coat?'

Sailen had never visited this dark and mildewed room from which the plaster was dropping. The glimpses that he had obtained, while going upstairs—especially when, in the evening, Kalipada, the upper part of his body bare, would sit poring over his books with a smoky lamp beside him—were, he felt, enough to choke him. Sailen asked his boon companions to explore the room below, and find out the treasure which Kalipada had hidden. Everybody felt greatly amused at the proposal.

The lock on Kalipada's door was a cheap one, any key would fit. One evening, when Kalipada had gone out to his private work, two or three of the students with an exuberant sense of humour took a lantern, unlocked the room and entered. It did not need a moment's search to discover the pots of chutney under the bed, but these hardly seemed valuable enough to demand such watchful care on the part of Kalipada. Further search disclosed a key on a ring under the pillow. They opened the steel trunk with the key and found a few soiled clothes, books and writing material. They were about to shut the box in disgust when they saw, at the very bottom, a packet covered by a dirty handkerchief. On uncovering three or four wrappers, they found a currency note for fifty rupees. This made them burst into peals of laughter. They felt certain that Kalipada suspected the whole world, because of this fifty-rupee note!

The meanness of this suspicious precaution deepened the intensity of their contempt for Kalipada. At that moment, they heard a footstep outside. They hastily shut the box, locked the door, and ran upstairs with the note in their possession.

Sailen was vastly amused. Though fifty rupees was a mere trifle, he could never have believed that Kalipada had so much money in his trunk. They all decided to watch the result of this loss upon the queer creature downstairs.

When Kalipada came home that night after his work was over, he was too tired to notice any disorder in his room. One of his worst attacks of nervous headache was coming on, and he went straight to bed.

The next day, when he brought out his trunk from under the bed to take out his clothes, he found it open. He was naturally careful, but it was not unlikely, he thought, that he had forgotten to lock it the day before.

But when he lifted the lid he found all the contents topsy-turvy, and his heart gave a great thud when he discovered that the note, given to him by his mother, was missing. He searched the box over and over again in the vain hope of finding it, and when he had made certain of his loss, he flung himself upon his bed and lay like and dead.

Just then, he heard footsteps on the stairs and every now and then an outburst of laughter from the upper room. It struck him that this was not an ordinary theft: Sailen and his party must have taken the note to amuse themselves and make a jest of it. It would have given him less pain if a thief had stolen it. It seemed to him that these young men had laid their impious hands upon his mother herself.

Then, for the first time, Kalipada ascended those stairs. He ran to the upper floor—the old jersey on his shoulders—his face flushed with anger and with the pain of his illness. As it was Sunday, Sailen and his company were seated in the verandah, laughing and talking. Without any warning, Kalipada burst upon them and shouted: ‘Give me back my note!’

If he had begged it of them, they would have relented; but the sight of his anger made them furious. They started up from their chairs and exclaimed: ‘What do you mean, sir? What do you mean? What note?’

Kalipada shouted: ‘The note you have taken from my box!’

‘How dare you?’ they shouted back. ‘Do you take us for thieves?’

If Kalipada had had any weapon in his hand at that moment, he certainly would have killed one of them. But just as he was about to spring, they fell on him, and four or five of them dragged him down to his room and thrust him inside.

Sailen said to his companions. ‘Here take this hundred-rupee note, and throw it to that dog!’

They all loudly exclaimed: ‘No! Let him climb down first and give us a written apology. Then we shall consider it!’

Sailen’s party all went to bed at the proper time and slept the sleep of the innocent. In the morning they had almost forgotten Kalipada. But some of them passing his room, heard the sound of talking and they thought that possibly he was deep in consultation with some lawyer. The door was shut from the inside. They tried to overhear, but what they heard had nothing legal about it. It was

quite incoherent.

They informed Sailen. He came down and stood with his ear close to the door. The only thing that could be distinctly heard was the word ‘Father.’ This frightened Sailen. He thought that possibly Kalipada had gone mad with grief through the loss of that fifty-rupee note. Sailen shouted, ‘Kalipada Babu!’ two or three times, but got no answer. Only the muttering continued. Sailen called: ‘Kalipada Babu—please open the door. Your note has been found.’ But still the door was not opened, and the muttering went on.

Sailen had never anticipated such a result as this. He did not express a word of repentance to his followers, but he felt the sting of repentance all the same. Some advised him to break open the door, others thought that the police should be called in—for Kalipada might be in a dangerous state of lunacy. Sailen at once sent for a doctor who lived close at hand. When they burst open the door, they found the bedding hanging from the bed and Kalipada lying on the floor unconscious. He was tossing about and throwing up his arms and muttering, with his eyes red and open and his face flushed. The doctor examined him and asked whether there were any relatives near at hand; for the case was serious.

Sailen answered that he knew nothing, but would make inquiries. The doctor then advised the removal of the patient at once to an upper room where he could be nursed properly day and night. Sailen took him up to his own room and dismissed his followers. He got some ice and putting it on Kalipada’s head began to fan him. Kalipada, fearing that mocking references would be made, had with special care concealed the names and address of his parents from these people. So Sailen had no alternative but to open his box. He found two bundles of letters tied up with ribbon. One of them contained his mother’s letters: the other contained his father’s. His mother’s letters were the fewer in number. Sailen closed the door and began to read them. He was startled when he saw the address,—Saniari, the house of the Chowdhuris—and then the name of the father, Bhavani. He folded up the letters, and sat still, gazing at Kalipada’s face. Some of his friends had casually mentioned that there was a resemblance between Kalipada and himself. But he had been offended at the remark and did not believe it. Today he discovered the truth. He knew his own grandfather, Shyama Charan, had a step-brother named Bhavani; but the latter history of the family had remained a secret to him. He did not even know that Bhavani had a son, named Kalipada; and he never suspected that Bhavani had come to such an abject state of poverty as this. He now felt not only relieved, but proud of his relative, Kalipada, who had refused to become one of his protégés.

Knowing that his party had insulted Kalipada almost every day, Sailen was reluctant to keep him in the lodging-house with them. So he took another more suitable house and kept him there. Bhavani started in haste for Calcutta the moment he received a letter from Sailen informing him of his son's illness. Rashmani parted with all her savings, and told her husband to spare no expense. It was not considered proper for the daughters of the great Chowdhury family to leave their home and go to Calcutta, unless absolutely obliged, and therefore she had to remain behind offering prayers to all the tutelary gods. When Bhavani Charan arrived, he found Kalipada still unconscious and delirious. It nearly broke Bhavani's heart, when he heard himself called 'Master Mashai'. Kalipada often called him in his delirium and Bhavani tried to get his son to recognise him, but in vain.

The doctor came again and said the fever was abating. He thought the case was taking a more favourable turn. As for Bhavani he could not imagine that his son was past recovery. He *must* live: it was his destiny to live. Bhavani was much struck with the behaviour of Sailen. It was difficult to believe that he was not of their own kith and kin. He supposed all this kindness to be due to the town training which Sailen had received. Bhavani spoke to Sailen disparagingly of the country habits of village people like himself.

Gradually the fever went down and Kalipada recovered consciousness. He was astonished beyond measure when he saw his father sitting in the room beside him. His first anxiety was lest he should discover the miserable state in which he had been living. But what would be harder still to bear was, that his father with his rustic manners might become the butt of the people upstairs. He looked round, but could not recognise his own room and wondered whether he had been dreaming. But he found himself too weak to think.

He supposed that it was his father that had removed him to this better lodging, but he could not calculate how he could possibly bear the expense. The only thing that concerned him at that moment was that he felt he must live and for that he had a claim upon the world.

Once, when Bhavani was absent, Sailen came in with a plate of grapes in his hand. Kalipada could not understand this at all, and wondered if there was some practical joke behind. He became excited at once and wondered how he could save his father from annoyance. Sailen set the plate down on the table and humbly touching Kalipada's feet said: 'My offence has been great; pray forgive me.'

Kalipada started and sat up on his bed. He could see that Sailen's repentance

was sincere and he was greatly moved.

When Kalipada first came to the students' lodging-house, he had felt strongly drawn towards this handsome youth. He never missed a chance of looking at his face, when Sailen passed his room on his way upstairs. He would have given all the world to be friends with him, but the barrier was too great to be broken down. Now, today, when Sailen brought him the grapes and asked his forgiveness, he silently looked into his face and accepted the grapes as a token of his repentance.

It amused Kalipada greatly when he noticed the intimacy that had sprung up between his father and Sailen. Sailen used to call Bhavani Charan 'grandfather' and exercised to the full the grandchild's privilege of joking with him. The principal object of the jokes was the absent 'grandmother'. Sailen confessed that he had taken the opportunity of Kalipada's illness to steal all the delicious chutneys which his 'grandmother' had made with her own hand. The news of his act of 'thieving' gave Kalipada very great joy. He found it easy to deprive himself, if he could find anyone who could appreciate the good things made by his mother. Thus, the time of his convalescence became the happiest period in Kalipada's life.

There was only one flaw in this ideal happiness. Kalipada had a fierce pride in his poverty, which prevented him from speaking about his family's better days. Therefore, when his father used to talk of his former prosperity, Kalipada winced. Bhavani could not keep to himself the one great event of his life—the theft of that will, which he was absolutely certain he would some day recover. Kalipada had always regarded this as a kind of mania of his father's and in collusion with his mother, he had often humoured him concerning this amiable weakness. But he shrank in shame when his father talked about it to Sailen. He noticed particularly that Sailen did not relish such conversation and that he often tried with a certain amount of feeling to prove its absurdity. But Bhavani, who was ready to give in to others in matters much more serious, in this matter was adamant. Kalipada tried to pacify him by saying that there was no great need to worry about it, because those who were enjoying the benefit were almost the same as his own children, since they were his nephews.

Sailen could not bear such talk for long and he used to leave the room. This pained Kalipada, because he thought that Sailen might get quite a wrong conception of his father and imagine him to be a grasping worldly old man. Sailen would have revealed his own relationship to Kalipada and his father long before this, but this talk about the theft of the will prevented him. It was hard for him to believe that his grandfather or father had stolen the will; on the other

hand, he could not but think that some cruel injustice had been done in depriving Bhavani of his share of the ancestral property. Therefore, he gave up arguing when the subject was brought forward and took the first possible opportunity to leave.

Though Kalipada still had headaches in the evening, with a slight rise in temperature, he did not take it at all seriously. He became anxious to resume his studies, because he felt it would be a calamity to him if he again failed to obtain a scholarship. He secretly began to read once more, without taking any notice of the strict orders of the doctor. Kalipada asked his father to return home, assuring him that he was in the best of health. Bhavani had been all his life fed and nourished and looked after by his wife; he was pining to get back. He did not therefore wait to be pressed.

On the morning of his intended departure, when he went to say goodbye to Kalipada, he found him very ill indeed, his face flushed with fever and his whole body burning. He had been committing to memory page after page of his textbook of Logic half through the night, and for the remainder he could not sleep at all. The doctor took Sailen aside. ‘This relapse,’ he said, ‘is fatal.’ Sailen came to Bhavani and said: ‘Kalipada requires a mother’s nursing: she must be brought to Calcutta.’

It was evening when Rashmani came, and she only saw her son alive for a few hours. Not knowing how her husband could survive such a terrible shock she altogether suppressed her own sorrow. Her son was merged in her husband again, and she took up this burden of the dead and the living on her own aching heart. She said to her God, ‘It is too much for me to bear.’ But she did bear it.

It was midnight. Wearied out by grief, Rashmani had fallen asleep soon after reaching her home in the village. But Bhavani had no sleep that night. Tossing on his bed for hours he would heave a deep sigh saying—‘Merciful God!’ Then he got up from his bed and went out. He entered the room where Kalipada used to learn his lessons as a child. The lamp shook as he held it in his hand. On the wooden settee there was still the torn, ink-stained quilt, made long ago by Rashmani herself. On the wall were figures in Euclid and symbols in Algebra drawn in charcoal. The remains of a *Royal Reader No. III* and a few exercise books were lying about; and the one odd slipper of his infancy, which had evaded notice so long, kept its place in the dusty obscurity of the corner of the room. Today it had become so important that nothing in the world, however great, could keep it hidden any longer. Bhavani put the lamp in its niche, and silently sat on the settee, his eyes were dry, and his throat choking.

Bhavani opened the shutters on the eastern side and stood still, grasping the

iron bars, gazing into the darkness. Through the drizzling rain he could see the outline of the clump of trees at the end of the outer wall. At this spot Kalipada had made his own garden. The passion flowers which he had planted had grown thick and dense. While he gazed at this, Bhavani felt choking with sorrow. There was nobody now to wait for and expect daily. The summer vacation had come, but no one would come back home to fill the vacant room and use its old familiar furniture.

‘O my darling,’ he cried, ‘my darling son.’

He sat down. The rain came faster. A sound of footsteps was heard among the grass and withered leaves. Bhavani’s heart stood still. He hoped it was...that which was beyond any hope. He thought it was Kalipada himself come to see his own garden—and in his downpour of rain how wet he would be! Anxiety about this made him restless. Then somebody stood for a moment in front of the iron window bars. The cloak round his head made it impossible for Bhavani to see his face clearly; he was of the same height as Kalipada.

‘My boy!’ cried Bhavani, ‘You have come!’ and he hurried to open the door.

But when he came to the spot where the figure had stood, there was no one to be seen. He walked up and down in the garden through the drenching rain, but no one was there. He stood still for a moment raising his voice and calling—‘Kalipada,—but no answer came. The servant, Noto, who was sleeping in the cowshed, heard his cry and came out and coaxed him back to his room.

Next morning, Noto, while sweeping the room found a bundle just underneath the grated window. He brought it to Bhavani, who opened it and found it was an old document. He put on his spectacles and after reading a few lines rushed into Rashmani’s room and gave the paper into her hand.

‘What is it?’ Rashmani asked.

‘It is the will!’ replied Bhavani.

‘Who gave it to you?’

‘He himself came last night to give it to me.’

‘What are you going to do with it?’

Bhavani said: ‘I have no need of it now.’ And he tore the will to pieces.

When the news reached the village, Bagala proudly nodded his head and said: ‘Didn’t I prophesy that the will would be recovered through Kalipada?’

But the grocer Ramcharan replied: ‘Last night when the ten o’clock train reached the station, a handsome-looking young man came to my shop and asked the way to the Chowdhurys’ house, and I thought he had some sort of bundle in his hand.’

‘Absurd,’ said Bagala.

39. Subha

When the girl was given the name of Subhashini, who could have guessed that she would be dumb when she grew up? Her two elder sisters were Sukheshini and Suhashini, and for the sake of uniformity her father had named his youngest girl Subhashini. She was called Subha for short.

Her two elder sisters had been married with the usual difficulties in finding husbands and providing dowries, and now the youngest daughter lay like a silent weight upon the heart of her parents. People seemed to think that, because she did not speak, therefore she did not feel; they discussed her future and their anxiety concerning it even in her presence. She had understood from her earliest childhood that God had sent her like a curse to her father's house, so she withdrew herself from ordinary people and tried to live apart. If only they would all forget her, she felt she could endure it. But who can forget pain? Night and day her parents' minds ached with anxiety on her account. Her mother especially looked upon her as a deformity. To a mother, a daughter is a more closely intimate part of herself than a son can be and a fault in her is a source of personal shame. Banikantha, Subha's father, loved her rather better than he did his other daughters; her mother almost hated her as a stain upon her own body.

If Subha lacked speech, she did not lack a pair of large dark eyes, shaded with long lashes; and her lips trembled like a leaf in response to any thought that arose in her mind.

When we express our thoughts in words, the medium is not found easily. There must be a process of translation, which is often inexact, and then we fall into error. But black eyes need no translating; the mind itself throws a shadow upon them. In them, thought opens or shuts, shines forth or goes out in darkness, hangs steadfast like the setting moon or like the swift and restless lightning illumines all quarters of the sky. Those who from birth have had no other speech than the trembling of their lips learn a language of the eyes, endless in expression, deep as the sea, clear as the heavens, wherein play dawn and sunset, light and shadow. The dumb have a lonely grandeur like Nature's own. Wherefore the other children almost dreaded Subha and never played with her. She was silent and companionless as the noontide.

She lived in a small village called Chandipur. The river on whose bank it stood was small for a river of Bengal, and kept to its narrow bounds like a daughter of

the middle class. This busy streak of water never overflowed its banks, but went about its duties as though it were a member of every family in the villages besides it. On either side were houses and banks shaded with trees. So stepping from her queenly throne, the river-goddess became a garden deity of each home, and forgetful of herself performed her task of endless benediction with swift and cheerful feet.

Banikantha's house looked out upon the stream. Every hut and stack in the place could be seen by the passing boatmen. I know not if amid these signs of worldly wealth anyone noticed the little girl who, when her work was done, stole away to the waterside and sat there. But here Nature herself made up for her want of speech and spoke for her. The murmur of the brook, the voice of the village folk, the songs of the boatmen, the cry of the birds and the rustle of trees mingled and were one with the trembling of her heart. They became one vast wave of sound which beat upon her restless soul. This murmur movement of Nature was the dumb girl's language; that speech of the dark eyes, which the long lashes shaded, was the language of the world about her. From the trees, where the cicala chirped, to the quiet stars, there was nothing but signs and gestures, weeping and sighing. And in the deep mid-noon, when the boatmen and fisherfolk had gone to their dinner, when the villagers slept and the birds were still, when the ferry-boats were idle, when the great busy world paused in its toil and became suddenly a lonely, awful giant, then beneath the vast impressive heavens there were only dumb Nature and a dumb girl, sitting very silent—one under the spreading sunlight, the other where a small tree cast its shadow.

But Subha was not altogether without friends. In the stall were two cows, Sarbbashi and Panguli. They had never heard their names from her lips, but they knew her footfall. Though she could form no words, she murmured lovingly and they understood her gentle murmuring better than all speech. When the fondled them or scolded or coaxed them, they understood her better than men could do. Subha would come to the shed and throw her arms round Sarbbashi's neck; she would rub her cheek against her friend's and Panguli would turn her great kind eyes and lick her face. The girl visited them regularly three times a day, and at many an odd moment as well. Whenever she heard any words that hurt her, she would come to these dumb friends even though it might not be the hour for a regular visit. It was as though they guessed her anguish of spirit from her look of quiet sadness. Coming close to her, they would rub their horns softly against her arms, and in dumb, puzzled fashion try to comfort her. Besides these, there were goats and a kitten; but Subha had not the same equal friendship with them, though they showed the same attachment. Every time it got a chance, night or

day, the kitten would jump into her lap, and settle down to slumber, and show its appreciation of an aid to sleep as Subha drew her soft fingers over its neck and back.

Subha had a comrade also among the higher animals, and it is hard to say what were the girl's relations with him; for he could speak, and his gift of speech left them without any common language. He was the youngest boy of the Gosains, Pratap by name, an idle fellow. After long effort, his parents had abandoned the hope of his ever making a living. Now losers have this advantage, that though their own folk disapprove of them they are generally popular with everyone else. Having no work to chain them, they became public property. Just as every town needs an open space where all may breathe, so a village needs two or three gentlemen of leisure, who can give time to all; then, if we are lazy and want a companion, one is to hand.

Pratap's chief ambition was to catch fish. He managed to waste a lot of time this way and might be seen almost any afternoon so employed. It was thus most often that he met Subha. Whatever he was about, he liked a companion; and, when one is trying to catch fish, a silent companion is best of all. Pratap respected Subha for her silence, and, as everyone called her Subha, he showed his affection by calling her Su. Subha used to sit beneath a tamarind tree, and Pratap, a little distance off, would cast his line. Pratap took with him a small allowance of betel, and Subha prepared it for him. And I think that, sitting there and gazing a long while, she desired ardently to bring some great help to Pratap, to be a real aid, to prove by any means that she was not a useless burden in the world. But there was nothing to do. Then she turned to the Creator in prayer for some rare power, that by an astonishing miracle she might startle Pratap into exclaiming: 'My! I never dreamt our Su could do this!'

Only think, if Subha had been a water-nymph, she might have risen slowly from the river, bringing the gem of the snake's crown to the landing-place. Then Pratap, leaving his paltry fishing, might have dived into the lower world, and seen there, on a golden bed in a palace, of silver, whom else but dumb little Su, Banikantha's child! Yes, our Su, the only daughter of the king of that shining city of jewels! But that might not be, it was impossible. Not that anything is really impossible, but Su had been born, not into the royal house of Patalpur, but into Banikantha's family, and thus she knew of no means by which she might astonish the Gosains' boy.

She grew up, and little by little began to find herself. A new inexpressible consciousness like a tide from the central places of the sea, when the moon is full, swept through her. She saw herself, questioned herself, but no answer came

that she could understand.

Late one night, when the moon was full, she slowly opened her door, and timidly peeped out. Nature, herself at full moon, like lonely Subha, was looking down on the sleeping earth. Subha's strong young life beat within her; joy and sadness filled her being to its brim: she had felt unutterably lonely before but her feeling of loneliness was this moment as its intensest. Her heart was heavy and she could not speak. At the skirts of this silent troubled Mother, there stood a silent troubled girl.

The thought of her marriage filled her parents with anxious care. People blamed them, and even talked of making them outcasts. Banikantha was well off; his family even had fish-curry twice daily, and consequently he did not lack enemies. Then the women interfered, and Bani went away for a few days. Presently he returned and said: 'We must go to Calcutta.'

They got ready to go to this strange place. Subha's heart was heavy with tears, like a mist-wrapt dawn. With a vague fear that had been gathering for days, she dogged her father and mother like a dumb animal. With her large eyes wide open, she scanned their faces as though she wished to learn something. But not a word did they vouchsafe. One afternoon in the midst of all this, as Pratap was fishing, he laughed: 'So then, Su, they have caught your bridegroom, and you are going to be married! Mind you don't forget me altogether!' Then he turned his mind again to his fishing. As a stricken doe looks in the hunter's face, asking in silent agony: 'What have I done to harm you?' so Subha looked at Pratap. That day she sat no longer beneath her tree. Banikantha, having finished his nap, was smoking in his bedroom when Subha dropped at his feet and burst out weeping as she gazed towards him. Banikantha tried to comfort her and his own cheek grew wet with tears.

It was settled that on the morrow they should go to Calcutta. Subha went to the cowshed to bid farewell to the comrades of her childhood. She fed them from her hand; she clasped their necks; she looked into their faces, and tears fell fast from the eyes which spoke for her. That night was the tenth of the new moon. Subha left her room, and flung herself down on her grassy couch besides the river she loved so much. It was as if she threw her arms about the Earth, her strong, silent mother, and tried to say: 'Do not let me leave you, mother. Put your arms about me, as I have put mine about you, and hold me fast.'

One day, in a house in Calcutta, Subha's mother dressed her up with great care. She imprisoned her hair, knotting it up in laces, she hung her about with ornaments, and did her best to kill her natural beauty. Subha's eyes filled with tears. Her mother, fearing they would grow swollen with weeping, scolded her

harshly, but the tears disregarded the scolding. The bridegroom came with a friend to inspect the bride. Her parents were dizzy with anxiety and fear when they saw the God arrive to select the beast for his sacrifice. Behind the stage, the mother called her instructions aloud, so that her daughter's weeping redoubled, before she sent her into the examiner's presence. The great man, after looking her up and down a long time, observed: 'Not so bad.'

He took special note of her tears, and thought she must have a tender heart. He put it to her credit in the account, arguing that the heart, which today was distressed at leaving her parents, would presently prove a useful possession. Like the oyster's pearls, the child's tears only increased her value, and he made no other comment.

The almanac was consulted, and the marriage took place on an auspicious day. Having delivered their dumb girl into another's hands, Subha's parents returned home. Thank God! Their caste in this world and their safety in the next were assured! The bridegroom's work lay in the west, and shortly after the marriage he took his wife thither.

In less than ten days everyone knew that the bride was dumb! At least if anyone did not, it was not her fault, for she deceived no one. Her eyes told them everything, though no one understood her. She looked on every hand, but found no speech; she missed the faces, familiar from birth, of those who had understood a dumb girl's language. In her silent heart there sounded an endless, voiceless weeping, which only the Searcher of Hearts could hear.

40. The Supreme Night

I used to go to the same dame's school with Surabala and play at marriage with her. When I paid visits to her house, her mother would pet me, and setting us side by side would say to her: 'What a lovely pair!'

I was a child then, but I could understand her meaning well enough. The idea became rooted in my mind that I had a special right to Surabala above that of people in general. So it happened that, in the pride of ownership, at times I punished and tormented her; and she, too, fagged for me and bore all my punishments without complaint. The village was wont to praise her beauty; but in the eyes of a young barbarian like me that beauty had no glory;—I knew only that Surabala had been born in her father's house solely to bear my yoke, and that therefore she was the particular object of my neglect.

My father was the land-steward of the Chaudhuris, a family of *zemindars*. It was his plan, as soon as I had learnt to write a good hand, to train me in the work of estate management and secure a rent collectorship for me somewhere. But in my heart I disliked the proposal. Nilratan of our village had run away to Calcutta, had learnt English there, and finally became the *Nazir* of the District Magistrate; *that* was my life's ideal: I was secretly determined to be the Head Clerk of the Judge's Court, even if I could not become the Magistrate's *Nazir*.

I saw that my father always treated these court officers with the greatest respect. I knew from my childhood that they had to be propitiated with gifts of fish, vegetables, and even money. For this reason I had given a seat of high honour in my heart to the court underlings, even to the bailiffs. These are the gods worshipped in our Bengal,—a modern miniature edition of the 330 millions of deities of the Hindu pantheon. For gaining material success, people have more genuine faith in *them* than in the good Ganesh, the giver of success; hence the people now offer to these officers everything that was formerly Ganesh's due.

Fired by the example of Nilratan, I too seized a suitable opportunity and ran away to Calcutta. There I first put up in the house of a village acquaintance, and afterwards got some funds from my father for my education. Thus I carried on my studies regularly.

In addition, I joined political and benevolent societies. I had no doubt whatever that it was urgently necessary for me to give my life suddenly for my country. But I knew not how such a hard task could be carried out. Also no one showed

me the way.

But, nevertheless, my enthusiasm did not abate at all. We country lads had not learnt to sneer at everything like the precocious boys of Calcutta, and hence our faith was very strong. The ‘leaders’ of our associations delivered speeches, and we went begging for subscriptions from door to door in the hot blaze of noon without breaking our fast; or we stood by the roadside distributing hand-bills, or arranged the chairs and benches in the lecture-hall, and, if anybody whispered a word against our leader, we got ready to fight him. For these things the city boys used to laugh at us as provincials.

I had come to Calcutta to be a *Nazir* or a Head Clerk, but I was preparing to become a Mazzini or a Garibaldi.

At this time Surabala’s father and my father laid their heads together to unite us in marriage. I had come to Calcutta at the age of fifteen; Surabala was eight years old then. I was now eighteen, and in my father’s opinion I was almost past the age of marriage. But it was my secret vow to remain unmarried all my life and to die for my country; so I told my father that I would not marry before I had finished my education.

In two or three months I learnt that Surabala had been married to a pleader named Ram Lochan. I was then busy collecting subscriptions for raising fallen India, and this news did not seem worth my thought.

I had matriculated, and was about to appear at the Intermediate Examination, when my father died. I was not alone in the world, but had to maintain my mother and two sisters. I had therefore to leave college and look out for employment. After a good deal of exertion I secured the post of second master in the matriculation school of a small town in the Noakhali District.

I thought, here is just the work for me! By my advice and inspiration I shall train up everyone of my pupils as a general for future India.

I began to work, and then found that the impending examination was a more pressing affair than the future of India. The headmaster got angry whenever I talked of anything outside grammar or algebra. And in a few months my enthusiasm, too, flagged.

I am no genius. In the quiet of the home I may form vast plans; but when I enter the field of work, I have to bear the yoke of the plough on my neck like the Indian bullock, get my tail twisted by my master, break clods all day, patiently and with bowed head, and then at sunset have to be satisfied if I can get any cud to chew. Such a creature has not the spirit to prance and caper.

One of the teachers lived in the school-house, to guard against fires. As I was a bachelor, this work was thrown on me. I lodged in a thatched shed close to the

large cottage in which the school sat.

The school-house stood at some distance from the inhabited portion of the town, and beside a big tank. Around it were betel-nut, cocoa-nut, and *madar* trees, and very near to the school building two large ancient *nim* trees grew close together, and cast a cool shade around.

One thing I have forgotten to mention, and indeed I had not so long considered it worth mentioning. The local Government pleader, Ram Lochan Ray, lived near our school. I also knew that his wife—my early playmate, Surabala—lived with him.

I got acquainted with Ram Lochan Babu. I cannot say whether he knew that I had known Surabala in childhood. I did not think fit to mention the fact at my first introduction to him. Indeed, I did not clearly remember that Surabala had been ever linked with my life in any way.

One holiday I paid a visit to Ram Lochan Babu. The subject of our conversation has gone out of my mind; probably it was the unhappy condition of present-day India. Not that he was very much concerned or heart-broken over the matter; but the subject was such that one could freely pour forth one's sentimental sorrow over it for an hour or two while puffing at one's *hooka*.

While thus engaged, I heard in a side-room the softest possible jingle of bracelets, crackle of dress, and footfall; and I felt certain that two curious eyes were watching me through a small opening of the window.

All at once there flashed upon my memory a pair of eyes,—a pair of large eyes, beaming with trust, simplicity, and girlhood's love,—black pupils,—thick dark eyelashes,—a calm fixed gaze. Suddenly some unseen force squeezed my heart in an iron grip, and it throbbed with intense pain.

I returned to my house, but the pain clung to me. Whether I read, wrote, or did any other work, I could not shake that weight off my heart; a heavy load seemed to be always swinging from my heart-strings.

In the evening, calming myself a little, I began to reflect: 'What ails me?' From within came the question: 'Where is *your* Surabala now?' I replied: 'I gave her up of my free will. Surely I did not expect her to wait for me forever.'

But something kept saying: '*Then* you could have got her merely for the asking. Now you have not the right to look at her even once, do what you will. That Surabala of your boyhood may come very close to you; you may hear the jingle of her bracelets; you may breathe the air embalmed by the essence of her hair,—but there will always be a wall between you two.'

I answered: 'Be it so. What is Surabala to me?'

My heart rejoined: 'Today Surabala is nobody to you. But what might she not

have been to you?’

Ah! That’s true. *What* might she not have been to me? Dearest to me of all things, closer to me than the world besides, the sharer of all my life’s joys and sorrows,—she might have been. And now, she is so distant, so much of a stranger, that to look on her is forbidden, to talk with her is improper, and to think of her is a sin!—While this Ram Lochan, coming suddenly from nowhere, has muttered a few set religious texts, and in one swoop has carried off Surabala from the rest of mankind!

I have not come to preach a new ethical code, or to revolutionise society; I have no wish to tear asunder domestic ties. I am only expressing the exact working of my mind, though it may not be reasonable. I could not by any means banish from my mind the sense that Surabala, reigning there within shelter of Ram Lochan’s home, was mine far more than his. The thought was, I admit, unreasonable and improper,—but it was not unnatural.

Thereafter I could not set my mind to any kind of work. At noon when the boys in my class hummed, when Nature outside simmered in the sun, when the sweet scent of the *nim* blossoms entered the room on the tepid breeze, I then wished,—I know not what I wished for; but this I can say, that I did not wish to pass all my life in correcting the grammar exercises of those future hopes of India.

When school was over, I could not bear to live in my large lonely house; and yet, if anyone paid me a visit, it bored me. In the gloaming as I sat by the tank and listened to the meaningless breeze sighing through the betel-and cocoa-nut palms, I used to muse that human society is a web of mistakes; nobody has the sense to do the right thing at the right time, and when the chance is gone we break our hearts over vain longings.

I could have married Surabala and lived happily. But I must be a Garibaldi,—and I ended by becoming the second master of a village school! And pleader Ram Lochan Ray, who had no special call to be Surabala’s husband,—to whom, before his marriage, Surabala was no wise different from a hundred other maidens,—has very quietly married her, and is earning lots of money as Government pleader; when his dinner is badly cooked he scolds Surabala, and when he is in good humour he gives her a bangle! He is sleek and fat, tidily dressed, free from every kind of worry; *he* never passes his evenings by the tank gazing at the stars and sighing.

Ram Lochan was called away from our town for a few days by a big case elsewhere. Surabala in her house was as lonely as I was in my school building.

I remember it was a Monday. The sky was overcast with clouds from the morning. It began to drizzle at ten o’clock. At the aspect of the heavens our

headmaster closed the school early. All day the black detached clouds began to run about in the sky as if making ready for some grand display. Next day, towards afternoon, the rain descended in torrents, accompanied by storm. As the night advanced the fury of wind and water increased. At first the wind was easterly; gradually it veered, and blew towards the south and south-west.

It was idle to try to sleep on such a night. I remembered that in this terrible weather Surabala was alone in her house. Our school was much more strongly built than her bungalow. Often and often did I plan to invite her to the school-house, while I meant to pass the night alone by the tank. But I could not summon up courage for it.

When it was half-past one in the morning, the roar of the tidal wave was suddenly heard,—the sea was rushing on us! I left my room and ran towards Surabala's house. In the way stood one embankment of our tank, and as I was wading to it the flood already reached my knees. When I mounted the bank, a second wave broke on it. The highest part of the bank was more than seventeen feet above the plain.

As I climbed up the bank, another person reached it from the opposite side. Who she was, every fibre of my body knew at once, and my whole soul was thrilled with the consciousness. I had no doubt that she, too, had recognised me.

On an island some three yards in area stood we two; all else was covered with water.

It was a time of cataclysm; the stars had been blotted out of the sky; all the lights of the earth had been darkened; there would have been no harm if we had held converse *then*. But we could not bring ourselves to utter a word; neither of us made even a formal inquiry after the other's health. Only we stood gazing at the darkness. At our feet swirled the dense, black, wild, roaring torrent of death.

Today Surabala has come to *my* side, leaving the whole world. Today she has none besides *me*. In our far-off childhood this Surabala had come from some dark primeval realm of mystery, from a life in another orb, and stood by my side on this luminous peopled earth; and today, after a wide span of time, she has left that earth, so full of light and human beings, to stand alone by *my* side amidst this terrible desolate gloom of Nature's death-convulsion. The stream of birth had flung that tender bud before me, and the flood of death had wafted the same flower, now in full bloom, to *me* and to none else. One more wave and we shall be swept away from this extreme point of the earth, torn from the stalks on which we now sit apart, and made one in death.

May that wave never come! May Surabala live long and happily, girt round by husband and children, household and kinsfolk! This one night, standing on the

brink of Nature's destruction, I have tasted eternal bliss.

The night wore out, the tempest ceased, the flood abated; without a word spoken, Surabala went back to her house, and I, too, returned to my shed without having uttered a word.

I reflected: True, I have become no *Nazir* or Head Clerk, nor a Garibaldi; I am only the second master of a beggarly school. But one night had for its brief space beamed upon my whole life's course.

That one night, out of all the days and nights of my allotted span, has been the supreme glory of my humble existence.

41. Unwanted

Kiranmayi was the young wife of Sharat. She had been ailing for some time. The doctors advised that change of air would help her. The family was well off and so Sharat and his mother came to Chandernagore with Kiran. The villagers thought that they were fussing too much over her illness.

Kiran recovered from her illness but she was weak. She had nothing to keep herself busy at Chandernagore. There were no neighbours and no friends. She wished to go back home. But Sharat did not agree with her. (He thought that the time of the year was not apt. If they went back to their village, she was likely to get the infection again. He wanted her to wait for another month. There had been usual arguments and counter-arguments between the husband and the wife.

Kiran stopped arguing. She was quiet but miserable and angry. It was a terrific stormy night. There was lightning and there was thunder. The wind was blowing hard.

A shipwrecked Brahmin boy swam across the furious river and came safely to the shore. He found himself in the garden of the bungalow where (Sharat and Kiran were staying. Someone came and told them about the boy. Kiran was a kindhearted woman. She immediately sent dry clothes for the boy to put on. She gave him food to eat. The boy appeared to be sixteen or seventeen years old. He had no moustaches. He had large eyes and long hair. He told Kiran that his name was Nilkanta. He was an orphan and worked with a band of travelling players. The troupe was engaged to give a performance in a nearby house but the ship was caught in a storm. He was a good swimmer and had been able to save himself. He did not know what had happened to the others.

Kiran was delighted. She treated him with affection. Sharat also welcomed the arrival of the boy. He hoped Kiran would have something to do. It would keep her busy. Sharat's mother too was glad. She thought there was merit in looking after a Brahmin boy. Nilkanta too was happy. He had not only escaped death but had got the protection of a rich family.

Kiran was overindulgent and treated Nilkanta lavishly. She gives him Sharat's old shirts and socks. She decked him like a baby. She would ask Nilkanta to tell the story of Nala and Damayanti. The boy sang it with gestures. This pleased Kiran but irritated Sharat.

Nilkanta began to smoke Sharat's hookah in secret. He would take Sharat's silk umbrella and would go round the village proudly making friends. He fondled a dog that would come in and spoil the floor coverings with its muddy paws. He would go with the band of his followers into the mango-orchards and picked unripe mangoes. Several times Sharat cuffed, boxed and whacked him. But it had no effect on Nilkanta because he had been used to worse treatment.

Sharat and his mother began to realise that it was time the boy went away. They felt he had stayed with them too long and if they did to get rid of him soon, his stay would be troublesome. But Kiran was opposed to it. She continued to treat him with affection. He was Kiran's pet.

Now Nilkanta began to undergo psychological changes. He was passing from adolescence into youth. Kiran treated him like a child. One day she asked him to dress like a girl as he used to do earlier. But Nilkanta was embarrassed. They tried to teach Nilkanta to read and write. But Nilkanta only pretended to read. He could not learn anything. Earlier he used to sing the songs mechanically, but now he found meaning in them. He was transported to another world when he sang them.

While Nilkanta was undergoing these psychological changes, the arrival of Sharat's brother Satish changed his life entirely. He experienced frustration that he had never experienced before. Satish was the same age as Kiran. Both of them were good friends. Kiran was delighted. They enjoyed practical jokes and lot of fun. They laughed, they quarreled, they wept and made up again. Kiran's whole attention & time was given to Satish. Nilkanta was completely ignored. Earlier she herself served food to Nilkanta. She enjoyed watching him eat. Nilkanta could eat well. But now he was served by the maid-servant. Nilkanta would not like to eat. He would say he was not hungry. He expected that somehow Kiran would know this and would feed him herself. But no one told Kiran about it. Nilkanta was depressed. He would weep as he lay on his bed till he was asleep.

Nilkanta was convinced that Satish was responsible for his misfortune. He could not express his hostility towards Satish openly. So he tried to do him some harm stealthily.

It was time for the family to return home. Kiran proposed to take Nilkanta with them. But everyone else was opposed to it. So Kiran too had to give in. She called Nilkanta and told him to go back to his village. She spoke gently to him. Nilkanta was moved by her kind words. He burst into tears. Kiran was also sad to think that she had showered her affections on a person whom she would have to leave.

Satish had a fancy inkpot. He loved it. Nilkanta wished to cause Satish some pain. So he stole the inkpot and kept it in his box. When Satish did not find it, he suspected Nilkanta had stolen it. Kiran was not prepared to believe it. Nilkanta was called but he denied having stolen it. Kiran took him to the next room and asked him gently if he had stolen it. Nilkanta covered his face with his hands and wept. Kiran declared that Nilkanta was innocent. She defended him.

Kiran decided to give Nilkanta some clothes and money as a parting present. She went to his room and decided to put her gift in his box. Nilkanta was not there. When she opened the box she found the inkpot at the bottom of it. She was shocked. In the meantime Nilkanta came into the room. Kiran did not see him. But he saw that Kiran had discovered the theft. In fact he had not stolen it out of greed. He just wanted to do some harm to Satish. He meant to throw it into the Ganga. He ran away and disappeared. There was no sign of him. Kiran kept the discovery of the inkpot to herself. On their way home she threw it into the Ganga.

42. The Victory

She was the Princess Ajita. And the court poet of King Narayan had never seen her. On the day he recited a new poem to the king he would raise his voice just to that pitch which could be heard by unseen hearers in the screened balcony high above the hall. He sent up his song towards the star-land out of his reach, where, circled with light, the planet who ruled his destiny shone unknown and out of ken.

He would espy some shadow moving behind the veil. A tinkling sound would come to his ear from afar, and would set him dreaming of the ankles whose tiny golden bells sang at each step. Ah, the rosy red tender feet that walked the dust of the earth like God's mercy on the fallen! The poet had placed them on the altar of his heart, where he wove his songs to the tune of those golden bells. Doubt never arose in his mind as to whose shadow it was that moved behind the screen, and whose anklets they were that sang to the time of his beating heart.

Manjari, the maid of the princess, passed by the poet's house on her way to the river, and she never missed a day to have a few words with him on the sly. When she found the road deserted, and the shadow of dusk on the land, she would boldly enter his room, and sit at the corner of his carpet. There was a suspicion of an added care in the choice of the colour of her veil, in the setting of the flower in her hair.

People smiled and whispered at this, and they were not to blame. For Shekhar the poet never took the trouble to hide the fact that these meetings were a pure joy to him.

The meaning of her name was the spray of flowers. One must confess that for an ordinary mortal it was sufficient in its sweetness. But Shekhar made his own addition to this name, and called her the Spray of Spring Flowers. And ordinary mortals shook their heads and said, Ah, me!

In the spring songs that the poet sang the praise of the spray of spring flowers was conspicuously reiterated; and the king winked and smiled at him when he heard it, and the poet smiled in answer.

The king would put him the question; "Is it the business of the bee merely to hum in the court of the spring?"

The poet would answer; "No, but also to sip the honey of the spray of spring

flowers."

And they all laughed in the king's hall. And it was rumoured that the Princess Akita also laughed at her maid's accepting the poet's name for her, and Manjari felt glad in her heart.

Thus truth and falsehood mingle in life—and to what God builds man adds his own decoration.

Only those were pure truths which were sung by the poet. The theme was Krishna, the lover god, and Radha, the beloved, the Eternal Man and the Eternal Woman, the sorrow that comes from the beginning of time, and the joy without end. The truth of these songs was tested in his inmost heart by everybody from the beggar to the king himself. The poet's songs were on the lips of all. At the merest glimmer of the moon and the faintest whisper of the summer breeze his songs would break forth in the land from windows and courtyards, from sailing-boats, from shadows of the wayside trees, in numberless voices.

Thus passed the days happily. The poet recited, the king listened, the hearers applauded, Manjari passed and repassed by the poet's room on her way to the river—the shadow flitted behind the screened balcony, and the tiny golden bells tinkled from afar.

Just then set forth from his home in the south a poet on his path of conquest. He came to King Narayan, in the kingdom of Amarapur. He stood before the throne, and uttered a verse in praise of the king. He had challenged all the court poets on his way, and his career of victory had been unbroken.

The king received him with honour, and said: "Poet, I offer you welcome."

Pundarik, the poet, proudly replied : "Sir, I ask for war."

Shekhar, the court poet of the king did not know how the battle of the muse was to be waged. He had no sleep at night. The mighty figure of the famous Pundarik, his sharp nose curved like a scimitar, and his proud head tilted on one side, haunted the poet's vision in the dark.

With a trembling heart Shekhar entered the arena in the morning. The theatre was filled with the crowd.

The poet greeted his rival with a smile and a bow. Pundarik returned it with a slight toss of his head, and turned his face towards his circle of adoring followers with a meaning smile. Shekhar cast his glance towards the screened balcony high above, and saluted his lady in his mind, saying! "If I am the winner at the combat today, my lady, thy victorious name shall be glorified."

The trumpet sounded. The great crowd stood up, shouting victory to the king. The king, dressed in an ample robe of white, slowly came into the hall like a floating cloud of autumn, and sat on his throne.

Pundarik stood up, and the vast hall became still. With his head raised high and chest expanded, he began in his thundering voice to recite the praise of King Narayan. His words burst upon the walls of the hall like breakers of the sea, and seemed to rattle against the ribs of the listening crowd. The skill with which he gave varied meanings to the name Narayan, and wove each letter of it through the web of his verses in all mariner of combinations, took away the breath of his amazed hearers.

For some minutes after he took his seat his voice continued to vibrate among the numberless pillars of the king's court and in thousands of speechless hearts. The learned professors who had come from distant lands raised their right hands, and cried, Bravo!

The king threw a glance on Shekhar's face, and Shekhar in answer raised for a moment his eyes full of pain towards his master, and then stood up like a stricken deer at bay. His face was pale, his bashfulness was almost that of a woman, his slight youthful figure, delicate in its outline, seemed like a tensely strung vina ready to break out in music at the least touch.

His head was bent, his voice was low, when he began. The first few verses were almost inaudible. Then he slowly raised his head, and his clear sweet voice rose into the sky like a quivering flame of fire. He began with the ancient legend of the kingly line lost in the haze of the past, and brought it down through its long course of heroism and matchless generosity to the present age. He fixed his gaze on the king's face, and all the vast and unexpressed love of the people for the royal house rose like incense in his song, and enwreathed the throne on all sides. These were his last words when, trembling, he took his seat: "My master, I may be beaten in play of words, but not in my love for thee,"

Tears filled the eyes of the hearers, and the stone walls shook with cries of victory.

Mocking this popular outburst of feeling, with an august shake of his head and a contemptuous sneer, Pundarik stood up, and flung this question to the assembly; "What is there superior to words?" In a moment the hall lapsed into silence again.

Then with a marvellous display of learning, he proved that the Word was in the beginning, that the Word was God. He piled up quotations from scriptures, and built a high altar for the Word to be seated above all that there is in heaven and in earth. He repeated that question in his mighty voice: "What is there superior to words?"

Proudly he looked around him. None dared to accept his challenge, and he slowly took his seat like a lion who had just made a full meal of its victim. The

pandits shouted, Bravo! The king remained silent with wonder, and the poet Shekhar felt himself of no account by the side of this stupendous learning. The assembly broke up for that day.

Next day Shekhar began his song. It was of that day when the pipings of love's flute startled for the first time the hushed air of the Vrinda forest. The shepherd women did not know who was the player or whence came the music. Sometimes it seemed to come from the heart of the south wind, and sometimes from the straying clouds of the hilltops. It came with a message of tryst from the land of the sunrise, and it floated from the verge of sunset with its sigh of sorrow. The stars seemed to be the stops of the instrument that flooded the dreams of the night with melody. The music seemed to burst all at once from all sides, from fields and groves, from the shady lanes and lonely roads, from the melting blue of the sky, from the shimmering green of the grass. They neither knew its meaning nor could they find words to give utterance to the desire of their hearts. Tears filled their eyes, and their life seemed to long for a death that would be its consummation.

Shekhar forgot his audience, forgot the trial of his strength with a rival. He stood alone amid his thoughts that rustled and quivered round him like leaves in a summer breeze, and sang the Song of the Flute. He had in his mind the vision of an image that had taken its shape from a shadow, and the echo of a faint tinkling sound of a distant footstep.

He took his seat. His hearers trembled with the sadness of an indefinable delight, immense and vague, and they forgot to applaud him. As this feeling died away Pundarik stood up before the throne and challenged his rival to define who was this Lover and who was the Beloved. He arrogantly looked around him, he smiled at his followers and then put the question again: "Who is Krishna, the lover, and who is Radha, the beloved?"

Then he began to analyse the roots of those names,—and various interpretations of their meanings. He brought before the bewildered audience all the intricacies of the different schools of metaphysics with consummate skill. Each letter of those names he divided from its fellow, and then pursued them with a relentless logic till they fell to the dust in confusion, to be caught up again and restored to a meaning never before imagined by the subtlest of word-mongers.

The pandits were in ecstasy; they applauded vociferously; and the crowd followed them, deluded into the certainty that they had witnessed, that day, the last shred of the curtains of Truth torn to pieces before their eyes by a prodigy of intellect. The performance of his tremendous feat so delighted them that they

forgot to ask themselves if there was any truth behind it after all.

The king's mind was overwhelmed with wonder. The atmosphere was completely cleared of all illusion of music, and the vision of the world around seemed to be changed from its freshness of tender green to the solidity of a high road levelled and made hard with crushed stones.

To the people assembled their own poet appeared a mere boy in comparison with this giant, who walked with such ease, knocking down difficulties at each step in the world of words and thoughts. It became evident to them for the first time that the poems Shekhar wrote were absurdly simple, and it must be a mere accident that they did not write them themselves. They were neither new, nor difficult, nor instructive, nor necessary.

The king tried to goad his poet with keen glances, silently inciting him to make a final effort. But Shekhar took no notice, and remained fixed to his seat.

The king in anger came down from his throne—took off his pearl chain and put it on Pundarik's head. Everybody in the hall cheered. From the upper balcony came a slight sound of the movements of rustling robes and waist-chains hung with golden bells. Shekhar rose from his seat and left the hall.

It was a dark night of waning moon. The poet Shekhar took down his MSS. from his shelves and heaped them on the floor. Some of them contained his earliest writings, which he had almost forgotten. He turned over the pages, reading passages here and there. They all seemed to him poor and trivial—mere words and childish rhymes!

One by one he tore his books to fragments, and threw them into a vessel containing fire, and said: "To thee, to thee, O my beauty, my fire! Thou hast been burning in my heart all these futile years. If my life were a piece of gold it would come out of its trial brighter, but it is a trodden turf of grass, and nothing remains of it but this handful of ashes."

The night wore on. Shekhar opened wide his windows. He spread upon his bed the white flowers that he loved, the jasmines, tuberoses and chrysanthemums, and brought into his bedroom all the lamps he had in his house and lighted them. Then mixing with honey the juice of some poisonous root he drank it and lay down on his bed.

Golden anklets tinkled in the passage outside the door, and a subtle perfume came into the room with the breeze.

The poet, with his eyes shut, said: "My lady, have you taken pity upon your servant at last and come to see him?"

The answer came in a sweet voice, "My poet, I have come."

Shekhar opened his eyes—and saw before his bed the figure of a woman.

His sight was dim and blurred. And it seemed to him that the image made of a shadow that he had ever kept throned in the secret shrine of his heart had come into the outer world in his last moment to gaze upon his face.

The woman said; "I am the Princess Ajita."

The poet with a great effort sat up on his bed.

The princess whispered into his ear: "The king has not done you justice. It was you who won at the combat, my poet, and I have come to crown you with the crown of victory."

She took the garland of flowers from her own neck, and put it on his hair, and the poet fell down upon his bed stricken by death.

43. Vision

I When I was a very young wife, I gave birth to a dead child, and came near to death myself. I recovered strength very slowly, and my eyesight became weaker and weaker.

My husband at this time was studying medicine. He was not altogether sorry to have a chance of testing his medical knowledge on me. So he began to treat my eyes himself.

My elder brother was reading for his law examination. One day he came to see me, and was alarmed at my condition.

"What are you doing?" he said to my husband. "You are ruining Kumo's eyes. You ought to consult a good doctor at once."

My husband said irritably: "Why! What can a good doctor do more than I am doing? The case is quite a simple one, and the remedies are all well known."

Dada answered with scorn: "I suppose you think there is no difference between you and a Professor in your own Medical College."

My husband replied angrily: "If you ever get married, and there is a dispute about your wife's property, you won't take my advice about Law. Why, then, do you now come advising me about Medicine?"

While they were quarrelling, I was saying to myself that it was always the poor grass that suffered most when two kings went to war. Here was a dispute going on between these two, and I had to bear the brunt of it.

It also seemed to me very unfair that, when my family had given me in marriage, they should interfere afterwards. After all, my pleasure and pain are my husband's concern, not theirs.

From that day forward, merely over this trifling matter of my eyes, the bond between my husband and *Dada* was strained.

To my surprise one afternoon, while my husband was away, *Dada* brought a doctor in to see me. He examined my eyes very carefully, and looked grave. He said that further neglect would be dangerous. He wrote out a prescription, and *Dada* for the medicine at once. When the strange doctor had gone, I implored my *Dada* not to interfere. I was sure that only evil would come from the stealthy visits of a doctor.

I was surprised at myself for plucking up courage speak to my brother like that.

I had always hitherto been afraid of him. I am sure also that *Dada* was surprised at my boldness. He kept silence for a while, and then said to me: "Very well, Kumo. I won't call in the doctor any more. But when the medicine comes you must take it."

Dada then went away. The medicine came from chemist. I took it—bottles, powders, prescriptions and all—and threw it down the well!

My husband had been irritated by *Dada*'s interference, and he began to treat my eyes with greater diligence than ever. He tried all sorts of remedies. I bandaged my eyes as he told me, I wore his coloured glasses, I put in his drops, I took all his powders. I even drank the cod-liver oil he gave me, though my gorge rose against it.

Each time he came back from the hospital, he would ask me anxiously how I felt; and I would answer: "Oh! much better." Indeed I became an expert in self-delusion. When I found that the water in my eyes was still increasing, I would console myself with the thought that it was a good thing to get rid of so much bad fluid; and, when the flow of water in my eyes decreased, I was elated at my husband's skill.

But after a while the agony became unbearable. My eyesight faded away, and I had continual headaches day and night. I saw how much alarmed my husband was getting. I gathered from his manner that he was casting about for a pretext to call in a doctor. So I hinted that it might be as well to call one in.

That he was greatly relieved, I could see. He called in an English doctor that very day. I do not know what talk they had together, but I gathered that the Sahib had spoken very sharply to my husband.

He remained silent for some time after the doctor had gone. I took his hands in mine, and said: "What an ill-mannered brute that was! Why didn't you call in an Indian doctor? That would have been much better. Do you think that man knows better than you do about my eyes?"

My husband was very silent for a moment, and then said with a broken voice: "Kumo, your eyes must be operated on."

I pretended to be vexed with him for concealing the fact from me so long.

"Here you have known this all the time," said I, "and yet you have said nothing about it! Do you think I am such a baby as to be afraid of an operation?"

At that he regained his good spirits: "There are very few men," said he, "who are heroic enough to look forward to an operation without shrinking."

I laughed at him: "Yes, that is so. Men are heroic only before their wives!"

He looked at me gravely, and said: "You are perfectly right. We men are dreadfully vain."

I laughed away his seriousness: "Are you sure you can beat us women even in vanity?"

When *Dada* came, I took him aside: "*Dada*, that treatment your doctor recommended would have done me a world of good; only unfortunately. I mistook the mixture for the lotion. And since the day I made the mistake, my eyes have grown steadily worse; and now an operation is needed."

Dada said to me: "You were under your husband's treatment, and that is why I gave up coming to visit you."

"No," I answered. "In reality, I was secretly treating myself in accordance with your doctor's directions."

Oh! What lies we women have to tell! When we are mothers, we tell lies to pacify our children; and when we are wives, we tell lies to pacify the fathers of our children. We are never free from this necessity.

My deception had the effect of bringing about a better feeling between my husband and *Dada*. *Dada* blamed himself for asking me to keep a secret from my husband: and my husband regretted that he had not taken my brother's advice at the first.

At last, with the consent of both, an English doctor came, and operated on my left eye. That eye, however, was too weak to bear the strain; and the last flickering glimmer of light went out. Then the other eye gradually lost itself in darkness.

One day my husband came to my bedside. "I cannot brazen it out before you any longer," said he, "Kumo, it is I who have ruined your eyes."

I felt that his voice was choking with tears, and so I took up his right hand in both of mine and said: "Why! you did exactly what was right. You have dealt only with that which was your very own. Just imagine, if some strange doctor had come and taken away my eyesight. What consolation should I have had then? But now I can feel that all has happened for the best; and my great comfort is to know that it is at your hands I have lost my eyes. When Ramchandra found one lotus too few with which to worship God, he offered both his eyes in place of the lotus. And I hate dedicated my eyes to my God. From now, whenever you see something that is a joy to you, then you must describe it to me; and I will feed upon your words as a sacred gift left over from your vision."

I do not mean, of course, that I said all this there and then, for it is impossible to speak these things an the spur of the moment. But I used to think over words like these for days and days together. And when I was very depressed, or if at any time the light of my devotion became dim, and I pitied my evil fate, then I made my mind utter these sentences, one by one, as a child repeats a story that is

told. And so I could breathe once more the serener air of peace and love.

At the very time of our talk together, I said enough to show my husband what was in my heart.

"Kumo," he said to me, "the mischief I have done by my folly can never be made good. But I can do one thing. I can ever remain by your side, and try to make up for your want of vision as much as is in my power."

"No," said I. "That will never do. I shall not ask you to turn your house into an hospital for the blind. There is only one thing to be done, you must marry again."

As I tried to explain to him that this was necessary, my voice broke a little. I coughed, and tried to hide my emotion, but he burst out saying: "Kumo, I know I am a fool, and a braggart, and all that, but I am not a villain! If ever I marry again, I swear to you—I swear to you the most solemn oath by my family god, Gopinath—may that most hated of all sins, the sin of parricide, fall on my head!"

Ah! I should never, never have allowed him to swear that dreadful oath. But tears were choking my voice, and I could not say a word for insufferable joy. I hid my blind face in my pillows, and sobbed, and sobbed again. At last, when the first flood of my tears was over, I drew his head down to my breast.

"Ah I" said I, "why did you take such a terrible oath? Do you think I asked you to marry again for your own sordid pleasure? No! I was thinking of myself, for she could perform those services which were mine to give you when I had my sight."

"Services!" said he, "services! Those can be done by servants. Do you think I am mad enough to bring a slave into my house, and bid her share the throne with this my Goddess?"

As he said the word "Goddess," he held up my face in his hands, and placed a kiss between my brows. At that moment the third eye of divine wisdom was opened, where he kissed me, and verily I had a consecration.

I said in my own mind: "It is well. I am no longer able to serve him in the lower world of household cares. But I shall rise to a higher region. I shall bring down blessings from above. No more lies! No more deceptions for me! All the littlenesses and hypocrisies of my former life shall be banished forever!"

That day, the whole day through, I felt a conflict going on within me. The joy of the thought, that after this solemn oath it was impossible for my husband to marry again, fixed its roots deep in my heart, and I could not tear them out. But the new Goddess, who had taken her new throne in me, said: "The time might come when it would be good for your husband to break his oath and marry again." But the woman, who was within me, said: "That may be; but all the same an oath is an oath, and there is no way out." The Goddess, who was within me,

answered: "That is no reason why you should exult over it." But the woman, who was within me, replied: "What you say is quite true, no doubt; all the same he has taken his oath." And the same story went on again and again. At last the Goddess frowned in silence, and the darkness of a horrible fear came down upon me.

My repentant husband would not let the servants do my work; he must do it all himself. At first it gave me unbounded delight to be dependent on him thus for every little thing. It was a means of keeping him by my side, and my desire to have him with me had become intense since my blindness. That share of his presence, which my eyes had lost, my other senses craved. When he was absent from my side, I would feel as if I were hanging in mid-air, and had lost my hold of all things tangible.

Formerly, when my husband came back late from the hospital, I used to open my window and gaze at the road. That road was the link which connected his world with mine. Now when I had lost that link through my blindness, all my body would go out to seek him. The bridge that united us had given way, and there was now this unsurpassable chasm. When he left my side the gulf seemed to yawn wide open. I could only wait for the time when he should cross back again from his own shore to mine.

But such intense longing and such utter dependence can never be good. A wife is a burden enough to a man, in all conscience, and to add to it the burden of this blindness was to make his life unbearable. I vowed that I would suffer alone, and never wrap my husband round in the folds of my all-pervading darkness.

Within an incredibly short space of time I managed to train myself to do all my household duties by the help of touch and sound and smell. In fact I soon found that I could get on with greater skill than before. For sight often distracts rather than helps us. And so it came to pass that, when these roving eyes of mine could do their work no longer, all the other senses took up their several duties with quietude and completeness.

When I had gained experience by constant practice, I would not let my husband do any more household duties for me. He complained bitterly at first that I was depriving him of his penance.

This did not convince me. Whatever he might say, I could feel that he had a real sense of relief when these household duties were over. To serve daily a wife who is blind can never make up the life of a man.

II My husband at last had finished his medical course. He went away from Calcutta to a small town to practise as a doctor. There in the

country I felt with joy, through all my blindness, that I was restored to the arms of my mother. I had left my village birthplace for Calcutta when I was eight years old. Since then ten years had passed away, and in the great city the memory of my village home had grown dim. As long as I had eyesight, Calcutta with its busy life screened from view the memory of my early days. But when I lost my eyesight I knew for the first time that Calcutta allured only the eyes: it could not fill the mind. And now, in my blindness, the scenes of my childhood shone out once more, like stars that appear one by one in the evening sky at the end of the day.

It was the beginning of November when we left Calcutta for Harsingpur. The place was new to me, but the scents and sounds of the countryside pressed round and embraced me. The morning breeze coming fresh from the newly ploughed land, the sweet and tender smell of the flowering mustard, the shepherd-boy's flute sounding in the distance, even the creaking noise of the bullock-cart, as it groaned over the broken village road, filled my world with delight. The memory of my past life, with all its ineffable fragrance and sound, became a living present to me, and my blind eyes could not tell me I was wrong. I went back, and lived over again my childhood. Only one thing was absent: my mother was not with me.

I could see my home with the large peepul trees growing along the edge of the village pool. I could picture in my mind's eye my old grandmother seated on the ground with her thin wisps of hair untied, warming her back in the sun as she made the little round lentil balls to be dried and used for cooking. But somehow I could not recall the songs she used to croon to herself in her weak and quavering voice. In the evening, whenever I heard the lowing of cattle, I could almost watch the figure of my mother going round the sheds with lighted lamp in her hand. The smell of the wet fodder and the pungent smoke of the straw fire would enter into my very heart. And in the distance I seemed to hear the clanging of the temple bell wafted up by the breeze from the river bank.

Calcutta, with all its turmoil and gossip, curdles the heart. There, all the beautiful duties of life lose their freshness and innocence. I remember one day, when a friend of mine came in, and said to me: "Kumo, why don't you feel angry? If I had been treated like you by my husband, I would never look upon his face again."

She tried to make me indignant, because he had been so long calling in a doctor.

"My blindness," said I, "was itself a sufficient evil. Why should I make it

worse by allowing hatred to grow up against my husband?"

My friend shook her head in great contempt, when she heard such old-fashioned talk from the lips of a mere chit of a girl. She went away in disdain. But whatever might be my answer at the time, such words as these left their poison; and the venom was never wholly got out of the soul, when once they had been uttered.

So you see Calcutta, with its never-ending gossip, does harden the heart. But when I came back to the country all my earlier hopes and faiths, all that I held true in life during childhood, became fresh and bright once more. God came to me, and filled my heart and my world. I bowed to Him, and said: "It is well that Thou have taken away my eyes. Thou art with me."

Ah! But I said more than was right. It was a presumption to say: "Thou art with me." All we can say is this: "I must be true to Thee." Even when nothing is left for us, still we have to go on living.

III We passed a few happy months together. My husband gained some reputation in his profession as a doctor. And money came with it.

But there is a mischief in money. I cannot point to anyone event; but, because the blind have keener perceptions than other people, I could discern the change which came over my husband along with the increase of wealth.

He had a keen sense of justice when he was younger, and had often told me of his great desire to help the poor when once he obtained a practice of his own. He had a noble contempt for those in his profession who would not feel the pulse of a poor patient before collecting his fee. But now I noticed a difference. He had become strangely hard. Once when a poor woman came, and begged him, out of charity, to save the life of her only child, he bluntly refused. And when I implored him myself to help her, he did his work perfunctorily.

While we were less rich my husband disliked sharp practice in money matters. He was scrupulously honourable in such things. But since he had got a large account at the bank he was often closeted for hours with some scamp of a landlord's agent, for purposes which clearly boded no good.

Where has he drifted? What has become of this husband of mine,—the husband I knew before I was blind; the husband who kissed me that day between my brows, and enshrined me on the throne of a Goddess? Those whom a sudden gust of passion brings down to the dust can rise up again with a new strong impulse of goodness. But those who, day by day, become dried up in the very fibre of their moral being; those who by some outer parasitic growth choke the

inner life by slow degrees,—such wench one day a deadness which knows no healing.

The separation caused by blindness is the merest physical trifle. But, ah! It suffocates me to find that he is no longer with me, where he stood with me in that hour when we both knew that I was blind. That is a separation indeed!

I, with my love fresh and my faith unbroken, have kept to the shelter of my heart's inner shrine. But my husband has left the cool shade of those things that are ageless and unfading. He is fast disappearing into the barren, waterless waste in his mad thirst for gold.

Sometimes the suspicion comes to me that things not so bad as they seem: that perhaps I exaggerate because I am blind. It may be that, if my eyesight were unimpaired, I should have accepted world as I found it. This, at any rate, was the light in which my husband looked at all my moods and fancies.

One day an old Musalman came to the house. He asked my husband to visit his little grand-daughter. I could hear the old man say: "Baba, I am a poor man; but come with me, and Allah will do you good." My husband answered coldly: "What Allah will do won't help matters; I want to know what you can do for me."

When I heard it, I wondered in my mind why God had not made me deaf as well as blind. The old man heaved a deep sigh, and departed. I sent my maid to fetch him to my room. I met him at the door of the inner apartment, and put some money into his hand.

"Please take this from me," said I, "for your little grand-daughter, and get a trustworthy doctor to look after her. And-pray for my husband."

But the whole of that day I could take no food at all. In the afternoon, when my husband got up from sleep, he asked me: "Why do you look so pale?"

I was about to say, as I used to do in the past: "Oh! It's nothing"; but those days of deception were over, and I spoke to him plainly.

"I have been hesitating," I said, "for days together to tell you something. It has been hard to think out what exactly it was I wanted to say. Even now I may not be able to explain what I had in my mind. But I am sure you know what has happened. Our lives have drifted apart."

My husband laughed in a forced manner, and said: "Change is the law of nature."

I said to him: "I know that. But there are some things that are eternal."

Then he became serious.

"There are many women," said he, "who have a real cause for sorrow. There are some whose husbands do not earn money. There are others whose husbands

do not love them. But you are making yourself wretched about nothing at all."

Then it became clear to me that my very blindness had conferred on me the power of seeing a world which is beyond all change. Yes! It is true. I am not like other women. And my husband will never understand me.

IV

Our two lives went on with their dull routine for some time. Then there was a break in the monotony. An aunt of my husband came to pay us a visit.

The first thing she blurted out after our first greeting was this: "Well, Krum, it's a great pity you have become blind; but why do you impose your own affliction on your husband? You must get him to another wife."

There was an awkward pause. If my husband had only said something in jest, or laughed in her face, all would have been over. But he stammered and hesitated, and said at last in a nervous, stupid way: "Do you really think so? Really, Aunt, you shouldn't talk like that"

His aunt appealed to me. "Was I wrong, Kumo?"

I laughed a hollow laugh.

"Had not you better," said I, "consult someone more competent to decide? The pickpocket never asks permission from the man whose pocket he is going to pick."

"You are quite right," she replied blandly. "Abinash, my dear, let us have our little conference in private. What do you say to that?"

After a few days my husband asked her, in my presence, if she knew of any girl of a decent family who could come and help me in my household work. He knew quite well that I needed no help. I kept silence.

"Oh! There are heaps of them," replied his aunt. "My cousin has a daughter who is just of the marriageable age, and as nice a girl as you could wish. Her people would be only too glad to secure you as a husband."

Again there came from him that forced, hesitating laugh, and he said: "But I never mentioned marriage."

"How could you expect," asked his aunt, "a girl of decent family to come and live in your house without marriage?"

He had to admit that this was reasonable, and remained nervously silent.

I stood alone within the closed doors of my blindness after he had gone, and called upon my God and prayed: "O God, save my husband."

When I was coming out of the household shrine from my morning worship a few days later, his aunt took hold of both my hands warmly.

"Kumo, here is the girl," said she, "We were speaking about the other day. Her name is Hemangini. She will be delighted to meet you. Hemo, come here and be introduced to your sister."

My husband entered the room at the same moment. He feigned surprise when he saw the strange girl, and was about to retire. But his aunt said: "Abinash, my dear, what are you running away for? There is no need to do that. Here is my cousin's daughter, Hemangini, come to see you. Hemo, make your bow to him."

As if taken quite by surprise, he began to ply his aunt with questions about the when and why and how of the new arrival.

I saw the hollowness of the whole thing, and took Hemangini by the hand and led her to my own room. I gently stroked her face and arms and hair, and found that she was about fifteen years old, and very beautiful.

As I felt her face, she suddenly burst out laughing and said: "Why! What are you doing? Are you hypnotising me?"

That sweet ringing laughter of hers swept away in a moment all the dark clouds that stood between us. I threw my right arm about her neck.

"Dear one," said I, "I am trying to see you." And again I stroked her soft face with my left hand.

"Trying to see me?" she said, with a new burst of laughter. "Am I like a vegetable marrow, grown in your garden, that you want to feel me all round to see how soft I am?"

I suddenly bethought me that she did not know I had lost my sight.

"Sister, I am blind," said I.

She was silent. I could feel her big young eyes, full of curiosity, peering into my face. I knew they were full of pity. Then she grew thoughtful and puzzled, and said, after a short pause: "Oh! I see now. That was the reason your husband invited his aunt to come and stay here."

"No!" I replied, "You are quite mistaken. He did not ask her to come. She came of her own accord."

Hemangini went off into a peal of laughter. "That's just like my aunt," said she. "Oh I wasn't it nice of her to come without any invitation? But now she's come, you won't get her to move for some time, I can assure you!"

Then she paused, and looked puzzled.

"But why did father send me?" she asked. "Can you tell me that?"

The aunt had come into the room while we were talking. Hemangini said to her: "When are you thinking of going back, Aunt?"

The aunt looked very much upset.

"What a question to ask!" said she, "I've never seen such a restless body as you. We've only just come, and you ask when we're going back!"

"It is all very well for you," Hemangini said, "for this house belongs to your near relations. But what about me? I tell you plainly I can't stop here." And then

she held my hand and said: "What do you think, dear?"

I drew her to my heart, but said nothing. The aunt was in a great difficulty. She felt the situation was getting beyond her control; so she proposed that she and her niece should go out together to bathe.

"No! We two will go together," said Hemangini, clinging to me. The aunt gave in, fearing opposition if she tried to drag her away.

Going down to the river Hemangini asked me: "Why don't you have children?"

I was startled by her question, and answered: "How can I tell? My God has not given me any. That is the reason."

"No! That's not the reason," said Hemangini quickly. "You must have committed some sin. Look at my aunt. She is childless. It must be because her heart has some wickedness. But what wickedness is in your heart?"

The words hurt me. I have no solution to offer for the problem of evil. I sighed deeply, and said in the silence of my soul: "My God! Thou knowest the reason."

"Gracious goodness," cried Hemangini, "what are you sighing for? No one ever takes me seriously."

And her laughter pealed across the river.

V

I found out after this that there were constant interruptions in my husband's professional duties. He refused all calls from a distance, and would hurry away from his patients, even when they were close at hand.

Formerly it was only during the mid-day meals and at night-time that he could come into the inner apartment. But now, with unnecessary anxiety for his aunt's comfort, he began to visit her at all hours of the day. I knew at once that he had come to her room, when I heard her shouting for Hemangini to bring in a glass of water. At first the girl would do what she was told; but later on she refused altogether.

Then the aunt would call, in an endearing voice: "Hemo! Hemo! Hemangini." But the girl would cling to me with an impulse of pity. A sense of dread and sadness would keep her silent. Sometimes she would shrink towards me like a hunted thing, who scarcely knew what was coming.

About this time my brother came down from Calcutta to visit me. I knew how keen his powers of observation were, and what a hard judge he was. I feared my husband would be put on his defence, and have to stand his trial before him. So I endeavoured to hide the true situation behind a mask of noisy cheerfulness. But I am afraid I overdid the part: it was unnatural for me.

My husband began to fidget openly, and asked bow long my brother was going to stay. At last his impatience became little short of insulting, and my brother had no help for it but to leave. Before going he placed his hand on my head, and kept it there for some time. I noticed that his hand shook, and a tear fell from his eyes, as he silently gave me his blessing.

I well remember that it was an evening in April, and a market-day. People who had come into the town were going back home from market. There was the feeling of an impending storm in the air; the smell of the wet earth and the moisture in the wind were all-pervading. I never keep a lighted lamp in my bedroom, when I am alone, lest my clothes should catch fire, or some accident happen. I sat on the floor in my dark room, and called upon the God of my blind world.

"O my Lord," I cried, "Thy face is hidden. I cannot see. I am blind. I hold tight this broken rudder of a heart till my hands bleed. The waves have become too strong for me. How long wilt thou try me, my God, how long?"

I kept my head prone upon the bedstead and began to sob. As I did so, I felt the bedstead move a little. The next moment Hemangini was by my side. She clung

to my neck, and wiped my tears away silently. I do not know why she had been waiting that evening in the inner room, or why she had been lying alone there in the dusk. She asked me no question. She said no word. She simply placed her cool hand on my forehead, and kissed me, and departed.

The next morning Hemangini said to her aunt in my presence : "If you want to stay on, you can. But I don't. I'm going away home with our family servant."

The aunt said there was no need for her to go alone, for she was going away also. Then smilingly and mincingly she brought out, from a plush case, a ring set with pearls.

"Look, Hemo," said she, "what a beautiful ring my Abinash brought for you."

Hemangini snatched the ring from her hand.

"Look, Aunt," she answered quickly, "just see how splendidly I aim." And she flung the ring into the tank outside the window.

The aunt, overwhelmed with alarm, vexation, and surprise, bristled like a hedgehog. She turned to me, and held me by the hand.

"Kumo," she repeated again and again, "don't say a word about this childish freak to Abinash. He would be fearfully vexed."

I assured her that she need not fear. Not a word would reach him about it from my lips.

The next day before starting for home Hemangini embraced me, and said: "Dearest, keep me in mind; do not forget me."

I stroked her face over and over with my fingers, and said: "Sister, the blind have long memories."

I drew her head towards me, and kissed her hair and her forehead. My world suddenly became grey. All the beauty and laughter and tender youth, which had nestled so close to me, vanished when Hemangini departed. I went groping about with arms outstretched, seeking to find out what was left in my deserted world.

My husband came in later. He affected a great relief now that they were gone, but it was exaggerated and empty. He pretended that his aunt's visit had kept him away from work.

Hitherto there had been only the one barrier of blindness between me and my husband. Now another barrier was added,—this deliberate silence about Hemangini. He feigned utter indifference, but I knew he was having letters about her.

It was early in May. My maid entered my room one morning, and asked me: "What is all this preparation going on at the landing on the river? Where is Master going?"

I knew there was something impending, but I said to the maid: "I can't say."

The maid did not dare to ask me any more questions. She sighed, and went away.

Late that night my husband came to me.

"I have to visit a patient in the country," said he. "I shall have to start very early tomorrow morning, and I may have to be away for two or three days."

I got up from my bed. I stood before him, and cried aloud: "Why are you telling me lies?"

My husband stammered out: "What—what lies have I told you?"

I said: "You are going to get married."

He remained silent. For some moments there was no sound in the room. Then I broke the silence: "Answer me," I cried. "Say, yes."

He answered, "Yes," like a feeble echo.

I shouted out with a loud voice: "No! I shall never allow you. I shall save you from this great disaster, this dreadful sin. If I fail in this, then why am I your wife, and why did I ever worship my God?"

The room remained still as a stone. I dropped on the floor, and clung to my husband's knees.

"What have I done?" I asked. "Where have I been lacking? Tell me truly. Why do you want another wife?"

My husband said slowly: "I will tell you the truth. I am afraid of you. Your blindness has enclosed you in its fortress, and I have now no entrance. To me you are no longer a woman. You are awful as my God. I cannot live my everyday life with you. I want a woman—just an ordinary woman—whom I can be free to chide and coax and pet and scold."

Oh, tear open my heart and see! What am I else but that,—just an ordinary woman? I am the same girl that I was when I was newlywed, a girl with all her need to believe, to confide, to worship.

I do not recollect exactly the words that I uttered. I only remember that I said: "If I be a true wife, then, may God be my witness, you shall never do this wicked deed, you shall never break your oath. Before you commit such sacrilege, either I shall become a widow, or Hemangini shall die."

Then I fell down on the floor in a swoon. When I came to myself, it was still dark. The birds were silent. My husband had gone.

All that day I sat at my worship in the sanctuary at the household shrine. In the evening a fierce storm, with thunder and lightning and rain, swept down upon the house and shook it. As I crouched before the shrine, I did not ask my God to save my husband from the storm, though he must have been at that time in peril on the river. I prayed that whatever might happen to me, my husband might be

saved from this great sin.

Night passed. The whole of the next day I kept my seat at worship. When it was evening there was the noise of shaking and beating at the door. When the door was broken open, they found me lying unconscious on the ground, and carried me to my room.

When I came to myself at last, I heard someone whispering in my ear: "Sister."

I found that I was lying in my room with my head on Hemangini's lap. When my head moved, I heard her dress rustle. It was the sound of bridal silk.

O my God, my God! My prayer has gone unheeded! My husband has fallen!

Hemangini bent her head low, and said in a sweet whisper: "Sister, dearest, I have come to ask your blessing on our marriage."

At first my whole body stiffened like the trunk of a tree that has been struck by lightning. Then I sat up, and said, painfully, forcing myself to speak the words: "Why should I not bless you? You have done no wrong."

Hemangini laughed her merry laugh.

"Wrong!" said she. "When you married it was right; and when I marry, you call it wrong!"

I tried to smile in answer to her laughter. I said in my mind: "My prayer is not the final thing in this world. His will is all. Let the blows descend upon my head; but may they leave my faith and hope in God untouched."

Hemangini bowed to me, and touched my feet. "May you be happy," said I, blessing her, "and enjoy unbroken prosperity."

Hemangini was still unsatisfied.

"Dearest sister," she said, "a blessing for me is not enough. You must make our happiness complete. You must, with those saintly hands of yours, accept into your home my husband also. Let me bring him to you."

I said: "Yes, bring him to me."

A few moments later I heard a familiar footstep, and the question, "Kumo, how are you?"

I started up, and bowed to the ground, and cried: "*Dada!*"

Hemangini burst out laughing.

"You still call him elder brother?" she asked. "What nonsense! Call him younger brother now, and pull his ears and cease him, for he has married me, your younger sister."

Then I understood. My husband had been saved from that great sin. He had not fallen.

I knew my *Dada* had determined never to marry. And, since my mother had

died, there was no sacred wish of hers to implore him to wedlock. But I, his sister, by my sore need bad brought it to pass. He had married for my sake.

Tears of joy gushed from my eyes, and poured down my cheeks. I tried, but I could not stop them. *Dada* slowly passed his fingers through my hair. Hemangini clung to me, and went on laughing.

I was lying awake in my bed for the best part of the night, waiting with straining anxiety for my husband's return. I could not imagine how he would bear the shock of shame and disappointment.

When it was long past the hour of midnight, slowly my door opened. I sat up on my bed, and listened. They were the footsteps of my husband. My heart began to beat wildly. He came up to my bed, held my hand in his.

"Your *Dada*," said he, "has saved me from destruction. I was being dragged down and down by a moments madness. An infatuation had seized me, from which I seemed unable to escape. God alone knows what a load I was carrying on that day when I entered the boat. The storm came down on river, and covered the sky. In the midst of all fears I had a secret wish in my heart to be drowned, and so disentangle my life from the knot which I had tied it. I reached Mathurganj. There I heard the news which set me free. Your brother had married Hemangini. I cannot tell you with what joy and shame I heard it. I hastened on board the boat again. In that moment of self-revelation I knew that I could have no happiness except with you. You are a Goddess."

I laughed and cried at the same time, and said: "No, no, no! I am not going to be a Goddess any longer I am simply your own little wife. I am an ordinary woman."

"Dearest," he replied, "I have also something I want to say to you. Never again put me to shame by calling me your God."

On the next day the little town became joyous with sound of conch shells. But nobody made any reference to that night of madness, when all was so nearly lost.

44. We Crown Thee King

When Nabendu Sekhar was wedded to Arunlekha, the God of marriage smiled from behind the sacrificial fire. Alas! What is sport for the gods is not always a joke to us poor mortals.

Purnendu Sekhar, the father of Nabendu, was a man well known amongst the English officials of the Government. In the voyage of life he had arrived at the desert shores of Rai Bahadurship by diligently plying his oats of salaams. He held in reserve enough for further advancement, but at the age of fifty-five, his tender gaze still fixed on the misty peals of Raja-hood, he suddenly found himself transported to a region where earthly honours and decorations are naught, and his salaam-wearied neck found everlasting repose on the funeral pyre.

According to modern science, force is not destroyed, but is merely converted to another form, and applied to another point. So Purnendu's salaam-force, constant handmaid of the fickle Goddess of Fortune, descended from the shoulder of the father to that of his worthy son; and the youthful head of Nabendu Sekhar began to move up and down, at the doors of high-placed Englishmen, like a pumpkin swayed by the wind.

The traditions of the family into which he had married were entirely different. Its eldest son, Pramathanath, had won for himself the love of his kinsfolk and the regard of all who knew him. His kinsmen and his neighbours looked up to him as their ideal in all things.

Pramathanath was a Bachelor of Arts, and in addition was gifted with common sense. But he held no high official position; he had no handsome salary; nor did he exert any influence with his pen. There was no one in power to lend him a helping hand, because he desired to keep away from Englishmen, as much as they desired to keep away from him. So it happened that he shone only within the sphere of his family and his friends, and excited no admiration beyond it.

Yet this Pramathanath had once sojourned in England for some three years. The kindly treatment he received during his stay there overpowered him so much that he forgot the sorrow and the humiliation of his own country, and came back dressed in European clothes. This rather grieved his brothers and his sisters at first, but after a few days they began to think that European clothes suited nobody better, and gradually they came to share his pride and dignity.

On his return from England, Pramathanath resolved that he would show the world how to associate with Anglo-Indians on terms of equality. Those of our countrymen who think that no such association is possible, unless we bend our knees to them, showed their utter lack of self-respect, and were also unjust to the English-so thought Pramathanath.

He brought with him letters of introduction from many distinguished Englishmen at home, and these gave him some recognition in Anglo-Indian society. He and his wife occasionally enjoyed English hospitality at tea, dinner, sports and other entertainments. Such good luck intoxicated him, and began to produce a tingling sensation in every vein of his body.

About this time, at the opening of a new railway line, many of the town, proud recipients of official favour, were invited by the Lieutenant-Governor to take the first trip. Pramathanath was among them. On the return journey, a European Sergeant of the Police expelled some Indian gentlemen from a railway-carriage with great insolence. Pramathanath, dressed in his European clothes, was there. He, too, was getting out, when the Sergeant said: "You needn't move, sir. Keep your seat, please."

At first Pramathanath felt flattered at the special respect thus shown to him. When, however, the train went on, the dull rays of the setting sun, at the west of the fields, now ploughed up and stripped of green, seemed in his eyes to spread a glow of shame over the whole country. Sitting near the window of his lonely compartment, he seemed to catch a glimpse of the down-cast eyes of his Motherland, hidden behind the trees. As Pramathanath sat there, lost in reverie, burning tears flowed down his cheeks, and his heart burst with indignation.

He now remembered the story of a donkey who was drawing the chariot of an idol along the street. The wayfarers bowed down to the idol, and touched the dusty ground with their foreheads. The foolish donkey imagined that all this reverence was being shown to him. "The only difference," said Pramathanath to himself, "between the donkey and myself is this: I understand today that the respect I receive is not given to me but to the burden on my back."

Arriving home, Pramathanath called together all the children of the household, and lighting a big bonfire, threw all his European clothes into it one by one. The children danced round and round it, and the higher the flames shot up, the greater was their merriment. After that, Pramathanath gave up his sip of tea and bits of toast in Anglo-Indian houses, and once again sat inaccessible within the castle of his house, while his insulted friends went about from the door of one Englishman to that of another, bending their turbanned heads as before.

By an irony of fate, poor Nabendu Sekhar married the second daughter of this

house. His sisters-in-law were well educated and handsome. Nabendu considered he had made a lucky bargain. But he lost no time in trying to impress on the family that it was a rare bargain on their side also. As if by mistake, he would often hand to his sisters-in-law sundry letters that his late father had received from Europeans. And when the cherry lips of those young ladies smiled sarcastically, and the point of a shining dagger peeped out of its sheath of red velvet, the unfortunate man saw his folly, and regretted it.

Labanyalekha, the eldest sister, surpassed the rest in beauty and cleverness. Finding an auspicious day, she put on the mantel-shelf of Nabendu's bedroom two pairs of English boots, daubed with vermillion, and arranged flowers, sandal-paste, incense and a couple of burning candles before them in true ceremonial fashion. When Nabendu came in, the two sisters-in-law stood on either side of him, and said with mock solemnity: "Bow down to your gods, and may you prosper through their blessings."

The third sister Kiranlekha spent many days in embroidering with red silk one hundred common English names such as Jones, Smith, Brown, Thomson, etc., on a chadar. When it was ready, she presented this namavoli (A namavoli is a sheet of cloth printed all over with the names of Hindu gods and goddesses and worn by pious Hindus when engaged in devotional exercises.) to Nabendu Sekhar with great ceremony.

The fourth, Sasankalekha, of tender age and therefore of no account, said: "I will make you a string of beads, brother, with which to tell the names of your gods-the sahibs." Her sisters reproved her, saying: "Run away, you saucy girl."

Feelings of shame and irritation assailed by turns the mind of Nabendu Sekhar. Still he could not forego the company of his sisters-in-law, especially as the eldest one was beautiful. Her honey was no less than her gall, and Nabendu's mind tasted at once the sweetness of the one and the bitterness of the other. The butterfly, with its bruised wings, buzzes round the flower in blind fury, unable to depart.

The society of his sisters-in-Law so much infatuated him that at last Nabendu began to disavow his craving for European favours. When he went to salaam the Burra Sahib, he used to pretend that he was going to listen to a speech by Mr. Surendranath Banerjea. When he went to the railway station to pay respects to the Chota Sahib, returning from Darjeeling, he would tell his sisters-in-law that he expected his youngest uncle.

It was a sore trial to the unhappy man placed between the cross-fires of his Sahibs and his sisters-in-law. The sisters-in-law, however, secretly vowed that they would not rest till the Sahibs had been put to rout.

About this time it was rumoured that Nabendu's name would be included in the forthcoming list of Birthday honours, and that he would mount the first step of the ladder to Paradise by becoming a Rai Bahadur. The poor fellow had not the courage to break the joyful news to his sisters-in-law. One evening, however, when the autumn moon was flooding the earth with its mischievous beams, Nabendu's heart was so full that he could not contain himself any longer, and he told his wife. The next day, Mrs. Nabendu betook herself to her eldest sister's house in a palanquin, and in a voice choked with tears bewailed her lot.

"He isn't going to grow a tail," said Labanya, "by becoming a Rai Bahadur, is he? Why should you feel so very humiliated?"

"Oh, no, sister dear," replied Arunlekha, "I am prepared to be anything—but not a Rai-Baha-durni." The fact was that in her circle of acquaintances there was one Bhutnath Babu, who was a Rai Bahadur, and that explained her intense aversion to that title.

Labanya said to her sister in soothing tones: "Don't be upset about it, dear; I will see what I can do to prevent it."

Babu Nilratan, the husband of Labanya, was a pleader at Buxar. When the autumn was over, Nabendu received an invitation from Labanya to pay them a visit, and he started for Buxar greatly pleased.

The early winter of the western province endowed Labanyalekha with new health and beauty, and brought a glowing colour to her pale cheeks. She looked like the flower-laden kasa reeds on a clear autumn day, growing by the lonely bank of a rivulet. To Nabendu's enchanted eyes she appeared like a malati plant in full blossom, showering dew-drops brilliant with the morning light.

Nabendu had never felt better in his life. The exhilaration of his own health and the genial company of his pretty sister-in-law made him think himself light enough to tread on air. The Ganges in front of the garden seemed to him to be flowing ceaselessly to regions unknown, as though it gave shape to his own wild fantasies.

As he returned in the early morning from his walk on the bank of the river, the mellow rays of the winter sun gave his whole frame that pleasing sensation of warmth which lovers feel in each other's arms. Coming home, he would now and then find his sister-in-law amusing herself by cooking some dishes. He would offer his help, and display his want of skill and ignorance at every step. But Nabendu did not appear to be at all anxious to improve himself by practice and attention. On the contrary he thoroughly enjoyed the rebukes he received from his sister-in-law. He was at great pains to prove every day that he was inefficient and helpless as a new-born babe in mixing spices, handling the

saucepan, and regulating the heat so as to prevent things getting burnt—and he was duly rewarded with pitiful smiles and scoldings.

In the middle of the day he ate a great deal of the good food set before him, incited by his keen appetite and the coaxing of his sister-in-law. Later on, he would sit down to a game of cards—at which he betrayed the same lack of ability. He would cheat, pry into his adversary's hand, quarrel—but never did he win a single rubber, and worse still, he would not acknowledge defeat. This brought him abuse every day, and still he remained incorrigible.

There was, however, one matter in which his reform was complete. For the time at least, he had forgotten that to win the smiles of Sahibs was the final goal of life. He was beginning to understand how happy and worthy we might feel by winning the affection and esteem of those near and dear to us.

Besides, Nabendu was now moving in a new atmosphere. Labanya's husband, Babu Nilratan, a leader of the bar, was reproached by many, because he refused to pay his respects to European officials. To all such reproaches Nilratan would reply: "No, thank you,—if they are not polite enough to return my call, then the politeness I offer them is a loss that can never be made up for. The sands of the desert may be very white and shiny, but I would much rather sow my seeds in black soil, where I can expect a return."

And Nabendu began to adopt similar ideas, all regardless of the future. His chance of Rai Bahadurship threw on the soil carefully prepared by his late father and also by himself in days gone by, nor was any fresh watering required. Had he not at great expense laid out a splendid racecourse in a town, which was a fashionable resort of Europeans?

When the time of Congress drew near, Nilratan received a request from headquarters to collect subscriptions. Nabendu, free from anxiety, was merrily engaged in a game of cards with his sister-in-law, when Nilratan Babu came upon him with a subscription-book in his hand, and said: "Your signature, please."

From old habit Nabendu looked horrified. Labanya, assuming an air of great concern and anxiety, said: "Never do those. It would ruin your racecourse beyond repair."

Nabendu blurted out: "Do you suppose I pass sleepless nights through fear of that?"

"We won't publish your name in the papers," said Nilratan reassuringly.

Labanya, looking grave and anxious, said: "Still, it wouldn't be safe. Things spread so, from mouth to mouth—"

Nabendu replied with vehemence: "My name wouldn't suffer by appearing in

the newspapers." So saying, he snatched the subscription list from Nilratan's hand, and signed away a thousand rupees. Secretly he hoped that the papers would not publish the news.

Labanya struck her forehead with her palm and gasped out: What—have you—done?"

"Nothing wrong," said Nabendu boastfully.

"But—but—" drawled Labanya, "the Guard sahib of Sealdah Station, the shop-assistant at Whiteaway's, the syce-sahib of Hart Bros.—these gentlemen might be angry with you, and decline to come to your Poojah dinner to drink your champagne, you know. Just think, they mightn't pat you on the back, when you meet them again!"

"It wouldn't break my heart," Nabendu snapped out.

A few days passed. One morning Nabendu was sipping his tea, and glancing at a newspaper. Suddenly a letter signed "X" caught his eye. The writer thanked him profusely for his donation, and declared that the increase of strength the Congress had acquired by having such a man within its fold, was inestimable.

Alas, father Purnendu Sekhar! Was it to increase the strength of the Congress, that you brought this wretch into the world?

Put the cloud of misfortune had its silver lining. That he was not a mere cypher was clear from the fact that the Anglo-Indian community on the one side and the Congress on the other were each waiting patiently, eager to hook him, and land him on their own side. So Nabendu, beaming with pleasure took the paper to his sister-in-law, and showed her the letter. Looking as though she knew nothing about it, Labanya exclaimed in surprise: "Oh, what a pity! Everything has come out! Who bore you such ill-will? Oh, how cruel of him, how wicked of him!"

Nabendu laughed out, saying: "Now—now—don't call him names, Labanya. I forgive him with all my heart, and bless him too."

A couple of days after this, an anti-Congress Anglo-Indian paper reached Nabendu through the post. There was a letter in it, signed "One who knows," and contradicting the above report. "Those who have the pleasure of Babu Nabendu Sekhar's personal acquaintance," the writer went on, "cannot for a moment believe this absurd libel to be true. For him to turn a Congresswalla is as impossible as it is for the leopard to change his spots. He is a man of genuine worth, and neither a disappointed candidate for Government employ nor a briefless barrister. He is not one of those who, after a brief sojourn in England, return aping our dress and manners, audaciously try to thrust themselves on Anglo-Indian society, and finally go back in dejection. So there is absolutely no reason why Balm Nabendu Sekhar," etc., etc.

Ah, father Purnendu Sekhar! What a reputation you had made with the Europeans before you died!

This letter also was paraded before his sister-in-law, for did it not assert that he was no mean, contemptible scallywag, but a man of real worth?

Labanya exclaimed again in feigned surprise: "Which of your friends wrote it now? Oh, come—is it the Ticket Collector, or the hide merchant, or is it the drum-major of the Fort?"

"You ought to send in a contradiction, I think," said Nilratan.

"Is it necessary?" said Nabendu loftily. "Must I contradict every little thing they choose to say against me?"

Labanya filled the room with a deluge of laughter. Nabendu felt a little disconcerted at this, and said: "Why? What's the matter?" She went on laughing, unable to check herself, and her youthful slender form waved to and fro. This torrent of merriment had the effect of overthrowing Nabendu completely, and he said in pitiable accents: "Do you imagine that I am afraid to contradict it?"

"Oh, dear, no," said Labanya; "I was thinking that you haven't yet ceased trying to save that racecourse of yours, so full of promise. While there is life, there is hope, you know."

"That's what I am afraid of, you think, do you? Very well, you shall see," said Nabendu desperately, and forthwith sat down to write his contradiction. When he had finished, Labanya and Nilratan read it through, and said: "It isn't strong enough. We must give it them pretty hot, mustn't we?" And they kindly undertook to revise the composition. Thus it ran: "When one connected to us by ties of blood turns our enemy he becomes far more dangerous than any outsider. To the Government of India, the haughty Anglo-Indians are worse enemies than the Russians or the frontier Pathans themselves—they are the impenetrable barrier, forever hindering the growth of any bond of friendship between the Government and people of the country. It is the Congress which has opened up the royal road to a better understanding between the rulers and the ruled, and the Anglo-Indian papers have planted themselves like thorns across the whole breadth of that road," etc., etc.

Nabendu had an inward fear as to the mischief this letter might do, but at the same time he felt elated at the excellence of its composition, which he fondly imagined to be his own. It was duly published, and for some days comments, replies, and rejoinders went on in various newspapers, and the air was full of trumpet-notes, proclaiming the fact that Nabendu had joined the Congress, and the amount of his subscription.

Nabendu, now grown desperate, talked as though he was a patriot of the

fiercest type. Labanya laughed inwardly, and said to herself: "Well——well—you have to pass through the ordeal of fire yet."

One morning when Nabendu, before his bath, had finished rubbing oil over his chest, and was trying various devices to reach the inaccessible portions of his back, the bearer brought in a card inscribed with the name of the District Magistrate himself! Good heavens!—What would he do? He could not possibly go, and receive the Magistrate Sahib, thus oil-besmeared. He shook and twitched like a koi-fish, ready dressed for the frying pan. He finished his bath in a great hurry, tugged on his clothes somehow, and ran breathlessly to the outer apartments. The bearer said that the Sahib had just left after waiting for a long time. How much of the blame for concocting this drama of invented incidents may be set down to Labanya, and how much to the bearer is a nice problem for ethical mathematics to solve.

Nabendu's heart was convulsed with pain within his breast, like the tail of a lizard just cut off. He moped like an owl all day long.

Labanya banished all traces of inward merriment from her face, and kept on enquiring in anxious tones: "What has happened to you? You are not ill, I hope?"

Nabendu made great efforts to smile, and find a humorous reply. "How can there be," he managed to say, "any illness within your jurisdiction, since you yourself are the Goddess of Health?"

But the smile soon flickered out. His thoughts were: "I subscribed to the Congress fund to begin with, published a nasty letter in a newspaper, and on the top of that, when the Magistrate Sahib himself did me the honour to call on me, I kept him waiting. I wonder what he is thinking of me."

Alas, father Purnendu Sekhar, by an irony of Fate I am made to appear what I am not.

The next morning, Nabendu decked himself in his best clothes, wore his watch and chain, and put a big turban on his head.

"Where are you off to?" enquired his sister-in-law.

"Urgent business," Nabendu replied. Labanya kept quiet.

Arriving at the Magistrate's gate, he took out his card-case.

"You cannot see him now," said the orderly peon icily.

Nabendu took out a couple of rupees from his pocket. The peon at once salaamed him and said: "There are five of us, sir." Immediately Nabendu pulled out a ten-rupee note, and handed it to him.

He was sent for by the Magistrate, who was writing in his dressing-gown and bedroom slippers. Nabendu salaamed him. The Magistrate pointed to a chair

with his finger, and without raising his eyes from the paper before him said: "What can I do for you, Babu?"

Fingering his watch-chain nervously, Nabendu said in shaky tones: "Yesterday you were good enough to call at my place, sir—"

The Sahib knitted his brows, and, lifting just one eye from his paper, said: "I called at your place! Babu, what nonsense are you talking?"

"Beg your pardon, sir," faltered out Nabendu. There has been a mistake—some confusion," and wet with perspiration, he tumbled out of the room somehow. And that night, as he lay tossing on his bed, a distant dream-like voice came into his ear with a recurring persistency: "Babu, you are a howling idiot."

On his way home, Nabendu came to the conclusion that the Magistrate denied having called, simply because he was highly offended.

So he explained to Labanya that he had been out purchasing rose-water. No sooner had he uttered the words than half-a-dozen chuprassis wearing the Collectorate badge made their appearance, and after salaaming Nabendu, stood there grinning.

"Have they come to arrest you because you subscribed to the Congress fund?" whispered Labanya with a smile.

The six peons displayed a dozen rows of teeth and said: Bakshish—Babu-Sahib."

From a side room Nilratan came out, and said in an irritated manner: "Bakshish? What for?"

The peons, grinning as before, answered: "The Babu-Sahib went to see the Magistrate—so we have come for bakshish."

"I didn't know," laughed out Labanya, "that the Magistrate was selling rose-water nowadays. Coolness wasn't the special feature of his trade before."

Nabendu in trying to reconcile the story of his purchase with his visit to the Magistrate, uttered some incoherent words, which nobody could make sense of.

Nilratan spoke to the peons: "There has been no occasion for bakshish; you shan't have it."

Nabendu said, feeling very small: "Oh, they are poor men—what's the harm of giving them something?" And he took out a currency note. Nilratan snatched it away from Nabendu's hand, remarking: "There are poorer men in the world—I will give it to them for you."

Nabendu felt greatly distressed that he was not able to appease these ghostly retainers of the angry Siva. When the peons were leaving, with thunder in their eyes, he looked at them languishingly, as much as to say: "You know everything, gentlemen, it is not my fault."

The Congress was to be held at Calcutta this year. Nilratan went down thither with his wife to attend the sittings. Nabendu accompanied them.

As soon as they arrived at Calcutta, the Congress party surrounded Nabendu, and their delight and enthusiasm knew no bounds. They cheered him, honoured him, and extolled him up to the skies. Everybody said that, unless leading men like Nabendu devoted themselves to the Cause, there was no hope for the country. Nabendu was disposed to agree with them, and emerged out of the chaos of mistake and confusion as a leader of the country. When he entered the Congress Pavilion on the first day, everybody stood up, and shouted "Hip, hip, hurrah," in a loud outlandish voice, hearing which our Motherland reddened with shame to the root of her ears.

In due time the Queen's birthday came, and Nabendu's name was not found in the list of Rai Bahadurs.

He received an invitation from Labanya for that evening. When he arrived there, Labanya with great pomp and ceremony presented him with a robe of honour, and with her own hand put a mark of red sandal paste on the middle of his forehead. Each of the other sisters threw round his neck a garland of flowers woven by herself. Decked in a pink Sari and dazzling jewels, his wife Arunlekha was waiting in a side room, her face lit up with smiles and blushes. Her sisters rushed to her, and, placing another garland in her hand, insisted that she also should come, and do her part in the ceremony, but she would not listen to it; and that principal garland, cherishing a desire for Nabendu's neck, waited patiently for the still secrecy of midnight.

The sisters said to Nabendu: "Today we crown thee King. Such honour will not be done to anybody else in Hindoostan."

Whether Nabendu derived any consolation from this, he alone can tell; but we greatly doubt it. We believe, in fact, that he will become a Rai Bahadur before he has done, and the Englishman and the Pioneer will write heart-rending articles lamenting his demise at the proper time. So, in the meanwhile. Three Cheers for Babu Purnendu Sekhar! Hip, hip, hurrah—Hip, hip, hurrah—Hip, hip, hurrah.

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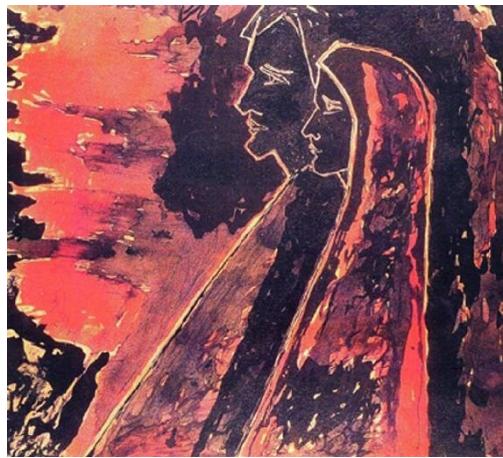
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Chapter 1

Bimala's Story I Mother, today there comes back to mind
the vermilion mark ²³ at the parting of your hair, the *sari*
²⁴ which you used to wear, with its wide red border, and
those wonderful eyes of yours, full of depth and peace.
They came at the start of my life's journey, like the first
streak of dawn, giving me golden provision to carry me
on my way.

²³. The mark of Hindu wifehood and the symbol of all the devotion that it implies.

²⁴. The *sari* is the dress of the Hindu woman.

The sky which gives light is blue, and my mother's face was dark, but she had the radiance of holiness, and her beauty would put to shame all the vanity of the beautiful.

Everyone says that I resemble my mother. In my childhood I used to resent this. It made me angry with my mirror. I thought that it was God's unfairness which was wrapped round my limbs—that my dark features were not my due, but had come to me by some misunderstanding. All that remained for me to ask of my God in reparation was, that I might grow up to be a model of what woman should be, as one reads it in some epic poem.

When the proposal came for my marriage, an astrologer was sent, who consulted my palm and said, "This girl has good signs. She will become an ideal wife."

And all the women who heard it said: "No wonder, for she resembles her mother."

I was married into a Rajah's house. When I was a child, I was quite familiar with the description of the Prince of the fairy story. But my husband's face was not of a kind that one's imagination would place in fairyland. It was dark, even as mine was. The feeling of shrinking, which I had about my own lack of physical beauty, was lifted a little; at the same time a touch of regret was left

lingering in my heart.

But when the physical appearance evades the scrutiny of our senses and enters the sanctuary of our hearts, then it can forget itself. I know, from my childhood's experience, how devotion is beauty itself, in its inner aspect. When my mother arranged the different fruits, carefully peeled by her own loving hands, on the white stone plate, and gently waved her fan to drive away the flies while my father sat down to his meals, her service would lose itself in a beauty which passed beyond outward forms. Even in my infancy I could feel its power. It transcended all debates, or doubts, or calculations: it was pure music.

I distinctly remember after my marriage, when, early in the morning, I would cautiously and silently get up and take the dust [25](#) of my husband's feet without waking him, how at such moments I could feel the vermilion mark upon my forehead shining out like the morning star.

[25.](#) Taking the dust of the feet is a formal offering of reverence and is done by lightly touching the feet of the revered one and then one's own head with the same hand. The wife does not ordinarily do this to the husband.

One day, he happened to awake, and smiled as he asked me: "What is that, Bimala? What *are* you doing?"

I can never forget the shame of being detected by him. He might possibly have thought that I was trying to earn merit secretly. But no, no! That had nothing to do with merit. It was my woman's heart, which must worship in order to love.

My father-in-law's house was old in dignity from the days of the *Badshahs*. Some of its manners were of the Moguls and Pathans, some of its customs of Manu and Parashar. But my husband was absolutely modern. He was the first of the house to go through a college course and take his M.A. degree. His elder brother had died young, of drink, and had left no children. My husband did not drink and was not given to dissipation. So foreign to the family was this abstinence, that too many it hardly seemed decent! Purity, they imagined, was only becoming in those on whom fortune had not smiled. It is the moon which has room for stains, not the stars.

My husband's parents had died long ago, and his old grandmother was mistress of the house. My husband was the apple of her eye, the jewel on her bosom. And so he never met with much difficulty in overstepping any of the ancient usages. When he brought in Miss Gilby, to teach me and be my companion, he stuck to his resolve in spite of the poison secreted by all the wagging tongues at home and outside.

My husband had then just got through his B.A. examination and was reading for his M.A. degree; so he had to stay in Calcutta to attend college. He used to write to me almost every day, a few lines only, and simple words, but his bold,

round handwriting would look up into my face, oh, so tenderly! I kept his letters in a sandalwood box and covered them every day with the flowers I gathered in the garden.

At that time the Prince of the fairy tale had faded, like the moon in the morning light. I had the Prince of my real world enthroned in my heart. I was his queen. I had my seat by his side. But my real joy was, that my true place was at his feet.

Since then, I have been educated, and introduced to the modern age in its own language, and therefore these words that I write seem to blush with shame in their prose setting. Except for my acquaintance with this modern standard of life, I should know, quite naturally, that just as my being born a woman was not in my own hands, so the element of devotion in woman's love is not like a hackneyed passage quoted from a romantic poem to be piously written down in round hand in a school-girl's copy-book.

But my husband would not give me any opportunity for worship. That was his greatness. They are cowards who claim absolute devotion from their wives as their right; that is a humiliation for both.

His love for me seemed to overflow my limits by its flood of wealth and service. But my necessity was more for giving than for receiving; for love is a vagabond, who can make his flowers bloom in the wayside dust, better than in the crystal jars kept in the drawing-room.

My husband could not break completely with the old-time traditions which prevailed in our family. It was difficult, therefore, for us to meet at any hour of the day we pleased. [26](#) I knew exactly the time that he could come to me, and therefore our meeting had all the care of loving preparation. It was like the rhyming of a poem; it had to come through the path of the metre.

[26.](#) It would not be reckoned good form for the husband to be continually going into the *zenana*, except at particular hours for meals or rest.

After finishing the day's work and taking my afternoon bath, I would do up my hair and renew my vermillion mark and put on my *sari*, carefully crinkled; and then, bringing back my body and mind from all distractions of household duties, I would dedicate it at this special hour, with special ceremonies, to one individual. That time, each day, with him was short; but it was infinite.

My husband used to say, that man and wife are equal in love because of their equal claim on each other. I never argued the point with him, but my heart said that devotion never stands in the way of true equality; it only raises the level of the ground of meeting. Therefore the joy of the higher equality remains permanent; it never slides down to the vulgar level of triviality.

My beloved, it was worthy of you that you never expected worship from me.

But if you had accepted it, you would have done me a real service. You showed your love by decorating me, by educating me, by giving me what I asked for, and what I did not. I have seen what depth of love there was in your eyes when you gazed at me. I have known the secret sigh of pain you suppressed in your love for me. You loved my body as if it were a flower of paradise. You loved my whole nature as if it had been given you by some rare providence.

Such lavish devotion made me proud to think that the wealth was all my own which drove you to my gate. But vanity such as this only checks the flow of free surrender in a woman's love. When I sit on the queen's throne and claim homage, then the claim only goes on magnifying itself; it is never satisfied. Can there be any real happiness for a woman in merely feeling that she has power over a man? To surrender one's pride in devotion is woman's only salvation.

It comes back to me today how, in the days of our happiness, the fires of envy sprung up all around us. That was only natural, for had I not stepped into my good fortune by a mere chance, and without deserving it? But providence does not allow a run of luck to last forever, unless its debt of honour be fully paid, day by day, through many a long day, and thus made secure. God may grant us gifts, but the merit of being able to take and hold them must be our own. Alas for the boons that slip through unworthy hands!

My husband's grandmother and mother were both renowned for their beauty. And my widowed sister-in-law was also of a beauty rarely to be seen. When, in turn, fate left them desolate, the grandmother vowed she would not insist on having beauty for her remaining grandson when he married. Only the auspicious marks with which I was endowed gained me an entry into this family —otherwise, I had no claim to be here.

In this house of luxury, but few of its ladies had received their meed of respect. They had, however, got used to the ways of the family, and managed to keep their heads above water, buoyed up by their dignity as *Ranis* of an ancient house, in spite of their daily tears being drowned in the foam of wine, and by the tinkle of the "dancing girls" anklets. Was the credit due to me that my husband did not touch liquor, nor squander his manhood in the markets of woman's flesh? What charm did I know to soothe the wild and wandering mind of men? It was my good luck, nothing else. For fate proved utterly callous to my sister-in-law. Her festivity died out, while yet the evening was early, leaving the light of her beauty shining in vain over empty halls—burning and burning, with no accompanying music!

His sister-in-law affected a contempt for my husband's modern notions. How absurd to keep the family ship, laden with all the weight of its time-honoured

glory, sailing under the colours of his slip of a girl-wife alone! Often have I felt the lash of scorn. “A thief who had stolen a husband’s love!” “A sham hidden in the shamelessness of her new-fangled finery!” The many-coloured garments of modern fashion with which my husband loved to adorn me roused jealous wrath. “Is not she ashamed to make a show-window of herself—and with her looks, too!”

My husband was aware of all this, but his gentleness knew no bounds. He used to implore me to forgive her.

I remember I once told him: “Women’s minds are so petty, so crooked!” “Like the feet of Chinese women,” he replied. “Has not the pressure of society cramped them into pettiness and crookedness? They are but pawns of the fate which gambles with them. What responsibility have they of their own?”

My sister-in-law never failed to get from my husband whatever she wanted. He did not stop to consider whether her requests were right or reasonable. But what exasperated me most was that she was not grateful for this. I had promised my husband that I would not talk back at her, but this set me raging all the more, inwardly. I used to feel that goodness has a limit, which, if passed, somehow seems to make men cowardly. Shall I tell the whole truth? I have often wished that my husband had the manliness to be a little less good.

My sister-in-law, the *Bara Rani*, [27](#) was still young and had no pretensions to saintliness. Rather, her talk and jest and laugh inclined to be forward. The young maids with whom she surrounded herself were also impudent to a degree. But there was none to gainsay her—for was not this the custom of the house? It seemed to me that my good fortune in having a stainless husband was a special eyesore to her. He, however, felt more the sorrow of her lot than the defects of her character.

[27.](#) *Bara* = Senior; *Chota* = Junior. In joint families of rank, though the widows remain entitled only to a life-interest in their husbands’ share, their rank remains to them according to seniority, and the titles “Senior” and “Junior” continue to distinguish the elder and younger branches, even though the junior branch be the one in power.

II My husband was very eager to take me out of purdah. [28](#)

[28.](#) The seclusion of the *zenana*, and all the customs peculiar to it, are designated by the general term “Purdah”, which means Screen.

One day I said to him: “What do I want with the outside world?”

“The outside world may want you,” he replied.

“If the outside world has got on so long without me, it may go on for some time longer. It need not pine to death for want of me.”

"Let it perish, for all I care! That is not troubling me. I am thinking about myself."

"Oh, indeed. Tell me what about yourself?"

My husband was silent, with a smile.

I knew his way, and protested at once: "No, no, you are not going to run away from me like that! I want to have this out with you."

"Can one ever finish a subject with words?"

"Do stop speaking in riddles. Tell me..."

"What I want is, that I should have you, and you should have me, more fully in the outside world. That is where we are still in debt to each other."

"Is anything wanting, then, in the love we have here at home?"

"Here you are wrapped up in me. You know neither what you have, nor what you want."

"I cannot bear to hear you talk like this."

"I would have you come into the heart of the outer world and meet reality. Merely going on with your household duties, living all your life in the world of household conventions and the drudgery of household tasks—you were not made for that! If we meet, and recognize each other, in the real world, then only will our love be true."

"If there be any drawback here to our full recognition of each other, then I have nothing to say. But as for myself, I feel no want."

"Well, even if the drawback is only on my side, why shouldn't you help to remove it?"

Such discussions repeatedly occurred. One day he said: "The greedy man who is fond of his fish stew has no compunction in cutting up the fish according to his need. But the man who loves the fish wants to enjoy it in the water; and if that is impossible he waits on the bank; and even if he comes back home without a sight of it he has the consolation of knowing that the fish is all right. Perfect gain is the best of all; but if that is impossible, then the next best gain is perfect losing."

I never liked the way my husband had of talking on this subject, but that is not the reason why I refused to leave the *zenana*. His grandmother was still alive. My husband had filled more than a hundred and twenty per cent of the house with the twentieth century, against her taste; but she had borne it uncomplaining.

She would have borne it, likewise, if the daughter-in-law [29](#) of the Rajah's house had left its seclusion. She was even prepared for this happening. But I did not consider it important enough to give her the pain of it. I have read in books that

we are called “caged birds”. I cannot speak for others, but I had so much in this cage of mine that there was not room for it in the universe—at least that is what I then felt.

29. The prestige of the daughter-in-law is of the first importance in a Hindu household of rank [Trans.]

The grandmother, in her old age, was very fond of me. At the bottom of her fondness was the thought that, with the conspiracy of favourable stars which attended me, I had been able to attract my husband’s love. Were not men naturally inclined to plunge downwards? None of the others, for all their beauty, had been able to prevent their husbands going headlong into the burning depths which consumed and destroyed them. She believed that I had been the means of extinguishing this fire, so deadly to the men of the family. So she kept me in the shelter of her bosom, and trembled if I was in the least bit unwell.

His grandmother did not like the dresses and ornaments my husband brought from European shops to deck me with. But she reflected: “Men will have some absurd hobby or other, which is sure to be expensive. It is no use trying to check their extravagance; one is glad enough if they stop short of ruin. If my Nikhil had not been busy dressing up his wife there is no knowing whom else he might have spent his money on!” So whenever any new dress of mine arrived she used to send for my husband and make merry over it.

Thus it came about that it was her taste which changed. The influence of the modern age fell so strongly upon her, that her evenings refused to pass if I did not tell her stories out of English books.

After his grandmother’s death, my husband wanted me to go and live with him in Calcutta. But I could not bring myself to do that. Was not this our House, which she had kept under her sheltering care through all her trials and troubles? Would not a curse come upon me if I deserted it and went off to town? This was the thought that kept me back, as her empty seat reproachfully looked up at me. That noble lady had come into this house at the age of eight, and had died in her seventy-ninth year. She had not spent a happy life. Fate had hurled shaft after shaft at her breast, only to draw out more and more the imperishable spirit within. This great house was hallowed with her tears. What should I do in the dust of Calcutta, away from it?

My husband’s idea was that this would be a good opportunity for leaving to my sister-in-law the consolation of ruling over the household, giving our life, at the same time, more room to branch out in Calcutta. That is just where my difficulty came in. She had worried my life out, she ill brooked my husband’s happiness, and for this she was to be rewarded! And what of the day when we should have to come back here? Should I then get back my seat at the head?

"What do you want with that seat?" my husband would say. "Are there not more precious things in life?"

Men never understand these things. They have their nests in the outside world; they little know the whole of what the household stands for. In these matters they ought to follow womanly guidance. Such were my thoughts at that time.

I felt the real point was, that one ought to stand up for one's rights. To go away, and leave everything in the hands of the enemy, would be nothing short of owning defeat.

But why did not my husband compel me to go with him to Calcutta? I know the reason. He did not use his power, just because he had it.

III If one had to fill in, little by little, the gap between day and night, it would take an eternity to do it. But the sun rises and the darkness is dispelled—a moment is sufficient to overcome an infinite distance.

One day there came the new era of *Swadeshi* [30](#) in Bengal; but as to how it happened, we had no distinct vision. There was no gradual slope connecting the past with the present. For that reason, I imagine, the new epoch came in like a flood, breaking down the dykes and sweeping all our prudence and fear before it. We had no time even to think about, or understand, what had happened, or what was about to happen.

[30.](#) The Nationalist movement, which began more as an economic than a political one, having as its main object the encouragement of indigenous industries [Trans.].

My sight and my mind, my hopes and my desires, became red with the passion of this new age. Though, up to this time, the walls of the home—which was the ultimate world to my mind—remained unbroken, yet I stood looking over into the distance, and I heard a voice from the far horizon, whose meaning was not perfectly clear to me, but whose call went straight to my heart.

From the time my husband had been a college student he had been trying to get the things required by our people produced in our own country. There are plenty of date trees in our district. He tried to invent an apparatus for extracting the juice and boiling it into sugar and treacle. I heard that it was a great success, only it extracted more money than juice. After a while he came to the conclusion that our attempts at reviving our industries were not succeeding for want of a bank of our own. He was, at the time, trying to teach me political economy. This alone would not have done much harm, but he also took it into his head to teach his countrymen ideas of thrift, so as to pave the way for a bank; and then he actually started a small bank. Its high rate of interest, which made the villagers flock so enthusiastically to put in their money, ended by swamping the bank altogether.

The old officers of the estate felt troubled and frightened. There was jubilation in the enemy's camp. Of all the family, only my husband's grandmother remained unmoved. She would scold me, saying: "Why are you all plaguing him so? Is it the fate of the estate that is worrying you? How many times have I seen this estate in the hands of the court receiver! Are men like women? Men are born spendthrifts and only know how to waste. Look here, child, count yourself fortunate that your husband is not wasting himself as well!"

My husband's list of charities was a long one. He would assist to the bitter end of utter failure anyone who wanted to invent a new loom or rice-husking machine. But what annoyed me most was the way that Sandip Babu ³¹ used to fleece him on the pretext of *Swadeshi* work. Whenever he wanted to start a newspaper, or travel about preaching the Cause, or take a change of air by the advice of his doctor, my husband would unquestioningly supply him with the money. This was over and above the regular living allowance which Sandip Babu also received from him. The strangest part of it was that my husband and Sandip Babu did not agree in their opinions.

^{31.} "Babu" is a term of respect, like "Father" or "Mister," but has also meant in colonial days a person who understands some English. [online ed.]

As soon as the *Swadeshi* storm reached my blood, I said to my husband: "I must burn all my foreign clothes."

"Why burn them?" said he. "You need not wear them as long as you please."

"As long as I please! Not in this life..."

"Very well, do not wear them for the rest of your life, then. But why this bonfire business?"

"Would you thwart me in my resolve?"

"What I want to say is this: Why not try to build up something? You should not waste even a tenth part of your energies in this destructive excitement."

"Such excitement will give us the energy to build."

"That is as much as to say, that you cannot light the house unless you set fire to it."

Then there came another trouble. When Miss Gilby first came to our house there was a great flutter, which afterwards calmed down when they got used to her. Now the whole thing was stirred up afresh. I had never bothered myself before as to whether Miss Gilby was European or Indian, but I began to do so now. I said to my husband: "We must get rid of Miss Gilby."

He kept silent.

I talked to him wildly, and he went away sad at heart.

After a fit of weeping, I felt in a more reasonable mood when we met at night.

"I cannot," my husband said, "look upon Miss Gilby through a mist of abstraction, just because she is English. Cannot you get over the barrier of her name after such a long acquaintance? Cannot you realize that she loves you?"

I felt a little ashamed and replied with some sharpness: "Let her remain. I am not over anxious to send her away." And Miss Gilby remained.

But one day I was told that she had been insulted by a young fellow on her way to church. This was a boy whom we were supporting. My husband turned him out of the house. There was not a single soul, that day, who could forgive my husband for that act—not even I. This time Miss Gilby left of her own accord. She shed tears when she came to say good-bye, but my mood would not melt. To slander the poor boy so—and such a fine boy, too, who would forget his daily bath and food in his enthusiasm for *Swadeshi*.

My husband escorted Miss Gilby to the railway station in his own carriage. I was sure he was going too far. When exaggerated accounts of the incident gave rise to a public scandal, which found its way to the newspapers, I felt he had been rightly served.

I had often become anxious at my husband's doings, but had never before been ashamed; yet now I had to blush for him! I did not know exactly, nor did I care, what wrong poor Noren might, or might not, have done to Miss Gilby, but the idea of sitting in judgement on such a matter at such a time! I should have refused to damp the spirit which prompted young Noren to defy the Englishwoman. I could not but look upon it as a sign of cowardice in my husband, that he should fail to understand this simple thing. And so I blushed for him.

And yet it was not that my husband refused to support *Swadeshi*, or was in any way against the Cause. Only he had not been able whole-heartedly to accept the spirit of *Bande Mataram*. ³²

³². Lit.: "Hail Mother"; the opening words of a song by Bankim Chatterjee, the famous Bengali novelist. The song has now become the national anthem, and *Bande Mataram* the national cry, since the days of the *Swadeshi* movement [Trans.].

"I am willing," he said, "to serve my country; but my worship I reserve for Right which is far greater than my country. To worship my country as a god is to bring a curse upon it."

Chapter 2

Bimala's Story IV

This was the time when Sandip Babu with his followers came to our neighbourhood to preach *Swadeshi*.

There is to be a big meeting in our temple pavilion. We women are sitting there, on one side, behind a screen. Triumphant shouts of *Bande Mataram* come nearer: and to them I am thrilling through and through. Suddenly a stream of barefooted youths in turbans, clad in ascetic ochre, rushes into the quadrangle, like a silt-reddened freshet into a dry river-bed at the first burst of the rains. The whole place is filled with an immense crowd, through which Sandip Babu is borne, seated in a big chair hoisted on the shoulders of ten or twelve of the youths.

Bande Mataram! Bande Mataram! Bande Mataram! It seems as though the skies would be rent and scattered into a thousand fragments.

I had seen Sandip Babu's photograph before. There was something in his features which I did not quite like. Not that he was bad-looking—far from it: he had a splendidly handsome face. Yet, I know not why, it seemed to me, in spite of all its brilliance, that too much of base alloy had gone into its making. The light in his eyes somehow did not shine true. That was why I did not like it when my husband unquestioningly gave in to all his demands. I could bear the waste of money; but it vexed me to think that he was imposing on my husband, taking advantage of friendship. His bearing was not that of an ascetic, nor even of a person of moderate means, but foppish all over. Love of comfort seemed to... any number of such reflections come back to me today, but let them be.

When, however, Sandip Babu began to speak that afternoon, and the hearts of the crowd swayed and surged to his words, as though they would break all bounds, I saw him wonderfully transformed. Especially when his features were suddenly lit up by a shaft of light from the slowly setting sun, as it sunk below the roof-line of the pavilion, he seemed to me to be marked out by the gods as their messenger to mortal men and women.

From beginning to end of his speech, each one of his utterances was a stormy

outburst. There was no limit to the confidence of his assurance. I do not know how it happened, but I found I had impatiently pushed away the screen from before me and had fixed my gaze upon him. Yet there was none in that crowd who paid any heed to my doings. Only once, I noticed, his eyes, like stars in fateful Orion, flashed full on my face.

I was utterly unconscious of myself. I was no longer the lady of the Rajah's house, but the sole representative of Bengal's womanhood. And he was the champion of Bengal. As the sky had shed its light over him, so he must receive the consecration of a woman's benediction...

It seemed clear to me that, since he had caught sight of me, the fire in his words had flamed up more fiercely. Indra's ³³ steed refused to be reined in, and there came the roar of thunder and the flash of lightning. I said within myself that his language had caught fire from my eyes; for we women are not only the deities of the household fire, but the flame of the soul itself.

33. The Jupiter Pluvius of Hindu mythology.

I returned home that evening radiant with a new pride and joy. The storm within me had shifted my whole being from one centre to another. Like the Greek maidens of old, I fain would cut off my long, resplendent tresses to make a bowstring for my hero. Had my outward ornaments been connected with my inner feelings, then my necklet, my armlets, my bracelets, would all have burst their bonds and flung themselves over that assembly like a shower of meteors. Only some personal sacrifice, I felt, could help me to bear the tumult of my exaltation.

When my husband came home later, I was trembling lest he should utter a sound out of tune with the triumphant paean which was still ringing in my ears, lest his fanaticism for truth should lead him to express disapproval of anything that had been said that afternoon. For then I should have openly defied and humiliated him. But he did not say a word... which I did not like either.

He should have said: "Sandip has brought me to my senses. I now realize how mistaken I have been all this time."

I somehow felt that he was spitefully silent, that he obstinately refused to be enthusiastic. I asked how long Sandip Babu was going to be with us.

"He is off to Rangpur early tomorrow morning," said my husband.

"Must it be tomorrow?"

"Yes, he is already engaged to speak there."

I was silent for a while and then asked again: "Could he not possibly stay a day longer?"

"That may hardly be possible, but why?"

"I want to invite him to dinner and attend on him myself."

My husband was surprised. He had often entreated me to be present when he had particular friends to dinner, but I had never let myself be persuaded. He gazed at me curiously, in silence, with a look I did not quite understand.

I was suddenly overcome with a sense of shame. "No, no," I exclaimed, "that would never do!"

"Why not?" said he. "I will ask him myself, and if it is at all possible he will surely stay on for tomorrow."

It turned out to be quite possible.

I will tell the exact truth. That day I reproached my Creator because he had not made me surpassingly beautiful—not to steal any heart away, but because beauty is glory. In this great day the men of the country should realize its goddess in its womanhood. But, alas, the eyes of men fail to discern the goddess, if outward beauty be lacking. Would Sandip Babu find the *Shakti* of the Motherland manifest in me? Or would he simply take me to be an ordinary, domestic woman?

That morning I scented my flowing hair and tied it in a loose knot, bound by a cunningly intertwined red silk ribbon. Dinner, you see, was to be served at midday, and there was no time to dry my hair after my bath and do it up plaited in the ordinary way. I put on a gold-bordered white *sari*, and my short-sleeve muslin jacket was also gold-bordered.

I felt that there was a certain restraint about my costume and that nothing could well have been simpler. But my sister-in-law, who happened to be passing by, stopped dead before me, surveyed me from head to foot and with compressed lips smiled a meaning smile. When I asked her the reason, "I am admiring your get-up!" she said.

"What is there so entertaining about it?" I enquired, considerably annoyed.

"It's superb," she said. "I was only thinking that one of those low-necked English bodices would have made it perfect." Not only her mouth and eyes, but her whole body seemed to ripple with suppressed laughter as she left the room.

I was very, very angry, and wanted to change everything and put on my everyday clothes. But I cannot tell exactly why I could not carry out my impulse. Women are the ornaments of society—thus I reasoned with myself—and my husband would never like it, if I appeared before Sandip Babu unworthily clad.

My idea had been to make my appearance after they had sat down to dinner. In the bustle of looking after the serving the first awkwardness would have passed off. But dinner was not ready in time, and it was getting late. Meanwhile my husband had sent for me to introduce the guest.

I was feeling horribly shy about looking Sandip Babu in the face. However, I managed to recover myself enough to say: "I am so sorry dinner is getting late."

He boldly came and sat right beside me as he replied: "I get a dinner of some kind every day, but the Goddess of Plenty keeps behind the scenes. Now that the goddess herself has appeared, it matters little if the dinner lags behind."

He was just as emphatic in his manners as he was in his public speaking. He had no hesitation and seemed to be accustomed to occupy, unchallenged, his chosen seat. He claimed the right to intimacy so confidently, that the blame would seem to belong to those who should dispute it.

I was in terror lest Sandip Babu should take me for a shrinking, old-fashioned bundle of inanity. But, for the life of me, I could not sparkle in repartees such as might charm or dazzle him. What could have possessed me, I angrily wondered, to appear before him in such an absurd way?

I was about to retire when dinner was over, but Sandip Babu, as bold as ever, placed himself in my way.

"You must not," he said, "think me greedy. It was not the dinner that kept me staying on, it was your invitation. If you were to run away now, that would not be playing fair with your guest."

If he had not said these words with a careless ease, they would have been out of tune. But, after all, he was such a great friend of my husband that I was like his sister.

While I was struggling to climb up this high wave of intimacy, my husband came to the rescue, saying: "Why not come back to us after you have taken your dinner?"

"But you must give your word," said Sandip Babu, "before we let you off."

"I will come," said I, with a slight smile.

"Let me tell you," continued Sandip Babu, "why I cannot trust you. Nikhil has been married these nine years, and all this while you have eluded me. If you do this again for another nine years, we shall never meet again."

I took up the spirit of his remark as I dropped my voice to reply: "Why even then should we not meet?"

"My horoscope tells me I am to die early. None of my forefathers have survived their thirtieth year. I am now twenty-seven."

He knew this would go home. This time there must have been a shade of concern in my low voice as I said: "The blessings of the whole country are sure to avert the evil influence of the stars."

"Then the blessings of the country must be voiced by its goddess. This is the reason for my anxiety that you should return, so that my talisman may begin to

work from today."

Sandip Babu had such a way of taking things by storm that I got no opportunity of resenting what I never should have permitted in another.

"So," he concluded with a laugh, "I am going to hold this husband of yours as a hostage till you come back."

As I was coming away, he exclaimed: "May I trouble you for a trifle?"

I started and turned round.

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "It's merely a glass of water. You might have noticed that I did not drink any water with my dinner. I take it a little later."

Upon this I had to make a show of interest and ask him the reason. He began to give the history of his dyspepsia. I was told how he had been a martyr to it for seven months, and how, after the usual course of nuisances, which included different allopathic and homoeopathic misadventures, he had obtained the most wonderful results by indigenous methods.

"Do you know," he added, with a smile, "God has built even my infirmities in such a manner that they yield only under the bombardment of *Swadeshi* pills."

My husband, at this, broke his silence. "You must confess," said he, "that you have as immense an attraction for foreign medicine as the earth has for meteors. You have three shelves in your sitting-room full of..."

Sandip Babu broke in: "Do you know what they are? They are the punitive police. They come, not because they are wanted, but because they are imposed on us by the rule of this modern age, exacting fines and-inflicting injuries."

My husband could not bear exaggerations, and I could see he disliked this. But all ornaments are exaggerations. They are not made by God, but by man. Once I remember in defence of some untruth of mine I said to my husband: "Only the trees and beasts and birds tell unmitigated truths, because these poor things have not the power to invent. In this men show their superiority to the lower creatures, and women beat even men. Neither is a profusion of ornament unbecoming for a woman, nor a profusion of untruth."

As I came out into the passage leading to the *zenana* I found my sister-in-law, standing near a window overlooking the reception rooms, peeping through the venetian shutter.

"You here?" I asked in surprise.

"Eavesdropping!" she replied.

When I returned, Sandip Babu was tenderly apologetic. "I am afraid we have spoilt your appetite," he said.

I felt greatly ashamed. Indeed, I had been too indecently quick over my dinner. With a little calculation, it would become quite evident that my non-eating had surpassed the eating. But I had no idea that anyone could have been deliberately calculating.

I suppose Sandip Babu detected my feeling of shame, which only augmented it. "I was sure," he said, "that you had the impulse of the wild deer to run away, but it is a great boon that you took the trouble to keep your promise with me."

I could not think of any suitable reply and so I sat down, blushing and uncomfortable, at one end of the sofa. The vision that I had of myself, as the *Shakti* of Womanhood, incarnate, crowning Sandip Babu simply with my presence, majestic and unashamed, failed me altogether.

Sandip Babu deliberately started a discussion with my husband. He knew that his keen wit flashed to the best effect in an argument. I have often since observed, that he never lost an opportunity for a passage at arms whenever I happened to be present.

He was familiar with my husband's views on the cult of *Bande Mataram*, and began in a provoking way: "So you do not allow that there is room for an appeal to the imagination in patriotic work?"

"It has its place, Sandip, I admit, but I do not believe in giving it the whole place. I would know my country in its frank reality, and for this I am both afraid and ashamed to make use of hypnotic texts of patriotism."

"What you call hypnotic texts I call truth. I truly believe my country to be my God. I worship Humanity. God manifests Himself both in man and in his country."

"If that is what you really believe, there should be no difference for you between man and man, and so between country and country."

"Quite true. But my powers are limited, so my worship of Humanity is continued in the worship of my country."

"I have nothing against your worship as such, but how is it you propose to conduct your worship of God by hating other countries in which He is equally manifest?"

"Hate is also an adjunct of worship. Arjuna won Mahadeva's favour by wrestling with him. God will be with us in the end, if we are prepared to give Him battle."

"If that be so, then those who are serving and those who are harming the country are both His devotees. Why, then, trouble to preach patriotism?"

"In the case of one's own country, it is different. There the heart clearly demands worship."

"If you push the same argument further you can say that since God is manifested in us, our *self* has to be worshipped before all else; because our natural instinct claims it."

"Look here, Nikhil, this is all merely dry logic. Can't you recognize that there is such a thing as feeling?"

"I tell you the truth, Sandip," my husband replied. "It is my feelings that are outraged, whenever you try to pass off injustice as a duty, and unrighteousness as a moral ideal. The fact, that I am incapable of stealing, is not due to my possessing logical faculties, but to my having some feeling of respect for myself and love for ideals."

I was raging inwardly. At last I could keep silent no longer. "Is not the history of every country," I cried, "whether England, France, Germany, or Russia, the history of stealing for the sake of one's own country?"

"They have to answer for these thefts; they are doing so even now; their history is not yet ended."

"At any rate," interposed Sandip Babu, "why should we not follow suit? Let us first fill our country's coffers with stolen goods and then take centuries, like these other countries, to answer for them, if we must. But, I ask you, where do you find this 'answering' in history?"

"When Rome was answering for her sin no one knew it. All that time, there was apparently no limit to her prosperity. But do you not see one thing: how these political bags of theirs are bursting with lies and treacheries, breaking their backs under their weight?"

Never before had I had any opportunity of being present at a discussion between my husband and his men friends. Whenever he argued with me I could feel his reluctance to push me into a corner. This arose out of the very love he bore me. Today for the first time I saw his fencer's skill in debate.

Nevertheless, my heart refused to accept my husband's position. I was struggling to find some answer, but it would not come. When the word "righteousness" comes into an argument, it sounds ugly to say that a thing can be too good to be useful.

All of a sudden Sandip Babu turned to me with the question: "What do you say to this?"

"I do not care about fine distinctions," I broke out. "I will tell you broadly what I feel. I am only human. I am covetous. I would have good things for my country. If I am obliged, I would snatch them and filch them. I have anger. I

would be angry for my country's sake. If necessary, I would smite and slay to avenge her insults. I have my desire to be fascinated, and fascination must be supplied to me in bodily shape by my country. She must have some visible symbol casting its spell upon my mind. I would make my country a Person, and call her Mother, Goddess, Durga—for whom I would redder the earth with sacrificial offerings. I am human, not divine."

Sandip Babu leapt to his feet with uplifted arms and shouted "Hurrah!"—The next moment he corrected himself and cried: "*Bande Mataram.*"

A shadow of pain passed over the face of my husband. He said to me in a very gentle voice: "Neither am I divine: I am human. And therefore I dare not permit the evil which is in me to be exaggerated into an image of my country—never, never!"

Sandip Babu cried out: "See, Nikhil, how in the heart of a woman Truth takes flesh and blood. Woman knows how to be cruel: her virulence is like a blind storm. It is beautifully fearful. In man it is ugly, because it harbours in its centre the gnawing worms of reason and thought. I tell you, Nikhil, it is our women who will save the country. This is not the time for nice scruples. We must be unswervingly, unreasoningly brutal. We must sin. We must give our women red sandal paste with which to anoint and enthrone our sin. Don't you remember what the poet says: Come, Sin, O beautiful Sin, Let thy stinging red kisses pour down fiery red wine into our blood.

*Sound the trumpet of imperious evil And cross our forehead with the wreath
of exulting lawlessness, O Deity of Desecration, Smear our breasts with the
blackest mud of disrepute, unashamed.*

Down with that righteousness, which cannot smilingly bring rack and ruin."

When Sandip Babu, standing with his head high, insulted at a moment's impulse all that men have cherished as their highest, in all countries and in all times, a shiver went right through my body.

But, with a stamp of his foot, he continued his declamation: "I can see that you are that beautiful spirit of fire, which burns the home to ashes and lights up the larger world with its flame. Give to us the indomitable courage to go to the bottom of Ruin itself. Impart grace to all that is baneful."

It was not clear to whom Sandip Babu addressed his last appeal. It might have been She whom he worshipped with his *Bande Mataram*. It might have been the Womanhood of his country. Or it might have been its representative, the woman before him. He would have gone further in the same strain, but my husband suddenly rose from his seat and touched him lightly on the shoulder saying:

“Sandip, Chandranath Babu is here.”

I started and turned round, to find an aged gentleman at the door, calm and dignified, in doubt as to whether he should come in or retire. His face was touched with a gentle light like that of the setting sun.

My husband came up to me and whispered: “This is my master, of whom I have so often told you. Make your obeisance to him.”

I bent reverently and took the dust of his feet. He gave me his blessing saying: “May God protect you always, my little mother.” I was sorely in need of such a blessing at that moment.

Nikhil’s Story I One day I had the faith to believe that I should be able to bear whatever came from my God. I never had the trial. Now I think it has come.

I used to test my strength of mind by imagining all kinds of evil which might happen to me—poverty, imprisonment, dishonour, death—even Bimala’s. And when I said to myself that I should be able to receive these with firmness, I am sure I did not exaggerate. Only I could never even imagine one thing, and today it is that of which I am thinking, and wondering whether I can really bear it. There is a thorn somewhere pricking in my heart, constantly giving me pain while I am about my daily work. It seems to persist even when I am asleep. The very moment I wake up in the morning, I find that the bloom has gone from the face of the sky. What is it? What has happened?

My mind has become so sensitive, that even my past life, which came to me in the disguise of happiness, seems to wring my very heart with its falsehood; and the shame and sorrow which are coming close to me are losing their cover of privacy, all the more because they try to veil their faces. My heart has become all eyes. The things that should not be seen, the things I do not want to see—these I must see.

The day has come at last when my ill-starred life has to reveal its destitution in a long-drawn series of exposures. This penury, all unexpected, has taken its seat in the heart where plenitude seemed to reign. The fees which I paid to delusion for just nine years of my youth have now to be returned with interest to Truth till the end of my days.

What is the use of straining to keep up my pride? What harm if I confess that I have something lacking in me? Possibly it is that unreasoning forcefulness

which women love to find in men. But is strength mere display of muscularity? Must strength have no scruples in treading the weak underfoot?

But why all these arguments? Worthiness cannot be earned merely by disputing about it. And I am unworthy, unworthy, unworthy.

What if I am unworthy? The true value of love is this, that it can ever bless the unworthy with its own prodigality. For the worthy there are many rewards on God's earth, but God has specially reserved love for the unworthy.

Up till now Bimala was my home-made Bimala, the product of the confined space and the daily routine of small duties. Did the love which I received from her, I asked myself, come from the deep spring of her heart, or was it merely like the daily provision of pipe water pumped up by the municipal steam-engine of society?

I longed to find Bimala blossoming fully in all her truth and power. But the thing I forgot to calculate was, that one must give up all claims based on conventional rights, if one would find a person freely revealed in truth.

Why did I fail to think of this? Was it because of the husband's pride of possession over his wife? No. It was because I placed the fullest trust upon love. I was vain enough to think that I had the power in me to bear the sight of truth in its awful nakedness. It was tempting Providence, but still I clung to my proud determination to come out victorious in the trial.

Bimala had failed to understand me in one thing. She could not fully realize that I held as weakness all imposition of force. Only the weak dare not be just. They shirk their responsibility of fairness and try quickly to get at results through the short-cuts of injustice. Bimala has no patience with patience. She loves to find in men the turbulent, the angry, the unjust. Her respect must have its element of fear.

I had hoped that when Bimala found herself free in the outer world she would be rescued from her infatuation for tyranny. But now I feel sure that this infatuation is deep down in her nature. Her love is for the boisterous. From the tip of her tongue to the pit of her stomach she must tingle with red pepper in order to enjoy the simple fare of life. But my determination was, never to do my duty with frantic impetuosity, helped on by the fiery liquor of excitement. I know Bimala finds it difficult to respect me for this, taking my scruples for feebleness—and she is quite angry with me because I am not running amuck crying *Bande Mataram*.

For the matter of that, I have become unpopular with all my countrymen because I have not joined them in their carousals. They are certain that either I have a longing for some title, or else that I am afraid of the police. The police on

their side suspect me of harbouring some hidden design and protesting too much in my mildness.

What I really feel is this, that those who cannot find food for their enthusiasm in a knowledge of their country as it actually is, or those who cannot love men just because they are men—who needs must shout and deify their country in order to keep up their excitement—these love excitement more than their country.

To try to give our infatuation a higher place than Truth is a sign of inherent slavishness. Where our minds are free we find ourselves lost. Our moribund vitality must have for its rider either some fantasy, or someone in authority, or a sanction from the pundits, in order to make it move. So long as we are impervious to truth and have to be moved by some hypnotic stimulus, we must know that we lack the capacity for self-government. Whatever may be our condition, we shall either need some imaginary ghost or some actual medicine-man to terrorize over us.

The other day when Sandip accused me of lack of imagination, saying that this prevented me from realizing my country in a visible image, Bimala agreed with him. I did not say anything in my defence, because to win in argument does not lead to happiness. Her difference of opinion is not due to any inequality of intelligence, but rather to dissimilarity of nature.

They accuse me of being unimaginative—that is, according to them, I may have oil in my lamp, but no flame. Now this is exactly the accusation which I bring against them. I would say to them: “You are dark, even as the flints are. You must come to violent conflicts and make a noise in order to produce your sparks. But their disconnected flashes merely assist your pride, and not your clear vision.”

I have been noticing for some time that there is a gross cupidity about Sandip. His fleshly feelings make him harbour delusions about his religion and impel him into a tyrannical attitude in his patriotism. His intellect is keen, but his nature is coarse, and so he glorifies his selfish lusts under high-sounding names. The cheap consolations of hatred are as urgently necessary for him as the satisfaction of his appetites. Bimala has often warned me, in the old days, of his hankering after money. I understood this, but I could not bring myself to haggle with Sandip. I felt ashamed even to own to myself that he was trying to take advantage of me.

It will, however, be difficult to explain to Bimala today that Sandip’s love of country is but a different phase of his covetous self-love. Bimala’s hero-worship of Sandip makes me hesitate all the more to talk to her about him, lest some

touch of jealousy may lead me unwittingly into exaggeration. It may be that the pain at my heart is already making me see a distorted picture of Sandip. And yet it is better perhaps to speak out than to keep my feelings gnawing within me.

II I have known my master these thirty years. Neither calumny, nor disaster, nor death itself has any terrors for him. Nothing could have saved me, born as I was into the traditions of this family of ours, but that he has established his own life in the centre of mine, with its peace and truth and spiritual vision, thus making it possible for me to realize goodness in its truth.

My master came to me that day and said: "Is it necessary to detain Sandip here any longer?"

His nature was so sensitive to all omens of evil that he had at once understood. He was not easily moved, but that day he felt the dark shadow of trouble ahead. Do I not know how well he loves me?

At tea-time I said to Sandip: "I have just had a letter from Rangpur. They are complaining that I am selfishly detaining you. When will you be going there?"

Bimala was pouring out the tea. Her face fell at once. She threw just one enquiring glance at Sandip.

"I have been thinking," said Sandip, "that this wandering up and down means a tremendous waste of energy. I feel that if I could work from a centre I could achieve more permanent results."

With this he looked up at Bimala and asked: "Do you not think so too?"

Bimala hesitated for a reply and then said: "Both ways seem good —to do the work from a centre, as well as by travelling about. That in which you find greater satisfaction is the way for you."

"Then let me speak out my mind," said Sandip. "I have never yet found any one source of inspiration suffice me for good. That is why I have been constantly moving about, rousing enthusiasm in the people, from which in turn I draw my own store of energy. Today you have given me the message of my country. Such fire I have never beheld in any man. I shall be able to spread the fire of enthusiasm in my country by borrowing it from you. No, do not be ashamed. You are far above all modesty and diffidence. You are the Queen Bee of our hive, and we the workers shall rally around you. You shall be our centre, our inspiration."

Bimala flushed all over with bashful pride and her hand shook as she went on pouring out the tea.

Another day my master came to me and said: "Why don't you two go up to

Darjeeling for a change? You are not looking well. Have you been getting enough sleep?"

I asked Bimala in the evening whether she would care to have a trip to the Hills. I knew she had a great longing to see the Himalayas. But she refused... The country's Cause, I suppose!

I must not lose my faith: I shall wait. The passage from the narrow to the larger world is stormy. When she is familiar with this freedom, then I shall know where my place is. If I discover that I do not fit in with the arrangement of the outer world, then I shall not quarrel with my fate, but silently take my leave... Use force? But for what? Can force prevail against Truth?

Sandip's Story I The impotent man says: "That which has come to my share is mine." And the weak man assents. But the lesson of the whole world is: "That is really mine which I can snatch away." My country does not become mine simply because it is the country of my birth. It becomes mine on the day when I am able to win it by force.

Every man has a natural right to possess, and therefore greed is natural. It is not in the wisdom of nature that we should be content to be deprived. What my mind covets, my surroundings must supply. This is the only true understanding between our inner and outer nature in this world. Let moral ideals remain merely for those poor anaemic creatures of starved desire whose grasp is weak. Those who can desire with all their soul and enjoy with all their heart, those who have no hesitation or scruple, it is they who are the anointed of Providence. Nature spreads out her riches and loveliest treasures for their benefit. They swim across streams, leap over walls, kick open doors, to help themselves to whatever is worth taking. In such a getting one can rejoice; such wresting as this gives value to the thing taken.

Nature surrenders herself, but only to the robber. For she delights in this forceful desire, this forceful abduction. And so she does not put the garland of her acceptance round the lean, scraggy neck of the ascetic. The music of the wedding march is struck. The time of the wedding I must not let pass. My heart

therefore is eager. For, who is the bridegroom? It is I. The bridegroom's place belongs to him who, torch in hand, can come in time. The bridegroom in Nature's wedding hall comes unexpected and uninvited.

Ashamed? No, I am never ashamed! I ask for whatever I want, and I do not always wait to ask before I take it. Those who are deprived by their own diffidence dignify their privation by the name of modesty. The world into which we are born is the world of reality. When a man goes away from the market of real things with empty hands and empty stomach, merely filling his bag with big sounding words, I wonder why he ever came into this hard world at all. Did these men get their appointment from the epicures of the religious world, to play set tunes on sweet, pious texts in that pleasure garden where blossom airy nothings? I neither affect those tunes nor do I find any sustenance in those blossoms.

What I desire, I desire positively, superlatively. I want to knead it with both my hands and both my feet; I want to smear it all over my body; I want to gorge myself with it to the full. The scranne pipes of those who have worn themselves out by their moral fastings, till they have become flat and pale like starved vermin infesting a long-deserted bed, will never reach my ear.

I would conceal nothing, because that would be cowardly. But if I cannot bring myself to conceal when concealment is needful, that also is cowardly. Because you have your greed, you build your walls. Because I have my greed, I break through them. You use your power: I use my craft. These are the realities of life. On these depend kingdoms and empires and all the great enterprises of men.

As for those *avatars* who come down from their paradise to talk to us in some holy jargon—their words are not real. Therefore, in spite of all the applause they get, these sayings of theirs only find a place in the hiding corners of the weak.

They are despised by those who are strong, the rulers of the world. Those who have had the courage to see this have won success, while those poor wretches who are dragged one way by nature and the other way by these avatars, they set one foot in the boat of the real and the other in the boat of the unreal, and thus are in a pitiable plight, able neither to advance nor to keep their place.

There are many men who seem to have been born only with an obsession to die. Possibly there is a beauty, like that of a sunset, in this lingering death in life which seems to fascinate them. Nikhil lives this kind of life, if life it may be called. Years ago, I had a great argument with him on this point.

"It is true," he said, "that you cannot get anything except by force. But then what is this force? And then also, what is this getting? The strength I believe in is the strength of renouncing."

"So you," I exclaimed, "are infatuated with the glory of bankruptcy."

"Just as desperately as the chick is infatuated about the bankruptcy of its shell," he replied. "The shell is real enough, yet it is given up in exchange for intangible light and air. A sorry exchange, I suppose you would call it?"

When once Nikhil gets on to metaphor, there is no hope of making him see that he is merely dealing with words, not with realities. Well, well, let him be happy with his metaphors. We are the flesh-eaters of the world; we have teeth and nails; we pursue and grab and tear. We are not satisfied with chewing in the evening the cud of the grass we have eaten in the morning. Anyhow, we cannot allow your metaphor-mongers to bar the door to our sustenance. In that case we shall simply steal or rob, for we must live.

People will say that I am starting some novel theory just because those who are moving in this world are in the habit of talking differently though they are really acting up to it all the time. Therefore they fail to understand, as I do, that this is the only working moral principle. In point of fact, I know that my idea is not an empty theory at all, for it has been proved in practical life. I have found that my way always wins over the hearts of women, who are creatures of this world of reality and do not roam about in cloud-land, as men do, in idea-filled balloons.

Women find in my features, my manner, my gait, my speech, a masterful passion—not a passion dried thin with the heat of asceticism, not a passion with its face turned back at every step in doubt and debate, but a full-blooded passion. It roars and rolls on, like a flood, with the cry: "I want, I want, I want." Women feel, in their own heart of hearts, that this indomitable passion is the lifeblood of the world, acknowledging no law but itself, and therefore victorious. For this reason they have so often abandoned themselves to be swept away on the flood-tide of my passion, recking naught as to whether it takes them to life or to death. This power which wins these women is the power of mighty men, the power which wins the world of reality.

Those who imagine the greater desirability of another world merely shift their desires from the earth to the skies. It remains to be seen how high their gushing fountain will play, and for how long. But this much is certain: women were not created for these pale creatures—these lotus-eaters of idealism.

"Affinity!" When it suited my need, I have often said that God has created special pairs of men and women, and that the union of such is the only legitimate union, higher than all unions made by law. The reason of it is, that though man wants to follow nature, he can find no pleasure in it unless he screens himself with some phrase—and that is why this world is so overflowing with lies.

"Affinity!" Why should there be only one? There may be affinity with

thousands. It was never in my agreement with nature that I should overlook all my innumerable affinities for the sake of only one. I have discovered many in my own life up to now, yet that has not closed the door to one more—and that one is clearly visible to my eyes. She has also discovered her own affinity to me.

And then?

Then, if I do not win I am a coward.

Chapter 3

Bimala's Story VI I wonder what could have happened to my feeling of shame. The fact is, I had no time to think about myself. My days and nights were passing in a whirl, like an eddy with myself in the centre. No gap was left for hesitation or delicacy to enter.

One day my sister-in-law remarked to my husband: "Up to now the women of this house have been kept weeping. Here comes the men's turn.

"We must see that they do not miss it," she continued, turning to me. "I see you are out for the fray, *Chota Rani!* Hurl your shafts straight at their hearts."

34. Bimala, the younger brother's wife, was the *Chota* or Junior *Rani*.

Her keen eyes looked me up and down. Not one of the colours into which my toilet, my dress, my manners, my speech, had blossomed out had escaped her. I am ashamed to speak of it today, but I felt no shame then. Something within me was at work of which I was not even conscious. I used to overdress, it is true, but more like an automaton, with no particular design. No doubt I knew which effort of mine would prove specially pleasing to Sandip Babu, but that required no intuition, for he would discuss it openly before all of them.

One day he said to my husband: "Do you know, Nikhil, when I first saw our Queen Bee, she was sitting there so demurely in her gold-bordered *sari*. Her eyes were gazing inquiringly into space, like stars which had lost their way, just as if she had been for ages standing on the edge of some darkness, looking out for something unknown. But when I saw her, I felt a quiver run through me. It seemed to me that the gold border of her *sari* was her own inner fire flaming out and twining round her. That is the flame we want, visible fire! Look here, Queen Bee, you really must do us the favour of dressing once more as a living flame."

So long I had been like a small river at the border of a village. My rhythm and my language were different from what they are now. But the tide came up from the sea, and my breast heaved; my banks gave way and the great drumbeats of the sea waves echoed in my mad current. I could not understand the meaning of

that sound in my blood. Where was that former self of mine? Whence came foaming into me this surging flood of glory? Sandip's hungry eyes burnt like the lamps of worship before my shrine. All his gaze proclaimed that I was a wonder in beauty and power; and the loudness of his praise, spoken and unspoken, drowned all other voices in my world. Had the Creator created me afresh, I wondered? Did he wish to make up now for neglecting me so long? I who before was plain had become suddenly beautiful. I who before had been of no account now felt in myself all the splendour of Bengal itself.

For Sandip Babu was not a mere individual. In him was the confluence of millions of minds of the country. When he called me the Queen Bee of the hive, I was acclaimed with a chorus of praise by all our patriot workers. After that, the loud jests of my sister-in-law could not touch me any longer. My relations with all the world underwent a change. Sandip Babu made it clear how all the country was in need of me. I had no difficulty in believing this at the time, for I felt that I had the power to do everything. Divine strength had come to me. It was something which I had never felt before, which was beyond myself. I had no time to question it to find out what was its nature. It seemed to belong to me, and yet to transcend me. It comprehended the whole of Bengal.

Sandip Babu would consult me about every little thing touching the Cause. At first I felt very awkward and would hang back, but that soon wore off. Whatever I suggested seemed to astonish him. He would go into raptures and say: "Men can only think. You women have a way of understanding without thinking. Woman was created out of God's own fancy. Man, He had to hammer into shape."

Letters used to come to Sandip Babu from all parts of the country which were submitted to me for my opinion. Occasionally he disagreed with me. But I would not argue with him. Then after a day or two—as if a new light had suddenly dawned upon him—he would send for me and say: "It was my mistake. Your suggestion was the correct one." He would often confess to me that wherever he had taken steps contrary to my advice he had gone wrong. Thus I gradually came to be convinced that behind whatever was taking place was Sandip Babu, and behind Sandip Babu was the plain common sense of a woman. The glory of a great responsibility filled my being.

My husband had no place in our counsels. Sandip Babu treated him as a younger brother, of whom personally one may be very fond and yet have no use for his business advice. He would tenderly and smilingly talk about my husband's childlike innocence, saying that his curious doctrine and perversities of mind had a flavour of humour which made them all the more lovable. It was

seemingly this very affection for Nikhil which led Sandip Babu to forbear from troubling him with the burden of the country.

Nature has many anodynes in her pharmacy, which she secretly administers when vital relations are being insidiously severed, so that none may know of the operation, till at last one awakes to know what a great rent has been made. When the knife was busy with my life's most intimate tie, my mind was so clouded with fumes of intoxicating gas that I was not in the least aware of what a cruel thing was happening. Possibly this is woman's nature. When her passion is roused she loses her sensibility for all that is outside it. When, like the river, we women keep to our banks, we give nourishment with all that we have: when we overflow them we destroy with all that we are.

Sandip's Story II I can see that something has gone wrong. I got an inkling of it the other day.

Ever since my arrival, Nikhil's sitting-room had become a thing amphibious—half women's apartment, half men's: Bimala had access to it from the zenana, it was not barred to me from the outer side. If we had only gone slow, and made use of our privileges with some restraint, we might not have fallen foul of other people. But we went ahead so vehemently that we could not think of the consequences.

Whenever Bee comes into Nikhil's room, I somehow get to know of it from mine. There are the tinkle of bangles and other little sounds; the door is perhaps shut with a shade of unnecessary vehemence; the bookcase is a trifle stiff and creaks if jerked open. When I enter I find Bee, with her back to the door, ever so busy selecting a book from the shelves. And as I offer to assist her in this difficult task she starts and protests; and then we naturally get on to other topics.

The other day, on an inauspicious [35](#) Thursday afternoon, I sallied forth from my room at the call of these same sounds. There was a man on guard in the passage. I walked on without so much as glancing at him, but as I approached the door he put himself in my way saying: "Not that way, sir."

[35.](#) According to the Hindu calendar. [Trans.]

"Not that way! Why?"

"The *Rani* Mother is there."

"Oh, very well. Tell your *Rani* Mother that Sandip Babu wants to see her."

"That cannot be, sir. It is against orders."

I felt highly indignant. "I order you!" I said in a raised voice.

"Go and announce me."

The fellow was somewhat taken aback at my attitude. In the meantime I had neared the door. I was on the point of reaching it, when he followed after me and took me by the arm saying: "No, sir, you must not."

What! To be touched by a flunkey! I snatched away my arm and gave the man a sounding blow. At this moment Bee came out of the room to find the man about to insult me.

I shall never forget the picture of her wrath! That Bee is beautiful is a discovery of my own. Most of our people would see nothing in her. Her tall, slim figure these boors would call "lanky". But it is just this litesomeness of hers that I admire—like an up-leaping fountain of life, coming direct out of the depths of the Creator's heart. Her complexion is dark, but it is the lustrous darkness of a sword-blade, keen and scintillating.

"Nanku!" she commanded, as she stood in the doorway, pointing with her finger, "leave us."

"Do not be angry with him," said I. "If it is against orders, it is I who should retire."

Bee's voice was still trembling as she replied: "You must not go. Come in."

It was not a request, but again a command! I followed her in, and taking a chair fanned myself with a fan which was on the table. Bee scribbled something with a pencil on a sheet of paper and, summoning a servant, handed it to him saying: "Take this to the Maharaja."

"Forgive me," I resumed. "I was unable to control myself, and hit that man of yours.

"You served him right," said Bee.

"But it was not the poor fellow's fault, after all. He was only obeying his orders."

Here Nikhil came in, and as he did so I left my seat with a rapid movement and went and stood near the window with my back to the room.

"Nanku, the guard, has insulted Sandip Babu," said Bee to Nikhil.

Nikhil seemed to be so genuinely surprised that I had to turn round and stare at him. Even an outrageously good man fails in keeping up his pride of truthfulness before his wife—if she be the proper kind of woman.

"He insolently stood in the way when Sandip Babu was coming in here," continued Bee. "He said he had orders..."

"Whose orders?" asked Nikhil.

"How am I to know?" exclaimed Bee impatiently, her eyes brimming over with

mortification.

Nikhil sent for the man and questioned him. "It was not my fault," Nanku repeated sullenly. "I had my orders."

"Who gave you the order?"

"The *Bara Rani* Mother."

We were all silent for a while. After the man had left, Bee said: "Nanku must go!"

Nikhil remained silent. I could see that his sense of justice would not allow this. There was no end to his qualms. But this time he was up against a tough problem. Bee was not the woman to take things lying down. She would have to get even with her sister-in-law by punishing this fellow. And as Nikhil remained silent, her eyes flashed fire. She knew not how to pour her scorn upon her husband's feebleness of spirit. Nikhil left the room after a while without another word.

The next day Nanku was not to be seen. On inquiry, I learnt that he had been sent off to some other part of the estates, and that his wages had not suffered by such transfer.

I could catch glimpses of the ravages of the storm raging over this, behind the scenes. All I can say is, that Nikhil is a curious creature, quite out of the common.

The upshot was, that after this Bee began to send for me to the sitting-room, for a chat, without any contrivance, or pretence of its being an accident. Thus from bare suggestion we came to broad hint: the implied came to be expressed. The daughter-in-law of a princely house lives in a starry region so remote from the ordinary outsider that there is not even a regular road for his approach. What a triumphal progress of Truth was this which, gradually but persistently, thrust aside veil after veil of obscuring custom, till at length Nature herself was laid bare.

Truth? Of course it was the truth! The attraction of man and woman for each other is fundamental. The whole world of matter, from the speck of dust upwards, is ranged on its side. And yet men would keep it hidden away out of sight, behind a tissue of words; and with home-made sanctions and prohibitions make of it a domestic utensil. Why, it's as absurd as melting down the solar system to make a watch-chain for one's son-in-law! [36](#)

[36.](#) The son-in-law is the pet of a Hindu household.

When, in spite of all, reality awakes at the call of what is but naked truth, what a gnashing of teeth and beating of breasts is there! But can one carry on a quarrel with a storm? It never takes the trouble to reply, it only gives a shaking.

I am enjoying the sight of this truth, as it gradually reveals itself. These tremblings of steps, these turnings of the face, are sweet to me: and sweet are the deceptions which deceive not only others, but also Bee herself. When Reality has to meet the unreal, deception is its principal weapon; for its enemies always try to shame Reality by calling it gross, and so it needs must hide itself, or else put on some disguise. The circumstances are such that it dare not frankly avow: "Yes, I am gross, because I am true. I am flesh. I am passion. I am hunger, unashamed and cruel."

All is now clear to me. The curtain flaps, and through it I can see the preparations for the catastrophe. The little red ribbon, which peeps through the luxuriant masses of her hair, with its flush of secret longing, it is the lolling tongue of the red storm cloud. I feel the warmth of each turn of her *sari*, each suggestion of her raiment, of which even the wearer may not be fully conscious.

Bee was not conscious, because she was ashamed of the reality; to which men have given a bad name, calling it Satan; and so it has to steal into the garden of paradise in the guise of a snake, and whisper secrets into the ears of man's chosen consort and make her rebellious; then farewell to all ease; and after that comes death!

My poor little Queen Bee is living in a dream. She knows not which way she is treading. It would not be safe to awaken her before the time. It is best for me to pretend to be equally unconscious.

The other day, at dinner, she was gazing at me in a curious sort of way, little realizing what such glances mean! As my eyes met hers, she turned away with a flush. "You are surprised at my appetite," I remarked. "I can hide everything, except that I am greedy! Anyhow, why trouble to blush for me, since I am shameless?"

This only made her colour more furiously, as she stammered: "No, no, I was only..."

"I know," I interrupted. "Women have a weakness for greedy men; for it is this greed of ours which gives them the upper hand. The indulgence which I have always received at their hands has made me all the more shameless. I do not mind your watching the good things disappear, not one bit. I mean to enjoy every one of them."

The other day I was reading an English book in which sex-problems were treated in an audaciously realistic manner. I had left it lying in the sitting-room. As I went there the next afternoon, for something or other, I found Bee seated with this book in her hand. When she heard my footsteps she hurriedly put it down and placed another book over it—a volume of Mrs Hemans's poems.

"I have never been able to make out," I began, "why women are so shy about being caught reading poetry. We men—lawyers, mechanics, or what not—may well feel ashamed. If we must read poetry, it should be at dead of night, within closed doors. But you women are so akin to poesy. The Creator Himself is a lyric poet, and Jayadeva [37](#) must have practised the divine art seated at His feet."

[37.](#) A Vaishnava poet (Sanskrit) whose lyrics of the adoration of the Divinity serve as well to express all shades of human passion [Trans.]

Bee made no reply, but only blushed uncomfortably. She made as if she would leave the room. Whereupon I protested: "No, no, pray read on. I will just take a book I left here, and run away." With which I took up my book from the table. "Lucky you did not think of glancing over its pages," I continued, "or you would have wanted to chastise me."

"Indeed! Why?" asked Bee.

"Because it is not poetry," said I. "Only blunt things, bluntly put, without any finicking niceness. I wish Nikhil would read it."

Bee frowned a little as she murmured: "What makes you wish that?"

"He is a man, you see, one of us. My only quarrel with him is that he delights in a misty vision of this world. Have you not observed how this trait of his makes him look on *Swadeshi* as if it was some poem of which the metre must be kept correct at every step? We, with the clubs of our prose, are the iconoclasts of metre."

"What has your book to do with *Swadeshi*?"

"You would know if you only read it. Nikhil wants to go by made-up maxims, in *Swadeshi* as in everything else; so he knocks up against human nature at every turn, and then falls to abusing it. He never will realize that human nature was created long before phrases were, and will survive them too."

Bee was silent for a while and then gravely said: "Is it not a part of human nature to try and rise superior to itself?"

I smiled inwardly. "These are not your words", I thought to myself. "You have learnt them from Nikhil. You are a healthy human being. Your flesh and blood have responded to the call of reality. You are burning in every vein with life-fire —do I not know it? How long should they keep you cool with the wet towel of moral precepts?"

"The weak are in the majority," I said aloud. "They are continually poisoning the ears of men by repeating these shibboleths. Nature has denied them strength —it is thus that they try to enfeeble others."

"We women are weak," replied Bimala. "So I suppose we must join in the conspiracy of the weak."

“Women weak!” I exclaimed with a laugh. “Men belaud you as delicate and fragile, so as to delude you into thinking yourselves weak. But it is you women who are strong. Men make a great outward show of their so-called freedom, but those who know their inner minds are aware of their bondage. They have manufactured scriptures with their own hands to bind themselves; with their very idealism they have made golden fetters of women to wind round their body and mind. If men had not that extraordinary faculty of entangling themselves in meshes of their own contriving, nothing could have kept them bound. But as for you women, you have desired to conceive reality with body and soul. You have given birth to reality. You have suckled reality at your breasts.”

Bee was well read for a woman, and would not easily give in to my arguments. “If that were true,” she objected, “men would not have found women attractive.”

“Women realize the danger,” I replied. “They know that men love delusions, so they give them full measure by borrowing their own phrases. They know that man, the drunkard, values intoxication more than food, and so they try to pass themselves off as an intoxicant. As a matter of fact, but for the sake of man, woman has no need for any make-believe.”

“Why, then, are you troubling to destroy the illusion?”

“For freedom. I want the country to be free. I want human relations to be free.”

III I was aware that it is unsafe suddenly to awake a sleep-walker. But I am so impetuous by nature, a halting gait does not suit me. I knew I was overbold that day. I knew that the first shock of such ideas is apt to be almost intolerable. But with women it is always audacity that wins.

Just as we were getting on nicely, who should walk in but Nikhil’s old tutor Chandranath Babu. The world would have been not half a bad place to live in but for these schoolmasters, who make one want to quit in disgust. The Nikhil type wants to keep the world always a school. This incarnation of a school turned up that afternoon at the psychological moment.

We all remain schoolboys in some corner of our hearts, and I, even I, felt somewhat pulled up. As for poor Bee, she at once took her place solemnly, like the topmost girl of the class on the front bench. All of a sudden she seemed to remember that she had to face her examination.

Some people are so like eternal points men lying in wait by the line, to shunt one’s train of thought from one rail to another.

Chandranath Babu had no sooner come in than he cast about for some excuse to retire, mumbling: “I beg your pardon, I...”

Before he could finish, Bee went up to him and made a profound obeisance, saying: "Pray do not leave us, sir. Will you not take a seat?" She looked like a drowning person clutching at him for support—the little coward!

But possibly I was mistaken. It is quite likely that there was a touch of womanly wile in it. She wanted, perhaps, to raise her value in my eyes. She might have been pointedly saying to me: "Please don't imagine for a moment that I am entirely overcome by you. My respect for Chandranath Babu is even greater."

Well, indulge in your respect by all means! Schoolmasters thrive on it. But not being one of them, I have no use for that empty compliment.

Chandranath Babu began to talk about *Swadeshi*. I thought I would let him go on with his monologues. There is nothing like letting an old man talk himself out. It makes him feel that he is winding up the world, forgetting all the while how far away the real world is from his wagging tongue.

But even my worst enemy would not accuse me of patience. And when Chandranath Babu went on to say: "If we expect to gather fruit where we have sown no seed, then we..." I had to interrupt him.

"Who wants fruit?" I cried. "We go by the Author of the Gita who says that we are concerned only with the doing, not with the fruit of our deeds."

"What is it then that you do want?" asked Chandranath Babu.

"Thorns!" I exclaimed, "which cost nothing to plant."

"Thorns do not obstruct others only," he replied. "They have a way of hurting one's own feet."

"That is all right for a copy-book," I retorted. "But the real thing is that we have this burning at heart. Now we have only to cultivate thorns for other's soles; afterwards when they hurt us we shall find leisure to repent. But why be frightened even of that? When at last we have to die it will be time enough to get cold. While we are on fire let us seethe and boil."

Chandranath Babu smiled. "Seethe by all means," he said, "but do not mistake it for work, or heroism. Nations which have got on in the world have done so by action, not by ebullition. Those who have always lain in dread of work, when with a start they awake to their sorry plight, they look to short-cuts and scamping for their deliverance."

I was girding up my loins to deliver a crushing reply, when Nikhil came back. Chandranath Babu rose, and looking towards Bee, said: "Let me go now, my little mother, I have some work to attend to."

As he left, I showed Nikhil the book in my hand. "I was telling Queen Bee about this book," I said.

Ninety-nine per cent of people have to be deluded with lies, but it is easier to delude this perpetual pupil of the schoolmaster with the truth. He is best cheated openly. So, in playing with him, the simplest course was to lay my cards on the table.

Nikhil read the title on the cover, but said nothing. "These writers," I continued, "are busy with their brooms, sweeping away the dust of epithets with which men have covered up this world of ours. So, as I was saying, I wish you would read it."

"I have read it," said Nikhil.

"Well, what do you say?"

"It is all very well for those who really care to think, but poison for those who shirk thought."

"What do you mean?"

"Those who preach 'Equal Rights of Property' should not be thieves. For, if they are, they would be preaching lies. When passion is in the ascendant, this kind of book is not rightly understood."

"Passion," I replied, "is the street lamp which guides us. To call it untrue is as hopeless as to expect to see better by plucking out our natural eyes."

Nikhil was visibly growing excited. "I accept the truth of passion," he said, "only when I recognize the truth of restraint. By pressing what we want to see right into our eyes we only injure them: we do not see. So does the violence of passion, which would leave no space between the mind and its object, defeat its purpose."

"It is simply your intellectual foppery," I replied, "which makes you indulge in moral delicacy, ignoring the savage side of truth. This merely helps you to mystify things, and so you fail to do your work with any degree of strength."

"The intrusion of strength," said Nikhil impatiently, "where strength is out of place, does not help you in your work... But why are we arguing about these things? Vain arguments only brush off the fresh bloom of truth."

I wanted Bee to join in the discussion, but she had not said a word up to now. Could I have given her too rude a shock, leaving her assailed with doubts and wanting to learn her lesson afresh from the schoolmaster? Still, a thorough shaking-up is essential. One must begin by realizing that things supposed to be unshakeable can be shaken.

"I am glad I had this talk with you," I said to Nikhil, "for I was on the point of lending this book to Queen Bee to read."

"What harm?" said Nikhil. "If I could read the book, why not Bimala too? All I want to say is, that in Europe people look at everything from the viewpoint of

science. But man is neither mere physiology, nor biology, nor psychology, nor even sociology. For God's sake don't forget that. Man is infinitely more than the natural science of himself. You laugh at me, calling me the schoolmaster's pupil, but that is what you are, not I. You want to find the truth of man from your science teachers, and not from your own inner being."

"But why all this excitement?" I mocked.

"Because I see you are bent on insulting man and making him petty."

"Where on earth do you see all that?"

"In the air, in my outraged feelings. You would go on wounding the great, the unselfish, the beautiful in man."

"What mad idea is this of yours?"

Nikhil suddenly stood up. "I tell you plainly, Sandip," he said, "man may be wounded unto death, but he will not die. This is the reason why I am ready to suffer all, knowing all, with eyes open."

With these words he hurriedly left the room.

I was staring blankly at his retreating figure, when the sound of a book, falling from the table, made me turn to find Bee following him with quick, nervous steps, making a detour to avoid passing too near me.

A curious creature, that Nikhil! He feels the danger threatening his home, and yet why does he not turn me out? I know, he is waiting for Bimal to give him the cue. If Bimal tells him that their mating has been a misfit, he will bow his head and admit that it may have been a blunder! He has not the strength of mind to understand that to acknowledge a mistake is the greatest of all mistakes. He is a typical example of how ideas make for weakness. I have not seen another like him—so whimsical a product of nature! He would hardly do as a character in a novel or drama, to say nothing of real life.

And Bee? I am afraid her dream-life is over from today. She has at length understood the nature of the current which is bearing her along. Now she must either advance or retreat, open-eyed. The chances are she will now advance a step, and then retreat a step. But that does not disturb me. When one is on fire, this rushing to and fro makes the blaze all the fiercer. The fright she has got will only fan her passion.

Perhaps I had better not say much to her, but simply select some modern books for her to read. Let her gradually come to the conviction that to acknowledge and respect passion as the supreme reality, is to be modern—not to be ashamed of it, not to glorify restraint. If she finds shelter in some such word as "modern", she will find strength.

Be that as it may, I must see this out to the end of the Fifth Act. I cannot,

unfortunately, boast of being merely a spectator, seated in the royal box, applauding now and again. There is a wrench at my heart, a pang in every nerve. When I have put out the light and am in my bed, little touches, little glances, little words flit about and fill the darkness. When I get up in the morning, I thrill with lively anticipations, my blood seems to course through me to the strains of music...

There was a double photo-frame on the table with Bee's photograph by the side of Nikhil's. I had taken out hers. Yesterday I showed Bee the empty side and said: "Theft becomes necessary only because of miserliness, so its sin must be divided between the miser and the thief. Do you not think so?"

"It was not a good one," observed Bee simply, with a little smile.

"What is to be done?" said I. "A portrait cannot be better than a portrait. I must be content with it, such as it is."

Bee took up a book and began to turn over the pages. "If you are annoyed," I went on, "I must make a shift to fill up the vacancy."

Today I have filled it up. This photograph of mine was taken in my early youth. My face was then fresher, and so was my mind. Then I still cherished some illusions about this world and the next. Faith deceives men, but it has one great merit: it imparts a radiance to the features.

My portrait now reposes next to Nikhil's, for are not the two of us old friends?

Chapter 4

Nikhil's Story III I was never self-conscious. But nowadays I often try to take an outside view—to see myself as Bimal sees me. What a dismally solemn picture it makes, my habit of taking things too seriously!

Better, surely, to laugh away the world than flood it with tears. That is, in fact, how the world gets on. We relish our food and rest, only because we can dismiss, as so many empty shadows, the sorrows scattered everywhere, both in the home and in the outer world. If we took them as true, even for a moment, where would be our appetite, our sleep?

But I cannot dismiss myself as one of these shadows, and so the load of my sorrow lies eternally heavy on the heart of my world.

Why not stand out aloof in the highway of the universe, and feel yourself to be part of the all? In the midst of the immense, age-long concourse of humanity, what is Bimal to you? Your wife? What is a wife? A bubble of a name blown big with your own breath, so carefully guarded night and day, yet ready to burst at any pin-prick from outside.

My wife—and so, forsooth, my very own! If she says: "No, I am myself"—am I to reply: "How can that be? Are you not mine?"

"My wife"—Does that amount to an argument, much less the truth? Can one imprison a whole personality within that name?

My wife!—Have I not cherished in this little world all that is purest and sweetest in my life, never for a moment letting it down from my bosom to the dust? What incense of worship, what music of passion, what flowers of my spring and of my autumn, have I not offered up at its shrine? If, like a toy paper-boat, she be swept along into the muddy waters of the gutter—would I not also...?

There it is again, my incorrigible solemnity! Why "muddy"? What "gutter" names, called in a fit of jealousy, do not change the facts of the world. If Bimal is not mine, she is not; and no fuming, or fretting, or arguing will serve to prove

that she is. If my heart is breaking—let it break! That will not make the world bankrupt—nor even me; for man is so much greater than the things he loses in this life. The very ocean of tears has its other shore, else none would have ever wept.

But then there is Society to be considered... which let Society consider! If I weep it is for myself, not for Society. If Bimal should say she is not mine, what care I where my Society wife may be?

Suffering there must be; but I must save myself, by any means in my power, from one form of self-torture: I must never think that my life loses its value because of any neglect it may suffer. The full value of my life does not all go to buy my narrow domestic world; its great commerce does not stand or fall with some petty success or failure in the bartering of my personal joys and sorrows.

The time has come when I must divest Bimala of all the ideal decorations with which I decked her. It was owing to my own weakness that I indulged in such idolatry. I was too greedy. I created an angel of Bimala, in order to exaggerate my own enjoyment. But Bimala is what she is. It is preposterous to expect that she should assume the rôle of an angel for my pleasure. The Creator is under no obligation to supply me with angels, just because I have an avidity for imaginary perfection.

I must acknowledge that I have merely been an accident in Bimala's life. Her nature, perhaps, can only find true union with one like Sandip. At the same time, I must not, in false modesty, accept my rejection as my desert. Sandip certainly has attractive qualities, which had their sway also upon myself; but yet, I feel sure, he is not a greater man than I. If the wreath of victory falls to his lot today, and I am overlooked, then the dispenser of the wreath will be called to judgement.

I say this in no spirit of boasting. Sheer necessity has driven me to the pass, that to secure myself from utter desolation I must recognize all the value that I truly possess. Therefore, through the, terrible experience of suffering let there come upon me the joy of deliverance—deliverance from self-distrust.

I have come to distinguish what is really in me from what I foolishly imagined to be there. The profit and loss account has been settled, and that which remains is myself—not a crippled self, dressed in rags and tatters, not a sick self to be nursed on invalid diet, but a spirit which has gone through the worst, and has survived.

My master passed through my room a moment ago and said with his hand on my shoulder. "Get away to bed, Nikhil, the night is far advanced."

The fact is, it has become so difficult for me to go to bed till late—till Bimal is

fast asleep. In the day-time we meet, and even converse, but what am I to say when we are alone together, in the silence of the night?—so ashamed do I feel in mind and body.

"How is it, sir, you have not yet retired?" I asked in my turn. My master smiled a little, as he left me, saying: "My sleeping days are over. I have now attained the waking age."

I had written thus far, and was about to rise to go off bedwards when, through the window before me, I saw the heavy pall of July cloud suddenly part a little, and a big star shine through. It seemed to say to me: "Dreamland ties are made, and dreamland ties are broken, but I am here forever—the everlasting lamp of the bridal night."

All at once my heart was full with the thought that my Eternal Love was steadfastly waiting for me through the ages, behind the veil of material things. Through many a life, in many a mirror, have I seen her image—broken mirrors, crooked mirrors, dusty mirrors. Whenever I have sought to make the mirror my very own, and shut it up within my box, I have lost sight of the image. But what of that. What have I to do with the mirror, or even the image?

My beloved, your smile shall never fade, and every dawn there shall appear fresh for me the vermillion mark on your forehead!

"What childish cajolery of self-deception," mocks some devil from his dark corner—"silly prattle to make children quiet!"

That may be. But millions and millions of children, with their million cries, have to be kept quiet. Can it be that all this multitude is quieted with only a lie? No, my Eternal Love cannot deceive me, for she is true!

She is true; that is why I have seen her and shall see her so often, even in my mistakes, even through the thickest mist of tears. I have seen her and lost her in the crowd of life's market-place, and found her again; and I shall find her once more when I have escaped through the loophole of death.

Ah, cruel one, play with me no longer! If I have failed to track you by the marks of your footsteps on the way, by the scent of your tresses lingering in the air, make me not weep for that forever. The unveiled star tells me not to fear. That which is eternal must always be there.

Now let me go and see my Bimala. She must have spread her tired limbs on the bed, limp after her struggles, and be asleep. I will leave a kiss on her forehead without waking her—that shall be the flower-offering of my worship. I believe I could forget everything after death—all my mistakes, all my sufferings—but some vibration of the memory of that kiss would remain; for the wreath which is being woven out of the kisses of many a successive birth is to crown the Eternal

Beloved.

As the gong of the watch rang out, sounding the hour of two, my sister-in-law came into the room. “Whatever are you doing, brother dear?” [38](#) She cried. “For pity’s sake go to bed and stop worrying so. I cannot bear to look on that awful shadow of pain on your face.” Tears welled up in her eyes and overflowed as she entreated me thus.

[38.](#) When a relationship is established by marriage, or by mutual understanding arising out of special friendship or affection, the persons so related call each other in terms of such relationship, and not by name. [Trans.]

I could not utter a word, but took the dust of her feet, as I went off to bed.

Bimala’s Story VII At first I suspected nothing, feared nothing; I simply felt dedicated to my country. What a stupendous joy there was in this unquestioning surrender.

Verily had I realized how, in thoroughness of self-destruction, man can find supreme bliss.

For aught I know, this frenzy of mine might have come to a gradual, natural end. But Sandip Babu would not have it so, he would insist on revealing himself. The tone of his voice became as intimate as a touch, every look flung itself on its knees in beggary. And, through it all, there burned a passion which in its violence made as though it would tear me up by the roots, and drag me along by the hair.

I will not shirk the truth. This cataclysmal desire drew me by day and by night. It seemed desperately alluring—this making havoc of myself. What a shame it seemed, how terrible, and yet how sweet! Then there was my overpowering curiosity, to which there seemed no limit. He of whom I knew but little, who never could assuredly be mine, whose youth flared so vigorously in a hundred points of flame—oh, the mystery of his seething passions, so immense, so tumultuous!

I began with a feeling of worship, but that soon passed away. I ceased even to respect Sandip; on the contrary, I began to look down upon him. Nevertheless this flesh-and-blood lute of mine, fashioned with my feeling and fancy, found in him a master-player. What though I shrank from his touch, and even came to loathe the lute itself; its music was conjured up all the same.

I must confess there was something in me which... what shall I say? Which makes me wish I could have died!

Chandranath Babu, when he finds leisure, comes to me. He has the power to lift my mind up to an eminence from where I can see in a moment the boundary of my life extended on all sides and so realize that the lines, which I took from my bounds, were merely imaginary.

But what is the use of it all? Do I really desire emancipation? Let suffering come to our house; let the best in me shrivel up and become black; but let this infatuation not leave me—such seems to be my prayer.

When, before my marriage, I used to see a brother-in-law of mine, now dead, mad with drink—beating his wife in his frenzy, and then sobbing and howling in maudlin repentance, vowing never to touch liquor again, and yet, the very same evening, sitting down to drink and drink—it would fill me with disgust. But my intoxication today is still more fearful. The stuff has not to be procured or poured out: it springs within my veins, and I know not how to resist it.

Must this continue to the end of my days? Now and again I start and look upon myself, and think my life to be a nightmare which will vanish all of a sudden with all its untruth. It has become so frightfully incongruous. It has no connection with its past. What it is, how it could have come to this pass, I cannot understand.

One day my sister-in-law remarked with a cutting laugh: “What a wonderfully hospitable *Chota Rani* we have! Her guest absolutely will not budge. In our time there used to be guests, too; but they had not such lavish looking after—we were so absurdly taken up with our husbands. Poor brother Nikhil is paying the penalty of being born too modern. He should have come as a guest if he wanted to stay on. Now it looks as if it were time for him to quit... O you little demon, do your glances never fall, by chance, on his agonized face?”

This sarcasm did not touch me; for I knew that these women had it not in them to understand the nature of the cause of my devotion. I was then wrapped in the protecting armour of the exaltation of sacrifice, through which such shafts were powerless to reach and shame me.

VIII For some time all talk of the country's cause has been dropped. Our conversation nowadays has become full of modern sex-problems, and various other matters, with a sprinkling of poetry, both old Vaishnava and modern English, accompanied by a running undertone of melody, low down in the bass, such as I have never in my life heard before, which seems to me to sound the true manly note, the note of power.

The day had come when all cover was gone. There was no longer even the pretence of a reason why Sandip Babu should linger on, or why I should have confidential talks with him every now and then. I felt thoroughly vexed with myself, with my sister-in-law, with the ways of the world, and I vowed I would never again go to the outer apartments, not if I were to die for it.

For two whole days I did not stir out. Then, for the first time, I discovered how far I had travelled. My life felt utterly tasteless. Whatever I touched I wanted to thrust away. I felt myself waiting—from the crown of my head to the tips of my toes—waiting for something, somebody; my blood kept tingling with some expectation.

I tried busying myself with extra work. The bedroom floor was clean enough but I insisted on its being scrubbed over again under my eyes. Things were arranged in the cabinets in one kind of order; I pulled them all out and rearranged them in a different way. I found no time that afternoon even to do up my hair; I hurriedly tied it into a loose knot, and went and worried everybody, fussing about the store-room. The stores seemed short, and pilfering must have been going on of late, but I could not muster up the courage to take any particular person to task—for might not the thought have crossed somebody's mind: "Where were your eyes all these days!"

In short, I behaved that day as one possessed. The next day I tried to do some reading. What I read I have no idea, but after a spell of absentmindedness I found I had wandered away, book in hand, along the passage leading towards the outer apartments, and was standing by a window looking out upon the verandah running along the row of rooms on the opposite side of the quadrangle. One of these rooms, I felt, had crossed over to another shore, and the ferry had ceased to ply. I felt like the ghost of myself of two days ago, doomed to remain where I was, and yet not really there, blankly looking out for ever.

As I stood there, I saw Sandip come out of his room into the verandah, a newspaper in his hand. I could see that he looked extraordinarily disturbed. The courtyard, the railings, in front, seemed to rouse his wrath. He flung away his newspaper with a gesture which seemed to want to rend the space before him.

I felt I could no longer keep my vow. I was about to move on towards the sitting-room, when I found my sister-in-law behind me. "O Lord, this beats everything!" she ejaculated, as she glided away. I could not proceed to the outer apartments.

The next morning when my maid came calling, "*Rani* Mother, it is getting late for giving out the stores," I flung the keys to her, saying, "Tell Harimati to see to it," and went on with some embroidery of English pattern on which I was

engaged, seated near the window.

Then came a servant with a letter. "From Sandip Babu," said he. What unbounded boldness! What must the messenger have thought? There was a tremor within my breast as I opened the envelope. There was no address on the letter, only the words: *An urgent matter—touching the Cause. Sandip.*

I flung aside the embroidery. I was up on my feet in a moment, giving a touch or two to my hair by the mirror. I kept the *sari* I had on, changing only my jacket—for one of my jackets had its associations.

I had to pass through one of the verandahs, where my sister-in-law used to sit in the morning slicing betel-nut. I refused to feel awkward. "Whither away, *Chota Rani?*" she cried.

"To the sitting-room outside."

"So early! A matinée, eh?"

And, as I passed on without further reply, she hummed after me a flippant song.

IX

When I was about to enter the sitting-room, I saw Sandip immersed in an illustrated catalogue of British Academy pictures, with his back to the door. He has a great notion of himself as an expert in matters of Art.

One day my husband said to him: "If the artists ever want a teacher, they need never lack for one so long as you are there." It had not been my husband's habit to speak cuttingly, but latterly there has been a change and he never spares Sandip.

"What makes you suppose that artists need no teachers?" Sandip retorted.

"Art is a creation," my husband replied. "So we should humbly be content to receive our lessons about Art from the work of the artist."

Sandip laughed at this modesty, saying: "You think that meekness is a kind of capital which increases your wealth the more you use it. It is my conviction that those who lack pride only float about like water reeds which have no roots in the soil."

My mind used to be full of contradictions when they talked thus. On the one hand I was eager that my husband should win in argument and that Sandip's pride should be shamed. Yet, on the other, it was Sandip's unabashed pride which attracted me so. It shone like a precious diamond, which knows no diffidence, and sparkles in the face of the sun itself.

I entered the room. I knew Sandip could hear my footsteps as I went forward, but he pretended not to, and kept his eyes on the book.

I dreaded his Art talks, for I could not overcome my delicacy about the pictures he talked of, and the things he said, and had much ado in putting on an air of overdone insensibility to hide my qualms. So, I was almost on the point of retracing my steps, when, with a deep sigh, Sandip raised his eyes, and affected to be startled at the sight of me. "Ah, you have come!" he said.

In his words, in his tone, in his eyes, there was a world of suppressed reproach, as if the claims he had acquired over me made my absence, even for these two or three days, a grievous wrong. I knew this attitude was an insult to me, but, alas, I had not the power to resent it.

I made no reply, but though I was looking another way, I could not help feeling that Sandip's plaintive gaze had planted itself right on my face, and would take no denial. I did so wish he would say something, so that I could shelter myself behind his words. I cannot tell how long this went on, but at last I could stand it

no longer. "What is this matter," I asked, "you are wanting to tell me about?"

Sandip again affected surprise as he said: "Must there always be some matter? Is friendship by itself a crime? Oh, Queen Bee, to think that you should make so light of the greatest thing on earth! Is the heart's worship to be shut out like a stray cur?"

There was again that tremor within me. I could feel the crisis coming, too importunate to be put off. Joy and fear struggled for the mastery. Would my shoulders, I wondered, be broad enough to stand its shock, or would it not leave me overthrown, with my face in the dust?

I was trembling all over. Steadying myself with an effort I repeated: "You summoned me for something touching the Cause, so I have left my household duties to attend to it."

"That is just what I was trying to explain," he said, with a dry laugh. "Do you not know that I come to worship? Have I not told you that, in you, I visualize the *Shakti* of our country? The Geography of a country is not the whole truth. No one can give up his life for a map! When I see you before me, then only do I realize how lovely my country is. When you have anointed me with your own hands, then shall I know I have the sanction of my country; and if, with that in my heart, I fall fighting, it shall not be on the dust of some map-made land, but on a lovingly spread skirt—do you know what kind of skirt?—like that of the earthen-red *sari* you wore the other day, with a broad blood-red border. Can I ever forget it? Such are the visions which give vigour to life, and joy to death!"

Sandip's eyes took fire as he went on, but whether it was the fire of worship, or of passion, I could not tell. I was reminded of the day on which I first heard him speak, when I could not be sure whether he was a person, or just a living flame.

I had not the power to utter a word. You cannot take shelter behind the walls of decorum when in a moment the fire leaps up and, with the flash of its sword and the roar of its laughter, destroys all the miser's stores. I was in terror lest he should forget himself and take me by the hand. For he shook like a quivering tongue of fire; his eyes showered scorching sparks on me.

"Are you forever determined," he cried after a pause, "to make gods of your petty household duties—you who have it in you to send us to life or to death? Is this power of yours to be kept veiled in a zenana? Cast away all false shame, I pray you; snap your fingers at the whispering around. Take your plunge today into the freedom of the outer world."

When, in Sandip's appeals, his worship of the country gets to be subtly interwoven with his worship of me, then does my blood dance, indeed, and the barriers of my hesitation totter. His talks about Art and Sex, his distinctions

between Real and Unreal, had but clogged my attempts at response with some revolting nastiness. This, however, now burst again into a glow before which my repugnance faded away. I felt that my resplendent womanhood made me indeed a goddess. Why should not its glory flash from my forehead with visible brilliance? Why does not my voice find a word, some audible cry, which would be like a sacred spell to my country for its fire initiation?

All of a sudden my maid Khema rushed into the room, dishevelled. "Give me my wages and let me go," she screamed. "Never in all my life have I been so..." The rest of her speech was drowned in sobs.

"What is the matter?"

Thako, the *Bara Rani*'s maid, it appeared, had for no rhyme or reason reviled her in unmeasured terms. She was in such a state, it was no manner of use trying to pacify her by saying I would look into the matter afterwards.

The slime of domestic life that lay beneath the lotus bank of womanhood came to the surface. Rather than allow Sandip a prolonged vision of it, I had to hurry back within.

X

My sister-in-law was absorbed in her betel-nuts, the suspicion of a smile playing about her lips, as if nothing untoward had happened. She was still humming the same song.

"Why has your Thako been calling poor Khema names?" I burst out.

"Indeed? The wretch! I will have her broomed out of the house. What a shame to spoil your morning out like this! As for Khema, where are the hussy's manners to go and disturb you when you are engaged? Anyhow, *Chota Rani*, don't you worry yourself with these domestic squabbles. Leave them to me, and return to your friend."

How suddenly the wind in the sails of our mind veers round! This going to meet Sandip outside seemed, in the light of the zenana code, such an extraordinarily out-of-the-way thing to do that I went off to my own room, at a loss for a reply. I knew this was my sister-in-law's doing and that she had egged her maid on to contrive this scene. But I had brought myself to such an unstable poise that I dared not have my fling.

Why, it was only the other day that I found I could not keep up to the last the unbending hauteur with which I had demanded from my husband the dismissal of the man Nanku. I felt suddenly abashed when the *Bara Rani* came up and said: "It is really all my fault, brother dear. We are old-fashioned folk, and I did not quite like the ways of your Sandip Babu, so I only told the guard... but how was I to know that our *Chota Rani* would take this as an insult?—I thought it would be the other way about! Just my incorrigible silliness!"

The thing which seems so glorious when viewed from the heights of the country's cause, looks so muddy when seen from the bottom. One begins by getting angry, and then feels disgusted.

I shut myself into my room, sitting by the window, thinking how easy life would be if only one could keep in harmony with one's surroundings. How simply the senior *Rani* sits in her verandah with her betel-nuts and how inaccessible to me has become my natural seat beside my daily duties! Where will it all end, I asked myself? Shall I ever recover, as from a delirium, and forget it all; or am I to be dragged to depths from which there can be no escape in this life? How on earth did I manage to let my good fortune escape me, and spoil my life so? Every wall of this bedroom of mine, which I first entered nine years ago as a bride, stares at me in dismay.

When my husband came home, after his M.A. examination, he brought for me

this orchid belonging to some far-away land beyond the seas. From beneath these few little leaves sprang such a cascade of blossoms, it looked as if they were pouring forth from some overturned urn of Beauty. We decided, together, to hang it here, over this window. It flowered only that once, but we have always been in hope of its doing so once more. Curiously enough I have kept on watering it these days, from force of habit, and it is still green.

It is now four years since I framed a photograph of my husband in ivory and put it in the niche over there. If I happen to look that way I have to lower my eyes. Up to last week I used regularly to put there the flowers of my worship, every morning after my bath. My husband has often chided me over this.

"It shames me to see you place me on a height to which I do not belong," he said one day.

"What nonsense!"

"I am not only ashamed, but also jealous!"

"Just hear him! Jealous of whom, pray?"

"Of that false me. It only shows that I am too petty for you, that you want some extraordinary man who can overpower you with his superiority, and so you needs must take refuge in making for yourself another 'me'."

"This kind of talk only makes me angry," said I.

"What is the use of being angry with me?" he replied. "Blame your fate which allowed you no choice, but made you take me blindfold. This keeps you trying to retrieve its blunder by making me out a paragon."

I felt so hurt at the bare idea that tears started to my eyes that day. And whenever I think of that now, I cannot raise my eyes to the niche.

For now there is another photograph in my jewel case. The other day, when arranging the sitting-room, I brought away that double photo frame, the one in which Sandip's portrait was next to my husband's. To this portrait I have no flowers of worship to offer, but it remains hidden away under my gems. It has all the greater fascination because kept secret. I look at it now and then with doors closed. At night I turn up the lamp, and sit with it in my hand, gazing and gazing. And every night I think of burning it in the flame of the lamp, to be done with it forever; but every night I heave a sigh and smother it again in my pearls and diamonds.

Ah, wretched woman! What a wealth of love was twined round each one of those jewels! Oh, why am I not dead?

Sandip had impressed it on me that hesitation is not in the nature of woman. For her, neither right nor left has any existence—she only moves forward. When the women of our country wake up, he repeatedly insisted, their voice will be

unmistakably confident in its utterance of the cry: "I want."

"I want!" Sandip went on one day—this was the primal word at the root of all creation. It had no maxim to guide it, but it became fire and wrought itself into suns and stars. Its partiality is terrible. Because it had a desire for man, it ruthlessly sacrificed millions of beasts for millions of years to achieve that desire. That terrible word "I want" has taken flesh in woman, and therefore men, who are cowards, try with all their might to keep back this primeval flood with their earthen dykes. They are afraid lest, laughing and dancing as it goes, it should wash away all the hedges and props of their pumpkin field. Men, in every age, flatter themselves that they have secured this force within the bounds of their convenience, but it gathers and grows. Now it is calm and deep like a lake, but gradually its pressure will increase, the dykes will give way, and the force which has so long been dumb will rush forward with the roar: "I want!"

These words of Sandip echo in my heart-beats like a war-drum. They shame into silence all my conflicts with myself. What do I care what people may think of me? Of what value are that orchid and that niche in my bedroom? What power have they to belittle me, to put me to shame? The primal fire of creation burns in me.

I felt a strong desire to snatch down the orchid and fling it out of the window, to denude the niche of its picture, to lay bare and naked the unashamed spirit of destruction that raged within me. My arm was raised to do it, but a sudden pang passed through my breast, tears started to my eyes. I threw myself down and sobbed: "What is the end of all this, what is the end?"

Sandip's Story IV

When I read these pages of the story of my life I seriously question myself: Is this Sandip? Am I made of words? Am I merely a book with a covering of flesh and blood?

The earth is not a dead thing like the moon. She breathes. Her rivers and oceans send up vapours in which she is clothed. She is covered with a mantle of her own dust which flies about the air. The onlooker, gazing upon the earth from the outside, can see only the light reflected from this vapour and this dust. The tracks of the mighty continents are not distinctly visible.

The man, who is alive as this earth is, is likewise always enveloped in the mist of the ideas which he is breathing out. His real land and water remain hidden,

and he appears to be made of only lights and shadows.

It seems to me, in this story of my life, that, like a living plant, I am displaying the picture of an ideal world. But I am not merely what I want, what I think—I am also what I do not love, what I do not wish to be. My creation had begun before I was born. I had no choice in regard to my surroundings and so must make the best of such material as comes to my hand.

My theory of life makes me certain that the Great is cruel. To be just is for ordinary men—it is reserved for the great to be unjust. The surface of the earth was even. The volcano butted it with its fiery horn and found its own eminence—its justice was not towards its obstacle, but towards itself. Successful injustice and genuine cruelty have been the only forces by which individual or nation has become millionaire or monarch.

That is why I preach the great discipline of Injustice. I say to everyone: Deliverance is based upon injustice. Injustice is the fire which must keep on burning something in order to save itself from becoming ashes. Whenever an individual or nation becomes incapable of perpetrating injustice it is swept into the dust-bin of the world.

As yet this is only my idea—it is not completely myself. There are rifts in the armour through which something peeps out which are extremely soft and sensitive. Because, as I say, the best part of myself was created before I came to this stage of existence.

From time to time I try my followers in their lesson of cruelty. One day we went on a picnic. A goat was grazing by. I asked them: "Who is there among you that can cut off a leg of that goat, alive, with this knife, and bring it to me?" While they all hesitated, I went myself and did it. One of them fainted at the sight. But when they saw me unmoved they took the dust of my feet, saying that I was above all human weaknesses. That is to say, they saw that day the vaporous envelope which was my idea, but failed to perceive the inner me, which by a curious freak of fate has been created tender and merciful.

In the present chapter of my life, which is growing in interest every day round Bimala and Nikhil, there is also much that remains hidden underneath. This malady of ideas which afflicts me is shaping my life within: nevertheless a great part of my life remains outside its influence; and so there is set up a discrepancy between my outward life and its inner design which I try my best to keep concealed even from myself; otherwise it may wreck not only my plans, but my very life.

Life is indefinite—a bundle of contradictions. We men, with our ideas, strive to give it a particular shape by melting it into a particular mould—into the

definiteness of success. All the world-conquerors, from Alexander down to the American millionaires, mould themselves into a sword or a mint, and thus find that distinct image of themselves which is the source of their success.

The chief controversy between Nikhil and myself arises from this: that though I say "know thyself", and Nikhil also says "know thyself", his interpretation makes this "knowing" tantamount to "not knowing".

"Winning your kind of success," Nikhil once objected, "is success gained at the cost of the soul: but the soul is greater than success."

I simply said in answer: "Your words are too vague."

"That I cannot help," Nikhil replied. "A machine is distinct enough, but not so life. If to gain distinctness you try to know life as a machine, then such mere distinctness cannot stand for truth. The soul is not as distinct as success, and so you only lose your soul if you seek it in your success."

"Where, then, is this wonderful soul?"

"Where it knows itself in the infinite and transcends its success."

"But how does all this apply to our work for the country?"

"It is the same thing. Where our country makes itself the final object, it gains success at the cost of the soul. Where it recognizes the Greatest as greater than all, there it may miss success, but gains its soul."

"Is there any example of this in history?"

"Man is so great that he can despise not only the success, but also the example. Possibly example is lacking, just as there is no example of the flower in the seed. But there is the urge of the flower in the seed all the same."

It is not that I do not at all understand Nikhil's point of view; that is rather where my danger lies. I was born in India and the poison of its spirituality runs in my blood. However loudly I may proclaim the madness of walking in the path of self-abnegation, I cannot avoid it altogether.

This is exactly how such curious anomalies happen nowadays in our country. We must have our religion and also our nationalism; our *Bhagavadgita* and also our *Bande Mataram*. The result is that both of them suffer. It is like performing with an English military band, side by side with our Indian festive pipes. I must make it the purpose of my life to put an end to this hideous confusion.

I want the western military style to prevail, not the Indian. We shall then not be ashamed of the flag of our passion, which mother Nature has sent with us as our standard into the battlefield of life. Passion is beautiful and pure—pure as the lily that comes out of the slimy soil. It rises superior to its defilement and needs no Pears' soap to wash it clean.

V

A question has been worrying me the last few days. Why am I allowing my life to become entangled with Bimala's? Am I a drifting log to be caught up at any and every obstacle?

Not that I have any false shame at Bimala becoming an object of my desire. It is only too clear how she wants me, and so I look on her as quite legitimately mine. The fruit hangs on the branch by the stem, but that is no reason why the claim of the stem should be eternal. Ripe fruit cannot for ever swear by its slackening stem-hold. All its sweetness has been accumulated for me; to surrender itself to my hand is the reason of its existence, its very nature, its true morality. So I must pluck it, for it becomes me not to make it futile.

But what is teasing me is that I am getting entangled. Am I not born to rule?—to bestride my proper steed, the crowd, and drive it as I will; the reins in my hand, the destination known only to me, and for it the thorns, the mire, on the road? This steed now awaits me at the door, pawing and champing its bit, its neighing filling the skies. But where am I, and what am I about, letting day after day of golden opportunity slip by?

I used to think I was like a storm—that the torn flowers with which I strewed my path would not impede my progress. But I am only wandering round and round a flower like a bee—not a storm. So, as I was saying, the colouring of ideas which man gives himself is only superficial. The inner man remains as ordinary as ever. If someone, who could see right into me, were to write my biography, he would make me out to be no different from that lout of a Panchu, or even from Nikhil!

Last night I was turning over the pages of my old diary... I had just graduated, and my brain was bursting with philosophy. Even so early I had vowed not to harbour any illusions, whether of my own or other's imagining, but to build my life on a solid basis of reality. But what has since been its actual story? Where is its solidity? It has rather been a network, where, though the thread be continuous, more space is taken up by the holes. Fight as I may, these will not own defeat. Just as I was congratulating myself on steadily following the thread, here I am badly caught in a hole! For I have become susceptible to compunctions.

"I want it; it is here; let me take it"—This is a clear-cut, straightforward policy. Those who can pursue its course with vigour needs must win through in the end. But the gods would not have it that such journey should be easy, so they have

deputed the siren Sympathy to distract the wayfarer, to dim his vision with her tearful mist.

I can see that poor Bimala is struggling like a snared deer. What a piteous alarm there is in her eyes! How she is torn with straining at her bonds! This sight, of course, should gladden the heart of a true hunter. And so do I rejoice; but, then, I am also touched; and therefore I dally, and standing on the brink I am hesitating to pull the noose fast.

There have been moments, I know, when I could have bounded up to her, clasped her hands and folded her to my breast, unresisting. Had I done so, she would not have said one word. She was aware that some crisis was impending, which in a moment would change the meaning of the whole world. Standing before that cavern of the incalculable but yet expected, her face went pale and her eyes glowed with a fearful ecstasy. Within that moment, when it arrives, an eternity will take shape, which our destiny awaits, holding its breath.

But I have let this moment slip by. I did not, with uncompromising strength, press the almost certain into the absolutely assured. I now see clearly that some hidden elements in my nature have openly ranged themselves as obstacles in my path.

That is exactly how Ravana, whom I look upon as the real hero of the *Ramayana*, met with his doom. He kept Sita in his Asoka garden, awaiting her pleasure, instead of taking her straight into his harem. This weak spot in his otherwise grand character made the whole of the abduction episode futile. Another such touch of compunction made him disregard, and be lenient to, his traitorous brother Bibhisan, only to get himself killed for his pains.

Thus does the tragic in life come by its own. In the beginning it lies, a little thing, in some dark under-vault, and ends by overthrowing the whole superstructure. The real tragedy is, that man does not know himself for what he really is.

VI Then again there is Nikhil. Crank though he be, laugh at him as I may, I cannot get rid of the idea that he is my friend. At first I gave no thought to his point of view, but of late it has begun to shame and hurt me. Therefore I have been trying to talk and argue with him in the same enthusiastic way as of old, but it does not ring true. It is even leading me at times into such a length of unnaturalness as to pretend to agree with him. But such hypocrisy is not in my nature, nor in that of Nikhil either. This, at least, is something we have in common. That is why, nowadays, I would rather not come across him, and have taken to fighting shy of his presence.

All these are signs of weakness. No sooner is the possibility of a wrong admitted than it becomes actual, and clutches you by the throat, however you may then try to shake off all belief in it. What I should like to be able to tell Nikhil frankly is, that happenings such as these must be looked in the face—as great Realities—and that which is the Truth should not be allowed to stand between true friends.

There is no denying that I have really weakened. It was not this weakness which won over Bimala; she burnt her wings in the blaze of the full strength of my unhesitating manliness. Whenever smoke obscures its lustre she also becomes confused, and draws back. Then comes a thorough revulsion of feeling, and she fain would take back the garland she has put round my neck, but cannot; and so she only closes her eyes, to shut it out of sight.

But all the same I must not swerve from the path I have chalked out. It would never do to abandon the cause of the country, especially at the present time. I shall simply make Bimala one with my country. The turbulent west wind which has swept away the country's veil of conscience, will sweep away the veil of the wife from Bimala's face, and in that uncovering there will be no shame. The ship will rock as it bears the crowd across the ocean, flying the pennant of *Bande Mataram*, and it will serve as the cradle to my power, as well as to my love.

Bimala will see such a majestic vision of deliverance, that her bonds will slip from about her, without shame, without her even being aware of it. Fascinated by the beauty of this terrible wrecking power, she will not hesitate a moment to be cruel. I have seen in Bimala's nature the cruelty which is the inherent force of existence—the cruelty which with its unrelenting might keeps the world beautiful.

If only women could be set free from the artificial fetters put round them by men, we could see on earth the living image of Kali, the shameless, pitiless goddess. I am a worshipper of Kali, and one day I shall truly worship her, setting Bimala on her altar of Destruction. For this let me get ready.

The way of retreat is absolutely closed for both of us. We shall despoil each other: get to hate each other: but never more be free.

Chapter 5

Nikhil's Story IV

Everything is rippling and waving with the flood of August. The young shoots of rice have the sheen of an infant's limbs. The water has invaded the garden next to our house. The morning light, like the love of the blue sky, is lavished upon the earth... Why cannot I sing? The water of the distant river is shimmering with light; the leaves are glistening; the rice-fields, with their fitful shivers, break into gleams of gold; and in this symphony of Autumn, only I remain voiceless. The sunshine of the world strikes my heart, but is not reflected back.

When I realize the lack of expressiveness in myself, I know why I am deprived. Who could bear my company day and night without a break? Bimala is full of the energy of life, and so she has never become stale to me for a moment, in all these nine years of our wedded life.

My life has only its dumb depths; but no murmuring rush. I can only receive: not impart movement. And therefore my company is like fasting. I recognize clearly today that Bimala has been languishing because of a famine of companionship.

Then whom shall I blame? Like Vidyapati I can only lament: It is August, the sky breaks into a passionate rain; Alas, empty is my house.

My house, I now see, was built to remain empty, because its doors cannot open. But I never knew till now that its divinity had been sitting outside. I had fondly believed that she had accepted my sacrifice, and granted in return her boon. But, alas, my house has all along been empty.

Every year, about this time, it was our practice to go in a house-boat over the broads of Samalda. I used to tell Bimala that a song must come back to its refrain over and over again. The original refrain of every song is in Nature, where the rain-laden wind passes over the rippling stream, where the green earth, drawing its shadow-veil over its face, keeps its ear close to the speaking water. There, at the beginning of time, a man and a woman first met—not within walls. And therefore we two must come back to Nature, at least once a year, to tune our

love anew to the first pure note of the meeting of hearts.

The first two anniversaries of our married life I spent in Calcutta, where I went through my examinations. But from the next year onwards, for seven years without a break, we have celebrated our union among the blossoming water-lilies. Now begins the next octave of my life.

It was difficult for me to ignore the fact that the same month of August had come round again this year. Does Bimala remember it, I wonder?—she has given me no reminder. Everything is mute about me.

It is August, the sky breaks into a passionate rain; Alas, empty is my house.

The house which becomes empty through the parting of lovers, still has music left in the heart of its emptiness. But the house that is empty because hearts are asunder, is awful in its silence. Even the cry of pain is out of place there.

This cry of pain must be silenced in me. So long as I continue to suffer, Bimala will never have true freedom. I must free her completely, otherwise I shall never gain my freedom from untruth...

I think I have come to the verge of understanding one thing. Man has so fanned the flame of the loves of men and women, as to make it overpass its rightful domain, and now, even in the name of humanity itself, he cannot bring it back under control. Man's worship has idolized his passion. But there must be no more human sacrifices at its shrine...

I went into my bedroom this morning, to fetch a book. It is long since I have been there in the day-time. A pang passed through me as I looked round it today, in the morning light. On the clothes rack was hanging a *sari* of Bimala's, crinkled ready for wear. On the dressing-table were her perfumes, her comb, her hair-pins, and with them, still, her vermillion box! Underneath were her tiny gold-embroidered slippers.

Once, in the old days, when Bimala had not yet overcome her objections to shoes, I had got these out from Lucknow, to tempt her. The first time she was ready to drop for very shame, to go in them even from the room to the verandah. Since then she has worn out many shoes, but has treasured up this pair. When first showing her the slippers, I chaffed her over a curious practice of hers; "I have caught you taking the dust of my feet, thinking me asleep! These are the offerings of my worship toward the dust off the feet of my wakeful divinity." "You must not say such things," she protested, "or I will never wear your shoes!"

This bedroom of mine—it has a subtle atmosphere which goes straight to my

heart. I was never aware, as I am today, how my thirsting heart has been sending out its roots to cling round each and every familiar object. The severing of the main root, I see, is not enough to set life free. Even these little slippers serve to hold one back.

My wandering eyes fall on the niche. My portrait there is looking the same as ever, in spite of the flowers scattered round it having been withered black! Of all the things in the room their greeting strikes me as sincere. They are still here simply because it was not felt worthwhile even to remove them. Never mind; let me welcome truth, albeit in such sere and sorry garb, and look forward to the time when I shall be able to do so unmoved, as does my photograph.

As I stood there, Bimal came in from behind. I hastily turned my eyes from the niche to the shelves as I muttered: "I came to get Amiel's Journal." What need had I to volunteer an explanation? I felt like a wrong-doer, a trespasser, prying into a secret not meant for me. I could not look Bimal in the face, but hurried away.

V

I had just made the discovery that it was useless to keep up a pretence of reading in my room outside, and also that it was equally beyond me to busy myself attending to anything at all—so that all the days of my future bid fair to congeal into one solid mass and settle heavily on my breast for good—when Panchu, the tenant of a neighbouring *zamindar*, came up to me with a basketful of cocoa-nuts and greeted me with a profound obeisance.

"Well, Panchu," said I. "What is all this for?"

I had got to know Panchu through my master. He was not extremely poor, nor was I in a position to do anything for him; so I supposed this present was intended to procure a tip to help the poor fellow to make both ends meet. I took some money from my purse and held it out towards him, but with folded hands he protested: "I cannot take that, sir!"

"Why, what is the matter?"

"Let me make a clean breast of it, sir. Once, when I was hard pressed, I stole some cocoa-nuts from the garden here. I am getting old, and may die any day, so I have come to pay them back."

Amiel's Journal could not have done me any good that day. But these words of Panchu lightened my heart. There are more things in life than the union or separation of man and woman. The great world stretches far beyond, and one can truly measure one's joys and sorrows when standing in its midst.

Panchu was devoted to my master. I know well enough how he manages to eke out a livelihood. He is up before dawn every day, and with a basket of *pan* leaves, twists of tobacco, coloured cotton yarn, little combs, looking-glasses, and other trinkets beloved of the village women, he wades through the knee-deep water of the marsh and goes over to the Namasudra quarters. There he barters his goods for rice, which fetches him a little more than their price in money. If he can get back soon enough he goes out again, after a hurried meal, to the sweetmeat seller's, where he assists in beating sugar for wafers. As soon as he comes home he sits at his shell-bangle making, plodding on often till midnight. All this cruel toil does not earn, for himself and his family, a bare two meals a day during much more than half the year. His method of eating is to begin with a good filling draught of water, and his staple food is the cheapest kind of seedy banana. And yet the family has to go with only one meal a day for the rest of the year.

At one time I had an idea of making him a charity allowance, "But," said my master, "your gift may destroy the man, it cannot destroy the hardship of his lot. Mother Bengal has not only this one Panchu. If the milk in her breasts has run dry, that cannot be supplied from the outside."

These are thoughts which give one pause, and I decided to devote myself to working it out. That very day I said to Bimal: "Let us dedicate our lives to removing the root of this sorrow in our country."

"You are my Prince Siddharta, ³⁹ I see," she replied with a smile. "But do not let the torrent of your feelings end by sweeping me away also!"

³⁹. The name by which Buddha was known when a Prince, before renouncing the world.

"Siddharta took his vows alone. I want ours to be a joint arrangement."

The idea passed away in talk. The fact is, Bimala is at heart what is called a "lady". Though her own people are not well off, she was born a *Rani*. She has no doubts in her mind that there is a lower unit of measure for the trials and troubles of the "lower classes". Want is, of course, a permanent feature of their lives, but does not necessarily mean "want" to them. Their very smallness protects them, as the banks protect the pool; by widening bounds only the slime is exposed.

The real fact is that Bimala has only come into my home, not into my life. I had magnified her so, leaving her such a large place, that when I lost her, my whole way of life became narrow and confined. I had thrust aside all other objects into a corner to make room for Bimala—taken up as I was with decorating her and dressing her and educating her and moving round her day and night; forgetting how great is humanity and how nobly precious is man's life. When the actualities of everyday things get the better of the man, then is Truth

lost sight of and freedom missed. So painfully important did Bimala make the mere actualities, that the truth remained concealed from me. That is why I find no gap in my misery, and spread this minute point of my emptiness over all the world. And so, for hours on this Autumn morning, the refrain has been humming in my ears: It is the month of August, and the sky breaks into a passionate rain; Alas, my house is empty.

Bimala's Story XI

The change which had, in a moment, come over the mind of Bengal was tremendous. It was as if the Ganges had touched the ashes of the sixty thousand sons of Sagar ⁴⁰ which no fire could enkindle, no other water knead again into living clay. The ashes of lifeless Bengal suddenly spoke up: "Here am I."

40. The condition of the curse which had reduced them to ashes was such that they could only be restored to life if the stream of the Ganges was brought down to them. [Trans.]

I have read somewhere that in ancient Greece a sculptor had the good fortune to impart life to the image made by his own hand. Even in that miracle, however, there was the process of form preceding life. But where was the unity in this heap of barren ashes? Had they been hard like stone, we might have had hopes of some form emerging, even as Ahalya, though turned to stone, at last won back her humanity. But these scattered ashes must have dropped to the dust through gaps in the Creator's fingers, to be blown hither and thither by the wind. They had become heaped up, but were never before united. Yet in this day which had come to Bengal, even this collection of looseness had taken shape, and proclaimed in a thundering voice, at our very door: "Here I am."

How could we help thinking that it was all supernatural? This moment of our history seemed to have dropped into our hand like a jewel from the crown of some drunken god. It had no resemblance to our past; and so we were led to hope that all our wants and miseries would disappear by the spell of some magic charm, that for us there was no longer any boundary line between the possible and the impossible. Everything seemed to be saying to us: "It is coming; it has come!"

Thus we came to cherish the belief that our history needed no steed, but that like heaven's chariot it would move with its own inherent power—At least no wages would have to be paid to the charioteer; only his wine cup would have to be filled again and again. And then in some impossible paradise the goal of our hopes would be reached.

My husband was not altogether unmoved, but through all our excitement it was the strain of sadness in him which deepened and deepened. He seemed to have a vision of something beyond the surging present.

I remember one day, in the course of the arguments he continually had with Sandip, he said: "Good fortune comes to our gate and announces itself, only to prove that we have not the power to receive it—that we have not kept things ready to be able to invite it into our house."

"No," was Sandip's answer. "You talk like an atheist because you do not believe in our gods. To us it has been made quite visible that the Goddess has come with her boon, yet you distrust the obvious signs of her presence."

"It is because I strongly believe in my God," said my husband, "that I feel so certain that our preparations for his worship are lacking. God has power to give the boon, but we must have power to accept it."

This kind of talk from my husband would only annoy me. I could not keep from joining in: "You think this excitement is only a fire of drunkenness, but does not drunkenness, up to a point, give strength?"

"Yes," my husband replied. "It may give strength, but not weapons."

"But strength is the gift of God," I went on. "Weapons can be supplied by mere mechanics."

My husband smiled. "The mechanics will claim their wages before they deliver their supplies," he said.

Sandip swelled his chest as he retorted: "Don't you trouble about that. Their wages shall be paid."

"I shall bespeak the festive music when the payment has been made, not before," my husband answered.

"You needn't imagine that we are depending on your bounty for the music," said Sandip scornfully. "Our festival is above all money payments."

And in his thick voice he began to sing: "My lover of the unpriced love, spurning payments, Plays upon the simple pipe, bought for nothing, Drawing my heart away."

Then with a smile he turned to me and said: "If I sing, Queen Bee, it is only to prove that when music comes into one's life, the lack of a good voice is no matter. When we sing merely on the strength of our tunefulness, the song is belittled. Now that a full flood of music has swept over our country, let Nikhil practise his scales, while we rouse the land with our cracked voices: "My house cries to me: Why go out to lose your all?

My life says: All that you have, fling to the winds!

*If we must lose our all, let us lose it: what is it worth after all?
If I must court ruin, let me do it smilingly; For my quest is the death-draught
of immortality.*

“The truth is, Nikhil, that we have all lost our hearts. None can hold us any longer within the bounds of the easily possible, in our forward rush to the hopelessly impossible.

“Those who would draw us back, They know not the fearful joy of recklessness.

*They know not that we have had our call From the end of the crooked path.
All that is good and straight and trim— Let it topple over in the dust.”*

I thought that my husband was going to continue the discussion, but he rose silently from his seat and left us.

The thing that was agitating me within was merely a variation of the stormy passion outside, which swept the country from one end to the other. The car of the wielder of my destiny was fast approaching, and the sound of its wheels reverberated in my being. I had a constant feeling that something extraordinary might happen any moment, for which, however, the responsibility would not be mine. Was I not removed from the plane in which right and wrong, and the feelings of others, have to be considered? Had I ever wanted this—had I ever been waiting or hoping for any such thing? Look at my whole life and tell me then, if I was in any way accountable.

Through all my past I had been consistent in my devotion—but when at length it came to receiving the boon, a different god appeared! And just as the awakened country, with its *Bande Mataram*, thrills in salutation to the unrealized future before it, so do all my veins and nerves send forth shocks of welcome to the unthought-of, the unknown, the unfortunate Stranger.

One night I left my bed and slipped out of my room on to the open terrace. Beyond our garden wall are fields of ripening rice. Through the gaps in the village groves to the North, glimpses of the river are seen. The whole scene slept in the darkness like the vague embryo of some future creation.

In that future I saw my country, a woman like myself, standing expectant. She has been drawn forth from her home corner by the sudden call of some Unknown. She has had no time to pause or ponder, or to light herself a torch, as she rushes forward into the darkness ahead. I know well how her very soul responds to the distant flute-strains which call her; how her breast rises and falls; how she feels she nears it, nay it is already hers, so that it matters not even if she

run blindfold. She is no mother. There is no call to her of children in their hunger, no home to be lighted of an evening, no household work to be done. So; she has to her tryst, for this is the land of the Vaishnava Poets. She has left home, forgotten domestic duties; she has nothing but an unfathomable yearning which hurries her on—by what road, to what goal, she recks not.

I, also, am possessed of just such a yearning. I likewise have lost my home and also lost my way. Both the end and the means have become equally shadowy to me. There remain only the yearning and the hurrying on. Ah! Wretched wanderer through the night, when the dawn reddens you will see no trace of a way to return. But why return? Death will serve as well. If the Dark which sounded the flute should lead to destruction, why trouble about the hereafter? When I am merged in its blackness, neither I, nor good and bad, nor laughter, nor tears, shall be any more!

XII In Bengal the machinery of time being thus suddenly run at full pressure, things which were difficult became easy, one following soon after another. Nothing could be held back any more, even in our corner of the country. In the beginning our district was backward, for my husband was unwilling to put any compulsion on the villagers. “Those who make sacrifices for their country’s sake are indeed her servants,” he would say, “but those who compel others to make them in her name are her enemies. They would cut freedom at the root, to gain it at the top.”

But when Sandip came and settled here, and his followers began to move about the country, speaking in towns and market-places, waves of excitement came rolling up to us as well. A band of young fellows of the locality attached themselves to him, some even who had been known as a disgrace to the village. But the glow of their genuine enthusiasm lighted them up, within as well as without. It became quite clear that when the pure breezes of a great joy and hope sweep through the land, all dirt and decay are cleansed away. It is hard, indeed, for men to be frank and straight and healthy, when their country is in the throes of dejection.

Then were all eyes turned on my husband, from whose estates alone foreign sugar and salt and cloths had not been banished. Even the estate officers began to feel awkward and ashamed over it. And yet, some time ago, when my husband began to import country-made articles into our village, he had been secretly and openly twitted for his folly, by old and young alike. When *Swadeshi* had not yet become a boast, we had despised it with all our hearts.

My husband still sharpens his Indian-made pencils with his Indian-made knife, does his writing with reed pens, drinks his water out of a bell-metal vessel, and works at night in the light of an old-fashioned castor-oil lamp. But this dull, milk-and-water *Swadeshi* of his never appealed to us. Rather, we had always felt ashamed of the inelegant, unfashionable furniture of his reception-rooms, especially when he had the magistrate, or any other European, as his guest.

My husband used to make light of my protests. "Why allow such trifles to upset you?" he would say with a smile.

"They will think us barbarians, or at all events wanting in refinement."

"If they do, I will pay them back by thinking that their refinement does not go deeper than their white skins."

My husband had an ordinary brass pot on his writing-table which he used as a flower-vase. It has often happened that, when I had news of some European guest, I would steal into his room and put in its place a crystal vase of European make. "Look here, Bimala," he objected at length, "that brass pot is as unconscious of itself as those blossoms are; but this thing protests its purpose so loudly, it is only fit for artificial flowers."

The *Bara Rani*, alone, pandered to my husband's whims. Once she comes panting to say: "Oh, brother, have you heard? Such lovely Indian soaps have come out! My days of luxury are gone by; still, if they contain no animal fat, I should like to try some."

This sort of thing makes my husband beam all over, and the house is deluged with Indian scents and soaps. Soaps indeed! They are more like lumps of caustic soda. And do I not know that what my sister-in-law uses on herself are the European soaps of old, while these are made over to the maids for washing clothes?

Another time it is: "Oh, brother dear, do get me some of these new Indian pen-holders."

Her "brother" bubbles up as usual, and the *Bara Rani*'s room becomes littered with all kinds of awful sticks that go by the name of *Swadeshi* pen-holders. Not that it makes any difference to her, for reading and writing are out of her line. Still, in her writing-case, lies the selfsame ivory pen-holder, the only one ever handled.

The fact is, all this was intended as a hit at me, because I would not keep my husband company in his vagaries. It was no good trying to show up my sister-in-law's insincerity; my husband's face would set so hard, if I barely touched on it. One only gets into trouble, trying to save such people from being imposed upon!

The *Bara Rani* loves sewing. One day I could not help blurting out: "What a

humbug you are, sister! When your ‘brother’ is present, your mouth waters at the very mention of *Swadeshi* scissors, but it is the English-made article every time when you work.”

“What harm?” she replied. “Do you not see what pleasure it gives him? We have grown up together in this house, since he was a boy. I simply cannot bear, as you can, the sight of the smile leaving his face. Poor dear, he has no amusement except this playing at shop-keeping. You are his only dissipation, and you will yet be his ruin!”

“Whatever you may say, it is not right to be double-faced,” I retorted.

My sister-in-law laughed out in my face. “Oh, our artless little *Chota Rani!*—straight as a schoolmaster’s rod, eh? But a woman is not built that way. She is soft and supple, so that she may bend without being crooked.”

I could not forget those words: “You are his dissipation, and will be his ruin!” Today I feel—if a man needs must have some intoxicant, let it not be a woman.

XIII Suksar, within our estates, is one of the biggest trade centres in the district. On one side of a stretch of water there is held a daily *bazar*; on the other, a weekly market. During the rains when this piece of water gets connected with the river, and boats can come through, great quantities of cotton yarns, and woollen stuffs for the coming winter, are brought in for sale.

At the height of our enthusiasm, Sandip laid it down that all foreign articles, together with the demon of foreign influence, must be driven out of our territory.

“Of course!” said I, girding myself up for a fight.

“I have had words with Nikhil about it,” said Sandip. “He tells me, he does not mind speechifying, but he will not have coercion.”

“I will see to that,” I said, with a proud sense of power. I knew how deep was my husband’s love for me. Had I been in my senses I should have allowed myself to be torn to pieces rather than assert my claim to that, at such a time. But Sandip had to be impressed with the full strength of my *Shakti*.

Sandip had brought home to me, in his irresistible way, how the cosmic Energy was revealed for each individual in the shape of some special affinity. Vaishnava Philosophy, he said, speaks of the *Shakti* of Delight that dwells in the heart of creation, ever attracting the heart of her Eternal Lover. Men have a perpetual longing to bring out this *Shakti* from the hidden depths of their own nature, and those of us who succeed in doing so at once clearly understand the meaning of the music coming to us from the Dark. He broke out singing: “My flute, that was

busy with its song, Is silent now when we stand face to face.

My call went seeking you from sky to sky When you lay hidden; But now all my cry finds its smile In the face of my beloved."

Listening to his allegories, I had forgotten that I was plain and simple Bimala. I was *Shakti*; also an embodiment of Universal joy. Nothing could fetter me, nothing was impossible for me; whatever I touched would gain new life. The world around me was a fresh creation of mine; for behold, before my heart's response had touched it, there had not been this wealth of gold in the Autumn sky! And this hero, this true servant of the country, this devotee of mine—this flaming intelligence, this burning energy, this shining genius—him also was I creating from moment to moment. Have I not seen how my presence pours fresh life into him time after time?

The other day Sandip begged me to receive a young lad, Amulya, an ardent disciple of his. In a moment I could see a new light flash out from the boy's eyes, and knew that he, too, had a vision of *Shakti* manifest, that my creative force had begun its work in his blood. "What sorcery is this of yours!" exclaimed Sandip next day. "Amulya is a boy no longer, the wick of his life is all ablaze. Who can hide your fire under your home-roof? Every one of them must be touched up by it, sooner or later, and when every lamp is alight what a grand carnival of a *Diwali* we shall have in the country!"

Blinded with the brilliance of my own glory I had decided to grant my devotee this boon. I was over weeningly confident that none could baulk me of what I really wanted. When I returned to my room after my talk with Sandip, I loosed my hair and tied it up over again. Miss Gilby had taught me a way of brushing it up from the neck and piling it in a knot over my head. This style was a favourite one with my husband. "It is a pity," he once said, "that Providence should have chosen poor me, instead of poet Kalidas, for revealing all the wonders of a woman's neck. The poet would probably have likened it to a flower-stem; but I feel it to be a torch, holding aloft the black flame of your hair." With which he... but why, oh why, do I go back to all that?

I sent for my husband. In the old days I could contrive a hundred and one excuses, good or bad, to get him to come to me. Now that all this had stopped for days I had lost the art of contriving.

Nikhil's Story VI

Panchu's wife has just died of a lingering consumption. Panchu must undergo a purification ceremony to cleanse himself of sin and to propitiate his community. The community has calculated and informed him that it will cost one hundred and twenty-three rupees.

"How absurd!" I cried, highly indignant. "Don't submit to this, Panchu. What can they do to you?"

Raising to me his patient eyes like those of a tired-out beast of burden, he said: "There is my eldest girl, sir, she will have to be married. And my poor wife's last rites have to be put through."

"Even if the sin were yours, Panchu," I mused aloud, "you have surely suffered enough for it already."

"That is so, sir," he naïvely assented. "I had to sell part of my land and mortgage the rest to meet the doctor's bills. But there is no escape from the offerings I have to make the Brahmins."

What was the use of arguing? When will come the time, I wondered, for the purification of the Brahmins themselves who can accept such offerings?

After his wife's illness and funeral, Panchu, who had been tottering on the brink of starvation, went altogether beyond his depth. In a desperate attempt to gain consolation of some sort he took to sitting at the feet of a wandering ascetic, and succeeded in acquiring philosophy enough to forget that his children went hungry. He kept himself steeped for a time in the idea that the world is vanity, and if of pleasure it has none, pain also is a delusion. Then, at last, one night he left his little ones in their tumble-down hovel, and started off wandering on his own account.

I knew nothing of this at the time, for just then a veritable ocean-churning by gods and demons was going on in my mind. Nor did my master tell me that he had taken Panchu's deserted children under his own roof and was caring for them, though alone in the house, with his school to attend to the whole day.

After a month Panchu came back, his ascetic fervour considerably worn off. His eldest boy and girl nestled up to him, crying: "Where have you been all this time, father?" His youngest boy filled his lap; his second girl leant over his back with her arms around his neck; and they all wept together. "O sir!" sobbed Panchu, at length, to my master. "I have not the power to give these little ones enough to eat—I am not free to run away from them. What has been my sin that I should be scourged so, bound hand and foot?"

In the meantime the thread of Panchu's little trade connections had snapped and he found he could not resume them. He clung on to the shelter of my master's roof, which had first received him on his return, and said not a word of

going back home. "Look here, Panchu," my master was at last driven to say. "If you don't take care of your cottage, it will tumble down altogether. I will lend you some money with which you can do a bit of peddling and return it me little by little."

Panchu was not excessively pleased—was there then no such thing as charity on earth? And when my master asked him to write out a receipt for the money, he felt that this favour, demanding a return, was hardly worth having. My master, however, did not care to make an outward gift which would leave an inward obligation. To destroy self-respect is to destroy caste, was his idea.

After signing the note, Panchu's obeisance to my master fell off considerably in its reverence—the dust-taking was left out. It made my master smile; he asked nothing better than that courtesy should stoop less low. "Respect given and taken truly balances the account between man and man," was the way he put it, "but veneration is overpayment."

Panchu began to buy cloth at the market and peddle it about the village. He did not get much of cash payment, it is true, but what he could realize in kind, in the way of rice, jute, and other field produce, went towards settlement of his account. In two month's time he was able to pay back an instalment of my master's debt, and with it there was a corresponding reduction in the depth of his bow. He must have begun to feel that he had been revering as a saint a mere man, who had not even risen superior to the lure of lucre.

While Panchu was thus engaged, the full shock of the *Swadeshi* flood fell on him.

VII It was vacation time, and many youths of our village and its neighbourhood had come home from their schools and colleges. They attached themselves to Sandip's leadership with enthusiasm, and some, in their excess of zeal, gave up their studies altogether. Many of the boys had been free pupils of my school here, and some held college scholarships from me in Calcutta. They came up in a body, and demanded that I should banish foreign goods from my Suksar market.

I told them I could not do it.

They were sarcastic: "Why, Maharaja, will the loss be too much for you?"

I took no notice of the insult in their tone, and was about to reply that the loss would fall on the poor traders and their customers, not on me, when my master, who was present, interposed.

"Yes, the loss will be his—not yours, that is clear enough," he said.

“But for one’s country...”

“The country does not mean the soil, but the men on it,” interrupted my master again. “Have you yet wasted so much as a glance on what was happening to them? But now you would dictate what salt they shall eat, what clothes they shall wear. Why should they put up with such tyranny, and why should we let them?”

“But we have taken to Indian salt and sugar and cloth ourselves.”

“You may do as you please to work off your irritation, to keep up your fanaticism. You are well off, you need not mind the cost. The poor do not want to stand in your way, but you insist on their submitting to your compulsion. As it is, every moment of theirs is a life-and-death struggle for a bare living; you cannot even imagine the difference a few pice means to them—so little have you in common. You have spent your whole past in a superior compartment, and now you come down to use them as tools for the wreaking of your wrath. I call it cowardly.”

They were all old pupils of my master, so they did not venture to be disrespectful, though they were quivering with indignation. They turned to me. “Will you then be the only one, Maharaja, to put obstacles in the way of what the country would achieve?”

“Who am I, that I should dare do such a thing? Would I not rather lay down my life to help it?”

The M.A. student smiled a crooked smile, as he asked: “May we enquire what you are actually doing to help?”

“I have imported Indian mill-made yarn and kept it for sale in my Suksar market, and also sent bales of it to markets belonging to neighbouring *zamindars*.”

“But we have been to your market, Maharaja,” the same student exclaimed, “and found nobody buying this yarn.”

“That is neither my fault nor the fault of my market. It only shows the whole country has not taken your vow.”

“That is not all,” my master went on. “It shows that what you have pledged yourselves to do is only to pester others. You want dealers, who have not taken your vow, to buy that yarn; weavers, who have not taken your vow, to make it up; then their wares eventually to be foisted on to consumers who, also, have not taken your vow. The method? Your clamour, and the *zamindars’* oppression. The result: all righteousness yours, all privations theirs!”

“And may we venture to ask, further, what your share of the privation has been?” pursued a science student.

"You want to know, do you?" replied my master. "It is Nikhil himself who has to buy up that Indian mill yarn; he has had to start a weaving school to get it woven; and to judge by his past brilliant business exploits, by the time his cotton fabrics leave the loom their cost will be that of cloth-of-gold; so they will only find a use, perhaps, as curtains for his drawing-room, even though their flimsiness may fail to screen him. When you get tired of your vow, you will laugh the loudest at their artistic effect. And if their workmanship is ever truly appreciated at all, it will be by foreigners."

I have known my master all my life, but have never seen him so agitated. I could see that the pain had been silently accumulating in his heart for some time, because of his surpassing love for me, and that his habitual self-possession had become secretly undermined to the breaking point.

"You are our elders," said the medical student. "It is unseemly that we should bandy words with you. But tell us, pray, finally, are you determined not to oust foreign articles from your market?"

"I will not," I said, "because they are not mine."

"Because that will cause you a loss!" smiled the M.A. student.

"Because he, whose is the loss, is the best judge," retorted my master.

With a shout of *Bande Mataram* they left us.

Chapter 6

Nikhil's Story VIII A few days later, my master brought Panchu round to me. His *zamindar*, it appeared, had fined him a hundred rupees, and was threatening him with ejection.

"For what fault?" I enquired.

"Because," I was told, "he has been found selling foreign cloths. He begged and prayed Harish Kundu, his *zamindar*, to let him sell off his stock, bought with borrowed money, promising faithfully never to do it again; but the *zamindar* would not hear of it, and insisted on his burning the foreign stuff there and then, if he wanted to be let off. Panchu in his desperation blurted out defiantly: 'I can't afford it! You are rich; why not buy it up and burn it?' This only made Harish Kundu red in the face as he shouted: 'The scoundrel must be taught manners, give him a shoe-beating!' So poor Panchu got insulted as well as fined.

"What happened to the cloth?"

"The whole bale was burnt."

"Who else was there?"

"Any number of people, who all kept shouting *Bande Mataram*. Sandip was also there. He took up some of the ashes, crying: 'Brothers! This is the first funeral pyre lighted by your village in celebration of the last rites of foreign commerce. These are sacred ashes. Smear yourselves with them in token of your *Swadeshi* vow.'"

"Panchu," said I, turning to him, "you must lodge a complaint."

"No one will bear me witness," he replied.

"None bear witness?—Sandip! Sandip!"

Sandip came out of his room at my call. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"Won't you bear witness to the burning of this man's cloth?"

Sandip smiled. "Of course I shall be a witness in the case," he said. "But I shall be on the opposite side."

"What do you mean," I exclaimed, "by being a witness on this or that side?

Will you not bear witness to the truth?"

"Is the thing which happens the only truth?"

"What other truths can there be?"

"The things that ought to happen! The truth we must build up will require a great deal of untruth in the process. Those who have made their way in the world have created truth, not blindly followed it."

"And so—"

"And so I will bear what you people are pleased to call false witness, as they have done who have created empires, built up social systems, founded religious organizations. Those who would rule do not dread untruths; the shackles of truth are reserved for those who will fall under their sway. Have you not read history? Do you not know that in the immense cauldrons, where vast political developments are simmering, untruths are the main ingredients?"

"Political cookery on a large scale is doubtless going on, but—"

"Oh, I know! You, of course, will never do any of the cooking. You prefer to be one of those down whose throats the hotchpotch which is being cooked will be crammed. They will partition Bengal and say it is for your benefit. They will seal the doors of education and call it raising the standard. But you will always remain good boys, snivelling in your corners. We bad men, however, must see whether we cannot erect a defensive fortification of untruth."

"It is no use arguing about these things, Nikhil," my master interposed. "How can they who do not feel the truth within them, realize that to bring it out from its obscurity into the light is man's highest aim—not to keep on heaping material outside?"

Sandip laughed. "Right, sir!" said he. "Quite a correct speech for a schoolmaster. That is the kind of stuff I have read in books; but in the real world I have seen that man's chief business is the accumulation of outside material. Those who are masters in the art, advertise the biggest lies in their business, enter false accounts in their political ledgers with their broadest-pointed pens, launch their newspapers daily laden with untruths, and send preachers abroad to disseminate falsehood like flies carrying pestilential germs. I am a humble follower of these great ones. When I was attached to the Congress party I never hesitated to dilute ten per cent of truth with ninety per cent of untruth. And now, merely because I have ceased to belong to that party, I have not forgotten the basic fact that man's goal is not truth but success."

"True success," corrected my master.

"Maybe," replied Sandip, "but the fruit of true success ripens only by cultivating the field of untruth, after tearing up the soil and pounding it into dust."

Truth grows up by itself like weeds and thorns, and only worms can expect to get fruit from it!" With this he flung out of the room.

My master smiled as he looked towards me. "Do you know, Nikhil," he said, "I believe Sandip is not irreligious—his religion is of the obverse side of truth, like the dark moon, which is still a moon, for all that its light has gone over to the wrong side."

"That is why," I assented, "I have always had an affection for him, though we have never been able to agree. I cannot condemn him, even now; though he has hurt me sorely, and may yet hurt me more."

"I have begun to realize that," said my master. "I have long wondered how you could go on putting up with him. I have, at times, even suspected you of weakness. I now see that though you two do not rhyme, your rhythm is the same."

"Fate seems bent on writing *Paradise Lost* in blank verse, in my case, and so has no use for a rhyming friend!" I remarked, pursuing his conceit.

"But what of Panchu?" resumed my master.

"You say Harish Kundu wants to eject him from his ancestral holding. Supposing I buy it up and then keep him on as my tenant?"

"And his fine?"

"How can the *zamindar* realize that if he becomes my tenant?"

"His burnt bale of cloth?"

"I will procure him another. I should like to see anyone interfering with a tenant of mine, for trading as he pleases!"

"I am afraid, sir," interposed Panchu despondently, "while you big folk are doing the fighting, the police and the law vultures will merrily gather round, and the crowd will enjoy the fun, but when it comes to getting killed, it will be the turn of only poor me!"

"Why, what harm can come to you?"

"They will burn down my house, sir, children and all!"

"Very well, I will take charge of your children," said my master. "You may go on with any trade you like. They shan't touch you."

That very day I bought up Panchu's holding and entered into formal possession. Then the trouble began.

Panchu had inherited the holding of his grandfather as his sole surviving heir. Everybody knew this. But at this juncture an aunt turned up from somewhere, with her boxes and bundles, her rosary, and a widowed niece. She ensconced herself in Panchu's home and laid claim to a life interest in all he had.

Panchu was dumbfounded. "My aunt died long ago," he protested.

In reply he was told that he was thinking of his uncle's first wife, but that the former had lost no time in taking to himself a second.

"But my uncle died before my aunt," exclaimed Panchu, still more mystified.
"Where was the time for him to marry again?"

This was not denied. But Panchu was reminded that it had never been asserted that the second wife had come after the death of the first, but the former had been married by his uncle during the latter's lifetime. Not relishing the idea of living with a co-wife she had remained in her father's house till her husband's death, after which she had got religion and retired to holy Brindaban, whence she was now coming. These facts were well known to the officers of Harish Kundu, as well as to some of his tenants. And if the *zamindar*'s summons should be peremptory enough, even some of those who had partaken of the marriage feast would be forthcoming!

IX

One afternoon, when I happened to be specially busy, word came to my office room that Bimala had sent for me. I was startled.

"Who did you say had sent for me?" I asked the messenger.

"The *Rani* Mother."

"The *Bara Rani*?"

"No, sir, the *Chota Rani* Mother."

The *Chota Rani*! It seemed a century since I had been sent for by her. I kept them all waiting there, and went off into the inner apartments. When I stepped into our room I had another shock of surprise to find Bimala there with a distinct suggestion of being dressed up. The room, which from persistent neglect had latterly acquired an air of having grown absent-minded, had regained something of its old order this afternoon. I stood there silently, looking enquiringly at Bimala.

She flushed a little and the fingers of her right hand toyed for a time with the bangles on her left arm. Then she abruptly broke the silence. "Look here! Is it right that ours should be the only market in all Bengal which allows foreign goods?"

"What, then, would be the right thing to do?" I asked.

"Order them to be cleared out!"

"But the goods are not mine."

"Is not the market yours?"

"It is much more theirs who use it for trade."

"Let them trade in Indian goods, then."

"Nothing would please me better. But suppose they do not?"

"Nonsense! How dare they be so insolent? Are you not..."

"I am very busy this afternoon and cannot stop to argue it out. But I must refuse to tyrannize."

"It would not be tyranny for selfish gain, but for the sake of the country."

"To tyrannize for the country is to tyrannize over the country. But that I am afraid you will never understand." With this I came away.

All of a sudden the world shone out for me with a fresh clearness. I seemed to feel it in my blood, that the Earth had lost the weight of its earthiness, and its daily task of sustaining life no longer appeared a burden, as with a wonderful access of power it whirled through space telling its beads of days and nights. What endless work, and withal what illimitable energy of freedom! None shall check it, oh, none can ever check it! From the depths of my being an uprush of joy, like a waterspout, sprang high to storm the skies.

I repeatedly asked myself the meaning of this outburst of feeling. At first there was no intelligible answer. Then it became clear that the bond against which I had been fretting inwardly, night and day, had broken. To my surprise I discovered that my mind was freed from all mistiness. I could see everything relating to Bimala as if vividly pictured on a camera screen. It was palpable that she had specially dressed herself up to coax that order out of me. Till that moment, I had never viewed Bimala's adornment as a thing apart from herself. But today the elaborate manner in which she had done up her hair, in the English fashion, made it appear a mere decoration. That which before had the mystery of her personality about it, and was priceless to me, was now out to sell itself cheap.

As I came away from that broken cage of a bedroom, out into the golden sunlight of the open, there was the avenue of bauhinias, along the gravelled path in front of my verandah, suffusing the sky with a rosy flush. A group of starlings beneath the trees were noisily chattering away. In the distance an empty bullock cart, with its nose on the ground, held up its tail aloft—one of its unharnessed bullocks grazing, the other resting on the grass, its eyes dropping for very comfort, while a crow on its back was pecking away at the insects on its body.

I seemed to have come closer to the heartbeats of the great earth in all the simplicity of its daily life; its warm breath fell on me with the perfume of the bauhinia blossoms; and an anthem, inexpressibly sweet, seemed to peal forth from this world, where I, in my freedom, live in the freedom of all else.

We, men, are knights whose quest is that freedom to which our ideals call us. She who makes for us the banner under which we fare forth is the true Woman for us. We must tear away the disguise of her who weaves our net of enchantment at home, and know her for what she is. We must beware of clothing her in the witchery of our own longings and imaginings, and thus allow her to distract us from our true quest.

Today I feel that I shall win through. I have come to the gateway of the simple; I am now content to see things as they are. I have gained freedom myself; I shall allow freedom to others. In my work will be my salvation.

I know that, time and again, my heart will ache, but now that I understand its pain in all its truth, I can disregard it. Now that I know it concerns only me, what after all can be its value? The suffering which belongs to all mankind shall be my crown.

Save me, Truth! Never again let me hanker after the false paradise of Illusion. If I must walk alone, let me at least tread your path. Let the drum-beats of Truth lead me to Victory.

Sandip's Story VII Bimala sent for me that day, but for a time she could not utter a word; her eyes kept brimming up to the verge of overflowing. I could see at once that she had been unsuccessful with Nikhil. She had been so proudly confident that she would have her own way—but I had never shared her confidence. Woman knows man well enough where he is weak, but she is quite unable to fathom him where he is strong. The fact is that man is as much a mystery to woman as woman is to man. If that were not so, the separation of the sexes would only have been a waste of Nature's energy.

Ah pride, pride! The trouble was, not that the necessary thing had failed of accomplishment, but that the entreaty, which had cost her such a struggle to make, should have been refused. What a wealth of colour and movement, suggestion and deception, group themselves round this "me" and "mine" in

woman. That is just where her beauty lies—she is ever so much more personal than man. When man was being made, the Creator was a schoolmaster—His bag full of commandments and principles; but when He came to woman, He resigned His headmastership and turned artist, with only His brush and paint-box.

When Bimala stood silently there, flushed and tearful in her broken pride, like a storm-cloud, laden with rain and charged with lightning, lowering over the horizon, she looked so absolutely sweet that I had to go right up to her and take her by the hand. It was trembling, but she did not snatch it away.

“Bee,” said I, “we two are colleagues, for our aims is one. Let us sit down and talk it over.”

I led her, unresisting, to a seat. But strange! at that very point the rush of my impetuosity suffered an unaccountable check—just as the current of the mighty Padma, roaring on in its irresistible course, all of a sudden gets turned away from the bank it is crumbling by some trifling obstacle beneath the surface. When I pressed Bimala’s hand my nerves rang music, like tuned-up strings; but the symphony stopped short at the first movement.

What stood in the way? Nothing singly; it was a tangle of a multitude of things—nothing definitely palpable, but only that unaccountable sense of obstruction. Anyhow, this much has become plain to me, that I cannot swear to what I really am. It is because I am such a mystery to my own mind that my attraction for myself is so strong! If once the whole of myself should become known to me, I would then fling it all away—and reach beatitude!

As she sat down, Bimala went ashy pale. She, too, must have realized what a crisis had come and gone, leaving her unscathed. The comet had passed by, but the brush of its burning tail had overcome her. To help her to recover herself I said: “Obstacles there will be, but let us fight them through, and not be down-hearted. Is not that best, Queen?”

Bimala cleared her throat with a little cough, but simply to murmur: “Yes.”

“Let us sketch out our plan of action,” I continued, as I drew a piece of paper and a pencil from my pocket.

I began to make a list of the workers who had joined us from Calcutta and to assign their duties to each. Bimala interrupted me before I was through, saying wearily: “Leave it now; I will join you again this evening” and then she hurried out of the room. It was evident she was not in a state to attend to anything. She must be alone with herself for a while—perhaps lie down on her bed and have a good cry!

When she left me, my intoxication began to deepen, as the cloud colours grow richer after the sun is down. I felt I had let the moment of moments slip by. What

an awful coward I had been! She must have left me in sheer disgust at my qualms—and she was right!

While I was tingling all over with these reflections, a servant came in and announced Amulya, one of our boys. I felt like sending him away for the time, but he stepped in before I could make up my mind. Then we fell to discussing the news of the fights which were raging in different quarters over cloth and sugar and salt; and the air was soon clear of all fumes of intoxication. I felt as if awakened from a dream. I leapt to my feet feeling quite ready for the fray—*Bande Mataram!*

The news was various. Most of the traders who were tenants of Harish Kundu had come over to us. Many of Nikhil's officials were also secretly on our side, pulling the wires in our interest. The Marwari shopkeepers were offering to pay a penalty, if only allowed to clear their present stocks. Only some Mahomedan traders were still obdurate.

One of them was taking home some German-made shawls for his family. These were confiscated and burnt by one of our village boys. This had given rise to trouble. We offered to buy him Indian woollen stuffs in their place. But where were cheap Indian woollens to be had? We could not very well indulge him in Cashmere shawls! He came and complained to Nikhil, who advised him to go to law. Of course Nikhil's men saw to it that the trial should come to nothing, even his law-agent being on our side!

The point is, if we have to replace burnt foreign clothes with Indian cloth every time, and on the top of that fight through a law-suit, where is the money to come from? And the beauty of it is that this destruction of foreign goods is increasing their demand and sending up the foreigner's profits—very like what happened to the fortunate shopkeeper whose chandeliers the nabob delighted in smashing, tickled by the tinkle of the breaking glass.

The next problem is—since there is no such thing as cheap and gaudy Indian woollen stuff, should we be rigorous in our boycott of foreign flannels and memos, or make an exception in their favour?

"Look here!" said I at length on the first point, "we are not going to keep on making presents of Indian stuff to those who have got their foreign purchases confiscated. The penalty is intended to fall on them, not on us. If they go to law, we must retaliate by burning down their granaries!—What startles you, Amulya? It is not the prospect of a grand illumination that delights me! You must remember, this is War. If you are afraid of causing suffering, go in for love-making, you will never do for this work!"

The second problem I solved by deciding to allow no compromise with foreign

articles, in any circumstance whatever. In the good old days, when these gaily coloured foreign shawls were unknown, our peasantry used to manage well enough with plain cotton quilts—they must learn to do so again. They may not look as gorgeous, but this is not the time to think of looks.

Most of the boatmen had been won over to refuse to carry foreign goods, but the chief of them, Mirjan, was still insubordinate.

“Could you not get his boat sunk?” I asked our manager here.

“Nothing easier, sir,” he replied. “But what if afterwards I am held responsible?”

“Why be so clumsy as to leave any loophole for responsibility? However, if there must be any, my shoulders will be there to bear it.”

Mirjan’s boat was tied near the landing-place after its freight had been taken over to the market-place. There was no one on it, for the manager had arranged for some entertainment to which all had been invited. After dusk the boat, loaded with rubbish, was holed and set adrift. It sank in mid-stream.

Mirjan understood the whole thing. He came to me in tears to beg for mercy. “I was wrong, sir—” he began.

“What makes you realize that all of a sudden?” I sneered.

He made no direct reply. “The boat was worth two thousand rupees,” he said. “I now see my mistake, and if excused this time I will never...” with which he threw himself at my feet.

I asked him to come ten days later. If only we could pay him that two thousand rupees at once, we could buy him up body and soul. This is just the sort of man who could render us immense service, if won over. We shall never be able to make any headway unless we can lay our hands on plenty of money.

As soon as Bimala came into the sitting-room, in the evening, I said as I rose up to receive her: “Queen! Everything is ready, success is at hand, but we must have money.

“Money? How much money?”

“Not so very much, but by hook or by crook we must have it!”

“But how much?”

“A mere fifty thousand rupees will do for the present.”

Bimala blenched inwardly at the figure, but tried not to show it. How could she again admit defeat?

“Queen!” said I, “you only can make the impossible possible. Indeed you have already done so. Oh, that I could show you the extent of your achievement—then you would know it. But the time for that is not now. Now we want money!”

“You shall have it,” she said.

I could see that the thought of selling her jewels had occurred to her. So I said: "Your jewels must remain in reserve. One can never tell when they may be wanted." And then, as Bimala stared blankly at me in silence, I went on: "This money must come from your husband's treasury."

Bimala was still more taken aback. After a long pause she said: "But how am I to get his money?"

"Is not his money yours as well?"

"Ah, no!" she said, her wounded pride hurt afresh.

"If not," I cried, "neither is it his, but his country's, whom he has deprived of it, in her time of need!"

"But how am I to get it?" she repeated.

"Get it you shall and must. You know best how. You must get it for Her to whom it rightfully belongs. *Bande Mataram!* These are the magic words which will open the door of his iron safe, break through the walls of his strong-room, and confound the hearts of those who are disloyal to its call. Say *Bande Mataram, Bee!*"

"*Bande Mataram!*"

Chapter 7

Sandip's Story VIII We are men, we are kings, we must have our tribute. Ever since we have come upon the Earth we have been plundering her; and the more we claimed, the more she submitted. From primeval days have we men been plucking fruits, cutting down trees, digging up the soil, killing beast, bird and fish. From the bottom of the sea, from underneath the ground, from the very jaws of death, it has all been grabbing and grabbing and grabbing—no strong-box in Nature's store-room has been respected or left unrifled. The one delight of this Earth is to fulfil the claims of those who are men. She has been made fertile and beautiful and complete through her endless sacrifices to them. But for this, she would be lost in the wilderness, not knowing herself, the doors of her heart shut, her diamonds and pearls never seeing the light.

Likewise, by sheer force of our claims, we men have opened up all the latent possibilities of women. In the process of surrendering themselves to us, they have ever gained their true greatness. Because they had to bring all the diamonds of their happiness and the pearls of their sorrow into our royal treasury, they have found their true wealth. So for men to accept is truly to give: for women to give is truly to gain.

The demand I have just made from Bimala, however, is indeed a large one! At first I felt scruples; for is it not the habit of man's mind to be in purposeless conflict with itself? I thought I had imposed too hard a task. My first impulse

was to call her back, and tell her I would rather not make her life wretched by dragging her into all these troubles. I forgot, for the moment, that it was the mission of man to be aggressive, to make woman's existence fruitful by stirring up disquiet in the depth of her passivity, to make the whole world blessed by churning up the immeasurable abyss of suffering! This is why man's hands are so strong, his grip so firm. Bimala had been longing with all her heart that I, Sandip, should demand of her some great sacrifice—should call her to her death. How else could she be happy? Had she not waited all these weary years only for an opportunity to weep out her heart—so satiated was she with the monotony of her placid happiness? And therefore, at the very sight of me, her heart's horizon darkened with the rain clouds of her impending days of anguish. If I pity her and save her from her sorrows, what then was the purpose of my being born a man?

The real reason of my qualms is that my demand happens to be for money. That savours of beggary, for money is man's, not woman's. That is why I had to make it a big figure. A thousand or two would have the air of petty theft. Fifty thousand has all the expanse of romantic brigandage. Ah, but riches should really have been mine! So many of my desires have had to halt, again and again, on the road to accomplishment simply for want of money. This does not become me! Had my fate been merely unjust, it could be forgiven—but its bad taste is unpardonable. It is not simply a hardship that a man like me should be at his wit's end to pay his house rent, or should have to carefully count out the coins for an Intermediate Class railway ticket—it is vulgar!

It is equally clear that Nikhil's paternal estates are a superfluity to him. For him it would not have been at all unbecoming to be poor. He would have cheerfully pulled in the double harness of indigent mediocrity with that precious master of his. I should love to have, just for once, the chance to fling about fifty thousand rupees in the service of my country and to the satisfaction of myself. I am a nabob born, and it is a great dream of mine to get rid of this disguise of poverty, though it be for a day only, and to see myself in my true character. I have grave misgivings, however, as to Bimala ever getting that fifty thousand rupees within her reach, and it will probably be only a thousand or two which will actually come to hand. Be it so. The wise man is content with half a loaf, or any fraction for that matter, rather than no bread. I must return to these personal reflections of mine later. News comes that I am wanted at once. Something has gone wrong...

It seems that the police have got a clue to the man who sank Mirjan's boat for us. He was an old offender. They are on his trail, but he should be too practised a hand to be caught blabbing. However, one never knows. Nikhil's back is up, and his manager may not be able to have things his own way.

"If I get into trouble, sir," said the manager when I saw him, "I shall have to drag you in!"

"Where is the noose with which you can catch me?" I asked.

"I have a letter of yours, and several of Amulya Babu's." I could not see that the letter marked "urgent" to which I had been hurried into writing a reply was wanted urgently for this purpose only! I am getting to learn quite a number of things.

The point now is, that the police must be bribed and hush-money paid to Mirjan for his boat. It is also becoming evident that much of the cost of this patriotic venture of ours will find its way as profit into the pockets of Nikhil's manager. However, I must shut my eyes to that for the present, for is he not shouting *Bande Mataram* as lustily as I am?

This kind of work has always to be carried on with leaky vessels which let as much through as they fetch in. We all have a hidden fund of moral judgement stored away within us, and so I was about to wax indignant with the manager, and enter in my diary a tirade against the unreliability of our countrymen. But, if there be a god, I must acknowledge with gratitude to him that he has given me a clear-seeing mind, which allows nothing inside or outside it to remain vague. I may delude others, but never myself. So I was unable to continue angry.

Whatever is true is neither good nor bad, but simply true, and that is Science. A lake is only the remnant of water which has not been sucked into the ground. Underneath the cult of *Bande Mataram*, as indeed at the bottom of all mundane affairs, there is a region of slime, whose absorbing power must be reckoned with. The manager will take what he wants; I also have my own wants. These lesser wants form a part of the wants of the great Cause—the horse must be fed and the wheels must be oiled if the best progress is to be made.

The long and short of it is that money we must have, and that soon. We must take whatever comes the readiest, for we cannot afford to wait. I know that the immediate often swallows up the ultimate; that the five thousand rupees of today may nip in the bud the fifty thousand rupees of tomorrow. But I must accept the penalty. Have I not often twitted Nikhil that they who walk in the paths of restraint have never known what sacrifice is? It is we greedy folk who have to sacrifice our greed at every step!

Of the cardinal sins of man, Desire is for men who are men—but Delusion, which is only for cowards, hampers them. Because delusion keeps them wrapped up in past and future, but is the very deuce for confounding their footsteps in the present. Those who are always straining their ears for the call of the remote, to the neglect of the call of the imminent, are like Shakuntala [41](#) absorbed in the

memories of her lover. The guest comes unheeded, and the curse descends, depriving them of the very object of their desire.

[41.](#) Shakuntala, after the king, her lover, went back to his kingdom, promising to send for her, was so lost in thoughts of him, that she failed to hear the call of her hermit guest who thereupon cursed her, saying that the object of her love would forget all about her. [Trans.]

The other day I pressed Bimala's hand, and that touch still stirs her mind, as it vibrates in mine. Its thrill must not be deadened by repetition, for then what is now music will descend to mere argument. There is at present no room in her mind for the question "why?" So I must not deprive Bimala, who is one of those creatures for whom illusion is necessary, of her full supply of it.

As for me, I have so much else to do that I shall have to be content for the present with the foam of the wine cup of passion. O man of desire! Curb your greed, and practise your hand on the harp of illusion till you can bring out all the delicate nuances of suggestion. This is not the time to drain the cup to the dregs.

IX

Our work proceeds apace. But though we have shouted ourselves hoarse, proclaiming the Mussulmans to be our brethren, we have come to realize that we shall never be able to bring them wholly round to our side. So they must be suppressed altogether and made to understand that we are the masters. They are now showing their teeth, but one day they shall dance like tame bears to the tune we play.

"If the idea of a United India is a true one," objects Nikhil, "Mussulmans are a necessary part of it."

"Quite so," said I, "but we must know their place and keep them there, otherwise they will constantly be giving trouble."

"So you want to make trouble to prevent trouble?"

"What, then, is your plan?"

"There is only one well-known way of avoiding quarrels," said Nikhil meaningly.

I know that, like tales written by good people, Nikhil's discourse always ends in a moral. The strange part of it is that with all his familiarity with moral precepts, he still believes in them! He is an incorrigible schoolboy. His only merit is his sincerity. The mischief with people like him is that they will not admit the finality even of death, but keep their eyes always fixed on a hereafter.

I have long been nursing a plan which, if only I could carry it out, would set fire to the whole country. True patriotism will never be roused in our

countrymen unless they can visualize the motherland. We must make a goddess of her. My colleagues saw the point at once. "Let us devise an appropriate image!" they exclaimed. "It will not do if you devise it," I admonished them. "We must get one of the current images accepted as representing the country—the worship of the people must flow towards it along the deep-cut grooves of custom."

But Nikhil's needs must argue even about this. "We must not seek the help of illusions," he said to me some time ago, "for what we believe to be the true cause."

"Illusions are necessary for lesser minds," I said, "and to this class the greater portion of the world belongs. That is why divinities are set up in every country to keep up the illusions of the people, for men are only too well aware of their weakness."

"No," he replied. "God is necessary to clear away our illusions. The divinities which keep them alive are false gods."

"What of that? If need be, even false gods must be invoked, rather than let the work suffer. Unfortunately for us, our illusions are alive enough, but we do not know how to make them serve our purpose. Look at the Brahmins. In spite of our treating them as demi-gods, and untiringly taking the dust of their feet, they are a force going to waste.

"There will always be a large class of people, given to grovelling, who can never be made to do anything unless they are bespattered with the dust of somebody's feet, be it on their heads or on their backs! What a pity if after keeping Brahmins saved up in our armoury for all these ages—keen and serviceable—they cannot be utilized to urge on this rabble in the time of our need."

But it is impossible to drive all this into Nikhil's head. He has such a prejudice in favour of truth—as though there exists such an objective reality! How often have I tried to explain to him that where untruth truly exists, there it is indeed the truth. This was understood in our country in the old days, and so they had the courage to declare that for those of little understanding untruth is the truth. For them, who can truly believe their country to be a goddess, her image will do duty for the truth. With our nature and our traditions we are unable to realize our country as she is, but we can easily bring ourselves to believe in her image. Those who want to do real work must not ignore this fact.

Nikhil only got excited. "Because you have lost the power of walking in the path of truth's attainment," he cried, "you keep waiting for some miraculous boon to drop from the skies! That is why when your service to the country has

fallen centuries into arrears all you can think of is, to make of it an image and stretch out your hands in expectation of gratuitous favours."

"We want to perform the impossible," I said. "So our country needs must be made into a god."

"You mean you have no heart for possible tasks," replied Nikhil. "Whatever is already there is to be left undisturbed; yet there must be a supernatural result:"

"Look here, Nikhil," I said at length, thoroughly exasperated.

"The things you have been saying are good enough as moral lessons. These ideas have served their purpose, as milk for babes, at one stage of man's evolution, but will no longer do, now that man has cut his teeth.

"Do we not see before our very eyes how things, of which we never even dreamt of sowing the seed, are sprouting up on every side? By what power? That of the deity in our country who is becoming manifest. It is for the genius of the age to give that deity its image. Genius does not argue, it creates. I only give form to what the country imagines.

"I will spread it abroad that the goddess has vouchsafed me a dream. I will tell the Brahmins that they have been appointed her priests, and that their downfall has been due to their dereliction of duty in not seeing to the proper performance of her worship. Do you say I shall be uttering lies? No, say I, it is the truth—nay more, the truth which the country has so long been waiting to learn from my lips. If only I could get the opportunity to deliver my message, you would see the stupendous result."

"What I am afraid of," said Nikhil, "is, that my lifetime is limited and the result you speak of is not the final result. It will have after-effects which may not be immediately apparent."

"I only seek the result," said I, "which belongs to today."

"The result I seek," answered Nikhil, "belongs to all time."

Nikhil may have had his share of Bengal's greatest gift—imagination, but he has allowed it to be overshadowed and nearly killed by an exotic conscientiousness. Just look at the worship of Durga which Bengal has carried to such heights. That is one of her greatest achievements. I can swear that Durga is a political goddess and was conceived as the image of the *Shakti* of patriotism in the days when Bengal was praying to be delivered from Mussulman domination. What other province of India has succeeded in giving such wonderful visual expression to the ideal of its quest?

Nothing betrayed Nikhil's loss of the divine gift of imagination more conclusively than his reply to me. "During the Mussulman domination," he said, "the Maratha and the Sikh asked for fruit from the arms which they themselves

took up. The Bengali contented himself with placing weapons in the hands of his goddess and muttering incantations to her; and as his country did not really happen to be a goddess the only fruit he got was the lopped-off heads of the goats and buffaloes of the sacrifice. The day that we seek the good of the country along the path of righteousness, He who is greater than our country will grant us true fruition."

The unfortunate part of it is that Nikhil's words sound so fine when put down on paper. My words, however, are not meant to be scribbled on paper, but to be scored into the heart of the country. The Pandit records his Treatise on Agriculture in printer's ink; but the cultivator at the point of his plough impresses his endeavour deep in the soil.

X

When I next saw Bimala I pitched my key high without further ado. "Have we been able," I began, "to believe with all our heart in the god for whose worship we have been born all these millions of years, until he actually made himself visible to us?

"How often have I told you," I continued, "that had I not seen you I never would have known all my country as One. I know not yet whether you rightly understand me. The gods are invisible only in their heaven—on earth they show themselves to mortal men."

Bimala looked at me in a strange kind of way as she gravely replied: "Indeed I understand you, Sandip." This was the first time she called me plain Sandip.

"Krishna," I continued, "whom Arjuna ordinarily knew only as the driver of his chariot, had also His universal aspect, of which, too, Arjuna had a vision one day, and that day he saw the Truth. I have seen your Universal Aspect in my country. The Ganges and the Brahmaputra are the chains of gold that wind round and round your neck; in the woodland fringes on the distant banks of the dark waters of the river, I have seen your collyrium-darkened eyelashes; the changeful sheen of your *sari* moves for me in the play of light and shade amongst the swaying shoots of green corn; and the blazing summer heat, which makes the whole sky lie gasping like a red-tongued lion in the desert, is nothing but your cruel radiance.

"Since the goddess has vouchsafed her presence to her votary in such wonderful guise, it is for me to proclaim her worship throughout our land, and then shall the country gain new life. 'Your image make we in temple after

temple.' [42](#) But this our people have not yet fully realized. So I would call on them in your name and offer for their worship an image from which none shall be able to withhold belief. Oh give me this boon, this power."

[42.](#) A line from Bankim Chatterjee's national song *Bande Mataram*.

Bimala's eyelids drooped and she became rigid in her seat like a figure of stone. Had I continued she would have gone off into a trance. When I ceased speaking she opened wide her eyes, and murmured with fixed gaze, as though still dazed: "O Traveller in the path of Destruction! Who is there that can stay your progress? Do I not see that none shall stand in the way of your desires? Kings shall lay their crowns at your feet; the wealthy shall hasten to throw open their treasure for your acceptance; those who have nothing else shall beg to be allowed to offer their lives. O my king, my god! What you have seen in me I know not, but I have seen the immensity of your grandeur in my heart. Who am I, what am I, in its presence? Ah, the awful power of Devastation! Never shall I truly live till it kills me utterly! I can bear it no longer, my heart is breaking!"

Bimala slid down from her seat and fell at my feet, which she clasped, and then she sobbed and sobbed and sobbed.

This is hypnotism indeed—the charm which can subdue the world! No materials, no weapons—but just the delusion of irresistible suggestion. Who says "Truth shall Triumph"? [43](#) Delusion shall win in the end. The Bengali understood this when he conceived the image of the ten-handed goddess astride her lion, and spread her worship in the land. Bengal must now create a new image to enchant and conquer the world. *Bande Mataram!*

[43.](#) A quotation from the Upanishads.

I gently lifted Bimala back into her chair, and lest reaction should set in, I began again without losing time: "Queen! The Divine Mother has laid on me the duty of establishing her worship in the land. But, alas, I am poor!"

Bimala was still flushed, her eyes clouded, her accents thick, as she replied: "You poor? Is not all that each one has yours? What are my caskets full of jewellery for? Drag away from me all my gold and gems for your worship. I have no use for them!"

Once before Bimala had offered up her ornaments. I am not usually in the habit of drawing lines, but I felt I had to draw the line there. [44](#) I know why I feel this hesitation. It is for man to give ornaments to woman; to take them from her wounds his manliness.

[44.](#) There is a world of sentiment attached to the ornaments worn by women in Bengal.

They are not merely indicative of the love and regard of the giver, but the wearing of them symbolizes all that is held best in wifehood—the constant solicitude for her husband's welfare, the successful performance of the material and spiritual duties of the household entrusted to her care. When the husband dies, and the

responsibility for the household changes hands, then are all ornaments cast aside as a sign of the widow's renunciation of worldly concerns. At any other time the giving up of ornaments is always a sign of supreme distress and as such appeals acutely to the sense of chivalry of any Bengali who may happen to witness it [Trans.].

But I must forget myself. Am I taking them? They are for the Divine Mother, to be poured in worship at her feet. Oh, but it must be a grand ceremony of worship such as the country has never beheld before. It must be a landmark in our history. It shall be my supreme legacy to the Nation. Ignorant men worship gods. I, Sandip, shall create them.

But all this is a far cry. What about the urgent immediate? At least three thousand is indispensably necessary—five thousand would do roundly and nicely. But how on earth am I to mention money after the high flight we have just taken? And yet time is precious!

I crushed all hesitation under foot as I jumped up and made my plunge: "Queen! Our purse is empty, our work about to stop!"

Bimala winced. I could see she was thinking of that impossible fifty thousand rupees. What a load she must have been carrying within her bosom, struggling under it, perhaps, through sleepless nights! What else had she with which to express her loving worship? Debarred from offering her heart at my feet, she hankers to make this sum of money, so hopelessly large for her, the bearer of her imprisoned feelings. The thought of what she must have gone through gives me a twinge of pain; for she is now wholly mine. The wrench of plucking up the plant by the roots is over. It is now only careful tending and nurture that is needed.

"Queen!" said I, "that fifty thousand rupees is not particularly wanted just now. I calculate that, for the present, five thousand or even three will serve."

The relief made her heart rebound. "I shall fetch you five thousand," she said in tones which seemed like an outburst of song—the song which Radhika of the Vaishnava lyrics sang: For my lover will I bind in my hair The flower which has no equal in the three worlds!

—it is the same tune, the same song: five thousand will I bring! That flower will I bind in my hair!

The narrow restraint of the flute brings out this quality of song. I must not allow the pressure of too much greed to flatten out the reed, for then, as I fear, music will give place to the questions "Why?" "What is the use of so much?" "How am I to get it?"—not a word of which will rhyme with what Radhika sang! So, as I was saying, illusion alone is real—it is the flute itself; while truth is but its empty hollow. Nikhil has of late got a taste of that pure emptiness—one

can see it in his face, which pains even me. But it was Nikhil's boast that he wanted the Truth, while mine was that I would never let go illusion from my grasp. Each has been suited to his taste, so why complain?

To keep Bimala's heart in the rarefied air of idealism, I cut short all further discussion over the five thousand rupees. I reverted to the demon-destroying goddess and her worship. When was the ceremony to be held and where? There is a great annual fair at Ruimari, within Nikhil's estates, where hundreds of thousands of pilgrims assemble. That would be a grand place to inaugurate the worship of our goddess!

Bimala waxed intensely enthusiastic. This was not the burning of foreign cloth or the people's granaries, so even Nikhil could have no objection—so thought she. But I smiled inwardly. How little these two persons, who have been together, day and night, for nine whole years, know of each other! They know something perhaps of their home life, but when it comes to outside concerns they are entirely at sea. They had cherished the belief that the harmony of the home with the outside was perfect. Today they realize to their cost that it is too late to repair their neglect of years, and seek to harmonize them now.

What does it matter? Let those who have made the mistake learn their error by knocking against the world. Why need I bother about their plight? For the present I find it wearisome to keep Bimala soaring much longer, like a captive balloon, in regions ethereal. I had better get quite through with the matter in hand.

When Bimala rose to depart and had neared the door I remarked in my most casual manner: "So, about the money..."

Bimala halted and faced back as she said: "On the expiry of the month, when our personal allowances become due..."

"That, I am afraid, would be much too late."

"When do you want it then?"

"Tomorrow.

"Tomorrow you shall have it."

Chapter 8

Nikhil's Story X

Paragraphs and letters against me have begun to come out in the local papers; cartoons and lampoons are to follow, I am told. Jets of wit and humour are being splashed about, and the lies thus scattered are convulsing the whole country. They know that the monopoly of mud-throwing is theirs, and the innocent passer-by cannot escape unsoiled.

They are saying that the residents in my estates, from the highest to the lowest, are in favour of *Swadeshi*, but they dare not declare themselves, for fear of me. The few who have been brave enough to defy me have felt the full rigour of my persecution. I am in secret league with the police, and in private communication with the magistrate, and these frantic efforts of mine to add a foreign title of my own earning to the one I have inherited, will not, it is opined, go in vain.

On the other hand, the papers are full of praise for those devoted sons of the motherland, the Kundu and the *Chakravarti zamindars*. If only, say they, the country had a few more of such staunch patriots, the mills of Manchester would have, had to sound their own dirge to the tune of *Bande Mataram*.

Then comes a letter in blood-red ink, giving a list of the traitorous *zamindars* whose treasures have been burnt down because of their failing to support the Cause. Holy Fire, it goes on to say, has been aroused to its sacred function of purifying the country; and other agencies are also at work to see that those who are not true sons of the motherland do cease to encumber her lap. The signature is an obvious *nom-de-plume*.

I could see that this was the doing of our local students. So I sent for some of them and showed them the letter.

The B.A. student gravely informed me that they also had heard that a band of desperate patriots had been formed who would stick at nothing in order to clear away all obstacles to the success of *Swadeshi*.

"If," said I, "even one of our countrymen succumbs to these overbearing desperadoes, that will indeed be a defeat for the country!"

"We fail to follow you, Maharaja," said the history student. "'Our country,'" I

tried to explain, "has been brought to death's door through sheer fear—from fear of the gods down to fear of the police; and if you set up, in the name of freedom, the fear of some other bogey, whatever it may be called; if you would raise your victorious standard on the cowardice of the country by means of downright oppression, then no true lover of the country can bow to your decision."

"Is there any country, sir," pursued the history student, "where submission to Government is not due to fear?"

"The freedom that exists in any country," I replied, "may be measured by the extent of this reign of fear. Where its threat is confined to those who would hurt or plunder, there the Government may claim to have freed man from the violence of man. But if fear is to regulate how people are to dress, where they shall trade, or what they must eat, then is man's freedom of will utterly ignored, and manhood destroyed at the root."

"Is not such coercion of the individual will seen in other countries too?" continued the history student.

"Who denies it?" I exclaimed. "But in every country man has destroyed himself to the extent that he has permitted slavery to flourish."

"Does it not rather show," interposed a Master of Arts, "that trading in slavery is inherent in man—a fundamental fact of his nature?"

"Sandip Babu made the whole thing clear," said a graduate. "He gave us the example of Harish Kundu, your neighbouring *zamindar*. From his estates you cannot ferret out a single ounce of foreign salt. Why? Because he has always ruled with an iron hand. In the case of those who are slaves by nature, the lack of a strong master is the greatest of all calamities."

"Why, sir!" chimed in an undergraduate, "have you not heard of the obstreperous tenant of *Chakravarti*, the other *zamindar* close by—how the law was set on him till he was reduced to utter destitution? When at last he was left with nothing to eat, he started out to sell his wife's silver ornaments, but no one dared buy them. Then *Chakravarti*'s manager offered him five rupees for the lot. They were worth over thirty, but he had to accept or starve. After taking over the bundle from him the manager coolly said that those five rupees would be credited towards his rent! We felt like having nothing more to do with *Chakravarti* or his manager after that, but Sandip Babu told us that if we threw over all the live people, we should have only dead bodies from the burning-grounds to carry on the work with! These live men, he pointed out, know what they want and how to get it—they are born rulers. Those who do not know how to desire for themselves, must live in accordance with, or die by virtue of, the desires of such as these. Sandip Babu contrasted them—Kundu and *Chakravarti*

—with you, Maharaja. You, he said, for all your good intentions, will never succeed in planting *Swadeshi* within your territory.”

“It is my desire,” I said, “to plant something greater than *Swadeshi*. I am not after dead logs but living trees—and these will take time to grow.”

“I am afraid, sir,” sneered the history student, “that you will get neither log nor tree. Sandip Babu rightly teaches that in order to get, you must snatch. This is taking all of us some time to learn, because it runs counter to what we were taught at school. I have seen with my own eyes that when a rent-collector of Harish Kundu’s found one of the tenants with nothing which could be sold up to pay his rent, he was made to sell his young wife! Buyers were not wanting, and the *zamindar*’s demand was satisfied. I tell you, sir, the sight of that man’s distress prevented my getting sleep for nights together! But, feel it as I did, this much I realized, that the man who knows how to get the money he is out for, even by selling up his debtor’s wife, is a better man than I am. I confess it is beyond me—I am a weakling, my eyes fill with tears. If anybody can save our country it is these Kundus and these *Chakravartis* and their officials!”

I was shocked beyond words. “If what you say be true,” I cried, “I clearly see that it must be the one endeavour of my life to save the country from these same Kundus and *Chakravartis* and officials. The slavery that has entered into our very bones is breaking out, at this opportunity, as ghastly tyranny. You have been so used to submit to domination through fear, you have come to believe that to make others submit is a kind of religion. My fight shall be against this weakness, this atrocious cruelty!” These things, which are so simple to ordinary folk, get so twisted in the minds of our B.A.’s and M.A.’s, the only purpose of whose historical quibbles seems to be to torture the truth!

XI I am worried over Panchu’s sham aunt. It will be difficult to disprove her, for though witnesses of a real event may be few or even wanting, innumerable proofs of a thing that has not happened can always be marshalled. The object of this move is, evidently, to get the sale of Panchu’s holding to me set aside. Being unable to find any other way out of it, I was thinking of allowing Panchu to hold a permanent tenure in my estates and building him a cottage on it. But my master would not have it. I should not give in to these nefarious tactics so easily, he objected, and offered to attend to the matter himself.

“You, sir!” I cried, considerably surprised.

“Yes, I,” he repeated.

I could not see, at all clearly, what my master could do to counteract these legal machinations. That evening, at the time he usually came to me, he did not turn up. On my making inquiries, his servant said he had left home with a few things packed in a small trunk, and some bedding, saying he would be back in a few days. I thought he might have sallied forth to hunt for witnesses in Panchu's uncle's village. In that case, however, I was sure that his would be a hopeless quest...

During the day I forget myself in my work. As the late autumn afternoon wears on, the colours of the sky become turbid, and so do the feelings of my mind. There are many in this world whose minds dwell in brick-built houses—they can afford to ignore the thing called the outside. But my mind lives under the trees in the open, directly receives upon itself the messages borne by the free winds, and responds from the bottom of its heart to all the musical cadences of light and darkness.

While the day is bright and the world in the pursuit of its numberless tasks crowds around, then it seems as if my life wants nothing else. But when the colours of the sky fade away and the blinds are drawn down over the windows of heaven, then my heart tells me that evening falls just for the purpose of shutting out the world, to mark the time when the darkness must be filled with the One. This is the end to which earth, sky, and waters conspire, and I cannot harden myself against accepting its meaning. So when the gloaming deepens over the world, like the gaze of the dark eyes of the beloved, then my whole being tells me that work alone cannot be the truth of life, that work is not the be-all and the end-all of man, for man is not simply a serf—even though the serfdom be of the True and the Good.

Alas, Nikhil, have you forever parted company with that self of yours who used to be set free under the starlight, to plunge into the infinite depths of the night's darkness after the day's work was done? How terribly alone is he, who misses companionship in the midst of the multitudinousness of life.

The other day, when the afternoon had reached the meeting-point of day and night, I had no work, nor the mind for work, nor was my master there to keep me company. With my empty, drifting heart longing to anchor on to something, I traced my steps towards the inner gardens. I was very fond of chrysanthemums and had rows of them, of all varieties, banked up in pots against one of the garden walls. When they were in flower, it looked like a wave of green breaking into iridescent foam. It was some time since I had been to this part of the grounds, and I was beguiled into a cheerful expectancy at the thought of meeting my chrysanthemums after our long separation.

As I went in, the full moon had just peeped over the wall, her slanting rays leaving its foot in deep shadow. It seemed as if she had come a-tiptoe from behind, and clasped the darkness over the eyes, smiling mischievously. When I came near the bank of chrysanthemums, I saw a figure stretched on the grass in front. My heart gave a sudden thud. The figure also sat up with a start at my footsteps.

What was to be done next? I was wondering whether it would do to beat a precipitate retreat. Bimala, also, was doubtless casting about for some way of escape. But it was as awkward to go as to stay! Before I could make up my mind, Bimala rose, pulled the end of her *sari* over her head, and walked off towards the inner apartments.

This brief pause had been enough to make real to me the cruel load of Bimala's misery. The plaint of my own life vanished from me in a moment. I called out: "Bimala!"

She started and stayed her steps, but did not turn back. I went round and stood before her. Her face was in the shade, the moonlight fell on mine. Her eyes were downcast, her hands clenched.

"Bimala," said I, "why should I seek to keep you fast in this closed cage of mine? Do I not know that thus you cannot but pine and droop?"

She stood still, without raising her eyes or uttering a word.

"I know," I continued, "that if I insist on keeping you shackled my whole life will be reduced to nothing but an iron chain. What pleasure can that be to me?"

She was still silent.

"So," I concluded, "I tell you, truly, Bimala, you are free. Whatever I may or may not have been to you, I refuse to be your fetters." With which I came away towards the outer apartments.

No, no, it was not a generous impulse, nor indifference. I had simply come to understand that never would I be free until I could set free. To try to keep Bimala as a garland round my neck, would have meant keeping a weight hanging over my heart. Have I not been praying with all my strength, that if happiness may not be mine, let it go; if grief needs must be my lot, let it come; but let me not be kept in bondage. To clutch hold of that which is untrue as though it were true, is only to throttle oneself. May I be saved from such self-destruction.

When I entered my room, I found my master waiting there. My agitated feelings were still heaving within me. "Freedom, sir," I began unceremoniously, without greeting or inquiry, "freedom is the biggest thing for man. Nothing can be compared to it—nothing at all!"

Surprised at my outburst, my master looked up at me in silence.

“One can understand nothing from books,” I went on. “We read in the scriptures that our desires are bonds, fettering us as well as others. But such words, by themselves, are so empty. It is only when we get to the point of letting the bird out of its cage that we can realize how free the bird has set us. Whatever we cage, shackles us with desire whose bonds are stronger than those of iron chains. I tell you, sir, this is just what the world has failed to understand. They all seek to reform something outside themselves. But reform is wanted only in one’s own desires, nowhere else, nowhere else!”

“We think,” he said, “that we are our own masters when we get in our hands the object of our desire—but we are really our own masters only when we are able to cast out our desires from our minds.”

“When we put all this into words, sir,” I went on, “it sounds like some bald-headed injunction, but when we realize even a little of it we find it to be *amrita*—which the gods have drunk and become immortal. We cannot see Beauty till we let go our hold of it. It was Buddha who conquered the world, not Alexander—this is untrue when stated in dry prose—oh when shall we be able to sing it? When shall all these most intimate truths of the universe overflow the pages of printed books and leap out in a sacred stream like the Ganges from the Gangotrie?”

I was suddenly reminded of my master’s absence during the last few days and of my ignorance as to its reason. I felt somewhat foolish as I asked him: “And where have you been all this while, sir?”

“Staying with Panchu,” he replied.

“Indeed!” I exclaimed. “Have you been there all these days?”

“Yes. I wanted to come to an understanding with the woman who calls herself his aunt. She could hardly be induced to believe that there could be such an odd character among the gentlefolk as the one who sought their hospitality. When she found I really meant to stay on, she began to feel rather ashamed of herself. ‘Mother,’ said I, ‘you are not going to get rid of me, even if you abuse me! And so long as I stay, Panchu stays also. For you see, do you not, that I cannot stand by and see his motherless little ones sent out into the streets?’

“She listened to my talks in this strain for a couple of days without saying yes or no. This morning I found her tying up her bundles. ‘We are going back to Brindaban,’ she said. ‘Let us have our expenses for the journey.’ I knew she was not going to Brindaban, and also that the cost of her journey would be substantial. So I have come to you.”

“The required cost shall be paid,” I said.

"The old woman is not a bad sort," my master went on musingly. "Panchu was not sure of her caste, and would not let her touch the water-jar, or anything at all of his. So they were continually bickering. When she found I had no objection to her touch, she looked after me devotedly. She is a splendid cook!"

"But all remnants of Panchu's respect for me vanished! To the last he had thought that I was at least a simple sort of person. But here was I, risking my caste without a qualm to win over the old woman for my purpose. Had I tried to steal a march on her by tutoring a witness for the trial, that would have been a different matter. Tactics must be met by tactics. But stratagem at the expense of orthodoxy is more than he can tolerate!"

"Anyhow, I must stay on a few days at Panchu's even after the woman leaves, for Harish Kundu may be up to any kind of devilry. He has been telling his satellites that he was content to have furnished Panchu with an aunt, but I have gone the length of supplying him with a father. He would like to see, now, how many fathers of his can save him!"

"We may or may not be able to save him," I said; "but if we should perish in the attempt to save the country from the thousand-and-one snares—of religion, custom and selfishness—which these people are busy spreading, we shall at least die happy."

Bimala's Story XIV

Who could have thought that so much would happen in this one life? I feel as if I have passed through a whole series of births, time has been flying so fast, I did not feel it move at all, till the shock came the other day.

I knew there would be words between us when I made up my mind to ask my husband to banish foreign goods from our market. But it was my firm belief that I had no need to meet argument by argument, for there was magic in the very air about me. Had not so tremendous a man as Sandip fallen helplessly at my feet, like a wave of the mighty sea breaking on the shore? Had I called him? No, it was the summons of that magic spell of mine. And Amulya, poor dear boy, when he first came to me—how the current of his life flushed with colour, like the river at dawn! Truly have I realized how a goddess feels when she looks upon the radiant face of her devotee.

With the confidence begotten of these proofs of my power, I was ready to meet my husband like a lightning-charged cloud. But what was it that happened?

Never in all these nine years have I seen such a far-away, distraught look in his eyes—like the desert sky—with no merciful moisture of its own, no colour reflected, even, from what it looked upon. I should have been so relieved if his anger had flashed out! But I could find nothing in him which I could touch. I felt as unreal as a dream—a dream which would leave only the blackness of night when it was over.

In the old days I used to be jealous of my sister-in-law for her beauty. Then I used to feel that Providence had given me no power of my own, that my whole strength lay in the love which my husband had bestowed on me. Now that I had drained to the dregs the cup of power and could not do without its intoxication, I suddenly found it dashed to pieces at my feet, leaving me nothing to live for.

How feverishly I had sat to do my hair that day. Oh, shame, shame on me, the utter shame of it! My sister-in-law, when passing by, had exclaimed: “Aha, *Chota Rani!* Your hair seems ready to jump off. Don’t let it carry your head with it.”

And then, the other day in the garden, how easy my husband found it to tell me that he set me free! But can freedom—empty freedom—be given and taken so easily as all that? It is like setting a fish free in the sky—for how can I move or live outside the atmosphere of loving care which has always sustained me?

When I came to my room today, I saw only furniture—only the bedstead, only the looking-glass, only the clothes-rack—not the all-pervading heart which used to be there, over all. Instead of it there was freedom, only freedom, mere emptiness! A dried-up watercourse with all its rocks and pebbles laid bare. No feeling, only furniture!

When I had arrived at a state of utter bewilderment, wondering whether anything true was left in my life, and whereabouts it could be, I happened to meet Sandip again. Then life struck against life, and the sparks flew in the same old way. Here was truth—impetuous truth—which rushed in and overflowed all bounds, truth which was a thousand times truer than the *Bara Rani* with her maid, Thako and her silly songs, and all the rest of them who talked and laughed and wandered about...

“Fifty thousand!” Sandip had demanded.

“What is fifty thousand?” cried my intoxicated heart. “You shall have it!”

How to get it, where to get it, were minor points not worth troubling over. Look at me. Had I not risen, all in one moment, from my nothingness to a height above everything? So shall all things come at my beck and call. I shall get it, get it, get it —there cannot be any doubt.

Thus had I come away from Sandip the other day. Then as I looked about me,

where was it—the tree of plenty? Oh, why does this outer world insult the heart so?

And yet get it I must; how, I do not care; for sin there cannot be. Sin taints only the weak; I with my *Shakti* am beyond its reach. Only a commoner can be a thief, the king conquers and takes his rightful spoil... I must find out where the treasury is; who takes the money in; who guards it.

I spent half the night standing in the outer verandah peering at the row of office buildings. But how to get that fifty thousand rupees out of the clutches of those iron bars? If by some *mantram* I could have made all those guards fall dead in their places, I would not have hesitated—so pitiless did I feel!

But while a whole gang of robbers seemed dancing a wardance within the whirling brain of its *Rani*, the great house of the Rajas slept in peace. The gong of the watch sounded hour after hour, and the sky overhead placidly looked on.

At last I sent for Amulya.

“Money is wanted for the Cause,” I told him. “Can you not get it out of the treasury?”

“Why not?” said he, with his chest thrown out.

Alas! Had I not said “Why not?” to Sandip just in the same way? The poor lad’s confidence could rouse no hopes in my mind.

“How will you do it?” I asked.

The wild plans he began to unfold would hardly bear repetition outside the pages of a penny dreadful.

“No, Amulya,” I said severely, “you must not be childish.”

“Very well, then,” he said, “let me bribe those watchmen.”

“Where is the money to come from?”

“I can loot the bazar,” he burst out, without blanching.

“Leave all that alone. I have my ornaments, they will serve.

“But,” said Amulya, “it strikes me that the cashier cannot be bribed. Never mind, there is another and simpler way.”

“What is that?”

“Why need you hear it? It is quite simple.”

“Still, I should like to know.”

Amulya fumbled in the pocket of his tunic and pulled out, first a small edition of the *Gita*, which he placed on the table—and then a little pistol, which he showed me, but said nothing further.

Horror! It did not take him a moment to make up his mind to kill our good old cashier! [45](#) To look at his frank, open face one would not have thought him

capable of hurting a fly, but how different were the words which came from his mouth. It was clear that the cashier's place in the world meant nothing real to him; it was a mere vacancy, lifeless, feelingless, with only stock phrases from the *Gita*—*Who kills the body kills naught!*

45. The cashier is the official who is most in touch with the ladies of a *zamindar*'s household, directly taking their requisitions for household stores and doing their shopping for them, and so he becomes more a member of the family than the others. [Trans.]

"Whatever do you mean, Amulya?" I exclaimed at length. "Don't you know that the dear old man has got a wife and children and that he is..."

"Where are we to find men who have no wives and children?" he interrupted. "Look here, Maharani, the thing we call pity is, at bottom, only pity for ourselves. We cannot bear to wound our own tender instincts, and so we do not strike at all—pity indeed! The height of cowardice!"

To hear Sandip's phrases in the mouth of this mere boy staggered me. So delightfully, lovably immature was he—of that age when the good may still be believed in as good, of that age when one really lives and grows. The Mother in me awoke.

For myself there was no longer good or bad—only death, beautiful alluring death. But to hear this stripling calmly talk of murdering an inoffensive old man as the right thing to do, made me shudder all over. The more clearly I saw that there was no sin in his heart, the more horrible appeared to me the sin of his words. I seemed to see the sin of the parents visited on the innocent child.

The sight of his great big eyes shining with faith and enthusiasm touched me to the quick. He was going, in his fascination, straight to the jaws of the python, from which, once in, there was no return. How was he to be saved? Why does not my country become, for once, a real Mother—clasp him to her bosom and cry out: "Oh, my child, my child, what profits it that you should save me, if so it be that I should fail to save you?"

I know, I know, that all Power on earth waxes great under compact with Satan. But the Mother is there, alone though she be, to condemn and stand against this devil's progress. The Mother cares not for mere success, however great—she wants to give life, to save life. My very soul, today, stretches out its hands in yearning to save this child.

A while ago I suggested robbery to him. Whatever I may now say against it will be put down to a woman's weakness. They only love our weakness when it drags the world in its toils!

"You need do nothing at all, Amulya, I will see to the money," I told him finally. When he had almost reached the door, I called him back.

"Amulya," said I, "I am your elder sister. Today is not the Brothers' Day ⁴⁶ according to the calendar, but all the days in the year are really Brothers' Days. My blessing be with you: may God keep you always."

46. The daughter of the house occupies a place of specially tender affection in a Bengali household (perhaps in Hindu households all over India) because, by dictate of custom, she must be given away in marriage so early. She thus takes corresponding memories with her to her husband's home, where she has to begin as a stranger before she can get into her place. The resulting feeling, of the mistress of her new home for the one she has left, has taken ceremonial form as the Brothers' Day, on which the brothers are invited to the married sisters' houses. Where the sister is the elder, she offers her blessing and receives the brother's reverence, and vice versa. Presents, called the offerings of reverence (or blessing), are exchanged. [Trans.]

These unexpected words from my lips took Amulya by surprise. He stood stock-still for a time. Then, coming to himself, he prostrated himself at my feet in acceptance of the relationship and did me reverence. When he rose his eyes were full of tears... O little brother mine! I am fast going to my death—let me take all your sin away with me. May no taint from me ever tarnish your innocence!

I said to him: "Let your offering of reverence be that pistol!"

"What do you want with it, sister?"

"I will practise death."

"Right, sister. Our women, also, must know how to die, to deal death!" with which Amulya handed me the pistol. The radiance of his youthful countenance seemed to tinge my life with the touch of a new dawn. I put away the pistol within my clothes. May this reverence-offering be the last resource in my extremity...

The door to the mother's chamber in my woman's heart once opened, I thought it would always remain open. But this pathway to the supreme good was closed when the mistress took the place of the mother and locked it again. The very next day I saw Sandip; and madness, naked and rampant, danced upon my heart.

What was this? Was this, then, my truer self? Never! I had never before known this shameless, this cruel one within me. The snake-charmer had come, pretending to draw this snake from within the fold of my garment—but it was never there, it was his all the time. Some demon has gained possession of me, and what I am doing today is the play of his activity—it has nothing to do with me.

This demon, in the guise of a god, had come with his ruddy torch to call me that day, saying: "I am your Country. I am your Sandip. I am more to you than anything else of yours. *Bande Mataram!*" And with folded hands I had responded: "You are my religion. You are my heaven. Whatever else is mine shall be swept away before my love for you. *Bande Mataram!*"

Five thousand is it? Five thousand it shall be! You want it tomorrow? Tomorrow you shall have it! In this desperate orgy, that gift of five thousand shall be as the foam of wine—and then for the riotous revel! The immovable world shall sway under our feet, fire shall flash from our eyes, a storm shall roar in our ears, what is or is not in front shall become equally dim. And then with tottering footsteps we shall plunge to our death—in a moment all fire will be extinguished, the ashes will be scattered, and nothing will remain behind.

Chapter 9

Bimala's Story XV

For a time I was utterly at a loss to think of any way of getting that money. Then, the other day, in the light of intense excitement, suddenly the whole picture stood out clear before me.

Every year my husband makes a reverence-offering of six thousand rupees to my sister-in-law at the time of the Durga Puja. Every year it is deposited in her account at the bank in Calcutta. This year the offering was made as usual, but it has not yet been sent to the bank, being kept meanwhile in an iron safe, in a corner of the little dressing-room attached to our bedroom.

Every year my husband takes the money to the bank himself. This year he has not yet had an opportunity of going to town. How could I fail to see the hand of Providence in this? The money has been held up because the country wants it—who could have the power to take it away from her to the bank? And how can I have the power to refuse to take the money? The goddess revelling in destruction holds out her blood-cup crying: "Give me drink. I am thirsty." I will give her my own heart's blood with that five thousand rupees. Mother, the loser of that money will scarcely feel the loss, but me you will utterly ruin!

Many a time, in the old days, have I inwardly called the Senior *Rani* a thief, for I charged her with wheedling money out of my trusting husband. After her husband's death, she often used to make away with things belonging to the estate for her own use. This I used to point out to my husband, but he remained silent. I would get angry and say: "If you feel generous, make gifts by all means, but why allow yourself to be robbed?" Providence must have smiled, then, at these complaints of mine, for tonight I am on the way to rob my husband's safe of my sister-in-law's money. My husband's custom was to let his keys remain in his pockets when he took off his clothes for the night, leaving them in the dressing-room. I picked out the key of the safe and opened it. The slight sound it made seemed to wake the whole world! A sudden chill turned my hands and feet icy cold, and I shivered all over.

There was a drawer inside the safe. On opening this I found the money, not in

currency notes, but in gold rolled up in paper. I had no time to count out what I wanted. There were twenty rolls, all of which I took and tied up in a corner of my *sari*.

What a weight it was. The burden of the theft crushed my heart to the dust. Perhaps notes would have made it seem less like thieving, but this was all gold.

After I had stolen into my room like a thief, it felt like my own room no longer. All the most precious rights which I had over it vanished at the touch of my theft. I began to mutter to myself, as though telling *mantrams*: *Bande Mataram*, *Bande Mataram*, my Country, my golden Country, all this gold is for you, for none else!

But in the night the mind is weak. I came back into the bedroom where my husband was asleep, closing my eyes as I passed through, and went off to the open terrace beyond, on which I lay prone, clasping to my breast the end of the *sari* tied over the gold. And each one of the rolls gave me a shock of pain.

The silent night stood there with forefinger upraised. I could not think of my house as separate from my country: I had robbed my house, I had robbed my country. For this sin my house had ceased to be mine, my country also was estranged from me. Had I died begging for my country, even unsuccessfully, that would have been worship, acceptable to the gods. But theft is never worship—how then can I offer this gold? Ah me! I am doomed to death myself, must I desecrate my country with my impious touch? The way to put the money back is closed to me. I have not the strength to return to the room, take again that key, open once more that safe—I should swoon on the threshold of my husband's door. The only road left now is the road in front. Neither have I the strength deliberately to sit down and count the coins. Let them remain behind their coverings: I cannot calculate.

There was no mist in the winter sky. The stars were shining brightly. If, thought I to myself, as I lay out there, I had to steal these stars one by one, like golden coins, for my country—these stars so carefully stored up in the bosom of the darkness—then the sky would be blinded, the night widowed forever, and my theft would rob the whole world. But was not also this very thing I had done a robbing of the whole world—not only of money, but of trust, of righteousness?

I spent the night lying on the terrace. When at last it was morning, and I was sure that my husband had risen and left the room, then only with my shawl pulled over my head, could I retrace my steps towards the bedroom.

My sister-in-law was about, with her brass pot, watering her plants. When she saw me passing in the distance she cried: "Have you heard the news, *Chota Rani*?"

I stopped in silence, all in a tremor. It seemed to me that the rolls of sovereigns were bulging through the shawl. I feared they would burst and scatter in a ringing shower, exposing to all the servants of the house the thief who had made herself destitute by robbing her own wealth.

"Your band of robbers," she went on, "have sent an anonymous message threatening to loot the treasury."

I remained as silent as a thief.

"I was advising Brother Nikhil to seek your protection," she continued banteringly. "Call off your minions, Robber Queen! We will offer sacrifices to your *Bande Mataram* if you will but save us. What doings there are these days! —but for the Lord's sake, spare our house at least from burglary."

I hastened into my room without reply. I had put my foot on quicksand, and could not now withdraw it. Struggling would only send me down deeper.

If only the time would arrive when I could hand over the money to Sandip! I could bear it no longer, its weight was breaking through my very ribs.

It was still early when I got word that Sandip was awaiting me. Today I had no thought of adornment. Wrapped as I was in my shawl, I went off to the outer apartments. As I entered the sitting-room I saw Sandip and Amulya there, together. All my dignity, all my honour, seemed to run tingling through my body from head to foot and vanish into the ground. I should have to lay bare a woman's uttermost shame in sight of this boy! Could they have been discussing my deed in their meeting place? Had any vestige of a veil of decency been left for me?

We women shall never understand men. When they are bent on making a road for some achievement, they think nothing of breaking the heart of the world into pieces to pave it for the progress of their chariot. When they are mad with the intoxication of creating, they rejoice in destroying the creation of the Creator. This heart-breaking shame of mine will not attract even a glance from their eyes. They have no feeling for life itself—all their eagerness is for their object. What am I to them but a meadow flower in the path of a torrent in flood?

What good will this extinction of me be to Sandip? Only five thousand rupees? Was not I good for something more than only five thousand rupees? Yes, indeed! Did I not learn that from Sandip himself, and was I not able in the light of this knowledge to despise all else in my world? I was the giver of light, of life, of *Shakti*, of immortality—in that belief, in that joy, I had burst all my bounds and come into the open. Had anyone then fulfilled for me that joy, I should have lived in my death. I should have lost nothing in the loss of my all. Do they want to tell me now that all this was false? The psalm of my praise

which was sung so devotedly, did it bring me down from my heaven, not to make heaven of earth, but only to level heaven itself with the dust?

XVI “The money, Queen?” said Sandip with his keen glance full on my face.

Amulya also fixed his gaze on me. Though not my own mother’s child, yet the dear lad is brother to me; for mother is mother all the world over. With his guileless face, his gentle eyes, his innocent youth, he looked at me. And I, a woman—of his mother’s sex—how could I hand him poison, just because he asked for it?

“The money, Queen!” Sandip’s insolent demand rang in my ears. For very shame and vexation I felt I wanted to fling that gold at Sandip’s head. I could hardly undo the knot of my *sari*, my fingers trembled so. At last the paper rolls dropped on the table.

Sandip’s face grew black... He must have thought that the rolls were of silver... What contempt was in his looks. What utter disgust at incapacity. It was almost as if he could have struck me! He must have suspected that I had come to parley with him, to offer to compound his claim for five thousand rupees with a few hundreds. There was a moment when I thought he would snatch up the rolls and throw them out of the window, declaring that he was no beggar, but a king claiming tribute.

“Is that all?” asked Amulya with such pity welling up in his voice that I wanted to sob out aloud. I kept my heart tightly pressed down, and merely nodded my head. Sandip was speechless. He neither touched the rolls, nor uttered a sound.

My humiliation went straight to the boy’s heart. With a sudden, feigned enthusiasm he exclaimed: “It’s plenty. It will do splendidly. You have saved us.” With which he tore open the covering of one of the rolls.

The sovereigns shone out. And in a moment the black covering seemed to be lifted from Sandip’s countenance also. His delight beamed forth from his features. Unable to control his sudden revulsion of feeling, he sprang up from his seat towards me. What he intended I know not. I flashed a lightning glance towards Amulya—the colour had left the boy’s face as at the stroke of a whip. Then with all my strength I thrust Sandip from me. As he reeled back his head struck the edge of the marble table and he dropped on the floor. There he lay awhile, motionless. Exhausted with my effort, I sank back on my seat.

Amulya’s face lightened with a joyful radiance. He did not even turn towards Sandip, but came straight up, took the dust of my feet, and then remained there, sitting on the floor in front of me. O my little brother, my child! This reverence

of yours is the last touch of heaven left in my empty world! I could contain myself no longer, and my tears flowed fast. I covered my eyes with the end of my *sari*, which I pressed to my face with both my hands, and sobbed and sobbed. And every time that I felt on my feet his tender touch trying to comfort me my tears broke out afresh.

After a little, when I had recovered myself and taken my hands from my face, I saw Sandip back at the table, gathering up the sovereigns in his handkerchief, as if nothing had happened. Amulya rose to his seat, from his place near my feet, his wet eyes shining.

Sandip coolly looked up at my face as he remarked: "It is six thousand."

"What do we want with so much, Sandip Babu?" cried Amulya. "Three thousand five hundred is all we need for our work."

"Our wants are not for this one place only," Sandip replied. "We shall want all we can get."

"That may be," said Amulya. "But in future I undertake to get you all you want. Out of this, Sandip Babu, please return the extra two thousand five hundred to the Maharani."

Sandip glanced enquiringly at me.

"No, no," I exclaimed. "I shall never touch that money again. Do with it as you will."

"Can man ever give as woman can?" said Sandip, looking towards Amulya.

"They are goddesses!" agreed Amulya with enthusiasm.

"We men can at best give of our power," continued Sandip. "But women give themselves. Out of their own life they give birth, out of their own life they give sustenance. Such gifts are the only true gifts." Then turning to me, "Queen!" said he, "if what you have given us had been only money I would not have touched it. But you have given that which is more to you than life itself!"

There must be two different persons inside men. One of these in me can understand that Sandip is trying to delude me; the other is content to be deluded. Sandip has power, but no strength of righteousness. The weapon of his which rouses up life smites it again to death. He has the unfailing quiver of the gods, but the shafts in them are of the demons.

Sandip's handkerchief was not large enough to hold all the coins. "Queen," he asked, "can you give me another?" When I gave him mine, he reverently touched his forehead with it, and then suddenly kneeling on the floor he made me an obeisance. "Goddess!" he said, "it was to offer my reverence that I had approached you, but you repulsed me, and rolled me in the dust. Be it so, I accept your repulse as your boon to me, I raise it to my head in salutation!" with

which he pointed to the place where he had been hurt.

Had I then misunderstood him? Could it be that his outstretched hands had really been directed towards my feet? Yet, surely, even Amulya had seen the passion that flamed out of his eyes, his face. But Sandip is such an adept in setting music to his chant of praise that I cannot argue; I lose my power of seeing truth; my sight is clouded over like an opium-eater's eyes. And so, after all, he gave me back twice as much in return for the blow I had dealt him—the wound on his head ended by making me bleed at heart. When I had received Sandip's obeisance my theft seemed to gain a dignity, and the gold glittering on the table to smile away all fear of disgrace, all stings of conscience.

Like me Amulya also was won back. His devotion to Sandip, which had suffered a momentary check, blazed up anew. The flower-vase of his mind filled once more with offerings for the worship of Sandip and me. His simple faith shone out of his eyes with the pure light of the morning star at dawn.

After I had offered worship and received worship my sin became radiant. And as Amulya looked on my face he raised his folded hands in salutation and cried *Bande Mataram!* I cannot expect to have this adoration surrounding me forever; and yet this has come to be the only means of keeping alive my self-respect.

I can no longer enter my bedroom. The bedstead seems to thrust out a forbidding hand, the iron safe frowns at me. I want to get away from this continual insult to myself which is rankling within me. I want to keep running to Sandip to hear him sing my praises. There is just this one little altar of worship which has kept its head above the all-pervading depths of my dishonour, and so I want to cleave to it night and day; for on whichever side I step away from it, there is only emptiness.

Praise, praise, I want unceasing praise. I cannot live if my wine-cup be left empty for a single moment. So, as the very price of my life, I want Sandip of all the world, today.

XVII When my husband nowadays comes in for his meals I feel I cannot sit before him; and yet it is such a shame not to be near him that I feel I cannot do that either. So I seat myself where we cannot look at each other's face.

That was how I was sitting the other day when the *Bara Rani* came and joined us.

"It is all very well for you, brother," said she, "to laugh away these threatening letters. But they do frighten me so. Have you sent off that money you gave me to the Calcutta bank?"

"No, I have not yet had the time to get it away," my husband replied.

"You are so careless, brother dear, you had better look out..."

"But it is in the iron safe right inside the inner dressing-room," said my husband with a reassuring smile.

"What if they get in there? You can never tell!"

"If they go so far, they might as well carry you off too!"

"Don't you fear, no one will come for poor me? The real attraction is in your room! But joking apart, don't run the risk of keeping money in the room like that."

"They will be taking along the Government revenue to Calcutta in a few days now; I will send this money to the bank under the same escort."

"Very well. But see you don't forget all about it, you are so absent-minded."

"Even if that money gets lost, while in my room, the loss cannot be yours, Sister *Rani*."

"Now, now, brother, you will make me very angry if you talk in that way. Was I making any difference between yours and mine? What if your money is lost, does not that hurt me? If Providence has thought fit to take away my all, it has not left me insensible to the value of the most devoted brother known since the days of Lakshman."⁴⁷

⁴⁷. Of the *Ramayana*. The story of his devotion to his elder brother Rama and his brother's wife Sita, has become a byword.

"Well, Junior *Rani*, are you turned into a wooden doll? You have not spoken a word yet. Do you know, brother, our Junior *Rani* thinks I try to flatter you. If things came to that pass I should not hesitate to do so, but I know my dear old brother does not need it!"

Thus the Senior *Rani* chattered on, not forgetting now and then to draw her brother's attention to this or that special delicacy amongst the dishes that were being served. My head was all the time in a whirl. The crisis was fast coming. Something must be done about replacing that money. And as I kept asking myself what could be done, and how it was to be done, the unceasing patter of my sister-in-law's words seemed more and more intolerable.

What made it all the worse was, that nothing could escape my sister-in-law's keen eyes. Every now and then she was casting side glances towards me. What she could read in my face I do not know, but to me it seemed that everything was written there only too plainly.

Then I did an infinitely rash thing. Affecting an easy, amused laugh I said: "All the Senior *Rani*'s suspicions, I see, are reserved for me—her fears of thieves and robbers are only a feint."

The Senior *Rani* smiled mischievously. "You are right, sister mine. A woman's theft is the most fatal of all thefts. But how can you elude my watchfulness? Am I a man, that you should hoodwink me?"

"If you fear me so," I retorted, "let me keep in your hands all I have, as security. If I cause you loss, you can then repay yourself."

"Just listen to her, our simple little Junior *Rani*!" she laughed back, turning to my husband. "Does she not know that there are losses which no security can make good, either in this world or in the next?"

My husband did not join in our exchange of words. When he had finished, he went off to the outer apartments, for nowadays he does not take his mid-day rest in our room.

All my more valuable jewels were in deposit in the treasury in charge of the cashier. Still what I kept with me must have been worth thirty or forty thousand. I took my jewel-box to the *Bara Rani*'s room and opened it out before her, saying: "I leave these with you, sister. They will keep you quite safe from all worry."

The *Bara Rani* made a gesture of mock despair. "You positively astound me, *Chota Rani*!" she said. "Do you really suppose I spend sleepless nights for fear of being robbed by you?"

"What harm if you did have a wholesome fear of me? Does anybody know anybody else in this world?"

"You want to teach me a lesson by trusting me? No, no! I am bothered enough to know what to do with my own jewels, without keeping watch over yours. Take them away, there's a dear, so many prying servants are about."

I went straight from my sister-in-law's room to the sitting-room outside, and sent for Amulya. With him Sandip came along too. I was in a great hurry, and said to Sandip: "If you don't mind, I want to have a word or two with Amulya. Would you..."

Sandip smiled a wry smile. "So Amulya and I are separate in your eyes? If you have set about to wean him from me, I must confess I have no power to retain him."

I made no reply, but stood waiting.

"Be it so," Sandip went on. "Finish your special talk with Amulya. But then you must give me a special talk all to myself too, or it will mean a defeat for me. I can stand everything, but not defeat. My share must always be the lion's share. This has been my constant quarrel with Providence. I will defeat the Dispenser of my fate, but not take defeat at his hands." With a crushing look at Amulya, Sandip walked out of the room."

"Amulya, my own little brother, you must do one thing for me," I said.

"I will stake my life for whatever duty you may lay on me, sister."

I brought out my jewel-box from the folds of my shawl and placed it before him. "Sell or pawn these," I said, "and get me six thousand rupees as fast as ever you can."

"No, no, Sister *Rani*," said Amulya, touched to the quick. "Let these jewels be. I will get you six thousand all the same."

"Oh, don't be silly," I said impatiently. "There is no time for any nonsense. Take this box. Get away to Calcutta by the night train. And bring me the money by the day after tomorrow positively."

Amulya took a diamond necklace out of the box, held it up to the light and put it back gloomily.

"I know," I told him, "that you will never get the proper price for these diamonds, so I am giving you jewels worth about thirty thousand. I don't care if they all go, but I must have that six thousand without fail."

"Do you know, Sister *Rani*," said Amulya, "I have had a quarrel with Sandip Babu over those six thousand rupees he took from you? I cannot tell you how ashamed I felt. But Sandip Babu would have it that we must give up even our shame for the country. That may be so. But this is somehow different. I do not fear to die for the country, to kill for the country—that much *Shakti* has been given me. But I cannot forget the shame of having taken money from you. There Sandip Babu is ahead of me. He has no regrets or compunctions. He says we must get rid of the idea that the money belongs to the one in whose box it happens to be—if we cannot, where is the magic of *Bande Mataram*?"

Amulya gathered enthusiasm as he talked on. He always warms up when he has me for a listener. "The Gita tells us," he continued, "that no one can kill the soul. Killing is a mere word. So also is the taking away of money. Whose is the money? No one has created it. No one can take it away with him when he departs this life, for it is no part of his soul. Today it is mine, tomorrow my son's, the next day his creditor's. Since, in fact, money belongs to no one, why should any blame attach to our patriots if, instead of leaving it for some worthless son, they take it for their own use?"

When I hear Sandip's words uttered by this boy, I tremble all over. Let those who are snake-charmers play with snakes; if harm comes to them, they are prepared for it. But these boys are so innocent, all the world is ready with its blessing to protect them. They play with a snake not knowing its nature, and when we see them smilingly, trustfully, putting their hands within reach of its fangs, then we understand how terribly dangerous the snake is. Sandip is right

when he suspects that though I, for myself, may be ready to die at his hands, this boy I shall wean from him and save.

"So the money is wanted for the use of your patriots?" I questioned with a smile.

"Of course it is!" said Amulya proudly. "Are they not our kings? Poverty takes away from their regal power. Do you know, we always insist on Sandip Babu travelling First Class? He never shirks kingly honours—he accepts them not for himself, but for the glory of us all. The greatest weapon of those who rule the world, Sandip Babu has told us, is the hypnotism of their display. To take the vow of poverty would be for them not merely a penance—it would mean suicide."

At this point Sandip noiselessly entered the room. I threw my shawl over the jewel-case with a rapid movement.

"The special-talk business not yet over?" he asked with a sneer in his tone.

"Yes, we've quite finished," said Amulya apologetically. "It was nothing much."

"No, Amulya," I said, "we have not quite finished."

"So exit Sandip for the second time, I suppose?" said Sandip.

"If you please."

"And as to Sandip's re-entry."

"Not today. I have no time."

"I see!" said Sandip as his eyes flashed. "No time to waste, only for special talks!"

Jealousy! Where the strong man shows weakness, there the weaker sex cannot help beating her drums of victory. So I repeated firmly: "I really have no time."

Sandip went away looking black. Amulya was greatly perturbed. "Sister *Rani*," he pleaded, "Sandip Babu is annoyed."

"He has neither cause nor right to be annoyed," I said with some vehemence. "Let me caution you about one thing, Amulya. Say nothing to Sandip Babu about the sale of my jewels—on your life."

"No, I will not."

"Then you had better not delay any more. You must get away by tonight's train."

Amulya and I left the room together. As we came out on the verandah Sandip was standing there. I could see he was waiting to waylay Amulya. To prevent that I had to engage him. "What is it you wanted to tell me, Sandip Babu?" I asked.

"I have nothing special to say—mere small talk. And since you have not the time..."

"I can give you just a little."

By this time Amulya had left. As we entered the room Sandip asked: "What was that box Amulya carried away?"

The box had not escaped his eyes. I remained firm. "If I could have told you, it would have been made over to him in your presence!"

"So you think Amulya will not tell me?"

"No, he will not."

Sandip could not conceal his anger any longer. "You think you will gain the mastery over me?" he blazed out. "That shall never be. Amulya, there, would die a happy death if I deigned to trample him under foot. I will never, so long as I live, allow you to bring him to your feet!"

Oh, the weak! The weak! At last Sandip has realized that he is weak before me! That is why there is this sudden outburst of anger. He has understood that he cannot meet the power that I wield, with mere strength. With a glance I can crumble his strongest fortifications. So he must needs resort to bluster. I simply smiled in contemptuous silence. At last have I come to a level above him. I must never lose this vantage ground; never descend lower again. Amidst all my degradation this bit of dignity must remain to me!

"I know," said Sandip, after a pause, "it was your jewel-case."

"You may guess as you please," said I, "but you will get nothing out of me.

"So you trust Amulya more than you trust me? Do you know that the boy is the shadow of my shadow, the echo of my echo—that he is nothing if I am not at his side?"

"Where he is not your echo, he is himself, Amulya. And that is where I trust him more than I can trust your echo!"

"You must not forget that you are under a promise to render up all your ornaments to me for the worship of the Divine Mother. In fact your offering has already been made."

"Whatever ornaments the gods leave to me will be offered up to the gods. But how can I offer those which have been stolen away from me?"

"Look here, it is no use your trying to give me the slip in that fashion. Now is the time for grim work. Let that work be finished, then you can make a display of your woman's wiles to your heart's content—and I will help you in your game."

The moment I had stolen my husband's money and paid it to Sandip, the music that was in our relations stopped. Not only did I destroy all my own value by

making myself cheap, but Sandip's powers, too, lost scope for their full play. You cannot employ your marksmanship against a thing which is right in your grasp. So Sandip has lost his aspect of the hero; a tone of low quarrelsomeness has come into his words.

Sandip kept his brilliant eyes fixed full on my face till they seemed to blaze with all the thirst of the mid-day sky. Once or twice he fidgeted with his feet, as though to leave his seat, as if to spring right on me. My whole body seemed to swim, my veins throbbed, the hot blood surged up to my ears; I felt that if I remained there, I should never get up at all. With a supreme effort I tore myself off the chair, and hastened towards the door.

From Sandip's dry throat there came a muffled cry: "Whither would you flee, Queen?" The next moment he left his seat with a bound to seize hold of me. At the sound of footsteps outside the door, however, he rapidly retreated and fell back into his chair. I checked my steps near the bookshelf, where I stood staring at the names of the books.

As my husband entered the room, Sandip exclaimed: "I say, Nikhil, don't you keep Browning among your books here? I was just telling Queen Bee of our college club. Do you remember that contest of ours over the translation of those lines from Browning? You don't?

*"She should never have looked at me, If she meant I should not love her,
There are plenty... men you call such, I suppose... she may discover All her
soul to, if she pleases, And yet leave much as she found them: But I'm not
so, and she knew it When she fixed me, glancing round them."*

"I managed to get together the words to render it into Bengali, somehow, but the result was hardly likely to be a 'joy forever' to the people of Bengal. I really did think at one time that I was on the verge of becoming a poet, but Providence was kind enough to save me from that disaster. Do you remember old Dakshina? If he had not become a Salt Inspector, he would have been a poet. I remember his rendering to this day..."

"No, Queen Bee, it is no use rummaging those bookshelves. Nikhil has ceased to read poetry since his marriage—perhaps he has no further need for it. But I suppose 'the fever fit of poesy', as the Sanskrit has it, is about to attack me again."

"I have come to give you a warning, Sandip," said my husband.

"About the fever fit of poesy?"

My husband took no notice of this attempt at humour. "For some time," he

continued, "Mahomedan preachers have been about stirring up the local Mussulmans. They are all wild with you, and may attack you any moment."

"Are you come to advise flight?"

"I have come to give you information, not to offer advice."

"Had these estates been mine, such a warning would have been necessary for the preachers, not for me. If, instead of trying to frighten me, you give them a taste of your intimidation, that would be worthier both of you and me. Do you know that your weakness is weakening your neighbouring *zamindars* also?"

"I did not offer you my advice, Sandip. I wish you, too, would refrain from giving me yours. Besides, it is useless. And there is another thing I want to tell you. You and your followers have been secretly worrying and oppressing my tenantry. I cannot allow that any longer. So I must ask you to leave my territory."

"For fear of the Mussulmans, or is there any other fear you have to threaten me with?"

"There are fears the want of which is cowardice. In the name of those fears, I tell you, Sandip, you must go. In five days I shall be starting for Calcutta. I want you to accompany me. You may of course stay in my house there—to that there is no objection."

"All right, I have still five day's time then. Meanwhile, Queen Bee, let me hum to you my song of parting from your honey-hive. Ah! you poet of modern Bengal! Throw open your doors and let me plunder your words. The theft is really yours, for it is my song which you have made your own—let the name be yours by all means, but the song is mine." With this Sandip struck up in a deep, husky voice, which threatened to be out of tune, a song in the Bhairavi mode: "In the springtime of your kingdom, my Queen, Meetings and partings chase each other in their endless hide and seek, And flowers blossom in the wake of those that droop and die in the shade.

In the springtime of your kingdom, my Queen, My meeting with you had its own songs, But has not also my leave-taking any gift to offer you?

That gift is my secret hope, which I keep hidden in the shadows of your flower garden, That the rains of July may sweetly temper your fiery June."

His boldness was immense—boldness which had no veil, but was naked as fire. One finds no time to stop it: it is like trying to resist a thunderbolt: the lightning flashes: it laughs at all resistance.

I left the room. As I was passing along the verandah towards the inner apartments, Amulya suddenly made his appearance and came and stood before

me.

“Fear nothing, Sister *Rani*,” he said. “I am off tonight and shall not return unsuccessful.”

“Amulya,” said I, looking straight into his earnest, youthful face, “I fear nothing for myself, but may I never cease to fear for you.”

Amulya turned to go, but before he was out of sight I called him back and asked: “Have you a mother, Amulya?”

“I have.”

“A sister?”

“No, I am the only child of my mother. My father died when I was quite little.”

“Then go back to your mother, Amulya.”

“But, Sister *Rani*, I have now both mother and sister.”

“Then, Amulya, before you leave tonight, come and have your dinner here.”

“There won’t be time for that. Let me take some food for the journey, consecrated with your touch.”

“What do you specially like, Amulya?” “If I had been with my mother I should have had lots of Poush cakes. Make some for me with your own hands, Sister *Rani*!”

Chapter 10

Nikhil's Story XII I learnt from my master that Sandip had joined forces with Harish Kundu, and there was to be a grand celebration of the worship of the demon-destroying Goddess. Harish Kundu was extorting the expenses from his tenantry. Pandits Kaviratna and Vidyavagish had been commissioned to compose a hymn with a double meaning.

My master has just had a passage at arms with Sandip over this. "Evolution is at work amongst the gods as well," says Sandip. "The grandson has to remodel the gods created by the grandfather to suit his own taste, or else he is left an atheist. It is my mission to modernize the ancient deities. I am born the saviour of the gods, to emancipate them from the thraldom of the past."

I have seen from our boyhood what a juggler with ideas is Sandip. He has no interest in discovering truth, but to make a quizzical display of it rejoices his heart. Had he been born in the wilds of Africa he would have spent a glorious time inventing argument after argument to prove that cannibalism is the best means of promoting true communion between man and man. But those who deal in delusion end by deluding themselves, and I fully believe that, each time Sandip creates a new fallacy, he persuades himself that he has found the truth, however contradictory his creations may be to one another.

However, I shall not give a helping hand to establish a liquor distillery in my country. The young men, who are ready to offer their services for their country's cause, must not fall into this habit of getting intoxicated. The people who want to exact work by drugging methods set more value on the excitement than on the minds they intoxicate.

I had to tell Sandip, in Bimala's presence, that he must go. Perhaps both will impute to me the wrong motive. But I must free myself also from all fear of being misunderstood. Let even Bimala misunderstand me...

A number of Mahomedan preachers are being sent over from Dacca. The Mussulmans in my territory had come to have almost as much of an aversion to the killing of cows as the Hindus. But now cases of cow-killing are cropping up here and there. I had the news first from some of my Mussulman tenants with expressions of their disapproval. Here was a situation which I could see would be difficult to meet. At the bottom was a pretence of fanaticism, which would cease to be a pretence if obstructed. That is just where the ingenuity of the move came in!

I sent for some of my principal Hindu tenants and tried to get them to see the matter in its proper light. "We can be staunch in our own convictions," I said, "but we have no control over those of others. For all that many of us are Vaishnavas, those of us who are Shaktas go on with their animal sacrifices just the same. That cannot be helped. We must, in the same way, let the Mussulmans do as they think best. So please refrain from all disturbance."

"Maharaja," they replied, "these outrages have been unknown for so long."

"That was so," I said, "because such was their spontaneous desire. Let us behave in such a way that the same may become true, over again. But a breach of the peace is not the way to bring this about."

"No, Maharaja," they insisted, "those good old days are gone. This will never stop unless you put it down with a strong hand."

"Oppression," I replied, "will not only not prevent cow-killing, it may lead to the killing of men as well."

One of them had had an English education. He had learnt to repeat the phrases of the day. "It is not only a question of orthodoxy," he argued. "Our country is mainly agricultural, and cows are..."

"Buffaloes in this country," I interrupted, "likewise give milk and are used for ploughing. And therefore, so long as we dance frantic dances on our temple pavements, smeared with their blood, their severed heads carried on our shoulders, religion will only laugh at us if we quarrel with Mussulmans in her name, and nothing but the quarrel itself will remain true. If the cow alone is to be held sacred from slaughter, and not the buffalo, then that is bigotry, not religion."

"But are you not aware, sir, of what is behind all this?" pursued the English-knowing tenant. "This has only become possible because the Mussulman is assured of safety, even if he breaks the law. Have you not heard of the Pachur case?"

"Why is it possible," I asked, "to use the Mussulmans thus, as tools against us? Is it not because we have fashioned them into such with our own intolerance?

That is how Providence punishes us. Our accumulated sins are being visited on our own heads."

"Oh, well, if that be so, let them be visited on us. But we shall have our revenge. We have undermined what was the greatest strength of the authorities, their devotion to their own laws. Once they were truly kings, dispensing justice; now they themselves will become law-breakers, and so no better than robbers. This may not go down to history, but we shall carry it in our hearts for all time..."

The evil reports about me which are spreading from paper to paper are making me notorious. News comes that my effigy has been burnt at the river-side burning-ground of the *Chakravartis*, with due ceremony and enthusiasm; and other insults are in contemplation. The trouble was that they had come to ask me to take shares in a Cotton Mill they wanted to start. I had to tell them that I did not so much mind the loss of my own money, but I would not be a party to causing a loss to so many poor shareholders.

"Are we to understand, Maharaja," said my visitors, "that the prosperity of the country does not interest you?"

"Industry may lead to the country's prosperity," I explained, "but a mere desire for its prosperity will not make for success in industry. Even when our heads were cool, our industries did not flourish. Why should we suppose that they will do so just because we have become frantic?"

"Why not say plainly that you will not risk your money?"

"I will put in my money when I see that it is industry which prompts you. But, because you have lighted a fire, it does not follow that you have the food to cook over it."

XIII What is this? Our Chakua sub-treasury looted! A remittance of seven thousand five hundred rupees was due from there to headquarters. The local cashier had changed the cash at the Government Treasury into small currency notes for convenience in carrying, and had kept them ready in bundles. In the middle of the night an armed band had raided the room, and wounded Kasim,

the man on guard. The curious part of it was that they had taken only six thousand rupees and left the rest scattered on the floor, though it would have been as easy to carry that away also. Anyhow, the raid of the dacoits was over; now the police raid would begin. Peace was out of the question.

When I went inside, I found the news had travelled before me. "What a terrible thing, brother," exclaimed the *Bara Rani*. "Whatever shall we do?"

I made light of the matter to reassure her. "We still have something left," I said with a smile. "We shall manage to get along somehow."

"Don't joke about it, brother dear. Why are they all so angry with you? Can't you humour them? Why put everybody out?"

"I cannot let the country go to rack and ruin, even if that would please everybody."

"That was a shocking thing they did at the burning-grounds. It's a horrid shame to treat you so. The *Chota Rani* has got rid of all her fears by dint of the Englishwoman's teaching, but as for me, I had to send for the priest to avert the omen before I could get any peace of mind. For my sake, dear, do get away to Calcutta. I tremble to think what they may do, if you stay on here."

My sister-in-law's genuine anxiety touched me deeply.

"And, brother," she went on, "did I not warn you, it was not well to keep so much money in your room? They might get wind of it any day. It is not the money—but who knows..."

To calm her I promised to remove the money to the treasury at once, and then get it away to Calcutta with the first escort going. We went together to my bedroom. The dressing-room door was shut. When I knocked, Bimala called out: "I am dressing."

"I wonder at the *Chota Rani*," exclaimed my sister-in-law, "dressing so early in the day! One of their *Bande Mataram* meetings, I suppose. Robber Queen!" she called out in jest to Bimala. "Are you counting your spoils inside?"

"I will attend to the money a little later," I said, as I came away to my office room outside.

I found the Police Inspector waiting for me. "Any trace of the dacoits?" I asked.

"I have my suspicions."

"On whom?"

"Kasim, the guard."

"Kasim? But was he not wounded?"

"A mere nothing. A flesh wound on the leg. Probably self-inflicted."

"But I cannot bring myself to believe it. He is such a trusted servant."

"You may have trusted him, but that does not prevent his being a thief. Have I not seen men trusted for twenty years together, suddenly developing..."

"Even if it were so, I could not send him to gaol. But why should he have left the rest of the money lying about?"

"To put us off the scent. Whatever you may say, Maharaja, he must be an old

hand at the game. He mounts guard during his watch, right enough, but I feel sure he has a finger in all the dacoities going on in the neighbourhood."

With this the Inspector proceeded to recount the various methods by which it was possible to be concerned in a dacoity twenty or thirty miles away, and yet be back in time for duty.

"Have you brought Kasim here?" I asked.

"No," was the reply, "he is in the lock-up. The Magistrate is due for the investigation."

"I want to see him," I said.

When I went to his cell he fell at my feet, weeping. "In God's name," he said, "I swear I did not do this thing."

"I do not doubt you, Kasim," I assured him. "Fear nothing. They can do nothing to you, if you are innocent."

Kasim, however, was unable to give a coherent account of the incident. He was obviously exaggerating. Four or five hundred men, big guns, numberless swords, figured in his narrative. It must have been either his disturbed state of mind or a desire to account for his easy defeat. He would have it that this was Harish Kundu's doing; he was even sure he had heard the voice of Ekram, the head retainer of the Kundus.

"Look here, Kasim," I had to warn him, "don't you be dragging other people in with your stories. You are not called upon to make out a case against Harish Kundu, or anybody else."

XIV

On returning home I asked my master to come over. He shook his head gravely. "I see no good in this," said he—"this setting aside of conscience and putting the country in its place. All the sins of the country will now break out, hideous and unashamed."

"Who do you think could have..."

"Don't ask me. But sin is rampant. Send them all away, right away from here."

"I have given them one more day. They will be leaving the day after tomorrow."

"And another thing. Take Bimala away to Calcutta. She is getting too narrow a view of the outside world from here, she cannot see men and things in their true proportions. Let her see the world—men and their work—give her abroad vision."

“That is exactly what I was thinking.”

“Well, don’t make any delay about it. I tell you, Nikhil, man’s history has to be built by the united effort of all the races in the world, and therefore this selling of conscience for political reasons—this making a fetish of one’s country, won’t do. I know that Europe does not at heart admit this, but there she has not the right to pose as our teacher. Men who die for the truth become immortal: and, if a whole people can die for the truth, it will also achieve immortality in the history of humanity. Here, in this land of India, amid the mocking laughter of Satan piercing the sky, may the feeling for this truth become real! What a terrible epidemic of sin has been brought into our country from foreign lands...”

The whole day passed in the turmoil of investigation. I was tired out when I retired for the night. I left over sending my sister-in-law’s money to the treasury till next morning.

I woke up from my sleep at dead of night. The room was dark. I thought I heard a moaning somewhere. Somebody must have been crying. Sounds of sobbing came heavy with tears like fitful gusts of wind in the rainy night. It seemed to me that the cry rose from the heart of my room itself. I was alone. For some days Bimala had her bed in another room adjoining mine. I rose up and when I went out I found her in the balcony lying prone upon her face on the bare floor.

This is something that cannot be written in words. He only knows it that sits in the bosom of the world and receives all its pangs in His own heart. The sky is dumb, the stars are mute, the night is still, and in the midst of it all that one sleepless cry!

We give these sufferings names, bad or good, according to the classifications of the books, but this agony which is welling up from a torn heart, pouring into the fathomless dark, has it any name? When in that midnight, standing under the silent stars, I looked upon that figure, my mind was struck with awe, and I said to myself: “Who am I to judge her?” O life, O death, O God of the infinite existence, I bow my head in silence to the mystery which is in you.

Once I thought I should turn back. But I could not. I sat down on the ground near Bimala and placed my hand on her head. At the first touch her whole body seemed to stiffen, but the next moment the hardness gave way, and the tears burst out. I gently passed my fingers over her forehead. Suddenly her hands groping for my feet grasped them and drew them to herself, pressing them against her breast with such force that I thought her heart would break.

Bimala's Story XVIII Amulya is due to return from Calcutta this morning. I told the servants to let me know as soon as he arrived, but could not keep still. At last I went outside to await him in the sitting-room.

When I sent him off to sell the jewels I must have been thinking only of myself. It never even crossed my mind that so young a boy, trying to sell such valuable jewellery, would at once be suspected. So helpless are we women, we needs must place on others the burden of our danger. When we go to our death we drag down those who are about us.

I had said with pride that I would save Amulya—as if she who was drowning could save others. But instead of saving him, I have sent him to his doom. My little brother, such a sister have I been to you that Death must have smiled on that Brothers' Day when I gave you my blessing—I, who wander distracted with the burden of my own evil-doing.

I feel today that man is at times attacked with evil as with the plague. Some germ finds its way in from somewhere, and then in the space of one night Death stalks in. Why cannot the stricken one be kept far away from the rest of the world? I, at least, have realized how terrible is the contagion—like a fiery torch which burns that it may set the world on fire.

It struck nine. I could not get rid of the idea that Amulya was in trouble, that he had fallen into the clutches of the police. There must be great excitement in the Police Office—whose are the jewels?—where did he get them? And in the end I shall have to furnish the answer, in public, before all the world.

What is that answer to be? Your day has come at last, *Bara Rani*, you whom I have so long despised. You, in the shape of the public, the world, will have your revenge. O God, save me this time, and I will cast all my pride at my sister-in-law's feet.

I could bear it no longer. I went straight to the *Bara Rani*. She was in the verandah, spicing her betel leaves, Thako at her side. The sight of Thako made me shrink back for a moment, but I overcame all hesitation, and making a low obeisance I took the dust of my elder sister-in-law's feet.

"Bless my soul, *Chota Rani*," she exclaimed, "what has come upon you? Why this sudden reverence?"

"It is my birthday, sister," said I. "I have caused you pain. Give me your blessing today that I may never do so again. My mind is so small." I repeated my obeisance and left her hurriedly, but she called me back.

"You never before told me that this was your birthday, *Chotie* darling! Be sure to come and have lunch with me this afternoon. You positively must."

O God, let it really be my birthday today. Can I not be born over again? Cleanse me, my God, and purify me and give me one more trial!

I went again to the sitting-room to find Sandip there. A feeling of disgust seemed to poison my very blood. The face of his, which I saw in the morning light, had nothing of the magic radiance of genius.

"Will you leave the room," I blurted out.

Sandip smiled. "Since Amulya is not here," he remarked, "I should think my turn had come for a special talk."

My fate was coming back upon me. How was I to take away the right I myself had given. "I would be alone," I repeated.

"Queen," he said, "the presence of another person does not prevent your being alone. Do not mistake me for one of the crowd. I, Sandip, am always alone, even when surrounded by thousands."

"Please come some other time. This morning I am..."

"Waiting for Amulya?"

I turned to leave the room for sheer vexation, when Sandip drew out from the folds of his cloak that jewel-casket of mine and banged it down on the marble table. I was thoroughly startled. "Has not Amulya gone, then?" I exclaimed.

"Gone where?"

"To Calcutta?"

"No," chuckled Sandip.

Ah, then my blessing had come true, in spite of all. He was saved. Let God's punishment fall on me, the thief, if only Amulya be safe.

The change in my countenance roused Sandip's scorn. "So pleased, Queen!" sneered he. "Are these jewels so very precious? How then did you bring yourself to offer them to the Goddess? Your gift was actually made. Would you now take it back?"

Pride dies hard and raises its fangs to the last. It was clear to me I must show Sandip I did not care a rap about these jewels. "If they have excited your greed," I said, "you may have them."

"My greed today embraces the wealth of all Bengal," replied Sandip. "Is there a greater force than greed? It is the steed of the great ones of the earth, as is the elephant, Airauat, the steed of Indra. So then these jewels are mine?"

As Sandip took up and replaced the casket under his cloak, Amulya rushed in. There were dark rings under his eyes, his lips were dry, his hair tumbled: the freshness of his youth seemed to have withered in a single day. Pangs gripped

my heart as I looked on him.

"My box!" he cried, as he went straight up to Sandip without a glance at me.
"Have you taken that jewel-box from my trunk?"

"Your jewel-box?" mocked Sandip.

"It was my trunk!" Sandip burst out into a laugh. "Your distinctions between mine and yours are getting rather thin, Amulya," he cried. "You will die a religious preacher yet, I see."

Amulya sank on a chair with his face in his hands. I went up to him and placing my hand on his head asked him: "What is your trouble, Amulya?"

He stood straight up as he replied: "I had set my heart, Sister *Rani*, on returning your jewels to you with my own hand. Sandip Babu knew this, but he forestalled me."

"What do I care for my jewels?" I said. "Let them go. No harm is done."

"Go? Where?" asked the mystified boy.

"The jewels are mine," said Sandip. "Insignia bestowed on me by my Queen!"

"No, no, no," broke out Amulya wildly. "Never, Sister *Rani*! I brought them back for you. You shall not give them away to anybody else."

"I accept your gift, my little brother," said I. "But let him, who hankers after them, satisfy his greed."

Amulya glared at Sandip like a beast of prey, as he growled: "Look here, Sandip Babu, you know that even hanging has no terrors for me. If you dare take away that box of jewels..."

With an attempt at a sarcastic laugh Sandip said: "You also ought to know by this time, Amulya, that I am not the man to be afraid of you."

"Queen Bee," he went on, turning to me, "I did not come here today to take these jewels, I came to give them to you. You would have done wrong to take my gift at Amulya's hands. In order to prevent it, I had first to make them clearly mine. Now these my jewels are my gift to you. Here they are! Patch up any understanding with this boy you like. I must go. You have been at your special talks all these days together, leaving me out of them. If special happenings now come to pass, don't blame me."

"Amulya," he continued, "I have sent on your trunks and things to your lodgings. Don't you be keeping any belongings of yours in my room any longer." With this parting shot, Sandip flung out of the room.

"I have had no peace of mind, Amulya," I said to him, "ever since I sent you off to sell my jewels."

"Why, Sister *Rani*?"

"I was afraid lest you should get into trouble with them, lest they should suspect you for a thief. I would rather go without that six thousand. You must now do another thing for me—go home at once, home to your mother."

Amulya produced a small bundle and said: "But, sister, I have got the six thousand."

"Where from?"

"I tried hard to get gold," he went on, without replying to my question, "but could not. So I had to bring it in notes."

"Tell me truly, Amulya, swear by me, where did you get this money?"

"That I will not tell you."

Everything seemed to grow dark before my eyes. "What terrible thing have you done, Amulya?" I cried. "Is it then..."

"I know you will say I got this money wrongly. Very well, I admit it. But I have paid the full price for my wrong-doing. So now the money is mine."

I no longer had any desire to learn more about it. My very blood-vessels contracted, making my whole body shrink within itself.

"Take it away, Amulya," I implored. "Put it back where you got it from."

"That would be hard indeed!"

"It is not hard, brother dear. It was an evil moment when you first came to me. Even Sandip has not been able to harm you as I have done."

Sandip's name seemed to stab him.

"Sandip!" he cried. "It was you alone who made me come to know that man for what he is. Do you know, sister, he has not spent a pice out of those sovereigns he took from you? He shut himself into his room, after he left you, and gloated over the gold, pouring it out in a heap on the floor. 'This is not money,' he exclaimed, 'but the petals of the divine lotus of power; crystallized strains of music from the pipes that play in the paradise of wealth! I cannot find it in my heart to change them, for they seem longing to fulfil their destiny of adorning the neck of Beauty. Amulya, my boy, don't you look at these with your fleshly eye, they are Lakshmi's smile, the gracious radiance of Indra's queen. No, no, I can't give them up to that boor of a manager. I am sure, Amulya, he was telling us lies. The police haven't traced the man who sank that boat. It's the manager who wants to make something out of it. We must get those letters back from him.'

"I asked him how we were to do this; he told me to use force or threats. I

offered to do so if he would return the gold. That, he said, we could consider later. I will not trouble you, sister, with all I did to frighten the man into giving up those letters and burn them—it is a long story. That very night I came to Sandip and said: ‘We are now safe. Let me have the sovereigns to return them tomorrow to my sister, the *Maharani*.’ But he cried, ‘What infatuation is this of yours? Your precious sister’s skirt bids fair to hide the whole country from you. Say *Bande Mataram* and exorcize the evil spirit.’

“You know, Sister *Rani*, the power of Sandip’s magic. The gold remained with him. And I spent the whole dark night on the bathing-steps of the lake muttering *Bande Mataram*.

“Then when you gave me your jewels to sell, I went again to Sandip. I could see he was angry with me. But he tried not to show it. ‘If I still have them hoarded up in any box of mine you may take them,’ said he, as he flung me his keys. They were nowhere to be seen. ‘Tell me where they are,’ I said. ‘I will do so,’ he replied, ‘when I find your infatuation has left you. Not now.’

“When I found I could not move him, I had to employ other methods. Then I tried to get the sovereigns from him in exchange for my currency notes for six thousand rupees. ‘You shall have them,’ he said, and disappeared into his bedroom, leaving me waiting outside. There he broke open my trunk and came straight to you with your casket through some other passage. He would not let me bring it, and now he dares call it his gift. How can I tell how much he has deprived me of? I shall never forgive him.

“But, oh sister, his power over me has been utterly broken. And it is you who have broken it!”

“Brother dear,” said I, “if that is so, then my life is justified. But more remains to be done, Amulya. It is not enough that the spell has been destroyed. Its stains must be washed away. Don’t delay any longer, go at once and put back the money where you took it from. Can you not do it, dear?”

“With your blessing everything is possible, Sister *Rani*.”

“Remember, it will not be your expiation alone, but mine also. I am a woman; the outside world is closed to me, else I would have gone myself. My hardest punishment is that I must put on you the burden of my sin.”

“Don’t say that, sister. The path I was treading was not your path. It attracted me because of its dangers and difficulties. Now that your path calls me, let it be a thousand times more difficult and dangerous, the dust of your feet will help me to win through. Is it then your command that this money be replaced?”

“Not my command, brother mine, but a command from above.”

“Of that I know nothing. It is enough for me that this command from above

comes from your lips. And, sister, I thought I had an invitation here. I must not lose that. You must give me your *prasad* [48](#) before I go. Then, if I can possibly manage it, I will finish my duty in the evening.”

[48.](#) Food consecrated by the touch of a revered person.

Tears came to my eyes when I tried to smile as I said: “So be it.”

Chapter 11

Bimala's Story XX

With Amulya's departure my heart sank within me. On what perilous adventure had I sent this only son of his mother? O God, why need my expiation have such pomp and circumstance? Could I not be allowed to suffer alone without inviting all this multitude to share my punishment? Oh, let not this innocent child fall victim to your wrath.

I called him back—"Amulya!"

My voice sounded so feebly, it failed to reach him.

I went up to the door and called again: "Amulya!"

He had gone.

"Who is there?"

"*Rani* Mother!"

"Go and tell Amulya Babu that I want him."

What exactly happened I could not make out—the man, perhaps, was not familiar with Amulya's name—but he returned almost at once followed by Sandip.

"The very moment you sent me away," he said as he came in, "I had a presentiment that you would call me back. The attraction of the same moon causes both ebb and flow. I was so sure of being sent for, that I was actually waiting out in the passage. As soon as I caught sight of your man, coming from your room, I said: 'Yes, yes, I am coming, I am coming at once!'-before he could utter a word. That up-country lout was surprised, I can tell you! He stared at me, open-mouthed, as if he thought I knew magic.

"All the fights in the world, Queen Bee," Sandip rambled on, "are really fights between hypnotic forces. Spell cast against spell —noiseless weapons which reach even invisible targets. At last I have met in you my match. Your quiver is full, I know, you artful warrior Queen! You are the only one in the world who has been able to turn Sandip out and call Sandip back, at your sweet will. Well, your quarry is at your feet. What will you do with him now? Will you give him the coup de grâce, or keep him in your cage? Let me warn you beforehand,

Queen, you will find the beast as difficult to kill outright as to keep in bondage. Anyway, why lose time in trying your magic weapons?"

Sandip must have felt the shadow of approaching defeat, and this made him try to gain time by chattering away without waiting for a reply. I believe he knew that I had sent the messenger for Amulya, whose name the man must have mentioned. In spite of that he had deliberately played this trick. He was now trying to avoid giving me any opening to tell him that it was Amulya I wanted, not him. But his stratagem was futile, for I could see his weakness through it. I must not yield up a pin's point of the ground I had gained.

"Sandip Babu," I said, "I wonder how you can go on making these endless speeches, without a stop. Do you get them up by heart, beforehand?"

Sandip's face flushed instantly.

"I have heard," I continued, "that our professional reciters keep a book full of all kinds of ready-made discourses, which can be fitted into any subject. Have you also a book?"

Sandip ground out his reply through his teeth. "God has given you women a plentiful supply of coquetry to start with, and on the top of that you have the milliner and the jeweller to help you; but do not think we men are so helpless..."

"You had better go back and look up your book, Sandip Babu. You are getting your words all wrong. That's just the trouble with trying to repeat things by rote."

"You!" shouted Sandip, losing all control over himself. "You to insult me thus! What is there left of you that I do not know to the very bottom? What..." He became speechless.

Sandip, the wielder of magic spells, is reduced to utter powerlessness, whenever his spell refuses to work. From a king he fell to the level of a boor. Oh, the joy of witnessing his weakness! The harsher he became in his rudeness, the more did this joy well up within me. His snaky coils, with which he used to snare me, are exhausted—I am free. I am saved, saved. Be rude to me, insult me, for that shows you in your truth; but spare me your songs of praise, which were false.

My husband came in at this juncture. Sandip had not the elasticity to recover himself in a moment, as he used to do before. My husband looked at him for a while in surprise. Had this happened some days ago I should have felt ashamed. But today I was pleased—whatever my husband might think. I wanted to have it out to the finish with my weakening adversary.

Finding us both silent and constrained, my husband hesitated a little, and then took a chair. "Sandip," he said, "I have been looking for you, and was told you

were here."

"I am here," said Sandip with some emphasis. "Queen Bee sent for me early this morning. And I, the humble worker of the hive, left all else to attend her summons."

"I am going to Calcutta tomorrow. You will come with me.

"And why, pray? Do you take me for one of your retinue?"

"Oh, very well, take it that you are going to Calcutta, and that I am your follower."

"I have no business there."

"All the more reason for going. You have too much business here."

"I don't propose to stir."

"Then I propose to shift you."

"Forcibly?"

"Forcibly."

"Very well, then, I will make a move. But the world is not divided between Calcutta and your estates. There are other places on the map."

"From the way you have been going on, one would hardly have thought that there was any other place in the world except my estates."

Sandip stood up. "It does happen at times," he said, "that a man's whole world is reduced to a single spot. I have realized my universe in this sitting-room of yours, that is why I have been a fixture here."

Then he turned to me. "None but you, Queen Bee," he said, "will understand my words—perhaps not even you. I salute you. With worship in my heart I leave you. My watchword has changed since you have come across my vision. It is no longer *Bande Mataram* (Hail Mother), but Hail Beloved, Hail Enchantress. The mother protects, the mistress leads to destruction—but sweet is that destruction. You have made the anklet sounds of the dance of death tinkle in my heart. You have changed for me, your devotee, the picture I had of this Bengal of ours —'the soft breeze-cooled land of pure water and sweet fruit.' ⁴⁹ You have no pity, my beloved. You have come to me with your poison cup and I shall drain it, either to die in agony or live triumphing over death.

⁴⁹. Quotation from the National song.—*Bande Mataram*.

"Yes," he continued. "The mother's day is past. O love, my love, you have made as naught for me the truth and right and heaven itself. All duties have become as shadows: all rules and restraints have snapped their bonds. O love, my love, I could set fire to all the world outside this land on which you have set your dainty feet, and dance in mad revel over the ashes... These are mild men. These are good men. They would do good to all—as if this all were a reality!"

No, no! There is no reality in the world save this one real love of mine. I do you reverence. My devotion to you has made me cruel; my worship of you has lighted the raging flame of destruction within me. I am not righteous. I have no beliefs, I only believe in her whom, above all else in the world, I have been able to realize."

Wonderful! It was wonderful, indeed. Only a minute ago I had despised this man with all my heart. But what I had thought to be dead ashes now glowed with living fire. The fire in him is true, that is beyond doubt. Oh why has God made man such a mixed creature? Was it only to show his supernatural sleight of hand? Only a few minutes ago I had thought that Sandip, whom I had once taken to be a hero, was only the stage hero of melodrama. But that is not so, not so. Even behind the trappings of the theatre, a true hero may sometimes be lurking.

There is much in Sandip that is coarse, that is sensuous, that is false, much that is overlaid with layer after layer of fleshly covering. Yet—yet it is best to confess that there is a great deal in the depths of him which we do not, cannot understand—much in ourselves too. A wonderful thing is man. What great mysterious purpose he is working out only the Terrible One [50](#) knows—meanwhile we groan under the brunt of it. Shiva is the Lord of Chaos. He is all Joy. He will destroy our bonds.

[50.](#) Rudra, the Terrible, a name of Shiva. [Trans.]

I cannot but feel, again and again, that there are two persons in me. One recoils from Sandip in his terrible aspect of Chaos—the other feels that very vision to be sweetly alluring. The sinking ship drags down all who are swimming round it. Sandip is just such a force of destruction. His immense attraction gets hold of one before fear can come to the rescue, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, one is drawn away, irresistibly, from all light, all good, all freedom of the sky, all air that can be breathed—from lifelong accumulations, from everyday cares—right to the bottom of dissolution.

From some realm of calamity has Sandip come as its messenger; and as he stalks the land, muttering unholy incantations, to him flock all the boys and youths. The mother, seated in the lotus-heart of the Country, is wailing her heart out; for they have broken open her store-room, there to hold their drunken revelry. Her vintage of the draught for the immortals they would pour out on the dust; her time-honoured vessels they would smash to pieces. True, I feel with her; but, at the same time, I cannot help being infected with their excitement.

Truth itself has sent us this temptation to test our trustiness in upholding its commandments. Intoxication masquerades in heavenly garb, and dances before the pilgrims saying: "Fools you are that pursue the fruitless path of renunciation.

Its way is long, its time passing slow. So the Wielder of the Thunderbolt has sent me to you. Behold, I the beautiful, the passionate, I will accept you—in my embrace you shall find fulfilment."

After a pause Sandip addressed me again: "Goddess, the time has come for me to leave you. It is well. The work of your nearness has been done. By lingering longer it would only become undone again, little by little. All is lost, if in our greed we try to cheapen that which is the greatest thing on earth. That which is eternal within the moment only becomes shallow if spread out in time. We were about to spoil our infinite moment, when it was your uplifted thunderbolt which came to the rescue. You intervened to save the purity of your own worship—and in so doing you also saved your worshipper. In my leave-taking today your worship stands out the biggest thing. Goddess, I, also, set you free today. My earthen temple could hold you no longer—every moment it was on the point of breaking apart. Today I depart to worship your larger image in a larger temple. I can gain you more truly only at a distance from yourself. Here I had only your favour, there I shall be vouchsafed your boon."

My jewel-casket was lying on the table. I held it up aloft as I said: "I charge you to convey these my jewels to the object of my worship—to whom I have dedicated them through you."

My husband remained silent. Sandip left the room.

XXI I had just sat down to make some cakes for Amulya when the *Bara Rani* came upon the scene. "Oh dear," she exclaimed, "has it come to this that you must make cakes for your own birthday?"

"Is there no one else for whom I could be making them?" I asked.

"But this is not the day when you should think of feasting others. It is for us to feast you. I was just thinking of making something up ⁵¹ when I heard the staggering news which completely upset me. A gang of five or six hundred men, they say, has raided one of our treasuries and made off with six thousand rupees. Our house will be looted next, they expect."

51. Any dainties to be offered ceremonially should be made by the lady of the house herself. [Trans.]

I felt greatly relieved. So it was our own money after all. I wanted to send for Amulya at once and tell him that he need only hand over those notes to my husband and leave the explanations to me.

"You are a wonderful creature!" my sister-in-law broke out, at the change in my countenance. "Have you then really no such thing as fear?"

"I cannot believe it," I said. "Why should they loot our house?"

"Not believe it, indeed! Who could have believed that they would attack our treasury, either?"

I made no reply, but bent over my cakes, putting in the cocoa-nut stuffing.

"Well, I'm off," said the *Bara Rani* after a prolonged stare at me. "I must see Brother Nikhil and get something done about sending off my money to Calcutta, before it's too late."

She was no sooner gone than I left the cakes to take care of themselves and rushed to my dressing-room, shutting myself inside. My husband's tunic with the keys in its pocket was still hanging there—so forgetful was he. I took the key of the iron safe off the ring and kept it by me, hidden in the folds of my dress.

Then there came a knocking at the door. "I am dressing," I called out. I could hear the *Bara Rani* saying: "Only a minute ago I saw her making cakes and now she is busy dressing up. What next, I wonder! One of their *Bande Mataram* meetings is on, I suppose. I say, Robber Queen," she called out to me, "are you taking stock of your loot?"

When they went away I hardly know what made me open the safe. Perhaps there was a lurking hope that it might all be a dream. What if, on pulling out the inside drawer, I should find the rolls of gold there, just as before?... Alas, everything was empty as the trust which had been betrayed.

I had to go through the farce of dressing. I had to do my hair up all over again, quite unnecessarily. When I came out my sister-in-law railed at me: "How many times are you going to dress today?"

"My birthday!" I said.

"Oh, any pretext seems good enough," she went on. "Many vain people have I seen in my day, but you beat them all hollow."

I was about to summon a servant to send after Amulya, when one of the men came up with a little note, which he handed to me. It was from Amulya. "Sister," he wrote, "you invited me this afternoon, but I thought I should not wait. Let me first execute your bidding and then come for my *prasad*. I may be a little late."

To whom could he be going to return that money? into what fresh entanglement was the poor boy rushing? O miserable woman, you can only send him off like an arrow, but not recall him if you miss your aim.

I should have declared at once that I was at the bottom of this robbery. But women live on the trust of their surroundings—this is their whole world. If once it is out that this trust has been secretly betrayed, their place in their world is lost. They have then to stand upon the fragments of the thing they have broken, and its jagged edges keep on wounding them at every turn. To sin is easy enough, but to make up for it is above all difficult for a woman.

For some time past all easy approaches for communion with my husband have been closed to me. How then could I burst on him with this stupendous news? He was very late in coming for his meal today—nearly two o'clock. He was absent-minded and hardly touched any food. I had lost even the right to press him to take a little more. I had to avert my face to wipe away my tears.

I wanted so badly to say to him: "Do come into our room and rest awhile; you look so tired." I had just cleared my throat with a little cough, when a servant hurried in to say that the Police Inspector had brought Panchu up to the palace. My husband, with the shadow on his face deepened, left his meal unfinished and went out.

A little later the *Bara Rani* appeared. "Why did you not send me word when Brother Nikhil came in?" she complained. "As he was late I thought I might as well finish my bath in the meantime. However did he manage to get through his meal so soon?"

"Why, did you want him for anything?"

"What is this about both of you going off to Calcutta tomorrow? All I can say is, I am not going to be left here alone. I should get startled out of my life at every sound, with all these dacoits about. Is it quite settled about your going tomorrow?"

"Yes," said I, though I had only just now heard it; and though, moreover, I was not at all sure that before tomorrow our history might not take such a turn as to make it all one whether we went or stayed. After that, what our home, our life would be like, was utterly beyond my ken—it seemed so misty and phantom-like.

In a very few hours now my unseen fate would become visible. Was there no one who could keep on postponing the flight of these hours, from day to day, and so make them long enough for me to set things right, so far as lay in my power? The time during which the seed lies underground is long—so long indeed that one forgets that there is any danger of its sprouting. But once its shoot shows up above the surface, it grows and grows so fast, there is no time to cover it up, neither with skirt, nor body, nor even life itself.

I will try to think of it no more, but sit quiet—passive and callous—let the crash come when it may. By the day after tomorrow all will be over—publicity, laughter, bewailing, questions, explanations—everything.

But I cannot forget the face of Amulya—beautiful, radiant with devotion. He did not wait, despairing, for the blow of fate to fall, but rushed into the thick of danger. In my misery I do him reverence. He is my boy-god. Under the pretext of his playfulness he took from me the weight of my burden. He would save me

by taking the punishment meant for me on his own head. But how am I to bear this terrible mercy of my God?

Oh, my child, my child, I do you reverence. Little brother mine, I do you reverence. Pure are you, beautiful are you, I do you reverence. May you come to my arms, in the next birth, as my own child—that is my prayer.

XXII Rumour became busy on every side. The police were continually in and out. The servants of the house were in a great flurry.

Khema, my maid, came up to me and said: “Oh, *Rani* Mother! For goodness’ sake put away my gold necklace and armlets in your iron safe.” To whom was I to explain that the *Rani* herself had been weaving all this network of trouble, and had got caught in it, too? I had to play the benign protector and take charge of Khema’s ornaments and Thako’s savings. The milk-woman, in her turn, brought along and kept in my room a box in which were a Benares *sari* and some other of her valued possessions. “I got these at your wedding,” she told me.

When, tomorrow, my iron safe will be opened in the presence of these—Khema, Thako, the milk-woman and all the rest... Let me not think of it! Let me rather try to think what it will be like when this third day of Magh comes round again after a year has passed. Will all the wounds of my home life then be still as fresh as ever?

Amulya writes that he will come later in the evening. I cannot remain alone with my thoughts, doing nothing. So I sit down again to make cakes for him. I have finished making quite a quantity, but still I must go on. Who will eat them? I shall distribute them amongst the servants. I must do so this very night. Tonight is my limit. Tomorrow will not be in my hands.

I went on untiringly, frying cake after cake. Every now and then it seemed to me that there was some noise in the direction of my rooms, upstairs. Could it be that my husband had missed the key of the safe, and the *Bara Rani* had assembled all the servants to help him to hunt for it? No, I must not pay heed to these sounds. Let me shut the door.

I rose to do so, when Thako came panting in: “*Rani* Mother, oh, *Rani* Mother!”

“Oh get away!” I snapped out, cutting her short. “Don’t come bothering me.”

“The *Bara Rani* Mother wants you,” she went on. “Her nephew has brought such a wonderful machine from Calcutta. It talks like a man. Do come and hear it!”

I did not know whether to laugh or to cry. So, of all things, a gramophone needs must come on the scene at such a time, repeating at every winding the

nasal twang of its theatrical songs! What a fearsome thing results when a machine apes a man.

The shades of evening began to fall. I knew that Amulya would not delay to announce himself—yet I could not wait. I summoned a servant and said: “Go and tell Amulya Babu to come straight in here.” The man came back after a while to say that Amulya was not in—he had not come back since he had gone.

“Gone!” The last word struck my ears like a wail in the gathering darkness. Amulya gone! Had he then come like a streak of light from the setting sun, only to be gone forever? All kinds of possible and impossible dangers flitted through my mind. It was I who had sent him to his death. What if he was fearless? That only showed his own greatness of heart. But after this how was I to go on living all by myself?

I had no memento of Amulya save that pistol—his reverence-offering. It seemed to me that this was a sign given by Providence. This guilt which had contaminated my life at its very root—my God in the form of a child had left with me the means of wiping it away, and then vanished. Oh the loving gift—the saving grave that lay hidden within it!

I opened my box and took out the pistol, lifting it reverently to my forehead. At that moment the gongs clanged out from the temple attached to our house. I prostrated myself in salutation.

In the evening I feasted the whole household with my cakes. “You have managed a wonderful birthday feast—and all by yourself too!” exclaimed my sister-in-law. “But you must leave something for us to do.” With this she turned on her gramophone and let loose the shrill treble of the Calcutta actresses all over the place. It seemed like a stable full of neighing fillies.

It got quite late before the feasting was over. I had a sudden longing to end my birthday celebration by taking the dust of my husband’s feet. I went up to the bedroom and found him fast asleep. He had had such a worrying, trying day. I raised the edge of the mosquito curtain very very gently, and laid my head near his feet. My hair must have touched him, for he moved his legs in his sleep and pushed my head away.

I then went out and sat in the west verandah. A silk-cotton tree, which had shed all its leaves, stood there in the distance, like a skeleton. Behind it the crescent moon was setting. All of a sudden I had the feeling that the very stars in the sky were afraid of me—that the whole of the night world was looking askance at me. Why? Because I was alone.

There is nothing so strange in creation as the man who is alone. Even he whose near ones have all died, one by one, is not alone—companionship comes for him

from behind the screen of death. But he, whose kin are there, yet no longer near, who has dropped out of all the varied companionship of a full home—the starry universe itself seems to bristle to look on him in his darkness.

Where I am, I am not. I am far away from those who are around me. I live and move upon a world-wide chasm of separation, unstable as the dew-drop upon the lotus leaf.

Why do not men change wholly when they change? When I look into my heart, I find everything that was there, still there—only they are topsy-turvy. Things that were well-ordered have become jumbled up. The gems that were strung into a necklace are now rolling in the dust. And so my heart is breaking.

I feel I want to die. Yet in my heart everything still lives—nor even in death can I see the end of it all: rather, in death there seems to be ever so much more of repining. What is to be ended must be ended in this life—there is no other way out.

Oh forgive me just once, only this time, Lord! All that you gave into my hands as the wealth of my life, I have made into my burden. I can neither bear it longer, nor give it up. O Lord, sound once again those flute strains which you played for me, long ago, standing at the rosy edge of my morning sky—and let all my complexities become simple and easy. Nothing save the music of your flute can make whole that which has been broken, and pure that which has been sullied. Create my home anew with your music. No other way can I see.

I threw myself prone on the ground and sobbed aloud. It was for mercy that I prayed—some little mercy from somewhere, some shelter, some sign of forgiveness, some hope that might bring about the end. “Lord,” I vowed to myself, “I will lie here, waiting and waiting, touching neither food nor drink, so long as your blessing does not reach me.”

I heard the sound of footsteps. Who says that the gods do not show themselves to mortal men? I did not raise my face to look up, lest the sight of it should break the spell. Come, oh come, come and let your feet touch my head. Come, Lord, and set your foot upon my throbbing heart, and at that moment let me die.

He came and sat near my head. Who? My husband! At the first touch of his presence I felt that I should swoon. And then the pain at my heart burst its way out in an overwhelming flood of tears, tearing through all my obstructing veins and nerves. I strained his feet to my bosom—oh, why could not their impress remain there forever?

He tenderly stroked my head. I received his blessing. Now I shall be able to take up the penalty of public humiliation which will be mine tomorrow, and offer it, in all sincerity, at the feet of my God.

But what keeps crushing my heart is the thought that the festive flutes which were played at my wedding, nine years ago, welcoming me to this house, will never sound for me again in this life. What rigour of penance is there which can serve to bring me once more, as a bride adorned for her husband, to my place upon that same bridal seat? How many years, how many ages, aeons, must pass before I can find my way back to that day of nine years ago?

God can create new things, but has even He the power to create afresh that which has been destroyed?

Chapter 12

Nikhil's Story XV

Today we are going to Calcutta. Our joys and sorrows lie heavy on us if we merely go on accumulating them. Keeping them and accumulating them alike are false. As master of the house I am in an artificial position—in reality I am a wayfarer on the path of life. That is why the true Master of the House gets hurt at every step and at last there comes the supreme hurt of death.

My union with you, my love, was only of the wayside; it was well enough so long as we followed the same road; it will only hamper us if we try to preserve it further. We are now leaving its bonds behind. We are started on our journey beyond, and it will be enough if we can throw each other a glance, or feel the touch of each other's hands in passing. After that? After that there is the larger world-path, the endless current of universal life.

How little can you deprive me of, my love, after all? Whenever I set my ear to it, I can hear the flute which is playing, its fountain of melody gushing forth from the flute-stops of separation. The immortal draught of the goddess is never exhausted. She sometimes breaks the bowl from which we drink it, only to smile at seeing us so disconsolate over the trifling loss. I will not stop to pick up my broken bowl. I will march forward, albeit with unsatisfied heart.

The *Bara Rani* came and asked me: "What is the meaning, brother, of all these books being packed up and sent off in box-loads?"

"It only means," I replied, "that I have not yet been able to get over my fondness for them."

"I only wish you would keep your fondness for some other things as well! Do you mean you are never coming back home?"

"I shall be coming and going, but shall not immure myself here anymore."

"Oh indeed! Then just come along to my room and see how many things *I* have been unable to shake off *my* fondness for." With this she took me by the hand and marched me off.

In my sister-in-law's rooms I found numberless boxes and bundles ready packed. She opened one of the boxes and said: "See, brother, look at all my *pan*

—making things. In this bottle I have catechu powder scented with the pollen of screw-pine blossoms. These little tin boxes are all for different kinds of spices. I have not forgotten my playing cards and draught-board either. If you two are over-busy, I shall manage to make other friends there, who will give me a game. Do you remember this comb? It was one of the *Swadeshi* combs you brought for me..."

"But what is all this for, Sister *Rani*? Why have you been packing up all these things?"

"Do you think I am not going with you?"

"What an extraordinary idea!"

"Don't you be afraid! I am not going there to flirt with you, nor to quarrel with the *Chota Rani*! One must die sooner or later, and it is just as well to be on the bank of the holy Ganges before it is too late. It is too horrible to think of being cremated in your wretched burning-ground here, under that stumpy banian tree—that is why I have been refusing to die, and have plagued you all this time."

At last I could hear the true voice of home. The *Bara Rani* came into our house as its bride, when I was only six years old. We have played together, through the drowsy afternoons, in a corner of the roof-terrace. I have thrown down to her green amras from the tree-top, to be made into deliciously indigestible chutnies by slicing them up with mustard, salt and fragrant herbs. It was my part to gather for her all the forbidden things from the store-room to be used in the marriage celebration of her doll; for, in the penal code of my grandmother, I alone was exempt from punishment. And I used to be appointed her messenger to my brother, whenever she wanted to coax something special out of him, because he could not resist my importunity. I also remember how, when I suffered under the rigorous régime of the doctors of those days—who would not allow anything except warm water and sugared cardamom seeds during feverish attacks—my sister-in-law could not bear my privation and used to bring me delicacies on the sly. What a scolding she got one day when she was caught!

And then, as we grew up, our mutual joys and sorrows took on deeper tones of intimacy. How we quarrelled! Sometimes conflicts of worldly interests roused suspicions and jealousies, making breaches in our love; and when the *Chota Rani* came in between us, these breaches seemed as if they would never be mended, but it always turned out that the healing forces at bottom proved more powerful than the wounds on the surface.

So has a true relationship grown up between us, from our childhood up till now, and its branching foliage has spread and broadened over every room and verandah and terrace of this great house. When I saw the *Bara Rani* make ready,

with all her belongings, to depart from this house of ours, all the ties that bound us, to their wide-spreading ends, felt the shock.

The reason was clear to me, why she had made up her mind to drift away towards the unknown, cutting asunder all her lifelong bonds of daily habit, and of the house itself, which she had never left for a day since she first entered it at the age of nine. And yet it was this real reason which she could not allow to escape her lips, preferring rather to put forward any other paltry excuse.

She had only this one relationship left in all the world, and the poor, unfortunate, widowed and childless woman had cherished it with all the tenderness hoarded in her heart. How deeply she had felt our proposed separation I never realized so keenly as when I stood amongst her scattered boxes and bundles.

I could see at once that the little differences she used to have with Bimala, about money matters, did not proceed from any sordid worldliness, but because she felt that her claims in regard to this one relationship of her life had been overridden and its ties weakened for her by the coming in between of this other woman from goodness knows where! She had been hurt at every turn and yet had not the right to complain.

And Bimala? She also had felt that the Senior *Rani*'s claim over me was not based merely on our social connection, but went much deeper; and she was jealous of these ties between us, reaching back to our childhood.

Today my heart knocked heavily against the doors of my breast. I sank down upon one of the boxes as I said: "How I should love, Sister *Rani*, to go back to the days when we first met in this old house of ours."

"No, brother dear," she replied with a sigh, "I would not live my life again—not as a woman! Let what I have had to bear end with this one birth. I could not bear it over again."

I said to her: "The freedom to which we pass through sorrow is greater than the sorrow."

"That may be so for you men. Freedom is for you. But we women would keep others bound. We would rather be put into bondage ourselves. No, no, brother, you will never get free from our toils. If you needs must spread your wings, you will have to take us with you; we refuse to be left behind. That is why I have gathered together all this weight of luggage. It would never do to allow men to run too light."

"I can feel the weight of your words," I said laughing, "and if we men do not complain of your burdens, it is because women pay us so handsomely for what they make us carry."

"You carry it," she said, "because it is made up of many small things. Whichever one you think of rejecting pleads that it is so light. And so with much lightness we weigh you down... When do we start?"

"The train leaves at half past eleven tonight. There will be lots of time."

"Look here, do be good for once and listen to just one word of mine. Take a good nap this afternoon. You know you never get any sleep in the train. You look so pulled down, you might go to pieces any moment. Come along, get through your bath first."

As we went towards my room, Khema, the maid, came up and with an ultra-modest pull at her veil told us, in deprecatingly low tones, that the Police Inspector had arrived with a prisoner and wanted to see the Maharaja.

"Is the Maharaja a thief, or a robber," the *Bara Rani* flared up, "that he should be set upon so by the police? Go and tell the Inspector that the Maharaja is at his bath."

"Let me just go and see what is the matter," I pleaded. "It may be something urgent."

"No, no," my sister-in-law insisted. "Our *Chota Rani* was making a heap of cakes last night. I'll send some to the Inspector, to keep him quiet till you're ready." With this she pushed me into my room and shut the door on me.

I had not the power to resist such tyranny—so rare is it in this world. Let the Inspector while away the time eating cakes. What if business is a bit neglected?

The police had been in great form these last few days arresting now this one, now that. Each day some innocent person or other would be brought along to enliven the assembly in my office-room. One more such unfortunate, I supposed, must have been brought in that day. But why should the Inspector alone be regaled with cakes? That would not do at all. I thumped vigorously on the door.

"If you are going mad, be quick and pour some water over your head—that will keep you cool," said my sister-in-law from the passage.

"Send down cakes for two," I shouted. "The person who has been brought in as the thief probably deserves them better. Tell the man to give him a good big helping."

I hurried through my bath. When I came out, I found Bimal sitting on the floor outside. [52](#) Could this be my Bimal of old, my proud, sensitive Bimal?

[52.](#) Sitting on the bare floor is a sign of mourning, and so, by association of ideas, of an abject attitude of mind. [Trans.].

What favour could she be wanting to beg, seated like this at my door?

As I stopped short, she stood up and said gently with downcast eyes: "I would have a word with you."

"Come inside then," I said.

"But are you going out on any particular business?"

"I was, but let that be. I want to hear..."

"No, finish your business first. We will have our talk after you have had your dinner."

I went off to my sitting-room, to find the Police Inspector's plate quite empty. The person he had brought with him, however, was still busy eating.

"Hello!" I ejaculated in surprise. "You, Amulya?"

"It is I, sir," said Amulya with his mouth full of cake. "I've had quite a feast. And if you don't mind, I'll take the rest with me." With this he proceeded to tie up the remaining cakes in his handkerchief.

"What does this mean?" I asked, staring at the Inspector.

The man laughed. "We are no nearer, sir," he said, "to solving the problem of the thief: meanwhile the mystery of the theft deepens." He then produced something tied up in a rag, which when untied disclosed a bundle of currency notes. "This, Maharaja," said the Inspector, "is your six thousand rupees!"

"Where was it found?"

"In Amulya Babu's hands. He went last evening to the manager of your Chakna sub-office to tell him that the money had been found. The manager seemed to be in a greater state of trepidation at the recovery than he had been at the robbery. He was afraid he would be suspected of having made away with the notes and of now making up a cock-and-bull story for fear of being found out. He asked Amulya to wait, on the pretext of getting him some refreshment, and came straight over to the Police Office. I rode off at once, kept Amulya with me, and have been busy with him the whole morning. He refuses to tell us where he got the money from. I warned him he would be kept under restraint till he did so. In that case, he informed me he would have to lie. Very well, I said, he might do so if he pleased. Then he stated that he had found the money under a bush. I pointed out to him that it was not quite so easy to lie as all that. Under what bush? Where was the place? Why was he there?—All this would have to be stated as well. 'Don't you worry,' he said, 'there is plenty of time to invent all that.'"

"But, Inspector," I said, "why are you badgering a respectable young gentleman like Amulya Babu?"

"I have no desire to harass him," said the Inspector. "He is not only a gentleman, but the son of Nibaran Babu, my school-fellow. Let me tell you, Maharaja, exactly what must have happened. Amulya knows the thief, but wants to shield him by drawing suspicion on himself. That is just the sort of bravado he

loves to indulge in." The Inspector turned to Amulya. "Look here, young man," he continued, "I also was eighteen once upon a time, and a student in the Ripon College. I nearly got into gaol trying to rescue a hack driver from a police constable. It was a near shave." Then he turned again to me and said: "Maharaja, the real thief will now probably escape, but I think I can tell you who is at the bottom of it all."

"Who is it, then?" I asked.

"The manager, in collusion with the guard, Kasim."

When the Inspector, having argued out his theory to his own satisfaction, at last departed, I said to Amulya: "If you will tell me who took the money, I promise you no one shall be hurt."

"I did," said he.

"But how can that be? What about the gang of armed men?"

"It was I, by myself, alone!"

What Amulya then told me was indeed extraordinary. The manager had just finished his supper and was on the verandah rinsing out his mouth. The place was somewhat dark. Amulya had a revolver in each pocket, one loaded with blank cartridges, the other with ball. He had a mask over his face. He flashed a bull's-eye lantern in the manager's face and fired a blank shot. The man swooned away. Some of the guards, who were off duty, came running up, but when Amulya fired another blank shot at them they lost no time in taking cover. Then Kasim, who was on duty, came up whirling a quarterstaff. This time Amulya aimed a bullet at his legs, and finding himself hit, Kasim collapsed on the floor. Amulya then made the trembling manager, who had come to his senses, open the safe and deliver up six thousand rupees. Finally, he took one of the estate horses and galloped off a few miles, there let the animal loose, and quietly walked up here, to our place.

"What made you do all this, Amulya?" I asked.

"There was a grave reason, Maharaja," he replied.

"But why, then, did you try to return the money?"

"Let her come, at whose command I did so. In her presence I shall make a clean breast of it."

"And who may 'she' be?"

"My sister, the *Chota Rani*!"

I sent for Bimala. She came hesitatingly, barefoot, with a white shawl over her head. I had never seen my Bimal like this before. She seemed to have wrapped herself in a morning light.

Amulya prostrated himself in salutation and took the dust of her feet. Then, as

he rose, he said: "Your command has been executed, sister. The money is returned."

"You have saved me, my little brother," said Bimal.

"With your image in my mind, I have not uttered a single lie," Amulya continued. "My watchword *Bande Mataram* has been cast away at your feet for good. I have also received my reward, your *prasad*, as soon as I came to the palace."

Bimal looked at him blankly, unable to follow his last words. Amulya brought out his handkerchief, and untying it showed her the cakes put away inside. "I did not eat them all," he said. "I have kept these to eat after you have helped me with your own hands."

I could see that I was not wanted here. I went out of the room. I could only preach and preach, so I mused, and get my effigy burnt for my pains. I had not yet been able to bring back a single soul from the path of death. They who have the power, can do so by a mere sign. My words have not that ineffable meaning. I am not a flame, only a black coal, which has gone out. I can light no lamp. That is what the story of my life shows—my row of lamps has remained unlit.

XVI I returned slowly towards the inner apartments. The *Bara Rani*'s room must have been drawing me again. It had become an absolute necessity for me, that day, to feel that this life of mine had been able to strike some real, some responsive chord in some other harp of life. One cannot realize one's own existence by remaining within oneself—it has to be sought outside.

As I passed in front of my sister-in-law's room, she came out saying: "I was afraid you would be late again this afternoon. However, I ordered your dinner as soon as I heard you coming. It will be served in a minute."

"Meanwhile," I said; "let me take out that money of yours and have it kept ready to take with us."

As we walked on towards my room she asked me if the Police Inspector had made any report about the robbery. I somehow did not feel inclined to tell her all the details of how that six thousand had come back. "That's just what all the fuss is about," I said evasively.

When I went into my dressing-room and took out my bunch of keys, I did not find the key of the iron safe on the ring. What an absurdly absent-minded fellow I was, to be sure! Only this morning I had been opening so many boxes and things, and never noticed that this key was not there.

"What has happened to your key?" she asked me.

I went on fumbling in this pocket and that, but could give her no answer. I hunted in the same place over and over again. It dawned on both of us that it could not be a case of the key being mislaid. Someone must have taken it off the ring. Who could it be? Who else could have come into this room?

“Don’t you worry about it,” she said to me. “Get through your dinner first. The *Chota Rani* must have kept it herself, seeing how absent-minded you are getting.”

I was, however, greatly disturbed. It was never Bimal’s habit to take any key of mine without telling me about it. Bimal was not present at my meal-time that day: she was busy feasting Amulya in her own room. My sister-in-law wanted to send for her, but I asked her not to do so.

I had just finished my dinner when Bimal came in. I would have preferred not to discuss the matter of the key in the *Bara Rani*’s presence, but as soon as she saw Bimal, she asked her: “Do you know, dear, where the key of the safe is?”

“I have it,” was the reply.

“Didn’t I say so!” exclaimed my sister-in-law triumphantly. “Our *Chota Rani* pretends not to care about these robberies, but she takes precautions on the sly, all the same.”

The look on Bimal’s face made my mind misgive me. “Let the key be, now,” I said. “I will take out that money in the evening.”

“There you go again, putting it off,” said the *Bara Rani*. “Why not take it out and send it to the treasury while you have it in mind?”

“I have taken it out already,” said Bimal.

I was startled.

“Where have you kept it, then?” asked my sister-in-law.

“I have spent it.”

“Just listen to her! Whatever did you spend all that money on?”

Bimal made no reply. I asked her nothing further. The *Bara Rani* seemed about to make some further remark to Bimala, but checked herself. “Well, that is all right, anyway,” she said at length, as she looked towards me. “Just what I used to do with my husband’s loose cash. I knew it was no use leaving it with him—his hundred and one hangers-on would be sure to get hold of it. You are much the same, dear! What a number of ways you men know of getting through money. We can only save it from you by stealing it ourselves! Come along now. Off with you to bed.”

The *Bara Rani* led me to my room, but I hardly knew where I was going. She sat by my bed after I was stretched on it, and smiled at Bimal as she said: “Give me one of your pans, *Chotie* darling—what? You have none! You have become a

regular *mem-sahib*. Then send for some from my room."

"But have you had your dinner yet?" I anxiously enquired.

"Oh long ago," she replied—clearly a fib.

She kept on chattering away there at my bedside, on all manner of things. The maid came and told Bimal that her dinner had been served and was getting cold, but she gave no sign of having heard it. "Not had your dinner yet? What nonsense! It's fearfully late." With this the *Bara Rani* took Bimal away with her.

I could divine that there was some connection between the taking out of this six thousand and the robbing of the other. But I have no curiosity to learn the nature of it. I shall never ask.

Providence leaves our life moulded in the rough—its object being that we ourselves should put the finishing touches, shaping it into its final form to our taste. There has always been the hankering within me to express some great idea in the process of giving shape to my life on the lines suggested by the Creator. In this endeavour I have spent all my days. How severely I have curbed my desires, repressed myself at every step, only the Searcher of the Heart knows.

But the difficulty is, that one's life is not solely one's own. He who would create it must do so with the help of his surroundings, or he will fail. So it was my constant dream to draw Bimal to join me in this work of creating myself. I loved her with all my soul; on the strength of that, I could not but succeed in winning her to my purpose—that was my firm belief.

Then I discovered that those who could simply and naturally draw their environment into the process of their self-creation belonged to one species of the genus "man",—and I to another. I had received the vital spark, but could not impart it. Those to whom I have surrendered my all have taken my all, but not myself with it.

My trial is hard indeed. Just when I want a helpmate most, I am thrown back on myself alone. Nevertheless, I record my vow that even in this trial I shall win through. Alone, then, shall I tread my thorny path to the end of this life's journey...

I have begun to suspect that there has all along been a vein of tyranny in me. There was a despotism in my desire to mould my relations with Bimala in a hard, clear-cut, perfect form. But man's life was not meant to be cast in a mould. And if we try to shape the good, as so much mere material, it takes a terrible revenge by losing its life.

I did not realize all this while that it must have been this unconscious tyranny of mine which made us gradually drift apart. Bimala's life, not finding its true level by reason of my pressure from above, has had to find an outlet by

undermining its banks at the bottom. She has had to steal this six thousand rupees because she could not be open with me, because she felt that, in certain things, I despotically differed from her.

Men, such as I, possessed with one idea, are indeed at one with those who can manage to agree with us; but those who do not, can only get on with us by cheating us. It is our unyielding obstinacy, which drives even the simplest to tortuous ways. In trying to manufacture a helpmate, we spoil a wife.

Could I not go back to the beginning? Then, indeed, I should follow the path of the simple. I should not try to fetter my life's companion with my ideas, but play the joyous pipes of my love and say: "Do you love me? Then may you grow true to yourself in the light of your love. Let my suggestions be suppressed, let God's design, which is in you, triumph, and my ideas retire abashed."

But can even Nature's nursing heal the open wound, into which our accumulated differences have broken out? The covering veil, beneath the privacy of which Nature's silent forces alone can work, has been torn asunder. Wounds must be bandaged—can we not bandage our wound with our love, so that the day may come when its scar will no longer be visible? It is not too late? So much time has been lost in misunderstanding; it has taken right up to now to come to an understanding; how much more time will it take for the correcting? What if the wound does eventually heal?—can the devastation it has wrought ever be made good?

There was a slight sound near the door. As I turned over I saw Bimala's retreating figure through the open doorway. She must have been waiting by the door, hesitating whether to come in or not, and at last have decided to go back. I jumped up and bounded to the door, calling: "Bimal."

She stopped on her way. She had her back to me. I went and took her by the hand and led her into our room. She threw herself face downwards on a pillow, and sobbed and sobbed. I said nothing, but held her hand as I sat by her head.

When her storm of grief had abated she sat up. I tried to draw her to my breast, but she pushed my arms away and knelt at my feet, touching them repeatedly with her head, in obeisance. I hastily drew my feet back, but she clasped them in her arms, saying in a choking voice: "No, no, no, you must not take away your feet. Let me do my worship."

I kept still. Who was I to stop her? Was I the god of her worship that I should have any qualms?

~~Bimal & Story, XIX. Come, come. Now is the time to~~
set sail towards that great confluence, where the river of love meets the sea of worship. In that pure blue all the weight of its muddiness sinks and disappears.

I now fear nothing—neither myself, nor anybody else. I have passed through fire. What was inflammable has been burnt to ashes; what is left is deathless. I have dedicated myself to the feet of him, who has received all my sin into the depths of his own pain.

Tonight we go to Calcutta. My inward troubles have so long prevented my looking after my things. Now let me arrange and pack them.

After a while I found my husband had come in and was taking a hand in the packing.

"This won't do," I said. "Did you not promise me you would have a sleep?"

"I might have made the promise," he replied, "but my sleep did not, and it was nowhere to be found."

"No, no," I repeated, "this will never do. Lie down for a while, at least."

"But how can you get through all this alone?"

"Of course I can."

"Well, you may boast of being able to do without me. But frankly I can't do without you. Even sleep refused to come to me, alone, in that room." Then he set to work again.

But there was an interruption, in the shape of a servant, who came and said that Sandip Babu had called and had asked to be announced. I did not dare to ask whom he wanted. The light of the sky seemed suddenly to be shut down, like the leaves of a sensitive plant.

"Come, Bimal," said my husband. "Let us go and hear what Sandip has to tell us. Since he has come back again, after taking his leave, he must have something special to say."

I went, simply because it would have been still more embarrassing to stay. Sandip was staring at a picture on the wall. As we entered he said: "You must be wondering why the fellow has returned. But you know the ghost is never laid till all the rights are complete." With these words he brought out of his pocket something tied in his handkerchief, and laying it on the table, undid the knot. It was those sovereigns.

"Don't you mistake me, Nikhil," he said. "You must not imagine that the contagion of your company has suddenly turned me honest; I am not the man to come back in slobbering repentance to return ill-gotten money. But..."

He left his speech unfinished. After a pause he turned towards Nikhil, but said to me: "After all these days, Queen Bee, the ghost of compunction has found an entry into my hitherto untroubled conscience. As I have to wrestle with it every night, after my first sleep is over, I cannot call it a phantom of my imagination. There is no escape even for me till its debt is paid. Into the hands of that spirit, therefore, let me make restitution. Goddess! From you, alone, of all the world, I shall not be able to take away anything. I shall not be rid of you till I am destitute. Take these back!"

He took out at the same time the jewel-casket from under his tunic and put it down, and then left us with hasty steps.

"Listen to me, Sandip," my husband called after him.

"I have not the time, Nikhil," said Sandip as he paused near the door. "The Mussulmans, I am told, have taken me for an invaluable gem, and are conspiring to loot me and hide me away in their graveyard. But I feel that it is necessary that I should live. I have just twenty-five minutes to catch the North-bound train. So, for the present, I must be gone. We shall have our talk out at the next convenient opportunity. If you take my advice, don't you delay in getting away either. I salute you, Queen Bee, Queen of the bleeding hearts, Queen of desolation!"

Sandip then left almost at a run. I stood stock-still; I had never realized in such a manner before, how trivial, how paltry, this gold and these jewels were. Only a short while ago I was so busy thinking what I should take with me, and how I should pack it. Now I felt that there was no need to take anything at all. To set out and go forth was the important thing.

My husband left his seat and came up and took me by the hand. "It is getting late," he said. "There is not much time left to complete our preparations for the journey."

At this point Chandranath Babu suddenly came in. Finding us both together, he fell back for a moment. Then he said, "Forgive me, my little mother, if I intrude. Nikhil, the Mussulmans are out of hand. They are looting Harish Kundu's treasury. That does not so much matter. But what is intolerable is the violence that is being done to the women of their house."

"I am off," said my husband.

"What can you do there?" I pleaded, as I held him by the hand. "Oh, sir," I appealed to his master. "Will you not tell him not to go?"

"My little mother," he replied, "there is no time to do anything else."

"Don't be alarmed, Bimal," said my husband, as he left us.

When I went to the window I saw my husband galloping away on horseback,

with not a weapon in his hands.

In another minute the *Bara Rani* came running in. "What have you done, Chotie darling," she cried. "How could you let him go?"

"Call the Dewan at once," she said, turning to a servant.

The *Ranis* never appeared before the Dewan, but the *Bara Rani* had no thought that day for appearances.

"Send a mounted man to bring back the Maharaja at once," she said, as soon as the Dewan came up.

"We have all entreated him to stay, *Rani* Mother," said the Dewan, "but he refused to turn back."

"Send word to him that the *Bara Rani* is ill, that she is on her death-bed," cried my sister-in-law wildly.

When the Dewan had left she turned on me with a furious outburst. "Oh, you witch, you ogress, you could not die yourself, but needs must send him to his death!"

The light of the day began to fade. The sun set behind the feathery foliage of the blossoming *Sajna* tree. I can see every different shade of that sunset even today. Two masses of cloud on either side of the sinking orb made it look like a great bird with fiery-feathered wings outspread. It seemed to me that this fateful day was taking its flight, to cross the ocean of night.

It became darker and darker. Like the flames of a distant village on fire, leaping up every now and then above the horizon, a distant din swelled up in recurring waves into the darkness.

The bells of the evening worship rang out from our temple. I knew the *Bara Rani* was sitting there, with palms joined in silent prayer. But I could not move a step from the window.

The roads, the village beyond, and the still more distant fringe of trees, grew more and more vague. The lake in our grounds looked up into the sky with a dull lustre, like a blind man's eye. On the left the tower seemed to be craning its neck to catch sight of something that was happening.

The sounds of night take on all manner of disguises. A twig snaps, and one thinks that somebody is running for his life. A door slams, and one feels it to be the sudden heart-thump of a startled world.

Lights would suddenly flicker under the shade of the distant trees, and then go out again. Horses' hoofs would clatter, now and again, only to turn out to be riders leaving the palace gates.

I continually had the feeling that, if only I could die, all this turmoil would come to an end. So long as I was alive my sins would remain rampant, scattering

destruction on every side. I remembered the pistol in my box. But my feet refused to leave the window in quest of it. Was I not awaiting my fate?

The gong of the watch solemnly struck ten. A little later, groups of lights appeared in the distance and a great crowd wound its way, like some great serpent, along the roads in the darkness, towards the palace gates.

The Dewan rushed to the gate at the sound. Just then a rider came galloping in. "What's the news, Jata?" asked the Dewan.

"Not good," was the reply.

I could hear these words distinctly from my window. But something was next whispered which I could not catch.

Then came a palanquin, followed by a litter. The doctor was walking alongside the palanquin.

"What do you think, doctor?" asked the Dewan.

"Can't say yet," the doctor replied. "The wound in the head is a serious one."

"And Amulya Babu?"

"He has a bullet through the heart. He is done for."

3. The Religion of Man

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Preface

The chapters included in this book, which comprises the Hibbert Lectures delivered in Oxford, at Manchester College, during the month of May 1930, contain also the gleanings of my thoughts on the same subject from the harvest of many lectures and addresses delivered in different countries of the world over a considerable period of my life.

The fact that one theme runs through all only proves to me that the Religion of Man has been growing within my mind as a religious experience and not merely as a philosophical subject. In fact, a very large portion of my writings, beginning from the earlier products of my immature youth down to the present time, carry an almost continuous trace of the history of this growth. To-day I am made conscious of the fact that the works that I have started and the words that I have uttered are deeply linked by a unity of inspiration whose proper definition has often remained unrevealed to me.

In the present volume I offer the evidence of my own personal life brought into a definite focus. To some of my readers this will supply matter of psychological interest; but for others I hope it will carry with it its own ideal value important for such a subject as religion.

My sincere thanks are due to the Hibbert Trustees, and especially to Dr. W. H. Drummond, with whom I have been in constant correspondence, for allowing me to postpone the delivery of these Hibbert Lectures from the year 1928, when I was too ill to proceed to Europe, until the summer of 1930. I have also to thank the Trustees for their very kind permission given to me to present the substance of the lectures in this book in an enlarged form by dividing the whole subject into chapters instead of keeping strictly to the lecture form in which they were delivered in Oxford. May I add that the great kindness of my hostess, Mrs. Drummond, in Oxford, will always remain in my memory along with these lectures as intimately associated with them?

In the Appendix I have gathered together from my own writings certain parallel passages which bring the reader to the heart of my main theme. Furthermore, two extracts, which contain historical material of great value, are from the pen of my esteemed colleague and friend, Professor Kshiti Mohan Sen. To him I would express my gratitude for the help he has given me in bringing before me the religious ideas of medieval India which touch the subject of my

lectures.

The eternal Dream is borne on the wings of ageless Light that rends the veil of the vague and goes across Time weaving ceaseless patterns of Being.

The mystery remains dumb, the meaning of this pilgrimage, the endless adventure of existence whose rush along the sky flames up into innumerable rings of paths, till at last knowledge gleams out from the dusk in the infinity of human spirit, and in that dim lighted dawn she speechlessly gazes through the break in the mist at the vision of Life and of Love rising from the tumult of profound pain and joy.

—**Santiniketan**

September 16, 1939

Chapter 1

Man's Universe

Light, as the radiant energy of creation, started the ring-dance of atoms in a diminutive sky, and also the dance of the stars in the vast, lonely theatre of time and space. The planets came out of their bath of fire and basked in the sun for ages. They were the thrones of the gigantic Inert, dumb and desolate, which knew not the meaning of its own blind destiny and majestically frowned upon a future when its monarchy would be menaced.

Then came a time when life was brought into the arena in the tiniest little monocycle of a cell. With its gift of growth and power of adaptation it faced the ponderous enormity of things, and contradicted the unmeaningness of their bulk. It was made conscious not of the volume but of the value of existence, which it ever tried to enhance and maintain in many-branched paths of creation, overcoming the obstructive inertia of Nature by obeying Nature's law.

But the miracle of creation did not stop here in this isolated speck of life launched on a lonely voyage to the Unknown. A multitude of cells were bound together into a larger unit, not through aggregation, but through a marvellous quality of complex inter-relationship maintaining a perfect co-ordination of functions. This is the creative principle of unity, the divine mystery of existence, that baffles all analysis.

The larger co-operative units could adequately pay for a greater freedom of self-expression, and they began to form and develop in their bodies new organs of power, new instruments of efficiency. This was the march of evolution ever unfolding the potentialities of life.

But this evolution which continues on the physical plane has its limited range. All exaggeration in that direction becomes a burden that breaks the natural rhythm of life, and those creatures that encouraged their ambitious flesh to grow in dimensions have nearly all perished of their cumbrous absurdity.

Before the chapter ended Man appeared and turned the course of this evolution from an indefinite march of physical aggrandisement to a freedom of a more subtle perfection. This has made possible his progress to become unlimited, and has enabled him to realize the boundless in his power.

The fire is lighted, the hammers are working, and for laborious days and nights

amidst dirt and discordance the musical instrument is being made. We may accept this as a detached fact and follow its evolution. But when the music is revealed, we know that the whole thing is a part of the manifestation of music in spite of its contradictory character.

The process of evolution, which after ages has reached man, must be realized in its unity with him; though in him it assumes a new value and proceeds to a different path. It is a continuous process that finds its meaning in Man; and we must acknowledge that the evolution which Science talks of is that of Man's universe. The leather binding and title-page are parts of the book itself; and this world that we perceive through our senses and mind and life's experience is profoundly one with ourselves.

The divine principle of unity has ever been that of an inner inter-relationship. This is revealed in some of its earliest stages in the evolution of multicellular life on this planet. The most perfect in-ward expression has been attained by man in his own body. But what is most important of all is the (fact that man has also attained its realization in a more subtle body outside his physical system. He 'misses himself when isolated; he finds his own larger and truer self in his wide human relationship. His multicellular body is born and it dies; his multi-personal humanity is immortal. In this ideal of unity he realizes the eternal in his life and the boundless in his love.

The unity becomes not a mere subjective idea, but an energizing truth. Whatever name may be given to it, and whatever form it symbolizes, the consciousness of this unity is spiritual, and our effort to be true to it is our religion. It ever waits to be revealed in our history in a more and more perfect illumination.

We have our eyes, which relate to us the vision of the physical universe. We have also an inner faculty of our own which helps us to find our relationship with the supreme self of man, the universe of personality. This faculty is our luminous imagination, which in its higher stage is special to man. It offers us that vision of wholeness which for the biological necessity of physical survival is superfluous; its purpose is to arouse in us the sense of perfection which is our true sense of immortality. For perfection dwells ideally in Man the Eternal, inspiring love for this ideal in the individual, urging him more and more to realize it.

The development of intelligence and physical power is equally necessary in animals and men for their purposes of living; but what is unique in man is the development of his consciousness which gradually deepens and widens the realization of his immortal being, the perfect, the eternal. It inspires those

creations of his that reveal the divinity in him which is his humanity in the varied manifestations of truth, goodness and beauty, in the freedom of activity which is not for his use but for his ultimate expression.

The individual man must exist for Man the great, and must express him in disinterested works, in science and philosophy, in literature and arts, in service and worship. This is his religion, which is working in the heart of all his religions in various names and forms. He knows and uses this world where it is endless and thus attains greatness, but he realizes his own truth where it is perfect and thus finds his fulfilment.

The idea of the humanity of our God, or the divinity of Man the Eternal, is the main subject of this book. This thought of God has not grown in my mind through any process of philosophical reasoning. On the contrary, it has followed the current of my temperament from early days until it suddenly flashed into my consciousness with a direct vision.

The experience which I have described in one of the chapters which follow convinced me that on the surface of our being we have the ever-changing phases of the individual self, but in the depth there dwells the Eternal Spirit of human unity beyond our direct knowledge. It very often contradicts the trivialities of our daily life, and upsets the arrangements made for securing our personal exclusiveness behind the walls of individual habits and superficial conventions. It inspires in us works that are the expressions of a Universal Spirit; it invokes unexpectedly in the midst of a self-centred life a supreme sacrifice. At its call, we hasten to dedicate our lives to the cause of truth and beauty, to unrewarded service of others, in spite of our lack of faith in the positive reality of the ideal values.

During the discussion of my own religious experience I have expressed my belief that the first stage of my realization was through my feeling of intimacy with Nature not that Nature which has its channel of information for our mind and physical relationship with our living body, but that which satisfies our personality with manifestations that make our life rich and stimulate our imagination in their harmony of forms, colours, sounds and movements.

It is not that world which vanishes into abstract symbols behind its own testimony to Science, but that which lavishly displays its wealth of reality to our personal self having its own perpetual reaction upon our human nature.

I have mentioned in connection with my personal experience some songs which I had often heard from wandering village singers, belonging to a popular sect of Bengal, called Bauls,' who have no images, temples, scriptures, or ceremonials, who declare in their songs the divinity of Man, and express for him

an intense feeling of love. Coming from men who are unsophisticated, living a simple life in obscurity, it gives us a clue to the inner meaning of all religions. For it suggests that these religions are never about a God of cosmic force, but rather about the God of human personality.

At the same time it must be admitted that even the impersonal aspect of truth dealt with by Science belongs to the human Universe. But men of Science tell us that truth, unlike beauty and goodness, is independent of our consciousness. They explain to us how the belief that truth is independent of the human mind is a mystical belief, natural to man but at the same time inexplicable. But may not the explanation be this, that ideal truth does not depend upon the individual mind of man, but on the universal mind which comprehends the individual? For to say that truth, as we see it, exists apart from humanity is really to contradict Science itself; because Science can only organize into rational concepts those facts which man can know and understand, and logic is a machinery of thinking created by the mechanic man.

The table that I am using with all its varied meanings appears as a table for man through his special organ of senses and his special organ of thoughts. When scientifically analysed the same table offers an enormously different appearance to him from that given by his senses. The evidence of his physical senses and that of his logic and his scientific instruments are both related to his own power of comprehension; both are true and true for him. He makes use of the table with full confidence for his physical purposes, and with equal confidence makes intellectual use of it for his scientific knowledge.

But the knowledge is his who is a man. If a particular man as an individual did not exist, the table would exist all the same, but still as a thing that is related to the human mind. The contradiction that there is between the table of our sense perception and the table of our scientific knowledge has its common centre of reconciliation in human personality.

The same thing holds true in the realm of idea. In the scientific idea of the world there is no gap in the universal law of causality. Whatever happens could never have happened otherwise. This is a generalization which has been made possible by a quality of logic which is possessed by the human mind. But this very mind of Man has its immediate consciousness of will within him which is aware of its freedom and ever struggles for it. Every day in most of our behaviour we acknowledge its truth; in fact, our conduct finds its best value in its relation to its truth.

Thus this has its analogy in our daily behaviour with regard to a table. For whatever may be the conclusion that Science has unquestionably proved about

the table, we are amply rewarded when we deal with it as a solid fact and never as a crowd of fluid elements that represent a certain kind of energy. We can also utilize this phenomenon of the measurement. The space represented by a needle when magnified by the microscope may cause us no anxiety as to the number of angels who could be accommodated on its point or camels which could walk through its eye.

In a cinema-picture our vision of time and space can be expanded or condensed merely according to the different technique of the instrument. A seed carries packed in a minute receptacle a future which is enormous in its contents both in time and space. The truth, which is Man, has not emerged out of nothing at a certain point of time, even though seemingly it might have been manifested then. But the manifestation of Man has no end in itself not even now. Neither did it have its beginning in any particular time we ascribe to it.

The truth of Man is in the heart of eternity, the fact of it being evolved through endless ages. If Man's manifestation has round it a background of millions of light-years, still it is his own background. He includes in himself the time, however long, that carries the process of his becoming, and he is related for the very truth of his existence to all things that surround him.

Relationship is the fundamental truth of this world of appearance. Take, for instance, a piece of coal. When we pursue the fact of it to its ultimate composition, substance which seemingly is the most stable element in it vanishes in centres of revolving forces.

These are the units, called the elements of carbon, which can further be analysed into a certain number of protons and electrons. Yet these electrical facts are what they are, not in their detachment, but in their inter-relationship, and though possibly some day they themselves may be further analysed, nevertheless the pervasive truth of inter-relation which is manifested in them will remain.

We do not know how these elements, as carbon, compose a piece of coal; all that we can say is that they build up that appearance through a unity of inter-relationship, which unites them not merely in an individual piece of coal, but in a comradeship of creative co-ordination with the entire physical universe.

Creation has been made possible through the continual self-surrender of the unit to the universe. And the spiritual universe of Man is also ever claiming self-renunciation from the individual units. This spiritual process is not so easy as the physical one in the physical world, for the intelligence and will of the units have to be tempered to those of the universal spirit.

It is said in a verse of the Upanishad that this world which is all movement is pervaded by one supreme unity, and therefore true enjoyment can never be had

through the satisfaction of greed, but only through the surrender of our individual self to the Universal Self.

There are thinkers who advocate the doctrine of the plurality of worlds, which can only mean that there are worlds that are absolutely unrelated to each other. Even if this were true it could never be proved. For our universe is the sum total of what Man feels, knows, imagines, reasons to be, and of whatever is knowable to him now or in another time. It affects him differently in its different aspects, in its beauty, its inevitable sequence of happenings, its potentiality; and the world proves itself to him only in its varied effects upon his senses, imagination and reasoning mind.

I do not imply that the final nature of the world depends upon the comprehension of the individual person. Its reality is associated with the universal human mind which comprehends all time and all possibilities of realization. And this is why for the accurate knowledge of things we depend upon Science that represents the rational mind of the universal Man, and not upon that of the individual who dwells in a limited range of space and time and the immediate needs of life. And this is why there is such a thing as progress in our civilization; for progress means that there is an ideal perfection which the individual seeks to reach by extending his limits in knowledge, power, love, enjoyment, thus approaching the universal.

The most distant star, whose faint message touches the threshold of the most powerful telescopic vision, has its sympathy with the understanding mind of man, and therefore we can never cease to believe that we shall probe further and further into the mystery of their nature. As we know the truth of the stars we know the great comprehensive mind of man.

We must realize not only the reasoning mind, but also the creative imagination, the love and wisdom that belong to the Supreme Person, whose Spirit is over us all, love for whom comprehends love for all creatures and exceeds in depth and strength all other loves, leading to difficult endeavours and martyrdoms that have no other gain than the fulfilment of this love itself.

The *Isha* of our Upanishad, the Super Soul, which permeates all moving things, is the God of this human universe whose mind we share in all our true knowledge, love and service, and who to reveal in ourselves through renunciation of self is the highest end of life.

Chapter 10

Man's Nature

From the time when Man became truly conscious of his own self he also became conscious of a mysterious spirit of unity which found its manifestation through him in his society. It is a subtle medium of relationship between individuals, which is not for any utilitarian purpose but for its own ultimate truth, not a sum of arithmetic but a value of life.

Somehow Man has felt that this comprehensive spirit of unity has a divine character which could claim the sacrifice of all that is individual in him, that in it dwells his highest meaning transcending his limited self, representing his best freedom.

Man's reverential loyalty to this spirit of unity is expressed in his religion; it is symbolized in the names of his deities. That is why, in the beginning, his gods were tribal gods, even gods of the different communities belonging to the same tribe. With the extension of the consciousness of human unity his God became revealed to him as one and universal, proving that the truth of human unity is the truth of Man's God.

In the Sanskrit language, religion goes by the name dharma, which in the derivative meaning implies the principle of relationship that holds us firm, and in its technical sense means the virtue of a thing, the essential quality of it; for instance, heat is the essential quality of fire, though in certain of its stages it may be absent.

Religion consists in the endeavour of men to cultivate and express those qualities which are inherent in the nature of Man the Eternal, and to have faith in him. If these qualities were absolutely natural in individuals, religion could have no purpose. We begin our history with all the original promptings of our brute nature which helps us to fulfil those vital needs of ours that are immediate. But deeper within us there is a current of tendencies which runs in many ways in a contrary direction, the life current of universal humanity. Religion has its function in reconciling the contradiction, by subordinating the brute nature to what we consider as the truth of Man.

This is helped when our faith in the Eternal Man, whom we call by different

names and imagine in different images, is made strong. The contradiction between the two natures in us is so great that men have willingly sacrificed their vital needs and courted death in order to express their dharma, which represents the truth of the Supreme Man.

The vision of the Supreme Man is realized by our imagination, but not created by our mind. More real than individual men, he surpasses each of us in his permeating personality which is transcendental. The procession of his ideas, following his great purpose, is ever moving across obstructive facts towards the perfected truth.

We, the individuals, having our place in his composition, may or may not be in conscious harmony with his purpose, may even put obstacles in his path bringing down our doom upon ourselves. But we gain our true religion when we consciously co-operate with him, finding our exceeding joy through suffering and sacrifice. For through our own love for him we are made conscious of a great love that radiates from his being, who is Mahatma, the Supreme Spirit.

The great Chinese sage Lao-tze has said: "One who may die, but will not perish, has life everlasting". It means that he lives in the life of the immortal Man. The urging for this life induces men to go through the struggle for a true survival. And it has been said in our scripture: "Through *adharma* (the negation of *dharma*) man prospers, gains what appears desirable, conquers enemies, but he perishes at the root." In this saying it is suggested that there is a life which is truer for men than their physical life which is transient.

Our life gains what is called "value" in those of its aspects which represent eternal humanity in knowledge, in sympathy, in deeds, in character and creative works. And from the beginning of our history we are seeking, often at the cost of everything else, the value for our life and not merely success; in other words, we are trying to realize in ourselves the immortal Man, so that we may die but not perish. This is the meaning of the utterance in the Upanishad: *Tam vedyam purusham veda, yatha ma vo mrityuh parivyathah*—Realize the Person so that thou mayst not suffer from death.

The meaning of these words is highly paradoxical, and cannot be proved by our senses or our reason, and yet its influence is so strong in men that they have cast away all fear and greed, defied all the instincts that cling to the brute nature, for the sake of acknowledging and preserving a life which belongs to the Eternal Person. It is all the more significant because many of them do not believe in its reality, and yet are ready to fling away for it all that they believe to be final and the only positive fact.

We call this ideal reality "spiritual". That word is vague; nevertheless, through

the dim light which reaches us across the barriers of physical existence, we seem to have a stronger faith in the spiritual Man than in the physical; and from the dimmest period of his history, Man has a feeling that the apparent facts of existence are not final; that his supreme welfare depends upon his being able to remain in perfect relationship with some great mystery behind the veil, at the threshold of a larger life, which is for giving him a far higher value than a mere continuation of his physical life in the material world.

Our physical body has its comprehensive reality in the physical world, which may be truly called our universal body, without which our individual body would miss its function. Our physical life realizes its growing meaning through a widening freedom in its relationship with the physical world, and this gives it a greater happiness than the mere pleasure of satisfied needs. We become aware of a profound meaning of our own self at the consciousness of some ideal of perfection, some truth beautiful or majestic which gives us an inner sense of completeness, a heightened sense of our own reality.

This strengthens man's faith, effective even if indefinite his faith in an objective ideal of perfection comprehending the human world. His vision of it has been beautiful or distorted, luminous or obscure, according to the stages of development that his consciousness has attained. But whatever may be the name and nature of his religious creed, man's ideal of human perfection has been based upon a bond of unity running through individuals culminating in a supreme Being who represents the eternal in human personality.

In his civilization the perfect expression of this idea produces the wealth of truth which is for the revelation of Man and not merely for the success of life. But when this creative ideal which is dharma gives place to some overmastering passion in a large body of men civilization bursts out in an explosive flame, like a star that has lighted its own funeral pyre of boisterous brilliancy.

When I was a child I had the freedom to make my own toys out of trifles and create my own games from imagination. In my happiness my playmates had their full share, in fact the complete enjoyment of my games depended upon their taking part in them. One day, in this paradise of our childhood, entered the temptation from the market world of the adult.

A toy brought from an English shop was given to one of our companions; it was perfect, it was big and wonderfully life-like. He became proud of the toy and less mindful of the game; he kept that expensive thing carefully away from us, glorying in his exclusive possession of it, feeling himself superior to his playmates whose toys were cheap. I am sure if he could use the modern language of history he would say that he was more civilized than ourselves to the

extent of his owning that ridiculously perfect toy.

One thing he failed to realize in his excitement a fact which at the moment seemed to him insignificant that this temptation obscured something a great deal more perfect than his toy, the revelation of the perfect child which ever dwells in the heart of man, in other words, the *dharma* of the child.

The toy merely expressed his wealth but not himself, not the child's creative spirit, not the child's generous joy in his play, his identification of himself with others who were his compeers in his play world. Civilization is to express Man's *dharma* and not merely his cleverness, power and possession.

Once there was an occasion for me to motor down to Calcutta from a place a hundred miles away. Something wrong with the mechanism made it necessary for us to have a repeated supply of water almost every half-hour.

At the first village where we were compelled to stop, we asked the help of a man to find water for us. It proved quite a task for him, but when we offered him his reward, poor though he was, he refused to accept it. In fifteen other villages the same thing happened.

In a hot country, where travellers constantly need water and where the water supply grows scanty in summer, the villagers consider it their duty to offer water to those who need it. They could easily make a business out of it, following the inexorable law of demand and supply. But the ideal which they consider to be their *dharma* has become one with their life. They do not claim any personal merit for possessing it.

Lao-tze, speaking about the man who is truly good, says: "He quickens but owns not He acts but claims not. Merit he accomplishes but dwells not in it. Since he does not dwell in it, it will never leave him." That which is outside ourselves we can sell; but that which is one with our being we cannot sell. This complete assimilation of truth belongs to the paradise of perfection; it lies beyond the purgatory of self-consciousness. To have reached it proves a long process of civilization.

To be able to take a considerable amount of trouble in order to supply water to a passing stranger and yet never to claim merit or reward for it seems absurdly and negligibly simple compared with the capacity to produce an amazing number of things per minute. A millionaire tourist, ready to corner the food market and grow rich by driving the whole world to the brink of starvation, is sure to feel too superior to notice this simple thing while rushing through our villages at sixty miles an hour.

Yes, it is simple, as simple as it is for a gentleman to be a gentleman; but that simplicity is the product of centuries of culture. That simplicity is difficult of

imitation. In a few years' time, it might be possible for me to learn how to make holes in thousands of needles simultaneously by turning a wheel, but to be absolutely simple in one's hospitality to one's enemy, or to a stranger, requires generations of training. Simplicity takes no account of its own value, claims no wages, and therefore those who are enamoured of power do not realize that simplicity of spiritual expression is the highest product of civilization.

A process of disintegration can kill this rare fruit of a higher life, as a whole race of birds possessing some rare beauty can be made extinct by the vulgar power of avarice which has civilized weapons. This fact was clearly proved to me when I found that the only place where a price was expected for the water given to us was a suburb at Calcutta, where life was richer, the water supply easier and more abundant and where progress flowed in numerous channels in all directions.

It shows that a harmony of character which the people once had was lost the harmony with the inner self which is greater in its universality than the self that gives prominence to its personal needs. The latter loses its feeling of beauty and generosity in its calculation of profit; for there it represents exclusively itself and not the universal Man.

There is an utterance in the *Atharva Veda*, wherein appears the question as to who it was that gave Man his music. Birds repeat their single notes, or a very simple combination of them, but Man builds his world of music and establishes ever new rhythmic relationship of notes.

These reveal to him a universal mystery of creation which cannot be described. They bring to him the inner rhythm that transmutes facts into truths. They give him pleasure not merely for his sense of hearing, but for his deeper being, which gains satisfaction in the ideal of perfect unity. Somehow man feels that truth finds its body in such perfection; and when he seeks for his own best revelation he seeks a medium which has the harmonious unity, as has music.

Our impulse to give expression to Universal Man produces arts and literature. They in their cadence of lines, colours, movements, words, thoughts, express vastly more than what they appear to be on the surface. They open the windows of our mind to the eternal reality of man. They are the superfluity of wealth of which we claim our common inheritance whatever may be the country and time to which we belong; for they are inspired by the universal mind.

And not merely in his arts, but in his own behaviour, the individual must for his excellence give emphasis to an ideal which has some value of truth that ideally belongs to all men. In other words, he should create a music of expression in his conduct and surroundings which makes him represent the

supreme Personality. And civilization is the creation of the race, its expression of the universal Man.

When I first visited Japan I had the opportunity of observing where the two parts of the human sphere strongly contrasted; one, on which grew up the ancient continents of social ideal, standards of beauty, codes of personal behaviour; and the other part, the fluid element, the perpetual current that carried wealth to its shores from all parts of the world. In half a century's time Japan has been able to make her own the mighty spirit of progress which suddenly burst upon her one morning in a storm of insult and menace.

China also has had her rousing, when her self-respect was being knocked to pieces through series of helpless years, and I am sure she also will master before long the instrument which hurt her to the quick. But the ideals that imparted life and body to Japanese civilization had been nourished in the reverent hopes of countless generations through ages which were not primarily occupied in an incessant hunt for opportunities. They had those large tracts of leisure in them which are necessary for the blossoming of Life's beauty and the ripening of her wisdom.

On the one hand we can look upon the modern factories in Japan with their numerous mechanical organizations and engines of production and destruction of the latest type. On the other hand, against them we may see some fragile vase, some small piece of silk, some architecture of sublime simplicity, some perfect lyric of bodily movement. We may also notice the Japanese expression of courtesy daily extracting from them a considerable amount of time and trouble.

All these have come not from any accurate knowledge of things but from an intense consciousness of the value of reality which takes time for its fullness. What Japan reveals in her skilful manipulation of telegraphic wires and railway lines, of machines for manufacturing things and for killing men, is more or less similar to what we see in other countries which have similar opportunity for training.

But in her art of living, her pictures, her code of conduct, the various forms of beauty which her religious and social ideals assume Japan expresses her own personality, her *dharma*, which, in order to be of any worth, must be unique and at the same time represent Man of the Everlasting Life.

Lao-tze has said: "Not knowing the eternal causes passions to rise; and that is evil". He has also said: "Let us die, and yet not perish". For we die when we lose our physical life, we perish when we miss our humanity. And humanity is the *dharma* of human beings.

What is evident in this world is the endless procession of moving things; but

what is to be realized, is the supreme human Truth by which the human world is permeated.

We must never forget to-day that a mere movement is not valuable in itself, that it may be a sign of a dangerous form of inertia. We must be reminded that a great upheaval of spirit, a universal realization of true dignity of man once caused by Buddha's teachings in India, started a movement for centuries which produced illumination of literature, art, science and numerous efforts of public beneficence. This was a movement whose motive force was not some additional accession of knowledge or power or urging of some overwhelming passion. It was an inspiration for freedom, the freedom which enables us to realize *dharma*, the truth of Eternal Man.

Lao-tze in one of his utterances has said: "Those who have virtue (*dharma*) attend to their obligations; those who have no virtue attend to their claims." Progress which is not related to an inner *dharma*, but to an attraction which is external, seeks to satisfy our endless claims. But civilization, which is an ideal, gives us the abundant power to renounce which is the power that realizes the infinite and inspires creation.

This great Chinese sage has said: "To increase life is called a blessing." For, the increase of life realizes the eternal life and yet does not transcend the limits of life's unity. The mountain pine grows tall and great, its every inch maintains the rhythm of an inner balance, and therefore even in its seeming extravagance it has the reticent grace of self-control.

The tree and its productions belong to the same vital system of cadence; the timber, the flowers, leaves and fruits are one with the tree; their exuberance is not a malady of exaggeration, but a blessing.

Appendix I The Baul Singers of Bengal

[The following account of the Bauls in Northern India has been given in the Visvabharati Quarterly by my friend and fellow-worker, Professor Kshiti Mohun Sen of Santiniketan, to whom I am grateful for having kindly allowed me to reproduce what he has written in this Appendix.]

Baul means madcap, from *bayu* (Skt. Vayu) in its sense of nerve current, and has become the appellation of a set of people who do not conform to established social usage. This derivation is supported by the following verse of *Narahari*: That is why, brother, I became a madcap Baul.

No master I obey, nor injunctions, canons or custom.

Now no men-made distinctions have any hold on me, And I revel only in the gladness of my own welling love.

In love there's no separation, but commingling always.

So I rejoice in song and dance with each and all.

These lines also introduce us to the main tenets of the cult. The freedom, however, that the Bauls seek from all forms of outward compulsion goes even further, for among such are recognized as well the compulsions exerted by our desires and antipathies.

Therefore, according to this cult, in order to gain real freedom, one has first to die to the life of the world whilst still in the flesh for only then can one be rid of all extraneous claims. Those of the Bauls who have Islamic leanings call such "death in life" *fana*, a term-used by the Sufis to denote union with the Supreme Being. True love, according to the Bauls, is incompatible with any kind of compulsion. Unless the bonds of necessity are overcome, liberation is out of the question. Love represents the wealth of life which is in excess of need. From hard, practical politics touching our earth to the nebulous regions of abstract metaphysics, everywhere India expressed the power of her genius equally well.

And yet none of these, neither severally nor collectively, constituted her specific genius; none showed the full height to which she could raise herself,

none compassed the veritable amplitude of her innermost reality. It is when we come to the domain of the Spirit, of God-realization, that we find the real nature and stature and genius of the Indian people; it is here that India lives and moves as in her own home of Truth.

The Baul cult is followed by householders as well as homeless wanderers, neither of whom acknowledge class or caste, special deities, temples or sacred places. Though they congregate on the occasion of religious festivals, mainly of the *Vaishnavas*, held in special centres, they never enter any temple. They do not set up any images of divinities, or religious symbols, in their own places of worship or mystic realization.

True, they sometimes maintain with care and reverence spots sacred to some esteemed master or devotee, but they perform no worship there. Devotees from the lowest strata of the Hindu and Moslem communities are welcomed into their ranks, hence the Bauls are looked down upon by both. It is possible that their own contempt for temples had its origin in the denial of admittance therein to their low class brethren. What need, say they, have we of other temples, is not this body of ours the temple where the Supreme Spirit has His abode?

The human body, despised by most other religions, is thus for them the holy of holies, wherein the Divine is intimately enshrined as the Man of the Heart. And in this wise is the dignity of Man upheld by them.

Kabir, Nanak, Ravidas, Dadu and his followers have also called man's body the temple of God the microcosm in which the cosmic abode of the all-pervading Supreme Being is represented.

Kabir says: In this body is the Garden of Paradise; herein are comprised the seven seas and the myriad stars; here is the Creator manifest (I. 101.) Dadu says: This body is my scripture; herein the All-Merciful has written for me His message.

Rajjab (Dadu's chief Moslem disciple) says: Within the devotee is the paper on which the scriptures are written in letters of Life. But few care to read them; they turn a deaf ear to the message of the heart.

Most Indian sects adopt some distinct way of keeping the hair of head and face as a sign of their sector order. Therefore, so as to avoid being dragged into any such distinctions, the Bauls allow hair and beard and moustache to grow freely. Thus do we remain simple, they say. The similar practice of the Sikhs in this matter is to be noted. Neither do the Bauls believe that lack of clothing or barenness of body conduce to religious merit.

According to them the whole body should be kept decently covered. Hence

their long robe, for which, if they cannot afford a new piece of cloth, they gather rags and make it of patches. In this they are different from the ascetic *sanyasins*, but resemble rather the Buddhist monks.

The Bauls do not believe in aloofness from, or renunciation of, any person or thing; their central idea is yoga, attachment to and communion with the divine and its manifestations, as the means of realization. We fail to recognize the temple of God in the bodily life of man, they explain, because its lamp is not alight.

The true vision must be attained in which this temple will become manifest in each and every human body, whereupon mutual communion and worship will spontaneously arise. Truth cannot be communicated to those on whom you look down. You must be able to see the divine light that shines within them, for it is your own lack of vision that makes all seem dark.

Kabir says the same thing: In every abode the light doth shine; it is you who are blind that cannot see. When by dint of looking and looking you at length can discern it, the veils of this world will be torn asunder. (II. 33.) It is because the devotee is not in communion that he says the goal is far away. (II. 34.) Many such similarities are to be observed between the sayings of the Bauls and those of the Upper Indian devotees of the Middle Ages, but, unlike the case of the followers of the latter, the Bauls did not become crystallized into any particular order or religious organization.

So, in the Bauls of Bengal, there is to be found a freedom and independence of mind and spirit that resists all attempt at definition. Their songs are unique in courage and felicity of expression. But under modern conditions they are becoming extinct, or at best holding on to external features bereft of their original specialty. It would be a great pity if no record of their achievements should be kept before their culture is lost to the world.

Though the Bauls count amongst their following a variety of sects and castes, both Hindu and Moslem, chiefly coming from the lower social ranks, they refuse to give any other account of themselves to the questioner than that they are Bauls. They acknowledge none of the social or religious formalities, but delight in the ever-changing play of life, which cannot be expressed in mere words but of which something may be captured in song, through the ineffable medium of rhythm and tune.

Their songs are passed on from Master to disciple, the latter when competent adding others of his own, but, as already mentioned, they are never recorded in book form. Their replies to questions are usually given by singing appropriate selections from these songs. If asked the reason why, they say: "We are like

birds. We do not walk on our legs, but fly with our wings.”

There was a Brahmin of Bikrampur, known as Chhaku Thakur, who was the disciple of a Baul of the Namasudra caste (accounted one of the lowest) and hence had lost his place in his own community. When admonished to be careful about what he uttered, so as to avoid popular odium, he answered with the song: Let them relieve their minds by saying what they will, I pursue my own simple way, fearing none at all.

The Mango seed will continue to produce Mango trees, no Jambolans. This seed of mine will produce the real me all glory to my Master!

Love being the main principle according to the Bauls, a Vaishnava once asked a Baul devotee whether he was aware of the different kinds of love as classified in the Vaishnava scriptures. “What should an illiterate ignoramus like me know of the scriptures?” was the reply. The Vaishnava then offered to read and explain the text, which he proceeded to do, while the Baul listened with such patience as he could muster. When asked for his opinion, after the reading was over, he sang: A goldsmith, methinks, has come into the flower garden.

He would appraise the lotus, forsooth.

By rubbing it on his touchstone!

Recruits from the higher castes are rare amongst the Bauls. When any such do happen to come, they are reduced to the level of the rest. Are the lower planks of a boat of any lesser importance than the upper? Say they.

Once in Bikrampur, I was seated on the river bank by the side of a Baul. “Father”, I asked him, “why is it that you keep no historical record of yourselves for the use of posterity?” “We follow the *sahaj* (simple) way”, he replied, “and so leave no trace behind us.” The tide had then ebbed, and there was but little water in the river bed. Only a few boatmen were to be seen pushing their boats along the mud.

The Baul continued: “Do the boats that sail over the flooded river leave any mark? What should these boatmen of the muddy track, urged on by their need, know of the *sahaj* (simple) way? The true endeavour is to keep oneself simply afloat in the stream of devotion that flows through the lives of devotees to mingle one’s own devotion with theirs. There are many classes of men amongst the Bauls, but they are all Bauls they have no other achievement or history. All the streams that fall into the Ganges become the Ganges. So must we lose ourselves in the common stream, else will it cease to be living.”

On another Baul being asked why they did not follow the scriptures, “Are we

dogs”, he replied, “that we should pick up the leavings of others? Brave men rejoice in the output of their own energy, they create their own festivals. These cowards who have not the power to rejoice in themselves have to rely on what others have left.

Afraid lest the world should lack festivals in the future, they save up the scraps left over by their predecessors for later use. They are content with glorifying their forefathers because they know not how to create for themselves.”

If you would know that Man, Simple must be your endeavour.

To the region of the simple must you fare.

Pursuers of the path of man’s own handiwork, Who follow the crowd, gleaning their false leavings, What news can they get of the Real?

It is hardly to be wondered at that people who think thus should have no use for history!

We have already noticed that, like all the followers of the simple way, the Bauls have no faith in specially sacred spots or places of pilgrimage, but that they nevertheless congregate on the occasion of religious festivals. If asked why, the Baul says: We would be within hail of the other Boatmen, to hear their calls, That we may make sure our boat rightly floats on the *sahaj* stream.

Not what men have said or done in the past, but the living human touch is what they find helpful. Here is a song giving their ideas about pilgrimage: I would not go, my heart, to Mecca or Medina, For behold, I ever abide by the side of my Friend.

Mad would I become, had I dwelt afar, not knowing Him.

There’s no worship in Mosque or Temple or special holy day.

At every step I have my Mecca and Kashi; sacred is every moment.

If a Baul is asked the age of his cult whether it comes before or after this one or that, he says, “Only the artificial religions of the world are limited by time. Our *sahaj* (simple, natural) religion is timeless, it has neither beginning nor end, and it is of all time.” The religion of the Upanishads and Puranas, even that of the Vedas, is, according to them, artificial.

The followers of the *sahaj* cult believe only in living religious experience. Truth, according to them, has two aspects, inert and living. Confined to itself truth has no value for man. It becomes priceless when embodied in a living personality. The conversion of the inert into living truth by the devotee they compare to the conversion into milk by the cow of its fodder, or the conversion

by the tree of dead matter into fruit. He who has this power of making truth living, is the Guru or Master. Such Gurus they hold in special reverence, for the eternal and all-pervading truth can only be brought to man's door by passing through his life. The Bauls say that emptiness of time and space is required for a playground. That is why God has preserved an emptiness in the heart of man, for the sake of His own play of Love. Our wise and learned ones were content with finding in Brahma the *tat* (lit. "that"—the ultimate substance).

The Bauls, not being Pandits, do not profess to understand all this fuss about *thatness*, they want a Person. So their God is the Man of the Heart (*maner manush*) sometimes simply the Man (*purush*). This Man of the Heart is ever and anon lost in the turmoil of things. Whilst He is revealed within, no worldly pleasures can give satisfaction. Their sole anxiety is the finding of this Man.

The Baul sings: Ah, where am I to find Him, the Man of my Heart? Alas, since I lost Him, I wander in search of Him, Thro' lands near and far.

The agony of separation from Him cannot be mitigated for them by learning or philosophy: Oh, these words and words, my mind would none of them, The Supreme Man it must and shall discover.

So long as Him I do not see, these mists slake not my thirst.

Mad am I; for lack of that Man I madly run about; For his sake the world I've left; for Bisha naught eke will serve.

This Bisha was a *bhuin-mali*, by caste, disciple of Bala, the Kaivarta.

This cult of the Supreme Man is only to be found in the Vedas hidden away in the *Purushasukta* (A.V. 19.6). It is more freely expressed by the Upper Indian devotees of the Middle Ages. It is all in all with the Bauls. The God whom these illiterate outcastes seek so simply and naturally in their lives is obscured by the accredited religious leaders in philosophical systems and terminology, in priestcraft and ceremonial, in institutions and temples.

Not satisfied with the avatars (incarnations of God) mentioned in the scriptures, the Baul sings: As we look on every creature, we find each to be His avatar.

What can you teach us of His ways?
In ever-new play He wondrously revels.

And Kabir also tells us: All see the Eternal One, but only the devotee, in his solitude, recognizes him.

A friend of mine was once much impressed by the reply of a Baul who was

asked why his robe was not tinted with ascetic ochre: Can the colour show outside, unless the inside is first tinctured? Can the fruit attain ripe sweetness by the painting of its skin?

This aversion of the Baul from outward marks of distinction is also shared by the Upper Indian devotees, as I have elsewhere noticed.

The age-long controversy regarding *dvaita* (dualism) and *advaita* (monism) is readily solved by these wayfarers on the path of Love. Love is the simple striving, love the natural communion, so believe the Bauls. "Ever two and ever one, of this the name of Love", say they. In love, oneness is achieved without any loss of respective selfhood.

The same need exists for the reconciliation of the antagonism between the outer call of the material world and the inner call of the spiritual world, as for the realization of the mutual love of the individual and Supreme self. The God who is Love, say the Bauls, can alone serve to turn the currents of the within and the without in one and the same direction.

Kabir says: If we say He is only within, then the whole Universe is shamed.

If we say He is only without, then that is false.

He, whose feet rest alike on the sentient and on the inert, fills the gap between the inner and the outer world.

The inter-relations of man's body and the Universe have to be realized by spiritual endeavour. Such endeavour is called *Kaya Sadhan* (Realization through the body).

One process in this *Kaya Sadhan* of the Bauls is known as *Urdha-srota* (the elevation of the current). Waters flow downwards according to the ordinary physical law. But with the advent of Life the process is reversed. When the living seed sprouts the juices are drawn upwards, and on the elevation that such flow can attain depends the height of the tree.

It is the same in the life of man. His desires ordinarily flow downward towards animality. The endeavour of the expanding spirit is to turn their current upwards towards the light. The currents of *jivaa* (animal life) must be converted into the current of *Shiva* (God life). They form a centre round the ego; they must be raised by the force of love.

Says Dadu's daughter, Nanimata: My life is the lamp afloat on the stream.

To what bourne shall it take me?

How is the divine to conquer the carnal, The downward current to be upward turned?

As when the wick is lighted the oil doth upward flow, So simply is destroyed the thirst of the body.

The *Yoga Vasistha* tells us: Uncleansed desires bind to the world, purified desires give liberation.

References to this reversal of current are also to be found in the Atharva Veda (X. 2.9; 2.34). This reversal is otherwise considered by Indian devotees as the conversion of the *sthula* (gross) in the *sukshma* (fine).

The Baul sings: Love is my golden touch it turns desire into service: Earth seeks to become Heaven, man to become God.

Another aspect of the idea of reversal has been put thus by Rabindranath Tagore in his Broken Ties: "If I keep going in the same direction along which He comes to me, then I shall be going further and further away from Him. If I proceed in the opposite direction, then only can we meet He loves form, so He is continually descending towards form. We cannot live by form alone, so we must art ascend towards His formlessness. He is free, so His play is within bonds. We are bound, so we find our joy in freedom. All our sorrow is because we cannot understand this. He who sings, proceeds from his joy to the tune; he who hears, from the tune to joy. One comes from freedom into bondage, the other goes from bondage into freedom; only thus can they have their communion. He sings and we hear. He ties the bonds as He sings to us, we untie them as we listen to Him."

This idea also occurs in our devotees of the Middle Ages.

The 'sahaj' folk endeavour to seek the bliss of divine union only for its own sake. Mundane desires are therefore accounted the chief obstacles in the way. But for getting rid of them, the wise Guru, according to the Bauls, does not advise renunciation of the good things of the world, but the opening of the door to the higher self. Thus guided, says Kabir: I close not my eyes, stop not my ears, nor torment my body.

But every path I then traverse becomes a path of pilgrimage, whatever work I engage in becomes service.

This simple consummation is the best.

The simple way has led its votaries easily and naturally to their living conception of Humanity.

Rajjab says: All the world is the Veda, all creations the Koran.

Why read paper scriptures, O Rajjab.

Gather ever fresh wisdom from the Universe.

The eternal wisdom shines within the concourse of the millions of Humanity. The Baul sings: The simple has its thirty million strings whose mingled symphony ever sounds.

Take all the creatures of the World into yourself. Drown yourself in that eternal music.

I conclude with a few more examples of Baul songs, esoteric and otherwise, from amongst many others of equal interest.

By Gangaram, the Namasudra: Realize how finite and unbounded are One, As you breathe in and out.

Of all ages, then, you will count the moments, In every moment find the ages,
The drop in the ocean, the ocean in the drop.

If your endeavour be but *sahaj*, beyond argument and cogitation, You will taste the precious quintessence.

Blinded are you by over-much journeying from bourne to bourne, O Gangaram, be simple! Then alone will vanish all your doubts.

By Bisha, the disciple of Bala: The Simple Man was in the Paradise of my heart, Alas, how and when did I lose Him, That now no peace I know, at home or abroad?

By meditation and telling of beads, in worship and travail, The quest goes on forever; But unless the Simple Man comes of Himself, Fruitless is it all; For he yields not to forgetfulness of striving.

Bisha's heart has understood right well, That by His own simple way alone is its door unlocked.

“Listen, O brother man”, declares Chandidas, “the Truth of Man is the highest of truths; there is no other truth above it.”

Appendix II Note on the Nature of Reality

[A conversation between Rabindranath Tagore and Professor Albert Einstein, in the afternoon of July 14, 1930, at the Professor's residence in Kaputh.]

EINSTEIN : Do you believe in the Divine as isolated from the world?

TAGORE : Not isolated. The infinite personality of Man comprehends the Universe. There cannot be anything that cannot be subsumed by the human personality, and this proves that the truth of the Universe is human truth. I have taken a scientific fact to illustrate this Matter is composed of protons and electrons, with gaps between them; but matter may seem to be solid. Similarly humanity is composed of individuals, yet they have their inter-connection of human relationship, which gives living solidarity to man's world. The entire universe is linked up with us in a similar manner, it is a human universe. I have pursued this thought through art, literature and the religious consciousness of man.

EINSTEIN : There are two different conceptions about the nature of the universe: (1) The world as a unity dependent on humanity. (2) The world as a reality independent of the human factor.

TAGORE : When our universe is in harmony with Man, the eternal, we know it as truth, we feel it as beauty.

EINSTEIN : This is a purely human conception of the universe.

TAGORE : There can be no other conception. This world is a human world the scientific view of it is also that of the scientific man. There is some standard of reason and enjoyment which gives it truth, the standard of the Eternal Man whose experiences are through our experiences.

EINSTEIN : This is a realization of the human entity.

TAGORE : Yes, one eternal entity. We have to realize it through our emotions and activities. We realize the Supreme Man who has no individual limitations through our limitations. Science is concerned with that which is not confined to

individuals; it is the impersonal human world of truths. Religion realizes these truths and links them up with our deeper needs; our individual consciousness of truth gains universal significance. Religion applies values to truth, and we know truth as good through our own harmony with it.

EINSTEIN : Truth, then, or Beauty, is not independent of man?

TAGORE : No.

EINSTEIN : If there would be no human beings any more, the Apollo of Belvedere would no longer be beautiful.

TAGORE : No.

EINSTEIN : I agree with regard to this conception of Beauty, but not with regard to Truth.

TAGORE : Why not? Truth is realized through man.

EINSTEIN : I cannot prove that my conception is right, but that is my religion.

TAGORE : Beauty is in the ideal of perfect harmony which is in the Universal Being; Truth the perfect comprehension of the Universal Mind. We individuals approach it through our own mistakes and blunders, through our accumulated experience, through our illumined consciousness how, otherwise, can we know Truth?

EINSTEIN : I cannot prove scientifically that truth must be conceived as a truth that is valid independent of humanity; but I believe it firmly. I believe, for instance, that the Pythagorean Theorem in geometry states something that is approximately true, independent of the existence of man. Anyway, if there is a reality independent of man there is also a truth relative to this reality; and in the same way the negation of the first engenders a negation of the existence of the latter.

TAGORE : Truth, which is one with the Universal Being, must essentially be human, otherwise whatever we individuals realize as true can never be called truth at least the truth which is described as scientific and can only be reached through the process of logic, in other words, by an organ of thoughts which is human. According to Indian Philosophy there is Brahman the absolute Truth, which cannot be conceived by the isolation of the individual mind or described by words, but can only be realised by completely merging the individual in its infinity. But such a truth cannot belong to Science. The nature of truth which we are discussing is an appearance that is to say what appears to be true to the human mind and therefore is human, and may be called *maya*, or illusion.

EINSTEIN : So according to your conception, which may be the Indian conception, it is not the illusion of the individual, but of humanity as a whole.

TAGORE : In science we go through the discipline of eliminating the personal

limitations of our individual minds and thus reach that comprehension of truth which is in the mind of the Universal Man.

EINSTEIN : The problem begins whether Truth is independent of our consciousness.

TAGORE : What we call truth lies in the rational harmony between the subjective and objective aspects of reality, both of which belong to the super-personal man.

EINSTEIN : Even in our everyday life we feel compelled to ascribe a reality independent of man to the objects we use. We do this to connect the experiences of our senses in a reasonable way. For instance, if nobody is in this house, yet that table remains where it is.

TAGORE : Yes, it remains outside the individual mind, but not outside the universal mind. The table which I perceive is perceptible by the same kind of consciousness which I possess.

EINSTEIN : Our natural point of view in regard to the existence of truth apart from humanity cannot be explained or proved, but it is a belief which nobody can lack no primitive beings even. We attribute to Truth a. super-human objectivity; it is indispensable for us, this reality which is independent of our existence and our experience and our mind though we cannot say what it means.

TAGORE : Science has proved that the table as a solid object is an appearance, and therefore that which the human mind perceives as a table would not exist if that mind were naught. At the same time it must be admitted that the fact, that the ultimate physical reality of the table is nothing but a multitude of separate revolving centres of electric forces, also belongs to the human mind.

In the apprehension of truth there is an eternal conflict between the universal human mind and the same mind confined in the individual. The perpetual process of reconciliation is being carried on in our science and philosophy, and in our ethics. In any case, if there be any truth absolutely unrelated to humanity then for us it is absolutely no existing.

It is not difficult to imagine a mind to which the sequence of things happens not in space, but only in time like the sequence of notes in music. For such a mind its conception of reality is akin to the musical reality in which Pythagorean geometry can have no meaning. There is the reality of paper, infinitely different from the reality of literature. For the kind of mind possessed by the moth, which eats that paper, literature is absolutely non-existent, yet for Man's mind literature has a greater value of truth than the paper itself, In a similar manner, if there be some truth which has no sensuous or rational relation to the human mind it will ever remain as nothing so long as we remain human beings.

EINSTEIN : Then I am more religious than you real.

TAGORE : My religion is in the reconciliation of the Super-personal Man, the Universal human spirit in my own individual being. This has been the subject of my Hibbert Lectures, which I have called “The Religion of Man”.

Appendix III Dadu and the Mystery of Form

[From an article in the *Vwuabharati Quarterly* by Professor Kshiti Mohan Sen.]

The language of man has been mainly occupied with telling us about the elements into which the finite world has been analysed; nevertheless, now and again, it reveals glimpses of the world of the Infinite as well; for the spirit of man has discovered rifts in the wall of Matter. Our intellect can count the petals, classify the scent, and describe the colour of the rose, but its unify finds its expression when we rejoice in it.

The intellect at best can give us only a broken view of things. The marvellous vision of the Seer, in spite of the scoffing in which both Science and Metaphysics so often indulge, can alone make manifest to us the truth of a thing in its completeness. When we thus gain a vision of unity, we are no longer intellectually aware of detail, counting, classifying, or distinguishing for them we have found admittance into the region of the spirit, and there we simply measure the truth of our realization by the intensity of our joy.

What is the meaning of this unutterable joy? That which we know by intellectual process is something outside ourselves. But the vision of anything in the fulness of its unity involves the realization of the unity of the self within, as well as of the relation between the two. The knowledge of the *many* may make us proud, but it makes us glad when our kinship with the *One* is brought home to us. Beauty is the name that we give to this acknowledgment of unity and of its relationship with ourselves.

It is through the beauty of Nature, or of Human Character, or Service, that we get our glimpses of the Supreme Soul whose essence is bliss. Or rather, it is when we become conscious of Him in Nature, or Art, or Service, that Beauty flashes out. And whenever we thus light upon the Dweller-within, all discord disappears and Love and Beauty are seen inseparable from Truth. It is really the coming of Truth to us as kinsman which floods our being with Joy.

This realization in Joy is immediate, self-sufficient, ultimate. When the self

experiences Joy within, it is completely satisfied and has nothing more to ask from the outside world. Joy, as we know it, is a direct, synthetic measure of Beauty and neither awaits nor depends upon any analytical process. In our Joy, further, we behold not only the unity, but also the origin, for the Beauty which tells us of Him can be nothing but radiance reflected, melody re-echoed, from Him; else would all this have been unmeaning indeed—Society, Civilization, Humanity. The progress of Man would otherwise have ended in an orgy of the gratification of his animal passions.

The power of realization, for each particular individual, is limited. All do not attain the privilege of directly apprehending the universal Unity. Nevertheless, a partial vision of it, say in a flower, or in a friend, is a common experience; moreover, the potentiality is inherent in every individual soul, by dint of disciplined striving, to effect its own expansion and thereupon eventually to achieve the realization of the Supreme Soul.

By whom, meanwhile, are these ineffable tidings from the realm of the Spirit, the world of the Infinite, brought to us? Not by potentates or philosophers, but by the poor, the untutored, the despised. And with what superb assurance do they lead us out of the desert of the intellect into the paradise of the Spirit!

When our metaphysicians, dividing themselves into rival schools of Monism, Dualism or Monistic-Dualism, had joined together in dismissing the world as Maya, then, up from the depths of their social obscurity, rose these cobblers, weavers, and sewers of bags, proclaiming such theorems of the intellect to be all nonsense; for the metaphysicians had not seen with their own inner vision how the world overflowed with Truth and Love, Beauty and Joy.

Dadu, Ravidas, Kabir and Nanak were not ascetics; they bore no message of poverty, or renunciation, for their own sake; they were poets who had pierced the curtain of appearances and had glimpses of the world of Unity, where God himself is a poet. Their words cannot stand the glare of logical criticism; they babble, like babes, of the joy of their vision of Him, of the ecstasy into which His music has thrown them.

Nevertheless, it is they, not the scientists or philosophers, who have taught us of reality. On the one side the Supreme Soul is alone, on the other my individual soul is alone. If the two do not come together, then indeed there befalls the greatest of all calamities, the utter emptiness of chaos. For all the abundance of His inherent joy, God is in want of my joy of Him; and Reality in its perfection only blossoms where we meet.

“When I look upon the beauty of this Universe”, says Dadu, “I cannot help asking: ‘How, O Lord, did you come to create it? What sudden wave of joy

coursing through your being compelled its own manifestation? Was it really due to desire for self-expression, or simply on the impulse of emotion? Or was it perhaps just your fancy to revel in the play of form? Is this play then so delightful to you; or is it that you would see your own inborn delight thus take shape?' Oh, how can these questions be answered in words?" cries Dadu. "Only those who know will understand."

"Why not go to him who has wrought this marvel", says Dadu elsewhere, "and ask: 'Cannot your own message make clear this wondrous making of the One into the many?' When I look on creation as beauty of form, I see only Form and Beauty. When I look on it as life, everywhere I see Life. When I look on it as Brahma, then indeed is Dadu at a loss for words. When I see it in relation, it is of bewildering variety. When I see it in my own soul, all its variousness is merged in the beauty of the Supreme Soul. This eye of mine then becomes also the eye of Brahma, and in this exchange of mutual vision does Dadu behold Truth."

The eye cannot see the face for that purpose a mirror is necessary. That is to say, either the face has to be put at a distance from the eye, or the eye moved away from the face in any case what was one has to be made into two. The image is not the face itself, but how else is that to be seen?

So does God mirror Himself in Creation; and since He cannot place Himself outside His own Infinity, He can only gain a vision of Himself—and get a taste of His own joy—through my joy in Him and in His Universe. Hence the anxious striving of the devotee to keep himself thoroughly pure—not through any pride of *puritanism*, but because his soul is the playground where God would revel in Himself. Had not God's radiance, His beauty, thus found its form in the Universe, its joy in the devotee, He would have remained mere formless, colourless Being in the nothingness of infinity.

This is what makes the Mystery so profound, so inscrutable. Whether we say that only Brahma is true, or only the universe is true, we are equally far from the Truth, which can only be expressed as both *this* and *that*, or neither *this* nor *that*.

And Dadu can only hint at it by saying: "Neither death nor life is He; He neither goes out, nor does He come in; nor sleeps, nor wakes; nor wants, nor is satisfied. He is neither I nor you, neither One nor Two, For no sooner do I say that all is One, than I find us both; and when I say there are two, I see we're One. So, O Dadu, rest content to look on Him just as He is, in the deep of your heart, and give up wrestling with vain imaginings and empty words."

"Words shower", Dadu goes on, "when spouts the fount of the intellect; but where realization grows, there music has its seat" When the intellect confesses defeat, and words fail, then, indeed, from the depth of the heart wells up the song

of the joy of realization. What words cannot make clear, melody can; to its strains one can revel in the vision of God in His revels.

“That is why”, cries Dadu, “your universe, this creation of yours, has charmed me so your waters and your breezes, and this earth which holds them, with its ranges of mountains, its great oceans, its snow-capped poles, its blazing sun, because, through all the three regions of earth, sky and heaven, amidst all their multifarious life, it is your ministration, your beauty, that keeps me enthralled. Who can know you, O Invisible, Unapproachable, Unfathomable! Dadu has no desire to know; he is satisfied to remain enraptured with all this beauty of yours, and to rejoice in it with.

To look upon Form as the play of His love is not to belittle it. In creating the senses God did not intend them to be starved, “And so”, says Dadu, “the eye is feasted with colour, the ear with music, the palate with flowers, wondrously provided.” And we find that the body longs for the spirit, the spirit for the body; the flower for the scent the scent for the flower; our words for truth, the Truth for words; form for its ideal, the ideal for form; all thus mutual worship is but the worship of the ineffable Reality behind, by whose Presence every one of them is glorified. And Dadu struggles not, but simply keeps his heart open to this shower of love and thus rejoices in perpetual springtime.

Every vessel of form the Formless fills with Himself, and in their beauty He gains them in return. With His love the Passionless fulfils every devoted heart and sets it a-dance, and their love streams back to the Colourless, variegated with the tints of each. Beauteous Creation yields up her charms, in all their purity, to her Lord. Need she make further protestation, in words of their mutual love? So Dadu surrenders his heart, mind and soul at the feet of his Beloved. His one care is that they be not sullied.

If anyone should object that evanescent Form is not worthy to represent the Eternal, Dadu would answer that it is just because Form is fleeting that it is a help, not a hindrance, to His worship. While returning back to its Origin, it captures our mind and takes it along with itself. The call of Beauty tells us of the Unthinkable, towards whom it lies. In passing over us, Death assures us of the truth of Life.

Appendix IV

Night and Morning

[An address in the Chapel of Manchester College, Oxford, on Sunday, May 25, 1930, by Rabindranath Tagore.]

In his early youth, stricken with a great sorrow at the death of his grandmother, my father painfully groped for truth when his world had darkened, and his life lost its meaning. At this moment of despair a torn page of a manuscript carried by a casual wind was brought to his notice. The text it contained was the first verse of the *Ishopanishad*: Isavasyam fdam survam Yat Kincha jagatyam jagat.
tena tyaktena bhunjitha Ma grdhah Kasyasvitdhanam.

It may be thus translated: “Thou must know that whatever moves in this moving world is enveloped by God. And therefore find thy enjoyment in renunciation, never coveting what belongs to others.”

In this we are enjoined to realize that all facts that move and change have their significance in their relation to one everlasting truth. For then we can be rid of the greed of acquisition, gladly dedicating everything we have to that Supreme Truth. The change in our mind is immense in its generosity of expression when an utter sense of vanity and vacancy is relieved at the consciousness of a pervading reality.

I remember once while on a boat trip in a strange neighbourhood I found myself unexpectedly at the confluence of three great rivers as the daylight faded and the night darkened over a desolation dumb and inhospitable. A sense of dread possessed the crew and an oppressive anxiety burdened my thoughts, with its unreasonable exaggeration all through the dark hours. The morning came and at once the brooding obsession vanished. Everything remained the same only the sky was filled with light.

The night had brought her peace, the peace of a black ultimatum in which all

hope ceased in an abyss of nothingness, but the peace of the morning appeared like that of a mother's smile, which in its serene silence utters, "I am here". I realized why birds break out singing in the morning, and felt that their songs are their own glad answers to the emphatic assurance of a Yes in the morning light in which they find a luminous harmony of their own existence.

Darkness drives our being into an isolation of insignificance and we are frightened because in the dark the sense of our own truth dwindles into a minimum. Within us we carry a positive truth, the consciousness of our personality, which naturally seeks from our surroundings its response in a truth which is positive, and then in this harmony we find our wealth of reality and are gladly ready to sacrifice. That which distinguishes man from the animal is the fact that he expresses himself not in his claims, in his needs, but in his sacrifice, which has the creative energy that builds his home, his society, his civilization.

It proves that his instinct acknowledges the inexhaustible wealth of a positive truth which gives highest value to existence. In whatever we are mean, greedy and unscrupulous, there are the dark bands in the spectrum of our consciousness; they prove chasms of bankruptcy in our realization of the truth that the world moves, not in a blank sky of negation, but in the bosom of an ideal spirit of fulfilment.

Most often crimes are committed when it is night. It must not be thought that the only reason for this is that in the dark they are likely to remain undetected. But the deeper reason is that in the dark the negative aspect of time weakens the positive sense of our own humanity. Our victims, as well as we ourselves, are less real to us in the night, and that which we miss within we desperately seek outside us.

Wherever in the human world the individual self forgets its isolation, the light that unifies is revealed the light of the Everlasting Yes, whose sound-symbol in India is OM. Then it becomes easy for man to be good not because his badness is restrained, but because of his joy in the positive background of his own reality, because his mind no longer dwells in a fathomless night of an anarchical world of denial.

Man finds an instance of this in the idea of his own country, which reveals to him a positive truth, the idea that has not the darkness of negation which is sinister, which generates suspicion, exaggerates fear, encourages uncontrolled greed; for his own country is an indubitable reality to him which delights his soul. In such intense consciousness of reality we discover our own greater self that spreads beyond our physical life and immediate present, and offers us generous opportunities of enjoyment in renunciation.

In the introductory chapter of our civilization individuals by some chance found themselves together within a geographic enclosure. But a mere crowd without an inner meaning of inter-relation is negative, and therefore it can easily be hurtful. The individual who is a mere component part of an unneighbourly crowd, who in his exclusiveness represents only himself, is apt to be suspicious of others, with no inner control in hating and hitting his fellow-beings at the very first sight.

This savage mentality is the product of the barren spirit of negation that dwells in the spiritual night. But when the morning of mutual recognition broke out, the morning of co-operative life, that divine mystery which is the creative spirit of unity, imparted meaning to individuals in a larger truth named “people”.

These individuals gladly surrendered themselves to the realization of their true humanity, the humanity of a great wholeness composed of generations of men consciously and unconsciously building up a perfect future. They realized peace according to the degree of unity which they attained in their mutual relationship, and within that limit they found the one sublime truth which pervades time that moves, the things that change, the life that grows, the thoughts that flow onwards. They united with themselves the surrounding physical nature in her hills and rivers, in the dance of rhythm in all her forms and colours, in the blue of her sky, the tender green of her corn shoots.

In gradual degrees men became aware that the subtle intricacies of human existence find their perfection in the harmony of interdependence, never in the vigorous exercise of elbows by a mutually pushing multitude, in the arrogant assertion of independence which fitly belongs to the barren rocks and deserts grey with the pallor of death.

For rampant individualism is against what is truly human that is to say spiritual it belongs to the primitive poverty of the animal life, it is the confinement of a cramped spirit, of restricted consciousness.

The limited boundaries of a race or a country within which the supreme truth of humanity has been more or less realized in the past are crossed to-day from the outside. The countries are physically brought closer to each other by science. But science has not brought with it the light that helps understanding. On the contrary science on its practical side has raised obstacles among them against the development of a sympathetic knowledge.

But I am not foolish enough to condemn science as materialistic. No truth can be that Science means intellectual probity in our knowledge and dealings with the physical world and such conscientiousness has a spiritual quality that encourages sacrifice and martyrdom. But in science the oft-used half-truth that

honesty is the best policy is completely made true and our mind's honesty in this field never fails to bring us the best profit for our living. Mischief finds its entry through this back-door of utility, tempting the primitive in man, arousing his evil passions. And through this the great meeting of races has been obscured of its great meaning.

When I view it in my mind I am reminded of the fearful immensity of the meeting of the three mighty rivers where I found myself unprepared in a blackness of universal menace. Over the vast gathering of peoples the insensitive night darkly broods, the night of unreality. The primitive barbarity of limitless suspicion and mutual jealousy fills the world's atmosphere to-day the barbarity of the aggressive individualism of nations, pitiless in its greed, unashamed of its boastful brutality.

Those that have come out for depredation in this universal night have the indecent audacity to say that such conditions are eternal in man, that the moral ideals are only for individuals but that the race belongs to the primitive nature of the animal.

But when we see that in the range of physical power man acknowledges no limits in his dreams, and is not even laughed at when he hopes to visit the neighbouring planet; must he insult his humanity by proclaiming that human nature has reached its limit of moral possibility? We must work with all our strength for the seemingly impossible; we must be sure that faith in the perfect builds the path for the perfect that the external fact of unity which has surprised us must be sublimated in an internal truth of unity which would light up the Truth of Man the Eternal.

Nations are kept apart not merely by international jealousy, but also by their *Karma*, their own past, handicapped by the burden of the dead. They find it hard to think that the mentality which they fondly cultivated within the limits of a narrow past has no continuance in a wider future, they are never tired of uttering the blasphemy that warfare is eternal, that physical might has its inevitable right of moral cannibalism where the flesh is weak.

The wrong that has been done in the past seeks to justify itself by its very perpetuation, like a disease by its chronic malignity, and it sneers and growls at the least proposal of its termination. Such an evil ghost of a persistent past, the dead that would cling to life, haunts the night today over mutually alienated countries, and men that are gathered together in the dark cannot see each other's faces and features.

We in India are unfortunate in not having the chance to give expression to the best in us in creating intimate relations with the powerful nations, whose

preparations are all leading to an enormous waste of resources in a competition of brow-beating and bluff. Some great voice is waiting to be heard which will usher in the sacred light of truth in the dark hours of the nightmare of politics, the voice which will proclaim that “God is over all”, and exhort us never to covet, to be great in renunciation that gives us the wealth of spirit, strength of truth, leads us from the illusion of power to the fullness of perfection, to the *Santam*, who is peace eternal, to the *Advaitam* who is the infinite One in the heart of the manifold.

But we in India have not yet had the chance. Yet we have our own human voice which truth demands. The messengers of truth have ever joined hands across centuries, across the seas, across historical barriers, and they help to raise up the great continent of human brotherhood from *avidya*, from the slimy bottom of spiritual apathy. We individuals, however small may be our power and whatever corner of the world we may belong to, have a claim upon us to add to the light of the consciousness that comprehends all humanity. And for this cause I ask your co-operation, not only because co-operation gives us strength in our work, but because co-operation itself is the best aspect of the truth we represent; it is an end and not merely the means.

Let us keep our faith firm in the objectivity of the source of our spiritual ideal of unity, though it cannot be proved by any mathematical logic. Let us proclaim in our conduct that it has already been given to us to be realized, like a song which has only to be mastered and sung, like the morning which has only to be welcomed by raising the screens, opening the doors.

The idea of a millennium is treasured in our ancient legends. The instinct cradled and nourished in them has profound meaning. It is like the instinct of a chick which dimly feels that an infinite world of freedom is already given to it, truer than the narrow fact of its immediate life within the egg. An agnostic chick has the rational right to doubt it, but at the same time it cannot help pecking at its shell.

The human soul, confined in its limitation, has also dreamt of millennium, and striven for a spiritual emancipation which seems impossible of attainment, and yet it feels its reverence for some ever-present source of inspiration in which all its experience of the true, the good and beautiful finds its reality.

And therefore it has been said by the Upanishad: “Thou must know that God pervades all things that move and change in this moving world; find thy enjoyment in renunciation, covet not what belongs to others.”

Ya eko varno bahudha saktiyogat Varnan ariekan nihitartho dadhati.

Vichaiti chante visvamadau sa devah Sa no buddhya subhaya samjrunaktu.

He who is one, and who dispenses the inherent needs of all peoples and all times, who is in the beginning and the end of all things, may he unite us with the bond of truth, of common fellowship, of righteousness.

Plays

1. Autumn-Festival

Characters in the Play

SANYASI, *Emperor Vijayaditya in disguise*

THAKURDADA

LUCKESWAR

UPANANDA

RAJAH

BOYS

MINISTERS, COURTIERS, etc.

Act

.....

Scene. *The forest near the river Vetasini.*

LUCKESWAR and UPANANDA.

LUCKESWAR : Have you brought me the money which is long overdue?

UPANANDA : My master died last night.

LUCKESWAR : Died! Absurd! That trick won't do. What about the money?

UPANANDA : He hasn't left anything except the vina which was his only means of paying off your debt.

LUCKESWAR : Only the vina! That's a consoling piece of news to bring to me.

UPANANDA : I haven't come to give you news. There was a time when I was a beggar in the street; he sheltered me and allowed me to share his food, which was scanty enough. I have come to offer my service till his debt is fully paid.

LUCKESWAR : Indeed! Now that he is no more you have come to share my food, which is not overabundant. I am not such an ass as to be taken in by you. However let me first know what you can do.

UPANANDA : I can copy manuscripts and illuminate them. Food I won't take in your house. I shall earn it and also pay off the debt.

LUCKESWAR : [Aside] The vina player was a big fool and he has moulded this boy in his own pattern. This vagabond is pining to take up some voluntary burden to be crushed to death. For some creatures this is the only natural death.—Good, I agree. But you must pay me the money on the third day of each month, otherwise— UPANANDA : Otherwise what! Your threats are of no use. In memory of my dear master I take this up. But no threats for me, I warn you.

LUCKESWAR : Don't take offence, my child. You are made of gold, every inch of you: you are a jewel. You know I have my god in the temple, his worship depends upon my charity. If, owing to any irregularity in your payment, I have to curtail the temple expenses, the sin will be on your head. [*Upananda moves away to another side of the forest.*] Who's that! It must be my own boy prowling about this place. I am sure the rogue is seeking for the place where I keep my

treasure hidden. Simply out of fear of these prying noses I have to remove it from place to place.—Dhanapati, why on earth are you here?

DHANAPATI : If you give me leave, I can have my game here this morning with the other boys.

LUCKESWAR : [Aside.] I know their game. They have got scent of that big pearl which I hid near this spot. [To Dhanapati] No, that won't do! Come at once to your multiplication table.

DHANAPATI : But, Sir, it is a beautiful day— LUCKESWAR : What do you mean by the day being beautiful! Come at once!

[Drags him away.

Enter BOYS with THAKURDADA.

FIRST BOY : You belong to our party, Thakurdada!

SECOND BOY : No, to ours.

THAKURDADA : Children, I don't sell myself in shares. I must remain undivided. Now for the song. [They sing.] Over the green and yellow rice fields sweeps the shadows of the autumn clouds followed by the swift-chasing sun. The bees forget to sip their honey; drunken with light they foolishly hover and hum. The ducks in the islands of the river clamour in joy for nothing.

Enter another group of boys.

THIRD BOY : Was it fair? Why didn't you call us when you came out?

THAKURDADA : It is your part to call me out. Don't quarrel, Finish the song. [They sing.] Let none go back home, brothers, this morning, let none go to work. Let us take the blue sky by storm and plunder space as we run. Laughter floats in the air like foam on the flood. Brothers, let us squander our morning infutile songs.

FIRST BOY : Look there Thakurdada, a sanyasi is coming.

SECOND BOY : It's grand! We shall have a game with the sanyasi. We shall be his followers.

THIRD BOY : We shall follow him to the end of the earth and nobody will be able to find us out.

THAKURDADA : Hush, he has come.

THE BOYS : [Shouting] Sanyasi Thakur! Sanyasi Thakur!

THAKURDADA : Stop that noise! The father will be angry.

FIRST BOY : Sanyasi Thakur, will you be angry with us?

SECOND BOY : We shall become your followers for this morning.

SANYASI : Excellent! When you have had your turn, I shall be your followers. That will be splendid fun!

THAKURDADA : My salutation. Who are you, father?

SANYASI : I am a student.

THAKURDADA : Student!

SANYASI : I have come out to fling to the four winds my books.

THAKURDADA : I understand. You want to be lightened of your learning, to follow the path of wisdom unburdened.

FIRST BOY : Thakurdada is wasting time with talk, and our holiday will come to its close.

SANYASI : You are right, my boys. My holidays are also near their end.

THE BOYS : Have you long holidays?

SANYASI : Oh! No, extremely short. My school-master is already after me.

FIRST BOY : You frighten us! Even you have school-masters?

SANYASI : What boy is that under the shade of that tree, merged in his manuscripts?

BOYS : He is Upananda.

FIRST BOY : Upananda, we are Sanyasi Thakur's followers, come and become our chief.

UPANANDA : Not today. I have my work.

SECOND BOY : No work. You must come!

UPANANDA : I must Finish copying manuscripts.

THIRD BOY : Father, you ask him to come. He won't listen to us.

SANYASI : [To Upananda.] What work have you, my son? Today is not meant for work.

UPANANDA : I know it is our holiday. But I have my debt to pay and I must work.

THAKURDADA : Upananda, your debt! To whom?

UPANANDA : My master has died, he is in debt to Luckeswar. I must pay it off.

THAKURDADA : Alas! That such a boy as you must pay your debts, and on such a day! The first breath of the autumn has sent a shiver through the white crest of flowering grass and the *shiuli* blossoms have offered their fragrance to the air, as if in the joy of reckless sacrifice, and it pains me to see that boy sitting in the midst of all this, foiling to pay his debts.

SANYASI : Why, this is as beautiful as all these flowers,—his paying his debts. He has made this morning glorious, sitting in its centre. Baba, you go on writing, let me watch you. Every line you finish brings you freedom, and thus you fill your holiday with truth. Give me one of your manuscripts and let me help you.

THAKURDADA : I have my spectacles with me, let me also sit down to this work.

FIRST BOY : We shall also write. This is great fun!

SECOND BOY : Yes, yes, let us try.

UPANANDA : But it will be such a great trouble to you, father.

SANYASI : That is why I join you. We shall take trouble for fun. What do you say to that, boys?

THE BOYS : [Clapping hands.] Yes, yes.

FIRST BOY : Give me one of the books.

SECOND BOY : And me also.

UPANANDA : But are you sure you can do it.

THE BOYS : O! Yes!

UPANANDA : You won't be tired?

SECOND BOY : Never.

UPANANDA : You will have to be very careful.

FIRST BOY : Try us.

UPANANDA : There must be no mistakes.

SECOND BOY : Not a bit.

SANYASI : Baba Upananda, what was your master's name?

UPANANDA : Surasen.

SANYASI : Surasen, the vina player?

UPANANDA : Yes, father. Was he known to you?

SANYASI : I came to this place with the one hope of hearing him.

UPANANDA : Had he such fame?

THAKURDADA : Was he such a master, that a *sanyasi* like yourself should have come all this way to hear him? Then we must have missed knowing him truly.

SANYASI : But the Rajah of this place?

THAKURDADA : The Rajah never even saw him. But where could you have heard him play?

SANYASI : I suppose you know that there is a Rajah whose name is Vijayaditya.

THAKURDADA : We may be very provincial, but surely you don't expect us not even to know him.

SANYASI : Very likely. Surasen played the vina in his court, where I was present. The Rajah tried hard to keep him permanently in his capital, but he failed.

THAKURDADA : What a pity that we did not honour him.

SANYASI : But that neglect has only made him all the greater. God has called him to His own court. Upananda, how did you come to know him?

UPANANDA : At my father's death I came to this town seeking shelter. It was at

the end of July and the rain was pouring down in torrents. I was trying to find a corner in Lokanath temple, when the priest came and drove me out, expecting me to be of a low caste. My master was playing the vina in the temple. At once he came up and putting his arms round my neck asked me to come to his house. From that day he brought me up suffering calumny for my sake.

SANYASI : How did you learn illuminating manuscripts?

UPANANDA : At first I asked him to teach me to play the vina, so that I could earn something and be useful to him. He said, ‘Baba, this art is not for filling one’s stomach.’ And so he taught me how to use paints for copying books.

SANYASI : Though Surasen’s vina is silent, I hear the undying music of his life through you. My boy go on with your writing.

THE BOYS : [Starting up] There he comes, Lucki’s owl! We must run away.

[They go.]

Enters LUCKESWAR.

LUCKESWAR : Horror! Upananda is sitting exactly on the spot where the pearl is hidden. I was simple to think he was a fool seeking to pay off other people’s debts. He is cleverer than he looked. He is after my pearl. I see he has captured a sanyasi to help him. Upananda!

UPANANDA : What’s the matter!

LUCKESWAR : Get up from that spot at once! What business have you to be sitting there!

UPANANDA : And what business have you to be shouting at me like that! Does this place belong to you?

LUCKESWAR : It is no concern of yours, if it does or does not. You are cunning! The other day this fellow came to me, looking innocent as a babe whose mother’s milk had hardly dried on his lips. And I believed him when he said that he came to pay his master’s debts. Of course, it is in the King’s statute also,—

UPANANDA : I sat down to my work here for that very purpose.

LUCKESWAR : That very purpose! How old am I do you think? Only born overnight?

SANYASI : But why do you suspect him and of what?

LUCKESWAR : As if you know nothing! False Sanyasi!

UPANANDA : [Getting excited.] Won to just smash his teeth with this pestle of mine!

[*Luckeswar hides himself behind the Sanyasi.*]

SANYASI : Don’t be excited. Luckeswar knows human nature better than any of

you here. Directly he sets his eyes upon me, I am caught,—a sanyasi false from his matted hair to his bare foot. I have passed through many countries and everywhere they believed in me, but Luckeswar is hard to deceive.

LUCKESWAR : [Aside] I am afraid I am mistaken. It was rash on my part. He may curse me. I still have three boats on the sea. [Taking the dust off Sanyasi's feet.] My salutation to you, father! I did make a blunder. Thakurdada, you had better take our Sanyasi to our house. I'll give him some alms. But you go First; don't delay, I shall be there in a minute.

THAKURDADA : You are excessively kind. Do you think that father come crossing hills and seas to accept a handful of rice from you?

SANYASI : Why not Thakurdada! Where that handful of rice is so very dear, I must claim it. Come Luckeswar!

LUCKESWAR : I shall follow you. Upananda, you get up first! Get up, I say, with your books and other nonsense.

UPANANDA : Very well, I get up. Than I cut off all connection with you for good.

LUCKESWAR : That will be a great relief to me. I was getting on splendidly before I had any connection with you.

UPANANDA : My debt is paid with this insult that I suffer from your hands.

[Goes.

LUCKESWAR : My God! Sepoys riding on horses are coming this way! I wonder if our Rajah also—I prefer Upananda to him. [To Sanyasi] Father, by your holy feet I entreat you, sit on this spot, just on this spot; no, slightly to the left, slightly more. Yes, now it is all right. Sit Firmly on this plot of grass. Let the Rajah come or the Emperor, don't you budge an inch. If you keep my words, I'll satisfy you later on.

THAKURDADA : What is the matter with Luckeswar? Has he gone mad?

LUCKESWAR : Father, the very sight of me suggests money to my Rajah. My enemies have falsely informed him that I keep my treasure hidden underground. Since this report, our Rajah has been digging an enormous number of wells in this kingdom. When asked for reasons, he said it was to remove the scarcity of water from this land. And now I can't sleep at nights because of the fear that a sudden fit of his generosity might lead him to remove the water scarcity from the floor of my own dwelling.

Enters the King's MESSENGER.

MESSENGER : Father, my salutation! You are Apurva-Ananda?

SANYASI : Some people know me by that name.

MESSENGER : The rumour is abroad of your extraordinary powers. Our Rajah is desirous of seeing you.

SANYASI : He will see me whenever he sets his eyes on me.

MESSENGER : If you would kindly— SANYASI : I have given my word to somebody that I shall remain immovable in this place.

MESSENGER : The King's garden is close by.

SANYASI : All the less trouble for him to come.

MESSENGER : I shall make known to him your wishes.

[Goes.]

THAKURDADA : Since an irruption of Rajahs is apprehended, I take my leave.

SANYASI : Do you gather my scattered friends together and keep them ready for me.

THAKURDADA : Let disasters come in the shape of Kings or of anarchy firmly hold by you.

[Goes.]

Enters LUCKESWAR.

LUCKESWAR : I have overheard all. You are the famous Apurva Ananda! I ask your pardon for the liberties I have taken.

SANYASI : I readily pardon you for your calling me a sham sanyasi.

LUCKESWAR : But, father, mere pardon does not cost much. You cannot dismiss Luckeswar with that. I must have a boon,—quite a substantial one.

SANYASI : What boon do you ask?

LUCKESWAR : I must confess to you, father, that I have piled up a little money for myself, though not quite to the measure of what people imagine. But the amount does not satisfy me. Tell me the secret of some treasure, which may lead me to the end of my wanderings.

SANYASI : I am also seeking for this.

LUCKESWAR : I can't believe it.

SANYASI : Yes, it is true.

LUCKESWAR : Then you are wider awake than we are.

SANYASI : Certainly.

LUCKESWAR : [Whispering] Have got on the track?

SANYASI : Otherwise I shouldn't be roving about like this.

LUCKESWAR : [Touching his fret.] Do make it a little plain to me. I swear I shall keep it secret from everybody else.

SANYASI : Then listen. I am on the quest of the golden lotus on which Lakshmi keeps her feet.

LUCKESWAR : How bold! This takes my breath away. But, do you think you can find it unaided? It means expense. Do one thing, let us go shares in it.

SANYASI : In that case you will have to be a sanyasi, never touching gold for a long time.

LUCKESWAR : That is hard.

SANYASI : You can only prosper in this business if you give up all others.

LUCKESWAR : That sounds very much like bankruptcy. But all the same I do believe in you—which astounds even myself. There comes our Rajah! Let me hide behind this tree.

[Hides himself.]

Enters the RAJAH.

RAJAH : My salutation!

SANYASI : Victory to you! What is your desire?

RAJAH : Surely you can divine it already. My desire is to rule over a kingdom which is supreme.

SANYASI : Then begin by giving up what is small.

RAJAH : The over lordship of Vijayaditya has become intolerable to me.

SANYASI : To tell you the truth he is growing too much even for me.

RAJAH : Is that so?

SANVASI : Yes. All my practices are to bring him under control.

RAJAH : Is that why you have become a sanyasi?

SANYASI : Yes.

RAJAH : Do you think your charms will be potent enough to bring you success?

SANYASI : It is not impossible.

RAJAH : In that case do not forget me.

SANYASI : I shall bring him to your court.

RAJAH : Yes, his pride must be brought low.

SANYASI : That will do him good.

RAJAH : With your leave I take my departure.

[Goes.]

[Returning] Father, I am sure you know Vijayaditya personally is he as great as the people make him out to be?

SANYASI : He is like an ordinary person,—it is his dress which gives him a false

distinction.

RAJAH : Just what I thought. Quite an ordinary person!

SANYASI : I want to convince him that he is very much so. I must free his mind from the notion that he is a different creature from others.

RAJAH : Yes, yes, let him feel it. Fools puff him up and he believes them, being the greatest of their kind. Pull down his conceit to the dust.

SANYASI : I am engaged in that difficult task.

[*The Rajah goes.*

Enters UPANANDA.

UPANANDA : Father, the burden is not yet off my mind.

SANYASI : What is it that troubles you, my son?

UPANANDA : In my anger, at the insult offered to me, I thought I was right in disowning my debt to him. Therefore I went back home. But just as I was dusting my master's vina its strings struck up a chord and it sent a thrill through my heart. I felt that I must do something super-human for my master. If I can lay down my life to pay his debts for him, this beautiful day of October will then have its full due from me.

SANYASI : Baba, what you say is true.

UPANANDA : Father, you have seen many countries, do you know of any great man who is likely to buy a boy like me for a thousand kahan. That is all that I need for the debt.

SANYASI : What do you say to trying Vijayaditya, who used to be so fond of your master?

UPANANDA : Vijayaditya? But he is our emperor.

SANYASI : Is that so?

UPANANDA : Don't you know that?

SANYASI : But what if he is your emperor?

UPANANDA : Do you think he will care to pay any price for a boy like myself?

SANYASI : I can assure you, that he will be ashamed of his full treasury, if he does not pay your debt.

UPANANDA : Is that possible, father?

SANYASI : Do you think in God's world Luckeswar is the only possibility?

UPANANDA : But I must not idly wait for chances. In the meanwhile, let me go on with my work and pay off in small parts what I owe.

SANYASI : Yes, my boy, take up your burden.

UPANANDA : I feel ever so much stronger, for having known you. Now I take my

leave.

[Goes.

Enters LUCKESWAR.

LUCKESWAR : I give it up. It is not in my power to be your follower. With an infinite struggle I have earned what I have done. To leave all that, at your bidding, and then to repent of my rashness till the end of my days, would be worse than madness; it would be so awfully unlike myself. Now then, father, you must move from your seat.

SANYASI : [Rising] Then I have got my release from you?

LUCKESWAR : [Taking out a jewel case from under some turf and dry leaves.] For this tiny little thing I have been haunting this place, like a ghost from the morning. You are the first human being to whom I have shown this. [Holding it up to him and then hastily withdrawing it.] No, impossible! I fully trust you, yet I have not the power to put it into your hands even for a moment. Merely holding it in the light makes my heart palpitate. Can you tell me, father, what kind of man is Vijayaditya? If I try to sell it to him, are you sure he won't take it away by force? Can you trust him?

SANYASI : Not always.

LUCKESWAR : Well, that does not sound promising. I suspect, after all, this will lie underground, and after my death nobody will be able to find it.

SANYASI : Neither Kings nor Emperors, but the dust will claim it as its final tribute.

LUCKESWAR : Let it; that does not trouble me. But my anxiety is lest someone should discover it, when I am no more... However, father, I shall never forget about that golden lotus. I feel sure you will get it someday; but all the same I cannot be your follower.

[Goes.

Enters THAKURDADA.

SANYASI : After long days I have learnt one thing at last, and that I must tell you.

THAKURDADA : Father, you are very kind to me.

SANYASI : I know why this world is so beautiful,—simply because it is ever paying back its debt. The rice field has done its utmost to earn its fulfilment and the Betasini River is what it is because it keeps nothing back.

THAKURDADA : I understand, father. There is One Who has given Himself in

creation in his abundance of joy. And Creation is every moment working to repay the gift, and this perpetual sacrifice is blossoming everywhere in beauty and life.

SANYASI : Wherever there is sluggishness, there accumulates debt, and there it is ugly.

THAKURDADA : Because where there is a lacking in the gift, the harmony is broken in the eternal rhythm of the payment and repayment.

Enters LUCKESWAR.

LUCKESWAR : What are you two people conspiring about?

SANYASI : About that golden lotus.

LUCKESWAR : Have you already given away your secret to Thakurdada? You hope to be successful when you do your business in such a manner? But is Thakurdada the proper man to help you? How much capital has he, do you think?

SANYASI : You don't know the secret. He has quite a big amount, though he does not show it.

LUCKESWAR : [Slapping Thakurdada on the shoulder.] You are deep. I never thought of that. And yet people only suspect me and not you, not even the Rajah himself—Father, I can't bear Thakurdada to steal a march on me. Let all three of us join in this business. Look there, a crowd of people is coming this way. They must have got news that a Swami is here. Father, they will wear out your feet up to the knees taking the dust of them. But I warn you, father, you are too simple. Don't take anybody else into your confidence... But, Thakurdada, you must know business is not mere child's play. The chances of loss are eleven to one—keep that in mind. I give it up. But no, I must take time to decide.

[Goes.

Enter VILLAGERS.

FIRST VILLAGER : Where is the sanyasi they talked about?

SECOND VILLAGER : Is this the man?

THIRD VILLAGER : He looks like a fraud. Where is the real one.

SANYASI : A real one is difficult to find. I am playing at Sanyasi to amuse boys.

FIRST VILLAGER : But we are not boys.

SANYASI : I know the distinction.

SECOND VILLAGER : Then why did someone say, that some swami is somewhere

about?

FIRST VILLAGER : But your appearance is good. Have you learnt some charms?

SANYASI : I am willing to learn. But who is to teach me?

SECOND VILLAGER : There is a proper man. He lives in Bhairabpur. He has control over some spirits, and there is no doubt of that. Only the other day a boy was about to die. And what do you think this man did? He simply let the boy's life-spark fly into the inside of a panther. You won't believe it, but I can assure you, that panther is still alive, though the boy died. You may laugh, but my own brother-in-law has seen the panther with his own eyes. If anybody tries to injure it, the father rushes at him with his big stick. The man is quite ruining himself by offering kids twice a day to this beast. If you must learn charms, this is the man for you.

THIRD VILLAGER : What is the use of wasting time? Didn't I tell you in the beginning, that I didn't believe a word about this sanyasi. There are very few people in these days who have magic powers.

SECOND VILLAGER : That is true. But I was told by Kalu's mother that her nephew knew a Sanyasi who overturned his pipe of ganja and there came out a skull and a full pot of liquor.

THIRD VILLAGER : But did he see it with his own eyes?

SECOND VILLAGER : Yes, with his very own eyes.

[They go.

Enters LUCKESWAR.

LUCKESWAR : I can't stand this. You must take away your charm from me. My accounts are all getting wrong. My head is in a muddle. Now I feel quite reckless about that golden lotus, and now it seems pure foolishness. Now I am afraid Thakurdada will win, and now I say to myself let Thakurdada go to the dogs. But this doesn't seem right. It is sorcery for the purpose of kidnapping. No, no, that will never do with me. What is there to smile about? I am pretty tough, and you shall never have me for your disciple.

[Goes.

Enter BOYS.

FIRST BOY : We are ready for the autumn festival. What must we do?

SANYASI : We must begin with a song.

[Sings.

The breeze has touched the white sails, the boat revels in the beauty of its dancing speed.

It sings of the treasure of the distant shore, it lures my heart to the voyage of the perilous quest.

The captain stands at his helm with the sun shining on his face and the rain-clouds looming behind.

My heart aches to know how to sing to him of tears and smiles made one in joy.

SANYASI : Now you have seen the face of the autumn.

FIRST BOY : But where is it, father?

SANYASI : Don't you see those white clouds sailing on?

SECOND BOY : Yes, yes.

THIRD BOY : Yes, I can see them.

SANYASI : The sky fills up.

FIRST BOY : With what?

SANYASI : With light. And don't you feel the touch of the dew in the air?

SECOND BOY : Yes.

SANYASI : Only look at that Betasini River—what headlong rush to spend herself. And see the shiver in the young shoots of rice. Thakurdada, let the boys sing the welcome song of the autumn and go round the forests and hills yonder.

[*Thakurdada sings and the Boys join him.*

I have spread my heart in the sky and found your touch in my dreams.

Take away that veil from your face, let me see your eyes.

There rings your welcome at the doors of the forest fairies; Your anklet bells sound in all my thoughts filling my work with music.

[*The Boys go out singing.*

Enters LUCKESWAR.

THAKURDADA : Hallo! Our Luckeswar in a sanyasi's garb!

LUCKESWAR : I have become your disciple at last father. Here is my pearl-case, and here are the jewel caskets. Take care of them.

SANYASI : Why has this sudden change come over you?

LUCKESWAR : The Emperor Vijayaditya's army is marching towards this town. Nobody will dare touch you, so you are the safest man to whom I can entrust my treasure.—I am your devoted follower,—protect me!

Enters the RAJAH.

RAJAH : Father!

SANYASI : Sit down. You seem to be out of breath. Rest awhile.

RAJAH : No time for rest. I am informed that Vijayaditya is almost upon us. His flag has been seen.

SANYASI : Very likely. He must be feeling eager to acquire new dominions.

RAJAH : What do you say? New dominions?

SANYASI : Why do you take offence at it, my son? You also had a similar idea.

RAJAH : Oh! No, that was quite different. But whatever that might be, I ask for your protection. Some mischief-makers must have carried tales to him. Please tell him, they are all lies. Am I mad, that I should want to be the Emperor? Have I got the power.

SANYASI : Thakurdada!

THAKURDADA : Yes, my master!

SANYASI : Simply with this rag upon my back and a few boys as my followers, I was fully successful in making this day glorious. But look at this wretched man,—this emperor,—he has power only to ruin it.

RAJAH : Hush! Somebody may overhear you!

SANYASI : I must fight it out with that— RAJAH : I won't allow it. You are becoming dangerous. Can't you keep your sentiments to yourself?

SANYASI : But I already had a discussion about this with you, haven't I?

RAJAH : What an awful man you are! Luckeswar, why are you here? Leave this place at once.

LUCKESWAR : Sire, I can tell you, it is not for the pure pleasure of your presence that I am here. I should be only too glad to get away, but I am fixed to this spot. I have not the power to move.

Enter VIJAYADITYA'S MINISTER and courtiers.

MINISTER : Victory to the Emperor Vijayaditya! [They all bow.

RAJAH : Stop that stupid jest! I am not Vijayaditya. I am his most unworthy servant—Somapal.

MINISTER : [To the Sanyasi] Sire, the time has come for you to come back to your capital.

THAKURDADA : My master, is this a dream?

SANYASI : Whether your dream or theirs is true who can tell.

THAKURDADA : Then— SANYASI : Yes, these people happen to know me as

Vijayaditya.

THAKURDADA : But this new situation has made things critical for me.

LUCKESWAR : And for me also. I surrendered myself to the Sanyasi. In order to be saved from the Emperor. But I do not know in whose hands I am now.

RAJAH : Sire, did you come to try me?

SANYASI : And also myself.

RAJAH : What is to be my punishment?

SANYASI : To leave you to your memory.

Enters UPANANDA.

UPANANDA : Who are these people? Oh! Here is the Rajah. [About to leave.

SANYASI : Upananda, do not go! Tell me what you had come to say.

UPANANDA : I came to tell you that I had earned this three Kahans by my day's work.

SANYASI : Give them to me. They are too valuable to go for clearing Luckeswar's debt. I take these for myself.

UPANANDA : Must you take these, father?

SANYASI : Yes, I must. Do you think I have mastered my greed, because I have become a sanyasi? These tempt me beyond anything else.

LUCKESWAR : This sounds ominous! I am undone!

SANYASI : Where is my treasurer?

TREASURER : Here I am.

SANYASI : Let this man have a thousand Kahan from my treasury.

UPANANDA : Then does he buy me?

SANYASI : You are mine. [To the Minister] You were troubled, because no son had been born to my house. But I have earned my son, by my merit, and here he is.

LUCKESWAR : How unlucky for me that I am too old for such adoption!

SANYASI : Luckeswar!

LUCKESWAR : Command me!

SANYASI : I have protected your jewels from the grasp of Vijayaditya. Now they are given back to you.

LUCKESWAR : If the Maharajah had given them back in secret, I could feel secure. Who is to save them now?

SANYASI : That is my business. But Luckeswar, something is due to me from you.

LUCKESWAR : [Aside] Curse me! I knew it would come at last.

SANYASI : Thakurdada is witness to my claim.

LUCKESWAR : [Aside] There will be no lack of false witnesses for him now.

SANYASI : You wanted to give me alms. You owe me a handful of rice. Do you think you will be, able to fill an Emperor's hand?

LUCKESWAR : But, Sire, it was a sanyasi's hand which gave me courage to propose what I did.

SANYASI : Then I free you from your promise.

LUCKESWAR : With the Maharajah's leave I take my departure. Everybody's eyes seem to be turned upon these caskets.

[*He goes.*

Enter the BOYS.

BOYS : [Shouting] Sanyasi Thakur! [They suddenly stop and are about to run away.

THAKURDADA : Boys, do not go.

SANYASI : Rajah, leave me.

[*Rajah goes.*
[*They go.*

2. Chitra

Preface

This lyrical drama was written about twenty-five years ago. It is based on the following story from the Mahabharata.

In the course of his wanderings, in fulfilment of a vow of penance, Arjuna came to Manipur. There he saw Chitrangada, the beautiful daughter of Chitravahana, the king of the country. Smitten with her charms, he asked the king for the hand of his daughter in marriage. Chitravahana asked him who he was, and learning that he was Arjuna the Pandava, told him that Prabhanjana, one of his ancestors in the kingly line of Manipur, had long been childless. In order to obtain an heir, he performed severe penances. Pleased with these austerities, the god Shiva gave him this boon, that he and his successors should each have one child. It so happened that the promised child had invariably been a son. He, Chitravahana, was the first to have only a daughter Chitrangada to perpetuate the race. He had, therefore, always treated her as a son and had made her his heir. Continuing, the king said:

‘The one son that will be born to her must be the perpetuator of my race. That son will be the price that I shall demand for this marriage. You can take her, if you like, on this condition.’

Arjuna promised and took Chitrangada to wife, and lived in her father’s capital for three years. When a son was born to them, he embraced her with affection, and taking leave of her and her father, set out again on his travels.

Characters in the Play

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GODS : MADANA [*Eros*]

VASANTA [*Lycoris*]

MORTALS : CHITRA, *daughter of the King of Manipur* ARJUNA, *a prince of the house of the Kurus. He is of the Kshatriya or ‘warrior caste’, and during the action is living as a Hermit retired in the forest.*

Villagers from an outlying district in Manipur.

Act

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Scene I CHITRA : Art thou the god with the five darts, the Lord of Love?

MADANA : I am he who was the first born in the heart of the Creator. I bind the bond of pain and bliss the lives of men and women!

CHITRA : I know, I know what that pain is and those bonds.—And who art thou, my lord?

VASANTA : I am his friend Vasanta the King of the Seasons. Death and decrepitude would wear—the world to the bone but that I follow them and constantly attack them, I am Eternal Youth.

CHITRA : I bow to thee, Lord Vasanta.

MADANA : But what stern vow is thine, fair stranger? Why dost thou wither thy fresh youth with penance and mortification? Such a sacrifice is not fit for the worship of love. Who art thou and what is thy prayer?

CHITRA : I am Chitra, the daughter of the kingly house of Manipur. With god-like grace Lord Shiva promised to my royal grandsire an unbroken line of male descent. Nevertheless, the divine word proved powerless to change the spark of life; in my mother's womb—so invincible was my nature, woman though I be.

MADANA : I know, that is why thy father brings thee up as his son. He has taught thee the use of the bow and all the duties of a king.

CHITRA : Yes, that is why I am dressed in man's attire and have left the seclusion of a woman's chamber. I know no feminine wiles for winning hearts. My hands are strong to bend the bow, but I have never learnt Cupid's archery, the play of eyes.

MADANA : That requires no schooling, fair one. The eye does its work untaught, and he knows how well, who is struck in the heart.

CHITRA : One day in search of game I roved alone to the forest on the bank of the Puma river. Tying my horse to a tree trunk I entered a dense thicket on the track of a deer. I found a narrow sinuous path meandering through the dusk of the entangled boughs, the foliage vibrated with the chirping of crickets, when of a sudden I came upon a man lying on a bed of dried leaves, across my path. I asked him haughtily to move aside, but he heeded not. Then with the sharp, end

of my bow I picked him in contempt. Instantly he leapt up with straight, tall limbs, like a sudden tongue of fire from a heap of ashes. An amused smile flickered round the corners of his mouth, perhaps at the sight of my boyish countenance. Then for the first time in my life I felt myself a woman, and knew that a man was before me.

MADANA : At the auspicious hour I teach the man and the woman this supreme lesson to know themselves. What happened after that?

CHITRA : With fear arid wonder I asked him ‘Who are you?’ ‘I am Arjuna,’ he Said, ‘of the great Kuru clan.’ I stood petrified like a statue, and forgot to do him obeisance. Was this indeed Arjuna, the one great idol of my dreams! Yes, I had long ago beard how be had vowed a twelve-years’ celibacy. Many a-day my young ambition had spurred me on to break my lance with him, to challenge him in disguise to single combat, and prove my skill in arms against him. Ah, foolish heart, whither fled thy presumption? Could I but exchange my youth with all its aspirations for the clod of death under his feet. I should deem it a most precious grace. I know riot in what whirlpool of thought I was lost, when suddenly I saw him vanish through the trees. O foolish woman, neither didst thou greet him, nor speak a word, nor beg forgiveness, but stoodest like a barbarian boor while he comtemptuously walked away! . . . Next morning I laid aside my man’s clothing. I donned bracelets, anklets, waist chain, and a gown of purple red silk. The unaccustomed dress clung about my shrinking shame; but I hastened on my quest, and found Arjuna in the forest temple of Shiva.

MADANA : Tell me the story to the end. I am the heart-born god, and. I understand the mystery of these impulses.

CHITRA : Only vaguely can I remember what things I said, and what answer I got. Do not ask me to tell you all. Shame fell on me like a thunderbolt, yet could not break me to pieces, so utterly hard, so like a man am I. His last words as I walked home pricked my ears like red hot needles. ‘I have taken the vow of celibacy, I am not fit to be thy husband! Oh, the vow of a man! Surely thou knowest, thou god of love, the unnumbered saints and sages have surrendered the merits of their life-long penance at the feet of a woman. I broke my bow in two and burnt my arrows in the fire. I hated my strong, lithe arm, scored drawing the bowstring. O Love, god Love, thou hast laid low the dust the vain pride of my manlike strength; and all my man’s training lies crushed under thy feet. Now teach me I lessons; give me the power of the weak and the weapon of the unarmed hand.

MADANA : I will be thy friend. I will bring the world-conquering Arjuna a captive before thee, to accept his rebellion’s sentence at thy hand.

CHITRA : Had I but the time needed, I could win his heart by slow degrees, and ask no help of the gods. I would stand by his side as a comrade, drive the fierce horses of his war-chariot, attend him in the pleasures of the chase, keep guard at night at the entrance of his tent, and help him in all the great duties of; Kshatriya, rescuing the weak, and meting out justice where it is due. Surely at last the day would have come for him to look at me and wonder. ‘What boy is this? Has one of my slaves in a former life followed me like my good deeds into this?’ I am not the woman who nourishes her despair in lonely silence feeding it with nightly tears and covering it with the daily patient smile, a widow from her birth. The flower of my desire shall never drop into the dust before it has ripened to fruit. But it is the labour of a lifetime to make one’s true self known and honoured. ‘Therefore I have come to thy door, thou world vanquishing Love, and thou, Vasanta, youthful Lord of the Seasons, take from my young body this primal injustice, an unattractive plainness. For a single day make me superbly beautiful, even as beautiful as was the sudden blooming of love in my heart. Give me but one brief day of perfect beauty, and I will answer for the days that follow.

MADANA : Lady, I grant thy prayer.

VASANTA : Not for the short span of a day, but for one whole year the charm of spring blossoms shall nestle round thy limbs.

Scene II ARJUNA : Was I dreaming or was what I saw by the lake truly there? Sitting on the mossy turf, I mused over bygone years in the sloping shadows of the evening, when slowly there came out from the folding darkness of foliage an apparition of beauty in the perfect form of a woman, and stood on a white slab of stone at the water’s brink. It seemed that the heart of the earth must heave in joy under her bare white feet. Me thought the vague veilings of her body should melt in ecstasy into air as the golden mist of dawn melts from off the snowy peak of the eastern hill. She bowed herself above the shining mirror of the lake and saw the reflection of her face. She started up in awe and stood still; then smiled, and with a careless sweep of her left arm unloosed her hair and let it trail on the earth at her feet. She bared her bosom and looked at her arms, so flawlessly modelled, and instinct with an exquisite caress. Bending her head she saw the sweet blossoming of her youth and the tender bloom and blush of her skin. She beamed with a glad surprise. So, if the white lotus bud on opening her eyes in the morning were to arch

her neck and see her shadow in the water, would she wonder at herself the live-long day. But a moment after the smile passed from her face and a shade of sadness crept into her eyes. She bound up her tresses, drew her veil over her arms, and sighing slowly, walked away like a beauteous evening fading into the night. To me the supreme fulfilment of desire seemed to have been revealed in a flash and then to have vanished... But who is it that pushes the door?

Enter CHITRA, dressed as a woman.

Ah! It is she. Quiet, my heart! ... Fear me not, lady! I am a Kshatriya.

CHITRA : Honoured sir, you are my guest. I live in this temple. I know not in what way I can show you hospitality.

ARJUNA : Fair lady, the very sight of you is indeed the highest hospitality. If you will not take it amiss I would ask you a question.

CHITRA : You have permission.

ARJUNA : What stern vow keeps you immured in this solitary temple, depriving all mortals of a Vision of so much loveliness?

CHITRA : I harbour a secret desire in my heart, for the fulfilment of which I offer daily prayers to lord Shiva.

ARJUNA : Alas, what can you desire, you who are the desire of the whole world! From the easternmost hill on whose summit the morning sun first prints his fiery foot. To the end of the sunset land have I travelled. I have seen whatever is most precious, beautiful and great on the earth. My knowledge shall be yours, only say for what or for whom you seek.

CHITRA : He whom I seek is known to all.

ARJUNA : Indeed! Who may this favourite of the gods be, whose fame has captured your heart?

CHITRA : Sprung from the highest of all royal houses, the greatest of all heroes is he.

ARJUNA : Lady, offer not such a wealth of beauty as is yours on the altar of false reputation. Spurious fame spreads from tongue to tongue like the fog of the early dawn before the sun rises. Tell me who in the highest of kingly lines is the supreme hero?

CHITRA : Hermit, you are jealous of other men's fame. Do you not know that all over the world the royal house of the Kurus is the most famous?

ARJUNA : The house of the Kurus!

CHITRA : And have you never heard of the greatest name of that far-famed house?

ARJUNA : From your own lips let me hear it.

CHITRA : Arjuna, the conqueror of the world. I have culled from the mouths of the multitude that imperishable name and hidden it with care in my maiden heart. Hermit, why do you look perturbed? Has that name only a deceitful glitter? Say so, and I will not hesitate to break this casket of my heart and throw the false gem to the dust.

ARJUNA : Be his name and fame, his bravery and prowess false or true, for mercy's sake do not banish him from your heart for the knees at your feet even now.

CHITRA : You, Arjuna!

ARJUNA : Yes, I am he, the love-hungred guest at your door.

CHITRA : Then it is not true that Arjuna has taken a vow of chastity for twelve long years?

ARJUNA : But you have dissolved my vow even as the moon dissolves the night's vow of obscurity.

CHITRA : Oh, shame upon you! What have you seen in me that makes you false to yourself? Whom do you seek in these dark eyes, in these milk-white arms, if you are ready to pay for her the price of your probity? Not my true self, I know. Surely this cannot be love, this is not man's highest homage to woman! Alas, that this frail disguise, the body, should make one blind to the; light of the deathless spirit! Yes, now indeed, I know, Arjuna, the fame of your heroic manhood is false.

ARJUNA : Ah, I feit how vain is fame, the pride of prowess! Everything seems to me—a dream. You alone are perfect; you are the wealth of the world, the end of all poverty, the goal of all efforts, the one woman! Others there are who can be but slowly known. While to see you for a moment is to see perfect completeness once and forever.

CHITRA : Alas, it is not I, not I, Arjuna! It is the deceit of a god. Go, go, my hero, go. Woo not falsehood, offer not your great heart to an illusion! Go.

Scene III CHITRA : No, impossible. To face that fervent gaze that almost grasps you like clutching hands of the hungry spirit within; to feel his heart struggling to break its bounds urging its passionate cry through the entire body and then to send him away like a beggar no, impossible.

Enter MADANA and VASANTA.

Ah, god of love, what fearful flame is this with which thou hast enveloped me! I burn, and I burn whatever I touch.

MADANA : I desire to know what happened last night.

CHITRA : At evening Hay down on a grassy bed strewn with the petals of spring flowers, and recollected the wonderful praise of my beauty I had heard from Arjuna; drinking drop by drop the honey that I had stored during the long day. The history of my past life like that of my former existences was forgotten. I felt like a flower, which has, but a few fleeting hours to listen to all the humming flatteries and whispered murmurs of the wood-lands and then must lower its eyes from the sky, bend its head and at a breath give itself up to the dust without a cry, thus ending the short story of a perfect moment that has neither past nor future.

VASANTA : A limitless life of glory can bloom and spend itself in a morning.

MADANA : Like an endless meaning in the narrow span of a song.

CHITRA : The southern breeze caressed me to sleep. From the flowering Malati bower overhead silent kisses dropped over my body. On my hair, my breast my feet, each flower chose a bed to die on. I slept. And, suddenly in the depth of my sleep, I felt as if some intense eager look, like tapering fingers off lame, touched my slumbering body. F started up and saw the Hermit standing before me. The moon had moved to the west, peering through the leaves to espy this wonder of divine art wrought in a fragile human frame. The ah-was heavy with perfume; the silence of the night was vocal with the chirping of crickets; the reflections of the trees hung motionless in the lake; and with his staff in his hand he stood, tall and straight and is WI, like a forest tree. It seemed to me that I had, on opening my eyes, died to all realities of life and undergone a dream, birth into a shadow land—Shame slipped to my feet like loosened clothes. I heard his call-'Beloved, my most beloved!' And all my forgotten lives united as one and responded to it. I said, 'Take me, take all I am!' And I stretched out my arms to him. The moon set behind the trees. One curtain of darkness covered all. Heaven and earth, time arid space, pleasure and 'pain, death and life merged together in an unbearable ecstasy... With the first gleam 6f light, the first twitter of birds, I rose up and sat leaning on my left arm. He lay asleep with a vague smile about his lips like the crescent moon in the morning. The rosy red glow of the dawn fell upon his noble forehead. I sighed and stood up. I drew together the leafy lianas to screen the streaming sun from his face. I looked about me and saw the same old earth. I remembered what I used to be, and ran and ran like a deer afraid of her own shadow, through the forest path strewn with Shephali flowers. I found a lonely nook, and sitting down covered my face with both hands, and tried to weep and

cry. But no tears came to my eyes.

MADANA : Alas, thou daughter of mortals! I stole from the divine Storehouse the fragrant wine of heaven, filled with it one earthly night to the brim, and placed it in thy hand to drink yet still I hear this cry of anguish!

CHITRA : [Bitterly.] Who drank it? The rarest completion of life's desire, the first union of love was proffered to me, but was wrested from my grasp? This borrowed beauty, this falsehood that enwraps me, will slip from me taking with it the only monument of that sweet union, as the petals fall from an overblown flower; and the woman ashamed of her naked poverty will sit weeping day and night. Lord Love, this cursed appearance companions me like a demon robbing me of all the prizes of love-all the kisses for which my heart is a thirst.

MADANA : Alas, how vain thy single night had been! The barque of joy came in sight, but the waves would riot let it touch the shore.

CHITRA : Heaven came so close to my hand that I forgot for a moment that it had not reached me. But when I woke in the morning from my dream I found that my body had become my own rival. It is my hateful task to deck her every day, to send her to my beloved and see her caressed by him. O god, take back thy boon!

MADANA : But if I take it from you how can you stand before your lover? To snatch away the cup from his lips when he has scarcely drained his first draught of pleasure, would not that be cruel? With what resentful anger he must regard thee then?

CHITRA : That would be better far than this. I will reveal my true self to him, a nobler thing than this disguise. If he rejects it, if he spurns me and breaks my heart, I will bear even that in silence.

VASANTA : Listen to my advice. When with the advent of autumn the flowering season is over then comes the triumph of fruitage. A time will come of itself when the heat-cloyed bloom of the-body will droop and Arjuna will gladly accept the abiding fruitful truth in thee. O child, go back to thy mad festival.

Scene IV

CHITRA : Why do you watch me like that, my warrior?

ARJUNA : I watch how you weave that garland. Skin and grace, the twin brother and sister, are dancing playfully on your finger tips. I am watching and thinking.

CHITRA : What are you thinking, sir?

ARJUNA : I am thinking that you, with this same lightness of touch and sweetness, are weaving my days exile into an immortal wreath, to crown me when I return home.

CHITRA : Home! But this love is not for a home!

ARJUNA : Not for a home?

CHITRA : No. Never talk of that. Take to your home what is abiding and strong. Leave the little wild flower where it was born; leave it beautifully to die at the day's end among all fading blossoms and decaying leaves. Do not take it to your palace hall to fling it on the stony floor which knows no pity for things that fade and are forgotten.

ARJUNA : Is ours that kind of love?

CHITRA : Yes, no other! Why regret it? That which was meant for idle days should never outlive them. Joy turns into pain when the door by which it should depart is shut against it. Take it and keep it as long as it lasts. Let not the satiety of your evening claim more than the desire of your morning could earn. The day is done. Put this garland on. I am tired. Take me in your arms, my love. Let all vain bickerings of discontent die away at the sweet meeting of our lips.

ARJUNA : Hush! Listen, my beloved, the sound of prayer bells from the distant village temple steals upon the evening air across the silent trees!

Scene V

VASANTA : I cannot keep pace with thee, my friend! I am tired. It is a hard task to keep alive the fire thou hast kindled. Sleep overtakes me, the fan drops from my hand, and cold ashes cover the glow of the fire. I start up again from my slumber and with all my might rescue the weary flame. But this can go on no longer.

MADANA : I know, thou art as fickle as a child. Ever restless is thy play in heaven and on earth. Things that thou for days buildest up with endless detail thou dost shatter in a moment without regret. But this work of ours is nearly finished. Pleasure—winged days fly fast, and the year, almost at its end, swoons in rapturous bliss.

Scene VI ARJUNA : I woke in the morning and found that my dreams had distilled a gem. I have no casket to inclose it, no king's crown whereon to fix it, no chain from which to hang it, and yet have not the heart to throw it away. My Kshatriya's right arm, idly occupied in holding it, forgets its duties.

Enter CHITRA.

CHITRA : Tell me your thoughts, sir!

ARJUNA : My mind is busy with thoughts of 'hunting today'. See, how the rain pours in torrents and fiercely beats upon the hillside. The dark shadow of the clouds hangs heavily over the forest, and the swollen stream, like reckless youth, overleaps all barriers with mocking laughter. On such rainy days we five brothers would go to the Chitraka forest to chase wild beasts. Those were glad times; our hearts danced to the drumbeat of rambling clouds. The woods resounded with the screams of peacocks. Timid deer could not hear our approaching steps for the patter of rain and the noise of waterfalls; the leopards would leave their tracks on the wet earth, betraying their lairs. Our sport over, we dared each other to swim across turbulent streams on our way back home. The restless spirit is on me. I long to go hunting.

CHITRA : First run down the quarry you are now following. Are you quite certain that the enchanted deer you pursue must needs be caught? No, not yet. Like a dream the wild creature eludes you when it seems most nearly yours. Look how the wind is chased by the mad rain that discharges a thousand arrows after it. Yet

it goes free and unconquered. Our sport is like that, my love! You give chase to the fleet-footed spirit of beauty, aiming at her every dart you have in your hands. Yet this magic deer runs ever free and untouched.

ARJUNA : My love, have you no home where kind hearts are waiting for your return? A home which you once made sweet with your gentle service and whose light went out when you left it for this wilderness?

CHITRA : Why these questions? Are the hours of unthinking pleasure over? Do you not know that I am no more than what you see before you? For me there is no vista beyond. The dew that hangs on the tip of a Kinsuka petal has neither name nor destination. It offers no answer to any question. She whom you love is like that perfect bead of dew.

ARJUNA : Has she no tie with the world? Can she be merely like a fragment of heaven dropped on the earth through the carelessness of a wanton god?

CHITRA : Yes.

ARJUNA : Ah, that is why I always seem about to lose you. My heart is unsatisfied, my mind knows no peace. Come closer to me, unattainable one! Surrender yourself to the bonds of name and home and parentage. Let my heart feel you on all sides and live with you in the peaceful security of love.

CHITRA : Why this vain effort to catch and keep the tints of the clouds, the dance of the waves, the smell of the flowers?

ARJUNA : Mistress mine, do not hope; to pacify love with airy nothings. Give me something to clasp, something that can last longer than pleasure, that can endure even through suffering.

CHITRA : Hero mine, the year is not yet full, and you are tired already! Now I know that it is heaven's basing that has made the flower's term of life short. Could this body of mine have drooped and fed with the flowers of last spring it surely would have died with honour. Yet, its, days are numbered, my love. Spare it not, press it dry of honey, for fear your beggar's heart come back to fit again and again with unsated desire, like a thirsty bee when summer blossoms lie dead in the dust.

Scene VII MADANA : Tonight is thy last night.

VASANTA : The loveliness of your body will return tomorrow to the inexhaustible stores of the spring. The ruddy tint of thy lips freed from the memory of Arjuna's kisses, will bud anew as a pair of fresh Asoka leaves, and the soft, white glow of thy skin will be born again in a hundred fragrant jasmine flowers.

CHITRA : O gods, grant me this my prayer! Tonight, in its last hour let my beauty

flash its brightest, like the final flicker of a dying flame.

MADANA : Thou shalt have thy wish.

Scene VIII VILLAGERS : Who will protect us now?

ARJUNA : Why, by what danger are you threatened?

VILLAGERS : The robbers are pouring from the northern hills like a mountain flood to devastate our village.

ARJUNA : Have you in this kingdom no warden?

VILLAGERS : Princess Chitra was the terror of all evil doers. While she was in this happy land we feared natural deaths, but had no other fears. Now she has gone on a pilgrimage, and none knows where to find her.

ARJUNA : Is the warden of the country a woman?

VILLAGERS : Yes, she is our father and mother in one.

[*Exeunt.*

Enter CHITRA.

CHITRA : Why are you sitting all alone?

ARJUNA : I am trying to imagine what kind of woman Princess Chitra maybe. I hear so many stories of her from all sorts of men.

CHITRA : Ah, but she is not beautiful. She has no such lovely eyes as mine, dark as death. She can pierce any target she will, but not our hero's heart.

ARJUNA : They say that in valour she is a man, and a woman in tenderness.

CHITRA : That, indeed, is her greatest misfortune. When a woman is merely a woman; when she winds herself round and round men's hearts with her smiles and sobs and services and caressing endearments; then she is happy. Of what use to her are learning and great achievements? Could you have seen her only yesterday in the court of the Lord Shiva's temple by the forest path, you would have passed by without deigning to look at her. But have you grown so weary of woman's beauty that you seek in her for a man's strength? With green leaves wet from the spray of the foaming waterfall, I have made our noonday bed in a cavern dark as night. There the cool of the soft green mosses thick on the black arid dripping stone, kisses your eyes to sleep. Let me guide you thither.

ARJUNA : Not today, beloved.

CHITRA : Why not today!

ARJUNA : I have heard that a horde of robbers has neared the plains. Needs must I go and prepare my weapons to protect the frightened villagers.

CHITRA : You need have no fear for them. Before she started on her pilgrimage. Princess Chitra had set strong guards at all the frontier passes.

ARJUNA : Yet permit me for short while to set about a—Kshatriya's work. With new glory will I ennable this idle arm, and make of it a pillow more worthy of your head.

CHITRA : What if I refuse to let you go, if I keep you entwined in my arms? Would you rudely snatch yourself free arid leave me? Go then! But you must know that the liana, once Broken in two, never joins again. Go, if your thirst is quenched. But, if not, then remember that the goddess of pleasure is fickle, and waits for no man. Sit for a while, my lord! Tell tile what uneasy thoughts tease you. Who occupied your mind today? Is it Chitra?

ARJUNA : Yes, it is Chitra. I wonder in fulfilment of what vow she has gone on her pilgrimage. Of what could she stand in need?

CHITRA : Her needs? Why, what has she ever had, the unfortunate creature? Her very qualities are as prison walls, shutting her woman's heart in a bare cell. She is obscured. She is unfulfilled. Her womanly love must content itself dressed m rags; beauty is denied her. She is like the spirit of a cheerless morning, sitting upon the stony mountain peak, all her light blotted out by dark clouds. Do not ask me other life. It will never sound sweet to man's ear.

ARJUNA : I am eager to learn all about her. I am like a traveller come to a strange city at midnight. Domes and towers arid garden-trees look vague and shadowy, and the dull moan of the sea comes fitfully through the silence of sleep. Wistfully he waits for the mornings to reveal to him all the strange wonders. Oh, tell me her story.

CHITRA : What more is there to tell?

ARJUNA : I seem to see her, in my mind's eye, riding on a white horse, proudly holding the reins in her left hand, and in her right a bow, and like the Goddess of Victory dispensing glad hope all round her. Like a watchful lioness she protects the litter at her dugs with a fierce love. Woman's arms, though adorned with naught but unfettered strength, are beautiful! My heart is restless, fair one, like a serpent reviving from his long winter's sleep. Come, let us both race on swift horses side by side, like twin orbs of light sweeping through space. Out from this slumberous prison of green gloom, this dank, dense cover of perfumed intoxication, choking breath.

CHITRA : Arjuna, tell me true, if, now at once, by some magic I could shake myself free from this voluptuous softness, this timid bloom of beauty shrinking from the rude and healthy touch of the world, and fling it from my body like borrowed clothes, would you be able to bear it? If I stand up straight and strong

with the strength of a daring heart spurning the wiles and arts of twining weakness, if I hold my head high like a tall young mountain fir, no longer trailing in the dust like a liana, shall I then appeal to man's eye? No, no, you could not endure it. It is better that I should keep spread about me all the dainty playthings of fugitive youth, and wait for you in patience. When it pleases you to return, I will smilingly pour out for you the wine of pleasure in the cup of this beauteous body. When you are tired and satiated with this wine, you can go to work or play; and when I grow old I will accept humbly and gratefully whatever corner is left for me. Would it please your heroic soul if the playmate of the night aspired to be the helpmate of the day, if the left arm learnt to share the burden of the proud right arm.

ARJUNA : I never seem to know you aright. You seem to me like a goddess hidden within a golden image. I cannot touch you, I cannot pay you my dues in return for your priceless gifts. Thus my love is incomplete. Sometimes in the enigmatic depth of your sad look, in your playful words mocking at their own meaning, I gain glimpses of being trying to rend asunder the languorous grace other body, to emerge in a chaste fire of pain through a vaporous veil of smiles. Illusion is the first appearance of Truth. She advances towards her lover in disguise. But a time comes when she throws off her ornaments and veils and stands clothed in naked dignity. I grope for that ultimate you, that bare simplicity of truth. Why these tears, my love? Why cover your face with your hands? Have I pained you, my darling? Forget what I said. I will be content with the present. Let each separate moment of beauty come to me like a bird of mystery from its unseen nest in the dark bearing a message of music. Let me forever sit with my hope on the brink of its realization, and thus end my days.

Scene IX

CHITRA : [Cloaked] My lord, has the cup been drained to the last drop? Is this, indeed, the end? No, when all is done something still remains, and that is my last sacrifice at your feet.

I brought from the garden of heaven flowers of incomparable beauty with which to worship you, god of my heart. If the rites are over, if the flowers have faded, let me throw them out of the temple. [*Unveiling in her original male attire*] Now, look at your worshipper with gracious eyes.

I am not beautifully perfect as the flowers with which I worshipped. I have many flaws and blemishes. I am a traveller in the great world-path, my garments are dirty, and my feet are bleeding with thorns. Where should I achieve flower-beauty, the unsullied loveliness of a moment's life? The gift that I proudly bring you is the heart of a woman. Here have all pains and joys gathered, the hopes and fears and shames of a daughter of the dust; here love springs up struggling toward immortal life. Herein lies an imperfection which yet is noble and grand. If the flower-service is finished, my master, accept this as your servant for the days to come!

I am Chitra, the king's daughter. Perhaps you will remember the day when a woman came to you in the temple of Shiva, her body loaded with ornaments and finery. That shameless woman came to court you as though she were a man. You rejected her; you did well. My lord, I am that woman. She was my disguise. Then by the boon of gods I obtained for a year the most radiant form that a mortal ever wore, and wearied my hero's heart with the burden of that deceit. Most surely I am not that woman.

I am Chitra. No goddess, to be worshipped, nor yet the object of common pity to be brushed aside like a moth with indifference. If you deign to keep me by your side in the path of danger and daring, if you allow me to share the great duties of your life, then you will know my true self. If your babe, whom I am nourishing in my womb be born a son, I shall myself teach him to be a second Arjuna, and send him to you when the time comes, and then at last you will truly know me. Today I can only offer you Chitra, the daughter of a king.

ARJUNA : Beloved, my life is full.

3. The Cycle of Spring

Introduction

The greater part of the introductory portion of this drama was translated from the original Bengali by Mr. C. F. Andrews and Prof. Nishikanta Sen, and revised by the Author.

Characters of the Prelude KING, VIZIER, GENERAL [BIJOY VARMA]

CHINESE AMBASSADOR, PUNDIT [SRUTI-BHUSHAN]
POET [KABI-SHEKHAR], GUARDS, COURTIERS, HERALD

The stage is on two levels: the higher, at the back, for the Song-preludes alone, concealed by a purple curtain; the lower only being discovered when the drop goes up. Diagonally across the extreme left of the lower stage, is arranged the king's court, with various platforms, for the various dignitaries ascending to the canopied throne. The body of the stage is left free for the "Play" when that develops.

Enter some COURTIERS.

The names of the speakers are not given in the margin, as they can easily be guessed.

Hush! Hush!

What is the matter?

The King is in great distress.

How dreadful!

Who is that over there, playing on his flute?

Why? What's the matter?

The King is greatly disturbed.

How dreadful!

What are those wild children doing, making so much noise?

They are the Mandal family.

Then tell the Mandal family to keep their children quiet.

Where can that Vizier have gone to?

Here I am. What's the matter?

Haven't you heard the news?

No, what?

The King is greatly troubled in his mind.

Well, I've got some very important news about the frontier war.

War we may have, but not the news.

Then the Chinese Ambassador is waiting to see His Majesty.

Let him wait. Anyhow he can't see the King.

Can't see the King?—Ah, here is the King at last. Look at him coming this way, with a mirror in his hand. "Long live the King. Long live the King."

If it please Your Majesty, it is time to go to the Court.

Time to go? Yes, time to go, but not to the Court.

What does Your Majesty mean?

Haven't you heard? The bell has just been rung to dismiss the Court.

When? What bell? We haven't heard any bell.

How could you hear? They have rung it in my ears alone.

Oh, Sire. No one can have had the impertinence to do that.

Vizier! They are ringing it now.

Pardon me, Sire, if I am very stupid; but I cannot understand.

Look at this, Vizier, look at this.

Your Majesty's hair—— Can't you see there's a bell-ringer there?

Oh, Your Majesty. Are you playing a joke?

The joke is not mine, but His, who has got the whole world by the ear, and is having His jest. Last night, when the Queen was putting a garland of jasmines round my neck, she cried out with alarm, "King, what is this? Here are two grey hairs behind your ear."

Oh, please, Sire, don't worry so much about a little thing like that. Why! The royal physician—— Vizier! The founder of our dynasty had his royal physician, too. But what could he do? Death has left his card of invitation behind my ear. The Queen wanted, then and there, to pluck out the grey hairs. But I said, "Queen, what's the use? You may remove Death's invitation, but can you remove Death, the Inviter?" So, for the present—— Yes, Sire, for the present, let us attend to business.

Business, Vizier! I have no time for business. Send for the Pundit. Send for Sruti-bhushan.

But, Sire, the General—— The General?—No, no, not the General. Send for the Pundit.

But, the news from the frontier—— Vizier, the news has come to me from the last great frontier of all, the frontier of Death. Send for the Pundit.

But if Your Majesty will give me one moment, the Ambassador from the great Emperor of China—— Vizier, a greater Emperor has sent his embassy to me. Call Sruti-bhushan.

Very well, Sire. But your father-in-law—— It is not my father-in-law whom I want now. Send for the Pundit.

But, if it please you to hear me this once. The poet, Kabi-shekhar, is waiting with his new book called the Garden of Poesy.

Let your poet disport himself, jumping about on the topmost branches of his Garden of Poesy, but send for the Pundit.

Very well, Sire. I will send for him at once.

Tell him to bring his book of devotions with him, called the *Ocean of Renunciation*.

Yes, Sire.

But, Vizier. Who are those outside making all that noise? Go out and stop them at once. I must have peace.

If it please Your Majesty, there is a famine in Nagapatam and the headmen of the villages are praying to be allowed to see your face.

My time is short, Vizier. I must have peace.

They say their time is shorter. They are at death's door. They, too, want peace, —peace from the burning of hunger.

Vizier! The burning of hunger is quenched at last on the funeral pyre.

Then these wretched people—— Wretched!—Listen to the advice of a wretched King to his wretched subjects. It is futile to be impatient, and try to break through the net of the inexorable Fisherman. Sooner or later, Death the Fisherman will have his haul.

Well then?

Let me have the Pundit, and his Book of Renunciation.

And in this scarcity—— Vizier! The real scarcity is of time, and not of food. We are all suffering from starvation of time. None of us has enough of it, neither the King, nor his people.

Then—— Then know, that our petitions for more time will all go to the last fire of doom. So why strain our voice in prayer?—Ah, here is Sruti-bhushan at last. My reverence to you.

Pundit, do tell the King that the Goddess of Fortune deserts him who gives way to melancholy.

Sruti-bhushan, what is my Vizier whispering to you?
He tells me, King, to instruct you in the ways of fortune.
What instruction can you give?

There is a verse in my book of devotions which runs as follows: Fortune, as fickle as lotus-flower, Closes her favours when comes the hour.

Oh, foolish man, how can you trust her, Who comes of a sudden, and goes in a fluster?

Ah, Pundit. One breath of your teaching blows out the false flame of ambition. Our teacher has said: "Teeth fall out, hair grows grey; Yet man clings to hope that plays him false."

Well, King, now that you have introduced the subject of hope, let me give you another verse from the *Ocean of Renunciation*. It runs as follows: That fetters are binding, all are aware; But fetters of hope are strange, I declare.

Hope's captive is tossed in the whirlpool's wake, And only grows still when the fetters break.

Ah, Pundit. Your words are priceless. Vizier, give him a hundred gold sequins at once. What's that noise outside?

It is the famine-stricken people.
Tell them to hold their peace.

Let Sruti-bhushan, with his book of devotions, go and try to bring them peace; and, in the meanwhile, Your Majesty might discuss war matters—— No, no. Let the war matters come later. I can't let Sruti-bhushan go yet.

King, you said something to me, a moment ago, about a gift of gold. Now mere gold, by itself, does not confer any permanent benefit. It is said in my book of devotions, called the *Ocean of Renunciation*: He who gives gold, gives only pain; When the gold is spent grief comes again.

When a lakh, or crore, of gold is spent, Grief only remains in the empty tent.

Ah, Pundit. How exquisite. So you don't want any gold, my Master?

No, King, I don't want gold, but something more permanent, which would make your merit permanent also. I should be quite content, if you gave me the living of Kanchanpur. For it is said in the *Renunciation*—— No, Pundit, I quite understand. You needn't quote scripture to support your claim. I understand quite well—Vizier!

Yes, Your Majesty.

See that the rich province of Kanchanpur is settled on the Pundit.—What's the matter now outside there? What are they crying for?

If it please Your Majesty, it is the people.

Why do they cry so repeatedly?

Their cry is repeated, I admit, but the reason remains most monotonously the same. They are starving.

But, King, I must tell you before I forget it. It is the one desire of my wife to make her whole body jingle, from head to foot, in praise of your munificence; but, alas, the sound is too feeble for want of proper ornaments.

I understand you, Pundit. Vizier! Order ornaments from the Court Jeweller for Sruti-bhushan's wife immediately.

And, King, while he is about it, would you tell the Vizier, that we are both of us distracted in our devotions by house-repairs. Let him ask the royal masons to put up a thoroughly well-built house, where we can practise our devotions in peace.

Very well, Pundit.—Vizier!

Yes, Your Majesty.

Give the order at once.

Sire, your treasury is empty. Funds are wanting.

Pooh! That's an old story. I hear that every year. It is your business to increase the funds, and mine to increase the wants. What do you say, Sruti-bhushan?

King, I cannot blame the Vizier. He is looking after your treasures in this world. We are looking after your treasures in the next. So where he sees want, we see wealth. Now, if you would only let me dive deep once more into the *Ocean of Renunciation* you will find it written as follows: That King's coffers are well stored, Where wealth alone on worth is poured.

Pundit, your company is most valuable.

Your Majesty, Sruti-bhushan knows its value to a farthing. Come, Sruti-bhushan, make haste. Let us collect all the wealth you need for your Treasury of Devotion. For wealth has the ugly habit of diminishing fast. If we are not quick about it, little will remain to enable us to observe our renunciation with all splendour.

Yes, Vizier, let us go at once. [To the King.] When he is making such a fuss about a tiny matter like this, it is best to pacify him first and then return to you afterwards.

Pundit, I am afraid that, some day, you will leave my royal protection altogether, and retire to the forest.

King, so long as I find contentment in a King's palace, it is as good as a hermitage for my peace of mind. I must now leave you, King. Vizier, let us go.

[*The Vizier and Pundit go out.*

Oh, dear me! Whatever shall I do? Here's the Poet coming. I am afraid he'll make me break all my good resolutions.—Oh, my grey hairs, cover my ears, so that the Poet's allurements may not enter.

Why, King, what's the matter? I hear you want to send away your Poet.

What have I to do with poets, when poetry brings me this parting message?

What parting message?

Look at this behind my ear. Don't you see it?

See what? Grey hairs? Why, King, don't you worry about that.

Poet, Nature is trying to rub out the green of youth, and to paint everything white.

No, no, King. You haven't understood the artist. On that white ground, Nature will paint new colours.

I don't see any sign of colours yet.

They are all within. In the heart of the white dwell all the colours of the rainbow.

Oh, Poet, do be quiet. You disturb me when you talk like that.

King, if this youth fades, let it fade. Another Queen of Youth is coming. And she is putting a garland of pure white jasmines round your head, in order to be your bride. The wedding festival is being made ready, behind the scene.

Oh, dear, Poet. You will undo everything. Do go away. Ho there, Guard. Go at once and call Sruti-bhushan.

What will you do with him, King, when he comes?

I will compose my mind, and practise my renunciation.

Ah, King, when I heard that news, I came at once. For I can be your companion in this practice of renunciation.

You?

Yes, I, King. We Poets exist for this very purpose. We set men free from their desires.

I don't understand you. You talk in riddles.

What? You don't understand me? And yet you have been reading my poems all this while!—There is renunciation in our words, renunciation in the metre, renunciation in our music. That is why fortune always forsakes us; and we, in turn always forsake fortune. We go about, all day long, initiating the youths in the sacred cult of fortune-forsaking.

What does it say to us?

It says: "Ah, brothers, don't cling to your goods and chattels, And sit ever in the corner of your room.

Come out, come out into the open world.

Come out into the highways of life.

Come out, ye youthful Renouncers."

But, Poet, do you really mean to say that the highway of the open world is the pathway of renunciation?

Why not, King? In the open world all is change, all is life, all is movement. And he who ever moves and journeys with this life-movement, dancing and playing on his flute as he goes, he is the true Renouncer. He is the true disciple of the minstrel Poet.

But how then can I get peace? I must have peace.

Oh, King, we haven't the least desire for peace. We are the Renouncers.

But ought we not to get that treasure, which is said to be never-changing?

No, we don't covet any never-changing treasures. We are the Renouncers.

What do you mean? Oh, dear, Poet, you will undo everything, if you talk like that. You are destroying my peace of mind. Call Sruti-bhushan. Let someone call the Pundit.

What I mean, King, is this. We are the true Renouncers, because change is our very secret. We lose, in order to find. We have no faith in the never-changing.

What do you mean?

Haven't you noticed the detachment of the rushing river, as it runs splashing from its mountain cave? It gives itself away so swiftly, and only thus it finds itself. What is never-changing, for the river, is the desert sand, where it loses its course.

Ah, but listen, Poet—listen to those cries there outside. That is your world. How do you deal with that?

King, they are your starving people.

My people, Poet? Why do you call them that? They are the world's people, not mine. Have I created their miseries? What can your youthful Poet Renouncers do to relieve sufferings like theirs? Tell me that.

King, it is we alone who can truly bear those sufferings, because we are like the river that flows on in gladness, thus lightening our burden, and the burden of the world. But the hard, metal led road is fixed and never-changing. And so it makes the burden more burdensome. The heavy loads groan and creak along it, and cut deep gashes in its breast. We Poets call to everyone to carry all their joys

and sorrows lightly, in a rhythmic measure. Our call is the Renouncers' call.

Ah, Poet, now I don't care a straw for Sruti-bhushan. Let the Pundit go hang. But, do you know what my trouble is now? Though I can't, for the life of me, understand your words, the music haunts me. Now, it's just the other way round with the Pundit. His words are clear enough, and they obey the rules of syntax quite correctly. But the tune!—No, it's no use telling you any further.

King, our words don't speak, they sing.

Well, Poet, what do you want to do now?

King, I'm going to have a race through those cries, which are rising outside your gate.

What do you mean? Famine relief is for men of business. Poets oughtn't to have anything to do with things like that.

King, business men always make their business so out of tune. That is why we Poets hasten to tune it.

Now come, my dear Poet, do speak in plainer language.

King, they work, because they must. We work, because we are in love with life. That is why they condemn us as unpractical, and we condemn them as lifeless.

But who is right, Poet? Who wins? You, or they?

We, King, we. We always win.

But, Poet, your proof—— King, the greatest things in the world disdain proof. But if you could for a time wipe out all the poets and all their poetry from the world, then you would soon discover, by their very absence, where the men of action got their energy from, and who really supplied the life-sap to their harvest-field. It is not those who have plunged deep down into the Pundit's Ocean of Renunciation, nor those who are always clinging to their possessions; it is not those who have become adepts in turning out quantities of work, nor those who are ever telling the dry beads of duty,—it is not these who win at last. But it is those who love, because they live. These truly win, for they truly surrender. They accept pain with all their strength and with all their strength they remove pain. It is they who create, because they know the secret of true joy, which is the secret of detachment.

Well then, Poet, if that be so, what do you ask me to do now?

I ask you, King, to rise up and move. That cry outside yonder is the cry of life to life. And if the life within you is not stirred, in response to that call without, then there is cause for anxiety indeed,—not because duty has been neglected, but because you are dying.

But, Poet, surely we must die, sooner or later?

No, King, that's a lie. When we feel for certain that we are alive, then we know for certain that we shall go on living. Those who have never put life to the test, in all possible ways, these keep on crying out: Life is fleeting, Life is waning, Life is like a dew-drop on a lotus leaf.

But, isn't life inconstant?

Only because its movement is unceasing. The moment you stop this movement, that moment you begin to play the drama of Death.

Poet, are you speaking the truth? Shall we really go on living?

Yes, we shall really go on living.

Then, Poet, if we are going to go on living, we must make our life worth its eternity. Is not that so?

Yes, indeed.

Ho, Guard.

Yes, Your Royal Highness.

Call the Vizier at once.

Yes, Your Royal Highness.

Vizier enters.

What is Your Majesty's pleasure?

Vizier! Why on earth have you kept me waiting so long?

I was very busy, Your Majesty.

Busy? What were you busy about?

I was dismissing the General.

Why should you dismiss the General? We have got to discuss war matters with him.

And arrangements had to be made for the state-departure of the Chinese Ambassador.

What do you mean by his state-departure?

If it please Your Majesty, you did not grant him an interview. So he——Vizier! You surprise me. Is this the way you manage state affairs? What has happened to you? Have you lost your senses?

Then, again. Sire, I was trying to find a way to pull down the Poet's house. At first, no one would undertake it. Then, at last, all the Pundits of the Royal School of Grammar and Logic came up with their proper tools and set to work.

Vizier! Are you mad this morning? Pull down the Poet's house? Why, you might as well kill all the birds in the garden and make them up into a pie.

If it please Your Majesty, you need not be annoyed. We shan't have to pull down the house after all; for the moment Sruti-bhushan heard it was to be demolished, he decided to take possession of it himself.

What, Vizier! That's worse still. Why! The Goddess of Music would break her harp in pieces against my head, if she even heard of such a thing. No, that can't be.

Then, Your Majesty, there was another thing to be got through. We had to deliver over the province of Kanchanpur to the Pundit.

No, Vizier! What a mess you are making. That must go to our Poet.

To me, King? No. My poetry never accepts reward.

Well, well. Let the Pundit have it.

And, last of all, Sire. I have issued orders to the soldiers to disperse the crowd of famine-stricken people.

Vizier, you are doing nothing but blunder. The best way to disperse the famished people is with food, not force.

Guard enters.

May it please Your Royal Highness.

What's the matter, Guard?

May it please Your Royal Highness, here is Sruti-bhushan, the Pundit, coming back with his Book of Devotions.

Oh, stop him, Vizier, stop him. He will undo everything. Don't let him come upon me unawares like this. In a moment of weakness, I may suddenly find myself out of my depths in the Ocean of Renunciation. Poet! Don't give me time for that. Do something. Do anything. Have you got anything ready to hand? Any play toward? Any poem? Any masque? Any—— Yes, King. I have got the very thing. But whether it is a drama, or a poem, or a play, or a masque, I cannot say.

Shall I be able to understand the sense of what you have written?

No, King, what a poet writes is not meant to have any sense.

What then?

To have the tune itself.

What do you mean? Is there no philosophy in it?

No, none at all, thank goodness.

What does it say, then?

King, it says "I exist." Don't you know the meaning of the first cry of the new-born child? The child, when it is born, hears at once the cries of the earth and water and sky, which surround him,—and they all cry to him, "We exist," and

his tiny little heart responds, and cries out in its turn, "I exist." My poetry is like the cry of that new-born child. It is a response to the cry of the Universe.

Is it nothing more than that, Poet?

No, nothing more. There is life in my song, which cries, "In joy and in sorrow, in work and in rest, in life and in death, in victory and in defeat, in this world and in the next, all hail to the 'I exist.'"

Well, Poet, I can assure you, if your play hasn't got any philosophy in it, it won't pass muster in these days.

That's true, King. The newer people, of this modern age, are more eager to amass than to realize. They are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light.

Whom shall we ask, then, for an audience? Shall we ask the young students of our royal school?

No, King, they cut up poetry with their logic. They are like the young-horned deer trying their new horns on the flower-beds.

Whom should I ask, then?

Ask those whose hair is turning grey.

What do you mean, Poet?

The youth of these middle-aged people is a youth of detachment. They have just crossed the waters of pleasure, and are in sight of the land of pure gladness. They don't want to eat fruit, but to produce it.

I, at least, have now reached that age of discretion, and ought to be able to appreciate your songs. Shall I ask the General?

Yes, ask him.

And the Chinese Ambassador?

Yes, ask him too.

I hear my father-in-law has come.

Well, ask him too, but I have my doubts about his youthful sons.

But don't forget his daughter.

Don't worry about her. She won't let herself be forgotten.

And Sruti-bhushan? Shall I ask him?

No, King, no. Decidedly, no. I have no grudge against him. Why should I inflict this on him?

Very well, Poet. Off with you. Make your stage preparations.

No, King. We are going to act this play without any special preparations. Truth looks tawdry when she is overdressed.

But, Poet, there must be some canvas for a background.

No. Our only background is the mind. On that we shall summon up a picture with the magic wand of music.

Are there any songs in the play?

Yes, King. The door of each act will be opened by the key of song.

What is the subject of the songs?

The Disrobing of Winter.

But, Poet, we haven't read about that in any Mythology.

In the world-myth this song comes round in its turn. In the play of the seasons, each year, the mask of the Old Man, Winter, is pulled off, and the form of Spring is revealed in all its beauty. Thus we see that the old is ever new.

Well, Poet, so much for the songs: but what about the remainder?

Oh, that is all about life.

Life? What is life?

This is how it runs: A band of young companions has run off in pursuit of one Old Man. They have taken a vow to catch him. They enter into a cave; they take hold of him, and then—— Then, what? What did they see?

Ah. That will be told in its own good time.

But, I haven't understood one thing. Your drama and your songs,—have they different subjects, or the same?

The same, King. The play of Spring in nature is the counterpart of the play of Youth in our lives. It is simply from the lyrical drama of the World Poet that I have stolen this plot.

Who, then, are the chief characters?

One is called the Leader.

Who is he, Poet?

He is the guiding impulse in our life. Another is Chandra.

Who is he?

He who makes life dear to us.

And who else?

Then there is Dada, to whom duty is the essence of life, not joy.

Is there anyone else?

Yes, the blind Minstrel.

Blind?

Because he does not see with his eyes, therefore he sees with his whole body and mind and soul.

Who else is there, in your play, among the chief actors?

You are there, King.

I?

Yes, you, King. For if you stayed out of it, instead of coming into it, then the King would begin to abuse the Poet and send for Sruti-bhushan again. And then there would be no hope of salvation for him. For the World Poet himself would be defeated. And the South Wind of Spring would have to retire, without receiving its homage.

Act I

.....

The Heralds of Spring are abroad. There are songs in the rustling bamboo leaves, in birds' nests, and in blossoming branches.

Song-Prelude The purple secondary curtain ¹ goes up, disclosing the elevated rear stage with a skyey background of dark blue, on which appear the horn of the crescent moon and the silver points of stars. Trees in the foreground, with two rope swings entwined with garlands of flowers. Flowers everywhere in profusion. On the extreme left the mouth of a dark cavern dimly seen. Boys representing the "Bamboo" disclosed, swinging.

1. Neither the secondary curtain nor the drop is again used during the play. The action is continuous, either on the front stage, or on the rear stage, the latter being darkened when not actually in use.

SONG OF THE BAMBOO

O South Wind, the Wanderer, come and rock me, Rouse me into the rapture of new leaves.

I am the wayside bamboo tree, waiting for your breath To tingle life into my branches.

O South Wind, the Wanderer, my dwelling is in the end of the lane.

I know your wayfaring, and the language of your footsteps.

Your least touch thrills me out of my slumber, Your whisper gleans my secrets.

Enter a troop of girls, dancing, representing birds.

SONG OF THE BIRD

The sky pours its light into our hearts, We fill the sky with songs in answer.

*We pelt the air with our notes When the air stirs our wings with its madness.
O Flame of the Forest, All your flower-torches are ablaze; You have kissed
our songs red with the passion of your youth.
In the spring breeze the mango-blossoms launch their messages to the
unknown And the new leaves dream aloud all day.
O Sirish, you have cast your perfume-net round our hearts, Drawing them
out in songs.
[Disclosed among the branches of trees, suddenly lighted up, boys representing
champak blossoms.*

SONG OF THE BLOSSOMING CHAMPAK

*My shadow dances in your waves, ever flowing river, I, the blossoming
champak, stand unmoved on the bank, with my flower-vigils.
My movement dwells in the stillness of my depth, In the delicious birth of new
leaves, In flood of flowers, In unseen urge of new life towards the light.
Its stirring thrills the sky, and the silence of the dawn is moved.*

**Morning The rear stage is now darkened. On the main stage, bright,
enter a band of youths whose number may be anything between three
and thirty. They sing.**

*The fire of April leaps from forest to forest, Flashing up in leaves and flowers
from all nooks and corners.
The sky is thriftless with colours, The air delirious with songs.
The wind-tost branches of the woodland Spread their unrest in our blood.
The air is filled with bewilderment of mirth; And the breeze rushes from
flower to flower, asking their names.
[In the following dialogue only the names of the principal characters are given.
Wherever the name is not given the speaker is one or other of the Youths.*

April pulls hard, brother, April pulls very hard.

How do you know that?

If he didn't, he would never have pulled Dada outside his den.

Well, I declare. Here is Dada, our cargo-boat of moral-maxims, towed against
the current of his own pen and ink.

CHANDRA : But you mustn't give April all the credit for that. For I, Chandra, have
hidden the yellow leaves of his manuscript book among the young buds of the

pail forest, and Dada is out looking for it.

The manuscript book banished! What a good riddance!

We ought to strip off Dada's grey philosopher's cloak also.

CHANDRA : Yes, the very dust of the earth is tingling with youth, and yet there's not a single touch of Spring in the whole of Dada's body.

DADA : Oh, do stop this fooling. What a nuisance you are making of yourselves! We aren't children any longer.

CHANDRA : Dada, the age of this earth is scarcely less than yours; and yet it is not ashamed to look fresh.

Dada, you are always struggling with those quatrains of yours, full of advice that is as old as death, while the earth and the water are ever striving to be new.

Dada, how in the world can you go on writing verses like that, sitting in your den?

DADA : Well, you see, I don't cultivate poetry, as an amateur gardener cultivates flowers. My poems have substance and weight in them.

Yes, they are like the turnips, which cling to the ground.

DADA : Well, then, listen to me—— How awful! Here's Dada going to run amuck with his quatrains.

Oh dear, oh dear! The quatrains are let loose. There's no holding them in.

To all passers-by I give notice that Dada's quatrains have gone mad, and are running amuck.

CHANDRA : Dada! Don't take any notice of their fun. Go on with your reading. If no one else can survive it, I think I can. I am not a coward like these fellows.

Come on, then, Dada. We won't be cowards. We will keep our ground, and not yield an inch, but only listen.

We will receive the spear-thrusts of the quatrains on our breast, not on our back. But for pity's sake, Dada, give us only one—not more.

DADA : Very well. Now listen: If bamboos were made only into flutes, They would droop and die with very shame, They hold their heads high in the sky, Because they are variously useful.

Please, gentlemen, don't laugh. Have patience while I explain. The meaning is
— The meaning?

What? Must the infantry charge of meaning follow the cannonading of your quatrains, to complete the rout?

DADA : Just one word to make you understand. It means, that if the bamboos were no better than those noisy instruments—— No, Dada, we must not understand.

I defy you to make us understand.

Dada, if you use force to make us understand we shall use force to force ourselves not to understand.

DADA : The gist of the quatrain is this, that if we do no good to the world, then
— Then the world will be very greatly relieved.

DADA : There is another verse that makes it clearer: There are numerous stars in the midnight sky, Which hang in the air for no purpose; If they would only come down to earth, For the street lighting they might be useful.

I see we must make clearer our meaning. Catch him. Let's raise him up, shoulder high, and take him back to his den.

DADA : Why are you so excited today? Have you any particular business to do?
Yes, we have very urgent business,—very urgent indeed.

DADA : What is your business about?

We are out to seek a play for our spring festival.

DADA : Play! Day and night, play!

[*They sing.*

We are free, my friends, from the fear of work, For we know that work is play,—the play of life.

It is Play, to fight and toss, between life and death; It is Play that flashes in the laughter of light in the infinite heart; It roars in the wind, and surges in the sea.

Oh, here comes our Leader. Brothers—our Leader, our Leader.

LEADER : Hallo! What a noise you make!

Was it that which made you come out of doors?

LEADER : Yes.

Well, we did it for that very purpose.

LEADER : You don't want me to remain indoors?

Why remain indoors? This outer world has been made with a lavish expenditure of sun and moon and stars. Let us enjoy it, and then we can save God's face for indulging in such extravagance.

LEADER : What were you discussing?

This: [*They sing.*

Play blooms in flower and ripens in fruit In the sunshine of eternal youth.

Play bursts up in the blood-red fire, and licks into ashes the decaying and the dead.

Our Dada's objection was about this play.

DADA : Shall I tell you the reason why?

Yes, Dada, you may tell us, but we shan't promise to listen.

DADA : Here it is: Time is the capital of work, And Play is its defalcation.

Play rifles the house, and then wastes its spoil, Therefore the wise call it worse than useless.

CHANDRA : But surely, Dada, you are talking nonsense. Time itself is Play. Its only object is Pas-time.

DADA : Then what is Work?

CHANDRA : Work is the dust raised by the passing of Time.

DADA : Leader, you must give us your answers.

LEADER : No. I never give answers. I lead on from one question to another. That is my leadership.

DADA : Everything else has its limits, but your childishness is absolutely unbounded.

Do you know the reason? It is because we are really nothing but children. And everything else has its limitations except the child.

DADA : Won't you ever attain Age?

No, we shall never attain Age.

We shall die old, but never attain Age.

CHANDRA : When we meet Age, we shall shave his head, and put him on a donkey, and send him across the river.

Oh, you can save yourself the trouble of shaving his head for Age is bald.

[They sing.

Our hair shall never turn grey, Never.

There is no blank in this world for us, no break in our road, It may be an illusion that we follow, But it shall never play us false, Never.

[The Leader sings.

Our hair shall never turn grey, Never.

We will never doubt the world and shut our eyes to ponder.

Never.

We will not grope in the maze of our mind.

We flow with the flood of things, from the mountain to the sea, We will never be lost in the desert sand, Never.

We can tell, by his looks, that Dada will someday go to that Old Man, to receive his lessons.

LEADER : Which Old Man?

The Old Man of the line of Adam.

He dwells in a cave, and never thinks of dying.

LEADER : Where did you learn about him?

Oh, everyone talks about him, And it is in the books also.

LEADER : What does he look like?

Some say he is white, like the skull of a dead man. And some say he is dark, like the socket of a skeleton's eye.

But haven't you heard any news of him, Leader?

LEADER : I don't believe in him at all.

Well, that goes entirely against current opinion. That Old Man is more existent than anything else. He lives within the ribs of creation.

According to our Pundit, it is we who have no existence. You can't be certain whether we are, or are not.

CHANDRA : We? Oh, we are too brand new altogether. We haven't yet got our credentials to prove that we exist.

LEADER : Have you really gone and opened communication with the Pundits?

Why? What harm is there in that, Leader?

LEADER : You will become pale, like the white mist in autumn. Even the least colour of blood will disappear from your mind. I have a suggestion.

What, Leader? What?

LEADER : You were looking out for a play?

Yes, yes, we got quite frantic about it.

We thought it over so vigorously, that people had to run to the King's court to lodge a complaint.

LEADER : Well, I can suggest a play which will be new.

What?—What?—Tell us.

LEADER : Go and capture the Old Man.

That is new, no doubt, but we very much doubt if it's a play.

LEADER : I am sure you won't be able to do it.

Not do it? We shall.

LEADER : No, never.

Well then, suppose we do capture him, what will you give us?

LEADER : I shall accept you as my preceptor.

Preceptor! You want to make us grey, and cold, and old, before our time.

LEADER : Then, what do you want me to do?

If we capture him, then we shall take away your leadership.

LEADER : That will be a great relief to me. You have made all my bones out of joint already. Very well, then it's all settled?

Yes, settled. We shall bring him to you by the next full moon of spring.

But what are we going to do with him?

LEADER : You shall let him join in your Spring Festival.

Oh no, that will be outrageous. Then the mango flowers will run to seed at once.

And all the cuckoos will become owls.

And the bees will go about reciting Sanskrit verses, making the air hum with m's and n's.

LEADER : And your skull will be so top-heavy with prudence, that it will be difficult for you to keep on your feet.

How awful!

LEADER : And you will have rheumatics in all your joints.

How awful!

LEADER : And you will become your own elder brothers, pulling your own ears to set yourselves right.

How awful!

LEADER : And—— No more “ands.” We are ready to surrender.

We will abandon our game of capturing the Old Man.

We will put it off till the cold weather. In this springtime, your company will be enough for us.

LEADER : Ah, I see! You have already got the chill of the Old Man in your bones.

Why? What are the symptoms?

LEADER : You have no enthusiasm. You back out at the very start. Why don't you make a trial?

Very well. Agreed. Come on.

Let us go after the Old Man. We will pluck him out, like a grey hair, wherever we find him.

LEADER : But the Old Man is an adept in the business of plucking out. His best weapon is the hoe.

You needn't try to frighten us like that. When we are out for adventure, we must leave behind all fears, all quatrains, all Pundits, and all Scriptures.

[They sing.

We are out on our way And we fear not the Robber, the Old Man.

*Our path is straight, it is broad, Our burden is light, for our pocket is bare,
Who can rob us of our folly?*

*For us there is no rest, nor ease, nor praise, nor success, We dance in the
measure of fortune's rise and fall, We play our game, or win or lose, And we
fear not the Robber.*

Act II

.....

Song-Prelude Spring's Heralds try to rob Winter of his outfit of age.

Rear stage lighted up, disclosing Old Winter teased by the boys and girls representing Spring's Heralds.

SONG OF THE HERALDS OF SPRING

*We seek our playmates, Waking them up from all corners before it is morning.
We call them in bird songs, Beckon them in nodding branches.
We spread our spell for them in the splendour of clouds.
We laugh at solemn Death Till he joins in our laughter.
We tear open Time's purse, Taking back his plunder from him.
You shall lose your heart to us, O Winter.
It will gleam in the trembling leaves And break into flowers.*

SONG OF WINTER

*Leave me, let me go.
I sail for the bleak North, for the peace of the frozen shore.
Your laughter is untimely, my friends.
You turn my farewell tunes into the welcome song of the Newcomer, And all things draw me back again into the dancing ring of their hearts.*

SONG OF THE HERALDS OF SPRING

*Life's spies are we, lurking in ambush everywhere.
We wait to rob you of your last savings of withered hours to scatter them in the wayward winds.
We shall bind you in flower chains where Spring keeps his captives, For we know you carry your jewels of youth hidden in your grey rags.*

Noon The rear stage is darkened. The band of Youths enters on the main stage. No actual change in the scenery is necessary—this being left to the imagination of the audience.

Ferryman! Ferryman! Open your door.

FERRYMAN : What do you want?

We want the Old Man.

FERRYMAN : Which old man?

Not which old man. We want the Old Man.

FERRYMAN : Who is he?

The true and original Old Man.

FERRYMAN : Oh! I understand. What do you want him for?

For our Spring Festival.

FERRYMAN : For your Spring Festival? Are you become mad?

Not a sudden becoming. We have been like this from the beginning.

And we shall go on like this to the end.

[*They sing.*

The Piper pipes in the centre, hidden from sight.

And we become frantic, we dance.

The March wind, seized with frenzy, Runs and reels, and sways with noisy branches.

The sun and stars are drawn in the whirl of rapture.

Now, Ferryman, give us news of the Old Man.

You play your boat from one landing stage to another. Surely you know where

— FERRYMAN : My business is limited only to the path. But whose path it is, and what it means, I have no occasion to enquire. For my goal is the landing-stage, not the house.

Very well. Let us go, let us try all the ways. [*They sing.*

The Piper pipes in the centre, hidden from sight.

Ah, the turbulent tune, to whose time the oceans dance, And dance our heaving hearts.

Fling away all burdens and cares, brother, Do not be doubtful of your path, For the path wakes up of itself Under the dancing steps of freedom.

FERRYMAN : There comes the Watchman. Ask him. I know about the way; but he

knows about the wayfarers.

WATCHMAN : Who are you?

We are just what you see. That's our only description.

WATCHMAN : But what do you want?

We want the Old Man.

WATCHMAN : Which old man?

That eternal Old Man.

WATCHMAN : How absurd! While you are seeking him, he is after you.

Why?

WATCHMAN : He is fond of warming his cold blood with the wine of hot youth.

We'll give him a warm enough reception. All we want is to see him. Have you seen him?

WATCHMAN : My watch is at night. I see my people, but don't know their features. But, look here, everyone knows that he is the great kidnapper; and you want to kidnap him! It's midsummer madness.

The secret is out. It doesn't take long to discover that we are mad.

WATCHMAN : I am the Watchman. The people I see passing along the road are all very much alike. Therefore, when I see anything queer, it always strikes me.

Just listen to him. All the respectable people of our neighbourhood say just the same thing—that we are queer.

Yes, we're queer. There's no mistake about that.

WATCHMAN : But all this is utter childishness.

Do you hear that? It's exactly what our Dada says.

We have been going on with our childishness through unremembered ages.

And now we have become confirmed children.

And we have a leader, who is a perfect veteran in childhood. He rushes along so recklessly, that he drops off his age at every step he runs.

WATCHMAN : And who are you?

We are butterflies, freed from the cocoon of Age.

WATCHMAN : [Aside] Mad. Raving mad.

FERRYMAN : Then what will you all do now?

CHANDRA : We shall go—— WATCHMAN : Where?

CHANDRA : That we haven't decided.

WATCHMAN : You have decided to go, but not where to go?

CHANDRA : Yes, that will be settled as we go along.

WATCHMAN : What does that mean?

CHANDRA : It means this song.

[They sing.

We move and move without rest, We move while the wanderers' stars shine in the sky and fade.

We play the tune of the road While our limbs scatter away the laughter of movement, And our many-coloured mantle of youth flutters about in the air.

WATCHMAN : Is it your custom to answer questions by songs?

CHANDRA : Yes, otherwise the answer becomes too unintelligible.

WATCHMAN : Then you think your songs intelligible?

CHANDRA : Yes, quite, because they contain music. [They sing.

We move and move without rest.

World, the Rover, loves his comrades of the road.

His call comes across the sky.

The seasons lead the way, strewing the path with flowers.

WATCHMAN : No ordinary being ever breaks out singing, like this, in the middle of talking.

CHANDRA : Again we are found out. We are no ordinary beings.

WATCHMAN : Have you got no work to do?

CHANDRA : No, we are on a holiday.

WATCHMAN : Why?

CHANDRA : Lest our time should all be wasted.

WATCHMAN : I don't quite understand you.

CHANDRA : Then we shall be obliged to sing again.

WATCHMAN : No, no. There's no need to do that. I don't hope to understand you any better, even if you do sing.

CHANDRA : Everybody has given up the hope of understanding us.

WATCHMAN : But how can things get on with you, if you behave like this?

CHANDRA : Oh, there's no need for things to get on with us, so long as we ourselves get on.

WATCHMAN : Mad! Quite mad! Raving mad!

CHANDRA : Why, here comes our Dada.

Dada, what made you lag behind?

CHANDRA : Don't you know? We are free as the wind, because we have no substance in us. But Dada is like the rain-cloud of August. He must stop, every now and then, to unburden himself.

DADA : Who are you?

FERRYMAN : I am the Ferryman.

DADA : And who are you?

WATCHMAN : I am the Watchman.

DADA : I am delighted to see you. I want to read you something that I have written. It contains nothing frivolous, but only the most important lessons.

FERRYMAN : Very good. Let us have it then.

WATCHMAN : Our master used to tell us that there are plenty of men to say good things, but very few to listen. That requires strength of mind. Now, go on, Sir, go on.

DADA : I saw, in the street, one of the King's officers dragging along a merchant. The King had made up a false charge, in order to get his money. This gave me an inspiration. You must know that I never write a single line which is not inspired by some actual fact. You can put my verses to the test in the open streets and markets—— FERRYMAN : Please, Sir, do let us hear what you have written.

DADA : *The sugar-cane filling itself with juice Is chewed and sucked dry by all beggars.*

O foolish men, take your lesson from this; Those trees are saved, which are fruitful.

You will understand that the sugar-cane gets into trouble, simply because it tries to keep its juice. But nobody is so foolish as to kill the tree that freely gives fruit.

WATCHMAN : What splendid writing, Ferryman!

FERRYMAN : Yes, Watchman, it contains great lessons for us.

WATCHMAN : It gives me food for thought. If only I had here our neighbour, the Scribe! I should like to take this down. Do send round to tell the people of the place to assemble.

CHANDRA : But, Ferryman, you promised to come out with us. Yet, if once Dada begins to quote his quatrains, there will be—— FERRYMAN : Go along with you. None of your madness here. We are fortunate now in having met our master. Let us improve the occasion with good words. We are all of us getting old. Who knows when we shall die?

All the more reason why you should cultivate our company.

CHANDRA : You can always find another Dada. But when once we are dead, God will never repeat the blunder of another absurdity like us again.

Enter OILMAN.

OILMAN : Ho! Watchman.

WATCHMAN : Who is there? Is that the Oilman?

OILMAN : The child I was bringing up was kidnapped last night.

WATCHMAN : By whom?

OILMAN : By the Old Man.

YOUTHS : [Together.] Old Man? You don't mean it. Old Man?

OILMAN : Yes, Sirs, the Old Man; what makes you so glad?

Oh, that's a bad habit of ours. We become glad for no reason whatever.

WATCHMAN : [Aside.] Mad! Raving mad! Have you seen the Old Man?

OILMAN : I think I saw him in the distance last night.

First Youth : What did he look like?

OILMAN : Black. More black than our brother here, the Watchman. Black as night, with two eyes on his breast shining like two glow-worms.

That won't suit us. That would be awkward for our Spring Festival.

CHANDRA : We shall have to change our date from the full moon to the dark moon. For the dark moon has no end of eyes on her breast.

WATCHMAN : But I warn you, my friends, you are not doing wisely.

No, we are not.

We are found out again. We never do anything wisely. It is contrary to our habit.

WATCHMAN : Do you take this to be a joke? I warn you, my friends, it is dangerous.

Dangerous? That's the best joke of all.

[They sing.

We are neither too good nor wise, That is all the merit we have.

Our calumny spreads from land to land, And danger dogs our steps.

*We take great care to forget what is taught us, We say things different from
the book, Bringing upon us trouble, And rebuke from the learned.*

WATCHMAN : Ah, Sir, you spoke about some Leader. Where is he? He could have kept you in order, if he were with you.

He never stays with us, lest he should have to keep us in order.

He simply launches us on our way, and then slips off.

WATCHMAN : That's a poor idea of leadership.

CHANDRA : He is never concerned about his leadership. That is why we recognize him as our Leader.

WATCHMAN : Then he has got a very easy task.

CHANDRA : It is no easy task to lead men. But it is easy enough to drive them.

[They sing.

We are not too good nor wise, That is all the merit we have.

In a luckless moment we were born, When the star of wisdom was the dimmest.

We can hope for no profit from our adventures, We move on, because we must.

Dada, come on. Let us go.

WATCHMAN : No, no, Sir. Don't you get yourself into mischief in their company.

FERRYMAN : You read your verses, Sir, to us. Our neighbours will be here soon. They will be greatly profited.

DADA : No. I'm not going to move a step from here.

Then let us move. The men in the street can't bear us.

That's because we rattle them too much.

You hear the hum of human bees, they smell the honey of Dada's quatrains.

YOUTHS : [Together.] They come! They come!

Enter Village folk.

VILLAGER : Is it true that there is going to be a reading?

Who are you? Are you going to read?

No. We commit all kinds of atrocities, but not that. This one merit will bring us salvation.

VILLAGER : What do they say? They seem to be talking in riddles.

CHANDRA : We only say things which we perfectly understand ourselves, and they are riddles to you. Dada repeats to you things which you understand perfectly and these sound to you the very essence of wisdom.

BOY Enters.

BOY : I couldn't catch him.

Whom?

BOY : The Old Man, whom you are seeking.

Have you seen him?

BOY : Yes, I thought I saw him going by in a car.

Where? In what direction?

BOY : I couldn't make out exactly. The dust raised by his wheels is still whirling in the air.

Then let us go.

He has filled the sky with dead leaves.

[*They go out.*

WATCHMAN : They are mad! Quite mad! Raving mad!

Act III

.....

Song-Prelude Winter is being unmasks—his hidden youth about to be disclosed.

The rear stage lighted up, disclosing Winter and the Heralds of Spring.

SONG OF THE HERALDS OF SPRING

How grave he looks, how laughably old, How solemnly quiet among death preparations!

Come, friends, help him to find himself before he reaches home.

Change his pilgrim's robe into the dress of the singing youth, Snatch away his bag of dead things And confound his calculations.

[Another group sings.

The time comes when the world shall know that you're not banished in your own shadows; Your heart shall burst in torrents Out of the clasp of the ice; And your North wind turn its face Against the haunts of the flitting phantoms. There sounds the magician's drum, And the sun waits with laughter in his glance, To see your grey turn into green.

Evening The rear stage is darkened; the light on the main stage dimmed to the greyness of dark.

BAND OF YOUTHS : They all cry, "There, there," and when we look for it, we find nothing but dust and dry leaves.

I thought I had a glimpse of the flag on his car through the cloud.

It is difficult to follow his track. Now it seems East: now it seems West.

And so we are tired, chasing shadows all day long. And the day has been lost.

I tell you the truth. Fear comes more and more into my mind, as the day passes.

We have made a mistake. The morning light whispered in our ears, "Bravo, march on." And now, the evening light is mocking us for that.

I am afraid we have been deceived. I am beginning to feel greater respect for Dada's quatrains than before. We shall all be soon sitting down on the ground composing quatrains.

And then the whole neighbourhood will come, swarming round us. And they will get such immense benefit from our wisdom that they will never leave us.

And we shall settle down like a great big boulder, cold and immovable.

And they will cling to us, as we sit there, like a thick fog.

What would our Leader think of us, I wonder, if he could hear us now?

I am sure it is our Leader, who has led us astray. He makes us toil for nothing, while he himself remains idle.

Let us go back and fight with him. We will tell him that we won't move a step further, but sit with our legs tucked under us. These legs are wretched vagabonds. They are always trudging the road.

We will keep our hands fast behind our backs.

There is no mischief in the back; all the trouble is in the front.

Of all our limbs, the back is the most truthful. It says to us, "Lie down."

When we are young, that braggart breast is a great swell; but, in the end, we can only rely on our back.

The little stream that flows past our village comes to my mind. That morning we thought that it said to us, "Forward! Forward!" But what it really said was, "False! False!" The world is all false.

Our Pundit used to tell us that.

We shall go straight to the Pundit, when we get back.

We shall never stir one step outside the limit of the Pundit's Scriptures.

What a mistake we made. We thought that moving itself was something heroic.

But really not to move, that is heroic, because it is defying the whole moving world.

Brave rebels that we are, we shall not move. We shall have the audacity to sit still, and never move an inch.

"Life and youth are fleeting," the Scripture says. Let life and youth go to the dogs, we shall not move.

"Our minds and wealth are fleeting," adds the Scripture. "Give them up and sit still," say we.

Let us go back to the point from which we started.

But that would be to move.

What then?

There sit down, where we have come to.

And let us imagine that there we had been before we ever came there.

Yes, yes, that will keep our minds still. If we know that we have come from somewhere else, then the mind longs for that somewhere else.

That land of somewhere else is a very dangerous place.

There the ground moves, and also the roads. But as for us—— [They sing.]

*We cling to our seats and never stir, We allow our flowers to fade in peace,
and avoid the trouble of bearing fruit.*

Let the starlights blazon their eternal folly, We quench our flames.

Let the forest rustle and the ocean roar, We sit mute.

Let the call of the flood-tide come from the sea, We remain still.

Do you hear that laughter?

Yes, yes, it is laughter.

What a relief! We have never heard that sound for an age.

We had been choking, for want of the breath of laughter.

This laughter comes to us like the April rain.

Whose is it?

Cannot you guess? It is our Chandra.

What a marvellous gift of laughter he has! It is like a waterfall. It dashes all the black stones out of the path.

It is like sunlight. It cuts the mist to pieces with its sword.

Now all danger of quatrain fever is over. Let us get up.

From this moment there will be nothing but work for us. As the Scripture says, “Everything in this world is fleeting, and he only lives who does his duty and achieves fame.”

Why are you quoting that? Are you still suffering from the quatrain fever?

What do you mean by fame? Does the river take any heed of its foam? Fame is that foam on life’s stream.

Enter CHANDRA with a blind MINSTREL.

Well, Chandra, what makes you so glad?

CHANDRA : I have got the track of the Old Man.

From whom?

CHANDRA : From this old Minstrel.

He seems to be blind.

CHANDRA : Yes, that is why he has not got to seek the road.

What do you say? Shall you be able to lead us right?

MINSTREL : Yes.

But how?

MINSTREL : Because I can hear the footsteps.

We also have ears, but—— MINSTREL : I hear with my whole being.

CHANDRA : They all started up with fear, when I asked about the Old Man. Only this Minstrel seemed to have no fear. I suppose because he cannot see, he is not afraid.

MINSTREL : Do you know why I have no fear? When the sun of my life set, and I became blind, the dark night revealed all its lights, and, from that day forward, I have been no more afraid of the dark.

Then let us go. The evening star is up.

MINSTREL : Let me sing, and walk on as I sing, and you follow me. I cannot find my way, if I do not sing.

What do you mean?

MINSTREL : My songs precede, I follow.

[*He sings.*

Gently, my friend, gently walk to your silent chamber.

I know not the way, I have not the light, Dark is my life and my world.

I have only the sound of your steps to guide me in this wilderness.

Gently, my friend, gently walk along the dark shore.

Let the hint of the way come in whisper, Through the night, in the April breeze.

I have only the scent of your garland to guide me in this wilderness.

Act IV

Song-Prelude There enter a troupe of young things, and they introduce themselves in a song as follows:

THE SONG OF RETURNING YOUTH

*Again and again we say “Good-bye, “
To come back again and again.
Oh, who are you?
I am the flower vakul.
And who are you?
I am the flower parul.
And who are these?
We are mango blossoms landed on the shore of light.
We laugh and take leave when the time beckons us.
We rush into the arms of the ever-returning.
But who are you?
I am the flower shimul.
And who are you?
I am the kamini bunch, And who are these?
We are the jostling crowd of new leaves.
[Winter is revealed as Spring and answers to the questions put by the chorus of
young things.*

THE SONG OF BURDENS DROPPED

*Do you own defeat at the hand of youth?
Yes.
Have you met at last the ageless Old, who ever grows new?
Yes.*

Have you come out of the walls that crumble and bury those whom they shelter?

Yes.

[*Another group sings.*

Do you own defeat at the hands of life?

Yes.

Have you passed through death to stand at last face to face with the Deathless?

Yes.

Have you dealt the blow to the demon dust, that swallows your city Immortal?

Yes.

[*Spring's flowers surround him and sing.*

THE SONG OF FRESH BEAUTY

We waited by the wayside counting moments till you appeared in the April morning.

You come as a soldier-boy winning life at death's gate,— Oh, the wonder of it.

We listen amazed at the music of your young voice.

Your mantle is blown in the wind like the fragrance of the Spring.

The white spray of malati flowers in your hair shines like star-clusters.

A fire burns through the veil of your smile,— Oh, the wonder of it.

And who knows where your arrows are hidden which smite death?

Night The rear stage is darkened, and the light on the main stage dimmed to the heavy purple blackness of mourning.

Enter the Band of Youths.

Chandra has gone away again, leaving us behind.

It is difficult to keep him still.

We get our rest by sitting down, but he gets his by walking on.

He has gone across the river with the blind minstrel, in whose depth of blindness Chandra is seeking the invisible light.

That is why our Leader calls him the Diver.
Our life becomes utterly empty, when Chandra is away.
Do you feel as though something was in the air?
The sky seems to be looking into our face, like a friend bidding farewell.
This little stream of water is trickling through the casuarina grove. It seems like
the tears of midnight.

We have never gazed upon the earth before with such intentness.
When we run forward at full speed, our eyes keep gazing in front of us, and we
see nothing on either side of us.

If things did not move on and vanish, we should see no beauty anywhere.
If youth had only the heat of movement, it would get parched and withered.
But there is ever the hidden tear, which keeps it fresh.

The cry of the world is not only "I have," but also "I give." In the first dawning
light of creation, "I have" was wedded to "I give." If this bond of union were to
snap, then everything would go to ruin.

I don't know where that blind Minstrel has landed us at last.
It seems as though these stars in the sky above us are the gazing of countless
eyes we met in all forgotten ages. It seems as if, through the flowers, there came
the whisper of those we have forgotten, saying Remember us.

Our hearts will break if we do not sing.

[*They sing.*

*Did you leave behind you your love, my heart, and miss peace through all
your days?*

*And is the path you followed lost and forgotten, making your return
hopeless?*

I go roaming listening to brooks' babble, to the rustle of leaves.

*And it seems to me that I shall find the way, that reaches the land of lost love
beyond the evening stars.*

What a strange tune is this, that comes out of the music of Spring.

It seems like the tune of yellow leaves.

Spring has stored up its tears in secret for us all this while.

It was afraid we should not understand it, because we were so youthful.

It wanted to beguile us with smiles.

But we shall sleep our hearts tonight in the sadness of the other shore.

Ah, the dear earth! The beautiful earth! She wants all that we have—the touch

of our hands, the song of our hearts.

She wants to draw out from us all that is within, hidden even from ourselves.

This is her sorrow, that she finds out some things only to know that she has not found all. She loses before she attains.

Ah, the dear earth! We shall never deceive you.

[They sing.]

I shall crown you with my garland, before I take leave.

You ever spoke to me in all my joys and sorrows.

And now, at the end of the day, my own heart will break in speech.

Words came to me, but not the tune, and the song that I never sang to you remains hidden behind my tears.

Brother, did you notice that someone seemed to have passed by?

The only thing you feel is this passing by.

I felt the touch of the mantle of some wayfarer.

We came out to capture somebody, but now we feel the longing to be captured ourselves.

Ah, here comes the Minstrel. Where have you brought us? The breath of the wayfaring world touches us here,—the breath of the starry sky.

We came seeking a new form of play. But now we have forgotten what play it was.

We wanted to catch the Old Man.

And everybody said that he was terrifying, a bodiless head, a gaping mouth, a dragon eager to swallow the moon of the youth of the world. But now we are no longer afraid. The flowers go, the leaves go, the waves in the river go, and we shall also follow them. Ah, blind Minstrel, strike your lute and sing to us. Who knows what is the hour of the night?

[The Minstrel sings.]

Let me give my all to him, before I am asked, whom the world offers its all.

When I came to him for my gifts, I was not afraid; And I will not fear, when I come to him, to give up what I have.

The morning accepts his gold with songs, the evening pays him back the debt of gold and is glad.

The joy of the blooming flower comes to fruit with shedding of its leaves.

Hasten, my heart, and spend yourself in love, before the day is done.

Minstrel, why is Chandra still absent?

MINSTREL : Don't you know that he has gone?

Gone?—Where?

MINSTREL : He said, I shall go and conquer him.

Whom?

MINSTREL : The One who is feared by all. He said, "Why else am I young?"

Ah, that was fine.—Dada goes to read his quatrains to the village people, and Chandra has disappeared,—for what purpose nobody knows.

MINSTREL : He said, "Men have always been fighting for a cause. It is the shock of that, which ruffles the breeze of this Spring."

The shock?

MINSTREL : Yes, the message that man's fight is not yet over.

Is this the message of Spring?

MINSTREL : Yes. Those, who have been made immortal by death, have sent their message in these fresh leaves of Spring. It said, "We never doubted the way. We never counted the cost: we rushed out: we blossomed. If we had sat down to debate, then where would be the Spring?"

Has that made Chandra mad?

MINSTREL : He said—— [*The Minstrel sings.*

The Spring flowers have woven my wreath of victory, The South wind breathes its breath of fire in my blood.

The voice of the house-corner wails in vain from behind.

Death stands before me, offering its crown.

The tempest of youth sweeps the sky harp with its fingers; My heart dances in its wild rhythm.

Gathering and storing are not for me, I spend and scatter.

And prudence and comfort bid me adieu in despair.

But where has he gone to?

MINSTREL : He said, "I cannot keep waiting by the wayside any longer. I must go and meet him, and conquer him."

But which way did he take?

MINSTREL : He has entered the cave.

How is that? It is so fearfully dark. Did he, without making any enquiries——

MINSTREL : Yes, he went in to make enquiries himself.

When will he come back?

I don't believe he will ever come back.

But if Chandra leaves us, then life is not worth living.

What shall we say to our Leader?

The Leader also will leave us.

Didn't he leave any message for us before he disappeared?

MINSTREL : He said, "Wait for me. I shall return."

Return? How are we to know it?

MINSTREL : He said, "I will conquer, and then come back again."

Then we shall wait for him all night.

But, Minstrel, where have we got to wait for him?

MINSTREL : Before that cave, from whence the stream of water comes flowing out.

Which way did he go to get there?

The darkness there is like a dark sword.

MINSTREL : He followed the sound of the night-bird's wings.

Why did you not go with him?

MINSTREL : He left me behind to give you hope.

When did he go?

MINSTREL : In the first hour of the watch.

Now the third hour has passed, I think. The air is chilly.

I dreamt that three women, with their hair hanging loose—— Oh, leave off your dream-women. I am sick of your dreams.

Everything appears darkly ominous. I didn't notice before the hooting of the owl. But now—— Do you hear that dog whining on the far bank of the river?

It seems as though a witch were riding upon him and lashing him.

Surely, if it had been possible, Chandra would have come back by now.

How I wish this night were over.

Do you hear the woman's cry?

Oh, the women, the women. They are ever crying and weeping. But they cannot turn those back, who must go forward.

It is getting unbearable to sit still like this. Men imagine all sorts of things when they sit still. Let us go also. As soon as we are started on our way fear will leave us.

But who will show us the way?

There is the blind Minstrel.

What do you say, Minstrel? Can you show us the way?

MINSTREL : Yes.

But we can hardly believe you. How can you find out the path by simply singing?

If Chandra never comes back, you shall.

We never knew that we loved Chandra so intensely. We made light of him all these days.

When we are in the playing mood, we become so intent on the play, that we neglect the playmate.

But, if he once comes back, we shall never neglect him anymore.

I am afraid that we have often given him pain.

Yet his love rose above all that. We never knew how beautiful he was, when we could see him every day.

[*They sing.*

When there was light in my world You stood outside my eyes.

Now that there is none, You come into my heart.

When there were dolls for me, I played; You smiled and watched from the door.

Now that the dolls have crumbled to dust, You come and sit by me.

And I have only my heart for my music, When my lute-strings have broken.

That Minstrel sits so still and silent. I don't like it.

He looks ominous,—like the lowering autumn cloud.

Let us dismiss him.

No, no. It gives us heart, when he sits there.

Don't you see that there is no sign of fear in his face?

It seems as if some messages were striking his forehead. His body appears to espy someone in the distance. There seem to be eyes on the tips of his fingers.

Simply by watching him, we can see that someone is coming through the dark.

Look. He is standing up. He is turning towards the East, and making his obeisance.

Yet there is nothing to be seen, not even a streak of light.

Why not ask him what it is that he sees?

No, don't disturb him.

Do you know, it seems to me that the morning has dawned in him.

As if the ferry-boat of light had reached the shore of his forehead.

His mind is still, like the morning sky.

The storm of birds' songs will burst out presently.

He is striking his lute. His heart is singing.
Hush. He is singing.

[*The Minstrel sings.*

*Victory to thee, victory forever, O brave heart.
Victory to life, to joy, to love, To eternal light.
The night shall wane, the darkness shall vanish, Have faith, brave heart.
Wake up from sleep, from languor of despair, Receive the light of new dawn
with a song.*

[*A ray of light hovers before the cavern.*

Ah! There he is. Chandra! Chandra!

Hush. Don't make any noise. I cannot see him distinctly.

Ah! It cannot be any other than Chandra.

Oh, what joy!

Chandra! Come!

Chandra! How could you leave us for so long?

Have you been able to capture the Old Man?

CHANDRA : Yes, I have.

But we don't see him.

CHANDRA : He is coming.

But what did you see in the cave? Tell us.

CHANDRA : No, I cannot tell you.

Why?

CHANDRA : If my mind were a voice, then I could tell you.

But could you see him, whom you captured? Was he the Old Man of the World?

The Old Man who would like to drink up the sea of youth in his insatiable thirst.

Was it the One who is like the dark night, whose eyes are fixed on his breast,
whose feet are turned the wrong way round, who walks backwards?

Was it the One who wears the garland of skulls, and lives in the burning-ground
of the dead?

CHANDRA : I do not know, I cannot say. But he is coming. You shall see him.

MINSTREL : Yes, I see him.

[*The light strengthens and gradually throughout the scene grows to a
culminating brilliance at the close.*

Where?

MINSTREL : Here.

He is coming out of the cave.—Someone is coming out of the cave.
How wonderful.

CHANDRA : Why, it is you!

Our Leader!

Our Leader!

Our Leader!

Where is the Old Man?

LEADER : He is nowhere.

Nowhere?

LEADER : Yes, nowhere.

Then what is he?

LEADER : He is a dream.

Then you are the real?

LEADER : Yes.

And we are the real?

LEADER : Yes.

Those who saw you from behind imagined you in all kinds of shapes.

We didn't recognize you through the dust.

You seemed old.

And then you came out of the cave,—and now you look like a boy.

It seems just as if we had seen you for the first time.

CHANDRA : You are first every time. You are first over and over again.

LEADER : Chandra! You must own your defeat. You couldn't catch the Old Man.

CHANDRA : Let our festival begin. The sun is up.

Minstrel, if you keep so still, you will swoon away. Sing something.

[*The Minstrel sings.*

I lose thee, to find thee back again and again, My beloved.

Thou leavest me, that I may receive thee all the more, when thou returnest.

*Thou canst vanish behind the moment's screen Only because thou art mine
forevermore, My beloved.*

*When I go in search of thee, my heart trembles, spreading ripples across my
love.*

*Thou smilest through thy disguise of utter absence, and my tears sweeten thy
smile.*

Do you hear the hum?

Yes.

They are not bees, but the people of the place.
Then Dada must be near at hand with his quatrains.

DADA : Is this the Leader?
Yes, Dada.

DADA : Oh, I am so glad you have come. I must read my collection of quatrains.
No. No. Not the whole collection, but only one.

DADA : Very well. One will do.

*The sun is at the gate of the East, his drum of victory sounding in the sky.
The Night says I am blessed, my death is bliss.
He receives his alms of gold, filling his wallet,—and departs.*

That is to say—— No. We don't want your that is to say.

DADA : It means—— Whatever it means, we are determined not to know it.

DADA : What makes you so desperate?

It is our festival day.

DADA : Ah! Is that so? Then let me go to all the neighbours—— No, you mustn't go there.

DADA : But is there any need for me here?

Yes.

Then my quatrains—— CHANDRA : We shall colour your quatrains with such a thick brush, that no one will know whether they have any meaning at all.

And then you will be without any means.

The neighbourhood will desert you.

The Watchman will take you to be a fool.

And the Pundit will take you to be a blockhead.

And your own people will consider you to be useless.

And the outside people will consider you queer.

CHANDRA : But we shall crown you, Dada, with a crown of new leaves.

We shall put a garland of jasmine round your neck.

And there will be no one else except ourselves who will know your true worth.

THE SONG OF THE FESTIVAL OF SPRING

In which all the persons of the drama, not excepting Sruti-bhushan, unite on the main stage in the dance of Spring.

Come and rejoice, for April is awake.

Fling yourselves into the flood of being, bursting the bondage of the past.

April is awake.

Life's shoreless sea is heaving in the sun before you.

All the losses are lost, and death is drowned in its waves.

Plunge into the deep without fear, with the gladness of April in your heart.

4. The Gardener

Preface

Most of the lyrics of love arid life, the translations of which from Bengali are published in this book, were written much earlier than the series of religious poems contained in the book named Gitanjali. The translations are not always literal-the originals being sometimes abridged and sometimes paraphrased.

—Rabindranath Tagore

1

SERVANT : Have mercy upon your servant, my queen!

QUEEN : The assembly is over and my servants are all gone. Why do you come at this late hour?

SERVANT : When you have finished with others, that is my time.

I come to ask what remains for your last servant to do.

QUEEN : What can you expect when it is too late?

SERVANT : Make me the gardener of your flower garden.

QUEEN : What folly is this?

SERVANT : I will give up my other work.

I throw my swords and lances down in the dust. Do not send me to distant courts; do not bid me undertake new conquests. But make me the gardener of your flower garden.

QUEEN : What will your duties be?

SERVANT : The service of your idle days.

I will keep fresh the grassy path where you walk in the morning, where your feet will be greeted with praise at every step by the flowers eager for death, I will swing you in a swing among the branches of the saptaparna, where the early evening moon will struggle to kiss your skirt through the leaves.

I will replenish with scented oil the lamp that burns by your bedside, and decorate your footstool with sandal and saffron paste in wondrous designs.

QUEEN : What will you have for your reward?

SERVANT : To be allowed to hold your little fists like tender lotus-buds and slip flower chains over your wrists; to tinge the soles of your feet with the red juice of ashoka petals and kiss away the speck of dust that may chance to linger there.

QUEEN : Your prayers are granted, my servant, you will be the gardener of my flower garden.

2

‘Ah, Poet, The evening draws near; your hair is turning grey.

‘Do you in your lonely musing hear the message of the hereafter? ’

It is evening, ‘the poet said, ‘and I am listening because someone may call from the village, late though it be.

'I watch if young straying hearts meet together, and two pairs of eager eyes beg for music to break their silence and speak for them.

'Who is there to weave their passionate songs, if I sit on' the shore of life and contemplate death and the beyond?

'The early evening star disappears.

'The glow of a funeral pyre slowly dies by the silent river.

'Jackals cry in chorus from the courtyard of the deserted house in the light of the worn-out moon.

'If some wanderer, leaving home, come here to watch the night and with bowed head listen to the murmur of the darkness, who is there to whisper the secrets of life into his ears if I, shutting my doors, should try to free myself from mortal bonds?

It is a trifle that my hair is turning grey.

I am ever as young or as old as the youngest and the oldest of this village.

'Some have smiles, sweet and simple, and some a sly twinkle in their eyes.

'Some have tears that well up in the daylight, and others tears that are hidden in the gloom.

'They all have need for me, and I have no time to brood over the afterlife.

I am of an age with each, what matter if my hair turns grey? '

3

In the morning I cast my net into the sea.

I dragged up from the dark abyss things of strange aspect and strange beauty—some shone like a smile, some glistened like tears, and some were flushed like the cheeks of a bride.

When with the day's burden I went home, my love was sitting in the garden idly tearing the leaves of a flower.

I hesitated for a moment, and then placed at her feet all that I had dragged up, and stood silent.

She glanced at them and said, 'What strange things are these? I know not of what use they are!'

I bowed my head in shame and thought, I have not fought for these, I did not buy them in the market; they are not fit gifts for her.'

Then the whole night through I flung them one by one into the street.

In the morning travellers came; they picked them up and carried them into far countries.

4

Ah me, why did they build my house by the road to the market town?

They moor their laden boats near my trees.

They come and go and wander at their will.

I sit and watch them; my time wears on.

Turn them away I cannot. And thus my days pass by.

Night and day their steps sound by my door.

Vainly I cry, 'I do not know you.'

Some of them are known to my fingers, some to my nostrils, the blood in my veins seems to know them, and some are known to my dreams Turn them away I cannot. I call them and say, 'Come to my house whoever chooses. Yes, come.'

In the morning the bell rings in the temple.

They come with their baskets in their hands.

Their feet are rosy red. The early light of dawn is on their faces.

Turn them away I cannot. I call them and I say, 'Come to my garden to gather flowers. Come hither.'

In the mid-day the gong sounds at the palace gate.

I know not why they leave their work and linger near my hedge.

The flowers in their hair are pale and faded; the notes are languid in their flutes.

Turn them away I cannot. I call them and say, 'The shade is cool under my trees. Come, friends.'

At night the crickets chirp in the woods.

Who is it that comes slowly to my door and gently knocks?

I vaguely see the face, not a word is spoken, the stillness of the sky is all around.

Turn away my silent guest I cannot. I look at the face through the dark, and hours of dreams pass by.

5

I am restless. I am a thirst for faraway things.

My soul goes out in a longing to touch the skirt of the dim distance.

O Great Beyond, O the keen call of thy flute!

I forget, I ever forget, that I have no wings to fly, that I am bound in this spot

evermore.

I am eager and wakeful, I am a stranger in a strange land.
Thy breath comes to me whispering an impossible hope.
Thy tongue is known to my heart as its very own.
O Far-to-seek, O the keen call thy flute!

I forget, I ever forget, that I know not the way, that I have not the winged horse.

I am listless, I am a wanderer in my heart In the sunny haze of the languid hours, what vast vision of thine takes shape in the blue of the sky!

O Farthest end, O the keen call of thy flute!

I forget, I ever forget, that the gates are shut everywhere in the house where I dwell alone!

6

The tame bird was in a cage, the free bird was in the forest.

They met when the time came, it was a decree of fate.

The tree bird cries, ‘O my love, let us fly to the wood.’

The cage bird whispers, ‘Come hither, let us both live in the cage.’

Says the free bird, ‘Among bars, where is there room to spread one’s wings?’

‘Alas,’ cries the cage bird, I should not know where to sit perched in the sky.’

The free bird cries, ‘My darling, sing the songs of the woodlands.’

The cage bird says, ‘Sit by my side, I’ll teach you the speech of the learned.’

The forest bird cries, ‘No, ah no! Songs can never be taught.’

The cage bird says, ‘Alas for me, I know not the songs of the woodlands.’

Their love is intense with longing, but they never can fly wing to wing.

Through the bars of the cage they look, and vain is their wish to know each other.

They flutter their wings in yearning, and sing, ‘Come closer, my love!’

The free bird cries. It cannot be, I fear the closed doors of the cage.’

The cage bird whispers, ‘Alas, my wings are powerless and dead.’

7

O mother, the young Prince is to pass by our door,—how can I attend to my work this morning?

Show me how to braid up my hair; tell me what garment to put on.

Why do you look at me amazed, mother?

I know well he will not glance up once at my window; I know he will pass out of my sight in the twinkling of an eye; only the vanishing strain of the flute will come sobbing to me from afar.

But the young Prince will pass by our door, and I will put on my best for the moment.

O mother, the young Prince did pass by our door, and the morning sun flashed from his chariot.

I swept aside the veil from my face, I tore the ruby chain from my neck and flung it in his path.

Why do you look at me amazed, mother?

I know well he did not pick up my chain; I know it was crushed under his wheels leaving a red stain upon the dust, and no one knows what my gift was nor to whom.

But the young Prince did pass by our door, and I flung the jewel from my breast before his path.

8

When the lamp went out by my bed I woke up with the early birds.

I sat at my open window with a fresh wreath on my loose hair.

The young traveller came along the road in the rosy mist of the morning.

A pearl chain was on his neck, and the sun's rays fell on his crown. He stopped before my door and asked me with an eager cry, 'Where is she? '

For very shame I could not say, 'She is I, young traveller, she is I.'

It was dusk and the lamp was not lit.

I was listlessly braiding my hair.

The young traveller came on his chariot in the glow of the setting sun.

His horses were foaming at the mouth, and there was dust on his garment.

He alighted at my door and asked in a tired voice, 'Where is she? '

For very shame I could not say, 'She is I, weary traveller, she is I.'

It is an April night. The lamp is burning in my room.

The breeze of the south comes gently. The noisy parrot sleeps in its cage.

My bodice is of the colour of the peacock's throat, and my mantle is green as young grass.

I sit upon the floor at the window watching the deserted street.

Through the dark night I keep humming, ‘She is I, despairing traveller, she is I.’

9

When I go alone at night to my love-tryst, birds do not sing, the wind does not stir, the houses on both sides of the street stand silent.

It is my own anklets that grow loud at every step and I am ashamed.

When I sit on my balcony and listen for his footsteps, leaves do not rustle on the trees, and the water is still in the river like the sword on the knees of a sentry fallen asleep.

It is my own heart that beats wildly – I do not know how to quiet it.

When my love comes and sits by my side, when my body trembles and my eyelids droop, the night darkens, the wind blows out the lamp, and the clouds draw veils over the stars.

It is the jewel at my own breast that shines and gives light. I do not know how to hide it.

10

Let your work be, bride. Listen, the guest has come.

Do you hear, he is gently shaking the chain which fastens the door?

See that your anklets make no loud noise, and that your step is not over-hurried at meeting him.

Let your work be, bride, the guest has come in the evening.

No, it is hot the ghostly wind, bride, do not be frightened.

It is the full moon on a night of April; shadows are pale in the courtyard; the sky overhead is bright.

Draw your veil over your face if you must, carry the lamp to the door if you fear.

No, it is not the ghostly wind, bride, do not be frightened.

Have no word with him if you are shy; stand aside by the door when you meet him.

If he asks you questions, and if you wish to, you can lower your eyes in silence.

Do not let your bracelets jingle when, lamp in hand, you lead him in.

Have no word with him if you are shy.

Have you not finished your work yet, bride? Listen, the guest has come.
Have you not lit the lamp in the cowshed?
Have you not got ready the offering basket for the evening service?
Have you not put the red lucky mark at the parting of your hair, and done your
toilet for the night?
O bride, do you hear, the guest has come?
Let your work be!

11

Come as you are; do not loiter over your toilet.
If your braided hair has loosened, if the parting of your hair be not straight, if
the ribbons of your bodice be not fastened, do not mind.
Come as you are; do not loiter over your toilet.
Come, with quick steps over the grass.
If the raddle come from your feet because of the dew, if the rings of bells upon
your feet slacken, if pearls drop out of your chain, do not mind.
Come, with quick steps over the grass.
Do you see the clouds wrapping the sky?
Flocks of cranes fly up from the further river-bank and fitful gusts of wind rush
over the heath.
The anxious cattle run to their stalls in the village.
Do you see the clouds wrapping the sky?
In vain you light your toilet lamp-it flickers and goes out in the wind.
Who can know that your eyelids have not been touched with lamp-black? For
your eyes are darker than rain-clouds.
In vain you light your toilet lamp-it goes out.
Come as you are; do not loiter over your toilet.
If the wreath is not woven, who cares; if the wrist-chain has not been linked, let
it be.
The sky is overcast with clouds-it is late.
Come as you are; do not loiter over your toilet.

12

If you would be busy and fill your pitcher, come, O come to my lake.

The water will cling round your feet and babble its secret.

The shadow of the coming rain is on the sands, and the clouds hang low upon the blue lines of the trees like the heavy hair above your eyebrows.

I know well the rhythm of your steps, they are beating in my heart.

Come, O come to my lake, if you must fill your pitcher.

If you would be idle and sit listless and let your pitcher float on the water, come, O come to my lake.

The grassy slope is green, and the wild flowers beyond number.

Your thoughts will stray out of your dark eyes like birds from their nests.

Your veil will drop to your feet.

Come, O come to my lake if you must sit idle.

If you would leave off your play and dive in the water, come, O come to my lake.

Let your blue mantle lie on the shore; the blue water will cover you and hide you.

The waves will stand a-tiptoe to kiss your neck and whisper in your ears.

Come, O come to my lake, if you would dive in the water.

If you must be mad and leap to your death, come, O come to my lake.

It is cool and fathomlessly deep.

It is dark like a sleep that' is dreamless.

There in its depths nights and days are one, and songs are silence.

Come, O come to my lake, if you would plunge to your death.

13

I asked nothing, only stood at the edge of the wood behind the tree.

Languor was still upon the eyes of the dawn, and the dew in the air.

The lazy smell of the damp grass hung in the thin mist above the earth.

Under the banyan tree you were milking the cow with your hands, tender and fresh as butter.

And I was standing still.

I did not say a word. It was the bird that sang unseen from the thicket.

The mango tree was shedding its flowers upon the village road, and the bees came humming one by one.

On the side of the pond the gate of Shiva's temple was opened and the worshipper had begun his chants.

With the vessel on your lap you were milking the cow.

I stood with my empty can.

I did not come near you.

The sky woke with the sound of the gong at the temple.

The dust was raised in the road from the hoofs of the driven cattle.

With the gurgling pitchers at their hips, women came from the river.

Your bracelets were jingling, and foam brimming over the jar.

The morning wore on and I did not come near you.

14

I was walking by the road, I do not know why, when the noonday was past and bamboo branches rustled in the wind.

The prone shadows with their outstretched arms clung to the feet of the hurrying light.

The koels were weary of their songs.

I was walking by the road, I do not know why.

The hut by the side of the water is shaded by an overhanging tree.

Someone was busy with her work, and her bangles made music in the corner.

I stood before this hut, I know not why.

The narrow winding road crosses many a mustard field, and many a mango forest.

It passes by the temple of the village and the market at the river landing-place.

I stopped by this hut, I do not know why.

Years ago it was a day of breezy March when the murmur of the spring was languorous, and mango blossoms were dropping on the dust.

The rippling water leapt and licked the brass vessel that stood on the landing-step.

I think of that day of breezy March, I do not know why.

Shadows are deepening and cattle returning to their folds.

The light is grey upon the lonely meadows, and the villagers are waiting for the ferry at the bank.

I slowly return upon my steps, I do not know why.

15

I run as a musk-deer runs in the shadow of the forest mad with his own perfume.

The night is the night of mid – May, the breeze is the breeze of the south.
I lose my way and I wander, I seek what I cannot get, I get what I do not seek.
From my heart comes out and dances the image of my own desire.
The gleaming vision flits on.
I try to clasp it firmly, it eludes me and leads me astray.
I seek what I cannot get, I get what I do not seek.

16

Hands cling to hands and eyes linger on eyes: thus begins the record of our hearts.

It is the moonlit night of March; the sweet smell of henna is in the air; my flute lies on the earth neglected and your garland of flowers is unfinished.

This love between you and me is simple as a song.

Your veil of the saffron colour makes my eyes drunk.

The jasmine wreath that you wove me thrills to my heart like praise.

It is a game of giving and with-holding, revealing and screening again; some smiles and some little shyness, and some sweet useless struggles.

This love between you and me is simple as a song.

No mystery beyond the present; no striving for the impossible; no shadow behind the charm; no groping in the depth of the dark.

This love between you and me is simple as a song.

We do not stray out of all words into the ever silent; we do not raise our hands to the void for things beyond hope.

It is enough what we give and we get.

We have not crushed the joy to the utmost to wring from it the wine of pain.

This love between you and me is simple as a song.

17

The yellow bird sings in their tree and makes my heart dance with gladness.

We both live in the same village, and that is our one piece of joy.

Her pair of pet lambs come to graze in the shade of our garden trees.

If they stray into our barley field, I take them up in my arms.

The name of our village is Khanjana, and Anjana they call our river.

My name is known to all the village, and her name is Ranjana.

Only one field lies between us.
Bees that have lived in our grove go to seek honey in theirs.
Flowers launched from their landing-stairs come floating by the stream where we bathe.

Baskets of dried kusm flowers come from their fields to our market.
The name of our village is Khanjana, and Anjana they call our river.
My name is known to all the village, and her name is Ranjana.
The lane that winds to their house is fragrant in the spring with mango flowers.
When their linseed is ripe for harvest the hemp is in bloom in our field.
The stars that smile on their cottage send us the same twinkling look.
The rain that floods their tank makes glad our kadam forest.
The name of our village is Khanjana, and Anjana they call our river.
My name is known to all the village, and her name is Ranjana.

18

When the two sisters go to fetch water, they come to this spot and they smile.
They must be aware of somebody who stands behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.
The two sisters whisper to each other when they pass this spot.
They must have guessed the secret of that somebody who stands behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.
Their pitchers lurch suddenly, and water spills when they reach this spot.
They must have found out that somebody's heart is beating who stands behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.
The two sisters glance at each other when they come to this spot, and they smile.
There is a laughter in their swift-stepping feet, which makes confusion in somebody's mind who stands behind the trees whenever they go to fetch water.

19

You walked by the riverside path with the full pitcher upon your hip.
Why did you swiftly turn your face and peep at me through your fluttering veil?
That gleaming look from the dark came upon me like a breeze that sends a

shiver through the rippling water and sweeps away to the shadowy shore.

It came to me like the bird of the evening that hurriedly flies across the lampless room from the one open window to the other, and disappears in the night.

You are hidden as a star behind the hills, and I am a passer-by upon the road.

But why did you stop for a moment and glance at my face through your veil while you walked by the riverside path with the full pitcher upon your hip?

20

Day after day he comes and goes away.

Go, and give him a flower from my hair, my friend.

If he asks who was it that sent it, I entreat you do not tell him my name – for he only comes and goes away.

He sits on the dust under the tree.

Spread there a seat with flowers and leaves, my friend.

His eyes are sad, and they bring sadness to my heart.

He does not speak what he has in mind; he only comes and goes away.

21

Why did he choose to come to my door, the wandering youth, when the day dawned?

As I come in and out I pass by him every time, and my eyes are caught by his face.

I know not if I should speak to him or keep silent. Why did he choose to come to my door?

The cloudy nights in July are dark; the sky is soft blue in the autumn; the spring days are restless with the south wind.

He weaves his songs with fresh tunes every time.

I turn from my work and my eyes fill with the mist. Why did he choose to come to my door?

22

When she passed by me with quick steps, the end of her skirt touched me.

From the unknown island of a heart came a sudden warm breath of spring.
A flutter of a flitting touch brushed me and vanished in a moment, like a torn
flower petal blown in the breeze.
It fell upon my heart like a sigh of her body and whisper of her heart.

23

Why do you sit there and jingle your bracelets in mere idle sport?
Fill your pitcher. It is time for you to come home.
Why do you stir the water with your hands and fitfully glance at the road for
someone in mere idle sport?
Fill your pitcher and come home.
The morning hours pass by-the dark water flows on.
The waves are laughing and whispering to each other in mere idle sport.
The wandering clouds have gathered at the edge of the sky on yonder rise of
the land.
They linger and look at your face and smile in mere idle sport.
Fill your pitcher and come home.

24

Do not keep to yourself the secret of your heart, my friend!
Say it to me, only to me, in secret.
You who smile so gently, softly whisper, my heart will hear it, not my ears.
The night is deep, the house is silent, the birds' nests are shrouded with sleep.
Speak to me through hesitating tears, through faltering smiles, through sweet
shame and pain, the secret of your heart!

25

'Come to us, youth, tell us truly why there is madness in your eyes? '
'I know not what wine of wild poppy I have drunk, that there is this madness in
my eyes.'
'Ah, shame!'
'Well, some are wise and some foolish, some are watchful and some careless.
There are eyes that smile and eyes that weep-and madness is in my eyes.'

‘Youth, why do you stand so still under the shadow of the tree? ’

‘My feet are languid with the burden of my heart, and I stand still in the shadow.’

‘Ah, shame! ’

‘Well, some march on their way and some linger, some are free and some are fettered—an⁴ my feet are languid with the burden of my heart.’

26

‘What comes from your willing hands I take. I beg for nothing more.’

‘Yes, yes, I know you, modest mendicant, you ask for all that one has.’

‘If there be a stray flower for me I will wear it in my heart.’

‘But if there be thorns? ’

‘I will endure them.’

‘Yes, yes, I know you, modest mendicant, you ask for all that one has.’

‘If but once you should raise your loving eyes to my face it would make my life sweet beyond death.’

‘But if there be only cruel glances? ’

‘I will keep them piercing my heart.’

‘Yes, yes, I know you, modest mendicant, you ask for all that one has.’

27

‘Trust love even if it brings sorrow. Do not close up your heart.’

‘Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them.’

‘The heart is only for giving away with a tear and a song, my love.’

‘Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them.’

‘Pleasure is frail like a dewdrop, while it laughs it dies. But sorrow is strong and abiding. Let sorrowful love wake in your eyes.’

‘Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them.’

‘The lotus blooms in the sight of the sun, and loses all that it has. It would not remain in bud in the eternal winter mist.’

‘Ah no, my friend, your words are dark, I cannot understand them.’

28

Your questioning eyes are sad. They seek to know my meaning as the moon would fathom the sea.

I have bared my life before your eyes from end to end, with nothing hidden or held back. That is why you know me not.

If it were only a gem, I could break it into a hundred pieces and string them into a chain to put on your neck.

If it were only a flower, round and small and sweet, I could pluck it from its stem to set it in your hair.

But it is a heart, my beloved. Where are its shores and its bottom?

You know not the limits of this kingdom, still you are its queen.

If it were only a moment of pleasure it would flower in an easy smile, and you could see it and read it in a moment.

If it were merely a pain it would melt in limpid tears, reflecting its inmost secret without a word.

But it is love, my beloved.

Its pleasure and pain are boundless, and endless its wants and wealth.

It is as near to you as your life, but you can never wholly know it.

29

Speak to me, my love! Tell me in words what you sang.

The night is dark. The stars are lost in clouds. The wind is sighing through the leaves.

I will let loose my hair. My blue cloak will cling round me like night. I will clasp your head to my bosom; and there in the sweet loneliness murmur on your heart I will shut my eyes and listen. I will not look in your face.

When your words are ended, we will sit still and silent. Only the trees will whisper in the dark.

The night will pale. The day will dawn. We shall look at each other's eyes and go on our different paths.

Speak to me, my love! Tell me in words what you sang.

30

You are the evening cloud floating in the sky of my dreams.

I paint you and fashion you ever with my love longings.

You are my own, my own. Dweller in my endless dreams!

Your feet are rosy-red with the glow of my heart's desire. Gleaner of my sunset songs!

Your lips are bitter-sweet with the taste of my wine of pain.

You are my own, my own. Dweller in my lonesome dreams!

With the shadow of my passion have I darkened your eyes, Haunter of the depth of my gaze!

I have caught you and wrap you, my love, in the net of my music.

You are my own, my own. Dweller in my deathless dreams!

31

My heart, the bird of the wilderness, has found its sky in your eyes.

They are the cradle of the morning, they are the kingdom of the stars.

My songs are lost in their depths.

Let me but soar in that sky, in its lonely immensity.

Let me but cleave its clouds and spread wings in its sunshine.

32

Tell me if this be all true, my lover, tell me if this be true.

When these eyes flash their lightning the dark clouds in your breast make stormy answer.

Is it true that my lips are sweet like the opening bud of the first conscious love?

Do the memories of vanished months of May linger in my limbs?

Does the earth, like a harp, shiver into songs with the touch of my feet?

Is it then true that the dewdrops fall from the eyes of night when I am seen, and the morning light is glad when it wraps my body round?

Is it true, is it true, that your love travelled alone through ages and worlds in search of me?

That when you found me at last, your age-long desire found utter peace in my gentle speech and my eyes and lips and flowing hair?

Is it then true that the mystery of the Infinite is written on this little forehead of mine?

Tell me, my lover, if all this be true.

33

I love you, beloved. Forgive me my love.

Like a bird losing its way I am caught When my heart was shaken it lost its veil
and was naked. Cover it with pity, beloved, and forgive me my love.

If you cannot love me, beloved, forgive me my pain.

Do not look askance at me from afar.

I will steal back to my corner and sit in the dark.

With both hands I will cover my naked shame.

Turn your face from me, beloved, and forgive me my pain.

If you love me, beloved, forgive me my joy.

When my heart is borne away by the flood of happiness, do not smile at my
perilous abandonment.

When I sit on my throne and rule you with my tyranny of love, when like a
goddess I grant you my favour, bear with my pride, beloved, and forgive me my
joy.

34

Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.

I have watched all night, and now my eyes are heavy with sleep.

I fear lest I lose you when I am sleeping.

Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.

I start up and stretch my hands to touch you. I ask myself, ‘Is it a dream? ’

Could I but entangle your feet with my heart and hold them fast to my breast!

Do not go, my love, without asking my leave.

35

Lest I should know you too easily, you play with me.

You blind me with flashes of laughter to hide your tears.

I know, I know your art, You never say the word you would.

Lest I should not prize you, you elude me in a thousand ways.

Lest I should confuse you with the crowd, you stand aside.

I know, I know your art, You never walk the path you would.

Your claim is more than that of others, that is why you are silent.

With playful carelessness you avoid my gifts.

I know, I know your art, You never will take what you would.

36

He whispered, ‘My love, raise your eyes:’

I sharply chid him, and said ‘Go!'; but he did not stir.

He stood before me and held both my hands. I said, ‘Leave me!'; but he did not go.

He brought his face near my ear. I glanced at him and said, ‘What a shame!'; but he did not move.

His lips touched my cheek. I trembled and said, ‘You dare too much'; but he had no shame.

He put a flower in my hair. I said. ‘It is useless!'; but he stood unmoved.

He took the garland from my neck and went away. I weep and ask my heart, ‘Why does he not come back?’

37

Would you put your wreath of fresh flowers on my neck, fair one?

But you must know that the one wreath that I had woven is for the many, for those who are seen in glimpses, or dwell in lands unexplored, or live in poets' songs.

It is too late to ask my heart in return for yours.

There was a time when my life was like a bud, all its perfume was stored in its core.

Now it is squandered far and wide.

Who knows the enchantment that can gather and shut it up again?

My heart is not mine to give to one only, it is given to the many.

38

My love, once upon a time your poet launched a great epic in his mind.

Alas, I was not careful, and it struck your ringing anklets and came to grief.

It broke up into scraps of songs and lay scattered at your feet.

All my cargo of the stories of old wars was tossed by the laughing waves and soaked in tears and sank.

You must make this loss good to me, my love.

If my claims to immortal fame after death are shattered, make me immortal

while I live.

And I will not mourn for my loss nor blame you.

39

I try to weave a wreath all the morning, but the flowers slip and they drop out.

You sit there watching me in secret through the corner of your prying eyes.

Ask those eyes, darkly planning mischief, whose fault it was.

I try to sing a song, but in vain.

A hidden smile trembles on your lips; ask of it the reason of my failure.

Let your smiling lips say on oath how my voice lost itself in silence like a drunken bee in the lotus.

It is evening, and the time for the flowers to close their petals.

Give me leave to sit by your side, and bid my lips to do the work that can be done in silence and in the dim light of stars.

40

An unbelieving smile flits on your eyes when I come to you to take my leave.

I have done it so often that you think I will soon return.

To tell you the truth I have the same doubt in my mind.

For the spring days come again time after time; the full moon takes leave and comes on another visit, the flowers come again and blush upon their branches year after year, and it is likely that I take my leave only to come to you again.

But keep the illusion awhile; do not send it away with ungentle haste.

When I say I leave you for all time, accept it as true, and let a mist of tears for one moment deepen the dark rim of your eyes.

Then smile as archly as you like when I come again.

41

I long to speak the deepest words I have to say to you; but I dare not, for fear you should laugh.

That is why I laugh at myself and shatter my secret in jest.

I make light of my pain, afraid you should do so.

I long to tell you the truest words I have to say to you; but I dare not, being

afraid that you would not believe them.

That is why I disguise them in untruth, saying the contrary of what I mean.

I make my pain appear absurd, afraid that you should do so.

I long to use the most precious words I have for you; but I dare not, fearing I should not be paid with like value.

That is why I give you hard names and boast of my callous strength.

I hurt you, for fear you should never know any pain.

I long to sit silent by you; but I dare not lest my heart come out at my lips.

That is why I prattle and chatter lightly and hide my heart behind words.

I rudely handle my pain, for fear you should do so.

I long to go away from your side; but I dare not, for fear my cowardice should become known to you.

That is why I hold my head high and carelessly come into your presence.

Constant thrusts from your eyes keep my pain fresh forever.

42

O Mad, superbly drunk; If you kick open your doors and play the fool in public;
If you empty your bag in a night, and snap your fingers at prudence; If you walk
in curious paths and play with useless things; Reck not rhyme or reason; If
unfurling your sails before the storm you snap the rudder in two, Then I will
follow you, comrade, and be drunken and go to the dogs.

I have wasted my days and nights in the company of steady wise neighbours.

Much knowing has turned my hair grey, and much watching has made my
sight dim.

For years I have gathered and heaped up scraps and fragments of things: Crush
them and dance upon them, and scatter them all to the winds.

For I know 'tis the height of wisdom to be drunken and go to the dogs.

Let all crooked scruples vanish, let me hopelessly lose my way.

Let a gust of wild giddiness come and sweep me away from my anchors.

The world is peopled with worthies, and workers, useful and clever.

There are men who are easily first, and men who come decently after.

Let them be happy and prosper, and let me be foolishly futile.

For I know 'tis the end of all works to be drunken and go to the dogs.

I swear to surrender this moment all claims to the ranks of the decent I let go
my pride of learning and judgment of right and of wrong.

I'll shatter memory's vessel, scattering the last drop of tears.

With the foam of the berry-red wine I will bathe and brighten my laughter.
The badge of the civil and staid I'll tear into shreds for the nonce.
I'll take the holy vow to be worthies, to be drunken and go to the dogs.

43

No, my friends, I shall never be an ascetic, whatever you may say.
I shall never be an ascetic if she does not take the vow with me.
It is my firm resolve that if I cannot find a shady shelter and a companion for my penance, I shall never turn ascetic.
No, my friends, I shall never leave my hearth and home, and retire into the forest solitude, if rings no merry laughter in its echoing shade and if the end of no saffron mantle flutters in the wind; if its silence is not deepened by soft whispers.
I shall never be an ascetic.

44

Reverend Sir, forgive this pair of sinners. Spring winds today are blowing in wild eddies, driving dust and dead leaves away, and with them your lessons are all lost.

Do not say, father, that life is a vanity.
For we have made truce with death for once, and only for a few fragrant hours we two have been made immortal.

Even if the king's army came and fiercely fell upon us we should sadly shake our heads and say, Brothers, you are disturbing us. If you must have this noisy game, go and clatter your arms elsewhere. Since only for a few fleeting moments we have been made immortal.

If friendly people came and flocked around us, we should humbly bow to them and say. This extravagant good fortune is an embarrassment to us. Room is scarce in the infinite sky where we dwell. For in the springtime flowers come in crowds, and the busy wings of bees jostle each other. Our little heaven, where dwell only we two immortals, is too absurdly narrow.

45

To the guests that must go bid God's speed and brush away all traces of their

steps.

Take to your bosom with a smile what is easy and simple and near.

Today is the festival of phantoms that know not when they die.

Let your laughter be but a meaningless mirth like twinkles of light on the ripples'

Let your life lightly dance on the edges of Time like dew on the tip of a leaf.

Strike in chords from your harp fitful momentary rhythms.

46

You left me and went on your way.

I thought I should mourn for you and set your solitary image in my heart wrought in a golden song.

But ah, my evil fortune, time is short Youth wanes year after year; the spring days are fugitive; the frail flowers die for nothing, and the wise man warns me that life is but a dewdrop on the lotus leaf.

Should I neglect all this to gaze after one who has turned her back on me?

That would be rude and foolish, for time is short.

Then, come, my rainy nights with pattering feet; smile, my golden autumn; come, careless April, scattering your kisses abroad.

You come, and you, and you also?

My loves, you know we are mortals. Is it wise to break one's heart for the one who takes her heart away? For time is short.

It is sweet to sit in a corner to muse and write in rhymes that you are all my world.

It is heroic to hug one's sorrow and determine not to be consoled.

But a fresh face peeps across my door and raises its eyes to my eyes.

I cannot but wipe away my tears and change the tune of my song.

For time is short.

47

If you would have it so, I will end my singing.

If it sets your heart aflutter, I will take away my eyes from your face.

If it suddenly startles you in your walk, I will step aside and take another path.

If it confuses you in your flower-weaving, I will shun your lonely garden.

If it makes the water wanton and wild, I will not row my boat by your bank.

48

Free me from the bonds of your sweetness, my love I No more of this wine of kisses.

This mist of heavy incense stifles my heart.

Open the doors, make room for the morning light I am lost in you, wrapped in the folds of your caresses.

Free me from your spells, and give me back the manhood to offer you my freed heart.

49

I hold her hands and press her to my breast.

I try to fill my arms with her loveliness, to plunder her sweet smile with kisses, to drink her dark glances with my eyes.

Ah, but, where is it? Who can strain the blue from the sky?

I try to grasp the beauty; it eludes me, leaving only the body in my hands.

Baffled and weary I come back.

How can the body touch the flower which only the spirit may touch?

50

Love, my heart longs day and night for the meeting with you-for the meeting that is like all-devouring death.

Sweep me away like a storm; take everything I have; break open my sleep and plunder my dreams. Rob me of my world.

In that devastation, in the utter nakedness of spirit, let us become one in beauty.

Alas for my vain desire! Where is this hope for union except in thee, my God?

51

Then finish the last song and let us leave.

Forget this night when the night is no more.

Whom do I try to clasp in my arms? Dreams can never be made captive.

My eager hands press emptiness to my heart and it bruises my breast.

52

Why did the lamp go out?

I shaded it with my cloak to save it from the wind, that is why the lamp went out.

Why did the flower fade?

I pressed it to my heart with anxious love, that is why the flower faded.

Why did the stream dry up?

I put a dam across it to have it for my use, that is why the stream dried up.

Why did the harp-string break?

I tried to force a note that was beyond its power, that is why the harp-string is broken.

53

Why do you put me to shame with a look?

I have not come as a beggar.

Only for a passing hour I stood at the end of your courtyard outside the garden hedge.

Why do you put me to shame with a look?

Not a rose did I gather from your garden, not a fruit did I pluck.

I humbly took my shelter under the wayside shade where every strange traveller may stand.

Not a rose did I pluck.

Yes, my feet were tired, and the shower of rain came down.

The winds cried out among the swaying bamboo branches.

The clouds ran across the sky as though in the flight from defeat.

My feet were tired.

I know not what you thought of me or for whom you were waiting at your door.

Flashes of lightning dazzled your watching eyes.

How could I know that you could see me where I stood in the dark?

I know not what you thought of me.

The day is ended, and the rain has ceased for a moment.

I leave the shadow of the tree at the end of your garden and this seat on the grass.

It has darkened; shut your door; I go my way.

The day is ended.

54

Where do you hurry with your basket this late evening when the marketing is over?

They all have come home with their burdens; die moon peeps from above the village trees.

The echoes of the voices calling for the ferry run across the dark water to the distant swamp where wild ducks sleep.

Where do you hurry with your basket when the marketing is over?

Sleep has laid her fingers upon the eyes of the earth.

The nests of the crows have become silent, and the murmurs of the bamboo leaves are silent.

The labourers home from their fields spread their mats in the courtyards.

Where do you hurry with your basket when the marketing is over?

55

It was mid-day when you went away.

The sun was strong in the sky.

I had done my work and sat alone on my balcony when you went away.

Fitful gusts came winnowing through the smells of many distant fields.

The doves cooed tireless in the shade, and a bee strayed in my room humming the news of many distant fields.

The village slept in the noonday heat. The road lay deserted.

In sudden fits the rustling of the leaves rose and died.

I gazed at the sky and wove in the blue the letters of a name I had known, while the village slept in the noonday heat I had forgotten to braid my hair. The languid breeze played with it upon my cheek.

The river ran unruffled under the shady bank.

The lazy white clouds did not move.

I had forgotten to braid my hair.

It was midway when you went away.
The dust of the road was hot and the fields panting.
The doves cooed among the dense leaves.
I was alone in my balcony when you went away.

56

I was one among many women busy with the obscure daily tasks of the household.

Why did you single me out and bring me away from the cool shelter of our common life?

Love unexpressed is sacred. It shines like gems in the gloom of the hidden heart. In the light of the curious day it looks pitifully dark.

Ah, you broke through the cover of my heart and dragged my trembling love into the open place, destroying forever the shady corner where it hid its nest. The other women are the same as ever.

No one has peeped into their inmost being, and they themselves know not their own secret. Lightly they smile, and weep, chatter, and work. Daily they go to the temple, light their lamps, and fetch water from the river.

I hoped my love would be saved from the shivering shame of the shelterless, but you turn your face away.

Yes, your path lies open before you, but you have cut off my return, and left me stripped naked before the world with its lidless eyes staring night and day.

57

I plucked your flower, O world!

I pressed it to my heart and the thorn pricked.

When the day waned and it darkened, I found that the flower had faded, but the pain remained.

More flowers will come to you with perfume and pride, O world!

But my time for flower-gathering is over, and through the dark night I have not my rose, only the pain remains.

58

One morning in the flower garden a blind girl came to offer me a flower chain in the cover of a lotus leaf.

I put it round my neck, and tears came to my eyes.

I kissed her and said, ‘You are blind even as the flowers are.’

‘You yourself know not how beautiful is your gift.’

59

O woman, you are not merely the handiwork of God, but also of men; these are ever endowing you with beauty from their hearts.

Poets are weaving for you a web with threads of golden imagery; painters are giving your form ever new immortality.

The sea gives its pearls, the mines their gold, the summer gardens their flowers to deck you, to cover you, to make you more precious.

The desire of men’s hearts has shed its glory over your youth.

You are one half woman and one half dream.

60

Amidst the rush and roar of life, O Beauty, carved in stone, you stand mute and still, alone and aloof.

Great Time sits enamoured at your feet and murmurs: ‘Speak, speak to me, my love; speak, my bride!’

But your speech is shut up in stone, O Immovable Beauty!

61

Peace, my heart, let the time for the parting be sweet.

Let it not be a death but completeness.

Let love melt into memory and pain into songs.

Let the flight through the sky end in the folding of the wings over the nest Let the last touch of your hands be gentle like the flower of the night.

Standstill, O Beautiful End, for a moment, and say your last words in silence.

I bow to you and hold up my lamp to light you on your way.

62

In the dusky path of a dream I went to seek the love who was mine in a former life.

Her house stood at the end of a desolate street.

In the evening breeze her pet peacock sat drowsing on its perch, and the pigeons were silent in their corner.

She set her lamp down by the portal and stood before me.

She raised her large eyes to my face and mutely asked, 'Are you well, my friend? '

I tried to answer, but our language had been lost and forgotten.

I thought and thought; our names would not come to my mind.

Tears shone in her eyes. She held up her right hand to me. I took it and stood silent.

Our lamp had flickered in the evening breeze and died.

63

Traveller, must you go?

The night is still and the darkness swoons upon the forest.

The lamps are bright in our balcony, the flowers all fresh, and the youthful eyes still awake.

Is the time for your parting come?

Traveller, must you go?

We have not bound your feet with our entreating arms.

Your doors are open. Your horse stands saddled at the gate.

If we have tried to bar your passage it was but with our songs.

Did we ever try to hold you back it was but with our eyes.

Traveller, we are helpless to keep you. We have only our tears.

What quenchless fire glows in your eyes?

What restless fever runs in your blood?

What call from the dark urges you?

What awful incantation have you read among the stars in the sky, that with a scaled secret message the night entered your heart, silent and strange?

If you do not care for merry meetings, if you must have peace, weary heart, we shall put our lamps out and silence our harps.

We shall sit still in the dark in the rustle of leaves, and the tired moon will shed pale rays on your window.

O traveller, what sleepless spirit has touched you from the heart of the

midnight?

64

I spent my day on the scorching hot dust of the road.

Now, in the cool of the evening, I knock at the door of the inn. It is deserted and in ruins.

A grim ashath tree spreads its hungry clutching roots through the gaping fissures of the walls.

Days have been when wayfarers came here to wash their weary feet They spread their mats in the courtyard in the dim light of the early moon, and sat and talked of strange lands.

They woke refreshed in the morning when birds made them glad, and friendly flowers nodded their heads at them from the wayside.

But no lighted lamp awaited me when I came here.

The black smudges of smoke left by many a forgotten evening lamp stare, like blind eyes, from the wall.

Fireflies flit in the bush near the dried-up pond, and bamboo branches fling their shadows on the grass-grown path.

I am the guest of no one at the end of my day.

The long night is before me, and I am tired.

65

Is that tour call again?

The evening has come. Weariness clings round me like the arms of entreating love.

Do you call me?

I had given all my day to you, cruel mistress, must you also rob me of my night?

Somewhere there is an end to everything, and the loneliness of the dark is one's own.

Must your voice cut through it and smite me?

Has the evening no music of sleep at your gate?

Do the silent-winged stars never climb the sky above your pitiless tower?

Do the flowers never drop on the dust in soft death in your garden?

Must you call me, you unquiet one?
Then let the sad eyes of love vainly watch and weep.
Let the lamp burn in the lonely house.
Let the ferry-boat take the weary labourers to their home.
I leave behind my dreams and I hasten to your call.

66

A wandering madman was seeking the touchstone, with matted locks, tawny and dust-laden, and body worn to a shadow, his lips tight-pressed, like the shut-up doors of his heart, his burning eyes like the lamp of a glow-worm seeking its mate.

Before him the endless ocean roared.

The garrulous waves ceaselessly talked of hidden treasures, mocking the ignorance that knew not their meaning.

Maybe he now had no hope remaining, yet he would not rest, for the search had become his life,— Just as the ocean forever lifts its arms to the sky for the unattainable Just as the stars go in circles, yet seeking a goal that can never be reached-

Even so on the lonely shore the madman with dusty tawny locks still roamed in search of the touchstone.

One day a village boy came up and asked, ‘Tell me, where did you come at this golden chain about your waist?’

The madman started—the chain that once was iron was verily gold; it was not a dream, but he did not know when it had changed.

He struck his forehead wildly—where, O where had he without knowing it achieved success?

It had grown into a habit, to pick up pebbles and touch the chain, and to throw them away without looking to see if a change had come; thus the madman found and lost the touchstone.

The sun was sinking low in the west, the sky was of gold.

The madman returned on his footsteps to seek anew the lost treasure, with his strength gone, his body bent, and his heart in the dust, like a tree uprooted.

67

Though the evening comes with slow steps and has signalled for all songs to

cease; Though your companions have gone to their rest and you are tired;
Though fear broods in the dark and the face of the sky is veiled; Yet, bird, O my
bird, listen to me, do not close your wings.

That is not the gloom of the leaves of the forest, that is the sea swelling like a
dark black snake.

That is not the dance of the flowering jasmine, that is flashing foam.

Ah, where is the sunny green shore, where is your nest?

Bird, O my bird, listen to me, do not close your wings.

The lone night lies along your path, the dawn sleeps behind the shadowy hills.

The stars hold their breath counting the hours, the feeble moon swims the deep
night.

Bird, O my bird, listen to me, do not close your wings.

There is no hope, no fear for you.

There is no word, no whisper, no cry.

There is no home, no bed of rest.

There is only your own pair of wings and the pathless sky.

Bird, O my bird, listen to me, do not close your wings.

68

None lives forever, brother, and nothing lasts for long. Keep that in mind and
rejoice.

Our life is not the one old burden, our path is not the one long journey.

One sole poet has not to sing one aged song.

The flower fades and dies; but he who wears the flower has not to mourn for it
forever.

Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.

There must come a full pause to weave perfection into music.

Life droops toward its sunset to be drowned in the golden shadows.

Love must be called from its play to drink sorrow and be borne to the heaven
of tears.

Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.

We hasten to gather our flowers lest they are plundered by the passing winds.

It quickens our blood and brightens our eyes to snatch kisses that would vanish
if we delayed.

Our life is eager, our desires are keen, for time tolls the bell of parting.

Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.

There is not time for us to clasp a thing and crush it and fling it away to the dust.

The hours trip rapidly away, hiding their dreams in their skirts.

Our life is short; it yields but a few days for love.

Were it for work and drudgery it would be endlessly long.

Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.

Beauty is sweet to us, because she dances to the same fleeting tune with our lives.

Knowledge is precious to us, because we shall never have time to complete it.

All is done and finished in the eternal Heaven.

But earth's flowers of illusion are kept eternally fresh by death.

Brother, keep that in mind and rejoice.

69

I hunt for the golden stag.

You may smile, my friends, but I pursue the vision that eludes me.

I run across hills and dales, I wander through nameless lands, because I am hunting for the golden stag.

You come and buy in the market and go back to your homes laden with goods, but the spell of the homeless winds has touched me I know not when and where.

I have no care in my heart; all my belongings I have left far behind me.

I run across hills and dales, I wander through nameless lands-because I am hunting for the golden stag.

70

I remember a day in my childhood I floated a paper boat in the ditch.

It was a wet day of July; I was alone and happy over my play.

I floated my paper boat in the ditch.

Suddenly the storm clouds thickened, winds came in gusts, and rain poured in torrents.

Rills of muddy water rushed and swelled the stream and sunk my boat.

Bitterly I thought in my mind that the storm came on purpose to spoil my happiness; all its malice was against me.

The cloudy day of July is long today, and I have been musing over all those

games in life wherein I was loser.

I was blaming my fate for the many tricks it played on me, when suddenly I remembered the paper boat that sank in the ditch.

71

The day is not yet done, the fair is not over, the fair on the river-bank.

I had feared that my time had been squandered and my last penny lost.

But no, my brother, I have still something left. My fate has not cheated me of everything.

The selling and buying are over.

All the dues on both sides have been gathered in, and it is time for me to go home.

But, gatekeeper, do you ask for your toll?

Do not fear, I have still something left. My fate has not cheated me of everything.

The lull in the wind threatens storm, and the lowering clouds in the west, bode no good.

The hushed water waits for the wind.

I hurry to cross the river before the night overtakes me.

O ferryman, you want your fee!

Yes, brother, I have still something left. My fate has not cheated me of everything.

In the wayside under the tree sits the beggar. Alas, he looks at my face with a timid hope!

He thinks I am rich with the day's profit.

Yes, brother, I have still something left. My fate has not cheated me of everything.

The night grows dark and the road lonely. Fireflies gleam among the leaves.

Who are you that follow me with stealthy silent steps?

Ah, I know, it is your desire to rob me of all my gains. I will not disappoint you!

For I still have something left, and my fate has not cheated me of everything.

At midnight I reach home. My hands are empty.

You are waiting with anxious eyes at my door, sleepless and silent.

Like a timorous bird you fly to my breast with eager love.

Ay, ay, my God, much remains still. My fate has not cheated me of everything.

72

With days of hard travail I raised a temple. It had no doors or windows, its walls were thickly built with massive stones.

I forgot all else, I shunned all the world, I gazed in rapt contemplation at the image I had set upon the altar.

It was always night inside, and lit by the lamps of perfumed oil.

The ceaseless smoke of incense wound my heart in its heavy coils.

Sleepless, I carved on the walls fantastic figures in mazy bewildering lines-winged horses, flowers with human faces, women with limbs like serpents.

No passage was left anywhere through which could enter the song of birds, the murmur of leaves, or hum of the busy village.

The only sound that echoed in its dark dome was that of incantations which I chanted.

My mind became keen and still like a pointed flame, my senses swooned in ecstasy.

I knew not how time passed till the thunderstone had struck the temple, and a pain stung me through the heart.

The lamp looked pale and ashamed; the carvings on the walls, like chained dreams, stared meaningless in the light as they would fain hide themselves.

I looked at the image on the altar. I saw it smiling and alive with the living touch of God. The night I had imprisoned had spread its wings and vanished.

73

Infinite wealth is not yours, my patient and dusky mother dust!

You toil to fill the mouths of your children, but food is scarce.

The gift of gladness that you have for us is never perfect.

The toys that you make for your children are fragile.

You cannot satisfy all our hungry hopes, but should I desert you for that?

Your smile which is shadowed with pain is sweet to my eyes.

Your love which knows not fulfilment is dear to my heart.

From your breast you have fed us with life but not immortality, that is why your eyes are ever wakeful.

For ages you are working with colour and song, yet your heaven is not built, but only its sad suggestion.

Over your creations of beauty there is the mist of tears.
I will pour my songs into your mute heart, and my love into your love.
I will worship you with labour.
I have seen your tender face and I love your mournful dust, Mother Earth.

74

In the world's audience hall, the simple blade of grass sits on the same carpet with the sunbeam and the stars of midnight.

Thus my songs share their seats in the heart of the world with the music of the clouds and forests.

But, you man of riches, your wealth has no part in the simple grandeur of the sun's glad gold and the mellow gleam of the musing moon.

The blowing of the all-embracing sky is not shed upon it.

And when death appears, it pales and withers and crumbles into dust.

75

At midnight the would-be ascetic announced: 'This is the time to give up my home and seek for God. Ah, who has held me so long in delusion here? '

God whispered, 'I,' but the ears of the man were stopped.

With a baby asleep at her breast lay his wife, peacefully sleeping on one side of the bed.

The man said, 'Who are ye that have fooled me so long? '

The voice said again, 'They are God,' but he heard it not.

The baby cried out in its dream, nestling close to its mother.

God commanded, 'Stop, fool, leave not thy home,' but still he heard not.

God sighed and complained, 'Why does my servant wander to seek me, forsaking me? '

76

The fair was on before the temple. It had rained from the early morning and the day came to its end.

Brighter than all the gladness of the crowd was the bright smile of a girl who bought for a farthing a whistle of palm leaf.

The shrill joy of that whistle floated above all laughter and noise.

An endless throng of people came and jostled together. The road was muddy, the river in flood, the field under water in ceaseless rain.

Greater than all the troubles of the crowd was a little boy's trouble—he had not a farthing to buy a painted stick.

His wistful eyes gazing at the shop' made this whole meeting of men so pitiful.

77

The workman and his wife from the west country are busy digging to make bricks for the kiln.

Their little daughter goes to the landing-place by the river; there she has no end of scouring and scrubbing of pots and pans.

Her little brother, with shaven head and brown, naked, mud-covered limbs, follows after her and waits patiently on the high bank at her bidding.

She goes back home with the full pitcher poised on her head, the shining brass pot in her left hand, holding the child with her right—she the tiny servant of her mother, grave with the weight of the household cares.

One day I saw this naked boy sitting with legs outstretched.

In the water his sister sat rubbing a drinking-pot with a handful of earth, turning it round and round.

Nearby a soft-haired lamb stood grazing along the bank.

It came close to where the boy sat and suddenly bleated aloud, and the child started up and screamed.

His sister left off cleaning her pot and ran up.

She took up her brother in one arm and the lamb in the other, and dividing her caresses between them bound in one bond of affection the offspring of beast and man.

78

It was in May. The sultry noon seemed endlessly long. The dry earth gaped with thirst in the heat.

When I heard from the riverside a voice calling, 'Come, my darling! '

I shut my book and opened the window to look out.

I saw a big buffalo with mud-stained hide standing near the river with placid, patient eyes; and a youth, knee-deep in water, calling it to its bath.

I smiled amused and felt a touch of sweetness in my heart.

79

I often wonder where lie hidden the boundaries of recognition between man and the beast whose heart knows no spoken language.

Through what primal paradise in a remote morning of creation ran the simple path by which their hearts visited each other.

Those marks of their constant tread have not been effaced though their kinship has been long forgotten.

Yet suddenly in some wordless music the dim memory wakes up and the beast gazes into the man's face with a tender trust, and the man looks down into its eyes with amused affection.

It seems that the two friends meet masked, and vaguely know each other through the disguise.

80

With a glance of your eyes you could plunder all the wealth of songs struck from poets' harps, fair woman!

But for their praises you have no ear, therefore I come to praise you.

You could humble at your feet the proudest heads in the world.

But it is your loved ones, unknown to fame, whom you choose to worship, therefore I worship you.

The perfection of your arms would add glory to kingly splendour with their touch.

But you use them to sweep away the dust, and to make clean your humble home, therefore I am filled with awe.

81

Why do you whisper so faintly in my ears, O Death, my Death?

When the flowers droop in the evening and cattle come back to their stalls, you stealthily come to my side and speak words that I do not understand.

Is this how you must woo and win me with the opiate of drowsy murmur and cold kisses, O Death, my Death?

Will there be no proud ceremony for our wedding?
Will you not tie up with a wreath your tawny coiled locks?
Is there none to carry your banner before you, and will not the night be on fire
with your red torch-lights, O Death, my Death?
Come with your conch-shells sounding, come in the sleepless night.
Dress me with a crimson mantle, grasp my hand and take me.
Let your chariot be ready at my door with your horses neighing impatiently.
Raise my veil and look at my face proudly, O Death, my Death!

82

We are to play the game of death tonight, my bride and I.
The night is black, the clouds in the sky are capricious, and the waves are
raving at sea.
We have left our bed of dreams, flung open the door and come out, my bride
and I.
We sit upon a swing, and the storm winds give us a wild push from behind.
My bride starts up with fear and delight, she trembles and clings to my breast.
Long have I served her tenderly.
I made for her a bed of flowers and I closed the doors to shut out the rude light
from her eyes.
I kissed her gently on her lips and whispered softly in her ears till she half
swooned in languor.
She was lost in the endless mist of vague sweetness.
She answered not to my touch, my songs failed to arouse her.
Tonight has come to us the call of the storm from the wild.
My bride has shivered and stood up, she has clasped my hand and come out.
Her hair is flying in the wind, her veil is fluttering, her garland rustles over her
breast.
The push of death has swung her into life.
We are face to face and heart to heart, my bride and I.

83

She dwelt on the hillside by the edge of a maize-field, near the spring that flows
in laughing rills through the solemn shadows of ancient trees. The women came

there to fill their jars, and travellers would sit there to rest and talk. She worked and dreamed daily to the tune of the bubbling stream.

One evening the stranger came down from the cloud-hidden peak; his locks were tangled like drowsy snakes. We asked in wonder, ‘Who are you?’ He answered not but sat by the garrulous stream and silently gazed at the hut where she dwelt. Our hearts quaked in fear and we came back home when it was night.

Next morning when the women came to fetch water at the spring by the deodar trees, they found the doors open in her hut, but her voice was gone and where was her smiling face? The empty jar lay on the floor and her lamp had burnt itself out in the corner. No one knew where she had fled to before it was morning—and the stranger had gone.

In the month of May the sun grew strong and the snow melted, and we sat by the spring and wept. We wondered in our mind, ‘Is there a spring in the land where she has gone and where she can fill her vessel in these hot thirsty days?’ And we asked each other in dismay, ‘Is there a land beyond these hills where we live?’

It was a summer night; the breeze blew from the south; and I sat in her deserted room where the lamp stood still unlit. When suddenly from before my eyes the hills vanished like curtains drawn aside. ‘Ah, it is she who comes. How are you, my child? Are you happy? But where can you shelter under this open sky? And, alas! our spring is not here to allay your thirst.’

‘Here is the same sky,’ she said, ‘only free from the fencing hills,—this is the same stream grown into a river,—the same earth widened into a plain.’ ‘Everything is here,’ I sighed, ‘only we are not.’ She smiled sadly and said, ‘You are in my heart.’ I woke up and heard the babbling of the stream and the rustling of the deodars at night.

84

Over the green and yellow rice-fields sweep the shadows of the autumn clouds followed by the swift-chasing sun.

The bees forget to sip their honey; drunken with light they foolishly hover and hum.

The ducks in the islands of the river clamour in joy for mere nothing.

Let none go back home, brothers, this morning, let none go to work.

Let us take the blue sky by storm and plunder space as we run.

Laughter floats in the air like foam on the flood.

Brothers, let us squander our morning in futile songs.

85

Who are you, reader, reading my poems an hundred years hence?

I cannot send you one single flower from this wealth of the spring, one single streak of gold from yonder clouds.

Open your doors and look abroad.

From your blossoming garden gather fragrant memories of the vanished flowers of an hundred years before.

In the joy of your heart may you feel the living joy that sang one spring morning, sending its glad voice across an hundred years.

5. The King and the Queen

Act I

.....

The Palace Garden. King VIKRAM and Queen SUMITRA.

VIKRAM : Why have you delayed in coming to me for so long, my love?

SUMITRA : Do you not know, my King, that I am utterly yours, wherever I am? It was your house, and its service, that kept me away from your presence, but not from you.

VIKRAM : Leave the house, and its service, alone. My heart cannot spare you for my world, I am jealous of its claims.

SUMITRA : No, King, I have my place in your heart, as your beloved, and in your world, as your Queen.

VIKRAM : Alas, my darling, where have vanished those days of unalloyed joy, when we first met in love; when our world awoke not,—only the flush of the early dawn of our union broke through our hearts in over-flowing silence? You had sweet shyness in your eyelids, like a dew drop on the tip of a flower-petal, and the smile flickered on your lips like a timid evening lamp in the breeze. I remember the eager embrace of your love, when the morning broke and we had to part, and your unwilling steps, heavy with languor, that took you away from me. Where were the house, and its service, and the cares of your world?

SUMITRA : But then we were scarcely more than a boy and a girl; and today we are the King and the Queen.

VIKRAM : The King and the Queen? Mere names. We are more than that; we are lovers.

SUMITRA : You are my King, my husband, and I am content to follow your steps. Do not shame me by putting me before your kingship.

VIKRAM : Do you not want my love?

SUMITRA : Love me truly by not making your love extravagant; for truth can afford to be simple.

VIKRAM : I do not understand woman's heart.

SUMITRA : King, if you thriftlessly squander your all upon me, then I shall be

deprived.

VIKRAM : No more vain words, Queen. The birds' nests are silent with love. Let lips keep guard upon lips, and allow not words to clamour.

Enters ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT : The minister begs audience, to discuss a grave matter of state.

VIKRAM : No, not now.

[Attendant goes.]

SUMITRA : Sire, ask him to come.

VIKRAM : The state and its matter can wait. But sweet leisure comes rarely. It is frail, like a flower. Respite from duty is a part of duty.

SUMITRA : Sire, I beg of you, attend to your work.

VIKRAM : Again, cruel woman. Do you imagine that I always follow you to win your unwilling favour, drop by drop? I leave you and go. [He goes.]

Enters DEVADATTA, the King's Brahmin friend.

SUMITRA : Tell me, sir, what is that noise outside the gate?

DEVADATTA : That noise? Command me, and with the help of soldiers I shall drive away that noise, ragged and hungry.

SUMITRA : Do not mock me. Tell me what has happened.

DEVADATTA : Nothing. It is merely hunger,—the vulgar hunger of poverty. The famished horde of barbarians is rudely clamouring, making the drowsy cuckoos in your royal garden start up in fear.

SUMITRA : Tell me, father, who are hungry?

DEVADATTA : It is their ill-fate. The King's poor subjects have been practising long to live upon half a meal a day, but they have not yet become experts in complete starvation. It is amazing.

SUMITRA : But, father, the land is smiling with ripe corn. Why should the King's subjects die of hunger?

DEVADATTA : The com is his, whose is the land,—it is not for the poor. They, like intruding dogs at the King's feast, crouch in the corner for their crumbs, or kicks.

SUMITRA : Does it mean, that there is no King in this land?

DEVADATTA : Not one, but hundreds.

SUMITRA : Are not the King's officers watchful?

DEVADATTA : Who can blame your officers? They came penniless from the alien

land. Is it to bless the King's subjects with their empty hands?

SUMITRA : From the alien land? Are they my relatives?

DEVADATTA : Yes, Queen.

SUMITRA : What about Jaisen?

DEVADATTA : He rules the province of Singarh with such scrupulous care, that all the rubbish, in the shape of food and raiment, has been cleared away; only the skin and bones remain.

SUMITRA : And Shila?

DEVADATTA : He keeps his eyes upon the trade; he relieves all merchants of their excessive profits, taking the burden upon his own broad shoulders.

SUMITRA : And Ajit?

DEVADATTA : He lives in Vijaykote. He smiles sweetly, strokes the land on its back with his caressing hand, and whatever comes to his touch gathers with care.

SUMITRA : What shame is this. I must remove this refuse from my father's land and save my people. Leave me now, the King comes. [*Enters the King.*] I am the mother of my people. I cannot bear their cry. Save them, King.

VIKRAM : What do you want me to do?

SUMITRA : Turn those out from your kingdom, who are oppressing the land.

VIKRAM : Do you know who they are?

SUMITRA : Yes, I know.

VIKRAM : They are your own cousins.

SUMITRA : They are not a whit more my own than my people. They are robbers, who, under the cover of your throne, seek for their victims.

VIKRAM : They are Jaisen, Shila, Ajit.

SUMITRA : My country must be rid of them.

VIKRAM : They will not move without fight.

SUMITRA : Then fight them, Sire.

VIKRAM : Fight? But let me conquer you first, and then I shall have time to conquer my enemies.

SUMITRA : Allow me, King, as your Queen. I will save your Subjects myself.

[Goes.]

VIKRAM : This is how you make my heart distraught. You sit alone upon your peak of greatness, where I do not reach you. You go to attend your own God, and I go seeking you in vain.

Enters DEVADATTA.

DEVADATTA : Where is the Queen, Sire? Why are you alone?

VIKRAM : Brahmin, this is all your conspiracy. You come here to talk of the state news to the Queen?

DEVADATTA : The state is shouting its own news loud' enough to reach the Queen's ears. It has come to that pass, when it takes no heed lest your rest be broken. Do not be afraid of me, King. I have come to ask my Brahmin's dues from the Queen. For my wife is out of humour, her larder is empty, and in the house there are a number of empty stomachs. [He goes.

VIKRAM : I wish all happiness to my people. Why should there be suffering, and injustice? Why should the strong cast his vulture's eyes upon the poor man's comforts, pitifully small? [Enters Minister.] Banish all the foreign robbers from my kingdom, this moment. I must not hear the cry of the oppressed for a day longer.

MINISTER : But, King, the evil that has been slowly growing for long, you cannot uproot in a day.

VIKRAM : Strike at its root with vigour, and fell it with your axe in a day,—the tree that has taken a hundred years to grow.

MINISTER : But we want arms and soldiers.

VIKRAM : Where is my general?

MINISTER : He himself is a foreigner.

VIKRAM : Then invite the hungry people. Open my treasure; stop this cry with food; send them away with money,—And if they want to have my kingdom, let them do so in peace, and be happy.

[He goes.

Enter SUMITRA and DEVADATTA.

MINISTER : Queen, my humble salutation to you.

SUMITRA : We cannot allow misery to go unchecked in our land.

MINISTER : What are your commands, Queen?

SUMITRA : Call immediately, in my name, all our chiefs who are foreigners.

MINISTER : I have done so already. I have taken upon myself to invite them into the capital, in the King's name, without asking for his sanction, for fear of refusal.

SUMITRA : When did you send your messengers?

MINISTER : It will soon be a month hence. I am expecting their answers every moment. But I am afraid they will not respond.

SUMITRA : Not respond to the King's call?

DEVADATTA : The King has become a piece of wild rumour, which they can believe, or not, as they like.

SUMITRA : Keep your soldiers ready, Minister, for these people. They shall have to answer to me, as my relatives.

[*The Minister goes.*

DEVADATTA : Queen, they will not come.

SUMITRA : Then the King shall fight them.

DEVADATTA : The King will not fight.

SUMITRA : Then I will.

DEVADATTA : You!

SUMITRA : I will go to my brother Kumarsen, Kashmir's King, and with his help fight these rebels, who are a disgrace to Kashmir.

Father, help me to escape from this kingdom, and do your duty, if things come to the worst.

DEVADATTA : I salute thee, Mother of the people. [*He goes.*

Enters VIKRAM.

VIKRAM : Why do you go away, Queen? My hungry desire is revealed to you in its naked poverty. Do you therefore go away from me in derision?

SUMITRA : I feel shamed to share alone your heart, which is for all men.

VIKRAM : Is it absolutely true, Queen, that you stand on your giddy height, and I grovel in the dust? No. I know my power. There is an unconquerable force in my nature, which I have turned into love for you.

SUMITRA : Hate me, King, hate me. Forget me. I shall bear it bravely,—but do not wreck your manhood against a woman's charms.

VIKRAM : So much love, yet such neglect? Your very indifference, like a cruel knife, cuts into my bosom, laying bare the warm bleeding love,—and then, to fling it into the dust!

SUMITRA : I throw myself at your feet, my beloved. Have you not forgiven your Queen, again and again, for wrongs done? Then why is this wrath, Sire, when I am blameless?

VIKRAM : Rise up, my love. Come to my heart. Shut my life from all else for a moment, with your encircling arms, rounding it into a world completely your own.

A VOICE FROM OUTSIDE : Queen.

SUMITRA : It is Devadatta.—Yes, father, what is the message?

Enters DEVADATTA.

DEVADATTA : They have defied the King's call,—the foreign governors of the provinces,—and they are preparing for rebellion.

SUMITRA : Do you hear, King?

VIKRAM : Brahmin, the palace garden is not the council-house.

DEVADATTA : Sire, we rarely meet our King in the council-house, because it is not the palace garden.

SUMITRA : The miserable dogs, grown fat upon the King's table sweepings, dare dream of barking against their master? King, is it time for debating in the council chamber? Is not the course clear before you? Go with your soldiers and crush these miscreants.

VIKRAM : But our general himself is a foreigner.

SUMITRA : Go yourself.

VIKRAM : Am I your misfortune, Queen,—a bad dream, a thorn in your flesh? No, I will never move a step from here. I will offer them terms of peace. Who is it that has caused this mischief? The Brahmin and the woman conspired to wake up the sleeping snake from its hole. Those who are too feeble to protect themselves are the most thoughtless in causing disasters to others.

SUMITRA : O the unfortunate land, and the unfortunate woman who is the Queen of this land.

VIKRAM : Where are you going?

SUMITRA : I am going to leave you.

VIKRAM : Leave me?

SUMITRA : Yes. I—am going to Fight the rebels.

VIKRAM : Woman, you mock me.

SUMITRA : I take my farewell.

VIKRAM : You dare not leave me.

SUMITRA : I dare not stay by your side, when I weaken you.

VIKRAM : Go, proud woman. I will never ask you to turn back,—but claim no help from me.

[*Sumitra goes.*

DEVADATTA : King, you allow her to go alone?

VIKRAM : She is not going. I do not believe her words.

DEVADATTA : I think she is in earnest.

VIKRAM : It is her woman's wiles. She threatens me, while she wants to spur me into action; and I despise her methods. She must not think that she can play with

my love. She shall regret it. O my friend, must I learn my lesson at last, that love is not for the King,—and learn it from that woman, whom I love like my doom? Devadatta, you have grown with me from infancy,—can you not forget, for a moment, that I am a king, and feel that I have a man's heart that knows pain?

DEVADATTA : My heart is yours, my friend, which is not only ready to receive your love, but your anger.

VIKRAM : But why do you invite the snake into my nest?

DEVADATTA : Your house was on fire,—I merely brought the news, and wakened you up. Am I to blame for that?

VIKRAM : What is the use of waking? When all are mere dreams, let me choose my own little dream, if I can, and then die. Fifty years hence, who will remember the joys and sorrows of this moment? Go, Devadatta, leave me to my kingly loneliness of pain.

Enters a COURTIER who is a foreigner.

COURTIER : We ask justice from your hands. King,—we, who came to this land with the Queen.

VIKRAM : Justice for what?

COURTIER : It has come to our ears, that false accusations against us are brought before you, for no other cause than that we are foreigners.

VIKRAM : Who knows, if they are not true? But so long as I trust you, can you not remain silent? Have I ever insulted you with the least suspicion—the suspicions that are bred like maggots in the rotten hearts of cowards? Treason I do not fear. I can crush it under my feet. But I fear to nourish littleness in my own mind.— You can leave me now. [The Courtier goes.

Enter MINISTER and DEVADATTA.

MINISTER : Sire, the Queen has left the palace, riding on her horse.

VIKRAM : What do you say? Left my palace?

MINISTER : Yes, King.

VIKRAM : Why did you not stop her?

MINISTER : She left in secret.

VIKRAM : Who brought you the news?

MINISTER : The priest. He saw her riding before the palace temple.

VIKRAM : Send for him.

MINISTER : But Sire, she cannot be far. She has only just left. You can yet bring

her back.

VIKRAM : Bringing her back is not important. The great fact is, that she left me.—Left me! And all the King's soldiers and forts, and prisons and iron chains, could not keep fast this little heart of a woman.

MINISTER : Alas, King. Calumny, like a flood-burst, when the dyke is broken, will rush in from all sides.

VIKRAM : Calumny! Let the people's tongues rot with their own poison.

DEVADATTA : In the days of eclipse, men dare look at the midday sun through their broken pieces of glass, blackened with soot.

Great Queen, your name will be soiled, tossed from mouth to mouth, but your light will ever shine far above all soiling.

VIKRAM : Bring the priest to me. [Minister goes.] I can yet go to seek her, and bring her back. But is this my eternal task? That she should always avoid me, and I should ever run after the fugitive heart? Take your flight, woman, day and night, homeless, loveless, without rest and peace. [Enters Priest.] Go, go, I have heard enough, I do not want to know more. [The Priest is about to go.] Come back.—Tell me, did she come down to the temple to pray, with tears in her eyes?

PRIEST : No, Sire. Only, for a moment, she checked her horse and turned her face to the temple, bowing her head low,—then rode away fast as lightning. I cannot say, if she had tears in her eyes. The light from the temple was dim.

VIKRAM : Tears in her eyes? You could not even imagine such enormity? Enough. You may go. [The Priest goes.] My God, you know that all the wrong that I have done to her, was that I loved her. I was willing to lose my heaven and my kingdom for her love. But they have not betrayed me, only she has.

Enters MINISTER.

MINISTER : Sire, I have sent messengers on horse-back in pursuit of her.

VIKRAM : Call them back. The dream has fled away. Where can your messengers find it? Get ready my army. I will go to war myself, and crush the rebellion.

MINISTER : As you command. [Goes away.]

VIKRAM : Devadatta, why do you sit silent and sad? The thief has fled, leaving the booty behind, and now I pick up my freedom. This is a moment of rejoicing to me. False, false friend, false are my words. Cruel pain pierces my heart.

DEVADATTA : You shall have no time for pain, or for love, now, your life will become one stream of purpose, and carry your kingly heart to its great conquest.

VIKRAM : But I am not yet completely freed in my heart. I still believe she will soon come back to me, when she finds that the world is not her lover, and that

man's heart is the only world for a woman. She will know what she has spurned, when she misses it; and my time will come when, her pride gone, she comes back, and jealously begins to woo me.

Enters ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT : A letter from the Queen. [*Gives the letter and goes.*]

VIKRAM : She relents already. [*Reads the letter.*] Only this. Just two lines, to say that she is going to her brother in Kashmir, to ask him to help her to quell the rebellion in my kingdom. This is insult! Help from Kashmir!

DEVADATTA : Lose no time to forestall her,—and let that be your revenge.

VIKRAM : My revenge? You shall know it.

Act II

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Tent in Kashmir. VIKRAM and the GENERAL.

GENERAL : Pardon me, King, if I dare offer you advice in the interest of your kingdom.

VIKRAM : Speak to me.

GENERAL : The rebellion in our land has been quelled. The rebels themselves are fighting on your side. Why waste our strength and time in Kashmir, when your presence in your own capital is so urgently needed?

VIKRAM : The fight here is not over yet.

GENERAL : But Kumarsen, the Queen's brother, is already punished for his sister's temerity. His army is routed, he is hiding for his life. His uncle, Chandrasen, is only too eager to be seated upon the vacant throne. Make him the king, and leave this unfortunate country to peace.

VIKRAM : It is not for punishment, that I stay here; it is for fight. The fight has become like a picture to a painter. I must add bold lines, blend strong colours, and perfect it every day. My mind grows more and more immersed in it, as it blossoms into forms; and I leave it with a sigh, when it is finished. The destruction is merely its materials, out of which it takes its shape. It is a creation. It is beautiful, as red bunches of palash, that break out like a drunken fury, yet everyone of its flowers delicately perfect.

GENERAL : But, Sire, this cannot go on forever. You have other duties. The minister has been sending me message after message, entreating me to help you to see how this war is ruining your country.

VIKRAM : I cannot see anything else in the world but what is growing under my masterly hands. Oh, the music of swords. Oh, the great battles that clasp your breast tight like hard embraces of love. Go, General, you have other works to do,—your advices flash out best on the points of your swords. [*General goes.*] This is deliverance. The bondage has fled of itself, leaving the prisoner free. Revenge is stronger than the thin wine of love. Revenge is freedom,—freedom from the

coils of cloying sweetness.

Enters GENERAL.

GENERAL : I can espy a carriage coming towards our tent, perhaps bringing an envoy of peace. It has no escort of armed soldiers.

VIKRAM : Peace must follow the war. The time for it has not yet come.

GENERAL : Let us hear the messenger first, and then,— VIKRAM : And then continue the war.

Enters a SOLDIER.

SOLDIER : The Queen has come asking for your audience.

VIKRAM : What do you say?

SOLDIER : The Queen has come.

VIKRAM : Which Queen?

SOLDIER : Our Queen, Sumitra.

VIKRAM : Go, General, see who has come. [*The General and the Oldier go.*] This is the third time that she has come, vainly attempting to coax me away, since I have carried war into Kashmir. But these are no dreams—these battles. To wake up suddenly, and then find again the same palace gardens, the flowers, the Queen, the long days made of sighs and small favours. No, a thousand times, no. She has come to make me captive, to take me as her trophy from the war-field into her palace hall. She may as well try to capture the thunderstorms.

Enters GENERAL.

GENERAL : Yes, Sire, it is our own Queen, who wants to see you. It breaks my heart when I cannot allow her to come freely into your presence.

VIKRAM : This is neither the time, nor the place, to see a woman.

GENERAL : But, Sire.

VIKRAM : No, no. Tell my guards to keep a strict watch at my tent door,—not for enemies, but for women. [*General goes.*]

Enters SHANKAR.

SHANKAR : I am Shankar,—King Kumarsen's servant. You have kept me captive in your tent.

VIKRAM : Yes, I know you.

SHANKAR : Your Queen waits outside your tent.

VIKRAM : She will have to wait for me farther away.

SHANKAR : It makes me blush to say, that she has come humbly to ask your pardon; or, if that is impossible, to accept her punishment from your hand. For she owns that she alone was to blame,—and she asks you, in the name of all that is sacred, to spare her brother's country and her brother.

VIKRAM : But you must know, old man, it is war,—and this war is with her brother, and not herself. I have no time to discuss the rights and wrongs of the question with a woman. But, being a man, you ought to know that when once a war is started, rightly or wrongly, it is our man's pride that must carry it on to the end.

SHANKAR : But do you know, Sire, you are carrying on this war with a woman, and she is your Queen. Our King is merely espousing her cause, being her brother. I ask you, is it king-like, or man-like, to magnify a domestic quarrel into a war, carrying it from country to country?

VIKRAM : I warn you, old man, your tongue is becoming dangerous. You may tell the Queen, in my name, that when her brother, Kumarsen, owns his defeat and surrenders himself into our hands, the question of pardoning will then be discussed.

SHANKAR : That is as impossible as for the morning sun to kiss the dust of the western horizon. My King will never surrender himself alive into your hands, and his sister will never suffer it.

VIKRAM : Then the war must continue. But do you not think that bravery ceases to be bravery at a certain point, and becomes mere fool-hardiness? Your King can never escape me. I have surrounded him on all sides, and he knows it.

SHANKAR : Yes, he knows it and also knows that there is a great gap.

VIKRAM : What do you mean?

SHANKAR : I mean death,—the triumphal gate through which he will escape you, if I know him right. And there waits his revenge.

[*He goes.*

Enters ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT : Sire, Chandrasen, and his wife Revati, Kumarsen's uncle and aunt, have come to see you.

VIKRAM : Ask them in.

Enter CHANDRASEN and REVATI.

VIKRAM : My obeisance to you both.

CHANDRASEN : May you live long.

REVATI : May you be victorious.

CHANDRASEN : What punishment have you decided for him?

VIKRAM : If he surrenders, I shall pardon him.

REVATI : Only this, and nothing more? If tame pardon comes at the end, then why is there such preparation? Kings are not over-grown children, and war is no mere child's play.

VIKRAM : To rob was not my purpose, but to restore my honour. The head that bears the crown cannot bear insult.

CHANDRASEN : My son, forgive him. For he is neither mature in age, nor in wisdom. You may deprive him of his right to the throne, or banish him, but spare him his life.

VIKRAM : I never wished to take his life.

REVATI : Then why such an army and arms? You kill the soldiers, who have done you no harm, and spare him who is guilty?

VIKRAM : I do not understand you.

CHANDRASEN : It is nothing. She is angry with Kumarsen for having brought our country into trouble, and for giving you just cause for anger, who are so nearly related to us.

VIKRAM : Justice will be meted out to him, when he is captured.

REVATI : I have come to ask you never to suspect that we are hiding him. It is the people. Burn their crops and their villages,— drive them with hunger, and then they will bring him out.

CHANDRASEN : Gently, wife, gently. Come to the palace, son, the reception of Kashmir awaits you there.

VIKRAM : You go there now, and I shall follow you. [*They go out.*] Oh, the red flame of hell-fire. The greed and hatred in a woman's heart. Did I catch a glimpse of my own face in her face, I wonder? Are there lines like those on my forehead, the burnt tracks made by a hidden fire? Have my lips grown as thin and curved at both ends as hers, like some murderer's knife? No, my passion is for war,—it is neither for greed, nor for cruelty; its fire is like love's fire, that knows no restraint, that counts no cost, that burns itself, and all that it touches, either into a flame, or to ashes.

Enters ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT : The Brahmin, Devadatta, has come, awaiting your pleasure.

VIKRAM : Devadatta has come? Bring him in,—No, no, stop. Let me think,—I know him. He has come to turn me back from the battle-field. Brahmin, you undermined the river banks, and now, when the water overflows, you piously pray that it may irrigate your fields, and then tamely go back. Will it not wash away your houses, and ruin the country? The joy of the terrible is blind,—its term of life is short, and it must gather its plunder in fearful haste, like a mad elephant uprooting the lotus from the pond. Wise councils will come, in their turn, when the great force is spent,—No, I must not see the Brahmin.

Enters AMARU, the chieftain of Trichur hills.

AMARU : Sire, I have come at your bidding, and I own you as my King.

VIKRAM : You are the chief of this place?

AMARU : Yes. I am the chief of Trichur. You are the King of many kings, and I am your servant. I have a daughter, whose name is Ila. She is young and comely. Do not think roe vain, when I say that she is worthy to be your spouse. She is waiting outside. Permit me, King, and I shall send her to you as the best greeting of this land of flowers.

[He goes out.

Enters ILA with her ATTENDANT.

VIKRAM : Ah! She comes, as a surprise of dawn, when the moment before it seemed like a dark night. Come, maiden, you have made the battle-field forget itself. Kashmir has shot her best arrow, at last, to pierce the heart of the war-god. You make me feel that my eyes had been wandering among the wilderness of things, to find at last their fulfilment. But why do you stand so silent, with your eyes on the ground? I can almost see a trembling of pain in your limbs, whose intensity makes it invisible.

ILA : [Kneeling] I have heard that you are a great King. Be pleased to grant me my prayer.

VIKRAM : Rise up, fair maiden. This earth is not worthy to be touched by your feet. Why do you kneel in the dust? There is nothing that I cannot grant you.

ILA : My father has given me to you. I beg myself back from your hands. You have wealth untold, and territories unlimited,—go and leave me behind in the dust; there is nothing that you can want.

VIKRAM : Is there, indeed, nothing that I can want? How shall I show you my heart? Where is its wealth? Where are its territories? It is empty. Had I no kingdom, but only you— ILA : Then first take my life,—as you take that of the

wild deer of the forest, piercing her heart with your arrows,— VIKRAM : But why, child,—why such contempt for me? Am I so utterly unworthy of you? I have won kingdoms with the might of my arms. Can I not hope to beg your heart for me?

ILA : But my heart is not mine. I have given it to one who left me months ago, promising to come back and meet me in the shade of our ancient forest. Days pass, and I wait, and the silence of the forest grows wistful. If he find me not, when he comes back! If he go away forever, and the forest shadows keep their ancient watch for the love-meeting that remains eternally unfulfilled! King, do not take me away,—leave me for him, who has left me, to find me again.

VIKRAM : What a fortunate man is he. But I warn you, girl, gods are jealous of our love. Listen to my secret. There was a time when I despised the whole world, and only loved. I woke up from my dream, and found that the world was there,—only my love burst as a bubble. What is his name, for whom you wait?

ILA : He is Kashmir's King. His name is Kumarsen.

VIKRAM : Kumarsen!

ILA : Do you know him? He is known to all. Kashmir has given its heart to him.

VIKRAM : Kumarsen? Kashmir's King?

ILA : Yes. He must be your friend.

VIKRAM : But do you not know, that the sun of his fortune has set? Give up all hope of him. He is like a hunted animal, running and hiding from one hole to another. The poorest beggar in these hills is happier than he.

ILA : I hardly understand you. King.

VIKRAM : You, women, sit in the seclusion of your hearts, and only love. You do not know how the roaring torrent of the world passes by, and we, men, are carried away in its waves in all directions. With your sad, big eyes, filled with tears, you sit and watch, clinging to flimsy hope. But learn to despair, my child.

ILA : Tell me the truth. King. Do not deceive me. I am so very little and so trivial. But I am all his own. Where,—in what homeless wilds,—is my lover roaming? I will go to seek him,—I, who never have been out of my house. Show me the way,— VIKRAM : His enemy's soldiers are after him,—he is doomed.

ILA : But are you not his friend? Will you not save him? A king is in danger, and will you suffer it as a King? Are you not honour bound to succour him? I know that all the world loved him. But where are they, in his time of misfortune? Sire, you are great in power, but what is your power for, if you do not help the great? Can you keep yourself aloof? Then show me the way,— I will offer my life for him,—the one, weak woman.

VIKRAM : Love him, love him with all you have—Love him, who is the King of

your precious heart. I have lost my love's heaven myself,—but let me have the happiness to make you happy. I will not covet your love.—The withered branch cannot hope to blossom with borrowed flowers. Trust me. I am your friend. I will bring him to you.

ILA : Noble King. I owe you my life and my heaven of happiness.

VIKRAM : Go, and be ready with your bridal dress. I will change the tune of my music. [*Ila goes.*] This war is growing tiresome. But peace is insipid. Homeless fugitive, you are more fortunate than I am. Woman's love, like heaven's watchful eyes, follows you wherever you go in this world, making your defeat a triumph and misfortune splendid, like sunset clouds.

Enters DEVADATTA.

DEVADATTA : Save me from my pursuers.

KING : Who are they?

DEVADATTA : They are your guards, King. They kept me under strict watch for this ever-lasting half-hour. I talked to them of art and letters; they were amused. They thought I was playing the fool to please them. Then I began to recite to them the best lyrics of Kalidas,—and it soothed this pair of yokels to sleep. In perfect disgust, I left their tent to come to you.

KING : These guards should be punished for their want of taste in going off to sleep when the prisoner recited Kalidas.

DEVADATTA : We shall think 'of the punishment later on. In the meanwhile, we must leave this miserable war and go back home. Once I used to think that only they died of love's separation, who were the favoured of fortune, delicately nurtured. But since I left home to come here, I have discovered that even a poor Brahmin is not too small to fall a victim to angered love.

VIKRAM : Love and death are not too careful in their choice of victims. They are impartial. Yes, friend, let us go back home. Only I have one thing to do, before I leave this place. Try to find out, from the chief of Trichur, Kumarsen's hiding-place. Tell him, when you find him, that I am no longer his enemy. And, friend, if somebody else is there with him,—if you meet her,— DEVADATTA : Yes, yes, I know. She is ever in our thoughts, yet she is beyond our words. She, who is noble, her sorrow has to be great.

VIKRAM : Friend, you have come to me, like the first sudden breeze of spring. Now my flowers will follow, with all the memories of the past happy years.

[*Devadatta goes.*]

Enters CHANDRASEN.

VIKRAM : I have glad tidings for you. I have pardoned Kumarsen.

CHANDRASEN : You may have pardoned him,—but now that I represent Kashmir, he must await his country's judgment at my hands. He shall have his punishment from me.

VIKRAM : What punishment?

CHANDRASEN : He shall be deprived of his throne.

VIKRAM : Impossible. His throne I will restore to him.

CHANDRASEN : What right have you in Kashmir's throne?

VIKRAM : The right of the victorious. This throne is now mine, and I will give it to him.

CHANDRASEN : You give it to him! Do I not know proud Kumarsen, from his infancy? Do you think he will accept his father's throne as a gift from you. He can bear your vengeance, but not your generosity.

Enters a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER : The news has reached us that Kumarsen is coming in a closed carriage to surrender himself. [Goes out.]

CHANDRASEN : Incredible! The lion comes to beg his chains! Is life so precious?

VIKRAM : But why does he come in a closed carriage?

CHANDRASEN : How can he show himself? The eyes of the crowd in the streets will pierce him, like arrows, to the quick. King, put out the lamp, when he comes, receive him in darkness. Do not let him suffer the insult of the light.

Enters DEVADATTA.

DEVADATTA : I hear that the King, Kumarsen, is coining to see you of his own will.

VIKRAM : I will receive him with solemn rituals,—with you as our priest. Ask my general to employ his soldiers to make preparation for a wedding festival.

Enter the BRAHMIN ELDERS.

ALL : Victory be to you.

FIRST ELDER : We hear that you have invited our King, to restore him to his throne,—Therefore we have come to bless you for the joy that you have given to Kashmir.

They bless him, and VIKRAM bows to them. The BRAHMINS go out. Enters SHANKAR.

SHANKAR : [To Chandrasen] Sire, is it true that Kumarsen is coming to surrender himself to his enemies?

CHANDRASEN : Yes, it is true.

SHANKAR : Worse than a thousand lies. O my beloved King, I am your old servant, I have suffered pain that only God knows, yet never complained. But how can I bear this? That you should travel through all the roads of Kashmir, to enter your cage of prison? Why did not your servant die before this day?

Enters a SOLDIER.

SOLDIER : The carriage is at the door.

VIKRAM : Have they no instruments at hand,—flutes and drums? Let them strike a glad tune. [Coming near the door] I welcome you, my kingly friend, with all my heart.

Enters SUMITRA, with a covered tray in her hands.

VIKRAM : Sumitra. My Queen!

SUMITRA : King Vikram, day and night you sought him in hills and forests, spreading devastation, neglecting your people and your honour, and today he sends through me to you his coveted head,—the head upon which death sits even more majestic than his crown.

VIKRAM : My Queen.

SUMITRA : Sire, no longer your Queen; for merciful death has claimed me. [Falls and dies.]

SHANKAR : My King, my Master, my darling boy, you have done well. You have come to your eternal throne. God has allowed me to live for so long to witness this glory. And now, my days are done, and your servant will follow you.

ILA : King, I hear the bridal music. Where is my lover? I am ready.

6. The King of the Dark Chamber

Act

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Scene 1

A street. A few wayfarers, and a CITY GUARD.

FIRST MAN : Ho, Sir!

CITY GUARD : What do you want?

SECOND MAN : Which way should we go? We are strangers here. Please tell us which street we should take.

CITY GUARD : Where do you want to go?

THIRD MAN : To where those big festivities are going to be held, you know. Which way do we go?

CITY GUARD : One street is quite as good as another here. Any street will lead you there. Go straight ahead, and you cannot miss the place. [Exit.]

FIRST MAN : Just hear what the fool says: "Any street will lead you there!" Where, then, would be the sense of having so many streets?

SECOND MAN : You needn't be so awfully put out at that, my man. A country is free to arrange its affairs in its own way. As for roads in our country—well, they are as good as non-existent; narrow and crooked lanes, a labyrinth of ruts and tracks. Our King does not believe in open thoroughfares; he thinks that streets are just so many openings for his subjects to fly away from his kingdom. It is quite the contrary here; nobody stands in your way, nobody objects to your going elsewhere if you like to; and yet the people are far from deserting this kingdom. With such streets our country would certainly have been depopulated in no time.

FIRST MAN : My dear Janardan, I have always noticed that this is a great fault in your character.

JANARDAN : What is?

FIRST MAN : That you are always having a fling at your country. How can you think that open highways may be good for a country? Look here, Kaundilya; here is a man who actually believes that open highways are the salvation of a

country.

KAUNDILYA : There is no need, Bhavadatta, of my pointing out afresh that Janardan is blessed with an intelligence which is remarkably crooked, which is sure to land him in danger some day. If the King comes to hear of our worthy friend, he will make it a pretty hard job for him to find anyone to do him his funeral rites when he is dead.

BHAVADATTA : One can't help feeling that life becomes a burden in this country; one misses the joys of privacy in these streets—this jostling and brushing shoulders with strange people day and night makes one long for a bath. And nobody can tell exactly what kind of people you are meeting with in these public roads—ugh!

KAUNDILYA : And it is Janardan who persuaded us to come to this precious country! We never had any second person like him in our family. You knew my father, of course; he was a great man, a pious man if ever there was one. He spent his whole life within a circle of a radius of 49 cubits drawn with a rigid adherence to the injunctions of the scriptures, and never for a single day did he cross this circle. After his death a serious difficulty arose—how cremate him within the limits of the 49 cubits and yet outside the house? At length the priests decided that though we could not go beyond the scriptural number, the only way out of the difficulty was to reverse the figure and make it 94 cubits; only thus could we cremate him outside the house without violating the sacred books. My word, that was strict observance! Ours is indeed no common country.

BHAVADATTA : And yet, though Janardan comes from the very same soil, he thinks it wise to declare that open highways are best for a country.

Enter GRANDFATHER with a band of boys.

GRANDFATHER : Boys, we will have to vie with the wild breeze of the south today—and we are not going to be beaten. We will sing till we have flooded all streets with our mirth and song.

SONG.

The southern gate is unbarred. Come, my spring, come!

Thou wilt swing at the swing of my heart, come, my spring, come!

Come in the lisping leaves, in the youthful surrender of flowers; Come in the flute songs and the wistful sighs of the woodlands!

Let your unfastened robe wildly flap in the drunken wind! Come, my spring, come!

[*Exeunt.*]

Enter a band of CITIZENS.

FIRST CITIZEN : After all, one cannot help wishing that the King had allowed himself to be seen at least this one day. What a great pity, to live in his kingdom and yet not to have seen him for a single day!

SECOND CITIZEN : If you only knew the real meaning of all this mystery! I could tell you if you would keep a secret.

FIRST CITIZEN : My dear fellow, we both live in the same quarter of the town, but have you ever known me letting out any man's secret? Of course, that matter of your brother's finding a hidden fortune while digging for a well—well, you know well enough why I had to give it out. You know all the facts.

SECOND CITIZEN : Of course I know. And it is because I know that I ask, could you keep a secret if I tell you? It may mean ruination to us all, you know, if you once let it out.

THIRD CITIZEN : You are a nice man, after all, Virupaksha! Why are you so anxious to bring down a disaster which as yet only may happen? Who will be responsible for keeping your secret all his life?

VIRUPAKSHA : It is only because the topic came up—well, then, I shall not say anything. I am not the man to say things for nothing. You had yourself brought up the question that the King never showed himself; and I only remarked that it was not for nothing that the King shut himself up from the public gaze.

FIRST CITIZEN : Pray do tell us why, Virupaksha.

VIRUPAKSHA : Of course I don't mind telling you—for we are all good friends, aren't we? There can be no harm. [*With a low voice.*] The King—is—hideous to look at, so he has made up his mind never to show himself to his subjects.

FIRST CITIZEN : Ha! That's it! It must be so. We have always wondered... why, the mere sight of a King in all countries makes one's soul quake like an aspen leaf with fear; but why should our King never have been seen by any mortal soul? Even if he at least came out and consigned us all to the gibbet, we might be sure that our King was no hoax. After all, there is much in Virupaksha's explanation that sounds plausible enough.

THIRD CITIZEN : Not a bit—I don't believe in a syllable of it.

VIRUPAKSHA : What, Vishu, do you mean to say that I am a liar?

VISHU : I don't exactly mean that—but I cannot accept your theory. Excuse me, I cannot help if I seem a bit rude or churlish.

VIRUPAKSHA : Small wonder that you can't believe my words—you who think

yourself sage enough to reject the opinions of your parents and superiors. How long do you think you could have stayed in this country if the King did not remain in hiding? You are no better than a flagrant heretic.

VISHU : My dear pillar of orthodoxy! Do you think any other King would have hesitated to cut off your tongue and make it food for dogs? And you have the face to say that our King is horrid to look at!

VIRUPAKSHA : Look here, Vishu. Will you curb your tongue?

VISHU : It would be superfluous to point out whose tongue needs the curbing.

FIRST CITIZEN : Hush, my dear friends—this looks rather bad... It seems as if they are resolved to put me in danger as well. I am not going to be a party to all this. [Exit.

Enter a number of men, dragging in GRANDFATHER, in boisterous exuberance.

SECOND CITIZEN : Grandpa, something strikes me today...

GRANDFATHER : What is it?

SECOND CITIZEN : This year every country has sent its people to our festival, but everyone asks, “Everything is nice and beautiful—but where is your King?” and we do not know what to answer. That is the one big gap which cannot but make itself felt to everyone in our country.

GRANDFATHER : “Gap,” do you say! Why, the whole country is all filled and crammed and packed with the King: and you call him a “gap”! Why, he has made everyone of us a crowned King!

SINGS.

We are all Kings in the kingdom of our King.

Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart to meet him!

*We do what we like, yet we do what he likes; We are not bound with the chain
of fear at the feet of a slave-owning King.*

Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart to meet him!

Our King honours each one of us, thus honours his own very self.

No littleness can keep us shut up in its walls of untruth for aye.

Were it not so, how could we have hope in our heart to meet him!

We struggle and dig our own path, thus reach his path at the end.

We can never get lost in the abyss of dark night.

Were it not so, how could we hope in our heart to meet him!

THIRD CITIZEN : But, really, I cannot stand the absurd things people say about our

King simply because he is not seen in public.

FIRST CITIZEN : Just fancy! Any one libelling me can be punished, while nobody can stop the mouth of any rascal who chooses to slander the King.

GRANDFATHER : The slander cannot touch the King. With a mere breath you can blow out the flame which a lamp inherits from the sun, but if all the world blow upon the sun itself its effulgence remains undimmed and unimpaired as before.

Enter VISHVAVASU and VIRUPAKSHA.

VISHU : Here's Grandfather! Look here, this man is going about telling everybody that our King does not come out because he is ugly.

GRANDFATHER : But why does that make you angry, Vishu? His King must be ugly, because how else could Virupaksha possess such features in his kingdom? He fashions his King after the image of himself he sees in the mirror.

VIRUPAKSHA : Grandfather, I shall mention no names, but nobody would think of disbelieving the person who gave me the news.

GRANDFATHER : Who could be a higher authority than yourself!

VIRUPAKSHA : But I could give you proofs...

FIRST CITIZEN : The impudence of this fellow knows no bounds! Not content with spreading a ghastly rumour with an unabashed face, he offers to measure his lies with insolence!

SECOND CITIZEN : Why not make him measure his length on the ground?

GRANDFATHER : Why so much heat, my friends? The poor fellow is going to have his own festive day by singing the ugliness of his King. Go along, Virupaksha, you will find plenty of people ready to believe you: may you be happy in their company. [Exeunt.

Re-enter the party of FOREIGNERS.

BHAVADATTA : It strikes me, Kaundilya, that these people haven't got a King at all. They have somehow managed to keep the rumour afloat.

KAUNDILYA : You are right, I think. We all know that the supreme thing that strikes one's eye in any country is the King, who of course loses no opportunity of exhibiting himself.

JANARDAN : But look at the nice order and regularity prevailing all over the place —how do you explain it without a King?

BHAVADATTA : So this is the wisdom you have arrived at by living so long under a ruler! Where would be the necessity of having a King if order and harmony

existed already?

JANARDAN : All these people have assembled to rejoice at this festival. Do you think they could come together like this in a country of anarchy?

BHAVADATTA : My dear Janardan, you are evading the real issue, as usual. There can be no question about the order and regularity, and the festive rejoicing too is plain enough: there is no difficulty so far. But where is the King? Have you seen him? Just tell us that.

JANARDAN : What I want to say is this: you know from your experience that there can be chaos and anarchy even if a King be present: but what do we see here?

KAUNDILYA : You are always coming back to your quibbling. Why can you not give a straight answer to Bhavadatta's question—Have you, or have you not, seen the King? Yes or no? [Exeunt.

Enter a band of MEN, singing.

SONG.

My beloved is ever in my heart That is why I see him everywhere, He is in the pupils of my eyes That is why I see him everywhere.

I went far away to hear his own words, But, ah, it was vain!

When I came back I heard them In my own songs.

Who are you who seek him like a beggar from door to door!

Come to my heart and see his face in the tears of my eyes!

Enter HERALDS and ADVANCE GUARDS of the KING.

FIRST HERALD : Stand off! Get away from the street, all of you!

FIRST CITIZEN : Eh, man, who do you think you are? You weren't of course born with such lofty strides, my friend?—Why should we stand off, my dear sir? Why should we budge? Are we street dogs, or what?

SECOND HERALD : Our King is coming this way.

SECOND CITIZEN : King? Which King?

FIRST HERALD : Our King, the King of this country.

FIRST CITIZEN : What, is the fellow mad? Whoever heard of our King coming out heralded by these vociferous gentry?

SECOND HERALD : The King will no longer deny himself to his subjects. He is coming to command the festivities himself.

SECOND CITIZEN : Brother, is that so?

SECOND HERALD : Look, his banner is flying over there.

SECOND CITIZEN : Ah, yes, that is a flag indeed.

SECOND HERALD : Do you see the red *Kimshuk* flower painted on it?

SECOND CITIZEN : Yes, yes, it is the *Kimshuk* indeed!—what a bright scarlet flower!

FIRST HERALD : Well! do you believe us now?

SECOND CITIZEN : I never said I didn't. That fellow Kumbha started all this fuss. Did I say a word?

FIRST HERALD : Perhaps, though a pot-bellied man, he is quite empty inside; an empty vessel sounds most, you know.

SECOND HERALD : Who is he? Is he any kinsman of yours?

SECOND CITIZEN : Not at all. He is just a cousin of our village chief's father-in-law, and he does not even live in the same part of our village with us.

SECOND HERALD : Just so: he quite looks the seventh cousin of somebody's father-in-law, and his understanding appears also to bear the stamp of uncle-in-lawhood.

KUMBHA : Alas, my friends, many a bitter sorrow has given my poor mind a twist before it has become like this. It is only the other day that a King came and paraded the streets, with as many titles in front of him as the drums that made the town hideous by their din, ... What did I not do to serve and please him! I rained presents on him, I hung about him like a beggar—and in the end I found the strain on my resources too hard to bear. But what was the end of all that pomp and majesty? When people sought grants and presents from him, he could not somehow discover an auspicious day in the Calendar: though all days were red-letter days when we had to pay our taxes!

SECOND HERALD : Do you mean to insinuate that our King is a bogus King like the one you have described?

FIRST HERALD : Mr. Uncle-in-law, I believe the time has come for you to say good-bye to Aunty-in-law.

KUMBHA : Please, sirs, do not take any offence. I am a poor creature—my sincerest apologies, sirs: I will do anything to be excused. I am quite willing to move away as far as you like.

SECOND HERALD : All right, come here and form a line. The King will come just now—we shall go and prepare the way for him. [*They go out.*]

SECOND CITIZEN : My dear Kumbha, your tongue will be your death one day.

KUMBHA : Friend Madhav, it isn't my tongue, it is fate. When the bogus King appeared I never said a word, though that did not prevent my striking at my own feet with all the self-confidence of innocence. And now, when perhaps the real King has come, I simply must blurt out treason. It is fate, my dear friend!

MADHAV : My faith is, to go on obeying the King—it does not matter whether he is a real one or a pretender. What do we know of Kings that we should judge them! It is like throwing stones in the dark—you are almost sure of hitting your mark. I go on obeying and acknowledging—if it is a real King, well and good: if not, what harm is there?

KUMBHA : I should not have minded if the stones were nothing better than stones. But they are often precious things: here, as elsewhere, extravagance lands us in poverty, my friend.

MADHAV : Look! There comes the King! Ah, a King indeed! What a figure, what a face! Whoever saw such beauty—lily-white, creamy-soft! What now, Kumbha? What do you think now?

KUMBHA : He looks all right—yes, he may be the real King for all I know.

MADHAV : He looks as if he were moulded and carved for kingship, a figure too exquisite and delicate for the common light of day.

Enter the “KING”.

[Transcriber’s note: The author indicates the trumped up King as “KING” in this play, enclosing the word King in double quotes to help us distinguish the imposter from the real one.

MADHAV : Prosperity and victory attend thee, O King! We have been standing here to have a sight of thee since the early morning. Forget us not, your Majesty, in your favours.

KUMBHA : The mystery deepens. I will go and call Grandfather. [Goes out.

Enter another band of MEN.

FIRST MAN : The King, the King! Come along, quick, the King is passing this way.

SECOND MAN : Do not forget me, O King! I am Vivajadatta, the grandson of Udayadatta of Kushalivastu. I came here at the first report of thy coming—I did not stop to hear what people were saying: all the loyalty in me went out towards thee, O Monarch, and brought me here.

THIRD MAN : Rubbish! I came here earlier than you—before the cockcrow. Where were you then? O King, I am Bhadrasena, of Vikramasthali. Deign to keep thy servant in thy memory!

“KING” : I am much pleased with your loyalty and devotion.

VIVAJADATTA : Your Majesty, many are the grievances and complaints we have to make to thee: to whom could we turn our prayers so long, when we could not

approach thy august presence?

KING : Your grievances will all be redressed. [Exit.

FIRST MAN : It won't do to lag behind, boys—the King will lose sight of us if we get mixed up with the mob.

SECOND MAN : See there—look what that fool Narottam is doing! He has elbowed his way through all of us and is now sedulously fanning the King with a palm leaf!

MADHAV : Indeed! Well, well, the sheer audacity of the man takes one's breath away.

SECOND MAN : We shall have to pitch the fellow out of that place—is he fit to stand beside the King?

MADHAV : Do you imagine the King will not see through him? His loyalty is obviously a little too showy and profuse.

FIRST MAN : Nonsense! Kings can't scent hypocrites as we do—I should not be surprised if the King be taken in by that fool's strenuous fanning.

Enter KUMBHA with GRANDFATHER.

KUMBHA : I tell you—he has just passed by this street.

GRANDFATHER : Is that a very infallible test of Kingship?

KUMBHA : Oh no, he did not pass unobserved: not one or two men but hundreds and thousands on both sides of the street have seen him with their own eyes.

GRANDFATHER : That is exactly what makes the whole affair suspicious. When ever has our King set out to dazzle the eyes of the people by pomp and pageantry? He is not the King to make such a thundering row over his progress through the country.

KUMBHA : But he may just have chosen to do so on this important occasion: you cannot really tell.

GRANDFATHER : Oh yes, you can! My King cherishes no weathercock fancy, no fantastic vein.

KUMBHA : But, Grandfather, I wish I could only describe him! So soft, so delicate and exquisite like a waxen doll! As I looked on him, I yearned to shelter him from the sun, to protect him with my whole body.

GRANDFATHER : Fool, O precious ass that you are! My King a waxen doll, and you to protect him!

KUMBHA : But seriously, Grandpa, he is a superb god, a miracle of beauty: I do not find a single other figure in this vast assembly that can stand beside his peerless loveliness.

GRANDFATHER : If my King chose to make himself shown, your eyes would not have noticed him. He would not stand out like that amongst others—he is one of the people, he mingles with the common populace.

KUMBHA : But did I not tell you I saw his banner?

GRANDFATHER : What did you see displayed on his banner?

KUMBHA : It had a red *Kimshuk* flower painted on it—the bright and glittering scarlet dazzled my eyes.

GRANDFATHER : My King has a thunderbolt within a lotus painted on his flag.

KUMBHA : But everyone is saying, the King is out in this festival: *everyone*.

GRANDFATHER : Why, so he is, of course: but he has no heralds, no army, no retinue, no music bands or lights to accompany him.

KUMBHA : So none could recognise him in his incognito, it seems.

GRANDFATHER : Perhaps there are a few that can.

KUMBHA : And those that can recognise him—does the King grant them whatever they ask for?

GRANDFATHER : But they never ask for anything. No beggar will ever know the King. The greater beggar appears like the King to the eyes of the lesser beggar. O fool, the man that has come out today attired in crimson and gold to beg from you—it is him whom you are trumpeting as your King! ... Ah, there comes my mad friend! Oh come, my brothers! We cannot spend the day in idle wrangling and prating—let us now have some mad frolic, some wild enjoyment!

Enter the MAD FRIEND, who sings.

Do you smile, my friends? Do you laugh, my brothers? I roam in search of the golden stag! Ah yes, the fleet-foot vision that ever eludes me!

Oh, he flits and glimpses like a flash and then is gone, the untamed rover of the wilds! Approach him and he is afar in a trice, leaving a cloud of haze and dust before thy eyes!

Yet I roam in search of the golden stag, though I may never catch him in these wilds! Oh, I roam and wander through woods and fields and nameless lands like a restless vagabond, never caring to turn my back.

You all come and buy in the marketplace and go back to your homes laden with goods and provisions: but me the wild winds of unscalable heights have touched and kissed—Oh, I know not when or where!

I have parted with my all to get what never has become mine! And yet think my moanings and my tears are for the things I thus have lost!

With a laugh and a song in my heart I have left all sorrow and grief far

behind me: Oh, I roam and wander through woods and fields and nameless lands—never caring to turn my vagabond's back!

Scene 2

A Dark Chamber. QUEEN SUDARSHANA. Her Maid of Honour, SURANGAMA.

SUDARSHANA : Light, light! Where is light? Will the lamp never be lighted in this chamber?

SURANGAMA : My Queen, all your other rooms are lighted—will you never long to escape from the light into a dark room like this?

SUDARSHANA : But why should this room be kept dark?

SURANGAMA : Because otherwise you would know neither light nor darkness.

SUDARSHANA : Living in this dark room you have grown to speak darkly and strangely—I cannot understand you, Surangama. But tell me, in what part of the palace is this chamber situated? I cannot make out either the entrance or the way out of this room.

SURANGAMA : This room is placed deep down, in the very heart of the earth. The King has built this room specially for your sake.

SUDARSHANA : Why, he has no dearth of rooms—why need he have made this chamber of darkness specially for me?

SURANGAMA : You can meet others in the lighted rooms: but only in this dark room can you meet your lord.

SUDARSHANA : No, no—I cannot live without light—I am restless in this stifling dark. Surangama, if you can bring a light into this room, I shall give you this necklace of mine.

SURANGAMA : It is not in my power, O Queen. How can I bring light to a place which he would have kept always dark!

SUDARSHANA : Strange devotion! And yet, is it not true that the King punished your father?

SURANGAMA : Yes, that is true. My father used to gamble. All the young men of the country used to gather at my father's house—and they used to drink and gamble.

SUDARSHANA : And when the King sent away your father in exile, did it not make you feel bitterly oppressed?

SURANGAMA : Oh, it made me quite furious. I was on the road to ruin and destruction: when that path was closed for me, I seemed left without any support, without any succour or shelter. I raged and raved like a wild beast in a

cage—how I wanted to tear everyone to pieces in my powerless anger!

SUDARSHANA : But how did you get this devotion towards that same King?

SURANGAMA. How can I tell? Perhaps I could rely and depend on him because he was so hard, so pitiless!

SUDARSHANA : When did this change of feeling take place?

SURANGAMA : I could not tell you—I do not know that myself. A day came when all the rebel in me knew itself beaten, and then my whole nature bowed down in humble resignation on the dust of the earth. And then I saw... I saw that he was as matchless in beauty as in terror. Oh. I was saved, I was rescued.

SUDARSHANA : Tell me, Surangama, I implore you, won't you tell me what is the King like to look at? I have not seen him yet for a single day. He comes to me in darkness, and leaves me in this dark room again. How many people have I not asked—but they all return vague and dark answers—it seems to me that they all keep back something.

SURANGAMA : To tell you the truth, Queen, I could not say well what he is like. No—he is not what men call handsome.

SUDARSHANA : You don't say so? Not handsome!

SURANGAMA : No, my Queen, he is not handsome. To call him beautiful would be to say far too little about him.

SUDARSHANA : All your words are like that—dark, strange, and vague. I cannot understand what you mean.

SURANGAMA : No, I will not call him handsome. And it is because he is not beautiful that he is so wonderful, so superb, so miraculous!

SUDARSHANA : I do not quite understand you—though I like to hear you talk about him. But I must see him at any cost. I do not even remember the day when I was married to him. I have heard mother say that a wise man came before my marriage and said, "He who will wed your daughter is without a second on this earth." How often have I asked her to describe his appearance to me, but she only answers vaguely, and says she cannot say—she saw him through a veil, faintly and obscurely. But if he is the best among men, how can I sit still without seeing him?

SURANGAMA : Do you not feel a faint breeze blowing?

SUDARSHANA : A breeze? Where?

SURANGAMA : Do you not smell a soft perfume?

SUDARSHANA : No, I don't.

SURANGAMA : The large door has opened... he is coming; my King is coming in.

SUDARSHANA : How can you perceive when he comes?

SURANGAMA : I cannot say: I seem to hear his footsteps in my own heart. Being his servant of this dark chamber, I have developed a sense—I can know and feel without seeing.

SUDARSHANA : Would that I had this sense too, Surangama!

SURANGAMA : You will have it, O Queen... this sense will awaken in you one day. Your longing to have a sight of him makes you restless, and therefore all your mind is strained and warped in that direction. When you are past this state of feverish restlessness, everything will become quite easy.

SUDARSHANA : How is it that it is easy to you, who are a servant, and so difficult to me, the Queen?

SURANGAMA : It is because I am a mere servant that no difficulty baulks me. On the first day, when he left this room to my care, saying, "Surangama, you will always keep this chamber ready for me: this is all your task," then I did not say, even in thought, "Oh, give me the work of those who keep the other rooms lighted." No, but as soon as I bent all my mind to my task, a power woke and grew within me, and mastered every part of me unopposed... Oh, there he comes! ... he is standing outside, before the door. Lord! O King!

SONG outside.

Open your door. I am waiting.

The ferry of the light from the dawn to the dark is done for the day, The evening star is up.

Have you gathered your flowers, braided your hair, And donned your white robe for the night?

The cattle have come to their folds and birds to their nests.

The cross paths that run to all quarters have merged into one in the dark.

Open your door. I am waiting.

SURANGAMA : O King, who can keep thy own doors shut against thee? They are not locked or bolted—they will swing wide open if you only touch them with thy fingers. Wilt thou not even touch them? Wilt thou not enter unless I go and open the doors?

SONG.

At a breath you can remove my veils, my lord!

If I fall asleep on the dust and hear not your call, would you wait till I wake?

Would not the thunder of your chariot wheel make the earth tremble?

Would you not burst open the door and enter your own house unbidden?

Then do you go, O Queen, and open the door for him: he will not enter otherwise.

SUDARSHANA : I do not see anything distinctly in the dark—I do not know where the doors are. You know everything here—go and open the doors for me.

SURANGAMA opens the door, bows to the KING, and goes out. The KING will remain invisible throughout this play.

SUDARSHANA : Why do you not allow me to see you in the light?

KING : So you want to see me in the midst of a thousand things in broad daylight! Why should I not be the only thing you can feel in this darkness?

SUDARSHANA : But I must see you—I am longing to have a sight of you.

KING : You will not be able to bear the sight of me—it will only give you pain, poignant and overpowering.

SUDARSHANA : How can you say that I shall be unable to bear your sight? Oh, I can feel even in this dark how lovely and wonderful you are: why should I be afraid of you in the light? But tell me, can you see me in the dark?

KING : Yes, I can.

SUDARSHANA : What do you see?

KING : I see that the darkness of the infinite heavens, whirled into life and being by the power of my love, has drawn the light of a myriad stars into itself, and incarnated itself in a form of flesh and blood. And in that form, what aeons of thought and striving, untold yearnings of limitless skies, the countless gifts of unnumbered seasons!

SUDARSHANA : Am I so wonderful, so beautiful? When I hear you speak so, my heart swells with gladness and pride. But how can I believe the wonderful things you tell me? I cannot find them in myself!

KING : Your own mirror will not reflect them—it lessens you, limits you, makes you look small and insignificant. But could you see yourself mirrored in my own mind, how grand would you appear! In my own heart you are no longer the daily individual which you think you are—you are verily my second self.

SUDARSHANA : Oh, do show me for an instant how to see with your eyes! Is there nothing at all like darkness to you? I am afraid when I think of this. This darkness which is to me real and strong as death—is this simply nothing to you? Then how can there be any union at all between us, in a place like this? No, no—it is impossible: there is a barrier betwixt us two: not here, no, not in this place. I want to find you and see you where I see trees and animals, birds and stones and the earth.

KING : Very well, you can try to find me—but none will point me out to you. You will have to recognise me, if you can, yourself. And even if anybody professes to show me to you, how can you be sure he is speaking the truth?

SUDARSHANA : I shall know you; I shall recognise you. I shall find you out among a million men. I cannot be mistaken.

KING : Very well, then, tonight, during the festival of the full moon of the spring, you will try to find me out from the high turret of my palace—search for me with your own eyes amongst the crowd of people.

SUDARSHANA : Wilt thou be there among them?

KING : I shall show myself again and again, from every side of the crowd. Surangama!

Enter SURANGAMA.

SURANGAMA : What is thy pleasure, lord?

KING : Tonight is the full moon festival of the spring.

SURANGAMA : What have I to do tonight?

KING : Today is a festive day, not a day of work. The pleasure gardens are in their full bloom—you will join in my festivities there.

SURANGAMA : I shall do as thou desirest, lord.

KING : The Queen wants to see me tonight with her own eyes.

SURANGAMA : Where will the Queen see you?

KING : Where the music will play at its sweetest, where the air will be heavy with the dust of flowers—there in the pleasure grove of silver light and mellow gloom.

SURANGAMA : What can be seen in the hide-and-seek of darkness and light? There the wind is wild and restless, everything is dance and swift movement—will it not puzzle the eyes?

KING : The Queen is curious to search me out.

SURANGAMA : Curiosity will have to come back baffled and in tears!

SONG.

Ah, they would fly away, the restless vagrant eyes, the wild birds of the forest!

But the time of their surrender will come, their flights hither and thither will be ended when The music of enchantment will pursue them and pierce their hearts.

Alas, the wild birds would fly to the wilderness!

Scene 3

Before the Pleasure Gardens. Enter AVANTI, KOSHALA, KANCHI, and other KINGS.

AVANTI : Will the King of this place not receive us?

KANCHI : What manner of governing a country is this? The King is having a festival in a forest, where even the meanest and commonest people can have easy access!

KOSHALA : We ought to have had a separate place set apart and ready for our reception.

KANCHI : If he has not prepared such a place yet, we shall compel him to have one erected for us.

KOSHALA : All this makes one naturally suspect if these people have really got any King at all—it looks as if an unfounded rumour has led us astray.

AVANTI : It may be so with regard to the King, but the Queen Sudarshana of this place isn't at all an unfounded rumour.

KOSHALA : It is only for her sake that I have cared to come at all. I don't mind omitting to see one who never makes himself visible, but it would be a stupid mistake if we were to go away without a sight of one who is eminently worth a visit.

KANCHI : Let us make some definite plan, then.

AVANTI : A plan is an excellent thing, so long as you are not yourself entangled in it.

KANCHI : Hang it, who are these vermin swarming this way? Here! Who are you?

Enter GRANDFATHER and the boys.

GRANDFATHER : We are the Jolly Band of Have-Nothings.

AVANTI : The introduction was superfluous. But you will take yourselves away a little further and leave us in peace.

GRANDFATHER : We never suffer from a want of space: we can afford to give you as wide a berth as you like. What little suffices for us is never the bone of contention between any rival claimants. Is not that so, my little friends? [They sing.]

SONG.

We have nothing, indeed we have nothing at all!

We sing merrily fol de rol de rol!

*Some build high walls of their houses On the bog of the sands of gold.
We stand before them and sing Fol de rol de rol.
Pickpockets hover about us And honour us with covetous glances.
We shake our empty pockets and sing Fol de rol de rol.
When death, the old hag, steals to our doors We snap our fingers at her face,
And we sing in a chorus with gay flourishes Fol de rol de rol.*

KANCHI : Look over there, Koshala, who are those coming this way? A pantomime? Somebody is out masquerading as a King.

KOSHALA : The King of this place may tolerate all this tomfoolery, but we won't.

AVANTI : He is perhaps some rural chief.

Enter GUARDS on foot.

KANCHI : What country does your King come from?

FIRST SOLDIER : He is the King of this country. He is going to command the festivities. [They go out.

KOSHALA : What! The King of this country come out for the festivities!

AVANTI : Indeed! We shall then have to return with a sight of him only—leaving the delectable Queen unseen.

KANCHI : Do you really think that fellow spoke the truth? Anybody can pass himself off as the King of this kingless country. Can you not see that the man looks like a dressed-up King—much too over-dressed?

AVANTI : But he looks handsome—his appearance is not without a certain pleasing attractiveness.

KANCHI : He may be pleasing to your eye, but if you look at him closely enough there can be no mistaking him. You will see how I expose him before you all.

Enter the trumped-up “KING”.

“KING” : Welcome, princes, to our kingdom! I trust your reception has been properly looked after by my officials?

KINGS : [With feigned courtesy] Oh yes—nothing was lacking in the reception.

KANCHI : If there was any shortcoming at all, it has been made up by the honour of our sight of your Majesty.

“KING” : We do not show ourselves to the general public, but your great devotion and loyalty to us has made it a pleasure for us not to deny ourselves to you.

KANCHI : It is truly hard for us, your Majesty, to bear the weight of your gracious

favours.

KING : We are afraid we shall not be able to stop here long.

KANCHI : I have thought so, already: you do not quite look up to it.

KING : In the meantime if you have any favours to ask of us KANCHI : We have: but we would like to speak a little more in private.

KING : [To his Attendants.] Retire a little from our presence. [They retire.] Now you can express your desires without any reserve.

KANCHI : There will be no reserve on our part—our only fear is that you might think restraint necessary for yourself.

KING : Oh no, you need have no scruples on that score.

KANCHI : Come, then, do us homage by placing your head on the ground before us.

KING : It seems my servants have distributed the Varuni spirits too liberally in the reception camps.

KANCHI : False pretender, it is you who are suffering from an overdose of arrogant spirits. Your head will soon kiss the dust.

KING : Princes, these heavy jokes are not worthy of a king.

KANCHI : Those who will jest properly with you are near at hand. General!

KING : No more, I entreat you. I can see plainly I owe homage to you all. The head is bowing down of itself—there is no need for the application of any sharp methods to lay it low. So here I do my obeisance to you all. If you kindly allow me to escape I shall not inflict my presence long on you.

KANCHI : Why should you escape? We will make you king of this place—let us carry our joke to its legitimate finish. Have you got any following?

KING : I have. Everyone who sees me in the streets flocks after me. When I had a meagre retinue at first everyone regarded me with suspicion, but now with the increasing crowd their doubts are waning and dissolving. The crowd is being hypnotised by its own magnitude. I have not got to do anything now.

KANCHI : That's excellent! From this moment we all promise to help and stand by you. But you will have to do us one service in return.

KING : Your commands and the crown you are putting on my head will be equally binding and sacred to me.

KANCHI : At present we want nothing more than a sight of the Queen Sudarshana. You will have to see to this.

KING : I shall spare no pains for that.

KANCHI : We cannot put much faith on your pains—you will be solely directed by our instructions. But now you can go and join the festivities in the royal

arbour with all possible splendour and magnificence. [They go out.

Enter GRANDFATHER and a band of people.

FIRST CITIZEN : Grandfather, I cannot help saying—yes, and repeating it five hundred times—that our King is a perfect fraud.

GRANDFATHER : Why only five hundred times? There is no need to practise such heroic self-control—you can say it five thousand times if that adds to your pleasure.

SECOND CITIZEN : But you cannot keep up a dead lie forever.

GRANDFATHER : It has made me alive, my friend.

THIRD CITIZEN : We shall proclaim to the whole world that our King is a lie, the merest and emptiest shadow!

FIRST CITIZEN : We shall all shout from our housetops that we have no King—let him do whatever he likes if he exists.

GRANDFATHER : He will do nothing at all.

SECOND CITIZEN : My son died untimely at twenty-five of raging fever in seven days. Could such a calamity befall me under the rule of a virtuous King?

GRANDFATHER : But you still have got two sons left: while I have lost all my five children one after another.

THIRD CITIZEN : What do you say now?

GRANDFATHER : What then? Shall I lose my King too because I have lost my children? Don't take me for such a big fool as that.

FIRST CITIZEN : It is a fine thing to argue whether there is a King or not when one is simply starving for want of food! Will the King save us?

GRANDFATHER : Brother, you are right. But why not *find* the King who owns all the food? You certainly will not find by your wailings at home.

SECOND CITIZEN : Look at the justice of our King! That Bhadrasen—you know what a touching sight he is when he is speaking of his King—the sentimental idiot! He is reduced to such a state of penury that even the bats that infest his house find it a too uncomfortable place.

GRANDFATHER : Why, look at me! I am toiling and slaving night and day for my King, but I have not yet received so much as a brass farthing for my pains.

THIRD CITIZEN : Now, what do you think of that?

GRANDFATHER : What should I think? Does anyone reward his friends? Go, my friends, and say if you like that our King exists nowhere. That is also a part of our ceremony in celebrating this festival.

Scene 4

Turret of the Royal Palace. SUDARSHANA and her friend ROHINI.

SUDARSHANA : You may make mistakes, Rohini, but I cannot be mistaken: am I not the Queen? That, of course, must be my King.

ROHINI : He who has conferred such high honour upon you cannot be long in showing himself to you.

SUDARSHANA : His very form makes me restless like a caged bird. Did you try well to ascertain who he is?

ROHINI : Yes, I did. Everyone I asked said that he was the King.

SUDARSHANA : What country is he the King of?

ROHINI : Our country, King of this land.

SUDARSHANA : Are you sure that you are speaking of him who has a sunshade made of flowers held over his head?

ROHINI : The same: he whose flag has the *Kimshuk* flower painted on it.

SUDARSHANA : I recognised him at once, of course, but it is you who had your doubts.

ROHINI : We are apt to make mistakes, my Queen, and we are afraid to offend you in case we are wrong.

SUDARSHANA : Would that Surangama were here! There would remain no room for doubt then.

ROHINI : Do you think her cleverer than any of us?

SUDARSHANA : Oh no, but she would recognise him instantly.

ROHINI : I cannot believe that she would. She merely pretends to know him. There is none to test her knowledge if she professes to know the King. If we were as shameless as she is, it would not have been difficult for us to boast about our acquaintance with the King.

SUDARSHANA : But no, she never boasts.

ROHINI : It is pure affectation, the whole of it: which often goes a longer way than open boasting. She is up to all manner of tricks: that is why we could never like her.

SUDARSHANA : But whatever you may say, I should have liked to ask her if she were here.

ROHINI : Very well, Queen. I shall bring her here. She must be lucky if she is indispensable for the Queen to know the King.

SUDARSHANA : Oh no—it isn't for that—but I would like to hear it said by everyone.

ROHINI : Is not everyone saying it? Why, just listen, the acclamations of the people mount up even to this height!

SUDARSHANA : Then do one thing: put these flowers on a lotus leaf, and take them to him.

ROHINI : And what am I to say if he asks who sends them?

SUDARSHANA : You will not have to say anything—he will know. He thought that I would not be able to recognise him: I cannot let him off without showing that I have found him out. [Rohini goes out with the flowers.]

SUDARSHANA : My heart is all a-quiver and restless tonight: I have never felt like this before. The white, silver light of the full moon is flooding the heavens and brimming over on every side like the bubbling foam of wine, ... It seizes on me like a yearning, like a mantling intoxication. Here, who is here?

Enter a SERVANT.

SERVANT : What is your pleasure, your Majesty?

SUDARSHANA : Do you see those festive boys singing and moving through the alleys and avenues of the mango trees? Call them hither, bring them to me: I want to hear them sing. [Servant goes out and enters with the boys.] Come, living emblems of youthful spring, begin your festive song! All my mind and body is song and music tonight—but the ineffable melody escapes my tongue: do you then sing for my sake!

SONG.

My sorrow is sweet to me in this spring night.

My pain smites at the chords of my love and softly sings.

Visions take birth from my yearning eyes and flit in the moonlit sky.

The smells from the depths of the woodlands have lost their way in my dreams.

Words come in whispers to my ears, I know not from where, And bells in my anklets tremble and jingle in time with my heart thrills.

SUDARSHANA : Enough, enough—I cannot bear it anymore! Your song has filled my eyes with tears... A fancy comes to me—that desire can never attain its object—it need never attain it. What sweet hermit of the woods has taught you this song? Oh that my eyes could see him whose song my ears have heard! Oh, how I wish—I wish I could wander rapt and lovely in the thick woodland arbours of the heart! Dear boys of the hermitage! How shall I reward you? This necklace is but made of jewels, hard stones— its hardness will give you pain—I

have got nothing like the garlands of flowers you have on. [The boys bow and go out.

Enter ROHINI.

SUDARSHANA : I have not done well—I have not done well, Rohini. I feel ashamed to ask you what happened. I have just realised that no hand can really give the greatest of gifts. Still, let me hear all.

ROHINI : When I gave the King those flowers, he did not appear to understand anything.

SUDARSHANA : You don't say so? He did not understand ROHINI : No; he sat there like a doll, without uttering a single word. I think he did not want to show that he understood nothing, so he just held his tongue.

SUDARSHANA : Fie on me! My shamelessness has been justly punished. Why did you not bring back my flowers?

ROHINI : How could I? The King of Kanchi, a very clever man, who was sitting by him, took in everything at a glance, and he just smiled a bit and said, "Emperor, the Queen Sudarshana sends your Majesty her greetings with these blossoms—the blossoms that belong to the God of Love, the friend of Spring." The King seemed to awake with a start, and said, "This is the crown of all my regal glory tonight." I was coming back, all out of countenance, when the King of Kanchi took off this necklace of jewels from the King's person, and said to me, "Friend, the King's garland gives itself up to you, in return for the happy fortune you have brought."

SUDARSHANA : What, Kanchi had to make the King understand all this! Woe is me, tonight's festival has opened wide for me the doors of ignominy and shame! What else could I expect? Leave me alone, Rohini; I want solitude for a time. [Rohini goes out.] A great blow has shattered my pride to atoms today, and yet... I cannot efface from my mind that beautiful, fascinating figure! No pride is left me—I am beaten, vanquished, utterly helpless... I cannot even turn away from him. Oh, how the wish comes back to me again and again—to ask that garland of Rohini! But what would she think! Rohini!

Enter ROHINI.

ROHINI : What is your wish?

SUDARSHANA : What reward do you deserve for your services today?

ROHINI : Nothing from you—but I had my reward from the King as it should be.

SUDARSHANA : That is no free gift, but an extortion, of reward. I do not like to see

you put on what was given in so indifferent a manner. Take it off—I give you my bracelets if you leave it here. Take these bracelets, and go now. [Rohini goes out.] Another defeat! I should have thrown this necklace away,—but I could not! It is pricking me as if it were a garland of thorns—but I cannot throw it away. This is what the god of the festival has brought me tonight—this necklace of ignominy and shame!

Scene 5

GRANDFATHER near the door of the Pleasure House. A Company of MEN.

GRANDFATHER : Have you had enough of it, friends?

FIRST MAN : Oh, more than that, Grandpa. Just see, they have made me red all over. None has escaped.

[Author's note: During the spring festival in India people throw red powder on each other. In this play this red powder has been taken to be the symbol of the passion of love.]

GRANDFATHER : No? Did they throw the red dust on the Kings too?

SECOND MAN : But who could approach them? They were all secure inside the enclosures.

GRANDFATHER : So they have escaped you! Could you not throw the least bit of colour on them? You should have forced your way there.

THIRD MAN : My dear old man, they have a different sort of red specially to themselves. Their eyes are red: the turbans of their guards and retinue are red too. And the latter flourished their swords about so much that a little more nearness on our part would have meant a lavish display of the fundamental red colour.

GRANDFATHER : Well done, friends—always keep them at a distance. They are the exiles of the Earth—and we have got to keep them so.

THIRD MAN : I am going home, Grandpa; it is past midnight. [Goes out.]

Enter a Band of Singers, singing.

All blacks and whites have lost their distinction And have become red—red as the tinge of your feet.

Red is my bodice and red are my dreams, My heart sways and trembles like a red lotus.

GRANDFATHER : Excellent, my friends, splendid! So you had a really enjoyable

time!

SINGERS : Oh, grand! Everything was red, red! Only the moon in the sky gave us the slip—it remained white.

GRANDFATHER : He only looks so innocent from the outside. If you had only taken off his white disguise, you would have seen his trickery. I have been watching what red colours he is throwing on the Earth tonight. And yet, fancy his remaining white and colourless all the while!

SONG.

With you is my game, love, my love!

*My heart is mad, it will never own defeat, Do you think you will escape
stainless yourself reddening me with red powder?*

Could I not colour your robe with the red pollens of the blossom of my heart?

[They go out.]

Enter the “KING” and KANCHI.

KANCHI : You must do exactly as I have told you. Let there be no mistake of any kind.

“KING” : There shall be no mistake.

KANCHI : The Queen Sudarshana’s mansions are in the ...

“KING” : Yes, sire, I have seen the place well.

KANCHI : What you have got to do is to set fire to the garden, and then you will take advantage of the bustle and confusion to accomplish your object straightway.

“KING” : I shall remember.

KANCHI : Look here, Sir Pretender, I cannot help thinking that a needless fear is troubling us—there is really no King in this country.

“KING” : My sole aim is to rid this country of this anarchy. Your common man cannot live without a King, whether a real one or a fraud! Anarchy is always a source of danger.

KANCHI : Pious benefactor of the people, your wonderful self-sacrifice should really be an example to all of us. I am thinking of doing this extraordinary service to the people myself. [They go out.]

Scene 6

ROHINI : What is the matter? I cannot make out what is all this! [To the

Gardeners.] Where are you all going away in such a hurry?

FIRST GARDENER : We are going out of the garden.

ROHINI : Where?

SECOND GARDENER : We do not know where—the King has called us.

ROHINI : Why, the King is in the garden. Which King has called you?

FIRST GARDENER : We cannot say.

SECOND GARDENER : The King we have been serving all our life, of course.

ROHINI : Will you all go?

FIRST GARDENER : Yes, all—we have to go instantly. Otherwise we might get into trouble. [*They go out.*

ROHINI : I cannot understand their words... I am afraid. They are scampering off like wild animals that fly just before the bank of a river breaks down into the water.

Enter KING of KOSHALA.

KOSHALA : Rohini, do you know where your King and Kanchi have gone?

ROHINI : They are somewhere in the garden, but I could not tell you where.

KOSHALA : I cannot really understand their intentions. I have not done well to put my trust in Kanchi. [*Exit.*

ROHINI : What is this dark affair going on amongst these kings? Something dreadful is going to happen soon. Shall I too be drawn into this affair?

Enter AVANTI.

AVANTI : Rohini, do you know where the other princes are?

ROHINI : It is difficult to say which of them is where. The King of Koshala just passed by in this direction.

AVANTI : I am not thinking of Koshala. Where are your King and Kanchi?

ROHINI : I have not seen them for a long time.

AVANTI : Kanchi is always avoiding us. He is certainly planning to deceive us all. I have not done well to put my hand in this imbroglio. Friend, could you kindly tell me any way out of this garden?

ROHINI : I have none.

AVANTI : Is there no man here who will show me the way out?

ROHINI : The servants have all left the garden.

AVANTI : Why did they do so?

ROHINI : I could not exactly understand what they meant. They said the King had

commanded them to leave the garden at once.

AVANTI : King? Which King? Rohini They could not say exactly.

AVANTI : This does not sound well. I shall have to find a way out at any cost. I cannot stay here a single moment more. [Goes out hurriedly.]

ROHINI : Where shall I find the King? When I gave him the flowers the Queen had sent, he did not seem much interested in me at the time; but ever since that hour he has been showering gifts and presents on me. This causeless generosity makes me more afraid... Where are the birds flying at such an hour of the night? What has frightened them all of a sudden? This is not the usual time of their flight, certainly, ... Why is the Queen's pet deer running that way? Chapata! Chapata! She does not even hear my call. I have never seen a night like this! The horizon on every side suddenly becomes red, like a madman's eye! The sun seems to be setting at this untimely hour on all sides at the same time. What madness of the Almighty is this! ... Oh, I am frightened! ... Where shall I find the King?

Scene 7

At the Door of the QUEEN'S Palace.

"KING" : What is this you have done, Kanchi?

KANCHI : I wanted to fire only this part of the garden near the palace. I had no idea that it would spread so quickly on all sides. Tell me, quick, the way out of this garden.

"KING" : I can tell you nothing about it. Those who brought us here have all fled away.

KANCHI : You are a native of this country—you must know the way.

"KING" : I have never entered these inner royal gardens before.

KANCHI : I won't hear of it—you must show me the way, or I shall split you into halves.

"KING" : You may take my life by that means, but it would be a very precarious method of finding the way out of this garden.

KANCHI : Why were you, then, going about saying that you were the King of this country?

"KING" : I am not the King—I am not the King. [Throwing himself on the ground with folded hands.] Where art thou, my King? Save me, oh, save me! I am a rebel—punish me, but do not kill me!

KANCHI : What is the use of shouting and cringing to the empty air? It is a much

better way of spending the time to search for the way.

KING : I shall lie down here—I shall not move an inch. Come what will, I shall not complain.

KANCHI : I will not allow all this nonsense. If I am to be burnt to death, you will be my companion to the very end.

FROM THE OUTSIDE : Oh, save us, save us, our King! The fire is on all sides of us!

KANCHI : Fool, get up, lose no more time.

SUDARSHANA : [Entering] King, O my King! Save me, save me from death! I am surrounded by fire.

KING : Who is the King? I am no King.

SUDARSHANA : You are not the King?

KING : No, I am a hypocrite, I am a scoundrel. [*Flinging his crown on the ground.*] Let my deception and hypocrisy be shattered into dust! [Goes out with Kanchi.]

SUDARSHANA : No King! He is not the King? Then, O thou God of fire, burn me, reduce me to ashes! I shall throw myself into thy hands, O thou great purifier; burn to ashes my shame, my longing, my desire.

ROHINI : [Entering] Queen, where are you going? All your inner chambers are shrouded in raging fire—do you not enter there.

SUDARSHANA : Yes! I will enter those burning chambers! It is the fire of my death! [Enters the Palace.]

Scene 8

The Dark Room. The KING and SUDARSHANA.

KING : Do not be afraid—you have no cause for fear. The fire will not reach this room.

SUDARSHANA : I have no fear—but oh, shame has accompanied me like a raging fire. My face, my eyes, my heart, every part of my body is being scorched and burnt by its flames.

KING : It will be some time before you get over this burning.

SUDARSHANA : This fire will never cease—will never cease!

KING : Do not be despondent, Queen!

SUDARSHANA : O King, I shall not hide anything from you... I have another's garland round my neck.

KING : That garland, too, is mine—how else could he get it? He stole it from my room.

SUDARSHANA : But it is *his* gift to me: yet I could not fling this garland away! When the fire came roaring on all sides of me, I thought of throwing this garland into the fire. But no, I could not. My mind whispered, "Let that garland be on you in your death." ... What fire is this, O King, into which I, who had come out to see you, leaped like a moth that cannot resist the flame? What a pain is this, oh, what agony! The fire keeps burning as fiercely as ever, but I go on living within its flames!

KING : But you have seen me at last—your desire has been fulfilled.

SUDARSHANA : But did I seek to see you in the midst of this fearful doom? I know not what I saw, but my heart is still beating fast with fear.

KING : What did you see?

SUDARSHANA : Terrible,—oh, it was terrible! I am afraid even to think of it again. Black, black—oh, thou art black like the everlasting night! I only looked on thee for one dreadful instant. The blaze of the fire fell on your features—you looked like the awful night when a comet swings fearfully into our ken— oh, then I closed my eyes—I could not look on you anymore. Black as the threatening storm-cloud, black as the shoreless sea with the spectral red tint of twilight on its tumultuous waves!

KING : Have I not told you before that one cannot bear my sight unless one is already prepared for me? One would want to run away from me to the ends of the earth. Have I not seen this times without number? That is why I wanted to reveal myself to you slowly and gradually, not all too sudden.

SUDARSHANA : But sin came and destroyed all your hopes—the very possibility of a union with you has now become unthinkable to me.

KING : It will be possible in time, my Queen. The utter and bleak blackness that has today shaken you to your soul with fear will one day be your solace and salvation. What else can my love exist for?

SUDARSHANA : It cannot be, it is not possible. What will your love only do? My love has now turned away from you. Beauty has cast its spell on me—this frenzy, this intoxication will never leave me—it has dazzled and fired my eyes, it has thrown its golden glamour over my very dreams! I have told you all now—punish me as you like.

KING : The punishment has already begun.

SUDARSHANA : But if you do not cast me off. I will leave you KING : You have the utmost liberty to do as you like.

SUDARSHANA : I cannot bear your presence! My heart is angry at you. Why did you—but what have you done to me? ... Why are you like this? Why did they tell me you were fair and handsome? Thou art black, black as night—I shall

never, I can never, like you. I have seen what I love—it is soft as cream, delicate as the *shirisha* flower, beautiful as a butterfly.

KING : It is false as a mirage, empty as a bubble.

SUDARSHANA : Let it be—but I cannot stand near you—I simply cannot! I must fly away from here. Union with you, it cannot be possible! It cannot be anything but a false union—my mind must inevitably turn away from you.

KING : Will you not even try a little?

SUDARSHANA : I have been trying since yesterday—but the more I try, the more rebellious does my heart become. If I stay with you I shall constantly be pursued and hounded by the thought that I am impure, that I am false and faithless.

KING : Well then, you can go as far from me as you like.

SUDARSHANA : I cannot fly away from you—just because you do not prevent my going. Why do you not hold me back, hold me by the hair, saying, “You shall not go”? Why do you not strike me? Oh, punish me, strike me, beat me with violent hands! But your unresisting silence makes me wild—oh, I cannot bear it!

KING : How do you think that I am really silent? How do you know that I am not trying to keep you back?

SUDARSHANA : Oh, no, no!—I cannot bear this—tell me aloud, command me with the voice of thunder, compel me with words that will drown everything else in my ears—do not let me off so easily, so mildly!

KING : I shall leave you free, but why should I let you break away from me?

SUDARSHANA : You will not let me? Well then, I must go!

KING : Go then!

SUDARSHANA : Then I am not to blame at all. You could have held me back by force, but you did not! You have not hindered me—and now I shall go away. Command your sentinels to prevent my going KING : No one will stand in your way. You can go as free as the broken storm-cloud driven by the tempest.

SUDARSHANA : I can resist no more—something in me is impelling me forward—I am breaking away from my anchor! Perhaps I shall sink, but I shall return no more. [She rushes out.]

Enter SURANGAMA, who sings.

SURANGAMA : What will of thine is this that sends me afar! Again shall I come back at thy feet from all my wanderings. It is thy love that feigns this neglect—thy caressing hands are pushing me away—to draw me back to thy arms again! O my King, what is this game that thou art playing throughout thy kingdom?

SUDARSHANA : [Re-entering] King, O King!

SURANGAMA : He has gone away.

SUDARSHANA : Gone away? Well then, ... then he has cast me off for good! I have come back, but he could not wait a single instant for me! Very well, then, I am now perfectly free. Surangama, did he ask you to keep me back?

SURANGAMA : No, he said nothing.

SUDARSHANA : Why should he say anything? Why should he care for me? ... I am then free, perfectly free. But, Surangama, I wanted to ask one thing of the King, but could not utter it in his presence. Tell me if he has punished the prisoners with death.

SURANGAMA : Death? My King never punishes with death.

SUDARSHANA : What has he done to them, then?

SURANGAMA : He has set them at liberty. Kanchi has acknowledged his defeat and gone back to his kingdom.

SUDARSHANA : Ah, what a relief!

SURANGAMA : My Queen, I have one prayer to make to you.

SUDARSHANA : You will not have to utter your prayer in words, Surangama. Whatever jewellery and ornaments the King gave me, I leave to you—I am not worthy to wear them now.

SURANGAMA : No, I do not want them, my Queen. My master has never given me any ornaments to wear—my unadorned plainness is good enough for me. He has not given me anything of which I can boast before people.

SUDARSHANA : What do you want of me then?

SURANGAMA : I too shall go with you, my Queen.

SUDARSHANA : Consider what you are saying; you are wanting to leave your master. What a prayer for you to make!

SURANGAMA : I shall not go far from him—when you are going out unguarded he will be with you, close by your side.

SUDARSHANA : You are talking nonsense, my child. I wanted to take Rohini with me, but she would not come. What gives you courage enough to wish to come with me?

SURANGAMA : I have got neither courage nor strength. But I shall go—courage will come of itself, and strength too will come.

SUDARSHANA : No, I cannot take you with me; your presence will constantly remind me of my shame; I shall not be able to endure that.

SURANGAMA : O my Queen, I have made all your good and all your evil my own as well; will you treat me as a stranger still? I must go with you.

Scene 9

The KING OF KANYA KUBJA, father of SUDARSHANA, and his MINISTER.

KING OF KANYA KUBJA : I heard everything before her arrival.

MINISTER : The princess is waiting alone outside the city gates on the bank of the river. Shall I send people to welcome her home?

KING OF KANYA KUBJA : What! She who has faithlessly left her husband—do you propose trumpeting her infamy and shame to everyone by getting up a show for her?

MINISTER : Shall I then make arrangements for her residence at the palace?

KING OF KANYA KUBJA : You will do nothing of the sort. She has left her place as the Empress of her own accord—here she will have to work as a maid-servant if she wants to stay in my house.

MINISTER : It will be hard and bitter to her, Your Highness.

KING OF KANYA KUBJA : If I seek to save her from her sufferings, then I am not worthy to be her father.

MINISTER : I shall arrange everything as you wish, Your Highness.

KING OF KANYA KUBJA : Let it be kept a secret that she is my daughter; otherwise we shall all be in an awful trouble.

MINISTER : Why do you fear such disaster, Your Highness?

KING OF KANYA KUBJA : When woman swerves from the right path, then she appears fraught with the direst calamity. You do not know with what deadly fear this daughter of mine has inspired me—she is coming to my home laden with peril and danger.

Scene 10

Inner Apartments of the Palace. SUDARSHANA and SURANGAMA.

SUDARSHANA : Go away from me, Surangama! A deadly anger rages within me—I cannot bear anybody—it makes me wild to see you so patient and submissive.

SURANGAMA : Whom are you angry with?

SUDARSHANA : I do not know; but I wish to see everything destroyed and convulsed in ruin and disaster! I left my place on the throne as the Empress in a moment's time. Did I lose my all to sweep the dust, to sweat and slave in this dismal hole? Why do the torches of mourning not flare up for me all over the world? Why does not the earth quake and tremble? Is my fall but the unobserved dropping of the puny bean-flower? Is it not more like the fall of a glowing star,

whose fiery blazon bursts the heavens asunder?

SURANGAMA : A mighty forest only smokes and smoulders before it bursts into a conflagration: the time has not come yet.

SUDARSHANA : I have thrown my queen's honour and glory to the dust and winds—but is there no human being who will come out to meet my desolate soul here? Alone—oh, I am fearfully, terribly alone!

SURANGAMA : You are not alone.

SUDARSHANA : Surangama, I shall not keep anything from you. When he set the palace on fire, I could not be angry with him. A great inward joy set my heart a-flutter all the while. What a stupendous crime! What glorious prowess! It was this courage that made me strong and fired my own spirits. It was this terrible joy that enabled me to leave everything behind me in a moment's time. But is it all my imagination only? Why is there no sign of his coming anywhere?

SURANGAMA : He of whom you are thinking did not set fire to the palace—it is the King of Kanchi who did it.

SUDARSHANA : Coward! But is it possible? So handsome, so bewitching, and yet no manhood in him! Have I deceived myself for the sake of such a worthless creature? O shame! Fie on me! ... But, Surangama, don't you think that your King should yet have come to take me back? [*Surangama remains silent.*] You think I am anxious to go back? Never! Even if the King really came I should not have returned. Not even once did he forbid me to come away, and I found all the doors wide open to let me out! And the stony and dusty road over which I walked—it was nothing to it that a queen was treading on it. It is hard and has no feelings, like your King; the meanest beggar is the same to it as the highest Empress. You are silent! Well, I tell you, your King's behaviour is—mean, brutal, shameful!

SURANGAMA : Everyone knows that my King is hard and pitiless—no one has ever been able to move him.

SUDARSHANA : Why do you, then, call him day and night?

SURANGAMA : May he ever remain hard and relentless like rock—may my tears and prayers never move him! Let my sorrows be ever mine only—and may his glory and victory be forever!

SUDARSHANA : Surangama, look! A cloud of dust seems to rise over the eastern horizon across the fields.

SURANGAMA : Yes, I see it.

SUDARSHANA : Is that not like the banner of a chariot?

SURANGAMA : Indeed, a banner it is.

SUDARSHANA : Then he is coming. He has come at last!

SURANGAMA : Who is coming?

SUDARSHANA : Our King—who else? How could he live without me? It is a wonder how he could hold out even for these days.

SURANGAMA : No, no, this cannot be the King.

SUDARSHANA : “No,” indeed! As if you know everything! Your King is hard, stony, pitiless, isn’t he? Let us see how hard he can be. I knew from the beginning that he would come—that he would have to rush after me. But remember, Surangama, I never for a single moment asked him to come. You will see how I make your King confess his defeat to me! Just go out, Surangama, and let me know everything. [Surangama goes out.] But shall I go if he comes and asks me to return with him? Certainly not! I will not go! Never!

Enter SURANGAMA.

SURANGAMA : It is not the King, my Queen.

SUDARSHANA : Not the King? Are you quite sure? What! he has not come yet?

SURANGAMA : No, my King never raises so much dust when he comes. Nobody can know when he comes at all.

SUDARSHANA : Then this is— SURANGAMA : The same: he is coming with the King of Kanchi.

SUDARSHANA : Do you know his name?

SURANGAMA : His name is Suvarna.

SUDARSHANA : It is he, then. I thought, “I am lying here like waste refuse and offal, which no one cares even to touch.” But my hero is coming now to release me. Did you know Suvarna?

SURANGAMA : When I was at my father’s home, in the gambling den SUDARSHANA : No, no, I won’t hear anything of him from you. He is my own hero, my only salvation. I shall know him without your telling stories about him. But just see, a nice man your King is! He did not care to come to rescue me from even this degradation. You cannot blame me after this. I could not have waited for him all my life here, toiling ignominiously like a bondslave. I shall never have your meekness and submissiveness.

Scene 11 *Encampment.*

KANCHI : [To Kanya Kubja’s Messenger.] Tell your King that he need not receive us exactly as his guests. We are on our way back to our kingdoms, but we are

waiting to rescue Queen Sudarshana from the servitude and degradation to which she is condemned here.

MESSENGER : Your Highness, you will remember that the princess is in her father's house.

KANCHI : A daughter may stay in her father's home only so long as she remains unmarried.

MESSENGER : But her connections with her father's family remain intact still.

KANCHI : She has abjured all such relations now.

MESSENGER : Such relationship can never be abjured, Your Highness, on this side of death: it may remain in abeyance at times, but can never be wholly broken up.

KANCHI : If the King chooses not to give up his daughter to me on peaceful terms, our *Kshatriya* code of righteousness will oblige me to employ force. You may take this as my last word.

MESSENGER : Your Highness, do not forget that our King too is bound by the same code. It is idle to expect that he will deliver up his daughter by merely hearing your threats.

KANCHI : Tell your King that I have come prepared for such an answer.
[Messenger goes out.]

SUVARNA : King of Kanchi, it seems to me that we are daring too much.

KANCHI : What pleasure would there be in this adventure if it were otherwise?

SUVARNA : It does not cost much courage to challenge Kanya Kubja—but ...

KANCHI : If you once begin to be afraid of “but,” you will hardly find a place in this world safe enough for you.

Enter a SOLDIER.

SOLDIER : Your Highness! I have just received the news that the Kings of Koshala, Avanti, and Kalinga are coming this way with their armies. [Exit.]

KANCHI : Just what I was afraid of! The report of Sudarshana's flight has spread abroad—now we are going to be in for a general scramble which is sure to end in smoke.

SUVARNA : It is useless now, Your Highness. These are not good tidings. I am perfectly certain that it is our Emperor himself who has secretly spread the report everywhere.

KANCHI : Why, what good will it bring him?

SUVARNA : The greedy ones will tear one another to pieces in the general rivalry and scramble—and he will take advantage of the situation to go back with the booty.

KANCHI : Now it becomes clear why your King never shows himself. His trick is to multiply himself on every side—fear makes him visible everywhere. But I will still maintain that your King is but an empty fraud from top to bottom.

SUVARNA : But, please Your Highness, will you have the kindness to let me off?

KANCHI : I cannot let you go—I have some use for you in this affair.

Enter a SOLDIER.

SOLDIER : Your Highness, Virat, Panchal, and Vidarbha too have come. They have encamped on the other side of the river. [Exit.

KANCHI : In the beginning we must all fight together. Let the battle with Kanya Kubja first be over, then we shall find some way out of the difficulty.

SUVARNA : Please do not drag me into your plans—I shall be happy if you leave me alone—I am a poor, mean creature—nothing can—KANCHI : Look here, king of hypocrites, ways and means are never of a very exalted order—roads and stairs and so forth are always to be trodden under our feet. The advantage of utilising men like you in our plans is that we have to make use of no mask or illusion. But if I were to consult my prime minister, it would be absurd for me to call theft by any name less dignified than public benefit. I will go now, and move the princes about like pawns on the chessboard; the game cannot evidently go on if all the chessmen propose moving like kings!

Scene 12

Interior of the Palace.

SUDARSHANA : Is the fight still going on?

SURANGAMA : As fiercely as ever.

SUDARSHANA : Before going out to the battle my father came to me and said, "You have come away from one King, but you have drawn seven Kings after you: I have a mind to cut you up into seven pieces and distribute them among the princes. It would have been well if he did so. Surangama!"

SURANGAMA : Yes?

SUDARSHANA : If your King had the power to save me, could my present state have left him unmoved?

SURANGAMA : My Queen, why do you ask me? Have I the power to answer for my King? I know my understanding is dark; that is why I never dare to judge him.

SUDARSHANA : Who have joined in this fight?

SURANGAMA : All the seven princes.

SUDARSHANA : No one else?

SURANGAMA : Suvarna attempted to escape—in secret before the fight began—but Kanchi has kept him a prisoner in his camps.

SUDARSHANA : Oh, I should have been dead long ago! But, O King, my King, if you had come and helped my father, your fame would have been none the less! It would have become brighter and higher. Are you quite sure, Surangama, that he has not come?

SURANGAMA : I know nothing for certain.

SUDARSHANA : But since I came here I have felt suddenly many a time as if somebody were playing on a *vina* below my window.

SURANGAMA : There is nothing impossible in the idea that somebody indulges his taste for music there.

SUDARSHANA : There is a deep thicket below my window—I try to find out who it is every time I hear the music, but I can see nothing distinctly.

SURANGAMA : Perhaps some wayfarer rests in the shade and plays on the instrument.

SUDARSHANA : It may be so, but my old window in the palace comes back to my memory. I used to come after dressing in the evening and stand at my window, and out of the blank darkness of our lampless meeting-place used to stream forth strains and songs and melodies, dancing and vibrating in endless succession and overflowing profusion, like the passionate exuberance of a ceaseless fountain!

SURANGAMA : O deep and sweet darkness! The profound and mystic darkness whose servant I was!

SUDARSHANA : Why did you come away with me from that room?

SURANGAMA : Because I knew he would follow us and take us back.

SUDARSHANA : But no, he will not come—he has left us for good. Why should he not?

SURANGAMA : If he can leave us like that, then we have no need of him. Then he does not exist for us: then that dark chamber is totally empty and void—no *vina* ever breathed its music there—none called you or me in that chamber; then everything has been a delusion and an idle dream.

Enter the DOORKEEPER.

SUDARSHANA : Who are you?

DOORKEEPER : I am the porter of this palace.

SUDARSHANA : Tell me quickly what you have got to say.

DOORKEEPER : Our King has been taken prisoner.

SUDARSHANA : Prisoner? O Mother Earth! [Faints.]

Scene 13

KING OF KANCHI *and* SUVARNA.

SUVARNA : You say, then, that there will be no more necessity of any fight amongst yourselves?

KANCHI : No, you need not be afraid. I have made all the princes agree that he whom the Queen accepts as her husband will have her, and the others will have to abandon all further struggle.

SUVARNA : But you must have done with me now, Your Highness—so I beg to be let off now. Unfit as I am for anything, the fear of impending danger has unnerved me and stunned my intellect. You will therefore find it difficult to put me to any use.

KANCHI : You will have to sit there as my umbrella-holder.

SUVARNA : Your servant is ready for anything; but of what profit will that be to you?

KANCHI : My man, I see that your weak intellect cannot go with a high ambition in you. You have no notion yet with what favour the Queen looked upon you. After all, she cannot possibly throw the bridal garland on an umbrella-bearer's neck in a company of princes, and yet, I know, she will not be able to turn her mind away from you. So on all accounts this garland will fall under the shade of my regal umbrella.

SUVARNA : Your Highness, you are entertaining dangerous imaginings about me. I pray you, please do not implicate me in the toils of such groundless notions. I beg Your Highness most humbly, pray set me at liberty.

KANCHI : As soon as my object is attained, I shall not keep you one moment from your liberty. Once the end is attained, it is futile to burden oneself with the means.

Scene 14

SUDARSHANA *and* SURANGAMA *at the Window.*

SUDARSHANA : Must I go to the assembly of the princes, then? Is there no other means of saving father's life?

SURANGAMA : The King of Kanchi has said so.

SUDARSHANA : Are these the words worthy of a King? Did he say so with his own lips?

SURANGAMA : No, his messenger, Suvarna, brought this news.

SUDARSHANA : Woe, woe is me!

SURANGAMA : And he produced a few withered flowers and said, "Tell your Queen that the drier and more withered these souvenirs of the Spring Festival become, the fresher and more blooming do they grow within in my heart."

SUDARSHANA : Stop! Tell me no more. Do not torment me anymore.

SURANGAMA : Look! There sit all the princes in the great assembly. He who has no ornament on his person, except a single garland of flowers round his crown—he is the King of Kanchi. And he who holds the umbrella over his head, standing behind him—that is Suvarna.

SUDARSHANA : Is that Suvarna? Are you quite certain?

SURANGAMA : Yes, I know him well.

SUDARSHANA : Can it be that it is this man that I saw the other day? No, no,—I saw something mingled and transfused and blended with light and darkness, with wind and perfume,—no, no, it cannot be he; that is not he.

SURANGAMA : But everyone admits that he is exceedingly beautiful to look at.

SUDARSHANA : How could that beauty fascinate me? Oh, what shall I do to purge my eyes of their pollution?

SURANGAMA : You will have to wash them in that bottomless darkness.

SUDARSHANA : But tell me, Surangama, why does one make such mistakes?

SURANGAMA : Mistakes are but the preludes to their own destruction.

MESSENGER : [Entering.] Princess, the Kings are waiting for you in the hall. [Exit.

SUDARSHANA : Surangama, bring me the veil. [Surangama goes out.] O King, my only King! You have left me alone, and you have been but just in doing so. But will you not know the inmost truth within my soul? [Taking out a dagger from within her bosom.] This body of mine has received a stain—I shall make a sacrifice of it today in the dust of the hall, before all these princes! But shall I never be able to tell you that I know of no stain of faithlessness within the hidden chambers of my heart? That dark chamber where you would come to meet me lies cold and empty within my bosom today—but, O my Lord! none has opened its doors, none has entered it but you, O King! Will you never come again to open those doors? Then, let death come, for it is dark like yourself, and its features are beautiful as yours. It is you—it is yourself, O King!

Scene 15

The Gathering of the PRINCES.

VIDARBHA : King of Kanchi, how is it that you have not got a single piece of ornament on your person?

KANCHI : Because I entertain no hopes at all, my friend. Ornaments would but double the shame of my defeat.

KALINGA : But your umbrella-bearer seems to have made up for that,—he is loaded with gold and jewellery all over.

VIRAT : The King of Kanchi wants to demonstrate the futility and inferiority of outer beauty and grandeur. Vanity of his prowess has made him discard all outer embellishments from his limbs.

KOSLIALA : I am quite up to his trickery; he is seeking to prove his own dignity, maintaining a severe plainness among the bejewelled princes.

PANCHALA : I cannot commend his wisdom in this matter. Everyone knows that a woman's eyes are like a moth in that they fling themselves headlong on the glare and glitter of jewel and gold.

KALINGA : But how long shall we have to wait more?

KANCHI : Do not grow impatient, King of Kalinga—sweet are the fruits of delay.

KALINGA : If I were sure of the fruit I could have endured it. It is because my hopes of tasting the fruit are extremely precarious that my eagerness to have a sight of her breaks through all bounds.

KANCHI : But you are young still—abandoned hope comes back to you again and again like a shameless woman at your age: we, however, have long passed that stage.

KOSHALA : Kanchi, did you feel as if something shook your seat just now? Is it an earthquake?

KANCHI : Earthquake? I do not know.

VIDARBHA : Or perhaps some other prince is coming with his army.

KALINGA : There is nothing against your theory except that we should have first heard the news from some herald or messenger in that case.

VIDARBHA : I cannot regard this as a very auspicious omen.

KANCHI : Everything looks inauspicious to the eye of fear.

VIDARBHA : I fear none except Fate, before which courage or heroism is as futile as it is absurd.

PANCHALA : Vidarbha, do not darken today's happy proceedings with your unwelcome prognostications.

KANCHI : I never take the unseen into account till it has become "seen."

VIDARBHA : But then it might be too late to do anything.

PANCHALA : Did we not all of us start at a specially auspicious moment?

VIDARBHA : Do you think you insure against every possible risk by starting at auspicious moments? It looks as if— KANCHI : You had better let the “as if” alone: though our own creation, it often proves our ruin and destruction.

KALINGA : Isn’t that music somewhere outside?

PANCHALA : Yes, it sounds like music, sure enough.

KANCHI : Then at last it must be the Queen Sudarshana who is approaching near. [Aside to Suvarna.] Suvarna, you must not hide and cower behind me like that. Mind, the umbrella in your hand is shaking!

Enter GRANDFATHER, dressed as a warrior.

KALINGA : Who is that?—Who are you?

PANCHALA : Who is this that dares to enter this hall without being invited?

VIRAT : Amazing impudence! Kalinga, just prevent the fellow from advancing further.

KALINGA : You are all my superiors in age—you are fitter to do that than myself.

VIDARBHA : Let us hear what he has to say.

GRANDFATHER : The King has come.

VIDARBHA : [Starting.] King?

PANCHALA : Which King?

KALINGA : Where does he come from?

GRANDFATHER : My King!

VIRAT : Your King?

KALINGA : Who is he?

KOSHALA : What do you mean?

GRANDFATHER : You all know whom I mean. He has come.

VIDARBHA : He has come?

KOSHALA : With what intention?

GRANDFATHER : He has summoned you all to come to him.

KANCHI : Summoned us, indeed? In what terms has he been pleased to summon us?

GRANDFATHER : You can take his call in any way you like—there is none to prevent you—he is prepared to make all kinds of welcome to suit your various tastes.

VIRAT : But who are you?

GRANDFATHER : I am one of his generals.

KANCHI : Generals? It is a lie! Do you think of frightening us? Do you imagine that I cannot see through your disguise? We all know you well—and you pose as a “general” before us!

GRANDFATHER : You have recognised me to perfection. Who is so unworthy as I to bear my King’s commands? And yet it is he who has invested me with these robes of a general and sent me here: he has chosen me before greater generals and mightier warriors.

KANCHI : All right, we shall go to observe the proprieties and amenities on a fitting occasion—but at present we are in the midst of a pressing engagement. He will have to wait till this little function is over.

GRANDFATHER : When he sends out his call he does not wait.

KOSHALA : I shall obey his call; I am going at once.

VIDARBHA : Kanchi, I cannot agree with you in your proposal to wait till this function is over. I am going.

KALINGA : You are older than I am—I shall follow you.

PANCHALA : Look behind you, Prince of Kanchi, your regal umbrella is lying in the dust: you have not noticed when your umbrella-holder has stolen away.

KANCHI : All right, general. I too am going—but not to do him homage. I go to fight him on the battle-ground.

GRANDFATHER : You will meet my King in the field of battle: that is no mean place for your reception.

VIRAT : Look here, friends, perhaps we are all flying before an imagined terror—it looks as if the King of Kanchi will have the best of it.

PANCHALA : Possibly, when the fruit is so near the hand, it is cowardly and foolish to go away without plucking it.

KALINGA : It is better to join the King of Kanchi. He cannot be without a definite plan and purpose when he is doing and daring so much.

Scene 16

SUDARSHANA and SURANGAMA.

SUDARSHANA : The fight is over now. When will the King come?

SURANGAMA : I do not know myself: I am also looking forward to his coming.

SUDARSHANA : I feel such a throb of joy, Surangama, that my breast is positively aching. But I am dying with shame too; how shall I show my face to him?

SURANGAMA : Go to him in utmost humility and resignation, and all shame will

vanish in a moment.

SUDARSHANA : I cannot help confessing that I have met with my uttermost defeat for all the rest of my life. But pride made me claim the largest share in his love so long. Everyone used to say I had such wonderful beauty, such graces and virtues; everyone used to say that the King showed unlimited kindness towards me—this is what makes it difficult for me to bend my heart in humility before him.

SURANGAMA : This difficulty, my Queen, will pass off.

SUDARSHANA : Oh, yes, it will pass—the day has arrived for me to humble myself before the whole world. But why does not the King come to take me back? What more is he waiting for yet?

SURANGAMA : Have I not told you my King is cruel and hard—very hard indeed?

SUDARSHANA : Go out, Surangama, and bring me news of him.

SURANGAMA : I do not know where I should go to get any news of him. I have asked Grandfather to come; perhaps when he comes we shall hear something from him.

SUDARSHANA : Alack, my evil fate! I have been reduced to asking others to hear about my own King!

[Transcriber's note: *Alack* should probably be replaced with *Alas*.

Enter GRANDFATHER.

SUDARSHANA : I have heard that you are my King's friend, so accept my obeisance and give me your blessings.

GRANDFATHER : What are you doing, Queen? I never accept anybody's obeisance. My relation with everyone is only that of comradeship.

SUDARSHANA : Smile on me, then—give me good news. Tell me when the King is coming to take me back.

GRANDFATHER : You ask me a hard question, indeed! I hardly understand yet the ways of my friend. The battle is over, but no one can tell where he is gone.

SUDARSHANA : Is he gone away, then?

GRANDFATHER : I cannot find any trace of him here.

SUDARSHANA : Has he gone? And do you call such a person your friend?

GRANDFATHER : That is why he gets people's abuse as well as suspicion. But my King simply does not mind it in the least.

SUDARSHANA : Has he gone away? Oh, oh, how hard, how cruel, how cruel! He is made of stone, he is hard as adamant! I tried to move him with my own bosom—my breast is torn and bleeding—but him I could not move an inch! Grandfather,

tell me, how can you manage with such a friend?

GRANDFATHER : I have known him now—I have known him through my griefs and joys—he can make me weep no more now.

SUDARSHANA : Will he not let me know him also?

GRANDFATHER : Why, he will, of course. Nothing else will satisfy him.

SUDARSHANA : Very well, I shall see how hard he can be! I shall stay here near the window without saying a word; I shall not move an inch; let me see if he will not come!

GRANDFATHER : You are young still—you can afford to wait for him; but to me, an old man, a moment's loss is a week. I must set out to seek him whether I succeed or not. [Exit.

SUDARSHANA : I do not want him—I will not seek him! Surangama, I have no need of your King! Why did he fight with the princes? Was it for me at all? Did he want to show off his prowess and strength? Go away from here—I cannot bear your sight. He has humbled me to the dust, and is not satisfied still!

Scene 17

A Band of CITIZENS.

FIRST CITIZEN : When so many Kings met together, we thought we were going to have some big fun; but somehow everything took such a turn that nobody knows what happened at all!

SECOND CITIZEN : Did you not see, they could not come to an agreement among themselves?—everyone distrusted everyone else.

THIRD CITIZEN : None kept to their original plans; one wanted to advance, another thought it better policy to recede; some went to the right, others made a rush to the left: how can you call that a fight?

FIRST CITIZEN : They had no eye to real fighting—each had his eye on the others.

SECOND CITIZEN : Each was thinking, “Why should I die to enable others to reap the harvest?”

THIRD CITIZEN : But you must all admit that Kanchi fought like a real hero.

FIRST CITIZEN : He for a long time after his defeat seemed loth to acknowledge himself beaten.

SECOND CITIZEN : He was at last fixed in the chest by a deadly missile.

THIRD CITIZEN : But before that he did not seem to realise that he had been losing ground at every step.

FIRST CITIZEN : As for the other Kings—well, nobody knows where they fled,

leaving poor Kanchi alone in the field.

SECOND CITIZEN : But I have heard that he is not dead yet.

THIRD CITIZEN : No, the physicians have saved him—but he will carry the mark of his defeat on his breast till his dying day.

FIRST CITIZEN : None of the other Kings who fled has escaped; they have all been taken prisoners. But what sort of justice is this that was meted out to them?

SECOND CITIZEN : I heard that everyone was punished except Kanchi, whom the judge placed on his right on the throne of justice, putting a crown on his head.

THIRD CITIZEN : This beats all mystery hollow.

SECOND CITIZEN : This sort of justice, to speak frankly, strikes us as fantastic and capricious.

FIRST CITIZEN : Just so. The greatest offender is certainly the King of Kanchi; as for the others, greed of gain now pressed them to advance, now they drew back in fear.

THIRD CITIZEN : What kind of justice is this, I ask? It is as if the tiger got scot-free, while his tail got cut off.

SECOND CITIZEN : If I were the judge, do you think Kanchi would be whole and sound at this hour? There would be nothing left of him altogether.

THIRD CITIZEN : They are great, high justices, my friends; their brains are of a different stamp from ours.

FIRST CITIZEN : Have they got any brains at all, I wonder? They simply indulge their sweet whims as there are none to say anything to them from above.

SECOND CITIZEN : Whatever you may say, if we had the governing power in our hands we should certainly have carried on the government much better than this.

THIRD CITIZEN : Can there be any real doubts about that? That of course goes without saying.

Scene 18

The Street. GRANDFATHER and KANCHI.

GRANDFATHER : What, Prince of Kanchi, you here!

KANCHI : Your King has sent me on the road.

GRANDFATHER : That is a settled habit with him.

KANCHI : And now, no one can get a glimpse of him.

GRANDFATHER : That too is one of his amusements.

KANCHI : But how long more will he elude me like this? When nothing could make me acknowledge him as my King, he came all of a sudden like a terrific

tempest—God knows from where—and scattered my men and horses and banners in one wild tumult: but now, when I am seeking the ends of the earth to pay him my humble homage, he is nowhere to be seen.

GRANDFATHER : But however big an Emperor he may be, he has to submit to him that yields. But why have you come out at night, Prince?

KANCHI : I still cannot get rid of the feeling of a secret dread of being laughed at by people when they see me meekly doing my homage to your King, acknowledging my defeat.

GRANDFATHER : Such indeed is the people. What would move others to tears only serves to move their empty laughter.

KANCHI : But you too are on the road, Grandfather.

GRANDFATHER : This is my jolly pilgrimage to the land of losing everything.

SINGS.

I am waiting with my all in the hope of losing everything.

*I am watching at the roadside for him who turns one out into the open road,
Who hides himself and sees, who loves you unknown to you, I have given my
heart in secret love to him, I am waiting with my all in the hope of losing
everything.*

Scene 19

A Road. SUDARSHANA and SURANGAMA.

SUDARSHANA : What a relief, Surangama, what freedom! It is my defeat that has brought me freedom. Oh, what an iron pride was mine! Nothing could move it or soften it. My darkened mind could not in any way be brought to see the plain truth that it was not the King who was to come, it was I who ought to have gone to him. All through yester night I lay alone on the dusty floor before that window —lay there through the desolate hours and wept! All night the southern winds blew and shrieked and moaned like the pain that was biting at my heart; and all through it I heard the plaintive “Speak, wife!” of the night bird echoing in the tumult outside! ... It was the helpless wail of the dark night, Surangama!

SURANGAMA : Last night’s heavy and melancholy air seemed to hang on for an eternity—oh, what a dismal and gloomy night!

SUDARSHANA : But would you believe it—I seemed to hear the soft strains of the *vina* floating through all that wild din and tumult! Could he play such sweet and tender tunes, he who is so cruel and terrible? The world knows only my

indignity and ignominy—but none but my own heart could hear those strains that called me through the lone and wailing night. Did you too, Surangama, hear the *vina*? Or was that but a dream of mine?

SURANGAMA : But it is just to hear that same *vina*'s music that I am always by your side. It is for this call of music, which I knew would one day come to dissolve all the barriers of love, that I have all along been listening with an eager ear.

SUDARSHANA : He did at last send me on the open road—I could not withstand his will. When I shall find him, the first words that I shall tell him will be, “I have come of my own will—I have not awaited your coming.” I shall say, “For your sake have I trodden the hard and weary roads, and bitter and ceaseless has been my weeping all the way.” I shall at least have this pride in me when I meet him.

SURANGAMA : But even that pride will not last. He came before you did—who else could have sent you on the road?

SUDARSHANA : Perhaps he did. As long as a sense of offended pride remained with me, I could not help thinking that he had left me for good; but when I flung my dignity and pride to the winds and came out on the common streets, then it seemed to me that he too had come out: I have been finding him since the moment I was on the road. I have no misgivings now. All this suffering that I have gone through for his sake, the very bitterness of all this is giving me his company. Ah! Yes, he has come—he has held me by the hand, just as he used to do in that chamber of darkness, when, at his touch, all my body would start with a sudden thrill: it is the same, the same touch again! Who says that he is not here?—Surangama, can you not see that he has come, in silence and secret? ... Who is that there? Look, Surangama, there is a third traveller of this dark road at this hour of the night.

SURANGAMA : I see, it is the King of Kanchi, my Queen.

SUDARSHANA : King of Kanchi!

SURANGAMA : Don't be afraid, my Queen!

SUDARSHANA : Afraid! Why should I be afraid? The days of fear are gone forever for me.

KANCHI : [Entering] Queen-mother, I see you two on this road! I am a traveller of the same path as yourself. Have no fear of me, O Queen!

SUDARSHANA : It is well, King of Kanchi, that we should be going together, side by side—this is but right. I came on your way when I first left my home, and now I meet you again on my way back. Who could have dreamed that this meeting of ours would augur so well?

KANCHI : But, Queen-mother, it is not meet that you should walk over this road on foot. Will you permit me to get a chariot for you?

SUDARSHANA : Oh, do not say so: I shall never be happy if I could not on my way back home tread on the dust of the road that led me away from my King. I would be deceiving myself if I were now to go in a chariot.

SURANGAMA : King, you too are walking in the dust today: this road has never known anybody driving his horse or chariot over it.

SUDARSHANA : When I was the Queen, I stepped over silver and gold—I shall have now to atone for the evil fortune of my birth by walking over dust and bare earth. I could not have dreamed that thus I would meet my King of common earth and dust at every step of mine today.

SURANGAMA : Look, my Queen, there on the eastern horizon comes the dawn. We have not long to walk: I see the spires of the golden turrets of the King's palace.

Enter GRANDFATHER.

GRANDFATHER : My child, it is dawn—at last!

SUDARSHANA : Your benedictions have given me Godspeed, and here I am, at last.

GRANDFATHER : But do you see how ill-mannered our King is? He has sent no chariot, no music band, nothing splendid or grand.

SUDARSHANA : Nothing grand, did you say? Look, the sky is rosy and crimson from end to end, the air is full of the welcome of the scent of flowers.

GRANDFATHER : Yes, but however cruel our King may be, we cannot seek to emulate him: I cannot help feeling pain at seeing you in this state, my child. How can we bear to see you going to the King's palace attired in this poor and wretched attire? Wait a little—I am running to fetch you your Queen's garments.

SUDARSHANA : Oh no, no, no! He has taken away those regal robes from me forever—he has attired me in a servant's dress before the eyes of the whole world: what a relief this has been to me! I am his servant now, no longer his Queen. Today I stand at the feet of all those who can claim any relationship with him.

GRANDFATHER : But your enemies will laugh at you now: how can you bear their derision?

SUDARSHANA : Let their laughter and derision be immortal—let them throw dust at me in the streets: this dust will today be the powder with which I shall deck myself before meeting my lord.

GRANDFATHER : After this, we shall say nothing. Now let us play the last game of our Spring Festival—instead of the pollen of flowers let the south breeze blow and scatter dust of lowness in every direction! We shall go to the lord clad in the common grey of the dust. And we shall find him too covered with dust all over. For do you think the people spare him? Even he cannot escape from their soiled and dusty hands, and he does not even care to brush the dirt off his garments.

KANCHI : Grandfather, do not forget me in this game of yours! I also will have to get this royal garment of mine soiled till it is beyond all recognition.

GRANDFATHER : That will not take long, my brother. Now that you have come down so far—you will change your colour in no time. Just look at our Queen—she got into a temper with herself and thought that she could spoil her matchless beauty by flinging away all her ornaments: but this insult to her beauty has made it shine forth in tenfold radiance, and now it is in its unadorned perfection. We hear that our King is all innocent of beauty—that is why he loves all his manifold beauty of form which shines as the very ornament of his breast. And that beauty has today taken off its veil and cloak of pride and vanity! What could I not give to be allowed to hear the wonderful music and song that has filled my King's palace today!

SURANGAMA : Lo, there rises the sun!

Scene 20 *The Dark Chamber.*

SUDARSHANA : Lord, do not give me back the honour which you once did turn away from me! I am the servant of your feet—I only seek the privilege of serving you.

KING : Will you be able to bear me now?

SUDARSHANA : Oh yes, yes, I shall. Your sigh repelled me because I had sought to find you in the pleasure garden, in my Queen's chambers: there even your meanest servant looks handsomer than you. That fever of longing has left my eyes forever. You are not beautiful, my lord—you stand beyond all comparisons!

KING : That which can be comparable with me lies within yourself.

SUDARSHANA : If this be so, then that too is beyond comparison. Your love lives in me—you are mirrored in that love, and you see your face reflected in me: nothing of this mine, it is all yours, O lord!

KING : I open the doors of this dark room today—the game is finished here!
Come, come with me now, come outside—*into the light!*

SUDARSHANA : Before I go, let me bow at the feet of my lord of darkness, my
cruel, my terrible, my peerless one!

THE END

7. Malini

Act

.....

MALINI : The moment has come for me, and my life, like the dew drop upon a lotus leaf, is trembling upon the heart of this great time. I shut my eyes and seem to hear the tumult of the sky, and there is anguish in my heart, I know not for what.

Enters QUEEN.

QUEEN : My child, what is this? Why do you forget to put on dresses that befit your beauty and youth? Where are your ornaments? My beautiful dawn, how can you absent the touch of gold from your limbs?

MALINI : Mother, there are some who are born poor, even in a king's house. Wealth does not cling to those whose destiny it is to find riches in poverty.

QUEEN : That the child whose only language was the baby cry should talk to me in such riddles!—My heart quakes in fear when I listen to you. Where did you pick up your new creed, which goes against all our holy books? My child, they say that the Buddhist monks, from whom you take your lessons, practice black arts; that they cast their spells upon men's minds, confounding them with lies. But I ask you, is religion a thing that one has to find by seeking? Is it not like sunlight, given to you for all days? I am a simple woman. I do not understand men's creeds and dogmas. I only know that women's true objects of worship come to their own arms, without asking, in the shape of their husbands and their children.

Enters KING.

KING : My daughter, storm clouds are gathering over the King's house. Go no farther along your perilous path. Pause, if only for a short time.

QUEEN : What dark words are these?

KING : My foolish child, if you must bring your new creed into this land of the old, let it not come like a sudden flood threatening those who dwell on the bank.

Keep your faith to your own self. Rake not up public hatred and mockery against it.

QUEEN : Do not chide my girl, and teach her the crookedness of your diplomacy. If my child should choose her own teachers and pursue her own path, I do not know who can blame her.

KING : Queen, my people are agitated, they clamour for my daughter's banishment.

QUEEN : Banishment? Of your own daughter?

KING : The Brahmins, frightened at her heresy, have combined, and—QUEEN : Heresy indeed. Are all truths confined only in their musty, old books? Let them fling away their worm-eaten creeds, and come and take their lessons from this child. I tell you, King, she is not a common girl,—she is a pure flame of fire. Some divine spirit has taken birth in her. Do not despise her, lest some day you strike your forehead, and weep, and find her no more.

MALINI : Father, grant to your people their request. The great moment has come. Banish me.

KING : Why, child? What want do you feel in your father's house?

MALINI : Listen to me, father. Those, who cry for my banishment, cry for me. Mother, I have no words in which to tell you what I have in my mind. Leave me without regret, like the tree that sheds its flowers unheeding. Let me go out to all men,—for the world has claimed me from the King's hands.

KING : Child, I do not understand you.

MALINI : Father, you are a King. Be strong and fulfil your mission.

QUEEN : Child, is there no place for you here, where you were born? Is the burden of the world waiting for your little shoulders?

MALINI : I dream, while I am awake, that the wind is wild, and the water is troubled; the night is dark, and the boat is moored in the haven. Where is the captain, who shall take the wanderers home? I feel I know the path, and the boat will thrill with life at my touch, and speed on.

QUEEN : Do you hear, King? Whose words are these? Do they come from this little girl? Is she your daughter, and have I borne her?

KING : Yes, even as the night bears the dawn,—the dawn that is not of the night, but of all the world.

QUEEN : King, have you nothing to keep her bound to your house,—this image of light?—My darling, your hair has come loose on your shoulders. Let me bind it up.—Do they talk of banishment, King? If this be a part of their creed, then let come the new religion, and let those Brahmins be taught afresh what is truth.

KING : Queen, let us take away our child from this balcony. Do you see the

crowd gathering in the street?

[They all go out.

Enter a crowd of BRAHMINS, in the street, before the palace balcony. They shout.

BRAHMINS : Banishment of the King's daughter!

KEMANKAR : Friends, keep your resolution firm. The woman, as an enemy, is to be dreaded more than all others. For reason is futile against her and forces are ashamed; man's power gladly surrenders itself to her powerlessness, and she takes her shelter in the strongholds of our own hearts.

FIRST BRAHMIN : We must have audience with our King, to tell him that a snake has raised its poisonous hood from his own nest, and is aiming at the heart of our sacred religion.

SUPRIYA : Religion? I am stupid. I do not understand you. Tell me, sir, is it your religion that claims the banishment of an innocent girl?

FIRST BRAHMIN : You are a marplot, Supriya, you are ever a hindrance to all our enterprises.

SECOND BRAHMIN : We have united in defence of our faith, and you come like a subtle rift in the wall, like a thin smile on the compressed lips of contempt.

SUPRIYA : You think that, by the force of numbers, you will determine truth, and drown reason by your united shouts?

FIRST BRAHMIN : This is rank insolence, Supriya.

SUPRIYA : The insolence is not mine but theirs who shape their scripture to fit their own narrow hearts.

SECOND BRAHMIN : Drive him out. He is none of us.

FIRST BRAHMIN : We have all agreed upon the banishment of the Princess.—He who thinks differently, let him leave this assembly.

SUPRIYA : Brahmins, it was a mistake on your part to elect me as one of your league. I am neither your shadow, nor an echo of your texts. I never admit that truth sides with the shrillest voice and I am ashamed to own as mine a creed that depends on force for its existence. [To Kemankar] Dear friend, let me go.

KEMANKAR : No, I will not. I know you are firm in your action, only doubting when you debate. Keep silence, my friend; for the time is evil.

SUPRIYA : Of all things the blind certitude of stupidity is the hardest to bear. To think of saving your religion by banishing a girl from her home! But let me know what is her offence. Does she not maintain that truth and love are the body and soul of religion? If so, is that not the essence of all creeds?

KEMANKAR : Religion is one in its essence, but different in its forms. The water is one, yet by its different banks it is bounded and preserved for different peoples. What if you have a well-spring of your own in your heart, spurn not your neighbours who must go for their draught of water to their ancestral pond with the green of its gradual slopes mellowed by ages and its ancient trees bearing eternal fruit.

SUPRIYA : I shall follow you, my friend, as I have ever done in my life, and not argue.

Enters THIRD BRAHMIN.

THIRD BRAHMIN : I have good news. Our words have prevailed, and the King's army is about to take our side openly.

SECOND BRAHMIN : The army?—I do not quite like it.

FIRST BRAHMIN : Nor do I. It smells of rebellion.

SECOND BRAHMIN : Kemankar, I am not for such extreme measures.

FIRST BRAHMIN : Our faith will give us victory, not our arms. Let us make penance, and recite sacred verses. Let us call on the names of our guardian gods.

SECOND BRAHMIN : Come, Goddess, whose wrath is the sole weapon of thy worshippers, deign to take form and crush even to dust the blind pride of unbelievers. Prove to us the strength of our faith, and lead us to victory.

ALL : We invoke thee. Mother, descend from thy heavenly heights and do thy work among mortals.

Enters MALINI.

MALINI : I have come.

They all bow to her, except KEMANKAR and SUPRIYA, who stand aloof and watch.

SECOND BRAHMIN : Goddess. Thou hast come at last, as a daughter of man, withdrawing all thy terrible power into the tender beauty of a girl. Whence hast thou come, Mother? What is thy wish?

MALINI : I have come down to my exile at your call.

SECOND BRAHMIN : To exile from heaven, because thy children of earth have called thee?

FIRST BRAHMIN : Forgive us, Mother. Utter ruin threatens this world and it cries aloud for thy help.

MALINI : I will never desert you. I always knew that your doors were open for me. The cry went from you for my banishment and I woke up, amidst the wealth and pleasure of the King's house.

KEMANKAR : The Princess.

ALL : The King's daughter.

MALINI : I am exiled from my home, so that I may make your home my own. Yet tell me truly, have you need of me? When I lived in seclusion, a lonely girl, did you call to me from the outer world? Was it no dream of mine?

FIRST BRAHMIN : Mother, you have come, and taken your seat in the heart of our hearts.

MALINI : I was born in a King's house, never once looking out from my window. I had heard that it was a sorrowing world,—the world out of my reach. But I did not know where it felt its pain. Teach me to find this out.

FIRST BRAHMIN : Your sweet voice brings tears to our eyes.

MALINI : The moon has just come out of those clouds. Great peace is in the sky. It seems to gather all the world in its arms, under the fold of one vast moonlight. There goes the road, losing itself among the solemn trees with their still shadows. There are the houses, and there the temple; the river bank in the distance looks dim and desolate. I seem to have come down, like a sudden shower from a cloud of dreams, into this world of men, by the roadside.

FIRST BRAHMIN : You are the divine soul of this world.

SECOND BRAHMIN : Why did not our tongues burst in pain, when they shouted for your banishment?

FIRST BRAHMIN : Come, Brahmins, let us restore our Mother to her home. [*They shout.*] Victory to the Mother of the world! Victory to the Mother in the heart of the Man's daughter!

[Malini goes, surrounded by them.]

KEMANKAR : Let the illusion vanish. Where are you going, Supriya, like one walking in his sleep?

SUPRIYA : Leave hold of me, let me go.

KEMANKAR : Control yourself. Will you, too, fly into the fire with the rest of the blinded swarm?

SUPRIYA : Was it a dream, Kemankar?

KEMANKAR : It was nothing but a dream. Open your eyes, and wake up.

SUPRIYA : Your hope of heaven is false, Kemankar. Vainly have I wandered in the wilderness of doctrines,—I never found peace. The God, who belongs to the multitude, and the God of the books are not my own God. These never answered my questions and never consoled me. But, at last, I have found the divine

breathing and alive in the living world of men.

KEMANKAR : Alas, my friend, it is a fearful moment when a man's heart deceives him. Then blind desire becomes his gospel and fancy usurps the dread throne of his gods. Is yonder moon, lying asleep among soft fleecy clouds, the true emblem of ever-lasting reality? The naked day will come tomorrow, and the hungry crowd begin again to drag the sea of existence with their thousand nets. And then this moonlight night will hardly be remembered, but as a thin film of unreality made of sleep and shadows and delusions. The magic web, woven of the elusive charms of a woman, is like that,—and can it take the place of highest truth? Can any creed, born of your fancy, satisfy the gaping thirst of the midday, when it is wide awake in its burning heat?

SUPRIYA : Alas, I know not.

KEMANKAR : Then shake yourself up from your dreams, and look before you. The ancient house is on fire, whose nurslings are the ages. The spirits of our forefathers are hovering over the impending ruins, like crying birds over their perishing nests.

Is this the time for vacillation, when the night is dark, the enemies knocking at the gate, the citizens asleep, and men drunken with delusions laying their hands upon their brothers' throats?

SUPRIYA : I will stand by you.

KEMANKAR : I must go away from here.

SUPRIYA : Where? And for what?

KEMANKAR : To foreign lands. I shall bring soldiers from outside. For this conflagration cries for blood, to be quenched.

SUPRIYA : But our own soldiers are ready.

KEMANKAR : Vain is all hope of help from them. They, like moths, are already leaping into the fire. Do you not hear how they are shouting like fools? The whole town has gone mad, and is lighting her festival lamps at the funeral pyre of her own sacred faith.

SUPRIYA : If you must go, take me with you.

KEMANKAR : No. You remain here, to watch and keep me informed. But, friend, let your heart be not drawn away from me by the novelty of the falsehood.

SUPRIYA : Falsehood is new, but our friendship is old. We have ever been together from our childhood. This is our first separation.

KEMANKAR : May it prove our last! In evil times the strongest bonds give way. Brothers strike brothers and friends turn against friends. I go out into the dark, and in the darkness of night I shall come back to the gate. Shall I find my friend watching for me, with the lamp lighted? I take away that hope with me.

[They go.

Enter KING, with the PRINCE, in the balcony.

KING : I fear I must decide to banish my daughter.

PRINCE : Yes, Sire, delay will be dangerous.

KING : Gently, my son, gently. Never doubt that I will do my duty. Be sure I will banish her.

[Prince goes.

Enters QUEEN.

QUEEN : Tell me. King, where is she? Have you hidden her, even from me?

KING : Whom?

QUEEN : My Malini.

KING : What? Is she not in her room?

QUEEN : No, I cannot find her. Go with your soldiers and search for her through all the town, from house to house. The citizens have stolen her. Banish them all. Empty the whole town, till they return her.

KING : I will bring her back,—even if my Kingdom goes to ruin.

[The Brahmins and soldiers bring Malini, with torches lighted.

QUEEN : My darling, my cruel child. I never keep my eyes off you,—how could you evade me, and go out?

SECOND BRAHMIN : Do not be angry with her, Queen. She came to our home to give us her blessings.

FIRST BRAHMIN : Is she only yours? And does she not belong to us as well?

SECOND BRAHMIN : Our little mother, do not forget us. You are our star, to lead us across the pathless sea of life.

MALINI : My door has been opened for you. These walls will never-more separate us.

BRAHMINS : Blessed are we, and the land where we were born.

[They go.

MALINI : Mother, I have brought the outer world into your house. I seem to have lost the bounds of my body. I am one with the life of this world.

QUEEN : Yes, child. Now you shall never need to go out. Bring in the world to you, and to your mother.—It is close upon the second watch of the night. Sit here. Calm yourself. This flaming life in you is burning out all sleep from your eyes.

MALINI : [Embracing her mother.] Mother, I am tired. My body is trembling. So vast is this world.—Mother dear, sing me to sleep. Tears come to my eyes, and a sadness descends upon my heart.

MALINI : What can I say to you? I do not know how to argue. I have not read your books.

SUPRIYA : I am learned only among the fools of learning. I have left all arguments and books behind me. Lead me, princess, and I shall follow you, as the shadow follows the lamp.

MALINI : But, Brahmin, when you question me, I lose all my power and do not know how to answer you. It is a wonder to me to see that even you, who know everything, come to me with your questions.

SUPRIYA : Not for knowledge I come to you. Let me forget all that I have ever known. Roads there are, without number, but the light is missing.

MALINI : Alas, sir, the more you ask me, the more I feel my poverty. Where is that voice in me, which came down from heaven, like an unseen flash of lightning, into my heart? Why did you not come that day, but keep away in doubt? Now that I have met the world face to face my heart has grown timid, and I do not know how to hold the helm of the great ship that I must guide. I feel I am alone, and the world is large, and ways are many, and the light from the sky comes of a sudden to vanish the next moment. You who are wise and learned, will you help me?

SUPRIYA : I shall deem myself fortunate, if you ask my help.

MALINI : There are times when despair comes to choke all the life-currents; when suddenly, amidst crowds of men, my eyes turn upon myself and I am frightened. Will you befriend me in those moments of blankness, and utter me one word of hope that will bring me back to life.

SUPRIYA : I shall keep myself ready. I shall make my heart simple and pure, and my mind peaceful, to be able truly to serve you.

Enters ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT : The citizens have come, asking to see you.

MALINI : Not today. Ask their pardon for me. I must have time to fill my exhausted mind, and have rest to get rid of weariness.

[Attendant goes.

Tell me again about Kemankar, your friend. I long to know what your life has been and its trials.

SUPRIYA : Kemankar is my friend, my brother, my master. His mind has been

firm and strong, from early days, while my thoughts are always flickering with doubts. Yet he has ever kept me close to his heart, as the moon does its dark spots. But, however strong a ship may be, if it harbours a small hole in its bottom, it must sink.—That I would make you sink, Kemankar, was in the law of nature.

MALINI : You made him sink?

SUPRIYA : Yes, I did. The day when the rebellion slunk away in shame before the light in your face and the music in the air that touched you, Kemankar alone was unmoved. He left me behind him, and said that he must go to the foreign land to bring soldiers, and uproot the new creed from the sacred soil of Kashi.—You know what followed. You made me live again in a new land of birth. ‘Love for all life’ was a mere word, waiting from the old time to be made real,—and I saw that truth in you in flesh. My heart cried for my friend, but he was away, out of my reach; then came his letter, in which he wrote that he was coming with a foreign army at his back, to wash away the new faith in blood, and to punish you with death.—I could wait no longer. I showed the letter to the King.

MALINI : Why did you forget yourself, Supriya? Why did fear overcome you? Have I not room enough in my house for him and his soldiers?

Enters KING.

KING : Come to my arms, Supriya, I went at a fit time to surprise Kemankar and to capture him. An hour later, and a thunder-bolt would have burst upon my house in my sleep. You are my friend, Supriya, come— SUPRIYA : God forgive me.

KING : Do you not know, that a King’s love is not unsubstantial? I give you leave to ask for any reward that comes to your mind. Tell me, what do you want?

SUPRIYA : Nothing, Sire, nothing. I shall live, begging from door to door.

KING : Only ask me, and you shall have provinces worthy to tempt a king.

SUPRIYA : They do not tempt me.

KING : I understand you. I know towards what moon you raise your hands. Mad youth, be brave to ask even that which seems so impossible. Why are you silent? Do you remember the day when you prayed for my Malini’s banishment? Will you repeat that prayer to me, to lead my daughter to exile from her father’s house?—My daughter, do you know that you owe your life to this noble youth? And is it hard for you to pay off that debt with your—?

SUPRIYA : For pity’s sake, Sire, no more of this. Worshippers there are many who by life-long devotion have gained the highest fulfilment of their desire. Could I

be counted one of them I should be happy. But to accept it from the King's hands as the reward of treachery? Lady mine, you have the plenitude and peace of your greatness; you know not the secret cravings of a poverty-stricken soul. I dare not ask from you an atom more than that pity of love which you have for every creature in the world.

MALINI : Father, what is your punishment for the captive?

KING : He shall die.

MALINI : On my knees I beg from you his pardon.

KING : But he is a rebel, my child.

SUPRIYA : Do you judge him, King? He also judged you, when he came to punish you, not to rob your kingdom.

MALINI : Spare him his life, father. Then only will you have the right to bestow on him your friendship, who has saved you from a great peril.

KING : What do you say, Supriya? Shall I restore a friend to his friend's arms?

SUPRIYA : That will be king-like in its grace.

KING : It will come in its time, and you will find back your friend. But a King's generosity must not stop there. I must give you something which exceeds your hope,—yet not as a mere reward. You have won my heart, and my heart is ready to offer you its best treasure.—My child, where was this shyness in you before now? Your dawn had no tint of rose,—its light was white and dazzling. But today a tearful mist of tenderness sweetly tempers it for mortal eyes. [To Supriya] Leave my feet, rise up and come to my heart. Happiness is pressing it like pain. Leave me now for a while. I want to be alone with my Malini.

[*Supriya goes.*

I feel I have found back my child once again,—not the bright star of the sky, but the sweet flower that blossoms on earthly soil. She is my daughter, the darling of my heart.

Enters ATTENDANT.

ATTENDANT : The captive, Kemankar, is at the door.

KING : Bring him in. Here comes he, with his eyes fixed, his proud head held high, a brooding shadow on his forehead, like a thunder cloud motionless in a suspended storm.

MALINI : The iron chain is shamed of itself upon those limbs. The insult to greatness is its own insult. He looks like a god defying his captivity.

Enters KEMANKAR in chains.

KING : What punishment do you expect from my hands?

KEMANKAR : Death.

KING : But if I pardon you?

KEMANKAR : Then I shall have time again to complete the work I began.

KING : You seem out of love with your life. Tell me your last wish, if you have any.

KEMANKAR : I want to see my friend, Supriya, before I die.

KING : [To the Attendant.] Ask Supriya to come.

MALINI : There is a power in that face that frightens me. Father, do not let Supriya come.

KING : Your fear is baseless, child.

SUPRIYA enters, and walks towards KEMANKAR, with arms extended.

KEMANKAR : No, no, not yet. First let us have our say, and then the greeting of love.—Come closer to me. You know I am poor in words,—and my time is short. My trial is over, but not yours. Tell me, why have you done this?

SUPRIYA : Friend, you will not understand me. I had to keep nay faith, even at the cost of my love.

KEMANKAR : I understand you, Supriya. I have seen that girl's face, glowing with an inner light, looking like a voice becoming visible. You offered, to the fire of those eyes, the faith in your fathers' creed, the faith in your country's good, and built up a new one on the foundation of a treason.

SUPRIYA : Friend, you are right. My faith has come to me perfected in the form of that woman. Your sacred books were dumb to me. I have read, by the help of the light of those eyes, the ancient book of creation, and I have known that true faith is there, where there is man, where there is love. It comes from the mother in her devotion, and it goes back to her from her child.

It descends in the gift of a giver and it appears in the heart of him who takes it. I accepted the bond of this faith which reveals the infinite in man, when I set my eyes upon that face full of light and love and peace of hidden wisdom.

KEMANKAR : I also once set my eyes on that face, and for a moment dreamt that religion had come at last, in the form of a woman, to lead man's heart to heaven. For a moment, music broke out from the very ribs of my breast and all my life's hopes blossomed in their fulness. Yet did not I break through these meshes of illusion to wander in foreign lands? Did not I suffer humiliation from unworthy hands in patience, and bear the pain of separation from you, who have been my friend from my infancy? And what have you been doing meanwhile? You sat in

the shade of the King's garden, and spent your sweet leisure in idly weaving a lie to condone your infatuation and calling it a religion.

SUPRIYA : My friend, is not this world wide enough to hold men whose natures are widely different? Those countless stars of the sky, do they fight for the mastery of the One? Cannot faiths hold their separate lights in peace for the separate worlds of minds that need them?

KEMANKAR : Words, mere words. To let falsehood and truth live side by side in amity, the infinite world is not wide enough. That the corn ripening for the food of man should make room for thorny weeds, love is not so hatefully all-loving. That one should be allowed to sap the sure ground of friendship with betrayal of trust, could tolerance be so traitorously wide as that? That one should die like a thief to defend his faith and the other live in honour and wealth who betrayed it —no, no, the world is not so stony-hard as to bear without pain such hideous contradictions in its bosom.

SUPRIYA : [To Malini] All these hurts and insults I accept in your name, my lady, Kemankar, you are paying your life for your faith,—I am paying more. It is your love, dearer than my life.

KEMANKAR : No more of this prating. All truths must be tested in death's court. My friend, do you remember our student days when we used to wrangle the whole night through, to come at last to our teacher, in the morning, to know in a moment which of us was right? Let that morning break now. Let us go there to that land of the Final, and stand before death with all our questions, where the changing mist of doubts will vanish at a breath, and the mountain peaks of eternal truth will appear, and we two fools will look at each other and laugh.—Dear friend, bring before death that which you deem your best and immortal.

SUPRIYA : Friend, let it be as you wish.

KEMANKAR : Then come to my heart. You had wandered far from your comrade, in the infinite distance,—now, dear friend, come eternally close to me, and accept from one, who loves you, the gift of death.

[Strikes Supriya with his chains, and Supriya falls.

KEMANKAR : [Embracing the dead body of Supriya.] Now call your executioner.

KING : [Rising up.] Where is my sword?

MALINI : Father, forgive Kemankar!

8. The Post Office

Act I

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Madhav's House.

MADHAV : What a state I am in! Before he came, nothing mattered; I felt so free. But now that he has come, goodness knows from where, my heart is filled with his dear self, and my home will be no home to me when he leaves. Doctor, do you think he— PHYSICIAN : If there's life in his fate, then he will live long. But what the medical scriptures say, it seems— MADHAV : Great heavens, what?

PHYSICIAN : The scriptures have it: “Bile or palsy, cold or gout spring all alike.”

MADHAV : Oh, get along, don't fling your scriptures at me; you only make me more anxious; tell me what I can do.

PHYSICIAN : [Taking snuff] The patient needs the most scrupulous care.

MADHAV : That's true; but tell me how.

PHYSICIAN : I have already mentioned, on no account must he be let out of doors.

MADHAV : Poor child, it is very hard to keep him indoors all day long.

PHYSICIAN : What else can you do? The autumn sun and the damp are both very bad for the little fellow—for the scriptures have it: “In wheezing, swoon or in nervous fret, In jaundice or leaden eyes—”

MADHAV : Never mind the scriptures, please. Eh, then we must shut the poor thing up. Is there no other method?

PHYSICIAN : None at all: for, “In the wind and in the sun—”

MADHAV : What will your “in this and in that” do for me now? Why don't you let them alone and come straight to the point? What's to be done then? Your system is very, very hard for the poor boy; and he is so quiet too with all his pain and sickness. It tears my heart to see him wince, as he takes your medicine.

PHYSICIAN : Effect. That's why the sage Chyabana observes: “In medicine as in good advices, the least palatable ones are the truest.” Ah, well! I must be trotting now. [*Exit*.]

GAFFER enters.

MADHAV : Well, I'm jiggered, there's Gaffer now.

GAFFER : Why, why, I won't bite you.

MADHAV : No, but you are a devil to send children off their heads.

GAFFER : But you aren't a child, and you've no child in the house; why worry then?

MADHAV : Oh, but I have brought a child into the house.

GAFFER : Indeed, how so?

MADHAV : You remember how my wife was dying to adopt a child?

GAFFER : Yes, but that's an old story; you didn't like the idea.

MADHAV : You know, brother, how hard all this getting money in has been. That somebody else's child would sail in and waste all this money earned with so much trouble—Oh, I hated the idea. But this boy clings to my heart in such a queer sort of way— GAFFER : So that's the trouble! and your money goes all for him and feels jolly lucky it does go at all.

MADHAV : Formerly, earning was a sort of passion with me; I simply couldn't help working for money. Now, I make money and as I know it is all for this dear boy, earning becomes a joy to me.

GAFFER : Ah, well, and where did you pick him up?

MADHAV : He is the son of a man who was a brother to my wife by village ties. He has had no mother since infancy; and now the other day he lost his father as well.

GAFFER : Poor thing: and so he needs me all the more.

MADHAV : The doctor says all the organs of his little body are at loggerheads with each other, and there isn't much hope for his life. There is only one way to save him and that is to keep him out of this autumn wind and sun. But you are such a terror! What with this game of yours at your age, too, to get children out of doors!

GAFFER : God bless my soul! So I'm already as bad as autumn wind and sun, eh! But, friend, I know something, too, of the game of keeping them indoors. When my day's work is over I am coming in to make friends with this child of yours. [Exit.

AMAL enters.

AMAL : Uncle, I say, Uncle!

MADHAV : Hullo! Is that you, Amal?

AMAL : Mayn't I be out of the courtyard at all?

MADHAV : No, my dear, no.

AMAL : See, there where Auntie grinds lentils in the quirn, the squirrel is sitting with his tail up and with his wee hands he's picking up the broken grains of lentils and crunching them. Can't I run up there?

MADHAV : No, my darling, no.

AMAL : Wish I were a squirrel!—it would be lovely. Uncle, why won't you let me go about?

MADHAV : Doctor says it's bad for you to be out.

AMAL : How can the doctor know?

MADHAV : What a thing to say! The doctor can't know and he reads such huge books!

AMAL : Does his book-learning tell him everything?

MADHAV : Of course, don't you know!

AMAL : [With a sigh] Ah, I am so stupid! I don't read books.

MADHAV : Now, think of it; very, very learned people are all like you; they are never out of doors.

AMAL : Aren't they really?

MADHAV : No, how can they? Early and late they toil and moil at their books, and they've eyes for nothing else. Now, my little man, you are going to be learned when you grow up; and then you will stay at home and read such big books, and people will notice you and say, "he's a wonder."

AMAL : No, no, Uncle; I beg of you by your dear feet—I don't want to be learned, I won't.

MADHAV : Dear, dear; it would have been my saving if I could have been learned.

AMAL : No, I would rather go about and see everything that there is.

MADHAV : Listen to that! See! What will you see, what is there so much to see?

AMAL : See that far-away hill from our window—I often long to go beyond those hills and right away.

MADHAV : Oh, you silly! As if there's nothing more to be done but just get up to the top of that hill and away! Eh! You don't talk sense, my boy. Now listen, since that hill stands there upright as a barrier, it means you can't get beyond it. Else, what was the use in heaping up so many large stones to make such a big affair of it, eh!

AMAL : Uncle, do you think it is meant to prevent your crossing over? It seems to me because the earth can't speak it raises its hands into the sky and beckons. And those who live far and sit alone by their windows can see the signal. But I

suppose the learned people— MADHAV : No, they don't have time for that sort of nonsense. They are not crazy like you.

AMAL : Do you know, yesterday I met someone quite as crazy as I am.

MADHAV : Gracious me, really, how so?

AMAL : He had a bamboo staff on his shoulder with a small bundle at the top, and a brass pot in his left hand, and an old pair of shoes on; he was making for those hills straight across that meadow there. I called out to him and asked, "Where are you going?" He answered, "I don't know, anywhere!" I asked again, "Why are you going?" He said, "I'm going out to seek work." Say, Uncle, have you to seek work?

MADHAV : Of course I have to. There's many about looking for jobs.

AMAL : How lovely! I'll go about, like them too, finding things to do.

MADHAV : Suppose you seek and don't find. Then— AMAL : Wouldn't that be jolly? Then I should go farther! I watched that man slowly walking on with his pair of worn out shoes. And when he got to where the water flows under the fig tree, he stopped and washed his feet in the stream. Then he took out from his bundle some gram-flour, moistened it with water and began to eat. Then he tied up his bundle and shouldered it again; tucked up his cloth above his knees and crossed the stream. I've asked Auntie to let me go up to the stream, and eat my gram-flour just like him.

MADHAV : And what did your Auntie say to that?

AMAL : Auntie said, "Get well and then I'll take you over there." Please, Uncle, when shall I get well?

MADHAV : It won't be long, dear.

AMAL : Really, but then I shall go right away the moment I'm well again.

MADHAV : And where will you go?

AMAL : Oh, I will walk on, crossing so many streams, wading through water. Everybody will be asleep with their doors shut in the heat of the day and I will tramp on and on seeking work far, very far.

MADHAV : I see! I think you had better be getting well first; then— AMAL : But then you won't want me to be learned, will you, Uncle?

MADHAV : What would you rather be then?

AMAL : I can't think of anything just now; but I'll tell you later on.

MADHAV : Very well. But mind you, you aren't to call out and talk to strangers again.

AMAL : But I love to talk to strangers!

MADHAV : Suppose they had kidnapped you?

AMAL : That would have been splendid! But no one ever takes me away. They all want me to stay in here.

MADHAV : I am off to my work—but, darling, you won't go out, will you?

AMAL : No, I won't. But, Uncle, you'll let me be in this room by the roadside.

[Exit Madhav.]

DAIRYMAN : Curds, curds, good nice curds.

AMAL : Curdseller, I say, Curdseller.

DAIRYMAN : Why do you call me? Will you buy some curds?

AMAL : How can I buy? I have no money.

DAIRYMAN : What a boy! Why call out then? Ugh! What a waste of time.

AMAL : I would go with you if I could.

DAIRYMAN : With me?

AMAL : Yes, I seem to feel homesick when I hear you call from far down the road.

DAIRYMAN : [Lowering his yoke-pole] Whatever are you doing here, my child?

AMAL : The doctor says I'm not to be out, so I sit here all day long.

DAIRYMAN : My poor child, whatever has happened to you?

AMAL : I can't tell. You see I am not learned, so I don't know what's the matter with me. Say, Dairyman, where do you come from?

DAIRYMAN : From our village.

AMAL : Your village? Is it very far?

DAIRYMAN : Our village lies on the river Shamli at the foot of the Panch-mura hills.

AMAL : Panch-mura hills! Shamli river! I wonder. I may have seen your village. I can't think when though!

DAIRYMAN : Have you seen it? Been to the foot of those hills?

AMAL : Never. But I seem to remember having seen it. Your village is under some very old big trees, just by the side of the red road—isn't that so?

DAIRYMAN : That's right, child.

AMAL : And on the slope of the hill cattle grazing.

DAIRYMAN : How wonderful! Aren't there cattle grazing in our village! Indeed, there are!

AMAL : And your women with red sarees fill their pitchers from the river and carry them on their heads.

DAIRYMAN : Good, that's right. Women from our dairy village do come and draw their water from the river; but then it isn't everyone who has a red saree to put on. But, my dear child, surely you must have been there for a walk some time.

AMAL : Really, Dairyman, never been there at all. But the first day doctor lets me go out, you are going to take me to your village.

DAIRYMAN : I will, my child, with pleasure.

AMAL : And you'll teach me to cry curds and shoulder the yoke like you and walk the long, long road?

DAIRYMAN : Dear, dear, did you ever? Why should you sell curds? No, you will read big books and be learned.

AMAL : No, I never want to be learned—I'll be like you and take my curds from the village by the red road near the old banyan tree, and I will hawk it from cottage to cottage. Oh, how do you cry—"Curd, curd, good nice curd!" Teach me the tune, will you?

DAIRYMAN : Dear, dear, teach you the tune; what an idea!

AMAL : Please do. I love to hear it. I can't tell you how queer I feel when I hear you cry out from the bend of that road, through the line of those trees! Do you know I feel like that when I hear the shrill cry of kites from almost the end of the sky?

DAIRYMAN : Dear child, will you have some curds? Yes, do.

AMAL : But I have no money.

DAIRYMAN : No, no, no, don't talk of money! You'll make me so happy if you have a little curds from me.

AMAL : Say, have I kept you too long?

DAIRYMAN : Not a bit; it has been no loss to me at all; you have taught me how to be happy selling curds. [Exit.

AMAL : [Intoning] Curds, curds, good nice curds—from the dairy village—from the country of the Panch-mura hills by the Shamli bank. Curds, good curds; in the early morning the women make the cows stand in a row under the trees and milk them, and in the evening they turn the milk into curds. Curds, good curds. Hello, there's the watchman on his rounds. Watchman, I say, come and have a word with me.

WATCHMAN : What's all this row you are making? Aren't you afraid of the likes of me?

AMAL : No, why should I be?

WATCHMAN : Suppose I march you off then?

AMAL : Where will you take me to? Is it very far, right beyond the hills?

WATCHMAN : Suppose I march you straight to the King?

AMAL : To the King! Do, will you? But the doctor won't let me go out. No one can ever take me away. I've got to stay here all day long.

WATCHMAN : Doctor won't let you, poor fellow! So I see! Your face is pale and there are dark rings round your eyes. Your veins stick out from your poor thin hands.

AMAL : Won't you sound the gong, Watchman?

WATCHMAN : Time has not yet come.

AMAL : How curious! Some say time has not yet come, and some say time has gone by! But surely your time will come the moment you strike the gong!

WATCHMAN : That's not possible; I strike up the gong only when it is time.

AMAL : Yes, I love to hear your gong. When it is midday and our meal is over, Uncle goes off to his work and Auntie falls asleep reading her Râmayana, and in the courtyard under the shadow of the wall our doggie sleeps with his nose in his curled up tail; then your gong strikes out, "Dong, dong, dong!" Tell me why does your gong sound?

WATCHMAN : My gong sounds to tell the people, Time waits for none, but goes on forever.

AMAL : Where, to what land?

WATCHMAN : That none knows.

AMAL : Then I suppose no one has ever been there! Oh, I do wish to fly with the time to that land of which no one knows anything.

WATCHMAN : All of us have to get there one day, my child.

AMAL : Have I too?

WATCHMAN : Yes, you too!

AMAL : But doctor won't let me out.

WATCHMAN : One day the doctor himself may take you there by the hand.

AMAL : He won't; you don't know him. He only keeps me in.

WATCHMAN : One greater than he comes and lets us free.

AMAL : When will this great doctor come for me? I can't stick in here anymore.

WATCHMAN : Shouldn't talk like that, my child.

AMAL : No. I am here where they have left me—I never move a bit. But when your gong goes off, dong, dong, dong, it goes to my heart. Say, Watchman?

WATCHMAN : Yes, my dear.

AMAL : Say, what's going on there in that big house on the other side, where there is a flag flying high up and the people are always going in and out?

WATCHMAN : Oh, there? That's our new Post Office.

AMAL : Post Office? Whose?

WATCHMAN : Whose? Why, the King's surely!

AMAL : Do letters come from the King to his office here?

WATCHMAN : Of course. One fine day there may be a letter for you in there.

AMAL : A letter for me? But I am only a little boy.

WATCHMAN : The King sends tiny notes to little boys.

AMAL : Oh, how lovely! When shall I have my letter? How do you guess he'll write to me?

WATCHMAN : Otherwise why should he set his Post Office here right in front of your open window, with the golden flag flying?

AMAL : But who will fetch me my King's letter when it comes?

WATCHMAN : The King has many postmen. Don't you see them run about with round gilt badges on their chests?

AMAL : Well, where do they go?

WATCHMAN : Oh, from door to door, all through the country.

AMAL : I'll be the King's postman when I grow up.

WATCHMAN : Ha! Ha! Postman, indeed! Rain or shine, rich or poor, from house to house delivering letters—that's very great work!

AMAL : That's what I'd like best. What makes you smile so? Oh, yes, your work is great too. When it is silent everywhere in the heat of the noonday, your gong sounds, Dong, dong, dong,— and sometimes when I wake up at night all of a sudden and find our lamp blown out, I can hear through the darkness your gong slowly sounding, Dong, dong, dong!

WATCHMAN : There's the village headman! I must be off. If he catches me gossiping with you there'll be a great to do.

AMAL : The headman? Whereabouts is he?

WATCHMAN : Right down the road there; see that huge palm-leaf umbrella hopping along? That's him!

AMAL : I suppose the King's made him our headman here?

WATCHMAN : Made him? Oh, no! A fussy busy-body! He knows so many ways of making himself unpleasant that everybody is afraid of him. It's just a game for the likes of him, making trouble for everybody. I must be off now! Mustn't keep work waiting, you know! I'll drop in again tomorrow morning and tell you all the news of the town. [Exit.

AMAL : It would be splendid to have a letter from the King every day. I'll read them at the window. But, oh! I can't read writing. Who'll read them out to me, I wonder! Auntie reads her Rāmayana; she may know the King's writing. If no one will, then I must keep them carefully and read them when I'm grown up. But if the postman can't find me? Headman, Mr. Headman, may I have a word with you?

HEADMAN : Who is yelling after me on the highway? Oh, you wretched monkey!

AMAL : You're the headman. Everybody minds you.

HEADMAN : [Looking pleased] Yes, oh yes, they do! They must!

AMAL : Do the King's postmen listen to you?

HEADMAN : They've got to. By Jove, I'd like to see— AMAL : Will you tell the postman it's Amal who sits by the window here?

HEADMAN : What's the good of that?

AMAL : In case there's a letter for me.

HEADMAN : A letter for you! Whoever's going to write to you?

AMAL : If the King does.

HEADMAN : Ha! Ha! What an uncommon little fellow you are! Ha! Ha! The King indeed, aren't you his bosom friend, eh! You haven't met for a long while and the King is pining, I am sure. Wait till tomorrow and you'll have your letter.

AMAL : Say, Headman, why do you speak to me in that tone of voice? Are you cross?

HEADMAN : Upon my word! Cross, indeed! You write to the King! Madhav is devilish swell nowadays. He'd made a little pile; and so kings and padishahs are everyday talk with his people. Let me find him once and I'll make him dance. Oh, you snipper-snapper! I'll get the King's letter sent to your house—indeed I will!

AMAL : No, no, please don't trouble yourself about it.

HEADMAN : And why not, pray! I'll tell the King about you and he won't be very long. One of his footmen will come along presently for news of you. Madhav's impudence staggers me. If the King hears of this, that'll take some of his nonsense out of him. [Exit.

AMAL : Who are you walking there? How your anklets tinkle! Do stop a while, dear, won't you?

A GIRL enters.

GIRL : I haven't a moment to spare; it is already late!

AMAL : I see, you don't wish to stop; I don't care to stay on here either.

GIRL : You make me think of some late star of the morning! Whatever's the matter with you?

AMAL : I don't know; the doctor won't let me out.

GIRL : Ah me! Don't then! Should listen to the doctor. People'll be cross with you if you're naughty. I know, always looking out and watching must make you feel tired. Let me close the window a bit for you.

AMAL : No, don't, only this one's open! All the others are shut. But will you tell me who you are? Don't seem to know you.

GIRL : I am Sudha.

AMAL : What Sudha?

SUDHA : Don't you know? Daughter of the flower-seller here.

AMAL : What do you do?

SUDHA : I gather flowers in my basket.

AMAL : Oh, flower gathering! That is why your feet seem so glad and your anklets jingle so merrily as you walk. Wish I could be out too. Then I would pick some flowers for you from the very topmost branches right out of sight.

SUDHA : Would you really? Do you know more about flowers than I?

AMAL : Yes, I do, quite as much. I know all about Champa of the fairy tale and his seven brothers. If only they let me, I'll go right into the dense forest where you can't find your way. And where the honey-sipping hummingbird rocks himself on the end of the thinnest branch, I will flower out as a champa. Would you be my sister Parul?

SUDHA : You are silly! How can I be sister Parul when I am Sudha and my mother is Sasi, the flower-seller? I have to weave so many garlands a day. It would be jolly if I could lounge here like you!

AMAL : What would you do then, all the day long?

SUDHA : I could have great times with my doll Benay the bride, and Meni the pussycat and—but I say it is getting late and I mustn't stop, or I won't find a single flower.

AMAL : Oh, wait a little longer; I do like it so!

SUDHA : Ah, well—now don't you be naughty. Be good and sit still and on my way back home with the flowers I'll come and talk with you.

AMAL : And you'll let me have a flower then?

SUDHA : No, how can I? It has to be paid for.

AMAL : I'll pay when I grow up—before I leave to look for work out on the other side of that stream there.

SUDHA : Very well, then.

AMAL : And you'll come back when you have your flowers?

SUDHA : I will.

AMAL : You will, really?

SUDHA : Yes, I will.

AMAL : You won't forget me? I am Amal, remember that.

SUDHA : I won't forget you, you'll see. [Exit.

A Troop of BOYS enter.

AMAL : Say, brothers, where are you all off to? Stop here a little.

BOYS : We're off to play.

AMAL : What will you play at, brothers?

BOYS : We'll play at being ploughmen.

FIRST BOY : [Showing a stick] This is our ploughshare.

SECOND BOY : We two are the pair of oxen.

AMAL : And you're going to play the whole day?

BOYS : Yes, all day long.

AMAL : And you'll come back home in the evening by the road along the river bank?

BOYS : Yes.

AMAL : Do you pass our house on your way home?

BOYS : You come out to play with us, yes do.

AMAL : Doctor won't let me out.

BOYS : Doctor! Suppose the likes of you mind the doctor. Let's be off; it is getting late.

AMAL : Don't. Why not play on the road near this window? I could watch you then.

THIRD BOY : What can we play at here?

AMAL : With all these toys of mine lying about. Here you are, have them. I can't play alone. They are getting dirty and are of no use to me.

BOYS : How jolly! What fine toys! Look, here's a ship. There's old mother Jatai; say, chaps, ain't he a gorgeous sepoy? And you'll let us have them all? You don't really mind?

AMAL : No, not a bit; have them by all means.

BOYS : You don't want them back?

AMAL : Oh, no, I shan't want them.

BOYS : Say, won't you get a scolding for this?

AMAL : No one will scold me. But will you play with them in front of our door for a while every morning? I'll get you new ones when these are old.

BOYS : Oh, yes, we will. Say, chaps, put these sepoys into a line. We'll play at war; where can we get a musket? Oh, look here, this bit of reed will do nicely. Say, but you're off to sleep already.

AMAL : I'm afraid I'm sleepy. I don't know, I feel like it at times. I have been sitting a long while and I'm tired; my back aches.

BOYS : It's only early noon now. How is it you're sleepy? Listen! The gong's sounding the first watch.

AMAL : Yes, dong, dong, dong, it tolls me to sleep.

BOYS : We had better go then. We'll come in again tomorrow morning.

AMAL : I want to ask you something before you go. You are always out—do you know of the King's postmen?

BOYS : Yes, quite well.

AMAL : Who are they? Tell me their names.

BOYS : One's Badal, another's Sarat. There's so many of them.

AMAL : Do you think they will know me if there's a letter for me?

BOYS : Surely, if your name's on the letter they will find you out.

AMAL : When you call in tomorrow morning, will you bring one of them along so that he'll know me?

BOYS : Yes, if you like.

Act II

.....

AMAL in Bed.

AMAL : Can't I go near the window today, Uncle? Would the doctor mind that too?

MADHAV : Yes, darling, you see you've made yourself worse squatting there day after day.

AMAL : Oh, no, I don't know if it's made me more ill, but I always feel well when I'm there.

MADHAV : No, you don't; you squat there and make friends with the whole lot of people round here, old and young, as if they are holding a fair right under my eaves—flesh and blood won't stand that strain. Just see—your face is quite pale.

AMAL : Uncle, I fear my fakir'll pass and not see me by the window.

MADHAV : Your fakir, whoever's that?

AMAL : He comes and chats to me of the many lands where he's been. I love to hear him.

MADHAV : How's that? I don't know of any fakirs.

AMAL : This is about the time he comes in. I beg of you, by your dear feet, ask him in for a moment to talk to me here.

GAFFER Enters in a FAKIR'S Guise.

AMAL : There you are. Come here, Fakir, by my bedside.

MADHAV : Upon my word, but this is— GAFFER : [Winking hard] I am the fakir.

MADHAV : It beats my reckoning what you're not.

AMAL : Where have you been this time, Fakir?

FAKIR : To the Isle of Parrots. I am just back.

MADHAV : The Parrots' Isle!

FAKIR : Is it so very astonishing? Am I like you, man? A journey doesn't cost a thing. I tramp just where I like.

AMAL : [Clapping] How jolly for you! Remember your promise to take me with you as your follower when I'm well.

FAKIR : Of course, and I'll teach you such secrets too of travelling that nothing in sea or forest or mountain can bar your way.

MADHAV : What's all this rigmarole?

GAFFER : Amal, my dear, I bow to nothing in sea or mountain; but if the doctor joins in with this uncle of yours, then I with all my magic must own myself beaten.

AMAL : No. Uncle shan't tell the doctor. And I promise to lie quiet; but the day I am well, off I go with the Fakir and nothing in sea or mountain or torrent shall stand in my way.

MADHAV : Fie, dear child, don't keep on harping upon going! It makes me so sad to hear you talk so.

AMAL : Tell me, Fakir, what the Parrots' Isle is like.

GAFFER : It's a land of wonders; it's a haunt of birds. There's no man; and they neither speak nor walk, they simply sing and they fly.

AMAL : How glorious! And it's by some sea?

GAFFER : Of course. It's on the sea.

AMAL : And green hills are there?

GAFFER : Indeed, they live among the green hills; and in the time of the sunset when there is a red glow on the hillside, all the birds with their green wings flock back to their nests.

AMAL : And there are waterfalls!

GAFFER : Dear me, of course; you don't have a hill without its waterfalls. Oh, it's like molten diamonds; and, my dear, what dances they have! Don't they make the pebbles sing as they rush over them to the sea. No devil of a doctor can stop them for a moment. The birds looked upon me as nothing but a man, quite a trifling creature without wings—and they would have nothing to do with me. Were it not so I would build a small cabin for myself among their crowd of nests and pass my days counting the sea waves.

AMAL : How I wish I were a bird! Then— GAFFER : But that would have been a bit of a job; I hear you've fixed up with the dairyman to be a hawker of curds when you grow up; I'm afraid such business won't flourish among birds; you might land yourself into serious loss.

MADHAV : Really this is too much. Between you two I shall turn crazy. Now, I'm off.

AMAL : Has the dairyman been, Uncle?

MADHAV : And why shouldn't he? He won't bother his head running errands for

your pet fakir, in and out among the nests in his Parrots' Isle. But he has left a jar of curd for you saying that he is rather busy with his niece's wedding in the village, and he has got to order a band at Kamlipara.

AMAL : But he is going to marry me to his little niece.

GAFFER : Dear me, we are in a fix now.

AMAL : He said she would find me a lovely little bride with a pair of pearl drops in her ears and dressed in a lovely red sâree; and in the morning she would milk with her own hands the black cow and feed me with warm milk with foam on it from a brand new earthen cruse; and in the evenings she would carry the lamp round the cow-house, and then come and sit by me to tell me tales of Champa and his six brothers.

[Transcriber's note: In act 1, Amal mentions to Sudha about Champa and his seven brothers. In this act, Amal mentions to Gaffer about Champa and his six brothers. Translator error?]

GAFFER : How delicious! The prospect tempts even me, a hermit! But never mind, dear, about this wedding. Let it be. I tell you when you wed there'll be no lack of nieces in his household.

MADHAV : Shut up! This is more than I can stand. [Exit.

AMAL : Fakir, now that Uncle's off, just tell me, has the King sent me a letter to the Post Office?

GAFFER : I gather that his letter has already started; but it's still on the way.

AMAL : On the way? Where is it? Is it on that road winding through the trees which you can follow to the end of the forest when the sky is quite clear after rain?

GAFFER : That's so. You know all about it already.

AMAL : I do, everything.

GAFFER : So I see, but how?

AMAL : I can't say; but it's quite clear to me. I fancy I've seen it often in days long gone by. How long ago I can't tell. Do you know when? I can see it all: there, the King's postman coming down the hillside alone, a lantern in his left hand and on his back a bag of letters climbing down forever so long, for days and nights, and where at the foot of the mountain the waterfall becomes a stream he takes to the footpath on the bank and walks on through the rye; then comes the sugarcane field and he disappears into the narrow lane cutting through the tall stems of sugarcanes; then he reaches the open meadow where the cricket chirps and where there is not a single man to be seen, only the snipe wagging their tails and poking at the mud with their bills. I can feel him coming nearer and nearer and my heart becomes glad.

GAFFER : My eyes aren't young; but you make me see all the same.

AMAL : Say, Fakir, do you know the King who has this Post Office?

GAFFER : I do; I go to him for my alms every day.

AMAL : Good! When I get well, I must have my alms too from him, mayn't I?

GAFFER : You won't need to ask, my dear, he'll give it to you of his own accord.

AMAL : No, I would go to his gate and cry, "Victory to thee, O King!" and dancing to the tabor's sound, ask for alms. Won't it be nice?

GAFFER : It would be splendid, and if you're with me, I shall have my full share. But what'll you ask?

AMAL : I shall say, "Make me your postman, that I may go about lantern in hand, delivering your letters from door to door. Don't let me stay at home all day!"

GAFFER : What is there to be sad for, my child, even were you to stay at home?

AMAL : It isn't sad. When they shut me in here first I felt the day was so long. Since the King's Post Office I like it more and more being indoors, and as I think I shall get a letter one day, I feel quite happy and then I don't mind being quiet and alone. I wonder if I shall make out what'll be in the King's letter?

GAFFER : Even if you didn't wouldn't it be enough if it just bore your name?

MADHAV enters.

MADHAV : Have you any idea of the trouble you've got me into, between you two?

GAFFER : What's the matter?

MADHAV : I hear you've let it get rumored about that the King has planted his office here to send messages to both of you.

GAFFER : Well, what about it?

MADHAV : Our headman Panchanan has had it told to the King anonymously.

GAFFER : Aren't we aware that everything reaches the King's ears?

MADHAV : Then why don't you look out? Why take the King's name in vain? You'll bring me to ruin if you do.

AMAL : Say, Fakir, will the King be cross?

GAFFER : Cross, nonsense! And with a child like you and a fakir such as I am. Let's see if the King be angry, and then won't I give him a piece of my mind.

AMAL : Say, Fakir, I've been feeling a sort of darkness coming over my eyes since the morning. Everything seems like a dream. I long to be quiet. I don't feel like talking at all. Won't the King's letter come? Suppose this room melts away all on a sudden, suppose— GAFFER : [Fanning Amal] The letter's sure to come today, my boy.

DOCTOR *enters.*

DOCTOR : And how do you feel today?

AMAL : Feel awfully well today, Doctor. All pain seems to have left me.

DOCTOR : [Aside to *Madhav*] Don't quite like the look of that smile. Bad sign that, his feeling well! Chakradhan has observed— **MADHAV** : For goodness sake, Doctor, leave Chakradhan alone. Tell me what's going to happen?

DOCTOR : Can't hold him in much longer, I fear! I warned you before—This looks like a fresh exposure.

MADHAV : No, I've used the utmost care, never let him out of doors; and the windows have been shut almost all the time.

DOCTOR : There's a peculiar quality in the air today. As I came in I found a fearful draught through your front door. That's most hurtful. Better lock it at once. Would it matter if this kept your visitors off for two or three days? If someone happens to call unexpectedly—there's the back door. You had better shut this window as well, it's letting in the sunset rays only to keep the patient awake.

MADHAV : Amal has shut his eyes. I expect he is sleeping. His face tells me—Oh, Doctor, I bring in a child who is a stranger and love him as my own, and now I suppose I must lose him!

DOCTOR : What's that? There's your headman sailing in!—What a bother! I must be going, brother. You had better stir about and see to the doors being properly fastened. I will send on a strong dose directly I get home. Try it on him—it may save him at last, if he can be saved at all. [*Exeunt Madhav and Doctor.*]

The HEADMAN enters.

HEADMAN : Hello, urchin!

GAFFER : [Rising hastily] 'Sh, be quiet.

AMAL : No, Fakir, did you think I was asleep? I wasn't. I can hear everything; yes, and voices far away. I feel that mother and father are sitting by my pillow and speaking to me.

MADHAV *enters.*

HEADMAN : I say, Madhav, I hear you hobnob with bigwigs nowadays.

MADHAV : Spare me your jests, Headman, we are but common people.

HEADMAN : But your child here is expecting a letter from the King.

MADHAV : Don't you take any notice of him, a mere foolish boy!

HEADMAN : Indeed, why not! It'll beat the King hard to find a better family! Don't you see why the King plants his new Post Office right before your window? Why there's a letter for you from the King, urchin.

AMAL : [Starting up] Indeed, really!

HEADMAN : How can it be false? You're the King's chum. Here's your letter [Showing a blank slip of paper.] Ha, ha, ha! This is the letter.

AMAL : Please don't mock me. Say, Fakir, is it so?

GAFFER : Yes, my dear. I as Fakir tell you it is his letter.

AMAL : How is it I can't see? It all looks so blank to me. What is there in the letter, Mr. Headman?

HEADMAN : The King says, "I am calling on you shortly; you had better arrange puffed rice offerings for me.—Palace fare is quite tasteless to me now. "Ha! Ha! Ha!"

MADHAV : [With folded palms] I beseech you, headman, don't you joke about these things—GAFFER : Cutting jokes indeed, dare he!

MADHAV : Are you out of your mind too, Gaffer?

GAFFER : Out of my mind, well then I am; I can read plainly that the King writes he will come himself to see Amal, with the state physician.

AMAL : Fakir, Fakir, 'sh, his trumpet! Can't you hear?

HEADMAN : Ha! Ha! Ha! I fear he won't until he's a bit more off his head.

AMAL : Mr. Headman, I thought you were cross with me and didn't love me. I never could think you would fetch me the King's letter. Let me wipe the dust off your feet.

HEADMAN : This little child does have an instinct of reverence. Though a little silly, he has a good heart.

AMAL : It's hard on the fourth watch now, I suppose—Hark the gong, "Dong, dong, ding," "Dong, dong, ding." Is the evening star up? How is it I can't see—

GAFFER : Oh, the windows are all shut, I'll open them.

[A knocking outside.]

MADHAV : What's that?—Who is it—what a bother!

VOICE : [From outside] Open the door.

MADHAV : Say, Headman—Hope they're not robbers.

HEADMAN : Who's there?—It's Panchanan, the headman, calls—Aren't you afraid of the like of me? Fancy! The noise has ceased! Panchanan's voice carries far.—Yes, show me the biggest robbers!

MADHAV : [Peering out of the window] I should think the noise has ceased.

They've smashed the door.

THE KING'S HERALD *enters.*

HERALD : Our Sovereign King comes tonight!

HEADMAN : My God!

AMAL : At what hour of the night, Herald?

HERALD : On the second watch.

AMAL : When from the city gates my friend the watchman will strike his gong, "ding dong ding, ding dong ding"—then?

HERALD : Yes, then. The King sends his greatest physician to attend on his young friend.

STATE PHYSICIAN *enters.*

STATE PHYSICIAN : What's this? How close it is here! Open wide all the doors and windows. [Feeling Amal's body] How do you feel, my child?

AMAL : I feel very well, Doctor, very well. All pain is gone. How fresh and open! I can see all the stars now twinkling from the other side of the dark.

PHYSICIAN : Will you feel well enough to leave your bed with the King when he comes in the middle watches of the night?

AMAL : Of course, I'm dying to be about forever so long. I'll ask the King to find me the polar star.—I must have seen it often, but I don't know exactly which it is.

PHYSICIAN : He will tell you everything. [To Madhav] Will you go about and arrange flowers through the room for the King's visit? [Indicating the Headman] We can't have that person in here.

AMAL : No, let him be, Doctor. He is a friend. It was he who brought me the King's letter.

PHYSICIAN : Very well, my child. He may remain if he is a friend of yours.

MADHAV : [Whispering into Amal's ear] My child, the King loves you. He is coming himself. Beg for a gift from him. You know our humble circumstances.

AMAL : Don't you worry, Uncle.—I've made up my mind about it.

MADHAV : What is it, my child?

AMAL : I shall ask him to make me one of his postmen that I may wander far and wide, delivering his message from door to door.

MADHAV : [Slapping his forehead] Alas, is that all?

AMAL : What'll be our offerings to the King, Uncle, when he comes?

HERALD : He has commanded puffed rice.

AMAL : Puffed rice! Say, Headman, you're right. You said so. You knew all we didn't.

HEADMAN : If you send word to my house then I could manage for the King's advent really nice— PHYSICIAN : No need at all. Now be quiet all of you. Sleep is coming over him. I'll sit by his pillow; he's dropping into slumber. Blow out the oil-lamp. Only let the star-light stream in. Hush, he slumbers.

MADHAV : [Addressing Gaffer] What are you standing there for like a statue, folding your palms.—I am nervous.—Say, are they good omens? Why are they darkening the room? How will star-light help?

GAFFER : Silence, unbeliever.

SUDHA enters.

SUDHA : Amal!

PHYSICIAN : He's asleep.

SUDHA : I have some flowers for him. Mayn't I give them into his own hand?

PHYSICIAN : Yes, you may.

SUDHA : When will he be awake?

PHYSICIAN : Directly the King comes and calls him.

SUDHA : Will you whisper a word for me in his ear?

PHYSICIAN : What shall I say?

SUDHA : Tell him Sudha has not forgotten him.

9. Red Oleanders

Act

.....

The curtain rises on a window covered by a network of intricate pattern in front of the Palace.

NANDINI and KISHOR, a digger boy, come in.

KISHOR : Have you enough flowers, Nandini? Here, I have brought some more.

NANDINI : Run away, Kishor, do, back to your work, quick! You'll be late again.

KISHOR : I must steal some time from my digging and digging of nuggets to bring out flowers to you.

NANDINI : But they'll punish you, my boy, if they know.

KISHOR : You said you must have red oleanders. I am glad they're hard to find in this place, Only one tree I discovered after days of search, nearly hidden away behind a rubbish heap.

NANDINI : Show it me. I'll go and gather the flowers myself.

KISHOR : Don't be cruel, Nandini. This tree is my one secret which none shall know. I've always envied Bishu, he can sing to you songs that are his own. From now I shall have flowers which you'll have to take only from my hands.

NANDINI : But it breaks my heart to know that those brutes punish you.

KISHOR : It makes these flowers all the more preciously mine. They come from my pain.

NANDINI : It pains me to accept anything which brings you hurt.

KISHOR : I dream of dying one day for your sake, Nandini.

NANDINI : Is there nothing I can give you in return?

KISHOR : Promise that you will accept flowers only from me every morning.

NANDINI : I will. But do be careful.

KISHOR : No, no, I shall be rash and defy their blows. My homage shall be my daily triumph.

[Goes.

PROFESSOR comes in.

PROFESSOR : Nandini!

NANDINI : Yes, Professor!

PROFESSOR : Why do you come and startle one, now and again, and then pass by? Since you awaken a cry in our hearts, what harm if you stop a moment in answer to it? Let us talk a little.

NANDINI : What need have you of me?

PROFESSOR : If you talk of need, look over there! You'll see our tunnel-diggers creeping out of the holes like worms, with loads of things of need. In this Yaksha Town all our treasure is of gold, the secret treasure of the dust. But the gold which is you, beautiful one, is not of the dust, but of the light which never owns any bond.

NANDINI : Over and over again you say this to me. What makes you wonder at me so, Professor?

PROFESSOR : The sunlight gleaming through the forest thickets surprises nobody, but the light that breaks through a cracked wall is quite a different thing. In Yaksha Town, you are this light that startles. Tell me, what d'you think of this place?

NANDINI : It puzzles me to see a whole city thrusting its head underground, groping with both hands in the dark. You dig tunnels in the underworld and come out with dead wealth that the earth has kept buried for ages past.

PROFESSOR : The Jinn of that dead wealth we invoke. If we can enslave him the whole world lies at our feet.

NANDINI : Then again, you hide your king behind a wall of netting. Is it for fear of people finding out that he's a man?

PROFESSOR : As the ghost of our dead wealth is fearfully potent so is our ghostly royalty, made hazy by this net, with its inhuman power to frighten people.

NANDINI : All you say is a kind of made-up talk.

PROFESSOR : Of course made-up. The naked is without a credential, it's the made-up clothes that define us. It delights me immensely to discuss philosophy with you.

NANDINI : That's strange! You who burrow day and night in a mass of yellow pages, like your diggers in the bowels of the earth, why waste your time on me?

PROFESSOR : The privilege of wasting time proves ones wealth of time. We poor drudges are insects in a hole in this solid toil, you are the evening star in the rich sky of leisure. When we see you, our wings grow restless. Come to my room. For a moment allow me to be reckless in my waste of time.

NANDINI : No, not now. I have come to see your king, in his room.

PROFESSOR : How can you enter through the screen?

NANDINI : I shall find my way through the network.

PROFESSOR : Do you know, Nandini, I too live behind a network of scholarship. I am an unmitigated scholar, just as our king is an unmitigated king.

NANDINI : You are laughing at me, Professor. But tell me, when they brought me here, why didn't they bring my Ranjan also?

PROFESSOR : It's their way to snatch things by fractions. But why should you want to drag your life's treasure down amongst this dead wealth of ours?

NANDINI : Because I know he can put a beating heart behind these dead ribs.

PROFESSOR : Your own presence is puzzling enough for our governors here; if Ranjan also comes they will be in despair.

NANDINI : They do not know how comic they are, Ranjan will bring God's own laughter in their midst and startle them into life.

PROFESSOR : Divine laughter is the sunlight that melts ice, but not stones. Only the pressure of gross muscle can move our governors.

NANDINI : My Ranjan's strength is like that of your river, Sankhini, it can laugh and yet it can break. Let me tell you a little secret news of mine. I shall meet Ranjan today.

PROFESSOR : Who told you that?

NANDINI : Yes, yes, we shall meet. The news has come.

PROFESSOR : Through what way could news come and yet evade the Governor?

NANDINI : Through the same way that brings news of the coming Spring.

PROFESSOR : You mean it's in the air, like the rumours which flush in the colour of the sky, or flutter in the dance of the wind?

NANDINI : I won't say more now. When Ranjan comes you'll see for yourself how rumours in the air come down on earth.

PROFESSOR : Once she begins to talk of Ranjan there's no stopping Nandini's mouth! Well, well, I have my books, let me take my shelter behind them, I dare not go on with this. [*Coming back after going a little way.*] Nandini. Let me ask you one thing.

Aren't you frightened of our Yaksha Town?

NANDINI : Why should I feel afraid?

PROFESSOR : All creatures fear an eclipse, not the full sun. Yaksha Town is a city under eclipse. The Shadow Demon, who lives in the gold caves, has eaten into it. It is not whole itself, neither does it allow anyone else to remain whole. Listen to me, don't stay here. When you go, these pits will yawn all the wider for us, I know, yet I say to you, fly; go and live happily with Ranjan where people in their drunken fury don't tear the earth's veil to pieces. [*Going a little way and*

then coming back.] Nandini, will you give me a flower from your chain of red oleanders?

NANDINI : Why, what will you do with it?

PROFESSOR : How often have I thought that there is some omen in these ornaments of yours.

NANDINI : I don't know of any.

PROFESSOR : Perhaps your fate knows. In that red there is not only beauty, but also the fascination of fear.

NANDINI : Fear! Even in me?

PROFESSOR : I don't know what event you have come to write with that crimson tint. There was the gardenia and the tuberose, there was white jasmine, why did you leave them all and choose this flower? Do you know, we often choose our own fate thus, without knowing it!

NANDINI : Ranjan sometimes calls me Red Oleander. I feel that the colour of his love is red, that red I wear on my neck, on my breast, on my arms.

PROFESSOR : Well, just give me one of those flowers, a moment's gift, let me try to understand the meaning of its colour.

NANDINI : Here, take it. Ranjan is coming today, out of my heart's delight I give it to you.

[Professor goes.

GOKUL, a digger, comes in.

GOKUL : Turn this way, woman! Who are you? I've never yet been able to understand you.

NANDINI : I'm nothing more than what you see. What need have you to understand me?

GOKUL : I don't trust what I can't understand. For what purpose has the King brought you here?

NANDINI : Because I serve no purpose of his.

GOKUL : You know some spell, I'm sure. You're snaring everybody here. You're a witch! Those who are bewitched by your beauty will come to their death.

NANDINI : That death will not be yours, Gokul, never fear! You'll die digging.

GOKUL : Let me see, let me see, what's that dangling over your forehead?

NANDINI : Only a tassel of red oleanders.

GOKUL : What does it mean?

NANDINI : It has no meaning at all.

GOKUL : I don't believe you, one bit! You're up to some trickery. Some evil will

befall us before the day is out. That's why you have got yourself up like this. Oh you terrible, terrible witch!

NANDINI : What makes you think me so terrible?

GOKUL : You're looking like an ominous torch.

NANDINI : The autumn song: Hark, 'tis Autumn calling: 'Come, O, come away!'

Her basket is heaped with corn.

Don't you see the September sun is spreading the glow of the ripening corn in the air?

Drunken with the perfumed wine of wind, the sky seems to sway among the shivering corn, its sunlight trailing on the fields.

You too come out, King! Out into the fields.

VOICE : Fields! What could I do there?

NANDINI : The work there is much simpler than your work in Yaksha Town.

VOICE : It's the simple which is impossible for me. A lake cannot run out dancing, like a frolicsome waterfall. Leave me now, I have no time.

NANDINI : The day you let me into your store-house the blocks of gold did not surprise me, what amazed me was the immense strength with which you lifted and arranged them. But can blocks of gold ever answer to the swinging rhythm of your arms in the same way as fields of corn? Are you not afraid. King, of handling the dead wealth of the earth?

VOICE : What is there to fear?

NANDINI : The living heart of the earth gives itself up in love and life and beauty, but when you rend its bosom and disturb the dead, you bring up with your booty the curse of its dark demon, blind and hard, cruel and envious. Don't you see everybody here is either angry, or suspicious, or afraid?

VOICE : Curse?

NANDINI : Yes, the curse of grabbing and killing.

VOICE : But we bring up strength. Does not my strength please you, Nandini?

NANDINI : Indeed it does. Therefore I ask you, come out into the light, step on the ground, let the earth be glad.

VOICE : Do you know, Nandini, you too are half-hidden behind an evasion, you mystery of beauty! I want to pluck you out of it, to grasp you within my closed fist, to handle you, scrutinize you, or else to break you to pieces.

NANDINI : Whatever do you mean?

VOICE : Why can't I strain out the tint of your oleanders and build a dream out of it to keep before my eyes? Those few frail petals guard it and hinder me. Within you there is the same hindrance, so strong because so soft. Nandini, will you tell

me what you think of me?

NANDINI : Not now, you have no time. Let me go.

VOICE : No, no, don't go. Do tell me what you think of me.

NANDINI : Have I not told you often enough? I think you are wonderful. Strength swelling up in your arms, like rolling clouds before a storm, it makes my heart dance within me.

VOICE : And when your heart dances to see Ranjan, is that also NANDINI : Let that be, you have no time.

VOICE : There is time, for this; only tell me, then go.

NANDINI : That dance rhythm is different, you won't understand.

VOICE : I will, I must understand.

NANDINI : I can't explain it clearly. Let me go.

VOICE : Tell me, at least, whether you like me.

NANDINI : Yes, I like you.

VOICE : The same as Ranjan?

NANDINI : Again the same question! I tell you, you don't understand these things.

VOICE : I do understand, a little. I know what the difference is between Ranjan and me. In me there is only strength, in Ranjan there is magic.

NANDINI : What d'you mean by magic?

VOICE : Shall I explain? Underground there are blocks of stone, iron, gold, there you have the image of strength. On the surface grows the grass, the flower blossoms, there you have the play of magic. I can extract gold from the fearsome depths of secrecy, but to wrest that magic from the near at hand I fail.

NANDINI : You have no end of things, yet why always covet?

VOICE : All I possess is so much dead weight. No increase of gold can create a particle of a touchstone, no increase of power can ever come up to youth. I can only guard by force. If I had Ranjan's youth I could leave you free and yet hold you fast. My time is spent in knotting the binding rope, but, alas, everything else can be kept tied, except joy.

NANDINI : It is you who entangle yourself in your own net, then why keep on fretting?

VOICE : You will never understand. I, who am a desert, stretch out my hand to you, a tiny blade of grass, and cry: I am parched, I am bare, I am weary. The flaming thirst of this desert licks up one fertile field after another, only to enlarge itself, it can never annex the life of the frailest of grasses.

NANDINI : One would never think you were so tired.

VOICE : One day, Nandini, in a far off land, I saw a mountain as weary as myself.

I could not guess that all its stones were aching inwardly. One night I heard a noise, as if some giant's evil dream had moaned and moaned and suddenly snapped asunder. Next morning I found the mountain had disappeared in the chasm of a yawning earthquake. That made me understand how overgrown power crushes itself inwardly by its own weight. I see in you something quite opposite.

NANDINI : What is it you see in me?

VOICE : The dance rhythm of the All.

NANDINI : I don't understand.

VOICE : The rhythm that lightens the enormous weight of matter. To that rhythm the bands of stars and planets go about dancing from sky to sky, like so many minstrel boys. It is that rhythm, Nandini, that makes you so simple, so perfect. How small you are compared to me, yet I envy you.

NANDINI : You have cut yourself off from everybody and so deprived yourself.

VOICE : I keep myself apart, that it may become easy for me to plunder the world's big treasure-houses. Nevertheless there are gifts that your little flower-like fingers can easily reach, but not all the strength of my body, gifts hidden in God's closed hand. That hand I must force open some day.

NANDINI : When you talk like that, I don't follow you. Let me go.

VOICE : Go then; but here, I stretch out this hand of mine from my window, place your hand on it for a moment.

NANDINI : Only a hand, and the rest of you hidden? It frightens me!

VOICE : Everybody flies from me because they only see my hand. But if I wished to hold you with all of me, would you come to me, Nandini?

NANDINI : Why talk like this when you wouldn't even let me come into your room?

VOICE : My busy time, overloaded with work, dragged along against obstruction, is not for you. On the day when you can arrive, full sail before the wind, into the bosom of my full.

PHAGULAL : Isn't it our holiday? Yesterday was the fast day of the War Goddess. Today they worship the Flag.

PHAGULAL : Must you drink just because it's a holiday? In our village home, on feast days, you never PHAGULAL : Freedom itself was enough for the holidays in our village. The caged bird spends its holiday knocking against the bars. In Yaksha Town holidays are more of a nuisance than work.

PHAGULAL : Let's go back home, then.

PHAGULAL : The road to our home is closed forever.

PHAGULAL : How's that?

PHAGULAL : Our homes don't yield them any profit.

PHAGULAL : But are we closely fitted to their profits only, like husks to grains of corn, with nothing of us left over?

PHAGULAL : Our mad Bishu says: to remain whole is useful only for the lamb itself; those who eat it prefer to leave out its horns and hooves, and even object to its bleating when butchered. There's the madcap, singing as he goes.

PHAGULAL : It's only the last few days that his songs have burst forth.

PHAGULAL : That's true.

PHAGULAL : He's been possessed by Nandini. She draws his heart and his songs too.

PHAGULAL : No wonder.

PHAGULAL : Indeed! You'd better be careful. She'll next be bringing out songs from your throat, which would be rough on our neighbours. The witch is up to all kinds of tricks, and is sure to bring misfortune.

PHAGULAL : Bishu's misfortune is nothing recent, he knew Nandini long before coming here.

PHAGULAL : [Calling out.] I say, Bishu, come this way. Maybe you'll find somebody here also to listen to your singing, it won't be altogether thrown away.

BISHU comes in, singing.

BISHU : [Sings]

Boatman of my dreams, The sail is filled with a boisterous breeze and my mad heart sings to the lilt of the rocking of thy boat, at the call of the far away landing.

PHAGULAL : I know who the boatman of your dreams is.

BISHU : How should you know from outside? You haven't seen from inside my boat.

PHAGULAL : Your boat is going to get wrecked one of these days, let me tell you, by that pet Nandini of yours.

GOKUL, the digger, comes in.

GOKUL : I say, Bishu, I don't quite trust your Nandini.

BISHU : Why, what has she done?

GOKUL : She does nothing, that's the rub. I don't understand the way she goes on.

PHAGULAL : To see her flaunting her prettiness all over the place makes me sick.

GOKUL : We can trust features that are plain enough to understand.

BISHU : I know the atmosphere of this place breeds contempt for beauty. There must be beauty even in hell; but nobody there can understand it, that's their cruellest punishment.

PHAGULAL : Maybe we are fools, but even our Governor here can't stand herd' you know that?

BISHU : Take care, Chandra, lest you catch the infection of our Governor's eyes then perhaps yours too will redden at the sight of us. What say you, Phagulal?

PHAGULAL : To tell you the truth, brother, when I see Nandini, I feel ashamed to think of myself. I can't utter a word when she's there.

GOKUL : The day will come when you'll know her to your cost, perhaps too late.

[Goes.

PHAGULAL : Bishu, your friend Chandra wants to know why we drink.

BISHU : God in his mercy has everywhere provided a liberal allowance of drink. We men with our arms supply the output of our muscles, you women with yours supply the wine of embraces. In this world there is hunger to force us to work; but there's also the green of the woods, the gold of the sunshine, to make us drunk with their holiday-call.

PHAGULAL : You call these things drink?

BISHU : Yes, drinks of life, an endless stream of intoxication. Take my case. I come to this place; I am set to work burgling the underworld; for me nature's own ration of spirits is stopped; so my inner man craves the artificial wine of the market place.

[Sings.

My life, your sap has run dry, Fill then the cup with the wine of death, That flushes all emptiness with its laughter.

PHAGULAL : Come, brother, let us fly from here.

BISHU : To that boundless tavern, underneath the blue canopy? Alas, the road is closed, and we seek consolation in the stolen wine of the prison house. No open sky, no leisure for us; so we have distilled the essence of all the song and laughter, all the sunlight of the twelve hours' day into one draught of liquid fire.

[Sings.

Thy sun is hidden amid a mass of murky cloud.

Thy day has smudged itself black in dusty toil.

Then let the dark night descend the last comrade of drunken oblivion, Let it cover thy tired eyes with the mist that will help thee desperately to lose thyself.

PHAGULAL : Well, well, Bishu, you men have gone to the dogs in Yaksha Town, if you like, but we women haven't changed at all.

BISHU : Haven't you? Your flowers have faded, and you are all slavering for gold.

CHANURA : No, never!

BISHU : I say, yes. That Phagulal toils for hours over and above the twelve, why? For a reason unknown to him, unknown even to you. But I know. It's your dream of gold that lashes him on to work, more severely than the foreman's whip.

PHAGULAL : Very well. Then why don't we fly from here, and go back home?

BISHU : Your Governor has closed the way as well as the will to return. If you go there today you will fly back here tomorrow, like a caged bird to its cage, hankering for its drugged food.

PHAGULAL : I say, Bishu, once upon a time you came very near spoiling your eyesight poring over books; how is it they made you ply the spade along with the rest of us stupid boors?

PHAGULAL : All this time we've been here, we haven't got from Bishu the answer to this particular question.

PHAGULAL : Yet we all know it.

BISHU : Well, out with it then!

PHAGULAL : They employed you to spy on us.

BISHU : If you knew that, how is it you let me off alive?

PHAGULAL : But, we knew also, that game was not in your line.

PHAGULAL : How is it you couldn't stick to such a comfortable job, brother?

BISHU : Comfortable job? To stick to a living being like a carbuncle on his back? I said: I must go home, my health is failing. 'Poor thing,' said the Governor, 'how can you go home in such a state? However, there's no harm in your trying.' Well, I did try. And then I found that, as soon as one enters the maw of Yaksha Town, its jaws shut fast, and the one road that remains open leads within wards. Now I am swamped in that interior without hope and without light, and the only difference between you and me is, that the Governor looks down upon me even worse than upon you. Man despises the broken pot of his own creation more than the withered leaf fallen from the tree.

PHAGULAL : What does that matter, Bishu? You have risen high in our esteem.

BISHU : Discovery only means death. Where you favour falls there falls the Governor's glance. The more noisily the yellow frogs welcome the black toad, the sooner their croaking points him out to the boa-constrictor.

PHAGULAL : But when will your work be finished?

BISHU : The calendar never records the last day. After the first day comes the second, after the second the third. There's no such thing as getting finished here. We're always digging one yard, two yards, three yards. We go on raising gold nuggets, after one nugget another, then more and more and more. In Yaksha Town figures follow one another in rows and never arrive at any conclusion. That's why we are not men to them, but only numbers. Phagu, what's yours?

PHAGULAL : I'm No. 47 V.

BISHU : I'm 69 Ng.

PHAGULAL : Brother, they've hoarded such heaps of gold, can't they stop digging now?

BISHU : There's always an end to things of need, no doubt; so we stop when we've had enough to eat. But we don't need drunkenness, therefore there's no end to it. These nuggets are the drink the solid drink of our Gold King. Don't you see?

PHAGULAL : No, I don't.

BISHU : Cups in hand, we forget that we are chained to our limits. Gold blocks in hand, our master fancies he's freed from the gravitation of the commonplace, and is soaring in the rarest of upper heights.

PHAGULAL : In this season the villages are preparing for their harvest festival. Let's go home.

PHAGULAL : Don't worry me, Chandra. A thousand times over have I told you that in these parts there are high roads to the market, to the burning ground, to the scaffold, everywhere except to the homeland.

PHAGULAL : If we were to go to the Governor, and just tell him.

BISHU : Hasn't your woman's wit seen through the Governor yet?

PHAGULAL : Why, he seems to be so nice and.

BISHU : Yes, nice and polished, like the crocodile's teeth, which fit into one another with so thorough a bite that the King himself can't unlock the jaw, even if he wants to.

PHAGULAL : There comes the Governor.

BISHU : Then it's all up with us. He's sure to have overheard.

PHAGULAL : Why, we haven't said anything so very.

BISHU : Sister, we can only say the words, they put in the meaning.

The GOVERNOR comes in.

PHAGULAL : Sir Governor!

GOVERNOR : Well, my child?

PHAGULAL : Grant us leave to go home for a little.

GOVERNOR : Why, aren't the rooms we have given you excellent, much better than the ones at home? We have even kept a state watchman for your safety. Hullo, 69 Ng, to see you amongst these people reminds one of a heron come to teach paddy birds how to cut capers.

BISHU : Sir, your jesting does not reassure me. Had my feet the strength to make others dance, would I not have run away from here, first thing? Especially after the striking examples I've seen of the fate that overtakes dancing masters in this country. As things are, one's legs tremble even to walk straight.

PHAGULAL : Give us leave, Sir Governor, do give us leave. Let us go just for once, arid see our waving fields of barleycorn in the ear, and the ample shade of our banian tree with its hanging roots. I cannot tell you how our hearts ache. Don't you see that your men here work all day in the dark, and in the evening steep themselves in the denser dark of drunkenness? Have you no pity for them?

GOVERNOR : My dear child, surely you know of our constant anxiety for their welfare. That is exactly why I have sent for our High Preacher, Kenaram Gosain himself, to give moral talks to the men. Their votive fees will pay for his upkeep. Every evening the Gosain will come and PHAGULAL : That won't do, sir! Now, at worst, we get drunk of an evening, but if we are preached to every night, there'll be manslaughter!

BISHU : Hush, hush, Phagulal.

Preacher GOSAIN comes in.

GOVERNOR : Talk of the Preacher and he appears. Your Holiness, I do you reverence. These workmen of ours sometimes feel disturbed in their weak minds. Deign to whisper in their ears some texts of peace. The need is urgent.

GOSAIN : These people? Are they not the very incarnation of the sacred Tortoise of our scripture, that held up the sinking earth on its back? Because they meekly suppress themselves underneath their burden, the upper world can keep its head aloft. The very thought sends a thrill through my body! Just think of it, friend 47 V, yours is the duty of supplying food to this mouth which chants the holy name. With the sweat of your brow have you woven this wrap printed with the holy name, which exalts this devoted body? Surely that is no mean privilege. May you remain forever undisturbed, is my benediction, for then the grace of God will abide with you likewise. My friends, repeat aloud the holy name of Hari, and all your burdens will be lightened. The name of Hari shall be taken in the beginning, in the middle, and at the end, so say the scriptures.

PHAGULAL : How sweet! It's long since I have heard such words! Give, oh give me a little dust off your feet!

PHAGULAL : Stop this waste of money, Governor. If it's our offerings you want, we can stand it, but we're fairly sick of this cant.

BISHU : Once Phagulal runs amok it's all over with the lot of you. Hush, hush, Phagulal!

PHAGULAL : Are you bent on spoiling your chances both in this world and the next, you wretched man? You were never like this before. Nandini's ill wind has blown upon you, and no mistake.

A GOSAIN : What charming naivete. Sir Governor! What's in their heart is always on their lips. What can we teach them? It's they who'll teach us a lesson. You know what I mean.

GOVERNOR : I know where the root of the trouble is. I'll have to take them in hand myself, I see. Meanwhile, pray go to the next parish and chant them the holy name, the sawyers there have taken to grumbling, somewhat.

GOSAIN : Which parish did you say?

GOVERNOR : Parish T-D. No. 7I T is headman there. It ends to the left of where No. 65 of Row M lives.

GOSAIN : My son, though Parish T-D may not yet be quieted, the whole Row of M's have lately become steeped in a beautiful spirit of meekness. Still it is better to keep an extra police force posted in the parish some time longer. Because, as you know our scripture says, pride is our greatest foe. After the strength of the police has helped to conquer pride, then comes our turn. I take my leave.

PHAGULAL : Forgive these men, Your Holiness, and give them your blessing, that they may follow the right path.

GOSAIN : Fear not, good woman, they'll all end thoroughly pacified.

[*The Gosain goes.*]

GOVERNOR : I say, 69 Ng, the temper of your parish seems to be somewhat strained.

BISHU : That's nothing strange. The Gosain called them the incarnation of the Tortoise. But, according to scripture, incarnations change; and, when the Tortoise gave place to the Boar, in place of hard shell came out aggressive teeth, so that all-suffering patience was transformed into defiant obstinacy.

PHAGULAL : But, Sir Governor, don't forget my request.

GOVERNOR : I have heard it and will bear it in mind.

[*He goes.*]

PHAGULAL : Ah now, didn't you see how nice the Governor is? How he smiles every time he talks!

BISHU : Crocodile's teeth begin by smiling and end by biting.

PHAGULAL : Where does his bite come in?

BISHU : Don't you know he's going to make it a rule not to let the workmen's wives accompany them here.

PHAGULAL : Why?

BISHU : We have a place in their account book as numbers, but women's figures do not mate with figures of arithmetic.

PHAGULAL : O dear! But have they no women-folk of their own?

BISHU : Their ladies are besotted with the wine of gold, even worse than their husbands.

PHAGULAL : Bishu, you had a wife at home, what's become of her?

BISHU : So long as I filled the honoured post of spy, they used to invite her to those big mansions to play cards with their ladies. Ever since I joined Phagulal's set, all that was stopped, and she left me in a huff at the humiliation.

PHAGULAL : For shame! But look, brother Bishu, what a grand procession! One palanquin after another! Don't you see the sparkle of the jewelled fringes of the elephant-seats? How beautiful the out-riders on horseback look, as if they had bits of sunlight pinned on the points of their spears!

BISHU : Those are the Governor's and Deputy Governor's ladies, going to the Flag-worship.

PHAGULAL : Bless my soul, what a gorgeous array and how fine they look! I say, Bishu, if you hadn't given up that job, would you have gone along with that set in this grand style? And that wife of yours surely.

BISHU : Yes, we too should have come to just such a pass.

PHAGULAL : Is there no way going back, none whatever?

BISHU : There is, through the gutter.

A DISTANT VOICE : Bishu, my mad one!

BISHU : Yes, my mad girl!

PHAGULAL : There's Nandini. There'll be no more of Bishu for us, for the rest of the day.

PHAGULAL : Tell me, Bishu, what does she charm you with?

BISHU : The charm of sorrow.

PHAGULAL : Why do you talk so topsy-turvy?

BISHU : She reminds me that there are sorrows, to forget which is the greatest of sorrow.

PHAGULAL : Please to speak plainly, Bishu, otherwise it becomes positively annoying!

BISHU : The pain of desire for the near belongs to the animal, the sorrow of aspiration for the far belongs to man. That far away flame of my eternal sorrow is revealed through Nandini.

PHAGULAL : Brother, we don't understand these things. But one thing I do understand and that is, the less you men can make out a girl, the more she attracts you! We simple women, our price is not so high, but we at least keep you on the straight path. I warn you, once for all, that girl with her noose of red oleanders will drag you to perdition.

CHANDRA and PHAGULAL go.

NANDINI comes in.

NANDINI : My mad one, did you hear their autumn songs this morning?

BISHU : Is my morning like yours that I should hear singing? Mine is only a swept-away remnant of the weary night.

NANDINI : In my gladness of heart I thought I'd stand on the rampart and join in their song. But the guards would not let me, so I've come to you.

BISHU : I am not a rampart.

NANDINI : You are my rampart. When I come to you I seem to climb high, I find the open light.

BISHU : Ever since coming to Yaksha Town the sky has dropped out of my life. I felt as if they had pounded me in the same mortar with all the fractions of men here, and rolled us into a solid lump. Then you came and looked into my face in a way that made me sure some light could still be seen through me.

NANDINI : In this closed fort a bit of sky survives only between you and me, my mad one.

BISHU : Through that sky my songs can fly towards you.

[Sings.]

You keep me awake that I may sing to you, O Breaker of my sleep!

And so my heart you startle with your call, O Waker of my grief!

The shades of evening fall, the birds come to their nest.

The boat arrives ashore, yet my heart knows no rest, O Waker of my grief!

NANDINI : The waker of your grief, Bishu?

BISHU : Yes, you are my messenger from the unreachable shore. The day you came to Yaksha Town a gust of salt air knocked at my heart.

NANDINI : But I never had any message of this sorrow of which you sing.

BISHU : Not even from Ranjan?

NANDINI : No, he holds an oar in each hand and ferries me across the stormy waters; he catches wild horses by the mane and rides with me through the woods; he shoots an arrow between the eyebrows of the tiger on the spring, and scatters my fear with loud laughter. As he jumps into our Nagai river and disturbs its current with his joyous splashing, so he disturbs me with his tumultuous life. Desperately he stakes his all on the game and thus has he won me. You also were there with us, but you held aloof, and at last something urged you one day to leave our gambling set. At the time of your parting you looked at my face in a way I could not quite make out. After that I've had no news of you for long. Tell me where you went off to then.

BISHU : My boat was tied to the bank; the rope snapped; the wild wind drove it into the tackles unknown.

NANDINI : But who dragged you back from there to dig for nuggets here in Yaksha Town?

BISHU : A woman. Just as a bird on the wing is brought to the ground by a chance arrow, so did she bring me down to the dust. I forgot myself.

NANDINI : How could she touch you?

BISHU : When the thirsty heart despairs of finding water it's easy enough for it to be deluded by a mirage, and driven in barren quest from desert to desert. One day, while I was gazing at the sunset clouds, she had her eye upon the golden spire of the Governor's palace. Her glance challenged me to take her over there. In my foolish pride I vowed to do so. When I did bring her here, under the golden spire, the spell was broken.

NANDINI : I've come to take you away from here.

BISHU : Since you have moved even the king of this place, what power on earth can prevent you? Tell me, don't you feel afraid of him?

NANDINI : I did fear him from outside that screen. But now I've seen him inside.

BISHU : What was he like?

NANDINI : Like a man from the epics, his forehead like the gateway of a tower, his arms the iron bolts of some inaccessible fortress.

BISHU : What did you see when you went inside?

NANDINI : A falcon was sitting on his left wrist. He put it on the perch and gazed at my face. Then, just as he had been stroking the falcon 'swings, he began gently to stroke my hand. After a while he suddenly asked: 'Don't you fear me, Nandini?'

'Not in the least,' said I.

Then he buried his fingers in my unbound hair and sat long with closed eyes.

BISHU : How did you like it?

NANDINI : I liked it. Shall I tell you how? It was as if he were a thousand-year-old banyan tree, and I a tiny little bird; when I lit on a branch of his and had my little swing, he needs must have felt a thrill of delight to his very marrow. I loved to give that bit of joy to that lonely soul.

BISHU : Then what did he say?

NANDINI : Starting up and fixing his spear-point gaze on my face, he suddenly said: I want to know you.'

I felt a shiver run down my body and asked: 'What is there to know? I am not a manuscript!'

I know all there is in manuscripts,' said he, 'but I don't know you.' Then he became excited and cried: 'Tell me all about Ranjan. Tell me how you love him.'

I talked on: I love Ranjan as the rudder in the water might love the sail in the sky, answering its rhythm of wind in the rhythm of waves.'

He listened quietly, staring like a big greedy boy. All of a sudden he startled me by exclaiming: 'Could you die for him? '

'This very moment,' I replied.

'Never,' he almost roared, as if in anger.

'Yes, I could,' I repeated.

'What good would that do you? '

I don't know,' said I.

Then he writhed and shouted: 'Go away from my room, go, go at once, don't disturb me in my work.'

I could not understand what that meant.

BISHU : He gets angry when he can't understand.

NANDINI : Bishu, don't you feel pity for him?

BISHU : The day when God will be moved to pity for him, he will die.

NANDINI : No, no, you don't know how desperately he wants to live.

BISHU : You will see this very day what his living means. I don't know whether you'll be able to bear the sight.

NANDINI : There, look, there's a shadow. I am sure the Governor has secretly heard what we've been saying.

BISHU : This place is dark with the Governor's shadow, it is everywhere. How do you like him?

NANDINI : I have never seen anything so lifeless, like a r. u-stick cut from the cane bush, no leaves, no roots, no sap in the veins.

BISHU : Cut off from life, he spends himself in repressing life.

NANDINI : Hush, he will hear you.

BISHU : He hears even when you are silent, which is all the more dangerous. When I am with the diggers I am careful in my speech, so much so that the Governor thinks I'm the sorriest of the lot, and spares me out of sheer contempt. But, my mad girl, when I am with you my mind scorns to be cautious.

NANDINI : No, no, you must not court danger. There comes the Governor.

The GOVERNOR comes in.

GOVERNOR : Hallo, 69 Ng! you seem to be making friends with everybody, without distinction.

BISHU : You may remember that I began by making friends even with you, only it was the distinction that stood in the way.

GOVERNOR : Well, what are we discussing now?

BISHU : We are discussing how to escape from this fortress of yours.

GOVERNOR : Really? So recklessly, that you don't even mind confessing it?

BISHU : Sir Governor, it doesn't need much cleverness to know that when a captive-bird pecks at the bars it's not in the spirit of caress. What does it matter whether that's openly confessed or not?

GOVERNOR : The captives' want of love we were aware of, but their not fearing to admit it has become evident only recently.

NANDINI : Won't you let Ranjan come?

GOVERNOR : You will see him this very day.

NANDINI : I knew that; still, for your message of hope I wish you victory. Governor, take this garland of kunda flowers.

GOVERNOR : Why throw away the garland thus, and not keep it for Ranjan?

NANDINI : There is a garland for him.

GOVERNOR : Aha, I thought so! I suppose it's the one hanging round your neck. The garland of victory may be of kunda flowers, the gift of the hand; but the garland of welcome is of red oleanders, the gift of the heart. Well, let's be quick in accepting what comes from the hand, for that will fade; as for the heart's offering, the longer it waits the more precious it grows.

[The Governor goes.]

NANDINI : [Knocking at the window] Do you hear? Let me come into your room.

VOICE : [From behind the scenes] Why always the same futile request? Who is that with you? A pair to Ranjan?

BISHU : No, King, I am the obverse side of Ranjan, on which falls the shadow.

VOICE : What use has Nandini for you?

BISHU : The use which music has for the hollow of the flute.

VOICE : Nandini, what is this man to you?

NANDINI : He's my partner in music. My heart soars in his voice, my pain cries in his tunes, that's what he tells me.

[Sings.]

I love, I love, 'Tis the cry that breaks out from the bosom of earth and water.

VOICE : So that's your partner! What if I dissolved your partnership this very minute?

NANDINI : Why are you so cross? Haven't you any companion yourself?

VOICE : Has the mid-day sun any companion?

NANDINI : Well, let's change the subject. What's that? What's that in your hand?

VOICE : A dead frog.

NANDINI : What for?

VOICE : Once upon a time this frog got into a hole in a stone, and in that shelter it existed for three thousand years. I have learnt from it the secret of continuing to exist, but to live it does not know. Today I felt bored and smashed its shelter. I've thus saved it from existing forever. Isn't that good news?

NANDINI : Your stone walls will also fall away from around me today, I shall meet Ranjan.

VOICE : I want to see you both together.

NANDINI : You won't be able to see from behind your net.

VOICE : I shall let you sit inside my room.

NANDINI : What will you do with us?

VOICE : Nothing, I only want to know you.

NANDINI : When you talk of knowing, it frightens me.

VOICE : Why?

NANDINI : I feel that you have no patience with things that cannot be known, but can only be felt.

VOICE : I dare not trust such things lest they should play me false. Now go away, don't waste my time. No, no, wait a little. Give me that tassel of red oleanders which hangs from your hair.

NANDINI : What will you do with it?

VOICE : When I look at those flowers it seems to me as if the red light of my evil star has appeared in their shape. At times I want to snatch them from you and tear them to pieces. Again I think that if Nandini were ever to place that spray of

flowers on my head, with her own hands, then NANDINI : Then what?

VOICE : Then perhaps I might die in peace.

NANDINI : Someone loves red oleanders and calls me by that name. It is in remembrance of him that I wear these flowers.

VOICE : Then, I tell you, they're going to be his evil star as well as mine.

NANDINI : Don't say such things for shame! I am going.

VOICE : Where?

NANDINI : I shall go and sit near the gate of your fort.

VOICE : Why?

NANDINI : When Ranjan comes he'll see I am waiting for him.

VOICE : I should like to tread hard on Ranjan and grind him in the dust.

NANDINI : Why pretend to frighten me?

VOICE : Pretend, you say? Don't you know I am really fearsome?

NANDINI : You seem to take pleasure in seeing people frightened at you. In our village plays Srikantha takes the part of a demon; when he comes on the stage, he is delighted if the children are terrified. You are like him. Do you know what I think?

VOICE : What is it?

NANDINI : The people here trade on frightening others. That's why they have put you behind a network and dressed you fantastically. Don't you feel ashamed to be got up like a bogeyman?

VOICE : How dare you!

NANDINI : Those whom you have scared all along will one day feel ashamed to be afraid. If my Ranjan were here, he would have snapped his fingers in your face, and not been afraid even if he died for it.

VOICE : Your impudence is something great. I should like to stand you up on the top of a heap of everything I've smashed throughout my life. And then—

NANDINI : Then what?

VOICE : Then, like a squeezed bunch of grapes with its juice running out from between the gripping fingers, if I could but hold you tight with these two hands of mine, and then go, go, run away, at once, at once!

NANDINI : If you shout at me so rudely, I'll stay on, do what you will!

VOICE : I long savagely to prove to you how cruel I am. Have you never heard moans from inside my room?

NANDINI : I have. Whose moaning was it?

VOICE : The hidden mystery of life, wrenched away by me, bewails its torn ties. To get fire from a tree you have to burn it. Nandini, there is fire within you too,

red fire. One day I shall burn you and extract that also.

NANDINI : Oh, you are cruel!

VOICE : I must either gather or scatter. I can feel no pity for what I do not get. Breaking is a fierce kind of getting.

NANDINI : But why thrust out your clenched fist like that?

VOICE : Here, I take away my fist. Now fly, as the dove flies from the shadow of a hawk.

NANDINI : Very well, I will go, and not vex you anymore.

VOICE : Here, listen, come back, Nandini!

NANDINI : What is it?

VOICE : On your face, there is the play of life in your eyes and lips; at the back of you flows your black hair, the silent fall of death. The other day when my hands sank into it they felt the soft calm of dying. I long to sleep with my face hidden inside those thick black clusters. You don't know how tired I am!

NANDINI : Don't you ever sleep?

VOICE : I feel afraid to sleep.

NANDINI : Let me sing you the latest song that I've learnt.

[*Sings.*

'I love, I love is the cry that breaks out from the bosom of earth and water.

The sky broods like an aching heart, the horizon is tender like eyes misted with tears.

VOICE : Enough! Enough! Stop your singing!

NANDINI : [*Sings on.*]

A lament heaves and bursts on the shore of the sea, The whispers of forgotten days are born in new leaves to die again.

See, Bishu, he has left the dead frog there and disappeared. He is afraid of songs.

BISHU : The old frog in his heart yearns to die when it hears singing, that's why he feels afraid. My mad girl, why is there a strange light on your face today, like the glow of a distant torch in the sky?

NANDINI : News has reached me, Ranjan is coming today.

BISHU : How?

NANDINI : Let me tell you. Every day a pair of blue-throats come and sit on the pomegranate tree in front of my window. Every night, before I sleep, I salute the pole star and say: Sacred star of constancy, if a feather from the wings of the blue-throats Finds its way into my room, then I will know my Ranjan is coming.

This morning, as soon as I woke, I found a feather on my bed. See, here it is under my breast-cloth. When I meet him I shall put this feather on his crest.

BISHU : They say blue-throats' wings are an omen of victory.

NANDINI : Ranjan's way to victory lies through my heart.

BISHU : No more of this; let me go to my work.

NANDINI : I shan't let you work today.

BISHU : What must I do then.

NANDINI : Sing that song of waiting.

BISHU : [Sings]

He whoever wants me through the ages, is it not he who sits today by my wayside?

I seem to remember a glimpse I had of his face, in the twilight dusk of some ancient year.

Is it not he who sits today by the wayside?

NANDINI : Bishu, when you sing I cannot help feeling that I owe you much, but have never given anything to you.

BISHU : I shall decorate my forehead with the mark of your never-giving, and go my way. No little-giving for me, in return for my song! Where will you go now?

NANDINI : To the wayside by which Ranjan is coming.

[They go.

The GOVERNOR and a HEADMAN come in.

GOVERNOR : No, we can't possibly allow Ranjan to enter this parish.

HEADMAN : I put him to work in the tunnels of Vajragarh.

GOVERNOR : Well, what happened?

HEADMAN : He said he was not used to being made to work. The Headman of Vajragarh came with the police, but the fellow doesn't know what fear is. Threaten him, he bursts out laughing. Asked why he laughs, he says solemnity is the mask of stupidity and he has come to take it off.

GOVERNOR : Did you set him to work with the diggers?

HEADMAN : I did, I thought that pressure would make him yield. But on the contrary it seemed to lift the pressure from the diggers' minds also. He cheered them up, and asked them to have a digger's dance!

GOVERNOR : Digger's dance! What on earth is that?

HEADMAN : Ranjan started singing. Where were they to get drums? they objected.

Ranjan said, if there weren't any drums, there were spades enough. So they began keeping time with the spades, making a joke of their digging up of nuggets.

The Headman himself came over to reprimand them.

'What style of work is this?' he thundered.

'I have unbound the work,' said Ranjan. 'It won't have to be dragged out by main force any more, it will run along of itself, dancing.'

GOVERNOR : The fellow is mad, I see.

HEADMAN : Hopelessly mad. 'Use your spade properly,' shouted I 'Much better give me a guitar,' said he, smiling.

GOVERNOR : But how did he manage to escape from Vajragarh and come up here?

HEADMAN : That I do not know. Nothing seems to fasten on to him. His boisterousness is infectious. The diggers are getting frisky.

GOVERNOR : Hallo, isn't that Ranjan himself, going along the road, thrumming on an old guitar? Impudent rascal! He doesn't even care to hide.

HEADMAN : Well, I never! Goodness alone knows how he broke through the wall!

GOVERNOR : Go and seize him instantly! He must not meet Nandini in this parish, for anything.

Enters ASSISTANT GOVERNOR.

GOVERNOR : Where are you going?

ASSISTANT GOVERNOR : To arrest Ranjan.

GOVERNOR : Where is the Deputy Governor?

ASSISTANT GOVERNOR : He is so much amused by this fellow that he doesn't want to lay hands on him. He says the man's laugh shows us what queer creatures we governors have grown into.

GOVERNOR : I have an idea. Don't arrest Ranjan. Send him on to the King's sanctum.

ASSISTANT GOVERNOR : He refuses to obey our call, even in the King's name.

GOVERNOR : Tell him the King has made a slave-girl of his Nandini.

ASSISTANT GOVERNOR : But if the King— GOVERNOR : Don't you worry. Come on, I'll go with you myself.

[*They go.*

Enter PROFESSOR and ANTIQUARIAN.

ANTIQUARIAN : I say, what is this infernal noise going on inside?

PROFESSOR : The King, probably in a temper with himself, is engaged in breaking some of his own handiwork.

ANTIQUARIAN : It sounds like big pillars crashing down one after another.

PROFESSOR : There was a lake, at the foot of our hill over there, in which the waters of this Sankhini river used to gather. One day, suddenly, the rock to its left gave way, and the stored-up water rushed out laughing like mad. To see the King now-a-days, it strikes me that his treasure lake has grown weary of its rock wall.

ANTIQUARIAN : What did you bring me here for, Professor?

PROFESSOR : Latterly he has begun to get angry with my science. He says it only burbles through one wall to reveal another behind it, and never reaches the inner chamber of the Life spirit. I thought that, perhaps in the study of antiquity, he might explore the secret of Life's play. My knapsack has been rifled empty, now he can go on pocket-picking history.

ANTIQUARIAN : A girl wearing a grass-green robe.

PROFESSOR : She has for her mantle the green joy of the earth. That is our Nandini. In this Yaksha Town there are governors, foremen, headmen, tunnel-diggers, scholars like myself; there are policemen, executioners, and undertakers, altogether a beautiful assortment! Only she is out of element. Midst the clamour of the market place she is a tuned-up lyre. There are days when the mesh of my studies is torn by the sudden breeze other passing by, and through that rent my attention flies away swish, like a bird.

ANTIQUARIAN : Good heavens, man! Are even your well-seasoned bones subject to these poetic fits?

PROFESSOR : Life's attraction, like the tidal wave, tears away mind from its anchorage of books.

ANTIQUARIAN : Tell me, where am I to meet the King.

PROFESSOR : There's no means of meeting him. You'll have to talk to him from outside this network.

ANTIQUARIAN : We're to converse with this net between us?

PROFESSOR : Not the kind of whispered talk that may take place through a woman's veil, but solidly concentrated conversation. Even the cows in his stall don't dare to give milk, they yield their butter straight off!

ANTIQUARIAN : Admirable! To extract the essential from the diluted, is what scholars aim at.

PROFESSOR : But not what God in His creation aims at. He respects the fruit stones that are hard, but rejoices in the pulp that is sweet.

ANTIQUARIAN : Professor, I see that your grey science is galloping fast towards grass-green. But I wonder how you can stand this King of yours.

PROFESSOR : Shall I tell you the truth? I love him.

ANTIQUARIAN : You don't mean to say so?

PROFESSOR : He is so great that even what is wrong with him will not be able to spoil him.

The GOVERNOR comes in.

GOVERNOR : I say, man of science, so this is the person you volunteered to bring here. Our King flew into a passion at the very mention of his special subject.

ANTIQUARIAN : May I ask why?

GOVERNOR : The King says there is no age of history which may be called old. It is always an eternal extension of the present.

ANTIQUARIAN : Can the front exist without the back?

GOVERNOR : What he said was: 'Time proceeds by revealing the new on his front; but the men of learning, suppressing that fact, will have it that Time ever carries the burden of the old on his back.'

NANDINI comes in hurriedly.

NANDINI : What is happening? Who are they?

GOVERNOR : Hallo, Nandini, is that you? I shall wear your kunda chain late in the evening. When three-quarters of me can hardly be seen for the dark, then perchance a flower garland might become even me.

NANDINI : Look over there what a piteous sight! Who are those people, going along with the guards, filing out from the backdoor of the King's apartments?

GOVERNOR : We call them the King's leavings.

NANDINI : What does that mean?

GOVERNOR : Some day you too will know its meaning; let it be for today.

NANDINI : But are these men? Have they flesh and marrow, life and soul?

GOVERNOR : Maybe they haven't.

NANDINI : Had they never any?

GOVERNOR : Maybe they had.

NANDINI : Where then is it all gone now?

GOVERNOR : Man of science, explain it if you can, I'm off.

[He goes.]

NANDINI : Alas, alas! I see amongst these shadows faces that I know. Surely that

is our Anup and Upamanyu? Professor, they belong to our neighbouring village. Two brothers as tall as they were strong. They used to come and race their boats in our river on the fourteenth day of the moon in rainy June. Oh, who has brought them to this miserable plight? See, there goes Shaklu, in sword play he used to win the prize garland before all the others. Anu-up! Sha-klu-u! Look this way; it's I, your the principle underlying all rise to greatness.

NANDINI : It's a fiendish principle!

PROFESSOR : It's no use getting annoyed with a principle. Principles are neither good nor bad. That which happens does happen. To go against it, is to knock your head against the law of being.

NANDINI : If this is the way of man's being, I refuse to be, I want to depart with those shadows, show me the way.

PROFESSOR : When the time comes for showing us out, the great ones themselves will point the way. Before that, there's no such nuisance as a way at all! You see how our Antiquarian has quietly slipped off, thinking he'll fly and save himself. After going a few steps, he'll soon discover that there's a wire network stretched from post to post, from country to country.

Nandini, I' see, your temper is rising. The red oleanders against your flaming cheek are beginning to look like evening storm clouds gathering for a night of terror.

NANDINI : [Knocking at the net window.] Listen, listen!

PROFESSOR : Whom are you calling?

NANDINI : That King of yours, shrouded in his mist of netting.

PROFESSOR : The door of the inner room has been closed. He won't hear you.

NANDINI : [Calling out] Bishu, mad brother mine!

PROFESSOR : What d'you want with him?

NANDINI : Why hasn't he come back yet? I feel afraid.

PROFESSOR : He was with you only a little while ago.

NANDINI : The Governor said he was wanted to identify Ranjan. I tried to go with him, but they wouldn't let me. Whose groaning is that?

PROFESSOR : It must be that wrestler of ours.

NANDINI : What wrestler?

PROFESSOR : The world-famous Gajju, whose brother, Bhajan, had the bravado to challenge the King to a wrestling match, since when not even a thread of his loin cloth is anywhere to be seen. That put Gajju on his mettle, and he came on with great sound and fury. I told him at the outset that, if he wanted to dig in the tunnels underneath this kingdom, he was welcome, he could at least drag on a dead and alive existence for some time. But if he wanted to make a show of

heroics, that would not be tolerated for a moment.

NANDINI : Does it at all make for their well-being thus to keep watch and ward over these man-traps night and day?

PROFESSOR : Well-being! There's no question of 'well' in it at all, only 'being.' That being of theirs has expanded so terribly that, unless millions of men are pressed into service, who's going to support its weight? So the net is spreading farther and farther. They must exist, you see.

NANDINI : Must they? If it is necessary to die in order to live like men, what harm in dying?

PROFESSOR : Again that anger, the wild cry of red oleander? It is sweet, no doubt, yet what is true is true. If it gives you pleasure to say that one must die to live, well, say so by all means; but those who say that others must die that they themselves may live, it's only they who are actually alive. You may cry out that this shows a lack of humanity, but you forget, in your indignation, that this is what humanity itself happens to be. The tiger does not feed on the tiger, it's only man who fattens on his fellow-man.

The WRESTLER totters in.

NANDINI : Oh poor thing, see how he comes, staggering. Wrestler, lie down here. Professor, do see where he's hurt.

PROFESSOR : You won't see any outward sign of a wound.

WRESTLER : All-merciful God, grant me strength once more in my life, if only for one little day!

PROFESSOR : Why, my dear fellow?

WRESTLER : Just to wring that Governor's neck!

PROFESSOR : What has the Governor done to you?

WRESTLER : It's he who brought about the whole thing. I never wanted to fight. Now, after egging me on, he goes about saying it's my fault.

PROFESSOR : Why, what interest had he in your fighting?

WRESTLER : They only feel safe when they rob the whole world of strength. Lord of Mercy, grant that I may be able to gouge his eyes out some day, to tear asunder his lying tongue!

NANDINI : How do you feel now, Wrestler?

WRESTLER : Altogether hollowed out! These demons know the magic art of sucking away not only strength but hope.

If only once I could somehow, O good God, but once, everything is possible to Thy mercy, if only I could fasten my teeth for once in the Governor's throat!

NANDINI : Professor, help me to raise him.

PROFESSOR : That would be a crime, Nandini, according to the custom of this land.

NANDINI : Wouldn't it be a crime to let the man perish?

PROFESSOR : That which there is none to punish may be a sin, but never a crime. Nandini, come away, come right away out of this. The tree spreads its root-fingers and does its grabbing underground, but there it does not bring forth its flowers.

Flowers bloom on the branches which reach towards the light.

My sweet Red Oleander, don't try to probe our secrets in the depths of their dust. Be for us swaying in the air above, that we may gaze upwards to see you.

There comes the Governor. He hates to see me talk to you. So I must go.

NANDINI : Why is he so dead against me?

PROFESSOR : I can guess. You have touched his heart-strings. The longer it takes to tune them up, the more awful the discord meanwhile.

The PROFESSOR goes, the GOVERNOR comes in.

NANDINI : Sir Governor!

GOVERNOR : Nandini, when our Gosain saw that kunda garland of yours in my room, both his eyes, but here he comes [*The Gosain comes in.*] Your Holiness, accept my reverence. That garland was given to me by our Nandini here.

GOSAIN : Ah indeed! The gift of a pure heart! God's own white *kunda* flowers! Their beauty remains unsullied even in the hands of a man of the world. This is what gives one faith in the power of virtue, and hope for the sinners' redemption.

NANDINI : Please do something for this man, Your Reverence. There's very little life left in him.

GOSAIN : The Governor is sure to keep him as much alive as it is necessary for him to be. But, my child, these discussions ill become your lips.

NANDINI : So in this kingdom you follow some calculation in apportioning life?

GOSAIN : Of course, for mortal life has its limits. Our class of people have their great burden to bear, therefore we have to claim a larger portion of life's sustenance for our share. That's according to Almighty God's own decree.

NANDINI : Reverend Sir, may I know what good God has so heavily charged you to do to these people?

GOSAIN : The life that is unlimited gives no provocation to fight for its distribution. We Preachers have the charge of turning these people towards this unlimited life. So long as they remain content with that, we are their friends.

NANDINI : Let me come over to the Headman's quarters to help you.

WRESTLER : No. Don't add to my troubles, I beg of you.

[*The Wrestler goes.*

NANDINI : Governor, stay, tell me, whither have you taken my Bishu?

GOVERNOR : Who am I that I should take him? The wind carries off the clouds, if you think that to be a crime, make enquiries as to who is behind the wind.

NANDINI : Dear me, what an awful place! You are not men, and those you drive are not men, either, you are winds and they are clouds!

Reverend Gosain, I am sure, you know where my Bishu is.

GOSAIN : I know, for sure, that wherever he is, it's for the best.

NANDINI : For whose best?

GOSAIN : That you won't understand Oh, I say, leave off, let go of that, it's my rosary. Hallo, Governor, what wild girl is this you have.

GOVERNOR : The girl has somehow managed to ensconce herself in a niche, safe from the laws of this land, and we can't lay hands on her. Our King himself.

GOSAIN : Good heavens, now she'll tear off my wrap of the Holy Name too. What unspeakable outrage!

[*The Gosain flies.*

NANDINI : Governor, you must tell me where you have taken Bishu.

GOVERNOR : They have summoned him to the court of judgement. That's all that there is to tell you. Let me go.

NANDINI : Because I am a woman, you are not afraid of me? God sends His thunderbolt through His messenger, the lightning spark that bolt I have borne here with me; it will shatter the golden spire of your mastery.

GOVERNOR : Then let me tell you the truth before I go. It's you who have dragged Bishu into danger.

NANDINI : I?

GOVERNOR : Yes, you! He was so long content to be quietly burrowing away underground like a worm. It's you who taught him to spread the wings of death. O fire of the gods, you'll yet draw forth many more to their fate. Then at length will you and I come to our understanding, and that won't be long.

NANDINI : So may it be. But tell me one thing before you go. Will you not let Ranjan come and see me?

GOVERNOR : No, never.

NANDINI : Never, you say! I defy you to do your worst. This very day I am sure, absolutely sure, that he and I will meet!

[*Governor goes.*

NANDINI : [Knocking and tugging at the network.] Listen, listen, King! Where's your court of judgement? Open its door to me. Who is that? My boy, Kishor! Do you know where Bishu is?

KISHOR : Yes, Nandini, be ready to see him. I don't know how it was, the Chief of the Guard took a fancy to my youthfulness and yielded to my entreaties. He has consented to take him along by this path.

NANDINI : Guard! Take him along? Is he then.

KISHOR : Yes, here they come.

NANDINI : What! Handcuffs on your wrists? Friend of my heart, where are they taking you like that?

BISHU comes in under arrest.

BISHU : It's nothing to be anxious about! Guards, please wait a little, let me say a few words to her. My wild girl, my heart's joy, at last I am free.

NANDINI : What do you mean, Singer of my heart? I don't understand your words.

BISHU : When I used to be afraid, and try to avoid danger at every step, I seemed to be at liberty; but that liberty was the worst form of bondage.

NANDINI : What offence have you committed that they should take you away thus?

BISHU : I spoke out the truth today, at last.

NANDINI : What if you did?

BISHU : No harm at all!

NANDINI : Then why did they bind you like this?

BISHU : What harm in that either? These chains will bear witness to the truth of my freedom.

NANDINI : Don't they feel ashamed of themselves to lead you along the road chained like a beast? Aren't they men too?

BISHU : They have a big beast inside them, that's why their heads are not lowered by the indignity of man, rather the inner brute's tail swells and wags with pride at man's downfall.

NANDINI : O dear heart! Have they been hurting you? What are these marks on your body?

BISHU : They have whipped me, with the whips they use for their dogs. The string of that whip is made with the same thread which goes to the stringing of their Gosain's rosary. When they tell their beads they don't remember that; but probably their God is aware of it.

NANDINI : Let them bind me like that too, and take me away with you, my heart's joy! Unless I share some of your punishment I shan't be able to touch food from today.

KISHOR : I'm sure I can persuade them to take me in exchange for you. Let me take your place, Bishu.

BISHU : Don't be silly!

KISHOR : Punishment won't hurt me. I am young. I shall bear it with joy-

NANDINI : No, no, do not talk like that.

KISHOR : Nandini, my absence has been noticed, their bloodhounds are after me. Allow me to escape the indignity awaiting me by taking shelter in a punishment I joyfully accept.

BISHU : No, it won't do for you to be caught, not for a while yet. There's work for you, dear boy, and dangerous work too.

Ranjan has come. You must find him out.

KISHOR : Then I bid you farewell, Nandini. What is your message when I meet Ranjan?

NANDINI : This tassel of red oleanders. [*Hands it to him.*

[*Kishor goes.*

BISHU : May you both be united once again.

NANDINI : That union will give me no pleasure now. I shall never be able to forget that I sent you away empty-handed. And what has that poor boy, Kishor, got from me?

BISHU : All the treasure hidden in his heart has been revealed to him by the fire you have lighted in his life. Nandini, I remind you, it's for you to put that blue-throat's feather on Ranjan's crest. There, do you hear them singing the harvest song?

NANDINI : I do, and it wrings my heart, to tears.

BISHU : The play of the fields is ended now, and the field-master is taking the ripe corn home. Come on, Guards, let's not linger anymore.

[*Sings.*

Mow the corn of the last harvest, bind it in sheaves.

The remainder, let it return as dust unto the dust.

[*They go.*

The GOVERNOR and a DOCTOR come in.

DOCTOR : I've seen him. I find the King.

GOVERNOR : My wife will be driving out today. The post will be changed near

your village, and you must see that she's not detained.

HEADMAN : There's a plague on the cattle of our parish, and not a single ox can be had to draw the car. Never mind, we can press the diggers into service.

GOVERNOR : You know where you have to take her? To the garden-house, where the feast of the Flag-worship is to be held.

HEADMAN : I'll see to it at once, but let me tell you one thing before I go. That 69 Ng, whom they call mad Bishu, it's high time to cure his madness.

GOVERNOR : Why, how does he annoy you?

HEADMAN : Not so much by what he says or does, as by what he implies.

GOVERNOR : There's no need to worry about him any further. You understand!

HEADMAN : Really! That's good news, indeed! Another thing. That 47 V, he's rather too friendly with 69 Ng.

GOVERNOR : I have observed that.

HEADMAN : Your Lordship's observation is ever keen. Only, as you have to keep an eye on so many things, one or two may perchance escape your notice. For instance, there's our No. 95, a distant connection of mine by marriage, ever ready to make sandals for the feet of Your Lordship's sweeper out of his own ribs, so irrepressibly loyal is he that even his wife hangs her head for very shame, and yet up to now GOVERNOR : His name has been entered in the High Register.

HEADMAN : Ah, then his lifelong service will at last receive its reward! The news must be broken to him gently, because he gets epileptic fits, and supposing suddenly GOVERNOR : All right, we'll see to that. Now be off, there's no time.

HEADMAN : Just a word about another person, though he's my own brother-in-law. When his mother died, my wife brought him up with her own hands; yet for my master's sake GOVERNOR : You can tell me about him another time. Run away now.

HEADMAN : There comes His Honour the Deputy Governor. Please speak a word to him on my behalf. He doesn't look upon me with favour. I suspect that when 69 Ng used to enjoy the favour of free entry into the palace, he must have been saying things against me.

GOVERNOR : I assure you, he never even mentioned your name.

HEADMAN : That's just his cleverness! What can be more damaging than to suppress the name of a man, whose name is his best asset? These schemers have their different ways. No. 33 of our parish has an incurable habit of haunting Your Lordship's private chamber. One is always afraid of his inventing goodness knows what calumnies about other people. And yet if one knew the truth about his own GOVERNOR : There's positively no time today. Get away with

you, quick!

HEADMAN : I make my salute. [Coming back.] Just one word more lest I forget. No. 88 of our neighbouring parish started work on a miserable pittance, and before two years are out his income has run into thousands, not to speak of extras! Your Lordship's mind is like that of the gods a few words of hypocritical praise are enough to draw down the best of your boons.

GOVERNOR : All right, all right, that can keep for tomorrow.

HEADMAN : I'm not so mean as to suggest taking away the bread from his mouth. But Your Lordship should seriously consider whether it's wise to keep him on at the Treasury. Our Vishnu Dutt knows him inside out. If you send GOVERNOR : I shall send for him this very day. But be gone, not another word!

HEADMAN : Your Lordship, my third son is getting to be quite a big boy. He came the other day to prostrate himself at your feet. After two days of dancing attendance outside, he had to go away without gaining admission to you. He feels it very bitterly. My daughter-in-law has made with her own hands an offering of sweet pumpkin for Your Lordship GOVERNOR : Oh confound you! Tell him to come day after tomorrow, he will be admitted. Now, will you HEADMAN goes. *The DEPUTY GOVERNOR comes in.*

DEPUTY GOVERNOR : I've just sent on the dancing girls and musicians to the garden.

GOVERNOR : And that little matter about Ranjan, how far?

DEPUTY GOVERNOR : That kind of work is not in my line. The Assistant Governor has taken it upon himself to do the job. By this time his GOVERNOR : Does the King?

DEPUTY GOVERNOR : The King can't possibly have understood. Some lie told by our men has goaded Ranjan to frenzy, and he's rushing to the usual fate of I detest the whole business. Moreover, I don't think it right to deceive the King like this.

GOVERNOR : That responsibility is mine. Now then, that girl must be.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR : Don't talk of all that to me. The Headman who has been put on duty is the right man, he doesn't stick at any dirtiness whatever.

GOVERNOR : Does that man Gosain know about this affair?

DEPUTY GOVERNOR : I'm sure he can guess, but he's careful not to know for certain.

GOVERNOR : What's his object?

DEPUTY GOVERNOR : For fear of there being no way left open for saying: 'I don't believe it.'

GOVERNOR : But what makes him take all this trouble?

DEPUTY GOVERNOR : Don't you see? The poor man is really two in one, clumsily joined, Priest on the skin, Governor at the marrow. He has to take precious care to prevent the Governor part of him coming up to the surface, lest it should clash too much with his telling of beads.

GOVERNOR : He might have dropped the beads altogether.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR : No, for whatever his blood may be, his mind, in a sense, is really pious. If only he can tell his beads in his temple, and revel in slave-driving in his dreams, he feels happy. But for him, the true complexion of our God would appear too black. In fact, Gosain is placed here only to help our God to feel comfortable.

GOVERNOR : My friend, I see the instinct of the Ruler doesn't seem to match with the colour of your own blood, either!

DEPUTY GOVERNOR : There shope still. Human blood is fast drying up. But I can't stomach your No. 321 yet. When I'm obliged to embrace him in public, no holy water seems able to wash out the impurity of his touch. Here comes Nandini.

GOVERNOR : Come away, I don't trust you. I know the spell of Nandini has fallen on your eyes.

DEPUTY GOVERNOR : I know that as well as you do. But you don't seem to know that a tinge of her oleanders has got mixed with the colour of duty in your eyes too that's what makes them so frightfully red.

GOVERNOR : That may be. Fortunately for us, our mind knows not its own secret. Come away.

[They go.

NANDINI *comes in.*

NANDINI : [Knocking and pushing at the network.] Listen, listen, listen!

The GOSAIN comes in.

GOSAIN : Whom are you prodding like that?

NANDINI : That boa-constrictor of yours, who remains in hiding and swallows men.

GOSAIN : Lord, lord! When Providence wishes to destroy the small, it does so by putting big words into their little mouths. See here, Nandini, believe me when I tell you that I aim at your welfare.

NANDINI : Try some more real method of doing me good.

GOSAIN : Come to my sanctuary, let me chant you the Holy Name for a while.

NANDINI : What have I to do with the name?

GOSAIN : You will gain peace of mind.

NANDINI : Shame, shame on me if I do! I shall sit and wait here at the door.

GOSAIN : You have more faith in men than in God?

NANDINI : Your God of the Flagstaff, he will never unbend. But the man who is lost to sight behind the netting, will he also remain bound in his network forever? Go, go. It's your trade to delude men with words, after filching away their lives.

[*The Gosain goes.*

Enter PHAGULAL and CHANDRA.

PHAGULAL : Our Bishu came away with you, where is he now? Tell us the truth.

NANDINI : He has been made prisoner and taken away.

PHAGULAL : You witch, you must have given information against him. You are their spy.

NANDINI : You don't really believe that!

PHAGULAL : What else are you doing here?

PHAGULAL : Every person suspects every other person in this cursed place. Yet I have always trusted you, Nandini. In my heart I used to However, let that pass. But today it looks very very strange, I must say.

NANDINI : Perhaps it does. It may really be even as you say. Bishu has got into trouble for coming with me. He used to be quite safe in your company, he said so himself.

PHAGULAL : Then why did you decoy him away, you evil-omened creature?

NANDINI : Because he said he wanted to be free.

PHAGULAL : A precious kind of freedom you have given him!

NANDINI : I could not understand all that he said. Chandra. Why did he tell me that freedom could only be found by plunging down to the bottom of danger? Phagulal, how could I save him who wanted to be free from the tyranny of safety?

PHAGULAL : We don't understand all this. If you can't bring him back, you'll have to pay for it. I'm not to be taken in by that coquettish prettiness of yours.

PHAGULAL : What's the use of idle bickering? Let's gather a big crowd from the workmen's lines, and then go and smash the prison gate.

NANDINI : I'll come with you.

PHAGULAL : What for?

NANDINI : To join in the breaking.

PHAGULAL : As if you haven't done quite enough breaking already, you sorceress!

GOKUL comes in.

GOKUL : That witch must be burnt alive, before everything else.

PHAGULAL : That won't be punishment enough. First knock off that beauty of hers, with which she goes about ruining people. Weed it out of her face as the grass is weeded with a hoe.

GOKUL : That I can do. Let this hammer just have a dance on her nose tip.

PHAGULAL : Beware! If you dare touch her NANDINI : Stop, Phagulal. He's coward; he wants to strike me because he's afraid of me. I don't fear his blows one bit.

GOKUL : Phagulal, you haven't come to your senses yet. You think the Governor alone is your enemy. Well, I admire a straightforward enemy. But that sweet-mouthed beauty of yours.

NANDINI : Ah, so you too admire the Governor, as the mud beneath his feet admires the soles of his shoes!

PHAGULAL : Gokul, the time has at length come to show your prowess, but not by fighting a girl. Come along with me. I'll show you what to fight.

[*Phagulal, Chandra, and Gokul go.*

A band of MEN come in.

NANDINI : Where are you going, my good men?

FIRST MAN : We carry the offering for the Flag-worship.

NANDINI : Have you seen Ranjan?

SECOND MAN : I saw him once, five days ago, but not since. Ask those others who follow us.

NANDINI : Who are they?

THIRD MAN : They are bearing wine for the Governors' feast.

The first batch goes, another comes in.

NANDINI : Look here, red-caps, have you seen Ranjan?

FIRST MAN : I saw him the other day at the house of Headman Sambhu.

NANDINI : Where is he now?

SECOND MAN : D'you see those men taking the ladies' dresses for the feast? Ask them. They hear a lot of things that don't reach our ears.

Second batch goes, a third come in.

NANDINI : Do you know, my men, where they have kept Ranjan?

FIRST MAN : Hush, hush!

NANDINI : I am sure you know. You must tell me.

SECOND MAN : What enters by our ears doesn't come out by our mouths, that's why we are still alive. Ask one of the men who are carrying the weapons.

They go, others come in.

NANDINI : Oh do stop a moment and listen to me. Tell me, where is Ranjan?

FIRST MAN : The auspicious hour draws near. It's time for the King himself to come for the Flag-worship. Ask him about it when he steps out. We only know the beginning, not the end.

[*They go.*

NANDINI : [Shaking the network violently.] Open the door. The time has come.

VOICE : [Behind the scenes.] But not for you. Go away from here.

NANDINI : You must hear now what I have to say. It cannot wait for another time.

VOICE : You want Ranjan, I know. I have asked the Governor to fetch him at once. But don't remain standing at the door when I come out for the worship, for then you'll run great risk.

NANDINI : I have cast away all fear. You can't drive me away. Happen what may. I'm not going to move till your door is opened.

VOICE : Today's for the Flag-worship. Don't distract my mind. Get away from my door.

NANDINI : The gods have all eternity for their worship, they're not pressed for time. But the sorrows of men cannot wait.

KING : Deceived! These traitors have deceived me, perdition take them! My own machine refuses my sway! Call the Governor bring him to me handcuffed

NANDINI : King, they all say you know magic. Make him wake up for my sake.

KING : My magic can only put an end to waking. Alas! I know not how to awaken.

NANDINI : Then lull me to sleep, the same sleep! Oh, why did you work this havoc? I cannot bear it any more.

KING : I have killed youth. Yes, I have indeed killed youth, all these years, with

all my strength. The curse of youth, dead, is upon me.

NANDINI : Did he not take my name?

KING : He did, in such a way that every vein in my body was set on fire.

NANDINI : [To Ranjan] My love, my brave one, here do I place this blue-throat's feather in your crest. Your victory has begun from today, and I am its bearer. Ah, here is that tassel of my flowers in his hand. Then Kishor must have met him. But where is he? King, where is that boy?

KING : Which boy?

NANDINI : The boy who brought these flowers to Ranjan.

KING : That absurd little child! He came to defy me with his girlish face.

NANDINI : And then? Tell me! Quick!

KING : He burst himself against me, like a bubble.

NANDINI : King, the Time is indeed now come!

KING : Time for what?

NANDINI : For the last fight between you and me.

KING : But I can kill you in no time, this instant.

NANDINI : From that very instant that death of mine will go on killing you every single moment.

KING : Be brave, Nandini, trust me. Make me your comrade today.

NANDINI : What would you have me do?

KING : To fight against me, but with your hand in mine. That fight has already begun. There is my flag. First I break the Flagstaff, thus! Next it's for you to tear its banner. Let Guards. [Rushing up] What are you doing, King? You dare break the Flagstaff, the holiest symbol of our divinity? The Flagstaff which has its one point piercing the heart of the earth and the other that of heaven! What a terrible sin, on the very day of the Flag-worship! Comrades, let us go and inform our Governors.

[They run off.]

KING : A great deal of breaking remains to be done. You will come with me, Nandini?

NANDINI : I will.

PHAGULAL comes in.

PHAGULAL : They won't hear of letting Bishu off. I am afraid, they'll. Who is this? The King!

Oh you wicked witch, conspiring with the King himself! O vile deceiver!

KING : What is the matter with you? What is that crowd out for?

PHAGULAL : To break the prison gate. We may lose our lives, but we shan't fall back.

KING : Why should you fall back? I too am out for breaking. Behold the first sign my broken Flagstaff.

PHAGULAL : What! This is altogether beyond us simple folk.

Be merciful, Nandini, don't deceive me. Am I to believe my eyes?

NANDINI : Brother, you have set out to win death. You have left no chance for deception to touch you.

PHAGULAL : You too come along with us, our own Nandini!

NANDINI : That is what I'm still alive for, Phagulal. I wanted to bring my Ranjan amongst you. Look there, he has come, my hero, braving death!

PHAGULAL : Oh, horror! Is that Ranjan lying there, silent?

NANDINI : Not silent. He leaves behind him in death his conquering call. He will live again, he cannot die.

PHAGULAL : Ah, my Nandini, my beautiful one, was it for this you were waiting all these eager days?

NANDINI : I did await his coming, and he did come. I still wait to prepare for his coming again, and he shall come again. Where is Chandra?

PHAGULAL : She has gone with her tears and prayers to the Governor, accompanied by Gokul. I'm afraid Gokul is seeking to take up service with the Governor. He will betray us. King, are you sure you don't mistake us? We are out to break your own prison, I tell you!

KING : Yes, it is my own prison. You and I must work together, for you cannot break it alone.

PHAGULAL : As soon as the Governor hears of it, he will march with all his forces to prevent us.

KING : Yes, my fight is against them.

PHAGULAL : But the soldiers will not obey you.

KING : You will be on my side!

PHAGULAL : Shall we be able to win through?

KING : We shall at least be able to die! At last I have found the meaning of death. I am saved!

PHAGULAL : King, do you hear the tumult?

KING : There comes the Governor with his troops. How could he be so quick about it? He must have been prepared beforehand.

They have used my own power against me.

PHAGULAL : My men have not yet turned up.

KING : They will never come. The Governor is sure to get round them.

NANDINI : I had my last hope that they would bring my Bishu to me. Will that never be?

KING : No hope of that, I'm afraid.

PHAGULAL : Then come along, Nandini, let us take you to a safe place first. The Governor will see red, if he but catches sight of you.

NANDINI : You want to banish me into the solitary exile of safety?

[Calling out] Governor! Governor! He has swung up my garland of kunda flowers on his spear-head. I will dye that garland the colour of my oleanders with my heart's blood. Governor! He has seen me! Victory to Ranjan!

[Runs off.]

KING : [Calling after her.] Nandini!

[Follows her.]

The PROFESSOR comes in.

PHAGULAL : Where are you hurrying to, Professor?

PROFESSOR : Someone said that the King has at last had tidings of the secret of Life, and has gone off in quest of it. I have thrown away my books to follow him.

PHAGULAL : The King has just gone off to his death. He has heard Nandini's call.

PROFESSOR : The network is torn to shreds! Where is Nandini?

PHAGULAL : She has gone before them all. We can't reach her any more.

PROFESSOR : It is only now that we shall reach her. She won't evade us any longer.

PROFESSOR rushes out, BISHU comes in.

BISHU : Phagulal, where is Nandini?

PHAGULAL : How did you get here?

BISHU : Our workmen have broken into the prison. There they are, running off to fight. I came to look for Nandini. Where is she?

PHAGULAL : She has gone in advance of us all.

BISHU : Where?

PHAGULAL : To the last freedom. Bishu, do you see who is lying there?

BISHU : Ranjan!

PHAGULAL : You see the red streak?

BISHU : I understand, then red marriage.

PHAGULAL : They are united.

BISHU : Now it is for me to take my last lonely journey. Perhaps we may meet. Perhaps she may want me to sing. My mad girl, O my mad girl! Come, brother, on to the fight!

PHAGULAL : To the fight! Victory to Nandini!

BISHU : Victory to Nandini!

PHAGULAL : Here is her wristlet of red oleanders. She has bared her arm today, and left us.

BISHU : Once I told her I would not take anything from her hand. I break my word and take this. Come along!

[They go.

[Song in the distance.

Hark 'tis Autumn calling, Come, O come away!

The earth's mantle of dust is filled with ripe corn!

O the joy! The joy!

10. Sacrifice

Act

.....

A temple of the Goddess Kali in Tripura.

Enters GUNAVATI, the Queen.

GUNAVATI : Have I offended thee, dread Mother? Thou grantest children to the beggar woman, who sells them to live, and to the adulteress, who kills them to save herself from infamy, and here I am, the Queen, with all the world lying at my feet, hankering in vain for the baby-touch at my bosom, to feel the stir of a dearer life within my life. What sin have I committed, Mother, to merit this, to be banished from the mothers' heaven? [*Enters Raghupati, the priest.*] O Master, have I ever been remiss in my worship? and my husband, is he not godlike in his purity? Then why has the Goddess, who weaves the web of this world-illusion, assigned my place in the barren waste of childlessness?

RAGHUPATI : Our Mother is all caprice, she knows no law, our sorrows and joys are mere freaks of her mind. Have patience, daughter, today we shall offer special sacrifice in your name to please her.

GUNAVATI : Accept my grateful obeisance, father. My offerings are already on their way to the temple,—red bunches of hibiscus and beasts of sacrifice.

[*They go out.*

Enter GOVINDA, the King; JAISING, the servant of temple; and APARNA, the beggar girl.

JAISING : What is your wish, Sire?

GOVINDA : Is it true that this poor girl's pet goat has been brought by force to the temple to be killed? Will Mother accept such a gift with grace?

JAISING : King, how are we to know whence the servants collect our daily offerings of worship? But, my child, why is this weeping? Is it worthy of you to shed tears for that which Mother herself has taken?

APARNA : Mother! I am his mother, If I return late to my hut, he refuses his grass,

and bleats, with his eyes on the road. I take him up in my arms, when I come, and share my food with him. He knows no mother but me.

JAISING : Sire, could I make the goat live again, by giving up a portion of my life, gladly would I do it. But how can I restore that which Mother herself has taken?

APARNA : Mother has taken? It is a lie. Not mother, but demon.

JAISING : O, the blasphemy!

APARNA : Mother, art thou there to rob a poor girl of her love? Then where is the throne, before which to condemn thee? Tell me, King.

GOVINDA : I am silent, my child. I have no answer.

APARNA : This blood-streak running down the steps, is it his? O my darling, when you trembled and cried for dear life, why did your call not reach my heart through the whole deaf world?

JAISING : [To the image.] I have served thee from my infancy, Mother Kali, yet I understand thee not. Does pity only belong to weak mortals, and not to gods? Come with me, my child, let me do for you what I can. Help must come from man, when it is denied from gods. [All go out but the King.]

Enter RAGHUPATI; NAKSHATRA, who is the King's brother; and the courtiers.

ALL : Victory be to the King!

GOVINDA : Know you all, that I forbid shedding of blood in the temple from today forever.

MINISTER : You forbid sacrifice to the Goddess?

GENERAL NAYAN RAI : Forbid sacrifice?

NAKSHATRA : How terrible! Forbid sacrifice?

RAGHUPATI : Is it a dream?

GOVINDA : No dream, father. It is awakening. Mother came to me, in a girl's disguise, and told me that blood she cannot suffer.

RAGHUPATI : She has been drinking blood for ages. Whence comes this loathing all of a sudden?

GOVINDA : No, she never drank blood, she kept her face averted.

RAGHUPATI : I warn you, think and consider. You have no power to alter laws laid down in scriptures.

GOVINDA : God's words are above all laws.

RAGHUPATI : Do not add pride to your folly. Do you have the effrontery to say that you alone have heard God's words, and not I?

NAKSHATRA : It is strange, that the King should have heard from gods and not the priest.

GOVINUA : God's words are ever ringing in the world, and he who is willfully deaf cannot hear them.

RAGHUPATI : Atheist! Apostate!

GOVINDA : Father, go to your morning service, and declare to all worshippers that hence-forward they will be punished with banishment who shed creatures' blood in their worship of the Mother of all creatures.

RAGHUPATI : Is this your last word?

GOVINDA : Yes.

RAGHUPATI : Then curse upon you! Do you, in your enormous pride, imagine that the Goddess, dwelling in your land, is your subject? Do you presume to bind her with your laws and rob her of her dues? You shall never do it. I declare it,—I who am her servant. [Goes.

NAYAN RAI : Pardon me, Sire, but have you the right?

MINISTER : King, is it too late to revoke your order?

GOVINDA : We dare not delay to uproot sin from our realm.

MINISTER : Sin can never have such a long lease of life. Could they be sinful,—the rites that have grown old at the feet of the Goddess? [*The King is silent.*

NAKSHATRA : Indeed they could not be.

MINISTER : Our ancestors have performed these rites with reverence; can you have the heart to insult them?

[*The King remains silent.*

NAYAN RAI : That which has the sanction of ages, do you have the right to remove it?

GOVINDA : No more doubts and disputes. Go and spread my order in all my lands.

MINISTER : But, Sire, the Queen has offered her sacrifice for this morning's worship; it is come near the temple gate.

GOVINDA : Send it back. [*He goes.*

MINISTER : What is this?

NAKSHATRA : Are we, then, to come down to the level of Buddhists, and treat animals as if they have their right to live? Preposterous!

[*They all go out.*

Enters RAGHUPATI-JAISING following him with a jar of water to wash his feet.

JAISING : Father.

RAGHUPATI : Go!

JAISING : Here is some water.

RAGHUPATI : No need of it!

JAISING : Your clothes.

RAGHUPATI : Take them away!

JAISING : Have I done anything to offend you?

RAGHUPATI : Leave me alone. The shadows of evil have thickened. The King's throne is raising its insolent head above the temple altar. Ye Gods of these degenerate days, are ye ready to obey the King's laws with bowed heads, fawning upon him like his courtiers?

JAISING : Whatever has happened, father?

RAGHUPATI : I cannot find words to say. Ask the Mother Goddess who has been defied.

JAISING : Defied? By whom?

RAGHUPATI : By King Govinda.

JAISING : King Govinda defied Mother Kali?

RAGHUPATI : Defied you and me, all scriptures, all countries, all time, defied Mahakali, the Goddess of the endless stream of time,—sitting upon that puny little throne of his.

JAISING : King Govinda?

RAGHUPATI : Yes, yes, your King Govinda, the darling of your heart. Ungrateful! I have given all my love to bring you up, and yet King Govinda is dearer to you than I am.

JAISING : The child raises its arms to the full moon, sitting upon his father's lap. You are my father and my full moon is King Govinda. Then is it true, what I hear from people, that our King forbids all sacrifice in the temple? But in this we cannot obey him.

RAGHUPATI : Banishment is for him who does not obey.

JAISING : It is no calamity to be banished from a land where Mother's worship remains incomplete. No, so long as I live, the service of the temple shall be fully performed.

[*They go out.*

Enter GUNAVATI and her ATTENDANT.

GUNAVATI : What is it you say? The Queen's sacrifice turned away from the temple gate? Is there a man in this land who carries more than one head on his shoulders, that he could dare think of it? Who is that doomed creature?

ATTENDANT : I am afraid to name him.

GUNAVATI : Afraid to name him, when I ask you? Whom do you fear more than

me?

ATTENDANT : Pardon me.

GUNAVATI : Give my salutation to the priest, and ask him to come.

[Attendant goes out.]

Enter GOVINDA.

GUNAVATI : Have you heard, King? My offerings have been sent back from Mother's temple.

GOVINDA : I know it.

GUNAVATI : You know it, and yet bear the insult?

GOVINDA : I beg to ask your pardon for the culprit.

GUNAVATI : I know, King, your heart is merciful, but this is no mercy. It is feebleness. If your kindness hampers you, leave the punishment in my hand. Only, tell me, who is he?

GOVINDA : It is I, my Queen. My crime is in nothing else but having given you pain GUNAVATI : I do not understand you.

GOVINDA : From today shedding of blood in gods' temples is forbidden in my land.

GUNAVATI : Who forbids it?

GOVINDA : Mother herself.

GUNAVATI : Who heard it?

GOVINDA : I.

GUNAVATI : You! That makes me laugh. The Queen of all the world comes to the gate of Tripura's King with her petition.

GOVINDA : Not with her petition, but with her sorrow.

GUNAVATI : Your dominion is outside the temple limit. Do not send your commands there, where they are impertinent.

GOVINDA : The command is not mine, it is Mother's.

GUNAVATI : If you have no doubt in your decision, do not cross my faith. Let me perform my worship according to my light.

GOVINDA : I promised my Goddess to prevent sacrifice of life in her temple, and I must carry it out.

GUNAVATI : I also promised my Goddess the blood of three hundred kids and one hundred buffaloes, and I will carry it out. You may leave me now.

GOVINDA : As you wish.

[He goes out.]

Enters RAGHUPATI.

GUNAVATI : My offerings have been turned back from the temple, father.

RAGHUPATI : The worship offered by the most ragged of all beggars is not less precious than yours, Queen. But the misfortune is that Mother has been deprived.

GUNAVATI : What will come of all this, father?

RAGHUPATI : That is only known to her who fashions this world with her dreams. But this is certain, that the throne which casts its shadow upon Mother's shrine will burst like a bubble, vanishing in the void.

GUNAVATI : Have mercy and save us, father.

RAGHUPATI : Ha, ha! I am to save you,—you, the consort of a King who boasts of his kingdom on the earth and in heaven as well, before whom the gods and the Brahmins must—Oh, shame! Oh, the evil age, when the Brahmin's futile curse recoils upon himself, to sting him into madness.

[About to tear his sacrificial thread.]

GUNAVATI : [Preventing him.] Have mercy upon me.

RAGHUPATI : Then give back to Brahmins what is theirs by right.

GUNAVATI : Yes, I will. Go, master, to your worship, and nothing will hinder you.

RAGHUPATI : Indeed your favour overwhelms me. At the merest glance of your eyes gods are saved from ignominy and the Brahmin is restored to his sacred offices. Thrive and grow fat and sleek till the dire day of judgment comes.

[Goes out.]

Re-enters King GOVINDA.

GOVINDA : My Queen, the shadow of your angry brows hides all light from my heart.

GUNAVATI : Go! Do not bring a curse upon this house.

GOVINDA : Woman's smile removes all curse from the house, her love is God's grace.

GUNAVATI : Go, and never show your face to me again.

GOVINDA : I shall come back, my Queen, when you remember me.

GUNAVATI : [Clinging to the King's feet.] Pardon me. King. Have you become so hard, that you forget to respect woman's pride? Do you not know, beloved, that thwarted love takes the disguise of anger?

GOVINDA : I would die, if I lost my trust in you. I know, my love, that clouds are for moments only, and the sun is for all days.

GUNAVATI : Yes, the clouds will pass by, God's thunder will return to his armoury, and the sun of all days will shine upon the traditions of all time. Yes, my King, order it so, that Brahmins be restored to their rights, the Goddess to her offerings, and the King's authority to its earthly limits.

GOVINDA : It is not the Brahmin's right to violate the eternal good. Creature's blood is not the offering for gods. And it is within the rights of the King and the peasant alike to maintain truth and righteousness.

GUNAVATI : I prostrate myself on the ground before you; I beg at your feet. The custom that comes through all ages is not the King's own. Like the heaven's air, it belongs to all men. Yet your Queen begs it of you, with clasped hands, in the name of your people. Can you still remain silent, proud man, refusing entreaties of love in favour of duty which is doubtful? Then go, go, go from me.

[They go.

Enter RAGHUPATI, JAISING and NAYAN RAI.

RAGHUPATI : General, your devotion to Mother is well-known.

NAYAN RAI : It runs through generations of my ancestors.

RAGHUPATI : Let this sacred love give you indomitable courage. Let it make your sword-blade mighty as God's thunder, and win its place above all powers and positions of this world.

NAYAN RAI : The Brahmin's blessings will never be in vain.

RAGHUPATI : Then I bid you collect your soldiers and strike Mother's enemy down to the dust.

NAYAN RAI : Tell me, father, who is the enemy?

RAGHUPATI : Govinda.

NAYAN RAI : Our King?

RAGHUPATI : Yes, attack him with all your force.

NAYAN RAI : It is evil advice. Father, is this to try me?

RAGHUPATI : Yes, it is to try you, to know for certain whose servant you are. Give up all hesitation. Know that the Goddess calls, and all earthly bonds must be severed.

NAYAN RAI : I have no hesitation in my mind. I stand firm in my post, where my Goddess has placed me.

RAGHUPATI : You are brave.

NAYAN RAI : Am I the basest of Mother's servants, that the order should come for me to turn traitor? She herself stands upon the faith of man's heart. Can she ask me to break it? Then today comes to dust the King, and tomorrow the Goddess

herself.

JAISING : Noble words.

RAGHUPATI : The King, who has turned traitor to Mother, has lost all claims to your allegiance.

NAYAN RAI : Drive me not, father, into a wilderness of debates. I know only one path,—the straight path of faith and truth. This stupid servant of Mother shall never swerve from that highway of honour. [Goes out.

JAISING : Let us be strong in our faith as he is, master. Why ask the aid of soldiers? We have the strength within ourselves for the task given to us from above. Open the temple gate wide, father. Sound the drum. Come, come, O citizens, to worship her, who takes all fear away from our hearts. Come, Mother's children.

CITIZENS *come.*

FIRST CITIZEN : Come, come, we are called.

ALL : Victory to Mother! [*They sing and dance.*

The dread Mother dances naked in the battlefield, Her lolling tongue burns like a red flame of fire, Her dark tresses fly in the sky, sweeping away the sun and stars, Red streams of blood run from her cloud-black limbs, And the world trembles and cracks under her tread.

JAISING : Do you see the beasts of sacrifice coming towards the temple, driven by the Queen's attendants?

[*They cry.*

Victory to Mother! Victory to our Queen!

RAGHUPATI : Jaising, make haste and get ready for the worship.

JAISING : Everything is ready, father.

RAGHUPATI : Send a man to call Prince Nakshatra in my name.

[*Jaising goes.*

CITIZENS *sing and dance, enters King GOVINDA.*

GOVINDA : Silence, Raghupati! Do you dare to disregard my order?

RAGHUPATI : Yes, I do.

GOVINDA : Then you are not for my land.

RAGHUPATI : No, my land is there, where the King's crown kisses the dust. Ho! Citizens! Let Mother's offerings be brought in here.

[*They beat drums.*

GOVINDA : Silence! [To his attendants.] Ask my General to come. Raghupati, you drive me to call soldiers to defend God's right. I feel the shame of it; for the force of arms only reveals man's weakness.

Enter General NAYAN RAI and CHANDPAL, who is the second in command of the army.

GOVINDA : Stand here with your soldiers to prevent sacrifice of life in the temples Nayan. Pardon me, Sire. The King's servant is powerless in the temple of God.

GOVINDA : General, it is not for you to question my order. You are to carry out my words. Their merits and demerits belong only to me.

NAYAN : I am your servant, my King, but I am a man above all. I have reason and my religion. I have my King,—and also my God.

GOVINDA : Then surrender your sword to Chandpal. He will protect the temple from pollution of blood.

NAYAN RAI : Why to Chandpal? This sword was given to my forefathers by your royal ancestors. If you want it back, I will give it up to you. Be witness, my fathers, who are in the heroes' paradise, the sword that you made sacred with your loyal faith and bravery, I surrender to my King. [Goes out.

RAGHUPATI : The Brahmin's curse has begun its work already.

Enters JAISING.

JAISING : The beasts have been made ready for the sacrifice.

GOVINDA : Sacrifice?

JAISING : [On his knees.] King, listen to my earnest entreaties. Do not stand in the way, hiding the Goddess, man as you are.

RAGHUPATI : Shame, Jaising. Rise up and ask my pardon. I am your Master. Your place is at my feet, not the King's. Fool! Do you ask King's sanction to do God's service? Leave alone the worship and the sacrifice. Let us wait and see how his pride prevails in the end. Come away.

[They go out.

Enters APARNA, the beggar girl.

APARNA : Where is Jaising? He is not here, but only you,—the image whom nothing can move. You rob us of all our best without uttering a word. We pine for love, and die beggars for want of it. Yet it comes to you unasked, though you need it not. Like a grave, you hoard it under your miserly stone, keeping it from

the use of the yearning world. Jaising, what happiness do you find from her? What can she speak to you? O my heart, my famished heart!

Enters RAGHUPATI.

RAGHUPATI : Who are you?

APARNA : I am a beggar girl. Where is Jaising?

RAGHUPATI : Leave this place at once. I know you are haunting this temple, to steal Jaising's heart from the Goddess.

APARNA : Has the Goddess anything to fear from me? I fear her.

[She goes out.

Enter JAISING and Prince NAKSHATRA.

NAKSHATRA : Why have you called me?

RAGHUPATI : Last night the Goddess told me in a dream, that you shall become king within a week.

NAKSHATRA : Ha, ha, this is news indeed.

RAGHUPATI : Yes, you shall be King.

NAKSHATRA : I cannot believe it.

RAGHUPATI : You doubt my words?

NAKSHATRA : I do not want to doubt them. But suppose, by chance, it never comes to pass.

RAGHUPATI : No, it shall be true.

NAKSHATRA : But, tell me, how can it ever become true?

RAGHUPATI : The Goddess thirsts for King's blood.

NAKSHATRA : King's blood?

RAGHUPATI : You must offer it to her before you can be king.

NAKSHATRA : I know not where to get it.

RAGHUPATI : There is King Govinda.—Jaising, keep still.—Do you understand? Kill him in secret. Bring his blood, while warm, to the altar.—Jaising, leave this place, if you cannot remain still,— NAKSHATRA : But he is my brother, and I love him.

RAGHUPATI : Your sacrifice will be all the more precious.

NAKSHATRA : But, father, I am content to remain as I am. I do not want the kingdom.

RAGHUPATI : There is no escape for you, because the Goddess commands it. She is thirsting for blood from the King's house. If your brother is to live, then you

must die.

NAKSHATRA : Have pity on me, father.

RAGHUPATI : You shall never be free in life, or in death, until her bidding is done.

NAKSHATRA : Advise me, then, how to do it.

RAGHUPATI : Wait in silence. I will tell you what to do, when the time comes. And now, go. [Nakshatra goes.]

JAISING : What is it that I heard? Merciful Mother, is it your bidding? To ask brother to kill brother? Master, how could you say that it was Mother's own wish?

RAGHUPATI : There was no other means but this to serve my Goddess.

JAISING : Means? Why means? Mother, have you not your own sword to wield with your own hand? Must your wish burrow underground, like a thief, to steal in secret? Oh, the sin!

RAGHUPATI : What do you know about sin?

JAISING : What I have learnt from you.

RAGHUPATI : Then come and learn your lesson once again from me. Sin has no meaning in reality. To kill is but to kill, it is neither sin nor anything else. Do you not know that the dust of this earth is made of countless killings? Old Time is ever writing the chronicle of the transient life of creatures in letters of blood. Killing is in the wilderness, in the habitations of man, in birds' nests, in insects' holes, in the sea, in the sky; there is killing for life, for sport, for nothing whatever. The world is ceaselessly killing; and the great Goddess Kali, the spirit of ever changing time, is standing with her thirsty tongue hanging down from her mouth, with her cup in hand, into which is running the red life-blood of the world, like juice from the crushed cluster of grapes.

JAISING : Stop, master. Is then love a falsehood and mercy a mockery, and the one thing true, from the beginning of time, the lust for destruction? Would it not have destroyed itself long ago? You are playing with my heart, my master. Look there, she is gazing at me. My blood-thirsty Mother, wilt thou accept my blood? Is it so delicious to thee? Master, did you call me? The Mother, who is thirsting for our love, you accuse of blood—thirstiness!

RAGHUPATI : Then let the sacrifice be stopped in the temple.

JAISING : Yes, let it be stopped.—No, no, master, you know what is right and what is wrong. The heart's laws are not the laws of scripture. Eyes cannot see with their own light,—the light must come from the outside. Tell me, father, is it true that the Goddess seeks King's blood?

RAGHUPATI : Alas, child, have you lost your faith in me?

JAISING : My world stands upon my faith in you. If the Goddess must have

King's blood, let me bring it to her. I will never allow a brother to kill his brother.

RAGHUPATI : But there can be no evil in carrying out God's wishes.

JAISING : No, it must be good, and I will earn the merit of it.

RAGHUPATI : But, my boy, I have reared you from your childhood, and you have grown close to my heart. I can never bear to lose you, by any chance.

JAISING : I will not let your love for me be soiled with sin. Release Prince Nakshatra from his promise.

RAGHUPATI : I will think, and decide tomorrow. [*He goes.*]

JAISING : Deeds are better, however cruel they may be, than the hell of thinking and doubting. You are true, my master, to kill is no sin, to kill a brother is no sin, to kill a king is no sin.—Where do you go, my brothers? To the fair at Nishipur? There the women are to dance? Oh, this world is pleasant! And the dancing limbs of the girls are beautiful. In what careless merriment the crowds flow through the roads, making the sky ring with their laughter and song. I will follow them.

Enters RAGHUPATI.

RAGHUPATI : Jaising.

JAISING : I do not know you. I drift with the crowd. Why ask me to stop? Go your own way.

RAGHUPATI : Jaising.

JAISING : The road is straight before me. With alms bowl in hand and the beggar girl as my sweetheart I shall walk on. Who says that the world's sways are devious? Anyhow we reach the end,—the end where all laws and rules are no more, where the errors and hurts of life are forgotten. What is the use of all these scriptures, and the teacher and his instructions?—My master, my father, what wild words are these of mine? I was living in a dream. There stands the temple, cruel and immovable as truth. What was your order, my teacher? I have not forgotten it. [*Bringing out the knife*] I am sharpening your words in my mind, till they become one with this knife in keenness. Have you any other order to give me?

RAGHUPATI : My boy, my darling, how can I tell you how deep is my love for you?

JAISING : No, master, do not tell me of love. Let me think only of duty. Love, like the green grass and the trees and life's music, is only for the surface of the world. It comes* and vanishes like a dream. But underneath is duty, like the rude

layers of stone like a huge load that nothing can move.

[They go out.

Enter King GOVINDA and CHANDPAL.

CHANDPAL : Sire, I warn you to be careful.

GOVINDA : Why? What do you mean?

CHANDPAL : I have overheard a conspiracy to take away your life.

GOVINDA : Who wants my life?

CHANDPAL : I am afraid to tell you, lest the news become to you more deadly than the knife itself. It was Prince Nakshatra, who— GOVINDA : Nakshatra?

CHANDPAL : He has promised to Raghupati to bring your blood to the Goddess.

GOVINDA : To the Goddess? Then I cannot blame him. For a man loses his humanity when it concerns his gods. You go to your work and leave me alone. [Chandpal goes out.

[Addressing the image] Accept these flowers. Goddess, and let your creatures live in peace. Mother, those who are weak in this world are so helpless, and those who are strong are so cruel. Greed is pitiless, ignorance blind, and pride takes no heed when it crushes the small under its foot. Mother, do not raise your sword and lick your lips for blood; do not set brother against brother, and woman against man. If it is your desire to strike me by the hand of one I love, then let it be fulfilled. For the sin has to ripen to its ugliest limits, before it can burst and die a hideous death.

JAISING rushes in.

JAISING : Tell me, Goddess, dost thou truly want King's blood? Ask it in thine own voice, and thou shalt have it.

A VOICE : I want King's blood.

JAISING : King, say your last prayer, for your time has come.

GOVINDA : What makes you say it, Jaising?

JAISING : Did you not hear what the Goddess said?

GOVINDA : It was not the Goddess. I heard the familiar voice of Raghupati.

JAISING : Drive me not from doubt to doubt. It is all the same, whether the voice comes from the Goddess, or from my master. — [He unsheathes his knife, and then throws it away.] Listen to the cry of thy children, Mother. Let there be only flowers for thy offerings,—no more blood. They are red even as blood,—these bunches of hibiscus. They have come out of the heart-burst of the earth, pained

at the slaughter of her children. Accept this. Thou must accept this. I defy thy anger. Blood thou shalt never have. Redden thine eyes. Raise thy sword. Bring thy furies of destruction. I do not fear thee. King, leave this temple to its Goddess, and go to your men. [Govinda goes.] Alas, alas, in a moment I gave up all that I had, my master, my Goddess. [Raghupati comes.]

RAGHUPATI : I have heard all. Traitor, you have betrayed your master.

JAISING : Punish me, father.

RAGHUPATI : What punishment will you have?

JAISING : Punish me with my life.

RAGHUPATI : No, that is nothing. Take your oath touching the feet of the Goddess.

JAISING : I touch her feet.

RAGHUPATI : Say, I will bring kingly blood to the altar of the Goddess, before it is midnight.

JAISING : I will bring kingly blood to the altar of the Goddess, before it is midnight.

[They go out.

Enters GUNAVATI.

GUNAVATI : I failed. I have hoped that, if I remained hard and cold for some days, he would surrender. Such faith I had in my power, vain woman that I am. I showed my sullen anger, and remained away from him; but it was fruitless. Woman's anger is like a diamond's glitter; it only shines, but cannot burn. I would it were like thunder, bursting upon the King's house, startling him up from his sleep, and dashing his pride to the ground.

Enters the boy DRUVA.

GUNAVATI : Where are you going?

DRUVA : I am called by the King.

[Goes out.

GUNAVATI : There goes the darling of the King's heart. He has robbed my unborn children of their father's love, usurped their right to the first place in the King's breast. O Mother Kali, your creation is infinite and full of wonders, only send a child to m arms in merest whim, a tiny little warm living flesh to fill my lap, and I shall offer you whatever you wish.

Enters NAKSHATRA.

Prince Nakshatra, why are you so excited.

NAKSHATRA : Tell me what you want of me.

GUNAVATI : The thief that steals the crown awaiting you,—remove him. Do you understand?

NAKSHATRA : Yes, except who the thief is.

GUNAVATI : That boy, Druva. Do you not see how he is growing in the King's lap, till one clay he reaches the crown?

NAKSHATRA : Yes, I have often thought of it. I have seen my brother putting his crown on the boy's head in play.

GUNAVATI : Playing with the crown is a dangerous game. If you do not remove the player, he will make a game of you.

NAKSHATRA : Yes, I like it not.

GUNAVATI : Offer him to Kali. Have you not heard that Mother is thirsting for blood?

NAKSHATRA : But, sister, this is not my business.

GUNAVATI : Fool, can you feel yourself safe, so long as Mother is not appeased? Blood she must have; save your own, if you can.

NAKSHATRA : But she wants King's blood.

GUNAVATI : Who told you that.

NAKSHATRA : I know it from one to whom the Goddess herself sends her dreams.

GUNAVATI : Then that boy must die for the King. His blood is more precious to your brother than his own, and the King can only be saved by paying the price, which is more than his life.

NAKSHATRA : I understand.

GUNAVATI : Then lose no time. Run after him. He is not gone far. But remember. Offer him in my name.

NAKSHATRA : Yes, I will.

GUNAVATI : The Queen's offerings have been turned back from Mother's gate. Pray to her that she may forgive me.

[*They go out.*

Enter JAISING.

JAISING : Goddess, is there any little thing, that yet remains, out of the wreck of thee? If there be but a faintest spark of thy light in the remotest of the stars of evening, answer my cry, though thy voice be the feeblest. Say to me, 'Child,

here I am. ‘—No, she is nowhere. She is naught. But take pity upon Jaising, O Illusion! Art thou so irredeemably false, that not even my love can send the slightest tremor of life through thy nothingness? O fool, for whom have you upturned your cup of life, emptying it to the last drop? for this unanswering void,—truthless, merciless, and motherless?

Enters APARNA.

Aparna, they drive you away from the temple; yet you come back over and over again. For you are true, and truth cannot be banished. We enshrine falsehood in our temple, with all devotion; yet she is never there. Leave me not, Aparna. Sit here by my side. Why are you so sad, my darling? Do you miss some god, who is god no longer? But is there any need of God in this little world of ours? Let us be fearlessly godless and come closer to each other. They want our blood. And for this, they have come down to the dust of our earth, leaving their magnificence of heaven. For in their heaven there are no men, no creatures, who can suffer. No, my girl, there is no Goddess.

APARNA : Then leave this temple, and come away with me.

JAISING : Leave this temple? Yes, I will leave, Alas, Aparna, I must leave. Yet I cannot leave it, before I have paid my last dues to the.—But let that be. Come closer to me, my love. Whisper something to my ears, which will overflow this life with sweetness, flooding death itself.

APARNA : Words do not flow when the heart is full.

JAISING : Then lean your head on my breast. Let the silence of two eternities, life and death, touch each other.—But no more of this. I must go.

APARNA : Jaising, do not be cruel. Can you not feel what I have suffered?

JAISING : Am I cruel? Is this your last word to me? Cruel, as that block of stone, whom I called Goddess? Aparna, my beloved, if you were the Goddess, you would know what fire is this that burns my heart. But you are my Goddess. Do you know how I know it?

APARNA : Tell me.

JAISING : You bring to me your sacrifice every moment, as a mother does to her child. God must be all sacrifice, pouring out his life in all creation.

APARNA : Jaising, come, let us leave this temple and go away together.

JAISING : Save me, Aparna, have mercy upon me and leave me. I have only one object in my life. Do not usurp its place.

[Rushes out.]

APARNA : Again and again I have suffered. But my strength is gone. My

heartbreaks.

[*She goes out.*

Enter RAGHUPATI and Prince NAKSHATRA.

RAGHUPATI : Prince, where have you kept the boy?

NAKSHATRA : He is in the room where the vessels for worship are kept. He has cried himself to sleep. I think I shall never be able to bear it, when he wakes up again.

RAGHUPATI : Jaising was of the same age when he came to me. And I remember how he cried till he slept at the feet of the Goddess,—the temple lamp dimly shining on his tear-stained child-face. It was a stormy evening like this.

NAKSHATRA : Father, delay not. I wish to finish it all, while he is sleeping. His cry pierces my heart like a knife.

RAGHUPATI : I will drug him to sleep, if he wakes up.

NAKSHATRA : The King will soon find it out, if you are not quick. For, in the evening, he leaves the care of his kingdom to come to this boy.

RAGHUPATI : Have more faith in the Goddess. The victim is now in her own hands and it shall never escape.

NAKSHATRA : But Chandpal is so watchful.

RAGHUPATI : Not more so than our Mother.

NAKSHATRA : I thought I saw a shadow pass by.

RAGHUPATI : The shadow of your own fear.

NAKSHATRA : Do we not hear the sound of a cry?

RAGHUPATI : The sound of your own heart. Shake off your despondency, Prince. Let us drink this wine duly consecrated. So long as the purpose remains in the mind, it looms large and fearful. In action it becomes small. The vapour is dark and diffused. It dissolves into water drops that are small and sparkling. Prince, it is nothing. It takes only a moment,—not more than it does to snuff a candle.

NAKSHATRA : I think we should not be too rash. Leave this work till tomorrow night.

RAGHUPATI : Tonight is as good as tomorrow night, perhaps better.

NAKSHATRA : Listen to the sound of footsteps.

RAGHUPATI : I do not hear it.

NAKSHATRA : See there,—the light.

RAGHUPATI : The King comes. I fear we have delayed too long.

King GOVINDA comes with attendants.

GOVINDA : Make them prisoners. [To Raghupati] Have you anything to say?

RAGHUPATI : Nothing.

GOVINDA : Do you admit your crime?

RAGHUPATI : Crime? Yes, my crime was that, in my weakness, I delayed in carrying out Mother's service. The punishment comes from the Goddess. You are merely her instrument.

GOVINDA : According to my law, my soldiers shall escort you to exile, Raghupati, where you shall spend eight years of your life.

RAGHUPATI : King, I never bent my knees to any mortal in my life. I am a Brahmin. Your caste is lower than mine. Yet, in all humility, I pray to you, give me only one day's time.

GOVINDA : I grant it.

RAGHUPATI : [Mockingly] You are the King of all kings. Your majesty and mercy are alike immeasurable. Whereas I am a mere worm, hiding in the dust.

[He goes out.

GOVINDA : Nakshatra, admit your guilt.

NAKSHATRA : I am guilty, Sire, and I dare not ask for your pardon.

GOVINDA : Prince, I know you are tender of heart. Tell me, who beguiled you with evil counsel?

NAKSHATRA : I will not take other names, King. My guilt is my own. You have pardoned your foolish brother more than once, and once more he begs to be pardoned.

GOVINDA : Nakshatra, leave my feet. The judge is still more bound by his laws than his prisoner.

ATTENDANTS : Sire, remember that he is your brother, and pardon him.

GOVINDA : Let me remember that I am a king. Nakshatra shall remain in exile for eight years, in the house we have built, by the sacred river, outside the limits of Tripura. [Taking Nakshatra's hands.

The punishment is not yours only, brother, but also mine,—the more so because I cannot share it bodily.

[They all go out.

Enter RAGHUPATI and JAISING.

RAGHUPATI : My pride wallows in the mire. I have shamed my Brahminhood. I am no longer your master, my child. Yester-day I had the authority to command you. Today I can only beg your favour. Life's days are mere tinsel, most trifling of God's gifts, and I had to beg for one of those days from the King with bent

knees. Let that one day be not in vain. Let its infamous black brows be red with King's blood before it dies. Why do you not speak, my boy? Though I forsake my place as your master, yet have I not the right to claim your obedience as your father,—I who am more than a father to you, because father to an orphan? You are still silent, my child? Then let my knees bend to you, who were smaller than my knees when you first came to my arms.

JAISING : Father, do not torture the heart that is already broken. If the Goddess thirsts for kingly blood, I will bring it to her before tonight. I will pay all my debts, yes, every farthing. Keep ready for my return. I will delay not.

[Goes out.]

[*Storm outside.*]

RAGHUPATI : She is awake at last, the Terrible. Her curses go shrieking through the town. The hungry furies are shaking the cracking branches of the world tree with all their might, for the stars to break and drop. My Mother, why didst thou keep thine own people in doubt and dishonour so long? Leave it not for thy servant to raise thy sword. Let thy mighty arm do its own work!—I hear steps.

Enters APARNA.

APARNA : Where is Jaising?

RAGHUPATI : Away evil omen. [Aparna goes out.] But if Jaising never comes back? No, he will not break his promise. Victory to thee, Great Kali, the giver of all success!—But if he meet with obstruction? If he be caught and lose his life at the guards' hands?—Victory to thee, watchful Goddess, Mother invincible! Do not allow thy repute to be lost, and thine enemies to laugh at thee. If thy children must lose their pride and faith in their Mother, and bow down their heads in shame before the rebels, who then shall remain in this orphaned world to carry thy banner?—I hear his steps. But so soon? Is he coming back foiled in his purpose? No, that cannot be. Thy miracle needs not time, O Mistress of all time, terrible with thy necklace of human skulls. [Rushes In Jaising.]

Jaising, where is the blood?

JAISING : It is with me. Let go my hands. Let me offer it myself [*Entering the temple.*] Must thou have kingly blood, Great Mother, who nourishest the world at thy breast with life?—I am of the royal caste, a Kshatriya. My ancestors have sat upon thrones, and there are rulers of men in my mother's line. I have kingly blood in my veins. Take it, and quench thy thirst forever.

[*Stabs himself and falls.*]

RAGHUPATI : Jaising! O cruel, ungrateful! You have done the blackest crime. You

kill your father! Jaising, forgive me, my darling. Come back to my heart, my heart's one treasure! Let me die in your place.

Enters APARNA.

APARNA : It will madden me. Where is Jaising? Where is he?

RAGHUPATI : Come, Aparna, come, my child, call him with all your love. Call him back to life. Take him to you, away from me, only let him live.

APARNA enters the temple and swoons.

RAGHUPATI : [Beating his forehead on the temple floor.] Give him, give him, give him.—Give him back to me! [Stands up addressing the image.] Look how she stands there, the silly stone,—deaf, dumb, blind,—the whole sorrowing world weeping at her door,—the noblest hearts wrecking themselves at her stony feet. Give me back my Jaising. Oh, it is all in vain. Our bitterest cries wander in emptiness,—the emptiness that we vainly try to fill with these stony images of delusion. Away with them! Away with these our impotent dreams, that harden into stones, burdening our world.

[He throws away the image, and comes out into the courtyard.

Enters GUNAVATI.

GUNAVATI : Victory to thee, great Goddess!—But, where is the Goddess?

RAGHUPATI : Goddess there is none.

GUNAVATI : Bring her back, father. I have brought her my offerings. I have come at last, to appease her anger with my own heart's blood. Let her know that the Queen is true to her promise. Have pity on me, and bring back the Goddess only for this night. Tell me,—where is she?

RAGHUPATI : She is nowhere,—neither above, nor below.

GUNAVATI : Master, was not the Goddess here in the temple?

RAGHUPATI : Goddess?—If there were any true Goddess anywhere in the world, could she bear this thing to usurp her name?

GUNAVATI : Do not torture me. Tell me truly. Is there no Goddess?

RAGHUPATI : No, there is none.

GUNAVATI : Then who was here?

RAGHUPATI : Nothing, nothing.

APARNA comes out from the temple.

APARNA : Father.

RAGHUPATI : My sweet child! ‘Father,’—did you say? Do you rebuke me with that name? My son, whom I have killed, has left that one dear call behind him in your sweet voice.

Enters the KING.

GOVINDA : Where is the Goddess?

RAGHUPATI : The Goddess is nowhere.

GOVINDA : But what blood-stream is this?

RAGHUPATI : King, Jaising, who loved you so dearly, has killed himself.

GOVINDA : Killed himself? Why?

RAGHUPATI : To kill the falsehood, that sucks the life-blood of man.

GOVINDA : Jaising is great. He has conquered death. My flowers are for him.

GUNAVATI : My King.

GOVINDA : Yes, my love.

GUNAVATI : The Goddess is no more.

GOVINDA : She has burst her cruel prison of stone, and come back to woman’s heart.

APARNA : Father, come away.

RAGHUPATI : Come, child. Come, Mother. I have found thee. Thou art the last gift of Jaising.

11. Sanyasi or the Ascetic

Act

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Scene I SANYASI : [Outside the cave.] The division of days and nights is not for me, nor that of months and years. For me, the stream of time has stopped, on whose waves dances the world, like straws and twigs. In this dark cave I am alone, merged in myself, and the eternal night is still, like a mountain lake afraid of its own depth. Water oozes and drips from the cracks, and in the pool float the ancient frogs. I sit chanting the incantation of nothingness. The world's limits recede, line after line. The stars, like sparks of fire, flown from the anvil of time, are extinct; and that joy is mine which comes to the God Shiva, when, after aeons of dream, he wakes up to Find himself alone in the heart of the infinite annihilation. I am free, I am the great solitary One. When I was thy slave, O Nature, thou didst set my heart against itself, and madest it carry the Fierce war of suicide through its world. Desires, that have no other ends, but to feel upon themselves and all that comes to their mouths, lashed m into fury. I ran about, madly chasing my shadow. Thou droves me with thy lightning lashes of pleasure into the void of satiety And the hungers, who are thy decoys, ever led me into the endless famine, where food turned into dust, and drink into vapour.

Till, when my world was spotted with tears and ashes, took my oath, that I would have revenge upon thee, interminable Appearance, mistress of endless disguises. I took shelter in the darkness, the castle of the Infinite, and fought the deceitful light, day after day, till it lost all its weapons and la powerless at my feet. Now, when I am free of fear and desire' when the mist has vanished, and my reason shines pure and bright, let me go out into the kingdom of lies, and sit upon its heart, untouched and unmoved.

Scene II SANYASI : [By the roadside.] How small is this earth and confined, watched and followed by the persistent horizons. The trees, houses, and crowd of things are pressing upon my eyes. The light, like a cage, has

shut out the dark eternity; and the hours hop and cry within its barriers, like imprisoned birds. But why are these noisy men rushing on, and for what purpose? They seem always afraid of missing something, the something that never comes to their hands.

[*The crowd passes.*

Enter a VILLAGE ELDER and two WOMEN.

FIRST WOMAN : O my, O my! You do make me laugh.

SECOND WOMAN : But who says you are old?

VILLAGE ELDER : There are fools who judge men by their outside.

FIRST WOMAN : How sad! We have been watching your outside from our infancy. It is just the same all through these years.

VILLAGE ELDER : Like the morning sun.

FIRST WOMAN : Yes, like the morning sun in its shining baldness.

VILLAGE ELDER : Ladies, you are overcritical in your taste. You notice things that are unessential.

SECOND WOMAN : Leave off your chatter, Ananga. Let us hasten home, or my man will be angry.

FIRST WOMAN : Good bye, sir. Please judge us from our outside, we won't mind that— VILLAGE ELDER : Because you have no inside to speak of.

[*They go.*

Enter three VILLAGERS.

FIRST VILLAGER : Insult me? The scoundrel! He shall regret it.

SECOND VILLAGER : He must be taught a thorough lesson.

FIRST VILLAGER : A lesson that will follow him to his grave.

THIRD VILLAGER : Yes, brother, set your heart upon it. Never give him quarter.

SECOND VILLAGER : He has grown too big.

FIRST VILLAGER : Big enough to burst at last.

THIRD VILLAGER : The ants, when they begin to grow wings, perish.

SECOND VILLAGER : But have you got a plan?

FIRST VILLAGER : Not one, but hundreds. I will drive my plough share over his household. I will give him a donkey-ride through the town, with his cheeks painted white and black. I will make the world too hot for him, and [*They go.*

Enter two STUDENTS.

FIRST STUDENT : I am sure Professor Madhab won in the debate.

SECOND STUDENT : No, it was Professor Janardan.

FIRST STUDENT : Professor Madhab maintained his point to the last. He said that the subtle is the outcome of the gross.

SECOND STUDENT : But Professor Janardan conclusively proved that the subtle is the origin of the gross.

FIRST STUDENT : Impossible.

SECOND STUDENT : It is dear as the daylight.

FIRST STUDENT : Seeds come from the tree.

SECOND STUDENT : The tree comes from the seed.

FIRST STUDENT : Sanyasi, which of these is true? Which is the original, the subtle or the gross?

SANYASI : Neither.

SECOND STUDENT : Neither. Well, that sounds satisfactory.

SANYASI : The origin is the end, and the end is the origin. It is a circle. The distinction between the subtle and gross is in your ignorance.

FIRST STUDENT : Well, it sounds very simple and I think this was what my master meant.

SECOND STUDENT : Certainly this agrees more with what my master teaches.
[They go out.]

SANYASI : These birds are word-peckers. When they pick up some wriggling nonsense, which can fill their mouth, they are happy.

Enter two FLOWER-GIRLS, singing.

The weary hours pass by.

The flowers that blossom in the light Fade and drop in the shadow.

I thought I would weave a garland In the cool of the morning for my love.

But the morning wears on, The flowers are not gathered.

And my love is lost.

A WAYFARER : Why such regret, my darlings? When the garlands are ready, the necks will not be wanting.

FIRST FLOWER-GIRL : Nor the halter.

SECOND FLOWER-GIRL : You are bold. Why do you come so close?

WAYFARER : You quarrel for nothing, my girl. I am far enough from you to allow an elephant to pass between us.

SECOND FLOWER-GIRL : Indeed. Am I such a fright? If I wouldn't have eaten you, if

you had come.

[*They go out laughing.*

Comes an old BEGGAR.

BEGGAR : Kind sirs, have pity on me. May God prosper you. Give me one handful from your plenty.

Enters a SOLDIER.

SOLDIER : Move away. Don't you see the Minister's son is conning? [*They go out.*

SANYASI : It is midday. The sun is growing strong. The sky looks like an overturned burning copper bowl. The earth breathes hot sighs, and the whirling sands dance by. What sights of man have I seen! Can I ever again shrink back into the smallness of these creatures, and become one of them? No, I am free. I have not this obstacle, this world round me. I live in a pure desolation.

Enter the girl VASANTI and a WOMAN.

WOMAN : Girl, you are Raghu's daughter, aren't you? You should keep away from this road. Don't you know it goes to the temple?

VASANTI : I am on the farthest side, Lady.

WOMAN : But I thought my cloth-end touched you. I am taking my offerings to the goddess, I hope they are not polluted.

VASANTI : I assure you, your cloth did not touch me. [*The Woman goes.*] I am Vasanti, Raghu's daughter. May I come to you, father?

SANYASI : Why not, child?

VASANTI : I am a pollution, as they call me.

SANYASI : But they are all that, a pollution. They roll in the dust of existence. Only he is pure who has washed away the world from his mind. But what have you done, daughter?

VASANTI : My father, who is dead, had defied their laws and their gods. He would not perform their rites.

SANYASI : Why do you stand away from me?

VASANTI : Will you touch me?

SANYASI : Yes, because nothing can touch me truly. I am ever away in the endless. You can sit here, if you wish.

VASANTI : [*Breaking into a sob.*] Never tell me to leave you, when once you have

taken me near you.

SANYASI : Wipe away your tears, child. I am a Sanyasi. I have neither hatred, nor attachment in my heart, I never claim you as mine; therefore I can never discard you. You are to me as this blue sky is, you are, yet you are not.

VASANTI : Father, I am deserted by gods and men alike.

SANYASI : So am I. I have deserted both gods and men.

VASANTI : You have no mother?

SANYASI : No.

VASANTI : Nor father?

SANYASI : No.

VASANTI : Nor any friend?

SANYASI : No.

VASANTI : Then I shall be with you. You won't leave me?

SANYASI : I have done with leaving. You can stay near me, yet never coming near me.

VASANTI : I do not understand you, father. Tell me, is there no shelter for me in the whole world?

SANYASI : Shelter? Don't you know this world is a bottomless chasm? The swarm of creatures, coming out from the hole of nothingness, seeks for shelter, and enters into the gaping mouth of this emptiness, and is lost. These are the ghosts of lies around you, who hold their market of illusions, and the foods which they sell are shadows. They only deceive your hunger, but do not satisfy. Come away from here, child, come away.

VASANTI : But, father, they seem so happy in this world. Can we not watch them from the roadside?

SANYASI : Alas, they do not understand. They cannot see that this world is death spread out to eternity. It dies every moment, yet never comes to the end.—And we, the creatures of this world, live by feeding upon death.

VASANTI : Father, you frighten me.

Enters a TRAVELLER.

TRAVELLER : Can I get a shelter near this place?

SANYASI : Shelter there is nowhere, my son, but in the depth of one's self. Seek that; hold to it fast, if you would be saved.

TRAVELLER : But I am tired, and want shelter.

VASANTI : My hut is not far from here. Will you come?

TRAVELLER : But who are you?

VASANTI : Must you know me? I am Raghu's daughter.

TRAVELLER : God bless you, child, but I cannot stay. [Goes.

Men come bearing somebody on a bed.

FIRST BEARER : He is still asleep.

SECOND BEARER : How heavy the rascal is!

A TRAVELLER : [Outside their group.] Whom do you carry?

THIRD BEARER : Binde, the weaver, was sleeping as one dead, and we have taken him away.

SECOND BEARER : But I am tired, brothers. Let us give him a shake, and waken him up.

BINDE : [Wakes up.] Ee, a, u THIRD BEARER : What's that noise?

BINDE : I say. Who are you? Where am I being carried?

[They put down the bed from their shoulders.]

THIRD BEARER : Can't you keep quiet, like all decent dead people?

SECOND BEARER : The cheek of him! He must talk, even though he is dead.

THIRD BEARER : It would be more proper of you, if you kept still.

BINDE : I am sorry to disappoint you, gentlemen, you have made a mistake. I was not dead, but fast asleep.

SECOND BEARER : I admire this fellow's impudence. Not only must he die, but argue.

THIRD BEARER : He won't confess the truth. Let us go, and finish the rites of the dead.

BINDE : I swear by your beard, my brother, I am as alive as any of you.

[They take him away, laughing.]

SANYASI : The girl has fallen asleep, with her arm beneath her little head; I think I must leave her now, and go. But, coward, must you run away, run away from this tiny thing? These are nature's spiders' webs, they have danger merely for moths, and not for a Sanyasi like me.

VASANTI : [Awaking with a start.] Have you left me. Master? Have you gone away?

SANYASI : Why should I go away from you? What fear have I? Afraid of a shadow?

VASANTI : Do you hear the noise in the road?

SANYASI : But stillness is in my soul.

Enters a young WOMAN, followed by MEN.

WOMAN : Go now. Leave me. Don't talk to me of love.

FIRST MAN : Why, what has been my crime?

WOMAN : You men have hearts of stone.

FIRST MAN : Incredible. If our hearts were of stone, how could Cupid's darts make damage there?

OTHER MAN : Bravo. Well said.

SECOND MAN : Now, what is your answer to that, my dear?

WOMAN : Answer! You think you have said something very fine, don't you? It is perfect rubbish.

FIRST MAN : I leave it to your judgment, gentlemen. What I said was this, that if our hearts be of stone, how can THIRD MAN : Yes, yes, it has no answer at all.

FIRST MAN : Let me explain it to you. She said we men have hearts of stone, didn't she? Well, I said, in answer, if our hearts were truly of stone, how could Cupid's darts damage them? You understand?

SECOND MAN : Brother, I have been selling molasses in the town for the last twenty-four years, do you think I cannot understand what you say? [They go out.

SANYASI : What are you doing, my child?

VASANTI : I am looking at your broad palm, father. My hand is a little bird that finds its nest here. Your palm is great, like the great earth which holds all. These lines are the rivers, and these are hills.

[Puts her cheek upon it.

SANYASI : Your touch is soft, my daughter, like the touch of sleep. It seems to me this touch has something of the great darkness, which touches one's soul with the wand of the eternal. But, child, you are the moth of the daylight. You have your birds and flowers and fields what can you find in me, who have my centre in the One and my circumference nowhere?

VASANTI : I do not want anything else. Your love is enough for me.

SANYASI : The girl imagines I love her, foolish heart. She is happy in that thought. Let her nourish it. For they have been brought up in illusions, and they must have illusions to console them.

VASANTI : Father, this creeper trailing on the grass, seeking some tree to twine itself round, is my creeper. I have tended it and watered it from the time when it had pushed up only two little leaves into the air, like an infant's cry. This creeper is me, it has grown by the roadside, it can be so easily crushed. Do you see these beautiful little flowers, pale blue with white spots in their hearts, these white spots are their dreams. Let me gently brush your forehead with these flowers. To me, things that are beautiful are the keys to all that I have not seen and not known.

SANYASI : No, no, the beautiful is mere phantasy. To him who knows, the dust and the flower are the same. But what languor is this that is creeping into my blood and drawing before my eyes a thin mist veil of all the rainbow colours? Is it nature herself weaving her dreams round me, clouding my senses? [Suddenly he tears the creeper, and rises up.] No more of this; for this is death.

What game of yours is this with me, little girl? I am a sanyasi, I have cut all my knots, I am free. No, no, not those tears. I cannot bear them. But where was hidden in my heart this snake, this anger, that hissed out of its dark with its fang? No, they are not dead, they outlive starvation. These hell-creatures clatter their skeletons and dance in my heart, when their mistress, the great witch, plays upon her magic flute. Weep not, child, come to me. You seem to me like a cry of a lost world, like the song of a wandering star. You bring to my mind something, which is infinitely more than this Nature, more than the sun and stars. It is as great as the darkness. I understand it not. I have never known it, therefore I fear it. I must leave you. Go back whence you came, the messenger of the unknown.

VASANTI : Leave me not, father, I have none else but you.

SANYASI : I must go, I thought that I had known, but I do not know. Yet I must know. I leave you, to know who you are.

VASANTI : Father, if you leave me, I shall die.

SANYASI : Let go my hand. Do not touch me. I must be free.

[He runs away.

Scene III *The SANYASI is seen, sitting upon a boulder in a mountain path.*

[A shepherd boy passes by, singing.]

Do not turn away your face, my love, The spring has bared open its breast.

The flowers breathe their secrets in the dark.

*The rustle of the forest leaves comes across the sky, Like the sobs of the night.
Come, love, show me your face.*

SANYASI : The gold of the evening is melting in the heart of the blue sea. The forest, on the hillside, is drinking the last cup of the daylight. On the left, the village huts are seen through the trees with their evening lamps lighted, like a veiled mother watching by her sleeping children. Nature, thou art my slave. Thou hast spread thy many-coloured carpet in the great hall where I sit alone, like a king, and watch thee dance with thy starry necklace twinkling on thy breast.

[Shepherd girls pass by, singing.]

The music comes from across the dark river and calls me. .

*I was in the house and happy, But the flute sounded in the still air of night,
And a pain pierced my heart.*

Oh, tell me the way who know it, Tell me the way to him.

*I will go to him with my one little flower, And leave it at his feet, And tell him
that his music is one with my love.*

[They go.

SANYASI : I think such an evening had come to me only once before in all my births. Then its cup over brimmed with love and music, and I sat with someone, the memory of whose face is in that setting star of the evening. But where is my little girl, with her dark sad eyes, big with tears? Is she there, sitting outside her hut, watching that same star through the immense loneliness of the evening? But the star must set, the evening close her eyes in the night, and tears must cease and sobs be stilled in sleep. No, I will not go back. Let the world-dreams take their own shape. Let me not trouble its course and create new phantasies. I will see, and think, and know.

Enters a ragged GIRL.

GIRL : Are you there, father?

SANYASI : Come, child, sit by me. I wish I could own that call of yours. Someone did call me father, once, and the voice was somewhat like yours. The father answers now, but where is that call?

GIRL : Who are you?

SANYASI : I am a sanyasi. Tell, me child, what is your father?

GIRL : He gathers sticks from the forest.

SANYASI : And you have a mother?

GIRL : No. She died when I was young.

SANYASI : Do you love your father?

GIRL : I love him more than anything else in the world. I have no one else but him.

SANYASI : I understand you. Give me your little hand, let me hold it in my palm, in this big palm of mine.

GIRL : Sanyasi, do you read palms? Can you read in my palm all that I am and shall be?

SANYASI : I think I can read, but dimly know its meaning. One day, I shall know it.

GIRL : Now I must go to meet my father.

SANYASI : Where?

GIRL : Where the road goes into the forest. He will miss me, if he does not find me there.

SANYASI : Bring your head near to me, child. Let me give you my kiss of blessing, before you go.

[*Girl goes.*

A MOTHER enters, with two children.

MOTHER : How stout and chubby Misri's children are. They are something to look at. But the more I feed you, the more you seem to grow thin every day.

FIRST GIRL : But why do you always blame us for that, mother? Can we help it?

MOTHER : Don't I tell you to take plenty of rest? But you must always be running about.

SECOND GIRL : But mother, we run about on your errands.

MOTHER : How dare you answer me like that?

SANYASI : Where are you going, daughter?

MOTHER : My salutation, father. We are going home.

SANYASI : How many are you?

MOTHER : My mother-in-law, and my husband and two other children, beside these.

SANYASI : How do you spend your days?

MOTHER : I hardly know how my days pass. My man goes to the field, and I have my house to look after. Then, in the evening, I sit to spin with my elder girls. [*To the girls*] Go and salute the sanyasi.

Bless them, father.

[*They go.*

Enter two MEN.

FIRST MAN : Friend, go back from here. Do not come any further.

SECOND MAN : Yes, I know. Friends meet in this earth by chance, and the chance carries us on together some portion of the way, and then comes the moment when we must part.

SECOND FRIEND : Let us carry away with us the hope that we part to meet again.

FIRST FRIEND : Our meetings and partings belong to all the movements of the world. Stars do not take special notice of us.

SECOND FRIEND : Let us salute those stars which did throw us together. If for a moment, still it has been much.

FIRST FRIEND : Look back for a minute before you go. Can you see that faint glimmer of the water in the dark, and those casuarina trees on the sandy bank? Our village is all one heap of dark shadows. You can only see the lights. Can you guess which of those lights are ours?

SECOND FRIEND : Yes, I think I can.

FIRST FRIEND : That light is the last farewell look of our past days upon their parting guest. A little further on, and there will remain one blot of darkness. [They go away.

SANYASI : The night grows dark and desolate. It sits like a woman forsaken, those stars are her tears, turned into fire. O my child, the sorrow of your little heart has filled, forever, all the nights of my life with its sadness. Your dear caressing hand has left its touch in this night air, I feel it on my forehead, it is damp with your tears. My darling, your sobs that pursued me, when I fled away, have clung to my heart. I shall carry them to my death.

Scene IV

In the village path.

SANYASI : Let my vows of sanyasi go. I break my staff and my alms-bowl. This stately ship, this world, which is crossing the sea of time, let it take me up again, let me join once more the pilgrims. O the fool, who wanted to seek safety in swimming alone and gave up the light of the sun and stars, to pick his way with his glow-worm's lamp! The bird flies in the sky, not to fly away into the emptiness, but to come back again to this great earth. I am free. I am free from the bodiless chain of the Nay. I am free among things, and forms and purpose. The finite is the true infinite, and love knows its truth. My girl, you are the spirit of all that is, I can never leave you.

Enters a VILLAGE ELDER.

SANYASI : Do you know, brother, where Raghu's daughter is?

ELDER : She has left her village, and we are glad.

SANYASI : Where has she gone?

ELDER : Do you ask where? It is all one to her where she goes. [Goes out.

SANYASI : My darling has gone to seek a somewhere in the emptiness of nowhere. She must find me.

A CROWD OF VILLAGERS enter.

FIRST MAN : So our King's son is going to be married tonight.

SECOND MAN : Can you tell me, when is the wedding hour?

THIRD MAN : The wedding hour is only for the bride-groom and the bride. What have we got to do with it?

A WOMAN : But won't they give us cakes for the happy day?

FIRST MAN : Cakes? You are silly. My uncle lives in the town I have heard from him that we shall have curds and parched rice.

SECOND MAN : Grand.

FOURTH MAN : But we shall have a great deal more water than curds. You may be sure of that.

FIRST MAN : Moti, you are a dull fellow. Water in the curds at a prince's wedding!

FOURTH MAN : But we are not princes ourselves, Panchu. For us, poor people, the curds have the trick of turning into water most parts.

FIRST MAN : Look there. That son of the charcoal-burner is still busy with his work. We mustn't allow that.

SECOND MAN : We shall burn him into charcoal, if he does not come out.

SANYASI : Do you know, any of you, where is Raghu's daughter?

THE WOMAN : She has gone away.

SANYASI : Where?

WOMAN : That we don't know.

FIRST MAN : But we are sure that she is not the bride for our prince.

[They laugh and go out.]

Enters a WOMAN, with a child.

WOMAN : My obeisance to you, father. Let my child touch your feet with his head. He is sick. Bless him, father.

SANYASI : But, daughter, I am no longer a sanyasi. Do not mock me with your salutation.

WOMAN : Then who are you? What are you doing?

SANYASI : I am seeking.

WOMAN : Seeking whom?

SANYASI : Seeking my lost world back. Do you know Raghu's daughter? Where is she?

WOMAN : Raghu's daughter? She is dead.

SANYASI : No, she cannot be dead. No. No.

WOMAN : But what is her death to you. Sanyasi?

SANYASI : Not only to me; it would be death to all.

WOMAN : I do not understand you.

SANYASI : She can never be dead.

12. The Trial

Act I

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KHIRI the maid servant.

KHIRI : Some people have the means to be good in gorgeous comfort and others like us groan under the burden of their goodness Their charity grows fat in their easy chairs, while we carry out their mission with the sweat of our brows. They reap undying fame and we early death.

[A voice from without: *Khiri! Khiri!*

KHIRI : There she calls! No time for poor me even to nurse my Grievance!

Enters RANI KALYANI.

KALYANI : Sulky as usual!

KHIRI : That proves I am made of flesh and blood.

KALYANI : What is your latest grievance?

KHIRI : That I made a wrong choice when I chose you for my mistress. Why should I come to a Rani's house, if I must serve a whole world of ragged riffraffs, cook for a needy neighbourhood bred in dirt, and wear out my fingers washing their dishes? And all this with nobody to help me!

KALYANI : Help you could have enough if your tongue did not sting out all the servants I brought to my house.

KHIRI : You are right. I have a sensitive mind, and cannot bear the least wrong around me. This fastidious delicacy of mine dooms me to solitude. The servants you had were pure-blooded robbers, blessed with a dangerously innocent look.

KALYANI : And what about yourself?

KHIRI : Holy Mother! I never claim to be an exception. I freely take all that I can lay my hands on. Yet I have but a single pair of them. The Creator made these to grab and to hold; therefore if you multiply hands about you, you divide your possessions.

KALYANI : But your solitude seems to be bursting with a crowd of nephews and

nieces and a miscellaneous brood of cousins.

Hasn't each of them a pair of hands for their share? You anger me and yet make me laugh.

KHIRI : If only you laughed less and got angered more, possibly you could have changed my nature.

KALYANI : Your nature change! Not even when you are dead.

KHIRI : This is encouragingly true. It makes me hope that death will be cautious about claiming me. There! look at that lazy crowd waiting at your gate. Some of them have the story of a sick husband, who obligingly never dies, and some of an uncle, whose death remains forever fresh with its endless claim to funeral rites. They bring their bags full of lies, to exchange them for solid silver. I never cease to wonder how certain people can have a special relish for being cheated.

KALYANI : The poor cheat because wealth is often meaner than poverty. However, tell me why, last evening, when I fed the poor, sweets were scarce and also milk.

KHIRI : Very likely the pastryman and the milk-vendor like to give you a fair chance to be cheated.

Enter neighbouring WOMEN.

WOMEN : [They shout] Long live Rani Kalyani!

KHIRI : Listen to that! If their stomachs had missed their fill of good fare yesterday, their lungs would show it this morning.

KALYANI : Who is that girl with you, Piari? I never saw her before.

SECOND WOMAN : It is the new bride come to our house. I have brought her for your blessing.

KHIRI : It is easy to guess what you mean by blessing.

KALYANI : She has a sweet face.

SECOND WOMAN : But not a particle of jewelry has she brought from her father's house.

KHIRI : 'They are all safely stored in your own chest,' whisper those who are in the secret.

KALYANI : Come with me into my room.

[Kalyani goes with the Woman and the bride.]

FIRST WOMAN : The uncommon cheek of that woman.

KHIRI : It is tiresomely common.

THIRD WOMAN : But this surpasses anything that we know.

KHIRI : Because it benefits somebody else but you.

THIRD WOMAN : Your wit makes our sides burst with laughter.

FIRST WOMAN : Whatever we may say, our Rani has the biggest heart in the world.

KHIRI : In other words, she is the biggest fool under the Sun.

FOURTH WOMAN : That is true. You remember how blind Andi was loaded with money, merely for fun, it seemed to me.

THIRD WOMAN : And that old witch of a potter woman took away from her a real woolen rug as a reward for her facility in weeping.

FOURTH WOMAN : There is no harm in charity, but must it be foolish?

FIRST WOMAN : But she has such a sweet nature.

KHIRI : A great deal of one's sweetness belongs to one's pocket.

FOURTH WOMAN : What I object to in her is her familiarity with vulgar people.

THIRD WOMAN : She could easily have a better companion, to say the least, than Kedar's mother.

FOURTH WOMAN : It is simply courting the applause of the vulgar.

KHIRI : Such is the way of the world. It is all give and take. She supplies food to our mouths, to gather back praise from them. She gets the best of the bargain. For food is vulgar, but praise is for the great.

FOURTH WOMAN : There they, come back from the Rani's room, that woman with the bride.

FIRST WOMAN : Show us what you have got.

SECOND WOMAN : Nothing but a pair of bracelets.

THIRD WOMAN : It sounds like a practical joke.

FOURTH WOMAN : You remember Piari got for her newly married daughter a gold chain besides a pair of earrings.

SECOND WOMAN : Pity is not for the poor, but fortunate are they who have the reputation for it.

FOURTH WOMAN : The generosity of the rich is a mere hobby, it is only to please themselves.

KHIRI : If only Lakshmi, the Goddess of Luck, were kind to me, I would show how to be kind in proper style.

SECOND WOMAN : We pray that your wish may be fulfilled.

FIRST WOMAN : Stop your chatter! I hear the Rani's footsteps!

FOURTH WOMAN : [Loudly] Our Rani is an angel of mercy.

THIRD WOMAN : Wealth has been blessed by the touch of her hands.

Enters KALYANI.

KALYANI : What are you all so busy talking about?

KHIRI : They have been furiously ploughing the ground of your good fame, harrowing, hoeing and raking, weeding out every green thing that bore flowers.

KALYANI : Before you go home remember that if gifts had to flow parallel with expectations they would have run dry and disappeared from the world within a few days of creation. [*She leaves the room.*

FOURTH WOMAN : Isn't that spiteful? She must have been eavesdropping.

KHIRI : No need for that. She is old enough to know by this time that the praise that grows to excess before her face is generally pruned thin behind her back.

FOURTH WOMAN : Really, you people ought to control your tongues.

THIRD WOMAN : If only you can do it, it won't matter much if the rest of us fail.

KHIRI : Enough for the day's work of detraction. Now you can go home with eased hearts and try to forget the smart of receiving favours. [*The women go.—she calls*] Kini, Bini, Kashi!

The girls come.

KASHI : Yes, Granny.

KINI & BINI : Yes, aunt.

KHIRI : Come and take your meal.

GIRLS : We are not hungry.

KHIRI : For eating hunger is not essential, but opportunity is. You will find some milk in the cupboard and some sweets.

KASHI : You are doing nothing but eat all day. Appetite has its limits.

KHIRI : But good things are immensely more limited. Bini, why don't I see the silver comb you had in your hair?

BINI : Poor Khetu's girl— KHIRI : I understand. Benevolence! The plague is in the air in this house! It is fatal for a girl of your circumstances. Our Rani indulges in wasting her means only to prove that they can never be exhausted. But for you to give is to lose forever, do you not see the difference? Now then, off to bed.

[They go.

Enters KALYANI.

KHIRI : Life has become a burden to me, Rani.

KALYANI : You seem to bear it with wonderful ease.

KHIRI : I swear by your feet, I am serious. I have news from home, that my aunt, my father's youngest sister, is on her death-bed.

KALYANI : A year is hardly past since I paid you the funeral expenses of this very same aunt, the youngest one.

KHIRI : What a pity! But you seem to have a keen memory only about my poor aunts.

KALYANI : Does it choke you to ask from me? Must you lie?

KHIRI : Lies are necessary to give dignity to begging. Truth would be monotonous and mean.

KALYANI : But, have I ever denied you, when you asked?

KHIRI : To neglect our weapons, when not needed, is the sure way to miss them in the time of need. But I must tell you that you encourage lies by believing them.

KALYANI : They will fail this time.

KHIRI : I shall not despair about my next chance. Till then, my father's youngest sister shall never be mentioned again.

[Kalyani goes out laughing.]

Mother Goddess of Luck, your favourite bird, the owl, must have daily carried you to this house. Could it by mistake alight on my shoulder, I would feed it with choice morsels of mice flesh till it became languid and lay at my door.

Enters Goddess LAKSHMI.

KHIRI : Visitors again!

LAKSHMI : I am willing to leave, if I am not wanted.

KHIRI : I must not be rash. That seems to be a regular crown on your head. And yet you don't look ridiculous with it as a real queen would do. Tell me who you are.

LAKSHMI : I am Lakshmi.

KHIRI : Not from the stage?

LAKSHMI : No, from my heaven.

KHIRI : You must be tired. Do take your seat, and do not be in a hurry to leave. I know full well you have no mercy for those who have brains. It is, I suppose, because the clever ones need never die of starvation and only fools need your special favour.

LAKSHMI : Are you not ashamed to make your living by cheating your mistress?

KHIRI : It is because you are perverse in your choice that those who have minds live upon those who have money.

LAKSHMI : Intellect I never despise, only the crooked minds I avoid.

KHIRI : The intellect, which is too straight, is only another name for stupidity!

But if you promise me your favour, I give you my solemn word that henceforth my dullness will delight your heart. I shall be content to remain a perfect bore shunned by all intelligent people.

LAKSHMI : Do you think you will ever be able to spend a farthing in charity?

KHIRI : With pleasure. For when charity grazes only at the fringe of one's surplus, it adds to the beauty of the view—and it can also be made paying by good management. Only change our mutual position, and you will find the Rani developing a marvellous talent for devising means to get what is not her own. On the other hand, I shall become perfectly silly in swallowing lies and parting with my possessions, and my temper will grow as insipid as that of an egregious saint.

LAKSHMI : Your prayer is granted. I make you a Rani. The world will forget that you ever were a servant unless you yourself help it to remember.

Act II

.....

KHIRI the Queen.

KHIRI : Where is Kashi?

KASHI : Here I am.

KHIRI : Where are your four attendants?

KASHI : It is a perfect misery to be dogged by servants day and night.

KHIRI : Should the elephant ever complain of the weight of its tusks? Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness!

KHIRI : Teach this girl why she must be followed by attendants.

MALATI : Remember that you are a Rani's grand-daughter. In the Nawab's house, where I used to serve, the Begum had a litter of pet mongooses; each of them had four maids for their attendants, and sepoys besides.

KHIRI : Kashi, do you hear?

ATTENDANT : Moti of our neighbourhood craves audience.

KHIRI : Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness!

KHIRI : What is the form of salutation expected from visitors in your Begum's house?

MALATI : They have to walk forward, salaaming by touching the earth at each step, and then retire walking backward, salaaming again.

KHIRI : Let Moti come before me in proper style.

MALATI brings in MOTI.

MALATI : Bend your head low. Touch the floor, and then touch the tip of your nose. Once again—not so fast—step properly.

MOTI : Ah my poor back! How it aches!

MALATI : Take dust on the tip of your nose three times.

MOTI : I am rheumatic.

MALATI : Once again.

MOTI : Long live Rani Mother. Today, being the eleventh day of the moon, is for fasting and for almsgiving.

KHIRI : Your Rani Mother can ascertain the phases of the moon even without your help, if she finds it profitable.

MOTI : Let me receive alms from our Rani and take leave singing her praises.

KHIRI : The first part of your prayer I prefer to ignore; therest I graciously grant. You may leave immediately singing my praises. Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness!

KHIRI : Let this woman take her leave in proper style.

MOTI : Then I go.

MALATI : Not so easily. Bend your head down. Take up the dust of the floor on the tip of your nose. Once again. Once more.

[Moti goes.]

KHIRI : Bini, what happened to the ring you had on your forefinger? Has it been stolen?

BINI : Not stolen.

KHIRI : Then lost?

BINI : Not lost.

KHIRI : Then someone has cheated you of it?

BINI : No.

KHIRI : You must admit that a thing either remains, or is stolen, or lost, or...

BINI : I have given it away.

KHIRI : Which plainly means that someone has cheated you of it. Tell me, who has it?

BINI : Mallika. She is the poorest of all your servants, withher children starving. I have such a heap of rings, I thought...

KHIRI : Listen to her! Only those of moderate means earn fame by spending in charity, while the rich in doing it earn ingratitude. Charity has no merit for those who possess too much. Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness.

KHIRI : Mallika must be dismissed at once.

MALATI : She shall be driven away.

KHIRI : But not with the ring on her. What music is that outside my palace?

AN ATTENDANT : A marriage procession.

KHIRI : A marriage procession in front of the Rani's house! Suppose I happen to object, what is there to prevent me? Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness!

KHIRI : What do they do in a Nawab's house in such a case?

MALATI : The bridegroom is taken to the prison, and, for three days and nights two amateur flute players practice their scales at each of his ears, and then he is hanged if he survives.

KHIRI : Ask my guards to give everyone of the party ten strokes with a shoe.

FIRST ATTENDANT : Only ten strokes! It almost sounds like a caress.

SECOND ATTENDANT : They ought to rejoice at this happy ending.

THIRD ATTENDANT : Our Rani has the gift of humour, for which God be praised.

Enters a MAID.

MAID : My pay has been in arrears for the last nine months. To slave and yet to borrow money to feed oneself is not to my taste. Either pay up my wages or allow me leave and go home.

KHIRI : To pay up your wages is tolerably good, but it saves a lot of trouble to allow you to leave. Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness.

KHIRI : What is your advice?

MALATI : Let her be fined at least a hundred rupees.

KHIRI : As she is poor I remit fifty rupees out of her fine.

FIRST ATTENDANT : Rani, you are kind.

SECOND ATTENDANT : How lucky for her to get fifty rupees for nothing.

THIRD ATTENDANT : You can as well count it nine hundred and fifty rupees out of a thousand.

FOURTH ATTENDANT : How few are there whose charity can be such a drain.

KHIRI : You do make me blush. [To the Maid] Now you may go away with proper ceremony and finish the rest of your weeping at leisure outside my palace.

[Malati takes away the Maid making her walk backwards with salaams.]

Re-enters MALATI.

MALATI : Rani Kalyani is at your door.

KHIRI : Has she come riding on her elephant?

MALATI : No, walking. She is dusty all over.

KHIRI : Must I admit her in?

FIRST ATTENDANT : She should sit at a proper distance.

SECOND ATTENDANT : Let her stand behind your back.

THIRD ATTENDANT : She can be dismissed by saying that. Your Highness is tired.

KHIRI : Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness!

KHIRI : Advise me what to do.

MALATI : Let all other seats be removed but your own.

KHIRI : You are clever. Let my hundred and twenty slave girls stand in a row outside that door. Sashi, hold the state umbrella over my head. Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness!

KHIRI : Is it all right?

MALATI : Perfect! like a picture!

KHIRI : Bring her into my presence.

[*Malati goes out and returns with Kalyani.*

KALYANI : Are you well?

KHIRI : My desire is to keep well, but the rest of the world tries its best to wreck me.

KALYANI : I must have a talk with you in private.

KHIRI : Nothing can be more private than this. Only yourself and I. These are mere servants. Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness!

KHIRI : Is it possible to send them away?

MALATI : I shudder to think of it.

KALYANI : Then let me tell you briefly. Our Pathan King has forcibly robbed me of my lands.

KHIRI : You are not joking? Then those villages Gopalnagar, Kanaiganj and...

KALYANI : They no longer belong to me.

KHIRI : That's interesting. Haven't you some cash left?

KALYANI : Nothing whatever.

KHIRI : How funny! That sapphire necklace and those wonderful diamonds and that chain of rubies, seven rows deep...

KALYANI : They are all taken away.

KHIRI : Doesn't our scripture say that wealth is unstable like a water drop on a lotus leaf? And your jewelled umbrella, and that throne with its canopy—I suppose they also have followed the rest.

KALYANI : Yes.

KHIRI : This is instructive. Our sages truly say that prosperity is like a beautiful dream that makes the awakening all the more dismal. But have they left you

your palace?

KALYANI : The soldiers are in possession.

KHIRI : It does sound like a story—a Rani yesterday and today a beggar in the street. Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness!

KHIRI : What do you say?

MALATI : Those who grow too high must have their fall.

KALYANI : If I may have shelter here for a short time I can try to recover my lost fortune.

KHIRI : How unfortunate! My palace is crowded with my servants no space left where a needle can be dropped. Of course I could leave you my room and try to rough it in my country-house.

FIRST ATTENDANT : Absurd!

SECOND ATTENDANT : It will simply break our hearts.

KALYANI : I cannot dream of putting you to such inconvenience. I take my leave.

KHIRI : Must you go so soon? By the by if you still have some jewelry left, you may leave it with me for permanent safe keeping.

KALYANI : Nothing has been saved.

KHIRI : How late it is. It gives me a headache if I am made to talk too much I feel it already coming on. [Kalyani goes.] See that my State chair and footstool are carefully put back in the store-room. Malati!

MALATI : Yes, Your Highness!

KHIRI : What do you think of this?

MALATI : It makes one laugh to see the frog turning into a tadpole again.

AN ATTENDANT : A woman craves your audience. Shall I send her away.

KHIRI : No, no, call her in. I am in a delightful mood today.

Enters the WOMAN.

THE WOMAN : I am in trouble.

KHIRI : You want to pass it on to others?

THE WOMAN : Robbers came to my room last night.

KHIRI : And you must take your revenge on me!

THE WOMAN : I ask for your pity.

KHIRI : Pity for what you have lost yourself and nothing for what you ask me to lose?

THE WOMAN : If you must reject my prayer, tell me where I may get it granted.

KHIRI : Kalyani is the proper person to suit you. My men will go and show you her place.

THE WOMAN : Her place is well known to me,—I go back to her! [Revealing herself] I am the Goddess Lakshmi!

KHIRI : If you must leave me, do it in proper style.—Malati, Malati, Tarini! Where are my maids?

Enters KALYANI.

KALYANI : Have you gone mad? It is still dark, and your shouts bid fair to wake the whole neighbourhood.

KHIRI : What ugly dreams I have had all night! It is a new life to wake up from them. Stay a while, let me take the dust of your feet. You are my Rani, and I am your servant forever.

13. The Waterfall

Act I

.....

Scene. A mountainous country, with a road leading to the temple of Bhairava. The scene remains the same throughout the play.

In the background is represented the upper framework of a big iron machine; opposite to this is the spire of the Bhairava temple, with its trident.

Ranajit, the king of Uttarakut, has his royal tent in the mango grove by the side of the road. He is resting there on the way to celebrate the evening festival, on the dark night of the moon. After twenty-five years of strenuous effort, his royal engineer, Bibhuti, has succeeded in building up an embankment across the waterfall called Muktadhara.

The inhabitants of Uttarakut are seen visiting the temple with their offerings and preparing to hold in the temple court-yard the festival, which is to celebrate the achievement of the royal engineer, Bibhuti.

The temple devotees of Bhairava are in the foreground. They are seen making a long circuit in religious procession round the temple. As they sing the praises of the god Bhairava, some are swinging their censers, some are beating the gongs, some are blowing the conch shells.

[The Devotees sing, in procession,]

Victory to Him, the Terrible, The Lord of Destruction, The uttermost Peace, The Breaker of fetters, Who carries us beyond all conflicts, The Terrible, the Terrible!

[They go in.

A STRANGER comes with his offerings of worship and meets a CITIZEN of Uttarakut.

STRANGER : What's that there put up against the sky? It is frightful!

CITIZEN : Don't you know? You're a stranger, I see, It's the Machine.

STRANGER : Machine! What Machine?

CITIZEN : The Royal Engineer, Bibhuti, has been working at it for the last twenty-five years. It's just been finished. A festival is now being held in honour of the occasion.

STRANGER : What's the object of the Machine?

CITIZEN : It has bound up the waterfall of Muktadhara.

STRANGER : What a monster! It looks like a dragon's skull with its fleshless jaws hanging down! The constant sight of it would make the life within you withered and dead.

CITIZEN : The life within us has got a thick hide to protect it! You needn't have any fear for us!

STRANGER : All the same, this isn't a thing to put up nakedly before the sun and stars. Can't you see how it seems to irritate the whole sky by its obtrusion?

CITIZEN : But aren't you going to attend the evening worship of Bhairava?

STRANGER : Yes, I've come out for that object. Every year I bring my offering at this time. But I've never seen such a monstrous obstruction in the sky before. Don't you think it's a sacrilege to allow it to overtop the spire of the Temple?

[He goes.

Enters a woman named AMBA, with a white veil which covers her head and body and trails in the dust.

AMBA : My Suman! My Suman! Won't my son Suman come back to me? You've all returned, but where is he?

CITIZEN : Who are you?

AMBA : I'm Amba of Janai village. Suman, my son, 's the light of my eyes, the breath of my life, my Suman!

CITIZEN : What's happened to him?

AMBA : I don't know where they've taken him. I'd gone to worship Bhairava, in the Temple; and when I came back, I found that he had been taken away.

CITIZEN : Then he must have been recruited for the work of building up the embankment.

AMBA : I've heard that they've taken him along this road to the west of the Hill of Gauri; and my eyesight doesn't reach so far. I can't see the way across it.

CITIZEN : What's the use of grieving! We're going to the Temple. It's a great day for us. You also must come.

AMBA : No, no! From that day, when I lost my son, I've dreaded going to the Temple. Let me tell you our worship never reaches Him. Someone filches it away, as it's carried to the shrine.

CITIZEN : Who's that?

AMBA : The one who's taken my Suman away from me! I don't know who it is, Suman! My Suman! My darling!

[They go.

The MESSENGER from Abhijit, the Crown Prince of Uttarakut, meets BIBHUTI, while he is on his way to the Temple.

MESSENGER : Bibhuti! The Crown Prince has sent me to you.

BIBHUTI : What is his wish?

MESSENGER : You have been for a long time building up an embankment across the waterfall of Muktadhara. Over and over again it gave way, and men perished smothered with sand and earth; and others got washed away by the flood at last, today.

BIBHUTI : My object is accomplished and the sacrifice of their lives has met with its fulfilment.

MESSENGER : The inhabitants of Shiu-tarai are still ignorant of this fact. They cannot believe, that any man can deprive them of the water, which has been to them the gift of God.

BIBHUTI : God has given them the water; but He has given me the power to bind that water.

MESSENGER : They don't know that, within a week, their fields.

BIBHUTI : Why talk about their fields? What have I to do with their fields?

MESSENGER : Wasn't it your object to devastate their fields with drought?

BIBHUTI : My object was to make Man triumphant over the sands and water and stones, which conspired against him. I had not the time to trouble my mind about what would happen to some wretched maize fields of some wretched cultivator in some place or other.

MESSENGER : The Crown Prince asks you, if the time has not come at last for you to trouble your mind about it.

BIBHUTI : No! My mind is occupied with the contemplation of the majesty of the Machine.

MESSENGER : Cannot the cry of hunger interrupt that contemplation?

BIBHUTI : No! the pressure of water cannot break my embankment; the cry of hunger cannot sway my Machine.

MESSENGER : Aren't you afraid of curses?

BIBHUTI : Curses? When labourers became scarce in Uttarakut, I had all the young men of over eighteen years of age from every house of Pattana village

brought out by the King's command, and a great number of them never returned to their homes. My Machine has triumphed against the storm of mothers' curses. He who fights God's own power, is not afraid of man's male-diction.

MESSENGER : The Crown Prince says that you have already attained the glory of a creation; and now it is time for you to attain a greater glory by demolishing that creation.

BIBHUTI : So long as my work remained unfinished, it was mine. But now that it is finished, it belongs to all Uttarakut. I have no longer the right to demolish it.

MESSENGER : The Crown Prince declares, that he will take this right into his own hands.

BIBHUTI : Are these words from our own Crown Prince himself? Does he not belong to us?

MESSENGER : He says, that it has yet to be proved, whether God's Will has found its entrance into the Government of Uttarakut; the Machine must not stand between.

BIBHUTI : It is my mission to prove, by the force of the Machine, that God's throne is ours. Tell the Crown Prince, that no road is left open to make the Machine slacken its grip.

MESSENGER : The God, who breaks, does not need the broad road for his passage. The smallest holes, which escape our notice, are enough for him.

BIBHUTI : Holes! What do you know about them?

MESSENGER : Nothing. But He knows, who makes use of them.

[Messenger goes.]

CITIZENS of Uttarakut, on their way to the Temple, meet BIBHUTI.

FIRST CITIZEN : Engineer, you're a wonderful fellow! We never noticed when you got ahead of us!

SECOND CITIZEN : That's ever been his habit. Nobody knows how he wins in the race. That shaven-headed Bibhuti of our Chabua village got his ears pulled along with ourselves at the village school. And yet he's done such wonders, surpassing us all!

THIRD CITIZEN : Hallo, Gobru! why'd you stand there, basket in hand, with your mouth wide open? Is this the first time you've seen Bibhuti? Bring out the garlands. Let's garland him.

BIBHUTI : No, no! What's the use of doing that?

THIRD CITIZEN : Why do you say 'no'? If the length, of your neck could keep pace with your greatness, it'd grow like a camel's and we'd load it up to the tip of

your nose with garlands.

SECOND CITIZEN : Harish, our drummer, hasn't yet arrived.

FIRST CITIZEN : That man's the very prince of the sluggards! He needs a good beating on the drum of his back.

THIRD CITIZEN : Nonsense, he can beat the drum far better than we can.

FOURTH CITIZEN : The idea came to me, that we might borrow the chariot from Samanta, to drive Bibhuti on it to the Temple. But we hear that the king himself will go walking to the temple. Let's carry him on our shoulders.

BIBHUTI : No, no! This is too much!

FIFTH CITIZEN : Not at all! You were born in the lap of Uttarakut, and now you've got to be raised on its shoulders.

[*They all take him up and sing.*

THE SONG OF THE MACHINE

We salute the Machine, the Machine!

Loud with its rumbling of wheels, Quick with its thunder flame, Fastening its fangs into the breast of the world.

Hurling against obstructions its fiery defiance That melts iron, crushes rocks, And drives the inert from its rest.

We salute the Machine, the Machine!

Now stolidly stable, with timber and stones.

Now light and free, like a storm cloud.

Sailing across earth, water and sky.

The Machine, whose claws wrench bare.

The entrails of the earth.

Whose magic net captures in its meshes.

The elements elusive and subtle.

We salute the Machine, the Machine!

[They all go out.

Enter King RANAJIT and his MINISTER from the Camp.

RANAJIT : You ever failed thoroughly to subdue our subjects in Shiu-tarai. And now, Bibhuti has made it possible at last by controlling the waterfall, Muktadhara. But how is it, that you do not show any sign of elation? Is it jealousy!

MINISTER : Pardon me, Your Majesty. It is not our business to wrestle with the clay and stones by the help of spades and pickaxes. Our weapon is diplomacy. We deal with men's minds. It was I who advised you to send the Crown Prince to Shiu-tarai; and the embankment, which could have been built up by this policy, would have controlled a turbulent force with greater security and permanence than this one before us.

RANAJIT : Yet what was the result? They have not paid taxes for two years. Famines are not unusual among them, yet in former days they had never left their dues unpaid.

MINISTER : Something more valuable than taxes was being realized at the very moment when you ordered the Crown Prince back. It is not a sound policy to despise the small. When things are intolerable, then the small becomes great with the power of their suffering.

RANAJIT : You change the tune of your advice, time after time. I distinctly remember how you have often said to me that it is easiest to put pressure upon

those, who are down below you, from the vantage ground of the higher position; and that foreign subjects must always be under that pressure.

MINISTER : Yes, I did say that; but the circumstances then were different; therefore my advice was timely. But now, RANAJIT : It was against my wish to send the Crown Prince to Shiu-tarai.

MINISTER : Why, Sire?

RANAJIT : Distance has its dignity. Familiarity diminishes it. You can win the hearts of your own people through love; but aliens must be won over by fear.

MINISTER : You forget, Sire, what was the real reason for sending the Crown Prince to Shiu-tarai. For some days, we had noticed in him a spirit of restlessness, had we suspected that, by some chance, he had come to know that he was not born to the royal house, but picked up near the source of this waterfall. Therefore in order to keep his mind engaged, RANAJIT : Yes, I know. He began to visit the source of the waterfall alone, in the night. Once I surprised him, and asked him what was the matter, and why he was there. He said, I find my mother's tongue in the murmurs of this water.

MINISTER : Once I asked him what had come over him, and why he was so often absent from the palace. He answered, that he had come into the world to open out roads: this was the inner meaning of his life, which he must fulfil.

RANAJIT : The prophecy, that he would be the ruler of a great empire, is no longer credible.

MINISTER : But, Sire, it was the gum of your gum who came her especially for the purpose of telling you this. He made that prediction.

RANAJIT : He must have been mistaken. The Crown Prince, in all his moods, has always made me suffer loss. By his last fit of folly, wantonly destroying the wall across the Nandi Pass, he has undone the work in a few days which our forefathers took years to complete. And now there will be nothing to prevent the wool and other products of Shiu-tarai from finding their outlet in markets beyond our own kingdom. This will raise the price of food and clothing in Uttarakut.

MINISTER : You must remember that he is young and takes an one-sided view of his duty, having only the good of Shiu-tarai in view.

RANAJIT : But that is what I call rebellion against his own people. I am sure that Vairagi Dhananjai, of Shiu-tarai, whose business it is to incite our subjects against us, must have had a hand in this business. We must throttle this man with his own rosary. We must capture him.

MINISTER : I dare not contradict. But I am sure you know, that there are dangers which are better left free, than captured.

RANAJIT : You need not trouble yourself about it.

MINISTER : No Sire! I want you to trouble about it.

Enters WARDER.

WARDER : Sire, your uncle, Viswajit, of Mohangarh, has come.

RANAJIT : There is another of them! He is the worst of all those, who have acted their part in spoiling the Crown Prince. The man, who is a relation and yet an alien, is like a hump on the back of a bunch-back. It always follows you. You cannot cut it off, and yet it is a trouble to bear it. What is that?

MINISTER : The devotees have come out, and are going round the temple in procession.

[*The Devotees come and sing the rest of their song.*]

Victory to the fearful flame.

*That tears the heart of darkness, That burns to ashes things that are dead,
Victory to him, whose voice thunders forth truth, Whose right arm smites the
unrighteous, Whose guidance leads mortals across death.*

The Terrible!

[*They go away.*

VISWAJIT, the uncle of RANAJIT, enters.

RANAJIT : My greeting to you! I never expected the good fortune of your coming and joining with us tonight in our worship.

VISWAJIT : I have come to warn you that the God Bhairava will reject the worship you bring to him tonight.

RANAJIT : Such words from you are an insult to our great Festival.

VISWAJIT : Festival? For what? For shutting up the water, that has ever poured forth from the cup of the God of Gods, so that all who thirst may drink? Why did you do it?

RANAJIT : To defeat our enemies!

VISWAJIT : Are you not afraid of making an enemy of your God himself?

RANAJIT : Our victory is His. He is the Patron God of Uttarakut. Therefore. He has allowed His own boon to be withdrawn for our sake. He will bring Shiu-tarai to the feet of Uttarakut, piercing its heart with the spear of thirst.

VISWAJIT : If that is true, then the worship you offer to Him is no worship at all, but merely wages.

RANAJIT : Uncle, you are partial to the outsiders, and against your own kith and

kin. It is through your lessons that Abhijit has failed fully to accept the duties of the kingdom of Uttarakut which are to be his hereafter.

VISWAJIT : Through my lessons! Was there not a time when I belonged to your party? After your actions had caused a rebellion in Pattana, was it not I who crushed it, desolating the whole place? Then came that boy Abhijit into my heart. He came like a flash to light; and those whom I had struck, blinded by the darkness of my heart I could see them for the first time in their full humanity. You accepted him into your home, because you found in him the signs of a World Emperor; and now you try to keep him tied to the limits of the throne of Uttarakut.

RANAJIT : I am sure that it was you who divulged to him the secret, it was you, who told him that he was a foundling picked up at the source of the waterfall, Muktadhara.

VISWAJIT : Yes, I did. It was on the night of the Lamp Festival in my palace I found him standing alone in the balcony, gazing at the summit of Gauri. I asked him, what he was looking at. He said that he saw the vision of the roads of the future, the roads which had not yet been built across the difficult passes of the mountains; the roads that would bring the distant near. When I heard him, I said to myself, that nothing could keep such a child captive, whom some homeless mother had given birth to near the waterfall, which seeks its home in the Unknown. I could not contain myself and I said to him, 'My child, that bare mountain accepted you in its arms when you were born by the roadside. The welcome music of the home was not for you at your birth.'

RANAJIT : Now, I understand.

VISWAJIT : What do you understand?

RANAJIT : Abhijit has lost his feeling? attachment for our royal house ever since the time he heard this news from you. In order to show this disaffection the first thing he did was to break the wall of the fort of Nandi and open out the road of Nandi Pass.

VISWAJIT : What harm was there in that? The open road belongs to all,—as much to Uttarakut as to Shiu-tarai.

RANAJIT : Uncle, I have borne with you for long, but no more of this! You must leave my kingdom!

VISWAJIT : I have not the power to leave you. But if you leave me, I shall merely suffer it. [Goes.

Enters AMBA.

AMBA : Who are you there? The sun is about to set, but my Suman hasn't yet come back.

RANAJIT : Who are you?

AMBA : I'm nobody. He, who was my all in all, has been taken away from me along this path. And has this path no end? Does my Suman walk and ever walk on, into the West, across the peak of Gauri, where the sun is sinking, the light is sinking, and everything is sinking?

RANAJIT : [To his Minister.] It seems that— MINISTER : Yes, Sire, it must be connected with the building up of the embankment.

RANAJIT : [To Amba.] Set your mind free from all grief. I assure you, your son has received the last great gift of life.

AMBA : If that were true, he would have brought it to my hands in the evening. For I'm his mother.

RANAJIT : He will bring it. That evening time has not yet come.

AMBA : May your words turn out to be true! I shall wait for him on this road leading to the temple.

[She goes.

A SCHOOLMASTER enters, with a group of BOYS.

SCHOOLMASTER : These wretched boys are in for a good caning, I can see. Shout, with your loudest voices boys: 'Salve Imperator.'

BOYS : 'Salve Im'

SCHOOLMASTER : 'perator!'

BOYS : 'perator!'

SCHOOLMASTER : 'Salve Imperator Imperatorum!'

BOYS : 'Salve Imperatorum!'

SCHOOLMASTER : 'Imperatorum!'

BOYS : 'Imperatorum!'

RANAJIT : Where are you going?

SCHOOLMASTER : Your Majesty is about to confer special honour on the Royal Engineer, Bibhuti; and I am taking my boys to the festival, in order to share in the rejoicing. I do not want my boys to miss any opportunity of participating in the glory of Uttarakut.

RANAJIT : Do these boys know what Bibhuti has done?

THE BOYS : [Clapping their hands and jumping.] Yes! Yes! We know. He has shut up the drinking water of the Shiu-tarai people!

RANAJIT : Why has he shut it up?

BOYS : To give them a good lesson.

RANAJIT : What for?

BOYS : To make them smart!

RANAJIT : Why?

BOYS : Because they are bad!

RANAJIT : Why bad?

BOYS : Oh they are terribly bad. Everybody knows it!

RANAJIT : Then, you do not know why they are bad?

SCHOOLMASTER : Certainly, they know it, Your Majesty. [To the Boys] What's happened to you, you blockheads? Haven't you Haven't you, in your books? Haven't you in your books? [In a low voice, whispering] Their religion is rotten!

BOYS : Yes! Yes! Their religion is rotten!

SCHOOLMASTER : And they are not like us, come, answer, boys, don't you remember [Pointing to his nose].

BOYS : Yes, they haven't got high-bridged noses.

SCHOOLMASTER : Good! Of course you know what has been proved by our Professor. What does a high-bridged nose denote?

BOYS : The greatness of the race!

SCHOOLMASTER : Good! Good! And what is the mission of the greater races? Speak out! They conquer speak out! They conquer, the world, for themselves. Is not that so?

BOYS : Yes! They conquer the world for themselves.

SCHOOLMASTER : Is there a single case in which Uttarakut has been defeated in a war?

BOYS : No, never!

SCHOOLMASTER : You all know how the grandfather of our king, with only 293 soldiers, put to flight 31, 700 barbarians from the South. Isn't that true, boys?

BOYS : Yes!

SCHOOLMASTER : Your Majesty may rest assured that these very boys will one day be a terror to all those who have the misfortune to be born outside our boundaries. I shall be false to my vocation as a schoolmaster if this does not happen. I never allow myself to forget for one moment the great responsibility which we teachers have. We build up men! Your statesmen merely use them. And yet Your Majesty should take the trouble to compare the pay which they draw, with what we get.

MINISTER : But those very students are your best reward.

SCHOOLMASTER : Wonderfully uttered! Indeed, they are our best reward!

Beautiful! But, Sir, food is becoming so dear now-a-days. For instance, the butter from cow's milk was once MINISTER : You needn't go on. I shall ponder over this question of the butter from cow's milk. Now you may take your leave.

[*The Schoolmaster, with his Boys, departs.*

RANAJIT : Inside the skull of this schoolmaster of yours, there is nothing but the butter made of cow's milk.

MINISTER : Nevertheless, Sire, such people are useful. He loyally repeats the lesson, day after day, according to the instruction that he has received. If he had more brains, such a thing as this would not be possible.

RANAJIT : What is that in the sky?

MINISTER : Have you forgotten about it? That is the top of Bibhuti's Machine.

RANAJIT : I have never seen it so clear as it is today.

MINISTER : The storm this morning has cleared the sky. That is why it is so distinct.

RANAJIT : Don't you see how the sun from behind it looks red with anger, and the Machine appears like the menacing fist of a giant. It has not been at all proper to raise it so high.

MINISTER : The thing appears like a spasm of agony in the heart of the sky.

RANAJIT : It is time for us to go to the temple.

[*They go.*

A second group of CITIZENS of Uttarakut enters.

FIRST CITIZEN : Don't you notice, how Bibhuti seeks to evade us now-a-days? He tries to rub off from his skin the fact that he was bred up along with ourselves. One day he'll realize, that it's not good for the sword to grow longer than the sheath.

SECOND CITIZEN : Whatever you may say, Bibhuti has upheld the reputation of Uttarakut.

FIRST CITIZEN : Stop that nonsense! You're making too much of him! This embankment, which has cost him all his resources, has given way ten times at least.

THIRD CITIZEN : Who knows that it won't give way once again?

FIRST CITIZEN : Have you noticed the mound on the northern side.

SECOND CITIZEN : What about it?

FIRST CITIZEN : Don't you know? Everybody, who has seen it, says— SECOND CITIZEN :

CITIZEN : What? Tell me.

FIRST CITIZEN : You area simpleton! Don't you know, that from one end to the

other, it's Oh, rubbish!

SECOND CITIZEN : Do explain it to me a little more clearly.

FIRST CITIZEN : Wait a while. It'll explain itself, when all of a sudden— [Ends with a gesture.]

SECOND CITIZEN : Terrible! All of a sudden?

FIRST CITIZEN : Yes! Jagru will be able to tell you all about it. He has measured every inch of it.

SECOND CITIZEN : That's the best thing about Jagru. He has a wonderfully cool head. When everybody's delirious with admiration, he quietly brings out his measuring tape.

THIRD CITIZEN : Some people say that all the science of Bibhuti FIRST CITIZEN : Yes, yes! It's stolen from Benkot Varma. He-was a great man, indeed! Yes indeed, he-was great! There was nobody like him. What brains! What prodigious brain power! And yet Bibhuti gets all the rewards, and that poor man,—he actually died of starvation.

THIRD CITIZEN : Only of starvation?

FIRST CITIZEN : Whether from starvation or from some food from some hand, who knows? But what's the use of discussing it? Someone may overhear what we 're saying. There are all kind of scandal-mongers in this land. Our people can't bear to hear good of others.

SECOND CITIZEN : Whatever you may say, he's a— FIRST CITIZEN : What wonder is there in that. Just consider in what soil he flourished. That Chabua village of ours, don't you realize, it has given birth to my great grandfather? Of course you, know his name.

SECOND CITIZEN : Of course! Everybody in Uttarakut knows him. He's that what do you call it?

FIRST CITIZEN : Bhaskar. There was none in the whole kingdom of Uttarakut, who could come near to him in making snuff. The great Rajah Satrujit couldn't pass a day without buying snuff from him.

THIRD CITIZEN : Let's hurry to the temple now. We belong to the same village as Bibhuti. Our place will be on his right side.

[*Batu from behind the screen cries out: 'Don't go, friend! Don't go! Turn away from this path!'*

SECOND CITIZEN : There he is, old Batu!

BATU enters with a torn blanket on his back and a crooked stick in his hand.

FIRST CITIZEN : Where are you going, Batu?

BATU : I warn you, friends! Don't take that path! Go back, while there's time!

SECOND CITIZEN : Why?

BATU : They'll sacrifice, sacrifice human beings! They've taken away by force two of my grandsons, who never returned.

THIRD CITIZEN : Sacrifice? Before whom?

BATU : Before the Demon Thirst!

SECOND CITIZEN : Who's that?

BATU : The Demon whose dry tongue grows and grows, like a flame of fire fed by the oil.

FIRST CITIZEN : Madman! We're going to Bhairava's temple. Where's your Demon Thirst there?

BATU : Haven't you heard the news? They're going to dethrone Bhairava today, and the Demon Thirst will occupy his altar.

SECOND CITIZEN : Hold your tongue madman! The people of Uttarakut will cut you to pieces, if they hear you talk like this.

BATU : They're throwing mud at me, and the children are pelting me with stones. Everybody's saying, that my grandsons were fortunate in being able to give up their lives.

FIRST CITIZEN : That's true!

BATU : True? If the offer of life does not bring life in return, if with death you gain death itself, then Bhairava will never allow such an utter loss! I warn you, friends, never take that path!

[He goes.]

SECOND CITIZEN : I must confess his words seem to send a shiver of cold through my blood.

FIRST CITIZEN : Ranju, you're a great coward. Let's go!

[They all go.]

Enter the Crown Prince ABHIJIT and the Prince SANJAY.

SANJAY : I cannot understand why you are leaving our palace.

ABHIJIT : You will not fully understand it. For how are you to know that my life is a stream which must have its free course over the stones of the king's house.

SANJAY : We all have noticed that you have been feeling restless for some time past. It seemed as if the bond that kept you tied to us was slackening every day. Has it snapped at last?

ABHIJIT : Sanjay! Look at that image of the sunset over the peak of Gauri. Some bird of fire has spread its wings and is flying towards the night, the setting sun

has drawn in the sky the picture of my own life's adventure.

SANJAY : To me the picture is different. Look how the top of that Machine has pierced the heart of this evening. It seems like a stricken bird falling head foremost into the valley of night! I do not like this omen! Now is the time for rest. Come into the palace.

ABHIJIT : Where there is an obstruction, there can be no rest.

SANJAY : How have you discovered, after all these days, this obstruction of which you are speaking?

ABHIJIT : I discovered it when I heard that they had bound the waters of Muktadhara.

SANJAY : I do not understand the meaning of these words.

ABHIJIT : Every man has the mystery of his inner life somewhere written in the outer world. The secret of my own life has its symbol in that waterfall of Muktadhara. When I saw its movements shackled I received a shock at the very root of my being; I discovered that this throne of Uttarakut is an embankment built up across my own life's current. And I have come out into the road to set free its course.

SANJAY : Take me with you as your companion!

ABHIJIT : 'No! You have to find out your own course. If you follow me, then I shall only obscure it your own true path.

SANJAY : Do not be so hard! You hurt me!

ABHIJIT : You know my heart; and you will understand me even when I pain you.

SANJAY : I do not wish to question you as to the source from which your call has come. But, Prince, now it is evening, and the music of the nightfall comes floating from the palace tower. Has not this also its call? All that is stern and strenuous may have its glory. But all that is sweet has also its value.

ABHIJIT : The pursuit of the hard is for paying the price of the sweet.

SANJAY : Do you remember, the other day, you were surprised to find a white lotus before your seat, where you have your prayer? Someone had gathered that lotus early in the morning before you were awake, and you were not told who it was. Can you ignore, at a moment like this, the divine gift, which lies hidden in the heart of that little incident? Does not the face of that timid creature haunt your memory, who hid herself, but not her worship?

ABHIJIT : Yes, it does! And for the sake of that very love, which is in this world, I cannot tolerate this hideousness. It kills the music of the earth, and laughs its sinister laughter, displaying its rows of steel teeth in the sky. Because I love the paradise of the gods, I am ready to fight the Titans who menace it.

SANJAY : Cannot you see the picture of an infinite sorrow in the twilight glow,

clinging to that purple hill?

ABHIJIT : Yes, my heart fills with tears. I never boast of harshness as heroic. Look at that tiny bird, sitting on the topmost branch of the pine tree, all alone. I do not know whether it will go to its nest, or take its journey across the night to a distant forest; but the sight of that lonely bird gazing at the last ray of the setting sun fills my heart with a sadness which is sweet. How beautiful is this world! Here is my salutation to all that has made my life sweet.

Enters BATU.

BATU : They wouldn't let me go on, but turned me back with blows.

ABHIJIT : What has happened to you, Batu? There is a wound on your forehead, from which blood flows.

BATU : I came out to warn them; I cried out to them to leave that path and go back.

ABHIJIT : Why?

BATU : Don't you know, Prince? They're going to install, upon the altar of the Machine, the Demon Thirst. They will sacrifice human beings to this Demon.

SANJAY : What is this wild talk?

BATU : They're already poured out the blood of my own two grandsons at the foundation of this altar. I'd hoped that this shrine of sin would break into pieces with its own load of evil. But that has not yet come to pass; and the God Bhairava has not yet awakened out of sleep.

ABHIJIT : Yes, the shrine will break in pieces. The time has come!

BATU : [Coming close to him, whispers.] Then you must have heard, heard the call of Bhairava?

ABHIJIT : Yes, I have heard.

BATU : Then there is no escape for you?

ABHIJIT : No escape for me!

BATU : Don't you see how the blood flows from my wound? Will you be able to bear it, Prince, when your heart bleeds?

ABHIJIT : By the grace of Bhairava, I shall bear it.

BATU : When everybody becomes your enemy? When your own people renounce you?

ABHIJIT : I must bear it!

BATU : Then there's no fear!

ABHIJIT : No fear for me.

BATU : Good! Keep me in your mind I'm also bound for that path. You'll be able

to recognize me, even in the dark, by this mark of blood, which Bhairava Himself has painted on my forehead.

[Batu goes.

Enters the King's Guard, UDDHAB.

UDDHAB : [To the Crown Prince.] Sire, what made you open out the road along the Nandi Pass?

ABHIJIT : To save the people of Shiu-tarai from perpetual famine.

UDDHAB : Our King is kind! Is he not always ready to help them?

ABHIJIT : When the right hand in its miserliness shuts out the path of plenitude the generosity of the left hand is no help at all. For this I have freed the passage of provisions in Shiu-tarai. I have no respect for that mercy, which keeps poverty dependent on it.

UDDHAB : The King says, that you have taken the bottom out of Uttarakut's food vessel by breaking down the fort of the Nandi Pass.

ABHIJIT : I have set Uttarakut free from remaining for all time a parasite of Shiu-tarai.

UDDHAB : It was extremely rash of you. the King has heard the news. I dare not say any more. Leave this place at once, if you can do so. It's not safe for me to be seen talking with you on the road. [Uddhab goes.

Enters AMBA.

AMBA : Suman, my darling! Have none of you followed that path, along which they took my Suman?

ABHIJIT : Have they taken your son away?

AMBA : Yes, towards the West, where the sun sinks, where the days come to their end.

ABHIJIT : My journey is also along that path.

AMBA : Then remember an unfortunate woman like me. When you meet him, tell him that mother is waiting.

ABHIJIT : Yes, I shall tell him.

[Amba goes out.

[The Devotees of Bhairava enter singing.]

Victory to Him, who is Terrible!

The Lord of Destruction!

The uttermost Peace!

*The Dissolver of doubts, The Breaker of fetters!
Who carries us beyond all conflicts.
The Terrible! The Terrible!*

[They go.

Enters a General, BIJAYPAL.

BIJAYPAL : Princes, accept my humble salutation. I come from the King.

ABHIJIT : What is his command?

BIJAYPAL : I must tell it to you in secret.

SANJAY : [Holding Abhijit by his hand.] Why in secret? Secret even from me?

BIJAYPAL : Such is my instruction. I beg you, Crown Prince, to enter the tent.

SANJAY : I must accompany him. [Attempts to do so.

BIJAYPAL : No! That will be against the wishes of the King.

SANJAY : Then I shall wait for him at this road side.

[Abhijit, followed by Bijaypal, goes towards the tent.

Enters a FLOWER-SELLER.

FLOWER-SELLER : [To Sanjay.] Sir, who is this man, Bibhuti, of Uttarakut?

SANJAY : Why do you seek him?

FLOWER-SELLER : I'm a stranger coming from Deotali, and I've heard that they are throwing flowers on his path in Uttarakut. He must be some saint. So I've brought these flowers from my own garden to offer to him.

SANJAY : He is not a saint, but a clever man.

FLOWER-SELLER : What has he done?

SANJAY : He has bound up our waterfall.

FLOWER-SELLER : Is all this worship for that? Will the binding of the waterfall serve God's purpose?

SANJAY : No. It will fetter God's own designs.

FLOWER-SELLER : I don't understand.

SANJAY : It is good for you not to understand it. Go back again! [She starts to go.] Stay, hear me! Will you sell that white lotus to me?

FLOWER-SELLER : I can't sell this flower, which I had already offered in my mind to some saint.

SANJAY : The saint, whom I venerate more than anyone else, shall have this.

FLOWER-SELLER : Then take it. [He offers money.] No! No price for this! Give the Father my salutation, and tell him that I'm the poor woman of Deotali, who sells

flowers.

[She goes.

Enters BIJAYPAL.

SANJAY : Where is the Crown Prince?

BIJAYPAL : He is a captive in the tent.

SANJAY : The Crown Prince a captive! What arrogance!

BIJAYPAL : Here is the warrant from the King.

SANJAY : Whose conspiracy is this? Let me go to him for a moment.

BIJAYPAL : Pardon me, I cannot.

SANJAY : Then arrest me, also! I am a rebel!

BIJAYPAL : I have not the instructions.

SANJAY : I go myself to force from him the instructions. [*He goes some way, and then returns.*] Give this white lotus to the Crown Prince, in my name.

[They go out.

Enters the Bairagi, DHANANJAY of Shiu-tarai with CITIZENS who are his followers from Shiu-tarai.

DHANANJAY : [To one of his followers.] You look as pale as a ghost! Why? What's the matter?

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Master, the blows from Chandopal, the King's brother-in-law, have become intolerable!

The Shiu-tarai Leader, GANESH, enters.

GANESH : Father, give me your orders! Let me snatch away the baton from that scoundrel, Chandopal, and prove to him what a blow can really mean.

DHANANJAY : You had better try to prove what a 'no blow' can really mean! The helm's not for beating the waves, but for conquering them by keeping itself steady.

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Then, what's your wish?

DHANANJAY : Raise your head! Say that nothing hurts you, and then the hurt will receive its death blow.

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : It's difficult to say that nothing hurts me!

DHANANJAY : The true man within us is a flame of Fire. He consumes all hurts in light. Only the brute beast is hurt. The brute beast is flesh, and it goes whining

when it is struck. Why do you stand with your mouths gaping wide open? Cannot you follow my words!

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Father, we understand you! It doesn't matter if we fail to understand your words.

DHANANJAY : Then it's past cure.

GANESH : It takes a most tedious time to understand words. But when we understand you, we are saved at once.

DHANANJAY : Saved at once? But what about later on?

GANESH : We know that we must come to you for our shelter, and that shows that we understand.

DHANANJAY : No, not in the least. That's why your eyes are still red with passion, and your voice lacks music. Shall I give you the proper tune? [He sings.]

Let your hurts come upon me, Master!

More, if you wish, and yet more!

You cowards! In order to avoid being hurt, you either hurt others, or else run away. Both are the same. Both are for the brute beasts. [He sings again.]

I hide myself, I run away.

I try to avoid you in fear.

Capture me, and take all that I have.

Look here, children! I am going to make my final reckoning with the great god, Mrityunjay the Conqueror of death I want to say to him, 'Try me, and see if blows hurt me, or not.'

I must not in this voyage burden my boat with those who fear and those who frighten others.

[He sings again.]

May this be my last stake at the game.

Let me see whether I win or thou!

In the markets, in the highways, among the crowds, I had my mirth and I laughed.

Let me see if at last you can make me weep!

ALL : [Crying out together] Bravo, Father 'Let me see if at last you can make me weep.'

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Tell us where are you going?

DHANANJAY : To the King's Festival.

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : But the King's Festival is not for you. Why do you go there at all?

DHANANJAY : I must make my name known in the King's Court.

FOURTH SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : When once he catches you then he'll. But, no! that must never be!

DHANANJAY : Let it be, man! Let it be to the full!

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : You're not afraid of the King, Master. But we dread him!

DHANANJAY : That's only because, in your secret hearts, you want to hurt. But I don't want to hurt, and therefore never fear.

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Very well then. We also shall accompany you!

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Yes! We shall go to the King's Court.

DHANANJAY : What will you ask the King?

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : There are so many things to ask. But the question is, which of them will be granted.

DHANANJAY : Why not ask for the kingdom?

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Father, you're joking!

DHANANJAY : Not at all! If the kingdom belonged to the king alone and not also to the subjects, then the hopping about of that one-legged kingdom might make you jump with fright; but it would bring tears to the eyes of God! You must claim the kingdom for the sake of the king himself.

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : But when they come to push us out?

DHANANJAY : The push from the king will come back upon the king himself, if your claim has truth. [He sings.]

I forget, and forget again, my Lord, That Thou callest us to Thine own seat.

Shall I tell you the truth, children? So long as you don't recognize the seat to be His, your claim to the throne will be futile.

[He sings again.]

Thy door-keepers do not know us, They shut the gate against our face. We stand outside Thy house.

How are the door-keepers to recognize us? The dust has settled upon the mark of royalty on our foreheads. We can show nothing to prove our claim.

[He sings once more.]

Thou hast given us life with Thine own hand, And with it Thy crown of honour, But greed, fear and shame smudge it with grimy touch, And Thy gift is obscured day by day.

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Whatever you may say, we don't understand why you're going to the King's Court.

DHANANJAY : Shall I tell you why? It's because I have misgivings in my mind about you.

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Why, Father?

DHANANJAY : The more you cling to me, while trying to swim, the more you forget your lessons in swimming, and also keep dragging me down. I must take my leave of you and go where nobody follows me.

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : But the king won't easily let you go!

DHANANJAY : Why should he let me go?

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : We can never remain quiet, if they molest you!

DHANANJAY : If He, to whom I have dedicated this body of mine, chooses to suffer through me, you also will have to be patient.

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Very well, then, Father! Let us also go, and then let happen what may!

DHANANJAY : You must wait here for me. This is a strange place and I must get to know something about the neighbourhood.

[*He goes.*

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Have you noticed the features of these men of Uttarakut? They look as if the Creator, when He made them, had begun with a big lump of flesh and had had no time to finish His work.

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : And do you see how they dress themselves in tight clothes.

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : They pack themselves up tightly in bundles as though to prevent the least leakage.

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : They're born to drudgery. They spend their lives in going from market to market, and from one landing place to another.

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : They've no culture worth speaking of. The books that they have are worth nothing.

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Nothing at all. Haven't you noticed the letters in them like lines of white ants creeping across the page.

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Well said! White ants indeed! Their culture gnaws everything to pieces.

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : And heaps up earth mounds. They kill life with their arms and destroy mind with their books.

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Sin! Sin! Our guru says that even to cross their shadow is a sin. Do you know why?

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Tell me, why.

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : After the nectar had been churned up by the Gods

and Titans from the sea, some drops of it were spilt from the Gods' cups. From the clay thus formed the ancestor of the Shiu-tarai was made. And when the Titans licked the nearly empty cups of the Gods and threw them into the ditch, the broken pieces of the cups were fashioned into the ancestor of the Uttarakut people. That's why they are so hard, and faugh! so unclean!

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Where did you learn all this?

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : From our own guru.

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : [Reverently bowing his head.] Guru, you're truth itself!

A group of UTTARAKUT CITIZENS enters.

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Everything has passed off so happily, excepting the admission of that blacksmith, Bibhuti into the Kshatriya order by our king.

SECOND UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : That's all a domestic question. We shall deal with that, later on. Meanwhile let's cry 'Long live the Royal Engineer, Bibhuti.'

THIRD UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : He who has united the Kshatriya's weapons with the tools of the Vaishya! 'Long live Bibhuti.'

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Hallo! There are some men from Shiu-tarai.

SECOND UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : HOW d'you know?

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Don't you see their ear-cups. How queer they look! They seem like people suddenly thumped on the head and thus stopped in their growth.

SECOND UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Of all head dresses, why have they chosen this? Do they think that ears are a mistake of the Creator?

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : They have put an embankment over their ears, lest the precious little intelligence which they have should ooze out.

THIRD UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : No, it's rather to prevent any commonsense entering in to trouble them.

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Some ear-pulling ghost of Uttarakut might haunt them!

[They all laugh.]

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Hallo! You clodhoppers from Shiu-tarai! What's the matter with you?

THIRD UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Don't you know that today's our festival? Come and join us in our cry 'Long live the Royal Engineer Bibhuti!'

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Are your throats dry? Shout 'Long live Bibhuti.'

GANESH : Why should we cry 'Long live Bibhuti'? What has he done?

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Just hark at him! ‘What has he done?’ The tremendous news has not reached them yet! That’s all the result of their ear-caps!

[*The Uttarakut Citizens laugh.*

THIRD UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Do you ask what he has done? Why! The water to quench your thirst is in his hands! If he withholds it, then you will dry up, like toads in a time of drought!

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Our water in Bibhuti’s hands! Has he suddenly become a God?

SECOND UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : He has dismissed God from service. He’ll take up God’s work himself.

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Is there any specimen of his work?

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Yes! That embankment across Muktadhara.

[*Shiu-Tarai Citizens laugh loudly.*

SECOND UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : D’you take this to be a joke?

GANESH : Why! What else can it be? That son of a blacksmith to snatch away from us the gift that comes from Bhairava Himself!

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : See with your own eyes there in the sky!

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Great heavens! What on earth is that?

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Good God! It looks like a gigantic grasshopper just going to jump towards the stars!

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : That grasshopper is going to stop, with his legs, your water supply!

GANESH : Leave off that foolery, won’t you? Some day you will be saying that the son of this blacksmith is riding the grasshopper in order to catch the moon!

FIRST UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : That’s the beauty of their ear-caps. They refuse to listen and thus they perish!

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : We refuse to perish!

THIRD UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : That sounds well! But who is to save you?

GANESH : Haven’t you seen our God, our Vairagi Dhananjay? One of his bodies is in the temple, and one outside.

THIRD UTTARAKUT CITIZEN : Listen to these men with their ear-caps on! Nobody can save them from utter destruction.

[*The Uttarakut Citizens go out.*

Enters DHANANJAY.

DHANANJAY : Fools! What have you been saying? Is it in my hand to save you

from death? Then you're dead thrice over!

GANESH : The Uttarakut people said to us that Bibhuti has stopped the water of Muktadhara.

DHANANJAY : Did they say that an embankment had been raised?

GANESH : Yes, Father!

DHANANJAY : You haven't listened to them carefully!

GANESH : It is not worth listening to!

DHANANJAY : Have you kept all your ears with me alone? Must I hear for all of you?

THIRD SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : What is there to hear at all. Father?

DHANANJAY : Is it a small thing, to control the turbulent power, whether it is outside us or within us?

GANESH : That may be; but what about this stoppage of DHANANJAY : That's a different matter; and Bhairava will never suffer it to be done. I must go and find out all about it. This world is full of voices. To stop listening to them is to perish.

[*Dhananjay goes out.*

Another CITIZEN from Shiu-tarai enters.

FOURTH SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Bishan, what's the news?

BISHAN : The Crown Prince has been recalled from Shiu-tarai.

ALL : Impossible!

BISHAN : What are you to do?

ALL : We shall take him back.

BISHAN : HOW?

ALL : By force.

BISHAN : What about our King?

ALL : We deny him.

Enter King RANAJIT and MINISTER.

RANAJIT : Whom do you defy?

ALL : [To the King.] Long live your Majesty!

GANESH : We have come to you with our prayer.

RANAJIT : What is it?

ALL : We want the Crown Prince for ourselves.

RANAJIT : You are modest in your demand.

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Yes, we must take him back to Shiu-tarai.

RANAJIT : And then triumphantly forgot to pay the taxes?

ALL : But we're starving.

RANAJIT : Where is your leader?

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : [Pointing to Ganesh.] Here's our leader, Ganesh.

RANAJIT : No. Where is the Vairagi.

GANESH : There he comes.

Enters DHANANJAY.

RANAJIT : It is you who make these people forget themselves.

DHANANJAY : Yes, Sir. And I forget myself also.

RANAJIT : Don't parry words with me! Tell me, are you for paying taxes?

DHANANJAY : No, Sir! Decidedly no!

RANAJIT : You are insolent.

DHANANJAY : I must not give you what is not yours.

RANAJIT : Not mine?

DHANANJAY : A part of our excess food belongs to you, but not the food which belongs to our hunger.

RANAJIT : Do you prevent my people from paying me my dues?

DHANANJAY : Yes, they are timid and ready to submit. But I tell them. 'Give your life only to Him, whose gift it is.'

RANAJIT : Their timidity you merely repress with your own assurance; but when that bloated assurance is pricked somewhere, the fear will burst out with double force, and then they will be lost. You have trouble written on the tablet of your fate.

DHANANJAY : I have taken that tablet to my heart. There dwells He, who is above all trouble.

RANAJIT : [To Shiu-Tarai Citizens] All of you go back to your place, and the Vairagi will remain here.

ALL : No, that cannot be!

DHANANJAY : [Sings.]

"*Remain!*" You cry.

But, strain hard as you may, Only that will remain which must.

King! You can keep nothing by straining.

He who gives all, keeps all.

That which your greed tries to keep, is a stolen thing.

It will have to be given up.

[*Sings.*]

You are wilful, you are strong, in the injuries you inflict, There is one who suffers, And only what he chooses to bear, shall he borne.

You make a mistake. King, when you think that the world, which you take by force is your world.

What you keep free, you gain. But seize it, and it eludes you!

[*Sings.*]

You dream that you make the world dance, to the tune of your own desire; Suddenly your eyes open; you see, That things happen which you never wish.

RANAJIT : Minister, keep this Vairagi under custody.

MINISTER : Sire, [*Pauses.*]

RANAJIT : This command of mine is not agreeable to you?

MINISTER : A terrible engine of punishment is made ready. You merely weaken it, by trying to add to its fierceness.

SHIU-TARAI CITIZENS : We shall never allow this.

DHANANJAY : Leave me, I tell you! Leave me and go!

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Haven't you heard, Father, that we have also lost our Crown Prince?

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Who is there to sustain our strength if we lose both of you?

DHANANJAY : I am defeated! Let me retire.

ALL : Why, Father?

DHANANJAY : You rejoice to think, that you gain me, and take no heed that you lose yourself! I cannot make good that loss! You put me to shame!

FIRST SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Don't say that! We shall do whatever you wish.

DHANANJAY : Then leave me and go.

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : But have you the heart to keep away from us? Do you not love us?

DHANANJAY : It is better to love you and keep you free, than to love you and smother you by my love. Go! No more of this! Go, and leave me!

SECOND SHIU-TARAI CITIZEN : Very well, Father, we go. But DHANANJAY : No but! Hold your heads high and go!

ALL : Very well, father, we go! [*They move slowly away.*]

DHANANJAY : Is that hat you call going? Quick! Begone!

GANESH : As you wish. But you must know, that all our hopes and thoughts

remain with you. [They go.

RANAJIT : What are you thinking of, Vairagi? Why are you so silent?

DHANANJAY : They have made me anxious, King!

RANAJIT : For what?

DHANANJAY : I am afraid that I have succeeded in doing what your own Chandopal has failed to accomplish with his baton.

RANAJIT : What makes you think so?

DHANANJAY : Once I chuckled to myself and said,—‘I am strengthening their hopes and thoughts.’ But today they brutally threw it in my face, that it was I who had robbed them of their hopes and thoughts.

RANAJIT : How has that been made possible?

DHANANJAY : The more I excited them, the less I matured their minds. By making people run and rush, you do not lighten their load of debts.—They believe me to be greater even than their Providence, and to have the power to write off the debt, which they owe to their God. And therefore they shut their eyes and cling to me with all their might.

RANAJIT : They have taken you to be their God.

DHANANJAY : And thus they stop at me, and never reach their true God. He, who could have guided them from within, has been obscured by me, who forced them from outside.

RANAJIT : You prevent them, when they come to pay their dues to their king. But do not you suffer in your mind, when they come to pay you the offering which is for their God?

DHANANJAY : I do indeed! I feel as if I could sink through the ground. They become bankrupt in their minds by spending on me all their worship. The responsibility for their debt will be mine; and I shall not be able to escape from it.

RANAJIT : What is your duty now?

DHANANJAY : To remain away from them. If it is true that I have raised an embankment across the freedom of their minds, then I am afraid the God Bhairava will take both your Bibhuti and me to account at the same time.

RANAJIT : Then why delay? Why not move away?—[To Uudhab] Take this Vairagi to my tent and keep him there.

[Uddhab takes Dhananjay to the tent.]

RANAJIT : Minister! Go and see Abhijit in the guard house. If you find him in a repentant mood, then—

MINISTER : Sire, is it not right, that you yourself should personally— RANAJIT :

No, no! He is a traitor against his own people. I shall not see his face, until he confesses his guilt I go back to my palace. Send me the news there! [The King goes.

Enter the DEVOTEES, who sing.

Victory to the fearful Flame, That tears the heart of Darkness That burns to ashes things which are dead Victory to Him, whose voice thunders forth Truth Whose right arm smites the unrighteous Whose guidance leads mortals across Death [They go.

UDDHAB re-enters.

UDDHAB : What is this? The King goes away without seeing the Crown Prince!

MINISTER : He was afraid, lest his resolution should fail him. He was prolonging his talk with the Vairagi, because the conflict was going on in his mind. He could not decide to go into the tent or to leave the tent. I must go and see the Crown Prince.

[They go out.

Some CITIZENS from Uttarakut enter.

FIRST CITIZEN : We must be firm. Let's go to the King.

SECOND CITIZEN : What's the good of it? The Crown Prince is the jewel of his heart. We will never be able to judge him; he will only be angry with us.

FIRST CITIZEN : That doesn't matter. We must give him a piece of our mind, whatever may happen after. The Crown Prince made such a fine display of his love for us, and is this the end? Shiu-tarai has become greater in importance to him than Uttarakut.

SECOND CITIZEN : If this can come to pass, then there's no justice in the world!

THIRD CITIZEN : It's impossible to trust anybody merely by his appearance.

FIRST CITIZEN : If our king doesn't punish him, we must do it ourselves.

SECOND CITIZEN : What will you do?

FIRST CITIZEN : He'll not find his place here. He must be sent off along the very path he has opened out at Nandi Pass.

THIRD CITIZEN : But that man at Chabua village says. that he's not at Shiu-tarai at this moment. And he cannot be found in the palace here.

FIRST CITIZEN : I am sure that our King has been hiding him from us.

THIRD CITIZEN : Hiding him? We'll break down the palace walls and drag him

out!

FIRST CITIZEN : We'll set fire to the palace.

Enter the MINISTER and UDDHAB.

FIRST CITIZEN : [To the Minister.] Don't you try to play the game of hide and seek with us! Bring out the Crown Prince!

MINISTER : Who am I, to bring him out?

SECOND CITIZEN : It must have been by your advice. But, I tell you it won't do! We'll drag him out from his hiding place.

MINISTER : Then take the reins of this government in your own hands, and release him from the King's prison.

THIRD CITIZEN : From the King's prison!

MINISTER : The King has imprisoned him.

ALL : Long live the King! Victory to Uttarakut!

SECOND CITIZEN : Come, let's go to the prison, and there MINISTER : What?

SECOND CITIZEN : We'll take the flowers from the garland that Bibhuti has cast off, and put the string of it on the Crown Prince's neck.

MINISTER : The Crown Prince is guilty, you say, because he has broken the Fort. But is there no guilt in it, when you break the laws of the realm?

SECOND CITIZEN : That's altogether a different affair.

THIRD CITIZEN : But if we do break the laws?

MINISTER : You may jump into the void because you are not in love with the ground underneath your feet. But I can assure you, that you won't find yourself in love with that void.

THIRD CITIZEN : Then let's go and stand before the Palace and shout, 'Long live the King.'

FIRST CITIZEN : Look there! The sun has set, and the sky's growing dark. But that framework of Bibhuti's machine is still glowing. It looks as if it had got red with drunkenness.

SECOND CITIZEN : And on that trident, the last sinking light of the day is held aloft. It looks a kind of, I don't know how to describe it. [The Citizens of Uttarakut go out.

MINISTER : Now I understand, why the King has kept the Crown Prince captive in his own camp.

UDDHAB : Why?

MINISTER : To save him from the hands of his people. But things look ugly. The excitement is growing wilder every moment.

Enters SANJAY.

SANJAY : I dare not show my eagerness to the King, because that only helps to make his determination stronger.

MINISTER : Prince, try to keep quiet. Do not add to the complications which are already too great.

SANJAY : I went to talk to the people. I knew that they loved the Crown Prince more than life itself; that they would not tolerate his imprisonment. But I found them flaming with anger at the news of the opening out of Nandi Pass.

MINISTER : Then you ought to understand, that the Crown Prince's safety lies in his imprisonment itself.

SANJAY : I have ever followed him, from my childhood. Let me follow him into the prison.

MINISTER : What good will that do?

SANJAY : Every man is but half a man by himself. He finds his unity only when he is truly united with someone else. My . . . unity I find in my union with the Crown Prince.

MINISTER : But where the union is true, a mere outward meeting is superfluous. The cloud in the sky, and the water in the sea, are truly one, in spite of their distance from each other. Our Crown Prince must manifest himself through you, where he is absent.

SANJAY : These words do not seem like your own. They sound like his.

MINISTER : His words are everywhere in the air of this place. We make use of them, and yet forget that they are his.

SANJAY : You have done well to remind me of this. I shall serve him by living away from him. I must now go to the King.

MINISTER : Why?

SANJAY : I shall ask the King to give me the Governorship of Shiu-tarai.

MINISTER : But the times are very critical.

SANJAY : And therefore, this is the best time. [They go.]

Enters VISHWAJIT, the King's uncle.

VISHWAJIT : Who is there? Is that Uddhab?

UDDHAB : Yes, Sire!

VISHWAJIT : I was waiting for it to grow dark. Have you received my letter?

UDDHAB : I have.

VISHWAJIT : Have you followed my advice?

UDDHAB : You will know within a short time. But— VISHWAJIT : Have no misgiving in your mind. The King is not ready to give him freedom: but if, by some chance, someone without his knowledge effects it, it will be a great relief to the King.

UDDHAB : But he will never forgive the man who does it.

VISHWAJIT : My soldiers will take you and your guards captive. The responsibility is mine.

[A voice from outside, ‘Fire! Fire!’]

UDDHAB : There it is! They have set on fire the kitchen tent, which is near the guard-room. This is the opportunity for me to release Dhananjay and the Crown Prince.

[He goes out, and Abhijit comes in later.]

ABHIJIT : [To Vishwajit.] Why are you here?

VISHWAJIT : I have come to capture you. You must come to Mohangarh.

ABHIJIT : Nothing will be able to keep me captive today, neither anger, nor affection. You think that you are the agents who set this tent on fire? No! This fire has been waiting for me! The leisure has not been granted to me to remain in captivity.

VISHWAJIT : Why, child! What work have you to do?

ABHIJIT : I must pay off the debt of my birthright. The current of the waterfall has been my first nurse and I must set her free.

VISHWAJIT : There is time enough for that, but not today!

ABHIJIT : All that I know is this, that the time has come! And no one knows when that time will ever come again.

VISHWAJIT : We also shall join you.

ABHIJIT : No, the quest is mine; it has never reached you.

VISHWAJIT : The people of Shiu-tarai, who love you and are eagerly waiting to join hands in your work, will you not call them to your side.

ABHIJIT : If my call had come to them also, they would never sit waiting for me. My call will only lead them astray.

VISHWAJIT : It is growing dark, my child.

ABHIJIT : The light comes from that direction, from whence comes the call.

VISHWAJIT : I have not the power to turn you from your own path. Though you are taking a plunge into the darkness, I will trust in God to guide you. I must leave you in His hands. Only let me hear one word of hope. Tell me, that we shall meet again.

ABHIJIT : Keep it ever in your mind, that we can never be separated. [They go in

opposite directions.

Enter BATU and DHANANJAY.

BATU : Father, the day is ended and it grows dark.

DHANANJAY : My son, we have formed the habit of depending upon the light which is outside us, and therefore we are blinded when it is dark.

BATU : I had thought that the dance of the God, Bhairava, would commence from today. But has the Engineer, Bibhuti, bound up even His hands and feet with the machine?

DHANANJAY : When Bhairava begins His dance, it is not visible. Only when it comes to its end, is it revealed.

BATU : Give us confidence, Master. We are afraid! Awake Bhairava! Awake! The light has gone out! The path is dark! We find no response! Lord of all conquering Life! Kill our fear with something still more dread! Bhairava, awake! Awake!

[*He goes.*

Enter CITIZENS of Uttarakut.

FIRST CITIZEN : It was a lie! He's not in the prison house! They have hidden him somewhere.

SECOND CITIZEN : We shall see how they can hide him.

DHANANJAY : No! They will never be able to hide him. The walls will break down; the gate will be shattered. The light will rush into the dark corner, and everything will be revealed.

FIRST CITIZEN : Who's this? He gave me such a start.

THIRD CITIZEN : All's right! We Must have some victim! this Vairagi will serve us quite well. Bind him!

DHANANJAY : What is the use of catching one, who has always surrendered himself?

FIRST CITIZEN : Leave your saintliness behind you! We are not your followers.

DHANANJAY : You are fortunate! I know some miserable wretches, who have lost their teacher by following him.

FIRST CITIZEN : Who is their teacher?

DHANANJAY : Their true teacher is he, from whom they get their blows.

Enter the DEVOTEES, who sing.

Victory to the fearful Flame, That tears the heart of Darkness, That burns to ashes things which are dead, Victory to Him, whose voice thunders forth Truth, Whose right arm smites the unrighteous, Whose guidance leads mortals across death, Victory to Him!

THIRD CITIZEN : Look there! Look at that! The evening is darkening and that machine is looking blacker and blacker.

FIRST CITIZEN : In the day time, it tried to outmatch the sunlight, and now it's rivalling the night itself in blackness. It looks like a ghost!

SECOND CITIZEN : I can't understand why Bibhuti built it in that fashion. Wherever we are in the town, we cannot help looking at it. It's like a shriek rending the sky.

Enters FOURTH CITIZEN.

FOURTH CITIZEN : Our King's uncle has carried away by force the Crown Prince along with the guards who guarded his prison.

FIRST CITIZEN : What's the meaning of that?

THIRD CITIZEN : It shows he has the blood of Uttarakut in his veins. He must have done it, for fear lest the Crown Prince should fail to get his proper punishment from our King.

FIRST CITIZEN : Outrageous! Think of it! To encroach upon our right to punish our own Prince ourselves!

SECOND CITIZEN : The best thing to do, friend, is to you understand?

FIRST CITIZEN : Yes, Yes. The gold mine which he has in his territory, THIRD CITIZEN : And I've heard from a most reliable source that he has at least fifty thousand head of cattle in his stall. We must take possession of them, counting every head. This is insufferable!

FOURTH CITIZEN : And then again, the yearly yield of his saffron field must amount at least to SECOND CITIZEN : Yes! yes! His state must be made to disgorge it. What an affront!

FIRST CITIZEN : Come! Let us inform the King about it.

[They all go.

Enters a TRAVELLER, who shouts out.

FIRST TRAVELLER : Budhan! Sambhu! Budha-an! Sambhu-u-u! What a nuisance! They sent me in advance, saying they'd overtake me, following the short cut. But there's no sign of them. [Looking up] That black iron monster over there!

It's making grimaces at me! It makes me shiver with fear.

Enters another TRAVELLER.

Who's there? Why don't you answer? Are you Budhan?

SECOND TRAVELLER : I'm Nimku, the lamp-seller. They've got in all night festival in the Capital, and lamps will be needed. Who are you?

FIRST TRAVELLER : I'm Hubba. I belong to a band of strolling players. Did you meet with our party on the way, and their leader Andu?

NIMKU : There are crowds of men coming up. How could I recognize them?

HUBBA : But our Andu is an entire man by himself. You don't have to put on glasses to pick him out of the crowd. He's not a mere fraction. I say! What a quantity of lamps you have in your basket! Can't you spare one for me? Those who are out in the street have greater need of lamps than those who are in their houses.

NIMKU : How much will you pay for it?

HUBBA : If I could afford to pay, I should order you in a loud voice, and not waste my sweet tones on you!

NIMKU : You seem to be a humorist! [He goes.

HUBBA : I failed to get my lamp; but I got my recognition as a humorist! That's something! Humorists have the knack of making themselves felt, even in the dark. Confound this chirping of the crickets! It is like pins and needles in the limbs of the sky, made audible. I wish I had used my muscle with that lamp-seller, instead of displaying my humour.

Enters a RECRUITER.

RECRUITER : Up! Up!

HUBBA : Oh, goodness! Why on earth d'you go and frighten me in that way?

RECRUITER : Get ready to start!

HUBBA : That was exactly my intention, my friend. And now I am trying to digest the lesson how to get stuck, when one tries to go ahead.

RECRUITER : Your party is ready. Only you are wanting.

HUBBA : What do you say? We, inhabitants of Tin Mohana are remarkably inept at understanding words, when their meaning is not clear. What do you mean by my party?

RECRUITER : We inhabitants of Chabua village have become wonderful adepts in making our meaning clear by other means than words. [Gives him a push.] Now

you understand!

HUBBA : H'm! Yes! The simple meaning is, I must start, whether I wish it or not. But for what place? Please make your answer a little more gentle this time. That first push of your talk has cleared my mind greatly.

RECRUITER : You have to go to Shiu-tarai.

HUBBA : To Shiu-tarai? On this dark night? What is the subject of the play there?

RECRUITER : The subject is 'The rebuilding of the fort of Nandi Pass'.

HUBBA : You mean to rebuild the Fort with my help? My dear friend, it's only because you can't get a good sight of me, in this darkness, that you could ever utter such an absurdity as that! I'm RECRUITER : I don't care who you are! You've got your two hands.

HUBBA : That's only because I could not help it. But can you call these RECRUITER : The proof of the use of your hands doesn't come from your mouth. We shall discover it at the right time. Come now! Get up!

Enters SECOND RECRUITER.

SECOND RECRUITER : Here's another man, Kankar.

KANKAR : Who is he?

WAYFARER : I'm nobody, Sir! I am Lachman. I sound the gong in the Temple of Bhairava.

KANKAR : That means your hands are strong. Come to Shiu-tarai!

LACHMAN : But the gong?

KANKAR : Bhairava will sound His own gong himself.

LACHMAN : Pray, have pity on me! My wife's ailing!

KANKAR : She'll either be cured or dead, when you're absent. And the same thing'll happen if you're present.

HUBBA : Lachman, my good fellow! Don't make a fuss. The work has its risk, I know. But your objection also has its own risk, and I've had some taste of it already.

KANKAR : Listen! I can hear the voice of Narsingh.

NARSINGH enters with a gang of men.

KANKAR : Is the news good, Narsingh?

NARSINGH : I've gathered these men for our purpose. And some have already been despatched.

ONE OF THE PARTY : I refuse to go.

KANKAR : Why? What's the matter with you?

ONE OF THE PARTY : Nothing. But I'm not going.

KANKAR : What's his name, Narsingh?

NARSINGH : His name's Banwari. He makes rosaries out of lotus seeds.

KANKAR : Let me settle with him. [To Banwari] Why do you refuse to go?

BANWARI : I've no quarrel with the Shiu-tarai people. They're not our enemies.

KANKAR : But let's suppose that we are their enemies. Hasn't that also its responsibility?

BANWARI : I'd hate to take part in wrong-doing.

KANKAR : Wrong's only wrong where you've the right to judge. Uttarakut is a great body, you're only a part. Whatever you do as a part of it you can have no responsibility for that!

BANWARI : There's a greater body, whose part's Uttarakut as well as Shiu-tarai.

KANKAR : I say, Narsingh! This man argues! Nobody's a greater nuisance for the country than the man who argues!

NARSINGH : Hard work is the best cure for that! This is why I'm taking him along with us.

BANWARI : I'll be only a burden to you and of no use for your work.

KANKAR : You're a burden to Uttarakut, and we're trying to get rid of you.

HUBBA : My dear friend Banwari, you seem to belong to that class of men who are rational and you won't accept the fact that there's another class of men who are powerful. And you two always clash! Either learn their method, or else give up your own and keep quiet.

BANWARI : What's your method?

HUBBA : I usually sing. But that would only be useless now, and therefore I keep silence.

KANKAR : [To Banwari.] Now tell me what you're going to do.

BANWARI : I shan't move a step further.

KANKAR : Oh! Then we'll have to make you move. I say, there! Bind him with this rope.

HUBBA : [Intervening.] My dear sir, please let me say one word. Don't be angry with me! The force you spend in carrying this man can be better used, if you save it.

KANKAR : Those who are unwilling to serve Uttarakut we've got our unpleasant duty towards them, and we can't neglect it. D'you understand?

HUBBA : H'm, yes! Very clearly indeed!

[They all go out except Narsingh and Kankar.

NARSINGH : Here comes Bibhuti. Long live Bibhuti!

Enters BIBHUTI.

KANKAR : We've made great progress. Our party's grown strong. Why are you here? They're waiting for you at their Festival.

BIBHUTI : I have no heart for this Festival.

NARSINGH : Why?

BIBHUTI : The news about the Nandi pass has deliberately been sent to us today, in order to take away from the glory of my reception. There is a rivalry against me.

KANKAR : Who's the rival?

BIBHUTI : I do not want to utter his name. You all know it. The problem has become acute with him, whether he shall have more honour in this country than I. I have not told you one fact. A messenger came to me from the other party, to lure me away, and he also gave me a hint that they are ready to break the embankment.

NARSINGH : What impudence!

KANKAR : How could you bear it, Bibhuti?

BIBHUTI : It is useless to contradict the ravings of madness.

KANKAR : But is it right to feel too secure? I remember how you said once that there are one or two weak spots, which can easily be.

BIBHUTI : Those who have any information about these weak spots also know, that they themselves will be carried away by the flood, if they meddle with them.

NARSINGH : Wouldn't it be wise to keep guards at those places?

BIBHUTI : Death itself is keeping guard there. There is not the least fear for my embankment. If only I can shut up once again the Nandi Pass, I shall die happy.

KANKAR : It's not at all difficult for you to do that.

BIBHUTI : My appliances are ready. Only the Pass is so narrow, that it can be defended by a very few men.

KANKAR : That means we shall require men who must die.

[From behind the scene, the cry comes, 'Awake, Bhairava! Awake.'

Enters DHANANJAY.

KANKAR : This is an evil sight for us at the moment of starting for our adventure.

BIBHUTI : Vairagi, saints like you have never succeeded in awakening BHAIRAVA : But men like myself, whom you call infidels, are on our way to give Him a good

rousing up.

DHANANJAY : I have no doubt in nay mind, that it's for you to awaken Him.

BIBHUTI : Our process-of awakening Him is not through sounding temple gongs and lighting temple lamps.

DHANANJAY : No! When you bind Him with your fetters, he will wake up to break them.

BIBHUTI : Our fetters are not easy to break. The evils are innumerable, and there are an infinite number of knots.

DHANANJAY : His time comes when the obstacle becomes insurmountable.

[*The Devotees come, singing.*]

Victory to Him, the Terrible, The Lord of Destruction, The Uttermost Peace, The Dissolver of doubts, The Breaker of fetters, Who carries us beyond all conflicts, The Terrible! The Terrible!

Enter RANAJIT and MINISTER.

MINISTER : Sire, the camp is deserted and a great part of it is burnt away. The few guards, who were there.

RANAJIT : Never mind about them. Where is Abhijit? I must know!

KANKAR : King! We claim punishment for the Crown Prince.

RANAJIT : Do I ever wait for your claim, in order to punish the one who deserves it?

KANKAR : The people harbour suspicions in their minds, when they cannot find him.

RANAJIT : Suspicions? Against whom?

KANKAR : Pardon me, Sire! You must understand the state of mind of your subjects. Owing to the delay in finding the Crown Prince, their impatience has grown to such a degree, that they will never wait for your judgment, when he is discovered.

BIBHUTI : Of our own accord we have taken in hand the duty of building up again the Fort of Nandi Pass.

RANAJIT : Why could you not leave it in my hands?

BIBHUTI : We have the right to suspect your secret sanction to this outrage done by the Crown Prince.

MINISTER : Sire, the mind of the public is excited by their self-glorification on the one hand and by their anger on the other. Do not add to their impatience, and make it still more turbulent by your impatience.

RANAJIT : Who is there? Is it Dhananjay?

DHANANJAY : I am happy to find that you have not forgotten me!

RANAJIT : You certainly know where Abhijit is.

DHANANJAY : I can never keep secret what I know for certain.

RANAJIT : Then what are you doing here?

DHANANJAY : I am waiting for the appearance of the Crown Prince.

[From outside, the voice is heard of Amba.]

AMBA : Suman! Suman, my darling! It's dark. It's so dark!

RANAJIT : Who is that calling?

MINISTER : It is that mad woman, Amba.

Enters AMBA.

AMBA : He has not yet come back.

RANAJIT : Why do you seek him? The time came, and Bhairava called him away.

AMBA : Does Bhairava only call away and never restore, secretly? In the depth of the night? My Suman!

[Amra goes out.]

Enters a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER : A multitude of men from Shiu-tarai is marching up.

BIBHUTI : How is that? We had planned to disarm them, by falling on them suddenly. There must be some traitor among us! Kankar! Very few people knew, except your party. Then how was it?

KANKAR : Bibhuti! You suspect even us!

BIBHUTI : Suspicion knows no limits.

KANKAR : Then we also suspect you.

BIBHUTI : You have the right! But when the time comes, there will be a reckoning.

RANAJIT : [To the Messenger] Do you know, why they are coming?

MESSENGER : They have heard that the Crown Prince is in prison, and they have come to seek him out and rescue him.

BIBHUTI : We are also seeking him, as well as they. Let us see who can find him!

DHANANJAY : Both of you will find him. He has no favourites.

MESSENGER : There comes Ganesh. the leader of Shiu-tarai.

Enters GANESH.

GANESH : [To Dhananjay.] Father, shall we find him?

DHANANJAY : Yes.

GANESH : Promise us!

DHANANJAY : Yes, you shall find him.

RANAJIT : Whom are you seeking?

GANESH : King! You must release him.

RANAJIT : Whom?

GANESH : Our Crown Prince! You do not want him, but we do! Would you shut up everything that we need for our life, even him?

DHANANJAY : Fool! Who has the power to shut him up?

GANESH : We shall make him our King.

DHANANJAY : Yes, you shall! He is coming with his King's crown.

Enter the evotees, singing.

Victory to the fearful Flame, That tears the heart of Darkness, That burns to ashes things which are dead.

Victory to Him whose voice thunders forth Truth.

Whose right arm smites the unrighteous.

Whose guidance leads mortals across Death.

[From outside is heard the cry of Amba.

AMBA : Mother calls, Suman! Mother calls! Come back, Suman! Come back! [A sound is heard in the distance.

BIBHUTI : Hark! What is that? What is that sound?

DHANANJAY : It is laughter, bubbling up from the heart of the darkness.

BIBHUTI : Hush! Let me find out from what direction the sound comes.

[In the distance, the cry is faintly heard, 'Victory to Bhairava.'

BIBHUTI : [Listening with his head bent towards the ground.] It is the sound of water.

DHANANJAY : The first beat of the drum before the dance BIBHUTI : The sound grows in strength!

KANKAR : It seems NARSINGH : Yes! It certainly seems BIBHUTI : My God! There is no doubt of it. The water of Muktadhara is freed! Who has done it? Who has broken the embankment? He shall pay the price! There is no escape for him!

[He rushes out.

[Kankar and Narsingh rush out, following him.

RANAJIT : Minister! What is this!

DHANANJAY : It is the call to the Feast of the Breaking of Bondage [Sings.] The drum beats; It beats into the beatings of my heart.

MINISTER : Sire, it is RANAJIT : Yes, it must be his!

MINISTER : It can be no other man than RANAJIT : Who is so brave as he?

DHANANJAY : [Sings.] His feet dance, They dance in the depth of my life.

RANAJIT : I shall punish him, if punished he must be. But these people, maddened with rage, Only Abhijit! He is favoured of the Gods! May the Gods save him!

GANESH : I do not understand what has happened. Master!

DHANANJAY : [Sings.]

The night watches, And watches also the Watchman.

The silent stars throb with dread.

RANAJIT : I hear some steps! Abhijit! Abhijit!

MINISTER : It must be he, who comes.

DHANANJAY : [Sings] My heart aches and aches, While the fetters fall to pieces.

Enters SANJAY.

RANAJIT : Here comes Sanjay! Where is Abhijit?

SANJAY : The waterfall of Muktadhara has borne him away, and we have lost him.

RANAJIT : What say you, Prince?

SANJAY : He has broken the embankment.

RANAJIT : I understand! And with this he has found his freedom!

SANJAY : No! But I was certain he would go there. And so I preceded him, and waited in the dark. But there it ends. He kept me back. He would not let me go.

RANAJIT : Tell me more!

SANJAY : Somehow he had come to know about a weakness in the structure, and at that point he gave his blow to the monster Machine. The monster returned that blow against him. Then Muktadhara, like a mother, took up his stricken body into her arms and carried him away.

GANESH : We came to seek our Prince! Shall we never find him again!

DHANANJAY : You have found him forever!

Enter the DEVOTEES of Bhairava, singing.

Victory to Him, who is Terrible, The Lord of Destruction, The Uttermost Peace!

The Dissolver of doubts, The Breaker of fetters, Who carries us beyond all conflicts, The Terrible! the Terrible!

Victory to the fearful Flame, That tears the heart of Darkness!

That turns to ashes things that are dead!

Victory to Him, whose voice thunders forth Truth.

Whose right arm smites the unrighteous, Whose guidance leads mortals across death!

The Terrible! The Terrible!

Essays

1. The Center of Indian Culture

I The question which I intend to discuss in the present paper is, what should be the ideal of education in India. Instead of holding my listeners' minds in suspense till the very end, let me briefly give the answer in the beginning before entering into a detailed discussion. On each race is the duty laid to keep alight its own lamp of mind as its part in the illumination of the world. To break the lamp of any people is to deprive it of its rightful place in the world festival. He who has no light is unfortunate enough, but utterly miserable is he who, having it, has been deprived of it, or has forgotten all about it.

India has proved that it has its own mind, which has deeply thought and felt and tried to solve according to its light the problems of existence. The education of India is to enable this mind of India to find out truth, to make this truth its own wherever found and to give expression to it in such a manner as only it can do.

In order to carry this out, first of all the mind of India has to be concentrated and made conscious of itself and then only can it accept education from its teachers in a right spirit, judge it by its own standard and make use of it by its own creative power. The fingers must be joined together to take, as well as to give. So when we can bring the scattered minds of India into coordinated activity, they will then become receptive as well as creative—and the waters of life will cease to slip through the gaps, to make sodden the ground beneath.

The next point is that, in education, the most important factor must be the inspiring atmosphere of creative activity. And therefore the primary function of our University should be the constructive work of knowledge. Men should be brought together and full scope given to them for their work of intellectual exploration and creation; and the teaching should be like the overflow water of this spring of culture, spontaneous and inevitable. Education can only become natural and wholesome when it is the direct fruit of a living and growing knowledge.

The last point is that our education should be in full touch with our complete life, economical, intellectual aesthetic, social and spiritual; and our educational institutions should be in the very heart of our society, connected with it by the

living bonds of varied cooperations. For true education is to realize at every step how our training and knowledge have organic connection with our surroundings.

II All over India, there is a vague feeling of discontent in the air about our prevalent system of education. Signs have lately been numerous of a desire for a change—there seems to be an urgent of life in the subsoil of our national mind, sending forth new institutions and giving rise to new experiments. But it often happens that because man's wish is so immediate to him, and so strong, it becomes difficult accurately to locate the exciting cause, to make sure of the object towards which it aspires.

The mind of our educated community has been brought up within the enclosure of the modern Indian educational system. It has grown as familiar to us as our own physical body, unconsciously giving rise in our mind to the belief that it can never be changed. Our imagination dare not soar beyond its limits; we are unable to see it and judge it from outside. We neither have the courage nor the heart to say that it has replaced by something else, because our own intellectual life has been its special product, for which we have a natural partiality and admiration.

And yet there lurks, in some depth of our self-satisfaction, a thorn, which does not let us sleep in comfort. When the secret pricking goes on for some time, we, in our fretfulness, try to ascribe the cause of our irritation to some outside intrusion. We say that the only thing wrong in our education is that it is not in our absolute control; that the boat is sea-worthy, only the helm has to be in our own hands to save it from wreckage. Lately, most of our attempts to establish national schools and universities were made with the idea that it was external independence which was needed. We forget that the same weakness in our character, or in our circumstances, which inevitably draws us on to the slippery slope of imitation, will pursue us when our independence is merely of the outside. For then our freedom will become the freedom to imitate the foreign institutions, thus bringing our evil fortune under the influence of the conjunction of two malignant planets—those of imitation and the badness of imitation—producing a machine-made University, which is made with a bad machine.

As it often happens with the party which has been beaten in a game, for the partners of the same side to ascribe the failure to one another's stupidity, so, in our discredited system of education, we two partners—our foreign authorities and ourselves—are following the same course of mutual recrimination. It is very likely that the blame can be justly apportioned between both of us; yet I always think it is more a matter of academic interest than anything else to wrangle with

the other fellow about his share of the futility when we ourselves were also deeply involved. What is of real practical importance is for us to know what was our own contribution to the deficiency we complain of.

Those who feel pity for the Sudras may say that only the Brahmins were responsible for placing the former in a degraded condition. But, without discussing the merit of such an assertion, it has to be admitted that it would be of real benefit to the Sudras to be told that it was they who were responsible for weakly allowing the helpless Brahmins to humiliate them.

So let us forget the other party in this concern. Let us blame our own weakness in being obsessed with the idea that we must have some artificial wooden legs of an education of foreign-make simply because we imagine that we have no legs of our own unfortunate man who got drowned in shallow water because he imagined that he had gone out of his depth.

The mischief is that as soon as the idea of a University enters our mind, the idea of a Cambridge University, Oxford University, and a host of other European Universities, rushes in at the same time and fills the whole space. We then imagine that our salvation lies in a selection of the best points of each patched together in an eclectic perfection. We forget that the European Universities are living organic parts of the life of Europe, where each found its natural birth. Patching up noses, and other small missing fractions of our features, with skins from foreign limbs is allowed in modern surgery; but to build up a whole man by piecing together foreign fragments is beyond the resources of science, not only for the present time, but let us fervently hope, for all time to come.

The European University comes before our vision, full-grown. That is why we cannot think of a University except as a fully developed institution. The sight of my neighbour, with a sturdy son to help and support him, may naturally provoke in my mind an envious wish to have a son myself. But if my wish be to have a full-grown son all at once, then, in my hurry, I may stumble upon somebody who is fully grown up, but who is no son to me at all. An impatient craving for result and an unfortunate weakness for imitation have led us to cherish just such an unnatural desire for a National University, full-fledged from its very birth. So that most of our endeavours become fruitless, or else the only fruit they produce is of the class of lacquer-ware fruit, which may rival the real thing in size and shape and colouring, but which one has to beware of biting, much more of taking into the stomach. These solidly complete Universities, over which our country is brooding, are like hard-boiled eggs from which you cannot expect chickens to come out.

Not only ourselves, but our European school-master himself seems to have

forgotten that his University has grown with the growth of the nation he belongs to, and that its material magnificence was not in its beginning and does not belong to its essential truth. No doubt the time has come when he can comfortably afford to forget, in his own case, that it was the indigent monks who were the source of his educational proficiency in the first instance, and that most of the students at one time were poor. But when he affects to ignore the fact that, in a poor country like India, the material features of our University must not assume more importance than we can bear, when he cruelly forgets that the insufficiency of our schools and colleges must not be made still narrower in scope by cutting down space and increasing furniture, then it becomes disastrous for our people.

I quite understand that food and the utensils to eat it out of are both needful to man. But where there is a shortage of food, a parsimony in regard to utensils also becomes necessary. To make the paraphernalia of our Education so expensive that Education itself becomes difficult of attainment would be like squandering all one's money in buying money-bags.

We in the East have had to arrive at our own solution of the problem of life. We have, as far as possible, made our food and clothing unburden some; and this our very climate has taught us to do. We require openings in the walls more than the walls themselves. Light and air have more to do with our wearing apparel than the weavers' loom. The sun makes for us the heat-producing factors which elsewhere are required from food-stuffs. All these natural advantages have moulded our life to a particular shape, which I cannot believe it will be profitable to ignore in the case of our education.

I do not seek to glorify poverty. But simplicity is of greater price than the appendages of luxury. The simplicity of which I speak is not merely the effect of a lack of superfluity: it is one of the signs of perfection. When this dawns on mankind, the unhealthy fog which now besmirches civilization will be lifted. It is for lack of this simplicity that the necessities of life have become so rare and costly.

Most things in the civilized world, such as eating and merry-making, education and culture, administration and litigation, occupy more than their legitimate space. Much of their burden is needless; and in bearing it civilized man may be showing great strength, but little skill. To the gods, viewing this from on high, it must seem like the floundering of a giant who has got out of his depth and knows not how to swim; who, as he keeps muddying the whole pool by his needlessly powerful efforts, cannot get rid of the idea that there must be some virtue in this display of strength.

When the simplicity of fulness awakens in the West, then work, enjoyment, and education alike, will find their true strength in becoming easy. When this will happen I have no idea, but till then we must, with bowed heads, continue to listen to lectures telling us that the highest education is to be had only in the tallest edifices.

To the extent that forms and appendages are the outgrowth of the soul, to ignore them is to be impoverished—this I know. But though Europe has been trying, she has not yet discovered the golden mean. Why, then, should obstacles be placed in the way of our attempting to find it out for ourselves? To be simple without becoming poorer is the problem which each must solve according to his temperament. But while we are ever ready to accept the subject-matter of education from outside, it is too bad to thrust on us the temperament as well.

This attitude of our teacher has affected the minds of his disciple and in our pursuit of magnitude we are becoming careless of reality.

III When the National Council of Education was being founded in Bengal, I asked one of its enthusiastic workers whether he really believed that the great spreading tree of a University could come into being, with root and branch and foliage all complete, in a day. His reply was that if not, it would not succeed in capturing the imagination of the country; so that the complete thing must be held forth from the beginning. Well, it was duly held forth, the imagination of the country was captured, money flowed in, and nothing seemed to be wanting except just one casual factor—the truth—the truth which never despairs small beginnings, which is never ashamed to carry its immense future in a tiny frail package. And the imitation tree, after vainly trying to prove its fruitfulness, has shrunk and shrivelled to such fragile precariousness that it does not have material enough to deceive even itself. So let us repeat, it does not follow that by merely founding a University oneself, and keeping it under one's own control, it can be made one's own.

Let us, then, try to find out what is the hidden cause of dissatisfaction that is troubling our minds. The fact is, it was nearly a hundred years ago when we first entered our English school, and we have not even yet been able to get out of it; we have permanently remained school-boys. We have got the same kind of shelter in it as the mouse in the trap—it threatens to be so awkwardly everlasting.

No one has been able to give us a complete definition of life, because, at every moment, it transcends its parts and is mysteriously more than what we get from

its analysis. What it gives out is far greater, in quality and value, than the materials it consumes. It is not a mere sum total of the carbon, nitrogen, and other ingredients which it takes in with its food. Our mind, also, in the fulness of its life, is infinitely greater than the information it appropriates, the training it acquires. That education is true, which acknowledges the mind to be a living thing, and therefore stimulates it to give out more in quality and quantity than is imparted to it from outside. And we are to judge our education by this standard.

Therefore the question is, whether, in our intellectual career in the modern time, we have given more than we have received, and created something which is our own. For when any race of men becomes a mere burden on the world, rendering no satisfactory account of the cost it imposes upon society, this, for it, is worse than death. For this is the intolerably mean situation of remaining under the charge of perpetual misappropriation.

As for us, far from having given our University more than we received, we have not even rendered back full measure. We have been repeating great words, learning great truths, looking on great examples, but in return we have simply become clerks, deputy magistrates, pleaders, or physicians.

Not that it is a small thing to be, for instance, a physician. But though our physicians are now practising in every town and village and hamlet of the country, and though many of them are of good repute and making money, all this extensive experience of theirs has not resulted in any new theory, or great fact, being added to the science of medicine. Like good school-boys, they have only applied with over-cautious precision just what they have learnt. And who shall make good the vital thing that is lost when students never become masters?

Yet I cannot admit that this is due to any inherent defect in our natural powers. There was a long period in the past, during which the science of healing with us was a living growth, spreading its different offshoots and branches all over our country. That teaches us at least this much that in those days our mind was in living connection with its acquirements; that then, we did not merely learn by rote, but made our own observations and experiments; that we tried to discover principles and build hypotheses and apply them to life.

Where has this initiative and courage of ours departed? Why do we tread so carefully, so fearfully, under the load of our learning? Is it because we were born to be serfs, permanently bending under the burden of another's intellectual acquisitions? Never!

For even in spite of the scarceness of opportunities and narrowness of prospects, in spite of our present defective education, which has been starved of all life elements, a few great men of science like Jagadischandra and

Prabhulla Chandra, and a great scholar and thinker like Brajendranath, have made their appearance in our country, proving that the power of true originality is not lacking among our people, only it is trampled down under the dead pressure of a mechanical method and the callousness of contemptuous discouragement.

IV

All organic beings live like a flame, a long way beyond themselves. They have thus a smaller and a larger body. The former is visible to the eye; it can be touched, captured and bound. The latter is indefinite; it has no fixed boundaries, but is widespread both in space and time. When we see a foreign University, we see only its smaller body—its buildings, its furniture, its regulations, its syllabus; its larger body is not present to us. But as the kernel of the coconut is in the whole coconut, so the University, in the case of Europeans, is in their society, in their parliament, in their literature, in the numerous activities of their corporate life. They have their thoughts published in their books, as well as the living men who think those thoughts and criticize, compare and disseminate them. One common medium of mind connects their teachers and students in an educational relationship which is living and luminous. In short their education has its permanent vessel which is their own mind; its permanent supply which is their own living spring of culture; its permanent field for irrigation which is their own social life. This organic unity of their mind and life and culture has enabled them to seek truth from all lands and all times, and to make it vitally one with their own culture which is the basis of their civilization.

On the other hand, those who, like our present Indian students, have to rely upon books, not truly for their mental sustenance, but for some external advantage, are sure to become anaemic in their intellects, like babies solely fed with artificial food. They never have intellectual courage, because they never see the process and the environment of those thoughts which they are compelled to learn—and thus they lose the historical sense of all ideas, never knowing the perspective of their growth. They are hypnotized by the sharp black and white of the printed words, formed and fixed, which hide their human genesis. They not only borrow a foreign culture, but also a foreign standard of judgment; and thus, not only is the money not theirs, but not even the pocket. Their education is a chariot that does not carry them in it, but drags them behind it. The sight is pitiful and very often comic. The modern European culture, whose truth and strength lie in its fluid mobility, comes to us rigidly fixed, almost like our own Sastras, about which our minds have to remain passively uncritical because of their supposed divine origin.

This has made us miss the dynamic character of living truth. The English mind from the early Victorian to the mid-Victorian, and from the mid-Victorian to the post-Victorian period of its growth, has been passing through different moods

and standards. But we, who take our lessons from the English, can only accept someone or other of these moods and standards as fixed; we cannot naturally move with the moving mind of our teacher, but only hop from one point to another and miss the modulation of life. We securely confine all our intellectual faith, either within the utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill, or the spiritualism of Carlyle and Ruskin, or the paradoxicalism, startling lazy minds into truth, in which Chesterton and Bernard Shaw excel; and we fail to notice their relation of inevitable action and reaction. We boast of the up-to-dateness of our education; we forget that the mission of all education is to lead us beyond the present date.

V

Communication of life can only be through a living agency. And culture, which is the life of mind, can only be imparted through man to man. Book learning, or scriptural texts, may merely make us pedants. They are static and quantitative; they accumulate and are hoarded up under strict guards. Culture grows and moves and multiplies itself in life.

The students of the European Universities not only have their human environment of culture in their society, they also acquire their learning direct from their teachers. They have their sun to give them light; it is the sun of the human relationship between the teachers and the students. We have our hard flints, which give us disconnected sparks after toilsome blows; and the noise is a great deal more than the light. These flints are the abstractions of learning; they are solid methods, inflexible and cold.

To our misfortune we have, in our own country, all the furniture of the European University—except the human teacher. We have, instead, merely purveyors of book-lore, in whom the paper god of the bookshop seems to have made himself vocal. And, as a natural result, we find our students to be ‘untouchable’, even to our Indian professors. These teachers distribute their doles of mental food, gingerly and from a dignified distance, raising walls of note-books between themselves and their students. This kind of food is neither relished, nor does it give nourishment. It is a famine ration strictly regulated, to save us, not from emaciation, but only from absolute death. It holds out no hope of that culture which is far in excess of man’s mere necessity; it is certainly less than enough, and far less than a feast.

Until we are in a position to prove that the world has need of us and cannot afford to do without us, that we are not merely hangers-on of the world-culture —beggars who cannot repay—so long must our sole hope lie in gaining others’ favours. And these we must extort, sometimes by lamentations, sometimes by flattery, sometimes by menial service, and show other constitutional methods of wagging tails.

No one will feel any anxiety to minister to us, to save us, if we have nothing to offer worthy of being reverently accepted. But whom are we to blame? Where is there space enough, lying fallow on this earth, for men who merely live and do not produce? How can they build an infirmary as big as the country itself? The hard fact must be laid to heart that we shall never get anything even if it be given to us. For it is only the lake, and not the desert, which can accept and retain a

contribution from the heaven's cloud because, in its depth, the receiving and the giving have become one. Only to him who hath is given, otherwise the gift is insulted and he, also, who receives it.

But we have been so used to living on beggars' doles that we cannot bring ourselves really to believe in this truth. We are always afraid lest we should lose some petty advantage in our attempts to acquire true learning, lest our preparedness for clerical work should be delayed, lest the English of our petition-writing lose its correct grammatical whine. Our education to us is like the carriage to a horse; a bondage, the dragging of which merely serves to provide it with food and shelter in the stable of its master; the horse has not the same freedom of relationship with the carriage as its owner, and therefore the carriage ever remains for it an imposition of beggarly necessity.

**VI Let me here quote a precedent to show how a University can work, which
has been born and has grown on national soil, and how with a different
history futility comes about.**

In that age of Europe which is called dark, when the lamp of Rome went out at the onslaught of the barbarians, Ireland, amongst all countries of the West, was the land where culture reared its head. Students from other parts of Europe used to flock there for education. They used to get their board, lodging and books free —something like our own Sanskrit *pathasalas*. The Irish monks revived the flame of the smouldering torch of Christian religion and culture all over Europe. Charlemagne took the help of Clemens, a learned Irishman, in founding the University of Paris. There are many other proofs of the height to which Irish culture had attained. Though its origin was in Rome, yet through a long period of segregation it became imbued with the life and mind of the people and acquired a genius which was characteristically Irish. And this culture had for its medium the Irish language.

When the Danes and the English invaded Ireland, they set fire to the Irish colleges, destroyed their libraries, and killed or scattered the monks and students. Nevertheless, in those parts of the country, which still remained independent and free from these outrages, the work of education continued to be carried on in the mother-tongue, till, in the time of Queen Elizabeth, Ireland was wholly conquered and finally lost its indigenous Universities. Thereafter, being deprived of the atmosphere of culture and study, the Irish language fell into contempt, as fit only for the lower classes. Then, in the nineteenth century, the National School movement was set afoot, and the Irish, with their ingrained love of learning, welcomed it with uncritical enthusiasm.

The idea of the so-called national schools was to mould the Irish on the Anglo-Saxon pattern. But, whether for good or for evil, Providence has fashioned each race on such different lines that to put one into the coat of another results in a misfit. When the National School movement was started, eighty per cent of Irishmen were using their own language. But the Irish boys, under pain of many penalties, were made to give up their own language altogether, and the ban was also extended to the study of their own history.

The result was just what might be expected. Mental numbness spread all over the country. Irish-speaking boys, who entered the schools with their intelligence and curiosity alive, left them mental cripples, with a distaste for all study. The reason was simple. The method was machine-like, the result parrot-like.

VII For the perfect irrigation of learning, a foreign language cannot be a true medium. This is a truism, whose utterance would bore men to sleep, or to something worse, in any other part of the world; but in our country truisms appear as dangerous heresies, rousing our phlegmatic souls into active hostility. Therefore, for us, all truisms are a tonic, though we relish platitudes far better. And this makes me bold to reiterate that when we are compelled to learn through the medium of English, the knocking at the gate and turning of the key take away the best part of our life. The feast may be waiting for us inside the room, but the difficulty and delay of admission spoil our appetite and the long privation permanently injures our stomach. The ideas are very late in coming to us, and the tediously long trial of our teeth over the grinding of the grammar, and a system of spelling, which is devoid of all conscience, takes away our relish for the food when it does come at last.

If you want to grow a tree on the sandy soil of a rainless desert, then you not only have to borrow your seed from some distant land, but also the soil itself and the water. Yet, after the immense trouble you have taken, the tree grows up miserably stunted; and even if it does bear fruit, the seeds do not mature. The education which we receive from our universities takes it for granted that it is for cultivating a hopeless desert, and that not only the mental outlook and the knowledge, but also the whole language must bodily be imported from across the sea. And this makes our education so nebulously distant and unreal, so detached from all our associations of life, so terribly costly to us in time, health and means, and yet so meagre of results.

So far as my own experience of teaching goes, a considerable proportion of pupils are naturally deficient in the power of learning languages. Such may find

it barely possible to matriculate with an insufficient understanding of the English language, while in the higher stages disaster is inevitable. There are, moreover, other reasons why English cannot be mastered by a large majority of Indian boys. First of all, to accommodate this language in their minds, whose ingrained habit has been to think in an Eastern tongue, is as much a feat as fitting an English sword into the scabbard of a scimitar. Then again, very few boys have the means of getting anything like a proper grounding in English at the hands of a competent teacher—the sons of the poor certainly have not.

So, like the Hanuman of our ancient Epic, who, not knowing which herb might be wanted, had to carry away the whole mountain top, these boys, unable to use the language intelligently, have to carry in their heads the whole of the book by rote. Those who have extraordinary memories may thus manage to carry on to the end, but this cannot be expected of the poor fellows with only average brain power.

The point is—is the crime committed by this large number of boys, who, owing to congenital or accidental causes, have been unable to become proficient in the English language, so heinous that they must be sentenced to perpetual exile by the University? In England at one time thieves used to get hanged. But this penal code is even harsher, because the extreme penalty is imposed for not being able to cheat! For if it is cheating to take a book into the examination hall hidden in one's clothes, why not when the whole of its contents is smuggled in within the head?

However, I do not wish to lay any charge against those fortunate crammers who manage to get across. But those who are left behind, to whom the Hooghly Bridge is closed, may they not have some kind of ferry, if not a steam launch, at least a country boat? What a terrible waste of national material to cut off all higher educational facilities from the thousands of pupils who have no gift for acquiring a foreign tongue, but who possess the intellect and desire to learn.

I know what the counter-argument will be. Men will say: ‘You want to give higher education in the vernaculars, but what about the textbooks?’ I am aware that there are none. But unless higher education is given in the vernacular languages, how are textbooks to come into existence? We cannot very well expect a mint to go on working if the coins are refused circulation.

VIII Another lesson to be learnt from the Irish example is that, in the natural course of things, the water comes first and then comes the fish—it is the presence of the learned men which draws the students round them, if their wish is to learn, and not merely to be branded, like a saleable commodity,

with the stamp of their market value.

In an age of great mental vitality, when men were there whose minds overflowed with thoughts and learning, the culture centres of Nalanda and Taxila were naturally formed in India. But, because we have been accustomed merely to branding institutions while receiving our education, therefore even in our attempts at founding national universities we begin from the wrong end—the students come first in our mind, and then we cast about for the teachers. It is like the vagary of an absent-minded Creator who takes great pains in creating a tail and then suddenly finds that the head is missing. We seat our guests at the table, and afterwards discover that the cooking has not been commenced. So the sumptuousness has to be made evident in the menu to keep the imagination of the famished fully occupied—we have to shout with an exaggerated vehemence for the dishes which never come, and make up for the lack in the food supply with deafening noise.

When the best part of our anxiety goes to secure students, we are obliged to think of laying ground baits for the imagination of the country. All in a night, long syllabuses have to be got ready, the hatred of the foreigner stirred up, frantic appeals made to Mother India, and all kinds of hypnotic texts uttered, do distract and confound the minds of men.

For the sake of the sanity of our mind and reasonableness of our purpose, let us for once throw to the winds all anxiety as to syllabuses, and as to students also. Let us drive out of our thoughts the holy images of our existing educational institutions, on which we have steadfastly meditated so long.

And then let us pray that those, who have successfully passed through the discipline of cultivating their minds, who are ready to produce and therefore to impart, may deign to come together and take up their seats of studious striving, doing intently their own work of exploration and discovery in the region of knowledge. In this way will be concentrated the power which shall be adequate for the spontaneous creation of a University, from within ourselves, in all the truth of life.

We must know that this concentration of intellectual forces of the country is the most important mission of a University, for it is like the nucleus of a living cell, the centre of the creative life of the national mind.

IX

The bringing about of an intellectual unity in India is, I am told, difficult to the verge of impossibility owing to the fact that India has so many different languages.

But every people in the world, in order to attain its greatness, must solve some great problem for itself, or accept defeat and degradation. All true civilizations have been built upon the bedrock of difficulties. Those who have rivers for their water supply are to be envied, but those who have not must dig wells and find water from the difficult depth of their own soil. But let us never imagine that dust can be made to do the duty of the water simply because it is more easily available. We must bravely accept the inconvenient fact of the diversity of our languages, and at the same time know that a foreign language, like foreign soil, may be good for pot culture, but not for that cultivation which is widely and permanently necessary for the maintenance of life.

Then let us admit that India is not like any one of the great countries of Europe, which has its one language, but like Europe herself branching out into different peoples having different languages. And yet Europe has a common civilization with an intellectual unity which is not based upon uniformity of language.

In the earlier stage of her culture the whole of Europe had Latin for her language of learning. It was like her intellectual bud-time, when all her petals of self-expression were closed into one point. But the perfection of her mental unfolding was not represented by that oneness of her literary vehicle. When the great European countries found their individual languages, then only the true federation of cultures became possible in the West and the very differences of the channels made the commerce of ideas in Europe so richly copious and so variedly active. In fact, when natural differences find their harmony, then it is true unity; but artificial uniformity leads to lifelessness. We can well imagine what the loss to European civilization would be, if France, Italy, Germany, England, through their separate agencies, did not contribute to the common coffers their individual earnings. And we know why, when the German culture tried to assert its sole dominance, it was hailed as a calamity by all Europe.

There was a time with us when India also had her common language of culture in Sanskrit. But, for the completeness of her commerce of thought, she must have all her vernaculars attaining their perfect powers, through which her different peoples may manifest their differences of genius to the full. This can never be done through a language which is foreign, containing its own peculiar

associations which are sure to hamper our freedom of thought and creation. The use of English inevitably tends to turn our mind for its source of inspiration towards the West, with which we can never be in close touch of life; and therefore our education will mostly remain sterile, or produce incongruities. The diversity of our languages should not be allowed to frighten us; but we should be warned of the futility of borrowing the language of our culture from a far-away land, making stagnant and shallow that which is fluid near its source.

It is unthinkable that we should cease to write petitions in English, or abdicate our seats in the obscure region of the subordinate service. For the present, we have sorrowfully to acknowledge the fact that, English being our court language, it acts like an artificial tariff, gradually driving away our mother-tongue from our life of culture into the insignificance of domestic use.

But this is perpetuating for us the heavy and costly burden of all the alien features of our Government, incomprehensible to the masses of our population. It involves the cruel necessity of a host of English-knowing middlemen for carrying on relationship with the governing power in matters of the smallest detail. I believe that India is the only country in the world where the Government has an Agricultural Department, which publishes its bulletins for the benefit of the cultivators in a language unknown to them, making these poor cultivators pay the cost of this heartless joke played upon themselves.

The Government has expensive arrangements made for everything necessary to be translated from the vernaculars into English, in order to make the administrative work of a foreign country lazily convenient for the few English officials engaged in this task. But, for the three hundred millions of people inhabiting this country, are kept strictly *purda-nashin*, behind a foreign language, the codes of law, the proceedings of the legislative councils, the lectures of the Governors addressed to the people, and all the important Government communications affecting their life. This makes us wonder all the more at the last remnant of the sense of humour exhibited in our railway stations, where the names are actually inscribed in the Indian alphabets to help the Indian travellers. In fact, our rulers have made their duties cheap for themselves, but immensely expensive for the people they have come to govern.

This has created a most unnatural situation for us, making our own language an obstacle in our pathway of success, thus generating among our educated men a humiliating pride in being able to perform the rope-dancer's feat of skill by leading their knowledge of English over the perilously thin line of correct grammar. And merely for this we have no other option but fondly to overlook all vital defects in our present system and with grateful tears accept from its hands a

stone in place of bread. For not only have we to pay the cost of our government with taxes, but also with our own language and with our own true culture, upon which depends the salvation of our motherland for all time to come.

X

We must therefore think of the seat of our Indian learning as in excess of, and quite apart from, the existing university-controlled schools and colleges. Let these lumbering machines be relegated to a place among our law courts, our offices, our police stations, goals, asylums, and other paraphernalia of civilization.

If our country wants fruit and shade, let it abandon brick-and-mortar erections and come down to the soil. Why cannot we boldly avow that we shall nurture our own life-force as naturally as the pupils who used to gather round the teachers in the forest retreats of the Vedic age; or at Nalanda or Taxila during the Buddhist era; or as they gather even now, in the day of our downfall, in our tols and chatuspathis?

We must beware even of calling it a University. For the name itself is bound to rouse an irrepressible tendency to comparison and feeble imitation. My suggestion is that we should generate somewhere a centripetal force, which will attract and group together from different parts of our land and different ages all our own materials of learning and thus create a complete and moving orb of Indian culture.

XI A pupil of an Anglo-vernacular school in Allahabad was once asked to define a river. The clever little fellow gave a perfectly correct definition.

When he was asked what river he had seen, this unfortunate mite, living at the confluence of the Ganges and Jumna, replied that he had not seen any. He

dimly had an idea that his familiar world (which so easily came to him through the medium of his own direct consciousness) could never be the great learned world of geography. In later life, he must have got the information that even his own country had its place in geography and actually had its rivers. But suppose this news did not reach him at all, till some foreign traveller told him one day that his was a great big country, that the Himalayas

were great big mountains, that the Indus, Ganges, Brahmaputra were great big rivers—the shock of it could not but upset his mental balance, and in the reaction against the self-contempt he had nursed so long, he would lose no time in making himself absurdly hoarse by shouting that other countries were merely countries, but his was heaven itself! His previous understanding of the world was wrong—due to his ignorance. His subsequent understanding of the

world was worse—it was ludicrously false with the falsehood of sophisticated foolishness.

The same thing happens in the case of our Indian culture. Because of the want of opportunity in our course of study, we take it for granted that India had no culture, or next to none. Then, when we hear from foreign pundits some echo of the praises of India's culture, we can contain ourselves no longer and rend the sky with the shout that all other cultures are merely human, but ours is divine—a special creation of Brahma! And this leads us to that moral dipsomania, which is the hankering after the continual stimulation of self-flattery.

We should remember that the doctrine of special creation is out of date, and the idea of a specially favoured race belongs to a barbaric age. We have come to understand in modern times that any special truth, or special culture, which is wholly dissociated from the universal, is not true at all. Only the prisoner condemned to a solitary cell is separate from the world. He who declares that India has been condemned by Providence to intellectual solitary confinement does not help to glorify her.

However that may be, if we are to create a centre of Indian culture, we must start with the belief that India has a culture, and one which is worthy of being imparted to all.

My mind feels a pull at its coat from the back at this point. I know a section of my countrymen are saying to me: 'Not so fast. Let us know if you believe that our Indian culture is the best in the world, or, at least so good as to deserve a place of honour in our education.'

Fortunately, in God's world, the tyranny of the one sole best is not tolerated. There are numerous varieties of the best to keep each other company. So let us not quarrel over that superlative adjective or take it too seriously.

It can be easily pointed out that our culture has its superstitions and its shortcomings. They show themselves too prominently only because its movement has stopped. European culture also has its superstitions. Its politics and its science are full of them. These do not become fatally unhealthy because they move and they change—just like their caste distinctions, which are not desperately oppressive because they are constantly moving.

Only a few years ago, Europe began to see the whole world through the mist of one scientific shibboleth, 'the struggle for existence'. This coloured her vision, and fixed her point of view. We, also, like a meekly obedient pupil, took the phrase from her and thought it a sign of imperfect education not to believe it. But already there is an indication of a change in this view, and facts are being brought to prove that the positive force which works at the basis of natural

selection is the power of sympathy, the power to combine. In the nineteenth century, the message of political economy was unrestrained competition; in the twentieth, it is beginning to change into cooperation. This only proves that whatever binders movement is bad.

There was a time when we in India worked at the problem of life; we freely made experiments; the solutions we arrived at then cannot be ignored merely because they are different from those of Europe. But they must move; they have to join the procession of man's discoveries; they must not lag behind and superciliously forget others, and be contemptuously forgotten themselves. We are to call them into line and to move to the drum-beat of life.

XII Far too long have we kept our culture outcaste in the confines of our indigenous Sanskrit *pathasalas*—for undue respect makes for untouchability as much as undue contempt.

There was a time when the excess of dignity of the Mikado of Japan kept him practically a prisoner in his palace, with the result that not he, but the Shogun, was the real ruler. When it became necessary for him to reign in fact, he had to be brought forth from his seclusion into the public view. So was the culture of our Sanskrit *pathasala* confined within itself, disdainfully ignoring all other cultures of the world. It was be lauded, as having come straight from Brahma's mouth, or Siva's matted locks, or some equally superhuman outlet of irruption, so that it was unlike anything else anywhere in the world, and had to be kept apart, guarded from contamination by the common people. Thus it became the Mikado of our country, while foreign culture, gaining strength from its perfect freedom of movement and growth and its humanness, dominated the situation like the Shogun. Our reverence is reserved for the one, but all our taxes are paid to the other. We may launch out invectives against the latter in private, we may lament over our slavery to it; but, all the same, we sell our wife's ornaments and mortgage our ancestral home to pay its dues to the last farthing when we send our sons to its durbar.

It will not do to keep our culture so reverently shackled with chains of gold. The age has come when all artificial fences are breaking down. Only that will survive which is basically consistent with the universal; while that which seeks safety in the out-of-the-way hole of the special will perish. The nursery of the infant should be secluded, its cradle safe. But the same seclusion, if continued after the infant has grown up, makes it weak in body and mind.

There was a time when China, Persia, Egypt, Greece and Rome had, each of them, to nurture its civilization in comparative seclusion. The greatness of the

universal, however, which was more or less in each, grew strong within its protecting sheath of individuality. Now has come the age for coordination and cooperation. The seedlings, that were reared within their enclosures, must now be transplanted into the open fields. They must pass the test of the world-market if their maximum value is to be obtained.

So we must prepare the grand field for the coordination of the cultures of the world, where each will give to and take from the other; where each will have to be studied through the growth of its stages in history. This adjustment of knowledge through comparative study, this progress in intellectual cooperation, is to be the key-note of the coming age. We may hug our holy aloofness from some imagined security of a corner, but the world will prove stronger than our corner, and it is our corner which will have to give way, receding and pressing against its walls till they burst on all sides.

But before we are in a position to stand a comparison with the other cultures of the world, or truly to co-operate with them, we must base our own structure on a synthesis of all the different cultures we have. When, taking our stand at such a centre, we turn towards the West, our gaze shall no longer be timid and dazed; our heads shall remain erect, safe from insult. For then we shall be able to take our own views of Truth, from the standpoint of our own vantage ground, thus opening out a new vista of thought before the grateful world.

XIII All great countries have their vital centres for intellectual life, where a high standard of learning is maintained, where the minds of the people are naturally attracted to find their genial atmosphere, to prove their worth, to contribute their share to the country's culture, and thus to kindle on some common altar of the land a great sacrificial fire of intellect which may radiate the sacred light in all directions.

Athens was such a centre in Greece, Rome in Italy, and Paris is such today in France. Benares has been and still continues to be the centre of our Sanskrit culture. But Sanskrit learning does not exhaust all the elements of culture that exist in the present-day India.

If we take for granted what some people maintain, that European culture is the only one worth the name in our modern age, then the question comes to our mind: has it any natural centre in India? Has it any vital ever-flowing connection with her life? The answer is that not only has it none, but it never can have any; for the perennial centre of European culture is sure to be in Europe. And therefore, if we must accept it as the only source of light for our mind, then it

would be like depending upon some star for our daybreak, which is the sun of a far distant alien sphere. The star may give us light, but not the day; it may give us direction in our voyage of exploration, but it can never open the full view of truth before our eyes. In fact, we can never use this star light for stirring sap in our invisible depths and giving colour and bloom to our life.

This is the reason why European education has become for India mere school lessons and no culture, a box of matches good for various uses, but not the morning in which the use and the beauty and all the subtle mysteries of life have blended in one.

And this is why the inner spirit of India is calling to us to establish in this land great centres, where all her intellectual forces will gather for the purpose of creation, and all her resources of knowledge and thought, Eastern and Western, will unite in perfect harmony. She is seeking for herself her modern Brahmavarta, her Mithila, of Janaka's time, her Ujjaini, of the time of Vikramaditya. She is seeking for the glorious opportunity when she will know her mind, and give her mind to the world, to help it in its progress; when she will be released from the chaos of scattered powers and the inertness of borrowed acquisition.

XIV

Let me state clearly that I have no distrust of any culture because of its foreign character. On the contrary, I believe that the shock of such forces is necessary for the vitality of our intellectual nature. It is admitted that much of the spirit of Christianity runs counter, not only to the classical culture of Europe, but to the European temperament altogether. And yet this alien movement of idea, constantly running against the natural mental current of Europe, has been the most important factor in strengthening and enriching her civilization on account of the very antagonism of its direction. In fact, the European vernaculars first woke up to life and fruitful vigour owing to the impact of this foreign thought power with all its oriental forms and feelings. The same thing is happening in India. The European culture has come to us not only with its knowledge but with its velocity. Though our assimilation of it is imperfect and the consequent aberrations numerous, still it is rousing our intellectual life from its inertia of formal habits into glowing consciousness by the very contradiction it offers to our own mental traditions.

What I object to is the artificial arrangement by which this foreign education tends to occupy all the space of our national mind and thus kills, or hampers, the great opportunity for the creation of a new thought power by a new combination of truths. It is this which makes me urge that all the elements in our own culture have to be strengthened, not to resist the Western culture, but truly to accept and assimilate it, and use it for our food and not as our burden; to get mastery over this culture, and not to live at its outskirts as the hewers of texts and drawers of book-learning.

XV

The main river of Indian culture has flowed in four streams—the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, and the Jain. It had its source in the heights of the Indian consciousness.

But a river belonging to a country is not fed by its own waters alone. The Tibetan Bramhaputra is a tributary to the Indian Ganges. Contributions have similarly found their way to India's original culture. The Muhammadan, for example, has repeatedly come into India from outside, laden with his own stores of knowledge and feeling and his wonderful religious democracy, bringing freshet after freshet to swell the current. In our music, our architecture, our pictorial art, our literature, the Muhammadans have made their permanent and precious contribution. Those who have studied the lives and writings of our medieval saints, and all the great religious movements that sprang up in the time of the Muhammadan rule, know how deep is our debt to this foreign current that has so intimately mingled with our life.

And then has descended upon us the later flood of Western culture, which bids fair to break through all banks and bounds, merging all the other streams in its impetuous rush. If we can but make a separate course, through which this last may flow, we shall be saved from an irruption, whose cost may one day prove out of all proportion to its contribution, however large.

So, in our centre of Indian learning, we must provide for the coordinated study of all these different cultures—the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Islamic, the Sikh, and the Zoroastrian. And side by side with them the European—for only then shall we be able to assimilate the last. A river flowing within banks is truly our own, but our relations with a flood are disastrously the opposite.

It is needless to add that, along with those languages in which lies stored our ancestral wealth of wisdom, we must make room for the study of all our great vernaculars which carry the living stream of the mind of modern India. Along with this study of our living languages, we must include our folk literature, in order truly to know the psychology of our people and the direction towards which our underground current of life is moving.

There are some who are insularly modern, who believe that the past is the bankrupt time, leaving no assets for us, but only a legacy of debts. They refuse to believe that the army that is marching forward can be fed from the rear. It is well to remind them that the great ages of renaissance in history were those when

men suddenly discovered the seeds of thought in the granary of the past.

The unfortunate people, who have lost the harvest of their past, have lost their present age. They have missed their seeds for cultivation, and go a-begging for their bare livelihood. We must not imagine that we are one of these disinherited peoples of the world. The time has come for us to break open the treasure trove of our ancestors and use it for our commerce of life. Let us, with its help, make our future our own—never continue our existence as the eternal rag-picker at other people's dustbins.

XVI So far I have dwelt only upon the intellectual aspect of education, because with this we are familiar, because, like the moon, we, in modern India, present to the sun of the World-culture only one side of our life, which is the intellectual side; we do not yet fully realize that our other sides also require the same light for their illumination. From the educational point of view we know Europe where it is scientific, or at best literary. So our notion of modern culture is limited within the boundary lines of grammar and the laboratory. We almost completely ignore the aesthetic life of man, leaving it uncultivated, allowing weeds to grow there.

Therefore again I have to give utterance to a truism and say with profound seriousness that music and the fine arts are among the highest means of national self-expression, without which the people remain inarticulate.

Our conscious mind occupies only a superficial layer of our life; the subconscious mind is almost fathomless in its depth—where the wisdom of countless ages grows up from its base, like the great continents, beyond our ken. Our conscious mind finds its expression in numerous deliberate activities which pass and repass before our view. Our subconscious mind, where dwells our soul, must also have its adequate media of expression. These media are poetry and music and the arts; herein the complete personality of man finds its utterance.

Our newspapers are prolific, our meeting places are vociferous; in these we wear out to shreds the things we have borrowed from our English teachers, and make the air dismal and damp with the tears of our grievances. But where are our arts, which, like the outbreak of spring flowers, are the spontaneous overflow of our deeper nature, of our spiritual abundance of wealth? Must we be condemned to carry to the end the dead load of dolorous dumbness? Must we, like miserable outcasts, be deprived of our place in the festival of national culture, and wait at the outer court, where colour is not for us, nor the forms of delight, nor the songs? Must ours be the education of a prison-house, with hard

labour and with a drab dress cut to the limits of minimum decency and necessity? Do we not know that the perfection of colour and form and expression belongs to the perfection of vitality—that the joy of life is only the other side of the strength of life?

The timber merchant may think that the flowers and foliage are mere frivolous decorations of a tree, but he will know to his cost that if these are suppressed, the timber also follows them.

During the Moghal period, music and art in India found a great impetus from the rulers, because their whole life was in this land, not merely their official life; and it is the wholeness of man from which originates Art. Our English teachers are birds of passage; they cackle to us, but do not sing—their true heart is not in this land of their exile. The natural place of their art and music is in Europe, where they are so deep in the soil that they cannot be transferred to a distant land, unless the soil itself is removed.

We see the European, where he is learned, where he is masterful, where he is busily constructive in his trade and politics, but not where he is busily constructive in his trade and politics, but not where he is artistically creative. That is the reason why modern Europe has not been revealed to us in her complete personality, but only in her intellectual power and utilitarian activities; and therefore she has only touched our intellect and evoked our utilitarian ambitions.

The mutilation of life owing to this narrowness of culture must no longer be encouraged. In the proposed centre of our cultures, music and art must have their prominent seats of honour, and not merely a tolerant nod of recognition. The different systems of music and different schools of art, which lie scattered in the different ages and provinces of India, and in the different strata of society, have to be brought together there and studied.

Thus a real standard of aesthetic taste will be formed, by the help of which our own art-expression will grow in strength and riches, enabling us to judge all foreign arts with the soberness of truth and to appropriate from them ideas and forms without incurring the charge of plagiarism.

XVII All the time that I have been developing my ideas in this paper a secret uneasiness has never been absent from my mind, reminding me that these ideas would have to be submitted to the scrutiny of practical men—those men who have a natural suspicion of all pictures of completeness because of their perfection. They are sure to ask with pitiless gravity: ‘All that you discuss and describe may be true, or what is far worse, beautiful—but is it possible.’

Not being a practical man myself, my answer will be: ‘Whatever is true is real. Reality is related to truth, as the canvas to the picture—it must be there at the back.’ And if my Ideal of the centre of Indian culture has any truth, it can be, and therefore must be, realized at all costs.

The one practical question which has to be answered, before all else, is the economic question: what adjustments should be made whereby such institutions can naturally maintain themselves and one day be independent, not only of the patronage of the rich, but of the dead imposition of their own accumulated funds. The wealth and honour which, once for all, are bequeathed to us, which we do not have to earn or produce, which never cease to be, whether we deserve them or not—these gradually and inevitably cripple our life and are sure to make us indolent and exclusive, bringing about stagnation of soul. They remain like the marble landing-stairs of a river, when the stream has changed its course. Therefore we must think out some scheme by which our truly national organization should be made to earn its own necessities by its own constant efforts, and thus perpetually keep in real touch with the life of the future ages and not continue its existence as a parasite feeding upon the charity of the past.

We are thus faced with two stupendous problems: the first, about our poverty of intellectual life; the second, about the poverty of our material life.

The first, I have discussed in some detail in this paper. I have come to the conclusion that for the perfection of our mental life the coordination of all our cultural resources is necessary. I have found that our present English education is, for our minds, a kind of food which contains only one particular ingredient needful for our vitality, and even that not fresh, but dried and—packed in tins. In our true food we must have coordination of all different ingredients—and most of these, not as laboratory products, or in a desiccated condition, but as organic things, similar to our own living tissues.

Our material poverty, likewise, can only be removed by the coordination of our material resources through the cooperation of our individual powers. And the basis of our institution should be laid upon this economic cooperation. It must not only instruct, but live; not only think, but produce. Our tapovanas, which were our natural Universities, were not abstracted from life. There the masters and students lived their full life; they gathered their fruit and fuel; they took their cattle to graze; and the spiritual education, which the students had, was a part of the spiritual life itself which comprehended all life. Our centre of culture should not only be the centre of the intellectual life of India, but the centre of her economic life also. It must cultivate land, breed cattle, to feed itself and its students; it must produce all necessaries, devising the best means and using the

best materials, calling science to its aid. Its very existence should depend upon the success of its industrial ventures carried out on the cooperative principle, which will unite the teachers and students in a living and active bond of necessity. This will give us also a practical industrial training, whose motive force is not the greed of profit.

Such an institution must group round it all the neighbouring villages and vitally unite them with itself in all its economic endeavours. Their housing accommodation, sanitation, the improvement of their moral and intellectual life—these should form the object of the social side of its activity. In a word, it should never be like a meteor—only a stray fragment of a world—but a complete world in itself, self-sustaining, independent, rich with ever-renewing life, radiating light across space and time, attracting and maintaining round it a planetary system of dependent bodies, imparting life-breath to the complete man, who is intellectual as well as economic, bound by social bonds and aspiring towards spiritual freedom.

XVIII Before I conclude my paper, a delicate question remains to be considered: what must be the religious teaching that is to be given in our centre of Indian culture, which I may name Visva-Bharati? The question has been generally shirked in the case of the schools which we call national. A National University, in our minds, has been only another name for a Hindu University. So, whenever we give any thought to the question, we think of the Hindu religion alone. Unable as we are to rise to the conception of the Great India, we try to divide it, in the case of our culture, just as we have done by our religious rites and social customs. In other words, the idea of such unity as we are capable of achieving for ourselves not only fails to rouse enthusiasm in our hearts, but gives rise to some amount of antipathy.

Be that as it may, it has to be admitted that the world is full of different religious sects and will probably always remain so. It is no use lamenting over, or quarrelling with, this fact. There is a private corner for me in my house with a little table, which has its special fittings of pen and ink-stand and paper, and here I can best do my writing and other work. There is no reason to run-down, or run away from, this corner of mine, because in it I cannot invite and provide seats for all my friends and guests. It may be that this corner is too narrow, or too close, or too untidy, so that my doctor may object, my friends remonstrate, my enemies sneer; but all that has nothing to do with the present case. My point is that if all the rooms in my house be likewise solely for my own special

convenience; if there be no reception room for my friends, or accommodation for my guests, then indeed am I blameworthy. Then with bowed head must I confess that in my house no great meeting of friends can ever take place.

Religious sects are formed in every country and every age owing to a diversity of historical causes. There will always be many, who, by tradition and temperament, find special solace in belonging to a particular sect; and also there will be others who think that the finding of such solace can only be allowed as legitimate within the pale of their own. Between such, there needs must be quarrels. Making ample provision for such inevitable and interminable squabbles, can there be no wide meeting place, where all sects may gather together and forget their differences? Has India, in her religious ideals, no such space for the common light of day and open air for all humanity? The vigour with which the sectarian fanatic will shake his head, makes one doubt it; the bloodshed which so frequently occurs for such trivial causes, makes one doubt it; the cruel and insulting distinctions between man and man which are kept alive under the sanction of religion, make one doubt it. Still, in spite of all these, when I turn to look back to India's own pure culture—in those ages when it flourished in its truth—I am emboldened to assert that it is there. Our forefathers did spread a single pure white carpet whereon all the world was cordially invited to take its seat in amity and good fellowship. No quarrel could have arisen there; for He, in whose name the invitation went forth, for all time to come, was *Santam, Sivam, Advaitam*—the Peaceful, in the heart of all conflicts; the Good, who is revealed through all losses and sufferings; the One, in all diversities of creation. And in His name was this eternal truth declared in ancient India: He alone sees, who sees all beings as himself.

2. Creative Unity

2.1. An Eastern University

In the midst of much that is discouraging in the present state of the world, there is one symptom of vital promise. Asia is awakening. This great event, if it be but directed along the right lines, is full of hope, not only for Asia herself, but for the whole world.

On the other hand, it has to be admitted that the relationship of the West with the East, growing more and more complex and widespread for over two centuries, far from attaining its true fulfilment, has given rise to a universal spirit of conflict. The consequent strain and unrest have profoundly disturbed Asia, and antipathetic forces have been accumulating for years in the depth of the Eastern mind.

The meeting of the East and the West has remained incomplete, because the occasions of it have not been disinterested. The political and commercial adventures carried on by Western races—very often by force and against the interest and wishes of the countries they have dealt with—have created a moral alienation, which is deeply injurious to both parties. The perils threatened by this unnatural relationship have long been contemptuously ignored by the West. But the blind confidence of the strong in their apparent invincibility has often led them, from their dream of security, into terrible surprises of history.

It is not the fear of danger or loss to one people or another, however, which is most important. The demoralising influence of the constant estrangement between the two hemispheres, which affects the baser passions of man,—pride, greed and hypocrisy on the one hand; fear, suspiciousness and flattery on the other,—has been developing, and threatens us with a world-wide spiritual disaster.

The time has come when we must use all our wisdom to understand the situation, and to control it, with a stronger trust in moral guidance than in any array of physical forces.

In the beginning of man's history his first social object was to form a community, to grow into a people. At that early period, individuals were gathered together within geographical enclosures. But in the present age, with its

facility of communication, geographical barriers have almost lost their reality, and the great federation of men, which is waiting either to find its true scope or to break asunder in a final catastrophe, is not a meeting of individuals, but of various human races. Now the problem before us is of one single country, which is this earth, where the races as individuals must find both their freedom of self-expression and their bond of federation. Mankind must realize a unity, wider in range, deeper in sentiment, stronger in power than ever before. Now that the problem is large, we have to solve it on a bigger scale, to realize the God in man by a larger faith and to build the temple of our faith on a sure and world-wide basis.

The first step towards realization is to create opportunities for revealing the different peoples to one another. This can never be done in those fields where the exploiting utilitarian spirit is supreme. We must find some meeting-ground, where there can be no question of conflicting interests. One of such places is the University, where we can work together in a common pursuit of truth, share together our common heritage, and realize that artists in all parts of the world have created forms of beauty, scientists discovered secrets of the universe, philosophers solved the problems of existence, saints made the truth of the spiritual world organic in their own lives, not merely for some particular race to which they belonged, but for all mankind. When the science of meteorology knows the earth's atmosphere as continuously one, affecting the different parts of the world differently, but in a harmony of adjustments, it knows and attains truth. And so, too, we must know that the great mind of man is one, working through the many differences which are needed to ensure the full result of its fundamental unity. When we understand this truth in a disinterested spirit, it teaches us to respect all the differences in man that are real, yet remain conscious of our oneness; and to know that perfection of unity is not in uniformity, but in harmony.

This is the problem of the present age. The East, for its own sake and for the sake of the world, must not remain unrevealed. The deepest source of all calamities in history is misunderstanding. For where we do not understand, we can never be just.

Being strongly impressed with the need and the responsibility, which every individual today must realize according to his power, I have formed the nucleus of an International University in India, as one of the best means of promoting mutual understanding between the East and the West. This Institution, according to the plan I have in mind, will invite students from the West to study the different systems of Indian philosophy, literature, art and music in their proper

environment, encouraging them to carry on research work in collaboration with the scholars already engaged in this task.

India has her renaissance. She is preparing to make her contribution to the world of the future. In the past she produced her great culture, and in the present age she has an equally important contribution to make to the culture of the New World which is emerging from the wreckage of the Old. This is a momentous period of her history pregnant with precious possibilities, when any disinterested offer of co-operation from any part of the West will have an immense moral value, the memory of which will become brighter as the regeneration of the East grows in vigour and creative power.

The Western Universities give their students an opportunity to learn what all the European peoples have contributed to their Western culture. Thus the intellectual mind of the West has been luminously revealed to the world. What is needed to complete this illumination is for the East to collect its own scattered lamps and offer them to the enlightenment of the world.

There was a time when the great countries of Asia had, each of them, to nurture its own civilization apart in comparative seclusion. Now has come the age of co-ordination and co-operation. The seedlings that were reared within narrow plots must now be transplanted into the open fields. They must pass the test of the world-market, if their maximum value is to be obtained.

But before Asia is in a position to co-operate with the culture of Europe, she must base her own structure on a synthesis of all the different cultures which she has. When, taking her stand on such a culture, she turns toward the West, she will take, with a confident sense of mental freedom, her own view of truth, from her own vantage-ground, and open a new vista of thought to the world. Otherwise, she will allow her priceless inheritance to crumble into dust, and, trying to replace it clumsily with feeble imitations of the West, make herself superfluous, cheap and ludicrous. If she thus loses her individuality and her specific power to exist, will it in the least help the rest of the world? Will not her terrible bankruptcy involve also the Western mind? If the whole world grows at last into an exaggerated West, then such an illimitable parody of the modern age will die, crushed beneath its own absurdity.

In this belief, it is my desire to extend by degrees the scope of this University on simple lines, until it comprehends the whole range of Eastern cultures—the Aryan, Semitic, Mongolian and others. Its object will be to reveal the Eastern mind to the world.

Of one thing I felt certain during my travels in Europe, that a genuine interest has been roused there in the philosophy and the arts of the East, from which the

Western mind seeks fresh inspiration of truth and beauty. Once the East had her reputation of fabulous wealth, and the seekers were attracted from across the sea. Since then, the shrine of wealth has changed its site. But the East is famed also for her storage of wisdom, harvested by her patriarchs from long successive ages of spiritual endeavour. And when, as now, in the midst of the pursuit of power and wealth, there rises the cry of privation from the famished spirit of man, an opportunity is offered to the East, to offer her store to those who need it.

Once upon a time we were in possession of such a thing as our own mind in India. It was living. It thought, it felt, it expressed itself. It was receptive as well as productive. That this mind could be of any use in the process, or in the end, of our education was overlooked by our modern educational dispensation. We are provided with buildings and books and other magnificent burdens calculated to suppress our mind. The latter was treated like a library-shelf solidly made of wood, to be loaded with leather-bound volumes of second-hand information. In consequence, it has lost its own colour and character, and has borrowed polish from the carpenter's shop. All this has cost us money, and also our finer ideas, while our intellectual vacancy has been crammed with what is described in official reports as Education. In fact, we have bought our spectacles at the expense of our eyesight.

In India our goddess of learning is *Saraswati*. My audience in the West, I am sure, will be glad to know that her complexion is white. But the signal fact is that she is living and she is a woman, and her seat is on a lotus-flower. The symbolic meaning of this is, that she dwells in the centre of life and the heart of all existence, which opens itself in beauty to the light of heaven.

The Western education which we have chanced to know is impersonal. Its complexion is also white, but it is the whiteness of the white-washed classroom walls. It dwells in the cold-storage compartments of lessons and the ice-packed minds of the schoolmasters. The effect which it had on my mind when, as a boy, I was compelled to go to school, I have described elsewhere. My feeling was very much the same as a tree might have, which was not allowed to live its full life, but was cut down to be made into packing-cases.

The introduction of this education was not a part of the solemn marriage ceremony which was to unite the minds of the East and West in mutual understanding. It represented an artificial method of training specially calculated to produce the carriers of the white man's burden. This want of ideals still clings to our education system, though our Universities have latterly burdened their syllabus with a greater number of subjects than before. But it is only like adding to the bags of wheat the bullock carries to market; it does not make the bullock

any better off.

Mind, when long deprived of its natural food of truth and freedom of growth, develops an unnatural craving for success; and our students have fallen victims to the mania for success in examinations. Success consists in obtaining the largest number of marks with the strictest economy of knowledge. It is a deliberate cultivation of disloyalty to truth, of intellectual dishonesty, of a foolish imposition by which the mind is encouraged to rob itself. But as we are by means of it made to forget the existence of mind, we are supremely happy at the result. We pass examinations, and shrivel up into clerks, lawyers and police inspectors, and we die young.

Universities should never be made into mechanical organizations for collecting and distributing knowledge. Through them the people should offer their intellectual hospitality, their wealth of mind to others, and earn their proud right in return to receive gifts from the rest of the world. But in the whole length and breadth of India there is not a single University established in the modern time where a foreign or an Indian student can properly be acquainted with the best products of the Indian mind. For that we have to cross the sea, and knock at the doors of France and Germany. Educational institutions in our country are India's alms-bowl of knowledge; they lower our intellectual self-respect; they encourage us to make a foolish display of decorations composed of borrowed feathers.

This it was that led me to found a school in Bengal, in face of many difficulties and discouragements, and in spite of my own vocation as a poet, who finds his true inspiration only when he forgets that he is a schoolmaster. It is my hope that in this school a nucleus has been formed, round which an indigenous University of our own land will find its natural growth—a University which will help India's mind to concentrate and to be fully conscious of itself; free to seek the truth and make this truth its own wherever found, to judge by its own standard, give expression to its own creative genius, and offer its wisdom to the guests who come from other parts of the world.

Man's intellect has a natural pride in its own aristocracy, which is the pride of its culture. Culture only acknowledges the excellence whose criticism is in its inner perfection, not in any external success. When this pride succumbs to some compulsion of necessity or lure of material advantage, it brings humiliation to the intellectual man. Modern India, through her very education, has been made to suffer this humiliation. Once she herself provided her children with a culture which was the product of her own ages of thought and creation. But it has been thrust aside, and we are made to tread the mill of passing examinations, not for learning anything, but for notifying that we are qualified for employments under

organisations conducted in English. Our educated community is not a cultured community, but a community of qualified candidates. Meanwhile the proportion of possible employments to the number of claimants has gradually been growing narrower, and the consequent disaffection has been widespread. At last the very authorities who are responsible for this are blaming their victims. Such is the perversity of human nature. It bears its worst grudge against those it has injured.

It is as if some tribe which had the primitive habit of decorating its tribal members with birds' plumage were some day to hold these very birds guilty of the crime of being extinct. There are belated attempts on the part of our governors to read us pious homilies about disinterested love of learning, while the old machinery goes on working, whose product is not education but certificates. It is good to remind the fettered bird that its wings are for soaring; but it is better to cut the chain which is holding it to its perch. The most pathetic feature of the tragedy is that the bird itself has learnt to use its chain for its ornament, simply because the chain jingles in fairly respectable English.

In the Bengali language there is a modern maxim which can be translated, 'He who learns to read and write rides in a carriage and pair.' In English there is a similar proverb, 'Knowledge is power.' It is an offer of a prospective bribe to the student, a promise of an ulterior reward which is more important than knowledge itself. Temptations, held before us as inducements to be good or to pursue uncongenial paths, are most often flimsy lies or half-truths, such as the oft-quoted maxim of respectable piety, 'Honesty is the best policy,' at which politicians all over the world seem to laugh in their sleeves. But unfortunately, education conducted under a special providence of purposefulness, of eating the fruit of knowledge from the wrong end, does lead one to that special paradise on earth, the daily rides in one's own carriage and pair. And the West, I have heard from authentic sources, is aspiring in its education after that special cultivation of worldliness.

Where society is comparatively simple and obstructions are not too numerous, we can clearly see how the life-process guides education in its vital purpose. The system of folk-education, which is indigenous to India, but is dying out, was one with the people's life. It flowed naturally through the social channels and made its way everywhere. It is a system of widespread irrigation of culture. Its teachers, specially trained men, are in constant requisition, and find crowded meetings in our villages, where they repeat the best thoughts and express the ideals of the land in the most effective form. The mode of instruction includes the recitation of epics, expounding of the scriptures, reading from the Puranas, which are the classical records of old history, performance of plays founded

upon the early myths and legends, dramatic narration of the lives of ancient heroes, and the singing in chorus of songs from the old religious literature. Evidently, according to this system, the best function of education is to enable us to realize that to live as a man is great, requiring profound philosophy for its ideal, poetry for its expression, and heroism in its conduct. Owing to this vital method of culture the common people of India, though technically illiterate, have been made conscious of the sanctity of social relationships, entailing constant sacrifice and self-control, urged and supported by ideals collectively expressed in one word, Dharma.

Such a system of education may sound too simple for the complexities of modern life. But the fundamental principle of social life in its different stages of development remains the same; and in no circumstance can the truth be ignored that all human complexities must harmonize in organic unity with life, failing which there will be endless conflict. Most things in the civilized world occupy more than their legitimate space. Much of their burden is needless. By bearing this burden civilized man may be showing great strength, but he displays little skill. To the gods, viewing this from on high, it must seem like the flounderings of a giant who has got out of his depth and knows not how to swim.

The main source of all forms of voluntary slavery is the desire of gain. It is difficult to fight against this when modern civilization is tainted with such a universal contamination of avarice. I have realized it myself in the little boys of my own school. For the first few years there is no trouble. But as soon as the upper class is reached, their worldly wisdom—the malady of the aged—begins to assert itself. They rebelliously insist that they must no longer learn, but rather pass examinations. Professions in the modern age are more numerous and lucrative than ever before. They need specialization of training and knowledge, tempting education to yield its spiritual freedom to the claims of utilitarian ambitions. But man's deeper nature is hurt; his smothered life seeks to be liberated from the suffocating folds and sensual ties of prosperity. And this is why we find almost everywhere in the world a growing dissatisfaction with the prevalent system of teaching, which betrays the encroachment of senility and worldly prudence over pure intellect.

In India, also, a vague feeling of discontent has given rise to numerous attempts at establishing national schools and colleges. But, unfortunately, our very education has been successful in depriving us of our real initiative and our courage of thought. The training we get in our schools has the constant implication in it that it is not for us to produce but to borrow. And we are casting about to borrow our educational plans from European institutions. The trampled

plants of Indian corn are dreaming of recouping their harvest from the neighbouring wheat fields. To change the figure, we forget that, for proficiency in walking, it is better to train the muscles of our own legs than to strut upon wooden ones of foreign make, although they clatter and cause more surprise at our skill in using them than if they were living and real.

But when we go to borrow help from a foreign neighbourhood we are apt to overlook the real source of help behind all that is external and apparent. Had the deep-water fishes happened to produce a scientist who chose the jumping of a monkey for his research work, I am sure he would give most of the credit to the branches of the trees and very little to the monkey itself. In a foreign University we see the branching wildernesses of its buildings, furniture, regulations, and syllabus, but the monkey, which is a difficult creature to catch and more difficult to manufacture, we are likely to treat as a mere accident of minor importance. It is convenient for us to overlook the fact that among the Europeans the living spirit of the University is widely spread in their society, their parliament, their literature, and the numerous activities of their corporate life. In all these functions they are in perpetual touch with the great personality of the land which is creative and heroic in its constant acts of self-expression and self-sacrifice. They have their thoughts published in their books as well as through the medium of living men who think those thoughts, and who criticise, compare and disseminate them. Some at least of the drawbacks of their academic education are redeemed by the living energy of the intellectual personality pervading their social organism. It is like the stagnant reservoir of water which finds its purification in the showers of rain to which it keeps itself open. But, to our misfortune, we have in India all the furniture of the European University except the human teacher. We have, instead, mere purveyors of book-lore in whom the paper god of the bookshop has been made vocal.

A most important truth, which we are apt to forget, is that a teacher can never truly teach unless he is still learning himself. A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame. The teacher who has come to the end of his subject, who has no living traffic with his knowledge, but merely repeats his lessons to his students, can only load their minds; he cannot quicken them. Truth not only must inform but inspire. If the inspiration dies out, and the information only accumulates, then truth loses its infinity. The greater part of our learning in the schools has been wasted because, for most of our teachers, their subjects are like dead specimens of once living things, with which they have a learned acquaintance, but no communication of life and love.

The educational institution, therefore, which I have in mind has primarily for

its object the constant pursuit of truth, from which the imparting of truth naturally follows. It must not be a dead cage in which living minds are fed with food artificially prepared. It should be an open house, in which students and teachers are at one. They must live their complete life together, dominated by a common aspiration for truth and a need of sharing all the delights of culture. In former days the great master-craftsmen had students in their workshops where they co-operated in shaping things to perfection. That was the place where knowledge could become living—that knowledge which not only has its substance and law, but its atmosphere subtly informed by a creative personality. For intellectual knowledge also has its aspect of creative art, in which the man who explores truth expresses something which is human in him—his enthusiasm, his courage, his sacrifice, his honesty, and his skill. In merely academical teaching we find subjects, but not the man who pursues the subjects; therefore the vital part of education remains incomplete.

For our Universities we must claim, not labelled packages of truth and authorized agents to distribute them, but truth in its living association with her lovers and seekers and discoverers. Also we must know that the concentration of the mind-forces scattered throughout the country is the most important mission of a University, which, like the nucleus of a living cell, should be the centre of the intellectual life of the people.

The bringing about of an intellectual unity in India is, I am told, difficult to the verge of impossibility owing to the fact that India has so many different languages. Such a statement is as unreasonable as to say that man, because he has a diversity of limbs, should find it impossible to realize life's unity in himself, and that only an earthworm composed of a tail and nothing else could truly know that it had a body.

Let us admit that India is not like any one of the great countries of Europe, which has its own separate language; but is rather like Europe herself, branching out into different peoples with many different languages. And yet Europe has a common civilization, with an intellectual unity which is not based upon uniformity of language. It is true that in the earlier stages of her culture the whole of Europe had Latin for her learned tongue. That was in her intellectual budding time, when all her petals of self-expression were closed in one point. But the perfection of her mental unfolding was not represented by the singularity of her literary vehicle. When the great European countries found their individual languages, then only the true federation of cultures became possible in the West, and the very differences of the channels made the commerce of ideas in Europe so richly copious and so variedly active. We can well imagine what the loss to

European civilization would be if France, Italy and Germany, and England herself, had not through their separate agencies contributed to the common coffer their individual earnings.

There was a time with us when India had her common language of culture in Sanskrit. But, for the complete commerce of her thought, she required that all her vernaculars should attain their perfect powers, through which her different peoples might manifest their idiosyncrasies; and this could never be done through a foreign tongue.

In the United States, in Canada and other British Colonies, the language of the people is English. It has a great literature which had its birth and growth in the history of the British Islands. But when this language, with all its products and acquisitions, matured by ages on its own mother soil, is carried into foreign lands, which have their own separate history and their own life-growth, it must constantly hamper the indigenous growth of culture and destroy individuality of judgement and the perfect freedom of self-expression. The inherited wealth of the English language, with all its splendour, becomes an impediment when taken into different surroundings, just as when lungs are given to the whale in the sea. If such is the case even with races whose grandmother-tongue naturally continues to be their own mother-tongue, one can imagine what sterility it means for a people which accepts, for its vehicle of culture, an altogether foreign language. A language is not like an umbrella or an overcoat, that can be borrowed by unconscious or deliberate mistake; it is like the living skin itself. If the body of a draught-horse enters into the skin of a race-horse, it will be safe to wager that such an anomaly will never win a race, and will fail even to drag a cart. Have we not watched some modern Japanese artists imitating European art? The imitation may sometimes produce clever results; but such cleverness has only the perfection of artificial flowers which never bear fruit.

All great countries have their vital centres for intellectual life, where a high standard of learning is maintained, where the minds of the people are naturally attracted, where they find their genial atmosphere, in which to prove their worth and to contribute their share to the country's culture. Thus they kindle, on the common altar of the land, that great sacrificial fire which can radiate the sacred light of wisdom abroad.

Athens was such a centre in Greece, Rome in Italy; and Paris is such today in France. Benares has been and still continues to be the centre of our Sanskrit culture. But Sanskrit learning does not exhaust all the elements of culture that exist in modern India.

If we were to take for granted, what some people maintain, that Western

culture is the only source of light for our mind, then it would be like depending for daybreak upon some star, which is the sun of a far distant sphere. The star may give us light, but not the day; it may give us direction in our voyage of exploration, but it can never open the full view of truth before our eyes. In fact, we can never use this cold starlight for stirring the sap in our branches, and giving colour and bloom to our life. This is the reason why European education has become for India mere school lessons and no culture; a box of matches, good for the small uses of illumination, but not the light of morning, in which the use and beauty, and all the subtle mysteries of life are blended in one.

Let me say clearly that I have no distrust of any culture because of its foreign character. On the contrary, I believe that the shock of such extraneous forces is necessary for the vitality of our intellectual nature. It is admitted that much of the spirit of Christianity runs counter, not only to the classical culture of Europe, but to the European temperament altogether. And yet this alien movement of ideas, constantly running against the natural mental current of Europe, has been a most important factor in strengthening and enriching her civilization, on account of the sharp antagonism of its intellectual direction. In fact, the European vernaculars first woke up to life and fruitful vigour when they felt the impact of this foreign thought-power with all its oriental forms and affinities. The same thing is happening in India. The European culture has come to us, not only with its knowledge, but with its velocity.

Then, again, let us admit that modern Science is Europe's great gift to humanity for all time to come. We, in India, must claim it from her hands, and gratefully accept it in order to be saved from the curse of futility by lagging behind. We shall fail to reap the harvest of the present age if we delay.

What I object to is the artificial arrangement by which foreign education tends to occupy all the space of our national mind, and thus kills, or hampers, the great opportunity for the creation of a new thought-power by a new combination of truths. It is this which makes me urge that all the elements in our own culture have to be strengthened, not to resist the Western culture, but truly to accept and assimilate it; to use it for our sustenance, not as our burden; to get mastery over this culture, and not to live on its outskirts as the hewers of texts and drawers of book-learning.

The main river in Indian culture has flowed in four streams,—the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, and the Jain. It has its source in the heights of the Indian consciousness. But a river, belonging to a country, is not fed by its own waters alone. The Tibetan Brahmaputra is a tributary to the Indian Ganges. Contributions have similarly found their way to India's original culture. The

Muhammadan, for example, has repeatedly come into India from outside, laden with his own stores of knowledge and feeling and his wonderful religious democracy, bringing freshet after freshet to swell the current. To our music, our architecture, our pictorial art, our literature, the Muhammadans have made their permanent and precious contribution. Those who have studied the lives and writings of our medieval saints, and all the great religious movements that sprang up in the time of the Muhammadan rule, know how deep is our debt to this foreign current that has so intimately mingled with our life.

So, in our centre of Indian learning, we must provide for the co-ordinate study of all these different cultures,—the Vedic, the Puranic, the Buddhist, the Jain, the Islamic, the Sikh and the Zoroastrian. The Chinese, Japanese, and Tibetan will also have to be added; for, in the past, India did not remain isolated within her own boundaries. Therefore, in order to learn what she was, in her relation to the whole continent of Asia, these cultures too must be studied. Side by side with them must finally be placed the Western culture. For only then shall we be able to assimilate this last contribution to our common stock. A river flowing within banks is truly our own, and it can contain its due tributaries; but our relations with a flood can only prove disastrous.

There are some who are exclusively modern, who believe that the past is the bankrupt time, leaving no assets for us, but only a legacy of debts. They refuse to believe that the army which is marching forward to believe that the army which is marching forward can be fed from the rear. It is well to remind such persons that the great ages of renaissance in history were those when man suddenly discovered the seeds of thought in the granary of the past.

The unfortunate people who have lost the harvest of their past have lost their present age. They have missed their seed for cultivation, and go begging for their bare livelihood. We must not imagine that we are one of these disinherited peoples of the world. The time has come for us to break open the treasure-trove of our ancestors, and use it for our commerce of life. Let us, with its help, make our future our own, and not continue our existence as the eternal rag-pickers in other people's dustbins.

So far I have dwelt only upon the intellectual aspect of Education. For, even in the West, it is the intellectual training which receives almost exclusive emphasis. The Western universities have not yet truly recognized that fulness of expression is fulness of life. And a large part of man can never find its expression in the mere language of words. It must therefore seek for its other languages,—lines and colours, sounds and movements. Through our mastery of these we not only make our whole nature articulate, but also understand man in all his attempts to

reveal his innermost being in every age and clime. The great use of Education is not merely to collect facts, but to know man and to make oneself known to man. It is the duty of every human being to master, at least to some extent, not only the language of intellect, but also that personality which is the language of Art. It is a great world of reality for man,—vast and profound,—this growing world of his own creative nature. This is the world of Art. To be brought up in ignorance of it is to be deprived of the knowledge and use of that great inheritance of humanity, which has been growing and waiting for every one of us from the beginning of our history. It is to remain deaf to the eternal voice of Man, that speaks to all men the messages that are beyond speech. From the educational point of view we know Europe where it is scientific, or at best literary. So our notion of its modern culture is limited within the boundary lines of grammar and the laboratory. We almost completely ignore the aesthetic life of man, leaving it uncultivated, allowing weeds to grow there. Our newspapers are prolific, our meeting-places are vociferous; and in them we wear to shreds the things we have borrowed from our English teachers. We make the air dismal and damp with the tears of our grievances. But where are our arts, which, like the outbreak of spring flowers, are the spontaneous overflow of our deeper nature and spiritual magnificence?

Through this great deficiency of our modern education, we are condemned to carry to the end a dead load of dumb wisdom. Like miserable outcasts, we are deprived of our place in the festival of culture, and wait at the outer court, where the colours are not for us, nor the forms of delight, nor the songs. Ours is the education of a prison-house, with hard labour and with a drab dress cut to the limits of minimum decency and necessity. We are made to forget that the perfection of colour and form and expression belongs to the perfection of vitality,—that the joy of life is only the other side of the strength of life. The timber merchant may think that the flowers and foliage are mere frivolous decorations of a tree; but if these are suppressed, he will know to his cost that the timber too will fail.

During the Moghal period, music and art in India found a great impetus from the rulers, because their whole life—not merely their official life—was lived in this land; and it is the wholeness of life from which originates Art. But our English teachers are birds of passage; they cackle to us, but do not sing,—their true heart is not in the land of their exile.

Construction of life, owing to this narrowness of culture, must no longer be encouraged. In the centre of Indian culture which I am proposing, music and art must have their prominent seats of honour, and not be given merely a tolerant

nod of recognition. The different systems of music and different schools of art which lie scattered in the different ages and provinces of India, and in the different strata of society, and also those belonging to the other great countries of Asia, which had communication with India, have to be brought there together and studied.

I have already hinted that Education should not be dragged out of its native element, the life-current of the people. Economic life covers the whole width of the fundamental basis of society, because its necessities are the simplest and the most universal. Educational institutions, in order to obtain their fulness of truth, must have close association with this economic life. The highest mission of education is to help us to realize the inner principle of the unity of all knowledge and all the activities of our social and spiritual being. Society in its early stage was held together by its economic co-operation, when all its members felt in unison a natural interest in their right to live. Civilization could never have been started at all if such was not the case. And civilization will fall to pieces if it never again realizes the spirit of mutual help and the common sharing of benefits in the elemental necessities of life. The idea of such economic co-operation should be made the basis of our University. It must not only instruct, but live; not only think, but produce.

Our ancient tapovanas, or forest schools, which were our natural universities, were not shut off from the daily life of the people. Masters and students gathered fruit and fuel, and took their cattle out to graze, supporting themselves by the work of their own hands. Spiritual education was a part of the spiritual life itself, which comprehended all life. Our centre of culture should not only be the centre of the intellectual life of India, but the centre of her economic life also. I must co-operate with the villages round it, cultivate land, breed cattle, spin cloths, press oil from oil-seeds; it must produce all the necessaries, devising the best means, using the best materials, and calling science to its aid. Its very existence should depend upon the success of its industrial activities carried out on the co-operative principle, which will unite the teachers and students and villagers of the neighbourhood in a living and active bond of necessity. This will give us also a practical industrial training, whose motive force is not the greed of profit.

Before I conclude my paper, a delicate question remains to be considered. What must be the religious ideal that is to rule our centre of Indian culture? The one abiding ideal in the religious life of India has been mukti, the deliverance of man's soul from the grip of self, its communion with the Infinite Soul through its union in ananda with the universe. This religion of spiritual harmony is not a theological doctrine to be taught, as a subject in the class, for half an hour each

day. It is the spiritual truth and beauty of our attitude towards our surroundings, our conscious relationship with the Infinite, and the lasting power of the Eternal in the passing moments of our life. Such a religious ideal can only be made possible by making provision for students to live in intimate touch with nature, daily to grow in an atmosphere of service offered to all creatures, tending trees, feeding birds and animals, learning to feel the immense mystery of the soil and water and air.

Along with this, there should be some common sharing of life with the tillers of the soil and the humble workers in the neighbouring villages; studying their crafts, inviting them to the feasts, joining them in works of co-operation for communal welfare; and in our intercourse we should be guided, not by moral maxims or the condescension of social superiority, but by natural sympathy of life for life, and by the sheer necessity of love's sacrifice for its own sake. In such an atmosphere students would learn to understand that humanity is a divine harp of many strings, waiting for its one grand music. Those who realize this unity are made ready for the pilgrimage through the night of suffering, and along the path of sacrifice, to the great meeting of Man in the future, for which the call comes to us across the darkness.

Life, in such a centre, should be simple and clean. We should never believe that simplicity of life might make us unsuited to the requirements of the society of our time. It is the simplicity of the tuning-fork, which is needed all the more because of the intricacy of strings in the instrument. In the morning of our career our nature needs the pure and the perfect note of a spiritual ideal in order to fit us for the complications of our later years.

In other words, this institution should be a perpetual creation by the co-operative enthusiasm of teachers and students, growing with the growth of their soul; a world in itself, self-sustaining, independent, rich with ever-renewing life radiating life across space and time, attracting and maintaining round it a planetary system of dependent bodies. Its aim should lie in imparting life-breath to the complete man, who is intellectual as well as economic, bound by social bonds, but aspiring towards spiritual freedom and final perfection.

2.2. An Indian Folk Religion

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I

In historical time the Buddha comes first of those who declared salvation to all men, without distinction, as by right man's own. What was the special force which startled men's minds and, almost within the master's lifetime, spread his teachings over India? It was the unique significance of the event, when a man came to men and said to them, 'I am here to emancipate you from the miseries of the thraldom of self.' This wisdom came, neither in texts of Scripture, nor in symbols of deities, nor in religious practices sanctified by ages, but through the voice of a living man and the love that flowed from a human heart.

And I believe this was the first occasion in the history of the world when the idea of the Avatar found its place in religion. Western scholars are never tired of insisting that Buddhism is of the nature of a moral code, coldly leading to the path of extinction. They forget that it was held to be a religion that roused in its devotees an inextinguishable fire of enthusiasm and carried them to lifelong exile across the mountain and desert barriers. To say that a philosophy of suicide can keep kindled in human hearts for centuries such fervour of self-sacrifice is to go against all the laws of sane psychology. The religious enthusiasm which cannot be bound within any daily ritual, but overflows into adventures of love and beneficence, must have in its centre that element of personality which rouses the whole soul. In answer, it may possibly be said that this was due to the personality of Buddha himself. But that also is not quite true. The personality which stirs the human heart to its immense depths, leading it to impossible deeds of heroism, must in the process itself reveal to men the infinite which is in all humanity. And that is what happened in Buddhism, making it a religion in the complete sense of the word.

Like the religion of the Upanishads, Buddhism also generated two divergent currents; the one impersonal, preaching the abnegation of self through discipline, and the other personal, preaching the cultivation of sympathy for all creatures, and devotion to the infinite truth of love; the other, which is called the

Mahayana, had its origin in the positive element contained in Buddha's teachings, which is immeasurable love. It could never, by any logic, find its reality in the emptiness of the truthless abyss. And the object of Buddha's meditation and his teachings was to free humanity from sufferings. But what was the path that he revealed to us? Was it some negative way of evading pain and seeking security against it? On the contrary, his path was the path of sacrifice—the utmost sacrifice of love. The meaning of such sacrifice is to reach some ultimate truth, some positive ideal, which in its greatness can accept suffering and transmute it into the profound peace of self-renunciation. True emancipation from suffering, which is the inalienable condition of the limited life of the self, can never be attained by fleeing from it, but rather by changing its value in the realm of truth—the truth of the higher life of love.

We have learnt that, by calculations made in accordance with the law of gravitation, some planets were discovered exactly in the place where they should be. Such a law of gravitation there is also in the moral world—And when we find men's minds disturbed, as they were by the preaching of the Buddha, we can be sure, even without any corroborative evidence, that there must have been some great luminous body of attraction, positive and powerful, and not a mere unfathomable vacancy. It is exactly this which we discover in the heart of the Mahayana system; and we have no hesitation in saying that the truth of Buddhism is there. The oil has to be burnt, not for the purpose of diminishing it, but for the purpose of giving light to the lamp. And when the Buddha said that the self must go, he said at the same moment that love must be realized. Thus originated the doctrine of the Dharma-kaya, the Infinite Wisdom and Love manifested in the Buddha. It was the first instance, as I have said, when men felt that the Universal and the Eternal Spirit was revealed in a human individual whom they had known and touched. The joy was too great for them, since the very idea itself came to them as a freedom—a freedom from the sense of their measureless insignificance. It was the first time I repeat, when the individual, as a man, felt in himself the Infinite made concrete.

What was more, those men who felt the love welling forth from the heart of Buddhism, as one with the current of the Eternal Love itself, were struck with the idea that such an effluence could never have been due to a single cataclysm of history—unnatural and therefore untrue. They felt instead that it was in the eternal nature of truth, that the event must belong to a series of manifestations; there must have been numberless other revelations in the past and endless others to follow.

The idea grew and widened until men began to feel that this Infinite Being was

already in every one of them, and that it rested with themselves to remove the sensual obstructions and reveal him in their own lives. In every individual there was, they realised, the potentiality of Buddha—that is to say, the Infinite made manifest.

We have to keep in mind the great fact that the preaching of the Buddha in India was not followed by stagnation of life—as would surely have happened if humanity was without any positive goal and his teaching was without any permanent value in itself. On the contrary, we find the arts and sciences springing up in its wake, institutions started for alleviating the misery of all creatures, human and non-human, and great centres of education founded. Some mighty power was suddenly roused from its obscurity, which worked for long centuries and changed the history of man in a large part of the world. And that power came into its full activity only by the individual being made conscious of his infinite worth. It was like the sudden discovery of a great mine of living wealth.

During the period of Buddhism the doctrine of deliverance flourished, which reached all mankind and released man's inner resources from neglect and self-insult. Even today we see in our own country human nature, from its despised corner of indignity, slowly and painfully finding its way to assert the inborn majesty of man. It is like the imprisoned tree finding a rift in the wall, and sending out its eager branches into freedom, to prove that darkness is not its birthright, that its love is for the sunshine. In the time of the Buddha the individual discovered his own immensity of worth, first by witnessing a man who united his heart in sympathy with all creatures, in all worlds, through the power of a love that knew no bounds; and then by learning that the same light of perfection lay confined within himself behind the clouds of selfish desire, and that the Bodhi-hridaya—‘the heart of the Eternal Enlightenment’—every moment claimed its unveiling in his own heart. Nagarjuna speaks of this Bodhi-hridaya (another of whose names is Bodhi-Citta) as follows: One who understands the nature of the Bodhi-hridaya, sees everything with a loving heart; for love is the essence of Bodhi-hridaya.’ My object in writing this paper is to show, by the further help of illustration from a popular religious sect of Bengal, that the religious instinct of man urges him towards a truth, by which he can transcend the finite nature of the individual self. Man would never feel the indignity of his limitations if these were inevitable. Within him he has glimpses of the Infinite, which give him assurance that this truth is not in his limitations, but that this truth can be attained by love. For love is the positive quality of the Infinite, and love's sacrifice accordingly does not lead to emptiness, but to fulfilment, to Bodhi-hridaya, ‘the heart of enlightenment’.

The members of the religious sect I have mentioned call themselves ‘Baul.’ They live outside social recognition, and their very obscurity helps them in their seeking, from a direct source, the enlightenment which the soul longs for, the eternal light of love.

It would be absurd to say that there is little difference between Buddhism and the religion of these simple people, who have no system of metaphysics to support their faith. But my object in bringing close together these two religions, which seem to belong to opposite poles, is to point out the fundamental unity in them. Both of them believe in a fulfilment which is reached by love’s emancipating us from the dominance of self. In both these religions we find man’s yearning to attain the infinite worth of his individuality, not through any conventional valuation of society, but through his perfect relationship with Truth. They agree in holding that the realization of our ultimate object is waiting for us in ourselves. The Baul likens this fulfilment to the blossoming of a bud, and sings: Make way, O bud, make way, Burst open thy heart and make way.

The opening spirit has overtaken thee, Canst thou remain a bud any longer?

II

One day in a small village in Bengal, an ascetic woman from the neighbourhood came to see me. She had the name ‘sarva-khepi’ given to her by the village people, the meaning of which is ‘the woman who is mad about all things.’ She fixed her star-like eyes upon my face and startled me with the question, ‘When are you coming to meet me underneath the trees?’ Evidently she pitied me who lived (according to her) prisoned behind walls, banished away from the great meeting-place of the All, where she had her dwelling. Just at that moment my gardener came with his basket, and when the woman understood that the flowers in the vase on my table were going to be thrown away, to make place for the fresh ones, she looked pained and said to me, ‘You are always engaged reading and writing; you do not see.’ Then she took the discarded flowers in her palms, kissed them and touched them with her forehead, and reverently murmured to herself, ‘Beloved of my heart.’ I felt that this woman, in her direct vision of the infinite personality in the heart of all things, truly represented the spirit of India.

In the same village I came into touch with some Baul singers. I had known them by their names, occasionally seen them singing and begging in the street, and so passed them by, vaguely classifying them in my mind under the general name of Vairagis, or ascetics.

The time came when I had occasion to meet with some members of the same

body and talk to them about spiritual matters. The first Baul song, which I chanced to hear with any attention, profoundly stirred my mind. Its words are so simple that it makes me hesitate to render them in a foreign tongue, and set them forward for critical observation. Besides, the best part of a song is missed when the tune is absent; for thereby its movement and its colour are lost, and it becomes like a butterfly whose wings have been plucked.

The first line may be translated thus: ‘Where shall I meet him, the Man of my Heart?’ This phrase, ‘the Man of my Heart,’ is not peculiar to this song, but is usual with the Baul sect. It means that, for me, the supreme truth of all existence is in the revelation of the Infinite in my own humanity.

‘The Man of my Heart,’ to the Baul, is like a divine instrument perfectly tuned. He gives expression to infinite truth in the music of life. And the longing for the truth which is in us, which we have not yet realised, breaks out in the following Baul song: Where shall I meet him, the Man of my Heart?

He is lost to me and I seek him wandering from land to land.

I am listless for that moonrise of beauty, Which is to light my life, Which I long to see in the fulness of vision, in gladness of heart.

The name of the poet who wrote this song was Gagan. He was almost illiterate; and the ideas he received from his Baul teacher found no distraction from the self-consciousness of the modern age. He was a village postman, earning about ten shillings a month, and he died before he had completed his teens. The sentiment, to which he gave such intensity of expression, is common to most of the songs of his sect. And it is a sect, almost exclusively confined to that lower floor of society, where the light of modern education hardly finds an entrance, while wealth and respectability shun its utter indigence.

In the song I have translated above, the longing of the singer to realize the infinite in his own personality is expressed. This has to be done daily by its perfect expression in life, in love. For the personal expression of life, in its perfection, is love; just as the personal expression of truth in its perfection is beauty.

In the political life of the modern age the idea of democracy has given mankind faith in the individual. It gives each man trust in his own possibilities, and pride in his humanity. Something of the same idea, we find, has been working in the popular mind of India, with regard to its religious consciousness. Over and over again it tries to assert, not only that God is for each of us, but also that God is in each of us. These people have no special incarnations in their simple theology, because they know that God is special to each individual. They say that to be

born a man is the greatest privilege that can fall to a creature in all the world. They assert that gods in Paradise envy human beings. Why? Because God's will, in giving his love, finds its completeness in man 'swill returning that love. Therefore Humanity is a necessary factor in the perfecting of the divine truth. The Infinite, for its self-expression, comes down into the manifoldness of the Finite; and the Finite, for its self-realization, must rise into the unity of the Infinite. Then only is the Cycle of Truth complete.

The dignity of man, in his eternal right of Truth, finds expression in the following song, composed, not by a theologian or a man of letters, but by one who belongs to that ninety per cent of the population of British India whose education has been far less than elementary, in fact almost below zero: My longing is to meet you in play of love, my Lover; But this longing is not only mine, but also yours.

For your lips can have their smile, and your flute its music, only in your delight in my love; And therefore you are importunate, even as I am.

If the world were a mere expression of formative forces, then this song would be pathetic in its presumption. But why is there beauty at all in creation—the beauty whose only meaning is in a call that claims disinterestedness as a response? The poet proudly says: 'Your flute could not have its music of beauty if your delight were not in my love. Your power is great—and there I am not equal to you—but it lies even in me to make you smile, and if you and I never meet, then this play of love remains incomplete.' If this were not true, then it would be an utter humiliation to exist at all in this world. If it were solely our business to seek the Lover, and his to keep himself passively aloof in the infinity of his glory, or actively masterful only in imposing his commands upon us, then we should dare to defy him, and refuse to accept the everlasting insult latent in the one-sided importunity of a slave. And this is what the Baul says—he who, in the world of men, goes about singing for alms from door to door, with his one-stringed instrument and long robe of patched-up rags on his back: I stop and sit here on the road. Do not ask me to walk farther.

*If your love can be complete without mine, let me turn back from seeing you.
I have been travelling to seek you, my friend, for long; Yet I refuse to beg a sight of you, if you do not feel my need.
I am blind with market dust and midday glare, And so wait, my heart's lover, in hopes that your own love Will send you to find me out.*

The poet is fully conscious that his value in the world's market is pitifully small; that he is neither wealthy nor learned. Yet he has his great compensation,

for he has come close to his Lover's heart. In Bengal the women bathing in the river often use their overturned water jars to keep themselves floating when they swim, and the poet uses this incident for his simile: It is lucky that I am an empty vessel, For when you swim, I keep floating by your side.

Your full vessels are left on the empty shore, they are for use; But I am carried to the river in your arms, and I dance to the rhythm of your heart-throbs and heaving of the waves.

The great distinguished people of the world do not know that these beggars—deprived of education, honour, and wealth—can, in the pride of their souls, look down upon them as the unfortunate ones, who are left on the shore for their worldly uses, but whose life ever misses the touch of the Lover's arms.

The feeling that man is not a mere casual visitor at the palace-gate of the world, but the invited guest whose presence is needed to give the royal banquet its sole meaning, is not confined to any particular sect in India. Let me quote here some poems from a mediaeval poet of Western India—Jnandas—whose works are nearly forgotten, and have become scarce from the very exquisiteness of their excellence. In the following poem he is addressing God's messenger, who comes to us in the morning light of our childhood, in the dusk of our day's end, and in the night's darkness: Messenger, morning brought you, habited in gold.

After sunset, your song wore a tune of ascetic grey, And then came night.

Your message was written in bright letters across the black.

Why is such splendour about you, to lure the heart of one who is nothing?

This is the answer of the messenger: Great is the festival hall where you are to be the only guest.

Therefore the letter to you is written from sky to sky, And I, the proud servant, bring the invitation with all ceremony.

And thus the poet knows that the silent rows of stars carry God's own invitation to the individual soul.

The same poet sings: What hast thou come to beg from the beggar, O King of Kings?

My Kingdom is poor for want of him, my dear one, and I wait for him in sorrow.

How long will you keep him waiting, O wretch, Who has waited for you for ages in silence and stillness?

Open your gate, and make this very moment fit for the union.

It is the song of man's pride in the value given to him by Supreme Love and realized by his own love.

The Vaishnava religion, which has become the popular religion of India, carries the same message: God's love finding its finality in man's love. According to it, the lover, man, is the complement of the Lover, God, in the internal love drama of existence; and God's call is ever wafted in man's heart in the world-music, drawing him towards the union. This idea has been expressed in rich elaboration of symbols verging upon realism. But for these Bauls this idea is direct and simple, full of the dignified beauty of truth, which shuns all tinsels of ornament.

The Baul poet, when asked why he had no sect mark on his forehead, answered in his song that the true colour decoration appears on the skin of the fruit when its inner core is filled with ripe, sweet juice; but by artificially smearing it with colour from outside you do not make it ripe. And he says of his Guru, his teacher, that he is puzzled to find in which direction he must make salutation. For his teacher is not one, but many, who, moving on, form a procession of wayfarers.

Bauls have no temple or image for their worship, and this utter simplicity is needful for men whose one subject is to realize the inner-most nearness of God. The Baul poet expressly says that if we try to approach God through the senses we miss him: Bring him not into your house as the guest of your eyes; But let him come at your heart's invitation.

Opening your doors to that which is seen only, is to lose it.

Yet, being a poet, he also knows that the objects of sense can reveal their spiritual meaning only when they are not seen through mere physical eyes: Eyes can see only dust and earth, But feel it with your heart, it is pure joy.

The flowers of delight blossom on all sides, in every form, But where is your heart's thread to weave them in a garland?

These Bauls have a philosophy, which they call the philosophy of the body; but they keep its secret; it is only for the initiated. Evidently the underlying idea is that the individual's body is itself the temple, in whose inner mystic shrine the Divine appears before the soul, and the key to it has to be found from those who know. But as the key is not for us outsiders, I leave it with the observation that this mystic philosophy of the body is the outcome of the attempt to get rid of all the outward shelters which are too costly for people like themselves. But this

human body of ours is made by God's own hand, from his own love, and even if some men, in the pride of their superiority, may despise it, God Finds his joy in dwelling in others of yet lower birth. It is a truth easier of discovery by these people of humble origin than by men of proud estate.

The pride of the Baul beggar is not in his worldly distinction, but in the distinction that God himself has given to him. He feels himself like a flute through which God's own breath of love has been breathed: My heart is like a flute he has played on.

If ever it fall into other hands, -

Let him fling it away.

My lover's flute is dear to him.

*Therefore, if today alien breath have entered it and sounded strange notes,
Let him break it to pieces and strew the dust with them.*

So we find that this man also has his disgust of defilement. While the ambitious world of wealth and power despises him, he in his turn thinks that the world's touch desecrates him who has been made sacred by the touch of his Lover. He does not envy us our life of ambition and achievements, but he knows how precious his own life has been: I am poured forth in living notes of joy and sorrow by your breath.

Morning and evening, in summer and in rains, I am fashioned to music.

*Yet should I be wholly spent in some flight of song, I shall not grieve, the tune
is so precious to me.*

Our joys and sorrows are contradictory when self separates them in opposition. But for the heart in which self merges in God's love, they lose their absoluteness. So the Baul's prayer is to feel in all situations—in danger, or pain, or sorrow—that he is in God's hands. He solves the problem of emancipation from sufferings by accepting and setting them in a higher context: I am the boat, you are the sea, and also the boatman.

*Though you never make the shore, though you let me sink, why should I be
foolish and afraid?*

Is the reaching the shore a greater prize than losing myself with you?

If you are only the haven, as they say, then what is the sea?

Let it surge and toss me on its waves, I shall be content.

I live in you, whatever and however you appear.

Save me or kill me as you wish, only never leave me in others' hands.

It is needless to say, before I conclude, that I had neither the training nor the opportunity to study this mendicant religious sect in Bengal from an ethnological standpoint. I was attracted to find out how the living currents of religious movements work in the heart of the people, saving them from degradation imposed by the society of the learned, of the rich, or of the highborn; how the spirit of man, by making use even of its obstacles, reaches fulfilment, led thither, not by the learned authorities in the scriptures, or by the mechanical impulse of the dogma-driven crowd, but by the unsophisticated aspiration of the loving soul. On the inaccessible mountain peaks of theology the snows of creed remain eternally rigid, cold, and pure. But God's manifest shower falls direct on the plain of humble hearts, flowing there in various channels, even getting mixed with some mud in its course, as it is soaked into the underground currents, invisible, but ever-moving.

I can think of nothing better than to conclude my paper with a poem of *Jnandas*, in which the aspiration of all simple spirits has found a devout expression: I had travelled all day and was tired; then I bowed my head towards thy kingly court still far away.

The night deepened, a longing burned in my heart.

Whatever the words I sang, pain cried through them—for even my songs thirsted—O my Lover, my Beloved, my Best in all the world.

When time seemed lost in darkness, thy hand dropped its sceptre to take up the lute and strike the uttermost chords; And my heart sang out, O my Lover, my Beloved, my Best in all the world.

Ah, who is this whose arms enfold me?

Whatever I have to leave, let me leave; and whatever I have to bear, let me bear.

Only let me walk with thee, O my Lover, my Beloved, my Best in all the world.

Descend at whiles from thy high audience hall, come down amid joys and sorrows.

Hide in all forms and delights, in love, And in my heart sing thy songs, — O my Lover, my Beloved, my Best in all the world.

2.3. The Creative Ideal

In an old Sanskrit book there is a verse which describes the essential elements of a picture. The first in order is Viupa-bhedah – ‘separateness of forms.’ Forms are many, forms are different, each of them having its limits. But if this were absolute, if all forms remained obstinately separate, then there would be a fearful loneliness of multitude. But the varied forms, in their very separateness, must carry something which indicates the paradox of their ultimate unity, otherwise there would be no creation.

So in the same verse, after the enumeration of separateness comes that of Pramanani – proportions. Proportions indicate relationship, the principle of mutual accommodation. A leg dismembered from the body has the fullest licence to make a caricature of itself. But, as a member of the body, it has its responsibility to the living unity which rules the body; it must behave properly, it must keep its proportion. If, by some monstrous chance of physiological profiteering, it could outgrow by yards its fellow-stalker, then we know what a ‘picture it would offer to the spectator and what embarrassment to the body itself. Any attempt to overcome the law of proportion altogether and to assert absolute separateness is rebellion; it means either running the gauntlet of the rest, or remaining segregated.

The same Sanskrit word Pramanani, which in a book of aesthetics means proportions, in a book of logic means the proofs by which the truth of a proposition is ascertained. All proofs of truth are credentials of relationship. Individual facts have to produce such passports to show that they are not expatriated, that they are not a break in the unity of the whole. The logical relationship present in an intellectual proposition, and the aesthetic relationship indicated in the proportions of a work of art, both agree in one thing. They affirm that truth consists, not in facts, but in harmony of facts. Of this fundamental note of reality it is that the poet has said, ‘Beauty is truth, truth beauty.’ Proportions, which prove relativity, form the outward language of creative ideals. A crowd of men is desultory, but in a march of soldiers every man keeps his proportion of time and space and relative movement, which makes him one with the whole vast army. But this is not all. The creation of an

army has, for its inner principle, one single idea of the General. According to the nature of that ruling idea, a production is either a work of art or a mere construction. All the materials and regulations of a joint-stock company have the unity of an inner motive. But the expression of this unity itself is not the end; it ever indicates an ulterior purpose. On the other hand, the revelation of a work of art is a fulfilment in itself.

The consciousness of personality, which is the consciousness of unity in ourselves, becomes prominently distinct when coloured by joy or sorrow, or some other emotion. It is like the sky, which is visible because it is blue, and which takes different aspect with the change of colours. In the creation of art, therefore, the energy of an emotional ideal is necessary; as its unity is not like that of a crystal, passive and inert, but actively expressive. Take, for example, the following verse:

*Oh, fly not Pleasure, pleasant-hearted Pleasure,
Fold me thy wings, I prithee, yet and stay,*

*For my heart no measure
Knows, nor other treasure
To buy a garland for my love today
And thou too, Sorrow, tender-hearted Sorrow,
Thou grey-eyed mourner, fly not yet away.*

*For I fain would borrow
Thy sad weeds tomorrow,
To make a mourning for love's yesterday.*

The words in this quotation, merely showing the metre, would have no appeal to us; with all its perfection and its proportion, rhyme and cadence, it would only be a construction. But when it is the outer body of an inner idea it assumes a personality. The idea flows through the rhythm, permeates the words and throbs in their rise and fall. On the other hand, the mere idea of the above-quoted poem, stated in unrhythmic prose, would represent only a fact, inertly static, which would not bear repetition. But the emotional idea, incarnated in a rhythmic form, acquires the dynamic quality needed for those things which take part in the world's eternal pageantry.

Take the following doggerel:

*Thirty days hath September,
April, June, and November.*

The metre is there, and it simulates the movement of life. But it finds no synchronous response in the metre of our heart-beats; it has not in its centre the living idea which creates for itself an indivisible unity. It is like a bag which is convenient, and not like a body which is inevitable.

This truth, implicit in our own works of art, gives us the clue to the mystery of creation. We find that the endless rhythms of the world are not merely constructive; they strike our own heart-strings and produce music.

Therefore it is we feel that this world is a creation; that in its centre there is a living idea which reveals itself in an eternal symphony, played on innumerable instruments, all keeping perfect time. We know that this great world-verse, that runs from sky to sky, is not made for the mere enumeration of facts—it is not 'Thirty days hath September'—it has its direct revelation in our delight. That delight gives us the key to the truth of existence; it is personality acting upon personalities through incessant manifestations. The solicitor does not sing to his client, but the bridegroom sings to his bride. And when our soul is stirred by the song, we know it claims no fees from us; but it brings the tribute of love and a call from the bridegroom.

It may be said that in pictorial and other arts there are some designs that are purely decorative and apparently have no living and inner ideal to express. But this cannot be true. These decorations carry the emotional motive of the artist, which says: 'I find joy in my creation; it is good.' All the language of joy is

beauty. It is necessary to note, however, that joy is not pleasure, and beauty not mere prettiness. Joy is the outcome of detachment from self and lives in freedom of spirit. Beauty is that profound expression of reality which satisfies our hearts without any other allurements but its own ultimate value. When in some pure moments of ecstasy we realize this in the world around us, we see the world, not as merely existing, but as decorated in its forms, sounds, colours and lines; we feel in our hearts that there is One who through all things proclaims: ‘I have joy in my creation.’ That is why the Sanskrit verse has given us for the essential elements of a picture, not only the manifoldness of forms and the unity of their proportions, but also *bhavah*, the emotional idea.

It is needless to say that upon a mere expression of emotion—even the best expression of it—no criterion of art can rest. The following poem is described by the poet as ‘An earnest Suit to his unkind Mistress:’

And wilt thou leave me thus?

Say nay, say nay, for shame!

To save thee from the blame

Of all my grief and grame.

And wilt thou leave me thus?

Say nay! Say nay!

I am sure the poet would not be offended if I expressed my doubts about the earnestness of his appeal, or the truth of his avowed necessity. He is responsible for the lyric and not for the sentiment, which is mere material. The fire assumes different colours according to the fuel used; but we do not discuss the fuel, only the flames. A lyric is indefinably more than the sentiment expressed in it, as a rose is more than its substance. Let us take a poem in which the earnestness of sentiment is truer and deeper than the one I have quoted above:

The sun,

Closing his benediction,

Sinks, and the darkening air

Thrills with the sense of the triumphing night,—

Night with her train of stars

And her great gift of sleep.

So be my passing!

My task accomplished and the long day done,

My wages taken, and in my heart

Some late lark singing,

Let me be gathered to the quiet West,

*The sundown splendid and serene,
Death.*

The sentiment expressed in this poem is a subject for a psychologist. But for a poem the subject is completely merged in its poetry, like carbon in a living plant which the lover of plants ignores, leaving it for a charcoal-burner to seek.

This is why, when some storm of feeling sweeps across the country, art is under a disadvantage. In such an atmosphere the boisterous passion breaks through the cordon of harmony and thrusts itself forward as the subject, which with its bulk and pressure dethrones the unity of creation. For a similar reason most of the hymns used in churches suffer from lack of poetry. For in them the deliberate subject, assuming the first importance, benumbs or kills the poem. Most patriotic poems have the same deficiency. They are like hill streams born of sudden showers, which are more proud of their rocky beds than of their water currents; in them the athletic and arrogant subject takes it for granted that the poem is there to give it occasion to display its powers. The subject is the material wealth for the sake of which poetry should never be tempted to barter her soul, even though the temptation should come in the name and shape of public good or some usefulness. Between the artist and his art must be that perfect detachment which is the pure medium of love. He must never make use of this love except for its own perfect expression.

In everyday life our personality moves in a narrow circle of immediate self-interest. And therefore our feelings and events, within that short range, become prominent subjects for ourselves. In their vehement self-assertion they ignore their unity with the All. They rise up like obstructions and obscure their own background. But art gives our personality the disinterested freedom of the eternal, there to find it in its true perspective. To see our own home in flames is not to see fire in its verity. But the fire in the stars is the fire in the heart of the Infinite; there, it is the script of creation.

Matthew Arnold, in his poem addressed to a nightingale, sings:

Hark! Ah, the nightingale-

The tawny-throated!

Hark, from that moonlit cedar what a burst!

What triumph! Hark!—what pain!

But pain, when met within the boundaries of limited reality, repels and hurts; it is discordant with the narrow scope of life. But the pain of some great martyrdom has the detachment of eternity. It appears in all its majesty,

harmonious in the context of everlasting life; like the thunder-flash in the stormy sky, not on the laboratory wire. Pain on that scale has its harmony in great love; for by hurting love it reveals the infinity of love in all its truth and beauty. On the other hand, the pain involved in business insolvency is discordant; it kills and consumes till nothing remains but ashes.

The poet sings again:

How thick the bursts come crowding through the leaves!

Eternal Passion!

Eternal Pain!

And the truth of pain in eternity has been sung by those Vedic poets who had said, 'From joy has come forth all creation.' They say:

Sa tapas tapatva sarvarna asrajata yadidam kincha.

(God from the heat of his pain created all that there is.)

The sacrifice, which is in the heart of creation, is both joy and pain at the same moment. Of this sings a village mystic in Bengal:

My eyes drown in the darkness of joy,

My heart, like a lotus, closes its petals in the rapture of the dark night.

That song speaks of a joy which is deep like the blue sea, endless like the blue sky; which has the magnificence of the night, and in its limitless darkness enfolds the radiant worlds in the awfulness of peace; it is the unfathomed joy in which all sufferings are made one.

A poet of mediaeval India tells us about his source of inspiration in a poem containing a question and an answer:

Where were your songs, my bird, when you spent your nights in the nest?

Was not all your pleasure stored therein?

What makes you lose your heart to the sky, the sky that is limitless?

The bird answers:

I had my pleasure while I rested within bounds.

When I soared into the limitless, I found my songs!

To detach the individual idea from its confinement of everyday facts and to give its soaring wings the freedom of the universal: this is the function of poetry. The ambition of Macbeth, the jealousy of Othello, would be at best sensational in police court proceedings; but in Shakespeare's dramas they are carried among

the flaming constellations where creation throbs with Eternal Passion, Eternal Pain.

2.4. East and West

I

It is not always a profound interest in man that carries travellers nowadays to distant lands. More often it is the facility for rapid movement. For lack of time and for the sake of convenience we generalize and crush our human facts into the packages within the steel trunks that hold our travellers' reports.

Our knowledge of our own countrymen and our feelings about them have slowly and unconsciously grown out of innumerable facts which are full of contradictions and subject to incessant change. They have the elusive mystery and fluidity of life. We cannot define to ourselves what we are as a whole, because we know too much; because our knowledge is more than knowledge. It is an immediate consciousness of personality, any evaluation of which carries some emotion, joy or sorrow, shame or exaltation. But in a foreign land we try to find our compensation for the meagerness of our data by the compactness of the generalization which our imperfect sympathy itself helps us to form. When a stranger from the West travels in the Eastern world he takes the facts that displease him and readily makes use of them for his rigid conclusions, fixed upon the unchallengeable authority of his personal experience. It is like a man who has his own boat for crossing his village stream, but, on being compelled to wade across some strange watercourse, draws angry comparisons as he goes from every patch of mud and every pebble which his feet encounter.

Our mind has faculties which are universal, but its habits are insular. There are men who become impatient and angry at the least discomfort when their habits are incommoded. In their idea of the next world they probably conjure up the ghosts of their slippers and dressing-gowns, and expect the latchkey that opens their lodging-house door on earth to fit their front door in the other world. As travellers they are a failure; for they have grown too accustomed to their mental easy-chairs, and in their intellectual nature love home comforts, which are of local make, more than the realities of life, which, like earth itself, are full of ups and downs, yet are one in their rounded completeness.

The modern age has brought the geography of the earth near to us, but made it

difficult for us to come into touch with man. We go to strange lands and observe; we do not live there. We hardly meet men: but only specimens of knowledge. We are in haste to seek for general types and overlook individuals.

When we fall into the habit of neglecting to use the understanding that comes of sympathy in our travels, our knowledge of foreign people grows insensitive, and therefore easily becomes both unjust and cruel in its character, and also selfish and contemptuous in its application. Such has, too often, been the case with regard to the meeting of Western people in our days with others for whom they do not recognize any obligation of kinship.

It has been admitted that the dealings between different races of men are not merely between individuals; that our mutual understanding is either aided, or else obstructed, by the general emanations forming the social atmosphere. These emanations are our collective ideas and collective feelings, generated according to special historical circumstances.

For instance, the caste-idea is a collective idea in India. When we approach an Indian who is under the influence of this collective idea, he is no longer a pure individual with his conscience fully awake to the judging of the value of a human being. He is more or less a passive medium for giving expression to the sentiment of a whole community.

It is evident that the caste-idea is not creative; it is merely institutional. It adjusts human beings according to some mechanical arrangement. It emphasizes the negative side of the individual—his separateness. It hurts the complete truth in man.

In the West, also, the people have a certain collective idea that obscures their humanity. Let me try to explain what I feel about it.

II

Lately I went to visit some battlefields of France which had been devastated by war. The awful calm of desolation, which still bore wrinkles of pain—death-struggles stiffened into ugly ridges—brought before my mind the vision of a huge demon, which had no shape, no meaning, yet had two arms that could strike and break and tear, a gaping mouth that could devour, and bulging brains that could conspire and plan. It was a purpose, which had a living body, but no complete humanity to temper it. Because it was passion—belonging to life, and yet not having the wholeness of life—it was the most terrible of life's enemies.

Something of the same sense of oppression in a different degree, the same desolation in a different aspect, is produced in my mind when I realize the effect

of the West upon Eastern life—the West which, in its relation to us, is all plan and purpose incarnate, without any superfluous humanity.

I feel the contrast very strongly in Japan. In that country the old world presents itself with some ideal of perfection, in which man has his varied opportunities of self-revelation in art, in ceremonial, in religious faith, and in customs expressing the poetry of social relationship. There one feels that deep delight of hospitality which life offers to life. And side by side, in the same soil, stands the modern world, which is stupendously big and powerful, but inhospitable. It has no simple-hearted welcome for man. It is living; yet the incompleteness of life's ideal within it cannot but hurt humanity.

The wriggling tentacles of a cold-blooded utilitarianism, with which the West has grasped all the easily yielding succulent causing pain and indignation throughout the Eastern countries. The West comes to us, not with the imagination and sympathy that create and unite, but with a shock of passion—passion for power and wealth. This passion is a mere force, which has in it the principle of separation, of conflict.

I have been fortunate in coming into close touch with individual men and women of the Western countries, and have felt with them their sorrows and shared their aspirations. I have known that they seek the same God, who is my God—even those who deny Him. I feel certain that, if the great light of culture be extinct in Europe, our horizon in the East will mourn in darkness. It does not hurt my pride to acknowledge that, in the present age, Western humanity has received its mission to be the teacher of the world; that her science, through the mastery of laws of nature, is to liberate human souls from the dark dungeon of matter. For this very reason I have realized all the more strongly, on the other hand, that the dominant collective idea in the Western countries is not creative. It is ready to enslave or kill individuals, to drug a great people with soul-killing poison, darkening their whole future with the black mist of stupefaction, and emasculating entire races of men to the utmost degree of helplessness. It is wholly wanting in spiritual power to blend and harmonize; it lacks the sense of the great personality of man.

The most significant fact of modern days is this, that the West has met the East. Such a momentous meeting of humanity, in order to be fruitful, must have in its heart some great emotional idea, generous and creative. There can be no doubt that God's choice has fallen upon the knights-errant of the West for the service of the present age; arms and armour have been given to them; but have they yet realized in their hearts the single-minded loyalty to their cause which can resist all temptations of bribery from the devil? The world today is offered to the West.

She will destroy it, if she does not use it for a great creation of man. The materials for such a creation are in the hands of science; but the creative genius is in Man's spiritual ideal.

III

When I was young a stranger from Europe came to Bengal. He chose his lodging among the people of the country, shared with them their frugal diet, and freely offered them his service. He found employment in the houses of the rich, teaching them French and German, and the money thus earned he spent to help poor students in buying books. This meant for him hours of walking in the mid-day heat of a tropical summer; for, intent upon exercising the utmost economy, he refused to hire conveyances. He was pitiless in his exaction from himself of his resources, in money, time, and strength, to the point of privation; and all this for the sake of a people who were obscure, to whom he was not born, yet whom he dearly loved. He did not come to us with a professional mission of teaching sectarian creeds; he had not in his nature the least trace of that self-sufficiency of goodness, which humiliates by gifts the victims of its insolent benevolence. Though he did not know our language, he took every occasion to frequent our meetings and ceremonies; yet he was always afraid of intrusion, and tenderly anxious lest he might offend us by his ignorance of our customs. At last, under the continual strain of work in an alien climate and surroundings, his health broke down. He died, and was cremated at our burning-ground, according to his express desire.

The attitude of his mind, the manner of his living, the object of his life, his modesty, his unstinted self-sacrifice for a people who had not even the power to give publicity to any benefaction bestowed upon them, were so utterly unlike anything we were accustomed to associate with the Europeans in India, that it gave rise in our mind to a feeling of love bordering upon awe.

We all have a realm, a private paradise, in our mind, where dwell deathless memories of persons who brought some divine light to our life's experience, who may not be known to others, and whose names have no place in the pages of history. Let me confess to you that this man lives as one of those immortals in the paradise of my individual life.

He came from Sweden, his name was Hammargren. What was most remarkable in the event of his coming to us in Bengal was the fact that in his own country he had chanced to read some works of my great countryman, Ram Mohan Roy, and felt an immense veneration for his genius and his character.

Ram Mohan Roy lived in the beginning of the last century, and it is no exaggeration when I describe him as one of the immortal personalities of modern time. This young Swede had the unusual gift of a farsighted intellect and sympathy, which enabled him even from his distance of space and time, and in spite of racial differences, to realize the greatness of Ram Mohan Roy. It moved him so deeply that he resolved to go to the country which produced this great man, and offer her his service. He was poor, and he had to wait some time in England before he could earn his passage money to India. There he came at last, and in reckless generosity of love utterly spent himself to the last breath of his life, away from home and kindred and all the inheritances of his motherland. His stay among us was too short to produce any outward result. He failed even to achieve during his life what he had in his mind, which was to found by the help of his scanty earnings a library as a memorial to Ram Mohan Roy, and thus to leave behind him a visible symbol of his devotion. But what I prize most in this European youth, who left no record of his life behind him, is not the memory of any service of goodwill, but the precious gift of respect which he offered to a people who are fallen upon evil times, and whom it is so easy to ignore or to humiliate. For the first time in the modern days this obscure individual from Sweden brought to our country the chivalrous courtesy of the West, a greeting of human fellowship.

The coincidence came to me with a great and delightful surprise when the Nobel Prize was offered to me from Sweden. As a recognition of individual merit it was of great value to me, no doubt; but it was the acknowledgement of the East as a collaborator with the Western continents, in contributing its riches to the common stock of civilization, which had the chief significance for the present age. It meant joining hands in comradeship by the two great hemispheres of the human world across the sea.

IV

Today the real East remains unexplored. The blindness of contempt is more hopeless than the blindness of ignorance; for contempt kills the light which ignorance merely leaves unignited. The East is waiting to be understood by the Western races, in order not only to be able to give what is true in her, but also to be confident of her own mission.

In Indian history, the meeting of the Mussulman and the Hindu produced Akbar, the object of whose dream was the unification of hearts and ideals. It had all the glowing enthusiasm of a religion, and it produced an immediate and a

vast result even in his own lifetime.

But the fact still remains that the Western mind, after centuries of contact with the East, has not evolved the enthusiasm of a chivalrous ideal which can bring this age to its fulfilment. It is everywhere raising thorny hedges of exclusion and offering human sacrifices to national self-seeking. It has intensified the mutual feelings of envy among Western races themselves, as they fight over their spoils and display a carnivorous pride in their snarling rows of teeth.

We must again guard our minds from any encroaching distrust of the individuals of a nation. The active love of humanity and the spirit of martyrdom for the cause of justice and truth which I have met with in the Western countries have been a great lesson and inspiration to me. I have no doubt in my mind that the West owes its true greatness, not so much to its marvellous training of intellect, as to its spirit of service devoted to the welfare of man. Therefore I speak with a personal feeling of pain and sadness about the collective power which is guiding the helm of Western civilization. It is a passion, not an ideal. The more success it has brought to Europe, the more costly it will prove to her at last, when the accounts have to be rendered. And the signs are unmistakable, that the accounts have been called for. The time has come when Europe must know that the forcible parasitism which she has been practising upon the two large Continents of the world—the two most unwieldy whales of humanity—must be causing to her moral nature a gradual atrophy and degeneration.

As an example, let me quote the following extract from the concluding chapter of *From the Cape to Cairo*, by Messrs. Grogan and Sharp, two writers who have the power to inculcate their doctrines by precept and example. In their reference to the African they are candid, as when they say, ‘We have stolen his land. Now we must steal his limbs.’ These two sentences, carefully articulated, with a smack of enjoyment, have been more clearly explained in the following statement, where some sense of that decency which is the attenuated ghost of a buried conscience, prompts the writers to use the phrase ‘compulsory labour’ in place of the honest word ‘slavery’; just as the modern politician adroitly avoids the word ‘injunction’ and uses the word ‘mandate.’ ‘Compulsory labour in some form,’ they say, ‘is the corollary of our occupation of the country.’ And they add: It is pathetic, but it is history,’ implying thereby that moral sentiments have no serious effect in the history of human beings.

Elsewhere they write: ‘Either we must give up the country commercially, or we must make the African work. And mere abuse of those who point out the impasse cannot change the facts. We must decide, and soon. Or rather the white man of South Africa will decide.’ The authors also confess that they have seen

too much of the world ‘to have any lingering belief that Western civilization benefits native races.’

The logic is simple—the logic of egoism. But the argument is simplified by lopping off the greater part of the premise. For these writers seem to hold that the only important question for the white men of South Africa is, how indefinitely to grow fat on ostrich feathers and diamond mines, and dance jazz dances over the misery and degradation of a whole race of fellow-beings of a different colour from their own. Possibly they believe that moral laws have a special domesticated breed of comfortable concessions for the service of the people in power. Possibly they ignore the fact that commercial and political cannibalism, profitably practised upon foreign races, creeps back nearer home; that the cultivation of unwholesome appetites has its final reckoning with the stomach which has been made to serve it. For, after all, man is a spiritual being, and not a mere living money-bag jumping from profit to profit, and breaking the backbone of human races in its financial leapfrog.

Such, however, has been the condition of things for more than a century; and today, trying to read the future by the light of the European conflagration, we are asking ourselves everywhere in the East: 1s this frightfully over-grown power really great? It can bruise us from without, but can it add to our wealth of spirit? It can sign peace treaties, but can it give peace?’

It was about two thousand years ago that all-powerful Rome in one of its eastern provinces executed on a cross a simple teacher of an obscure tribe of fishermen. On that day the Roman governor felt no falling off of his appetite or sleep. On that day there was, on the one hand, the agony, the humiliation, the death; on the other, the pomp of pride and festivity in the Governor’s palace.

And today? To whom, then, shall we bow the head?

Kasmai devaya havisha vidhema?

(To which God shall we offer oblation?)

We know of an instance in our own history of India, when a great personality, both in his life and voice, struck the keynote of the solemn music of the soul—love for all creatures. And that music crossed seas, mountains, and deserts. Races belonging to different climates, habits, and languages were drawn together, not in the clash of arms, not in the conflict of exploitation, but in harmony of life, in amity and peace. That was creation.

When we think of it, we see at once what the confusion of thought was to which the Western poet, dwelling upon the difference between East and West, referred when he said, ‘Never the twain shall meet.’ It is true that they are not

yet showing any real sign of meeting. But the reason is because the West has not sent out its humanity to meet the man in the East, but only its machine. Therefore the poet's line has to be changed into something like this:

*Man is man, machine is machine,
And never the twain shall wed.*

You must know that red tape can never be a common human bond; that official sealing-wax can never provide means of mutual attachment; that it is a painful ordeal for human beings to have to receive favours from animated pigeon-holes, and condescensions from printed circulars that give notice but never speak. The presence of the Western people in the East is a human fact. If we are to gain anything from them, it must not be a mere sum-total of legal codes and systems of civil and military services. Man is a great deal more to man than that. We have our human birthright to claim direct help from the man of the West, if he has anything great to give us. It must come to us, not through mere facts in juxtaposition, but through the spontaneous sacrifice made by those who have the gift, and therefore the responsibility.

Earnestly I ask the poet of the Western world to realize and/sing to you with all the great power of music which he has, that the East and the West are ever in search of each other, and that they must meet not merely in the fulness of physical strength, but in fulness of truth; that the right hand, which wields the sword, has the need of the left, which holds the shield of safety.

The East has its seat in the vast plains watched over by the snow-peaked mountains and fertilized by rivers carrying mighty volumes of water to the sea. There, under the blaze of a tropical sun, the physical life has bedimmed the light of its vigour and lessened its claims. There man has had the repose of mind which has ever tried to set itself in harmony with the inner notes of existence. In the silence of sunrise and sunset, and on star-crowded nights, he has sat face to face with the Infinite, waiting for the revelation that opens up the heart of all that there is. He has said, in a rapture of realization:

'Hearken to me, ye children of the Immortal, who dwell in the Kingdom of Heaven. I have known, from beyond darkness, the Supreme Person, shining with the radiance of the sun.'

The man from the East, with his faith in the eternal, who in his soul had met the touch of the Supreme Person—did he never come to you in the West and speak to you of the Kingdom of Heaven? Did he not unite the East and the West in truth, in the unity of one spiritual bond between all children of the Immortal, in the realization of one great Personality in all human persons?

Yes, the East did once meet the West profoundly in the growth of her life such union became possible, because the East came to the West with the idea that is creative, and not with the passion that destroys moral bonds. The mystic consciousness of the Infinite, which she brought with her, was greatly needed by the man of the West to give him his balance.

On the other hand, the East must find her own balance in Science—the magnificent gift that the West can bring to her. Truth has its nest as well as it sky. That nest is definite in structure, accurate in law of construction; and though it has to be changed and rebuilt over and over again, the need of it is never-ending and its laws are eternal. For some centuries the East has neglected the nest-building of truth. She has not been attentive to learn it secret. Trying to cross the trackless infinite, the East has relied solely upon the wings. She has spurned the earth, till, buffeted by storms, her wings are hurt and she is tired, sorely needing help. But has she then to be told that the messenger of the sky and the builder of the nest shall never meet?

2.5. The Modern Age

I

Wherever man meets man in a living relationship, the meeting finds its natural expression in works of art, the signatures of beauty, in which the mingling of the personal touch leaves its memorial.

On the other hand, a relationship of pure utility humiliates man—it ignores the rights and needs of his deeper nature; it feels no compunction in maltreating and killing things of beauty that can never be restored.

Some years ago, when I set out from Calcutta on my voyage to Japan, the first thing that shocked me, with a sense of personal injury, was the ruthless intrusion of the factories for making gunny-bags on both banks of the Ganges. The blow it gave to me was owing to the precious memory of the days of my boyhood, when the scenery of this river was the only great thing near my birthplace reminding me of the existence of a world which had its direct communication with our innermost spirit.

Calcutta is an upstart town with no depth of sentiment in her face and in her manners. It may truly be said about her genesis:— In the beginning there was the spirit of the Shop, which uttered through its megaphone, ‘Let there be the Office!’ and there was Calcutta. She brought with her no dower of distinction, no majesty of noble or romantic origin; she never gathered around her any great historical associations, any annals of brave sufferings, or memory of mighty deeds. The only thing which gave her the sacred baptism of beauty was the river. I was fortunate enough to be born before the smoke-belching iron dragon had devoured the greater part of the life of its banks; when the landing-stairs descending into its waters, caressed by its tides, appeared to me like the loving arms of the villages clinging to it; when Calcutta, with her up-tilted nose and stony stare, had not completely disowned her foster-mother, rural Bengal, and had riot surrendered body and soul to her wealthy paramour, the spirit of the ledger, bound in dead leather.

But as an instance of the contrast of the different ideal of a different age, incarnated in the form of a town, the memory of my last visit to Benares comes

to my mind. What impressed me most deeply, while I was there, was the mother-call of the river Ganges, ever filling the atmosphere with an ‘unheard melody,’ attracting the whole population to its bosom every hour of the day. I am proud of the fact that India has felt a most profound love for this river, which nourishes civilization on its banks, guiding its course from the silence of the hills to the sea with its myriad voices of solitude. The love of this river, which has become one with the love of the best in man, has given rise to this town as an expression of reverence. This is to show that there are sentiments in us which are creative, which do not clamour for gain, but overflow in gifts, in spontaneous generosity of self-sacrifice.

But our minds will nevermore cease to be haunted by the perturbed spirit of the question, ‘What about gunny-bags?’ I admit they are indispensable, and am willing to allow them a place in society, if my opponent will only admit that even gunny-bags should have their limits, and will acknowledge the importance of leisure to man, with space for joy and worship, and a home of wholesale privacy, with associations of chaste love and mutual service. If this concession to humanity be denied or curtailed, and if profit and production are allowed to run amuck, they will play havoc with our love of beauty, of truth, of justice, and also with our love for our fellow-beings. So it comes about that the peasant cultivators of jute, who live on the brink of everlasting famine, are combined against, and driven to lower the price of their labours to the point of blank despair, by those who earn more than cent per cent profit and wallow in the infamy of their wealth. The facts that man is brave and kind, that he is social and generous and self-sacrificing, have some aspect of the complete in them; but the fact that he is a manufacturer of gunny-bags is too ridiculously small to claim the right of reducing his higher nature to insignificance. The fragmentariness of utility should never forget its subordinate position in human affairs. It must not be permitted to occupy more than its legitimate place and power in society, nor to have the liberty to desecrate the poetry of life, to deaden our sensitiveness to ideals, bragging of its own coarseness as a sign of virility. The pity is that when in the centre of our activities we acknowledge, by some proud name, the supremacy of wanton destructiveness, or production not less wanton, we shut out all the lights of our souls, and in that darkness our conscience and our consciousness of shame are hidden, and our love of freedom is killed.

I do not for a moment mean to imply that in any particular period of history men were free from the disturbance of their lower passions. Selfishness ever had its share in government and trade. Yet there was a struggle to maintain a balance of forces in society; and our passions cherished no delusions about their own rank and value. They contrived no clever devices to hoodwink our moral nature.

For in those days our intellect was not tempted to put its weight into the balance on the side of over-greed.

But in recent centuries a devastating change has come over our mentality with regard to the acquisition of money. Whereas in former ages men treated it with condescension, even with disrespect, now they bend their knees to it. That it should be allowed a sufficiently large place in society, there can be no question; but it becomes an outrage when it occupies those seats which are specially reserved for the immortals, by bribing us, tampering with our moral pride, recruiting the best strength of society in a traitor's campaign against human ideals, thus disguising, with the help of pomp and pageantry, its true insignificance. Such a state of things has come to pass because, with the help of science, the possibilities of profit have suddenly become immoderate. The whole of the human world, throughout its length and breadth, has felt the gravitational pull of a giant planet of greed, with concentric rings of innumerable satellites, causing in our society a marked deviation from the moral orbit. In former times the intellectual and spiritual powers of this earth upheld their dignity of independence and were not giddily rocked on the tides of the money market. But, as in the last fatal stages of disease, this fatal influence of money has got into our brain and affected our heart. Like a usurper, it has occupied the throne of high social ideals, using every means, by menace and threat, to seize upon the right, and, tempted by opportunity, presuming to judge it. It has not only science for its ally, but other forces also that have some semblance of religion, such as nation-worship and the idealizing of organized selfishness. Its methods are far-reaching and sure. Like the claws of a tiger's paw, they are softly sheathed. Its massacres are invisible, because they are fundamental, attacking the very roots of life. Its plunder is ruthless behind a scientific system of screens, which have the formal appearance of being open and responsible to inquiries. By whitewashing its stains it keeps its respectability unblemished. It makes a liberal use of falsehood in diplomacy, only feeling embarrassed when its evidence is disclosed by others of the trade. An unscrupulous system of propaganda paves the way for widespread misrepresentation. It works up the crowd psychology through regulated hypnotic doses at repeated intervals, administered in bottles with moral labels upon them of soothing colours. In fact, man has been able to make his pursuit of power easier today by his art of mitigating the obstructive forces that come from the higher region of his humanity. With his cult of power and his idolatry of money he has, in a great measure, reverted to his primitive barbarism, a barbarism whose path is lit up by the lurid light of intellect. For barbarism is the simplicity of a superficial life. It may be bewildering in its surface adornments and complexities, but it lacks the ideal to impart to it the

depth of moral responsibility.

II

Society suffers from a profound feeling of unhappiness, not so much when it is in material poverty as when its members are deprived of a large part of their humanity. This unhappiness goes on smouldering in the subconscious mind of the community till its life is reduced to ashes or a sudden combustion is produced. The repressed personality of man generates an inflammable moral gas deadly in its explosive force.

We have seen in the late war, and also in some of the still more recent events of history, how human individuals freed from moral and spiritual bonds find a boisterous joy in a debauchery of destruction. There is generated a disinterested passion of ravage. Through such catastrophe we can realize what formidable forces of annihilation are kept in check in our communities by bonds of social ideas; nay, made into multitudinous manifestations of beauty and fruitfulness. Thus we know that evils are, like meteors, stray fragments of life, which need the attraction of some great ideal in order to be assimilated with the wholesomeness of creation. The evil forces are literally outlaws; they only need the control and cadence of spiritual laws to change them into good. The true goodness is not the negation of badness, it is in the mastery of it. Goodness is the miracle which turns the tumult of chaos into a dance of beauty.

In modern society the ideal of wholeness has lost its force. Therefore its different sections have become detached and resolved into their elemental character of forces. Labour is a force; so also is Capital; so are the Government and the People; so are Man and Woman. It is said that when the forces lying latent in even a handful of dust are liberated from their bond of unity, they can lift the buildings of a whole neighbourhood to the height of a mountain. Such disfranchised forces, irresponsible free-booters, maybe useful to us for certain purposes, but human habitations standing secure on their foundations are better for us. To own the secret of utilising these forces is a proud fact for us, but the power of self-control and the self-dedication of love are truer subjects for the exultation of mankind. The genii of the Arabian Nights may have in their magic their lure and fascination for us. But the consciousness of God is of another order, infinitely more precious in imparting to our minds ideas of the spiritual power of creation. Yet these genii are abroad everywhere; and even now, after the late war, their devotees are getting ready to play further tricks upon humanity by suddenly spiriting it away to some hill-top of desolation.

III

We know that when, at first, any large body of people in their history became aware of their unity, they expressed it in some popular symbol of divinity. For they felt that their combination was not an arithmetical one; its truth was deeper than the truth of number. They felt that their community was not a mere agglutination but a creation, having upon it the living touch of the infinite Person. The realization of this truth having been an end in itself, a fulfilment, it gave meaning to self-sacrifice, to the acceptance even of death.

But our modern education is producing a habit of mind which is ever weakening in us the spiritual apprehension of truth—the truth of a person as the ultimate reality of existence. Science has its proper sphere in analysing this world as a construction, just as grammar has its legitimate office in analysing the syntax of a poem. But the world, as a creation, is not a mere construction; it too is more than a syntax. It is a poem, which we are apt to forget when grammar takes exclusive hold of our minds.

Upon the loss of this sense of a universal personality, which is religion, the reign of the machine and of method has been firmly established, and man, humanly speaking, has been made a homeless tramp. As nomads, ravenous and restless, the men from the West have come to us. They have exploited our Eastern humanity for sheer gain of power. This modern meeting of men has not yet received the blessing of God. For it has kept us apart, though railway lines are laid far and wide, and ships are plying from shore to shore to bring us together.

It has been said in the Upanishads:

*Yastu sarvani bhutani atmanyevanupashyati
Sarva bhuteshu chatmanam na tato vijugupsate*

(He who sees all things in *atma*, in the infinite spirit, and the infinite spirit in all beings, remains no longer unrevealed.)

In the modern civilization, for which an enormous number of men are used as materials, and human relationships have in a large measure become utilitarian, man is imperfectly revealed. For man's revelation does not lie in the fact that he is a power, but that he is a spirit. The prevalence of the theory which realizes the power of the machine in the universe, and organizes men into machines, is like the eruption of Etna, tremendous in its force, in its outburst of fire and fume; but its creeping lava covers up human shelters made by the ages, and its ashes smother life.

IV

The terribly efficient method of repressing personality in the individuals and the races who have failed to resist it has, in the present scientific age, spread all over the world; and in consequence there have appeared signs of a universal disruption which seems not far off. Faced with the possibility of such a disaster, which is sure to affect the successful peoples of the world in their intemperate prosperity, the great Powers of the West are seeking peace, not by curbing their greed, or by giving up the exclusive advantages which they have unjustly acquired, but by concentrating their forces for mutual security.

But can powers find their equilibrium in themselves? Power has to be made secure not only against power, but also against weakness; for there lies the peril of its losing balance. The weak are as great a danger for the strong as quicksand's for an elephant. They do not assist progress because they do not resist; they only drag down. The people who grow accustomed to wield absolute power over others are apt to forget that by so doing they generate an unseen force which some day rends that power into pieces. The dumb fury of the downtrodden finds its awful support from the universal law of moral balance. The air which is so thin and unsubstantial gives birth to storms that nothing can resist. This has been proved in history over and over again, and stormy forces arising from the revolt of insulted humanity are openly gathering in the air at the present time.

Yet in the psychology of the strong the lesson is despised and no count taken of the terribleness of the weak. This is the latent ignorance that, like an unsuspected worm, burrows under the bulk of the prosperous. Have we never read of the castle of power, securely buttressed on all sides, in a moment dissolving in air at the explosion caused by the weak and outraged besiegers? Politicians calculate upon the number of mailed hands that are kept on the sword-hilts: they do not possess the third eye to see the great invisible hand that clasps in silence the hand of the helpless and waits its time. The strong form their league by a combination of powers, driving the weak to form their own league alone with their God. I know I am crying in the wilderness when I raise the voice of warning; and while the West is busy with its organization of a machine-made peace, it will still continue to nourish by its iniquities the underground forces of earthquake in the Eastern Continent. The West seems unconscious that Science, by providing it with more and more power, is tempting it to suicide and encouraging it to accept the challenge of the disarmed; it does not know that the challenge comes from a higher source.

Two prophecies about the world's salvation are cherished in the hearts of the two great religions of the world. They represent the highest expectation of man, thereby indicating his faith in a truth which he instinctively considers as ultimate—the truth of love. These prophecies have not for their vision the fettering of the world and reducing it to tameness by means of a close-linked power forged in the factory of a political steel trust. One of the religions has for its meditation the image of the Buddha who is to come, Maitreya, the Buddha of love; and he is to bring peace. The other religion waits for the coming of Christ. For Christ preached peace when he preached love, when he preached the oneness of the Father with the brothers who are many. And this was the truth of peace. Christ never held that peace was the best policy. For policy is not truth. The calculation of self-interest can never successfully fight the irrational force of passion—the passion which is perversion of love, and which can only be set right by the truth of love. So long as the powers build a league on the foundation of their desire for safety, secure enjoyment of gains, consolidation of past injustice, and putting off the reparation of wrongs, while their fingers still wriggle for greed and reek of blood, rifts will appear in their union; and in future their conflicts will take greater force and magnitude. It is political and commercial egoism which is the evil harbinger of war. By different combinations it changes its shape and dimensions, but not its nature. This egoism is still held sacred, and made a religion; and such a religion, by a mere change of temple, and by new committees of priests, will never save mankind. We must know that, as, through science and commerce, the realization of the unity of the material world gives us power, so the realization of the great spiritual Unity of Man alone can give us peace.

2.6. The Nation

The peoples are living beings. They have their distinct personalities. But nations are organizations of power, and therefore their inner aspects and outward expressions are everywhere monotonously the same. Their differences are merely differences in degree of efficiency.

In the modern world the fight is going on between the living spirit of the people and the methods of nation-organizing. It is like the struggle that began in Central Asia between cultivated areas of man's habitation and the continually encroaching desert sands, till the human region of life and beauty was choked out of existence. When the spread of higher ideals of humanity is not held to be important, the hardening method of national efficiency gains a certain strength; and for some limited period of time, at least, it proudly asserts itself as the fittest to survive. But it is the survival of that part of man which is the least living. And this is the reason why dead monotony is the sign of the spread of the Nation. The modern towns, which present the physiognomy due to this dominance of the Nation, are everywhere the same, from San Francisco to London, from London to Tokyo. They show no faces, but merely masks.

The peoples, being living personalities, must have their self-expression, and this leads to their distinctive creations. These creations are literature, art, social symbols and ceremonials. They are like different dishes at one common feast. They add richness to our enjoyment and understanding of truth. They are making the world of man fertile of life and variedly beautiful.

But the nations do not create, they merely produce and destroy. Organizations for production are necessary. Even organizations for destruction may be so. But when, actuated by greed and hatred, they crowd away into a corner the living man who creates, then the harmony is lost, and the people's history runs at a break-neck speed towards some fatal catastrophe.

Humanity, where it is living, is guided by inner ideals; but where it is a dead organization it becomes impervious to them. Its building process is only an external process, and in its response to the moral guidance it has to pass through obstacles that are gross and non-plastic.

Man as a person has his individuality, which is the field where his spirit has its freedom to express itself and to grow. The professional man carries a rigid crust around him which has very little variation and hardly any elasticity. This professionalism is the region where men specialize their knowledge and organize their power, mercilessly elbowing each other in their struggle to come to the front. Professionalism is necessary, without doubt; but it must not be allowed to exceed its healthy limits, to assume complete mastery over the personal man, making him narrow and hard, exclusively intent upon pursuit of success at the cost of his faith in ideals.

In ancient India professions were kept within limits by social regulation. They were considered primarily as social necessities, and in the second place as the means of livelihood for individuals. Thus man, being free from the constant urging of unbounded competition, could have leisure to cultivate his nature in its completeness.

The Cult of the Nation is the professionalism of the people. This cult is becoming their greatest danger, because it is bringing them enormous success, making them impatient of the claims of higher ideals. The greater the amount of success, the stronger are the conflicts of interest and jealousy and hatred which are aroused in men's minds, thereby making it more and more necessary for other peoples, who are still living, to stiffen into nations. With the growth of nationalism, man has become the greatest menace to man. Therefore the continual presence of panic goads that very nationalism into ever-increasing menace.

Crowd psychology is a blind force. Like steam and other physical forces, it can be utilized for creating a tremendous amount of power. And therefore rulers of men, who, out of greed and fear, are bent upon turning their peoples into machines of power, try to train this crowd psychology for their special purposes. They hold it to be their duty to foster in the popular mind universal panic, unreasoning pride in their own race, and hatred of others. Newspapers, school-books, and even religious services are made use of for this object; and those who have the courage to express their disapprobation of this blind and impious cult are either punished in the law-courts, or are socially ostracized. The individual thinks, even when he feels; but the same individual, when he feels with the crowd, does not reason at all. His moral sense becomes blurred. This suppression of higher humanity in crowd minds is productive of enormous strength. For the crowd mind is essentially primitive; its forces are elemental. Therefore the Nation is forever watching to take advantage of this enormous power of darkness.

The people's instinct of self-preservation has been made dominant at particular times of crisis. Then, for the time being, the consciousness of its solidarity becomes aggressively wide-awake. But in the Nation this hyper-consciousness is kept alive for all time by artificial means. A man has to act the part of a policeman when he finds his house invaded by burglars. But if that remains his normal condition, then his consciousness of his household becomes acute and over-wrought, making him fly at every stranger passing near his house. This intensity of self-consciousness is nothing of which a man should feel proud; certainly it is not healthful. In like manner, incessant self-consciousness in a nation is highly injurious for the people. It serves its immediate purpose, but at the cost of the eternal in man.

When a whole body of men train themselves for a particular narrow purpose, it becomes a common interest with them to keep up that purpose and preach absolute loyalty to it. Nationalism is the training of a whole people for a narrow ideal; and when it gets hold of their minds it is sure to lead them to moral degeneracy and intellectual blindness. We cannot but hold firm the faith that this Age of Nationalism, of gigantic vanity and selfishness, is only a passing phase in civilization, and those who are making permanent arrangements for accommodating this temporary mood of history will be unable to fit themselves for the coming age, when the true spirit of freedom will have sway.

With the unchecked growth of Nationalism the moral foundation of man's civilization is unconsciously undergoing a change. The ideal of the social man is unselfishness, but the ideal of the Nation, like that of the professional man, is selfishness. This is why selfishness in the individual is condemned, while in the nation it is extolled, which leads to hopeless moral blindness, confusing the religion of the people with the religion of the nation. Therefore, to take an example, we find men more and more convinced of the superior claims of Christianity, merely because Christian nations are in possession of the greater part of the world. It is like supporting a robber's religion by quoting the amount of his stolen property. Nations celebrate their successful massacre of men in their churches. They forget that Thugs also ascribed their success in manslaughter to the favour of their goddess. But in the case of the latter their goddess frankly represented the principle of destruction. It was the criminal tribe's own murderous instinct deified—the instinct, not of one individual, but of the whole community, and therefore held sacred. In the same manner, in modern churches, selfishness, hatred and vanity in their collective aspect of national instincts do not scruple to share the homage paid to God.

Of course, pursuit of self-interest need not be wholly selfish; it can even be in

harmony with the interest of all. Therefore, ideally speaking, the nationalism, which stands for the expression of the collective self-interest of a people, need not be ashamed of itself if it maintains its true limitations. But what we see in practice is, that every nation which has prospered has done so through its career of aggressive selfishness either in commercial adventures or in foreign possessions, or in both. And this material prosperity not only feeds continually the selfish instincts of the people, but impresses men's minds with the lesson that, for a nation, selfishness is a necessity and therefore a virtue. It is the emphasis laid in Europe upon the idea of the Nation's constant increase of power, which is becoming the greatest danger to man, both in its direct activity and its power of infection.

We must admit that evils there are in human nature, in spite of our faith in moral laws and our training in self-control. But they carry on their foreheads their own brand of infamy, their very success adding to their monstrosity. All through man's history there will be some who suffer, and others who cause suffering. The conquest of evil will never be a fully accomplished fact, but a continuous process like the process of burning in a flame.

In former ages, when some particular people became turbulent and tried to rob others of their human rights, they sometimes achieved success and sometimes failed. And it amounted to nothing more than that. But when this idea of the Nation, which has met with universal acceptance in the present day, tries to pass off the cult of collective selfishness as a moral duty, simply because that selfishness is gigantic in stature, it not only commits depredation, but attacks the very vitals of humanity. It unconsciously generates in people's minds an attitude of defiance against moral law. For men are taught by repeated devices the lesson that the Nation is greater than the people, while yet it scatters to the winds the moral law that the people have held sacred.

It has been said that a disease becomes most acutely critical when the brain is affected. For it is the brain that is constantly directing the siege against all disease forces. The spirit of national selfishness is that brain disease of a people which shows itself in red eyes and clenched fists, in violence of talk and movements, all the while shattering its natural restorative powers. But the power of self-sacrifice, together with the moral faculty of sympathy and co-operation, is the guiding spirit of social vitality. Its function is to maintain a beneficent relation of harmony with its surroundings. But when it begins to ignore the moral law which is universal and uses it only within the bounds of its own narrow sphere, then its strength becomes like the strength of madness which ends in self-destruction.

What is worse, this aberration of a people, decked with the showy title of ‘patriotism’, proudly walks abroad, passing itself off as a highly moral influence. Thus it has spread its inflammatory contagion all over the world, proclaiming its fever flush to be the best sign of health. It is causing in the hearts of peoples, naturally inoffensive, a feeling of envy at not having their temperature as high as that of their delirious neighbours and not being able to cause as much mischief, but merely having to suffer from it.

I have often been asked by my Western friends how to cope with this evil, which has attained such sinister strength and vast dimensions. In fact, I have often been blamed for merely giving warning, and offering no alternative. When we suffer as a result of a particular system, we believe that some other system would bring us better luck. We are apt to forget that all systems produce evil sooner or later, when the psychology which is at the root of them is wrong. The system which is national today may assume the shape of the international tomorrow; but so long as men have not forsaken their idolatry of primitive instincts and collective passions, the new system will only become a new instrument of suffering. And because we are trained to confound efficient system with moral goodness itself, every ruined system makes us more and more distrustful of moral law.

Therefore I do not put my faith in any new institution, but in the individuals all over the world who think clearly, feel nobly, and act rightly, thus becoming the channels of moral truth. Our moral ideals do not work with chisels and hammers. Like trees, they spread their roots in the soil and their branches in the sky, without consulting any architect for their plans.

2.7. The Poet's Religion

I

Civility is beauty of behaviour. It requires for its perfection patience, self-control, and an environment of leisure. For genuine courtesy is a creation, like pictures, like music. It is a harmonious blending of voice, gesture and movement, words and action, in which generosity of conduct is expressed. It reveals the man himself and has no ulterior purpose.

Our needs are always in a hurry. They rush and hustle, they are rude and unceremonious; they have no surplus of leisure, no patience for anything else but fulfilment of purpose. We frequently see in our country at the present day men utilising empty kerosene cans for carrying water. These cans are emblems of discourtesy; they are curt and abrupt, they have not the least shame for their unmannerliness, they do not care to be ever so slightly more than useful.

The instruments of our necessity assert that we must have food, shelter, clothes, comforts and convenience. And yet men spend an immense amount of their time and resources in contradicting this assertion, to prove that they are not a mere living catalogue of endless wants; that there is in them an ideal of perfection, a sense of unity, which is a harmony between parts and a harmony with surroundings.

The quality of the infinite is not the magnitude of extension, it is in the advaitam, the mystery of Unity. Facts occupy endless time and space; but the truth comprehending them all has no dimension; it is One. Wherever our heart touches the One, in the small or the big, it finds the touch of the infinite.

I was speaking to some one of the joy we have in our personality. I said it was because we were made conscious by it of a spirit of unity within ourselves. He answered that he had no such feeling of joy about himself, but I was sure he exaggerated. In all probability he had been suffering from some break of harmony between his surroundings and the spirit of unity within him, proving all the more strongly its truth. The meaning of health comes home to us with painful force when disease disturbs it; since health expresses the unity of the vital functions and is accordingly joyful. Life's tragedies occur, not to demonstrate

their own reality, but to reveal that eternal principle of joy in life, to which they gave a rude shaking. It is the object of this Oneness in us to realize its infinity by perfect union of love with others. All obstacles to this union create misery, giving rise to the baser passions that are expressions of finitude, of that separateness which is negative and therefore maya.

The joy of unity within ourselves, seeking expression, becomes creative; whereas our desire for the fulfilment of our needs is constructive. The water vessel, taken as a vessel only, raises the question, 'Why does it exist at all?' Through its fitness of construction, it offers the apology for its existence. But where it is a work of beauty it has no question to answer; it has nothing to do, but to be. It reveals in its form a unity to which all that seems various in it is so related that, in a mysterious manner, it strikes sympathetic chords to the music of unity in our own being.

What is the truth of this world? It is not in the masses of substance, not in the number of things, but in their relatedness, which neither can be counted, nor measured, nor abstracted. It is not in the materials which are many, but in the expression which is one. All our knowledge of things is knowing them in their relation to the Universe, in that relation which is truth. A drop of water is not a particular assortment of elements; it is the miracle of a harmonious mutuality, in which the two reveal the One. No amount of analysis can reveal to us this mystery of unity. Matter is an abstraction; we shall never be able to realize what it is, for our world of reality does not acknowledge it. Even the giant forces of the world, centripetal and centrifugal, are kept out of our recognition. They are the day-labourers not admitted into the audience-hall of creation. But light and sound come to us in their gay dresses as troubadours singing serenades before the windows of the senses. What is constantly before us, claiming our attention, is not the kitchen, but the feast; not the anatomy of the world, but its countenance. There is the dancing ring of seasons; the elusive play of lights and shadows, of wind and water; the many-coloured wings of erratic life flitting between birth and death. The importance of these does not lie in their existence as mere facts, but in their language of harmony, the mother-tongue of our own soul, through which they are communicated to us.

We grow out of touch with this great truth, we forget to accept its invitation and its hospitality, when in quest of external success our works become unspiritual and unexpressive. This is what Wordsworth complained of when he said:

*The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers.*

Little we see in Nature that is ours.

But it is not because the world has grown too familiar to us; on the contrary, it is because we do not see it in its aspect of unity, because we are driven to distraction by our pursuit of the fragmentary.

Materials are savage; they are solitary; they are ready to hurt one another. They are like our individual impulses seeking the unlimited freedom of wilfulness. Left to themselves they are destructive. But directly an ideal of unity raises its banner in their centre, it brings these rebellious forces under its sway and creation is revealed—the creation which is peace, which is the unity of perfect relationship. Our greed for eating is in itself ugly and selfish, it has no sense of decorum; but when brought under the ideal of social fellowship, it is regulated and made ornamental; it is changed into a daily festivity of life. In human nature sexual passion is fiercely individual and destructive, but dominated by the ideal of love, it has been made to flower into a perfection of beauty, becoming in its best expression symbolical of the spiritual truth in man which is his kinship of love with the Infinite. Thus we find it is the One which expresses itself in creation; and the Many, by giving up opposition, make the revelation of unity perfect.

II

I remember, when I was a child, that a row of coconut trees by our garden wall, with their branches beckoning the rising sun on the horizon, gave me a companionship as living as I was myself. I know it was my imagination which transmuted the world around me into my own world—the imagination which seeks unity, which deals with it. But we have to consider that this companionship was true; that the universe in which I was born had in it an element profoundly akin to my own imaginative mind, one which wakens in all children's natures the Creator, whose pleasure is in interweaving the web of creation with His own patterns of many-coloured strands. It is something akin to us, and therefore harmonious to our imagination. When we find some strings vibrating in unison with others, we know that this sympathy carries in it an eternal reality. The fact that the world stirs our imagination in sympathy tells us that this creative imagination is a common truth both in us and in the heart of existence. Wordsworth says:

*I'd rather be
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn;*

*So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.*

In this passage the poet says we are less forlorn in a world which we meet with our imagination. That can only be possible if through our imagination is revealed, behind all appearances, the reality which gives the touch of companionship, that is to say, something which has an affinity to us. An immense amount of our activity is engaged in making images, not for serving any useful purpose or formulating rational propositions, but for giving varied responses to the varied touches of this reality. In this image-making the child creates his own world in answer to the world in which he finds himself. The child in us finds glimpses of his eternal playmate from behind the veil of things, as Proteus rising from the sea, or Triton blowing his wreathed horn. And the playmate is the Reality, that makes it possible for the child to find delight in activities which do not inform or bring assistance but merely express. There is an image-making joy in the infinite, which inspires in us our joy in imagining. The rhythm of cosmic motion produces in our mind the emotion which is creative.

A poet has said about his destiny as a dreamer, about the worthlessness of his dreams and yet their permanence:

*I hang 'mid men my heedless head,
And my fruit is dreams, as theirs is bread:
The godly men and the sun-hazed sleeper,
Time shall reap; but after the reaper
The world shall glean to me, me the sleeper.*

The dream persists; it is more real than even bread which has substance and use. The painted canvas is durable and substantial; it has for its production and transport to market a whole array of machines and factories. But the picture which no factory can produce is a dream, maya, and yet it, not the canvas, has the meaning of ultimate reality.

A poet describes Autumn:

*I saw old Autumn in the misty morn
Stand shadowless like Silence, listening
To silence, for no lonely bird would sing
Into his hollow ear from woods forlorn.
Of April another poet sings:*

*April, April,
Laugh thy girlish laughter;
Then the moment after
Weep thy girlish tears!
April, that mine ears
Like a lover greetest,
If I tell thee, sweetest,
All my hopes and fears.
April, April,
Laugh thy golden laughter.
But the moment after
Weep thy golden tears!
This Autumn, this April,—are they nothing but phantasy?*

Let us suppose that the Man from the Moon comes to the earth and listens to some music in a gramophone. He seeks for the origin of the delight produced in his mind. The facts before him are a cabinet made of wood and a revolving disc producing sound; but the one thing which is neither seen nor can be explained is the truth of the music, which his personality must immediately acknowledge as a personal message. It is neither in the wood, nor in the disc, nor in the sound of the notes. If the Man from the Moon be a poet, as can reasonably be supposed, he will write about a fairy imprisoned in that box, who sits spinning fabrics of songs expressing her cry for a far-away magic casement opening on the foam of some perilous sea, in a fairyland forlorn. It will not be literally, but essentially true. The facts of the gramophone make us aware of the laws of sound, but the music gives us personal companionship. The bare facts about April are alternate sunshine and showers; but the subtle blending of shadows and lights, of murmurs and movements, in April, gives us not mere shocks of sensation, but unity of joy as does music. Therefore when a poet sees the vision of a girl in April, even a downright materialist is in sympathy with him. But we know that the same individual would be menacingly angry if the law of heredity or a geometrical problem were described as a girl or a rose—or even as a cat or a camel. For these intellectual abstractions have no magical touch for our lute-strings of imagination. They are no dreams, as are the harmony of bird-songs, rain-washed leaves glistening in the sun, and pale clouds floating in the blue.

The ultimate truth of our personality is that we are no mere biologists or geometricians; ‘we are the dreamers of dreams, we are the music-makers.’ This dreaming or music-making is not a function of the lotus-eaters, it is the creative

impulse which makes songs not only with words and tunes, lines and colours, but with stones and metals, with ideas and men:

*With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory.*

I have been told by a scholar friend of mine that by constant practice in logic he has weakened his natural instinct of faith. The reason is, faith is the spectator in us which finds the meaning of the drama from the unity of the performance; but logic lures us into the greenroom where there is stagecraft but no drama at all; and then this logic nods its head and wearily talks about disillusionment. But the greenroom, dealing with its fragments, looks foolish when questioned, or wears the sneering smile of Mephistopheles; for it does not have the secret of unity, which is somewhere else. It is for faith to answer, ‘Unity comes to us from the One, and the One in ourselves opens the door and receives it with joy.’ The function of poetry and the arts is to remind us that the greenroom is the greyest of illusions, and the reality is the drama presented before us, all its paint and tinsel, masks and pageantry, made one in art. The ropes and wheels perish, the stage is changed; but the dream which is drama remains true, for there remains the eternal Dreamer.

III

Poetry and the arts cherish in them the profound faith of man in the unity of his being with all existence, the final truth of which is the truth of personality. It is a religion directly apprehended, and not a system of metaphysics to be analysed and argued. We know in our personal experience what our creations are and we instinctively know through it what creation around us means.

When Keats said in his “Ode to a Grecian Urn”:

Thou, silent form, dost tease us out of thought,
As doth eternity, . . .

He felt the ineffable which is in all forms of perfection, the mystery of the One, which takes us beyond all thought into the immediate touch of Infinite. This is the mystery which is for a poet to realise and to reveal. It comes out in Keats’ poems with struggling gleams through consciousness of suffering and despair:

Spite off despondence, of the inhuman dearth

*Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,
Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darken'd ways
Made for our searching : yes, in spite of all,
Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
From our dark spirits.*

In this there is a suggestion that truth reveals itself in beauty. For if beauty were mere accident, a rent in the eternal fabric of things, then it would hurt, would be defeated by the antagonism of facts. Beauty is no phantasy, it has the everlasting meaning of reality. The facts that cause despondence and gloom are mere mist, and when through the mist beauty breaks out in momentary gleams, we realise that Peace is true and not conflict, Love is true and not hatred; and Truth is the One, not the disjointed multitude. We realize that Creation is the perpetual harmony between the infinite ideal of perfection and the eternal continuity of its realization; that so long as there is no absolute separation between the positive ideal and the material obstacle to its attainment, we need not be afraid of suffering and loss. This is the poet's religion.

Those who are habituated to the rigid framework of sectarian creeds will find such a religion as this too indefinite and elastic. No doubt it is so, but only because its ambition is not to shackle the Infinite and tame it for domestic use; but rather to help our consciousness to emancipate itself from materialism. It is as indefinite as the morning, and yet as luminous; it calls our thoughts, feelings, and actions into freedom, and feeds them with light. In the poet's religion we find no doctrine or injunction, but rather the attitude of our entire being towards a truth which is ever to be revealed in its own endless creation.

In dogmatic religion all questions are definitely answered, all doubts are finally laid to rest. But the poet's religion is fluid, like the atmosphere round the earth where lights and shadows play hide-and-seek, and the wind like a shepherd boy plays upon its reeds among flocks of clouds. It never undertakes to lead anybody anywhere to any solid conclusion; yet it reveals endless spheres of light, because it has no walls round itself. It acknowledges the facts of evil; it openly admits 'the weariness, the fever and the fret' in the world 'where men sit and hear each other groan'; yet it remembers that in spite of all there is the song of the nightingale, and 'haply the Queen Moon is on her throne,' and there is:

*White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine,
Fast-fading violets covered up in leaves;
And mid-day's eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,*

The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

But all this has not the definiteness of an answer; it has only the music that teases us out of thought as it fills our being.

Let me read a translation from an Eastern poet to show how this idea comes out in a poem in Bengali:

*In the morning I awoke at the flutter of thy boat-sails,
Lady of my Voyage, and I left the shore to follow the beckoning waves.
I asked thee, ‘Does the dream-harvest ripen in the island beyond the blue?’
The silence of thy smile fell on my question like the silence of sunlight on
waves.
The day passed on through storm and through calm, The perplexed winds
changed their course, time after time, and the sea moaned.
I asked thee, ‘Does thy sleep-tower stand somewhere beyond the dying
embers of the day’s funeral pyre?’
No answer came from thee, only thine eyes smiled like the edge of a sunset
cloud.
It is night. Thy figure grows dim in the dark.
Thy wind-blown hair flits on my cheek and thrills my sadness with its scent.
My hands grope to touch the hem of thy robe, and I ask thee—Is there thy
garden of death beyond the stars, Lady of my Voyage, where thy silence
blossoms into songs?’
Thy smile shines in the heart of the hush like the star-mist of midnight.*

IV

In Shelley we clearly see the growth of his religion through periods of vagueness and doubt, struggle and searching. But he did at length come to a positive utterance of his faith, though he died young. Its final expression is in his ‘Hymn to Intellectual Beauty’. By the title of the poem the poet evidently means a beauty that is not merely a passive quality of particular things, but a spirit that manifests itself through the apparent antagonism of the unintellectual life. This hymn rang out of his heart when he came to the end of his pilgrimage and stood face to face with the Divinity, glimpses of which had already filled his soul with restlessness. All his experiences of beauty had ever teased him with the question as to what was its truth. Somewhere he sings of a nosegay which he makes of violets, daisies, tender bluebells and—

*That tall flower that wets,
Like a child , half in tenderness and mirth,
Its mother's face with heaven-collected tears.*

*He ends by saying:
And then, elate and gay,
I hastened to the spot whence I had come,
That I might there present it!—Oh! To whom?*

This question, even though not answered, carries a significance. A creation of beauty suggests a fulfilment, which is the fulfilment of love. We have heard some poets scoff at it in bitterness and despair; but it is like a sick child beating its own mother—it is a sickness of faith, which hurts truth, but proves it by its very pain and anger. And the faith itself is this, that beauty is the self-offering of the One of the other One.

In the first part of his 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' Shelley dwells on the inconstancy and evanescence of the manifestation of beauty, which imparts to it an appearance of frailty and unreality:

*Like hues and harmonies of evening,
Like clouds in starlight widely spread,
Like memory of music fled.
This, he says, rouses in our mind the question:
Why ought should fail and fade that once is shown,
Why fear and dream and death and birth
Cast on the daylight of this earth
Such gloom,—why man has such a scope
For love and hate, despondency and hope?
The poet's own answer to this question is:
Man were immortal, and omnipotent,
Didst thou, unknown and awful as thou art,
Keep with thy glorious train firm state within his heart.*

This very elusiveness of beauty suggests the vision of immortality and of omnipotence, and stimulates the effort in man to realize it in some idea of permanence. The highest reality has actively to be achieved. The gain of truth is not in the end; it reveals itself through the endless length of achievement. But what is there to guide us in our voyage of realization? Men have ever been struggling for direction:

Therefore the names of Demon, Ghost, and Heaven

*Remain the records of their vain endeavour,
Frail spells,—whose uttered charm might not avail to sever,
From all we hear and all we see,
Doubt, chance and mutability.*

The prevalent rites and practices of piety, according to this poet, are like magic spells—they only prove men's desperate endeavour and not their success. He knows that the end we seek has its own direct call to us, its own light to guide us to itself. And truth's call is the call of beauty. Of this he says:

*The light alone,—like mist o'er mountain driven,
Or music by the night wind sent,
Thro' strings of some still instrument,
Or moonlight on a midnight stream
Gives grace and truth to life's unquiet dream.*

About this revelation of truth which calls us on, and yet which is everywhere, a village singer of Bengal sings:

*My master's flute sounds in everything, drawing me out of my house to everywhere.
While I listen to it I know that every step I take is in my master's house.
For he is the sea, he is the river that leads to the sea, and he is the landing place.*

Religion, in Shelley, grew with his life; it was not given to him in fixed and ready-made doctrines; he rebelled against them. He had the creative mind which could only approach Truth through its joy in creative effort. For true creation is realization of truth through the translation of it into our own symbols.

V

For man, the best opportunity for such a realization has been in men's Society. It is a collective creation of his, through which his social being tries to find itself in its truth and beauty. Had that Society merely manifested its usefulness, it would be inarticulate like a dark star. But, unless it degenerates, it ever suggests in its concerted movements a living truth as its soul, which has personality. In this large life of social communion man feels the mystery of Unity, as he does in music. From the sense of that Unity, men came to the sense of their God. And therefore every religion began with its tribal God.

The one question before all others that has to be answered by our civilizations is not what they have and in what quantity, but what they express and how. In a society, the production and circulation of materials, the amassing and spending of money, may go on, as in the interminable prolonging of a straight line, if its people forget to follow some spiritual design of life which curbs them and transforms them into an organic whole. For growth is not that enlargement which is merely adding to the dimensions of incompleteness. Growth is the movement of a whole towards a yet fuller wholeness. Living things start with this wholeness from the beginning of their career. A child has its own perfection as a child; it would be ugly if it appeared as an unfinished man. Life is a continual process of synthesis, and not of additions. Our activities of production and enjoyment of wealth attain that spirit of wholeness when they are blended with a creative ideal. Otherwise they have the insane aspect of the eternally unfinished; they become like locomotive engines which have railway lines but no stations; which rush on towards a collision of uncontrolled forces or to a sudden breakdown of the overstrained machinery.

Through creation man expresses his truth; through that expression he gains back his truth in its fulness. Human society is for the best expression of man, and that expression, according to its perfection, leads him to the full realization of the divine in humanity. When that expression is obscure, then his faith in the Infinite that is within him becomes weak; then his aspiration cannot go beyond the idea of success. His faith in the Infinite is creative; his desire for success is constructive; one is his home, and the other is his office. With the overwhelming growth of necessity, civilization becomes a gigantic office to which the home is a mere appendix. The predominance of the pursuit of success gives to society the character of what we call Shudra in India. In fighting a battle, the Kshatriya, the noble knight, followed his honour for his ideal, which was greater than victory itself; but the mercenary Shudra has success for his object. The name Shudra symbolizes a man who has no margin round him beyond his bare utility. The word denotes a classification which includes all naked machines that have lost their completeness of humanity, be their work manual or intellectual. They are like walking stomachs of brains, and we feel, in pity, urged to call on God and cry, ‘Cover them up for mercy’s sake with some veil of beauty and life!’ When Shelley in his view of the world realized the Spirit of Beauty, which is the vision of the Infinite, he thus uttered his faith:

*Never joy illumed my brow
Unlinked with hope that thou wouldest free
This world from its dark slavery;*

*That thou,—O awful Loveliness,—
Wouldst give whate'er these words cannot express.*

This was his faith in the Infinite. It led his aspiration towards the region of freedom and perfection which was beyond the immediate and above the successful. This faith in God, this faith in the reality of the ideal of perfection, has built up all that is great in the human world. To keep indefinitely walking on, along a zigzag course of change, is negative and barren. A mere procession of notes does not make music; it is only when we have in the heart of the march of sounds some musical idea that it creates song. Our faith in the infinite reality of Perfection is that musical idea, and there is that one great creative force in our civilization. When it wakens not, then our faith in money, in material power, takes its place; it fights and destroys, and in a brilliant fireworks of star-mimicry suddenly exhausts itself and dies in ashes and smoke.

VI

Men of great faith have always called us to wake up to great expectations, and the prudent have always laughed at them and said that these did not belong to reality. But the poet in man knows that reality is a creation, and human reality has to be called forth from its obscure depth by man's faith which is creative. There was a day when the human reality was the brutal reality. That was the only capital we had with which to begin our career. But age after age there has come to us the call of faith, which said against all the evidence of fact:

'You are more than you appear to be, more than your circumstances seem to warrant. You are to attain the impossible you are immortal.' The unbelievers had laughed and tried to kill the faith. But faith grew stronger with the strength of martyrdom and at her bidding higher realities have been created over the strata of the lower. Has not a new age come today, borne by thunderclouds, ushered in by a universal agony of suffering? Are we not waiting today for a great call of faith, which will say to us: 'Come out of your present limitations. You are to attain the impossible, you are immortal'? The nations who are not prepared to accept it, who have all their trust in their present machines of system, and have no thought or space to spare to welcome the sudden guest who comes as the messenger of emancipation, are bound to court defeat whatever may be their present wealth and power.

This great world, where it is a creation, an expression of the infinite—where its morning sings of joy to the newly awakened life, and its evening stars sing to the

traveller, weary and worn, of the triumph of life in a new birth across death,— has its call for us. The call has ever roused the creator in man, and urged him to reveal the truth, to reveal the Infinite in himself. It is ever claiming from us, in our own creations, cooperation with God, reminding us of our divine nature, which finds itself in freedom of spirit. Our society exists to remind us, through its various voices, that the ultimate truth in man is not in his intellect or his possessions; it is in his illumination of mind, in his extension of sympathy across all barriers of caste and colour; in his recognition of the world, not merely as a storehouse of power, but as a habitation of man's spirit, with its eternal music of beauty and its inner light of the divine presence.

2.8. The Religion of the Forest

I

We stand before this great world. The truth of our life depends upon our attitude of mind towards it—an attitude which is formed by our habit of dealing with it according to the special circumstance of our surroundings and our temperaments. It guides our attempts to establish relations with the universe either by conquest or by union, either through the cultivation of power or through that of sympathy. And thus, in our realization of the truth of existence, we put our emphasis either upon the principle of dualism or upon the principle of unity.

The Indian sages have held in the Upanishads that the emancipation of our soul lies in its realizing the ultimate truth of unity. They said: Ishavasyam idam sarvam yat kinch jagatyam jagat.

Yena tyaktena bhunjitha ma gradha kasyasvit dhanam.

(Know all that moves in this moving world as enveloped by God; and find enjoyment through renunciation, not through greed of possession.) The meaning of this is, that, when we know the multiplicity of things as the final truth, we try to augment ourselves by the external possession of them; but, when we know the Infinite Soul as the final truth, then through our union with it we realize the joy of our soul. Therefore it has been said of those who have attained their fulfilment, – ‘sarvarn eva vishanti’ (they enter into all things). Their perfect relation with this world is the relation of union.

This ideal of perfection preached by the forest-dwellers of ancient India runs through the heart of our classical literature and still dominates our mind. The legends related in our epics cluster under the forest shade bearing all through their narrative the message of the forest-dwellers. Our two greatest classical dramas find their background in scenes of the forest hermitage, which are permeated by the association of these sages.

The history of the Northmen of Europe is resonant with the music of the sea. That sea is not merely topographical in its significance, but represents certain

ideals of life which still guide the history and inspire the creations of that race. In the sea, nature presented herself to those men in her aspect of a danger, a barrier which seemed to be at constant war with the land and its children. The sea was the challenge of untamed nature to the indomitable human soul. And man did not flinch; he fought and won, and the spirit of fight continued in him. This fight he still maintains; it is the fight against disease and poverty, tyranny of matter and of man.

This refers to a people who live by the sea, and ride on it as on a wild, champing horse, catching it by its mane and making it render service from shore to shore. They find delight in turning by force the antagonism of circumstances into obedience. Truth appears to them in her aspect of dualism, the perpetual conflict of good and evil, which has no reconciliation, which can only end in victory or defeat.

But in the level tracts of Northern India men found no barrier between their lives and the grand life that permeates the universe. The forest entered into a close living relationship with their work and leisure, with their daily necessities and contemplations. They could not think of other surroundings as separate or inimical. So the view of the truth, which these men found, did not make manifest the difference, but rather the unity of all things. They uttered their faith in these words: *Yadidam kinch sarvam prana ejati nihsratam* (All that is vibrates with life, having come out from life). When we know this world as alien to us, then its mechanical aspect takes prominence in our mind; and then we set up our machines and our methods to deal with it and make as much profit as our knowledge of its mechanism allows us to do. This view of things does not play us false, for the machine has its place in this world. And not only this material universe, but human beings also, may be used as machines and made to yield powerful results. This aspect of truth cannot be ignored; it has to be known and mastered. Europe has done so and has reaped a rich harvest.

The view of this world which India has taken is summed up in one compound Sanskrit word, Sacchidananda. The meaning is that Reality, which is essentially one, has three phases. The first is sat; it is the simple fact that things are, the fact which relates us to all things through the relationship of common existence. The second is chit-, it is the fact that we know, which relates us to all things through the relationship of knowledge. The third is ananda. It is the fact that we enjoy, which unites us with all things through the relationship of love.

According to the true Indian view, our consciousness of the world, merely as the sum total of things that exist, and as governed by laws, is imperfect. But it is perfect when our consciousness realizes all things as spiritually one with it, and

therefore capable of giving us joy. For us the highest purpose of this world is not merely living in it, knowing it and making use of it, but realizing our own selves in it through expansion of-sympathy; not alienating ourselves from it and dominating it, but comprehending and uniting it with ourselves in perfect union.

II

When Vikramaditya became king, Ujjayini a great capital, and Kalidasa its poet, the age of India's forest retreats had passed. Then we had taken our stand in the midst of the great concourse of humanity. The Chinese and the Hun, the Scythian and the Persian, the Greek and the Roman, had crowded round us. But, even in that age of pomp and prosperity, the love and reverence with which its poet sang about the hermitage shows what was the dominant ideal that occupied the mind of India; what was the one current of memory that continually flowed through her life.

In Kalidasa's drama, *Shakuntala*, the hermitage, which dominates the play, overshadowing the king's palace, has the same idea running through it the recognition of the kinship of man with conscious and unconscious creation alike.

A poet of a later age, while describing a hermitage in his *Kadambari*, tells us of the posture of salutation in the flowering lianas as they bow to the wind; of the sacrifice offered by the trees scattering their blossoms; of the grove resounding with the lessons chanted by the neophytes, and the verses repeated by the parrots, learnt by constantly hearing them; of the wild-fowl enjoying *vaishvadeva-bali-pinda* (the food offered to the divinity which is in all creatures); of the ducks coming up from the lake for their portion of the grass seed spread in the cottage yards to dry; and of the deer caressing with their tongues the young hermit boys. It is again the same story. The hermitage shines out, in all our ancient literature, as the place where the chasm between man and the rest of creation has been bridged.

In the Western dramas, human characters drown our attention in the vortex of their passions. Nature occasionally peeps out, but she is almost always a trespasser, who has to offer excuses, or bow apologetically and depart. But in all our dramas which still retain their fame, such as *Mrit-Shakatika*, *Shakuntala*, *Uttara-ramachanta*, Nature stands on her own right, proving that she has her great function, to impart the peace of the eternal to human emotions.

The fury of passion in two of Shakespeare's youthful poems is exhibited in conspicuous isolation. It is snatched away, naked, from the context of the All; it has not the green earth or the blue sky around it; it is there ready to bring to our

view the raging fever which is in man's desires, and not the balm of health and repose which encircles it in the universe.

Ritusamhara is clearly a work of Kalidasa's immaturity. The youthful love-song in it does not reach the sublime reticence which is in Shakuntala and Kumara-Sambhava. But the tune of these voluptuous outbreaks is set to the varied harmony of Nature's symphony. The moonbeams of the summer evening, resonant with the flow of fountains, acknowledge it as a part of its own melody. In its rhythm sways the Kadamba forest, glistening in the first cool rain of the season; and the south breezes, carrying the scent of the mango blossoms, temper it with their murmur.

In the third canto of Kumara-Sambhava, Madana, the God Eros, enters the forest sanctuary to set free a sudden flood of desire amid the serenity of the ascetics' meditation. But the boisterous outbreak of passion so caused was shown against a background of universal life. The divine love-thrills of Sati and Shiva found their response in the world-wide immensity of youth, in which animals and trees have their life-throbs.

Not only its third canto but the whole of the Kumara-Sambhava poem is painted upon a limitless canvas. It tells of the eternal wedding of love, its wooing and sacrifice, and its fulfilment, for which the gods wait in suspense. Its inner idea is deep and of all time. It answers the one question that humanity asks through all its endeavours: 'How is the birth of the hero to be brought about, the brave one who can defy and vanquish the evil demon laying waste heaven's own kingdom?'

It becomes evident that such a problem had become acute in Kalidasa's time, when the old simplicity of Hindu life had broken up. The Hindu kings, forgetful of their duties, had become self-seeking epicureans, and India was being repeatedly devastated by the Scythians. What answer, then, does the poem give to the question it raises? Its message is that the cause of weakness lies in the inner life of the soul. It is in some break of harmony with the Good, some dissociation from the True. In the commencement of the poem we find that the God Shiva, the Good, had remained for long lost in the self-centred solitude of his asceticism, detached from the world of reality. And then Paradise was lost. But Kumara-Sambhava is the poem of Paradise Regained. How was it regained? When Sati, the Spirit of Reality, through humiliation, suffering, and penance, won the Heart of Shiva, the Spirit of Goodness. And thus, from the union of the freedom of the real with the restraint of the Good, was born the heroism that released Paradise from the demon of Lawlessness.

Viewed from without, India, in the time of Kalidasa, appeared to have reached

the zenith of civilization excelling as she did in luxury, literature and the arts. But from the poems of Kalidasa it is evident that this very magnificence of wealth and enjoyment worked against the ideal that sprang and flowed forth from the sacred solitude of the forest. These poems contain the voice of warnings against the gorgeous unreality of that age, which, like a Himalayan avalanche, was slowly gliding down to an abyss of catastrophe. And from his seat beside all the glories of Vikramaditya's throne the poet's heart yearns for the purity and simplicity of India's past age of spiritual striving. And it was this yearning which impelled him to go back to the annals of the ancient Kings of Raghu's line for the narrative poem, in which he traced the history of the rise and fall of the ideal that should guide the rulers of men.

King Dilipa, with Queen Sudakshina, has entered upon the life of the forest. The great monarch is busy tending the cattle of the hermitage. Thus the poem opens, amid scenes of simplicity and self-denial. But it ends in the palace of magnificence, in the extravagance of self-enjoyment. With a calm restraint of language the poet tells us of the kingly glory crowned with purity. He begins his poem as the day begins, in the serenity of sunrise. But lavish are the colours in which he describes the end, as of the evening, eloquent for a time with the sumptuous splendour of sunset, but overtaken at last by the devouring darkness which sweeps away all its brilliance into night.

In this beginning and this ending of his poem there lies hidden that message of the forest which found its voice in the poet's words. There runs through the narrative the idea that the future glowed gloriously ahead only when there was in the atmosphere the calm of self-control, of purity and renunciation. When downfall had become imminent, the hungry fires of desire, aflame at a hundred different points, dazzled the eyes of all beholders.

Kalidasa in almost all his works represented the unbounded impetuosity of kingly splendour on the one side and the serene strength of regulated desires on the other. Even in the minor drama of Malavikagnimitra we find the same thing in a different manner. It must never be thought that, in this play, the poet's deliberate object was to pander to his royal patron by inviting him to a literary orgy of lust and passion. The very introductory verse indicates the object towards which this play is directed. The poet begins the drama with the prayer, *Sanmargalokayan vyapanayatu sa nastamasi vritimishah* (Let God, to illumine for us the path of truth, sweep away our passions, bred of darkness). This is the God Shiva, in whose nature Parvati, the eternal Woman, is ever commingled in an ascetic purity of love. The unified being of Shiva and Parvati is the perfect symbol of the eternal in the wedded love of man and woman. When the poet

opens his drama with an invocation of this Spirit of the Divine Union it is evident that it contains in it the message with which he greets his kingly audience. The whole drama goes to show the ugliness of the treachery and cruelty inherent in unchecked self-indulgence. In the play the conflict of ideals is between the King and the Queen, between Agnimitra and Dharini, and the significance of the contrast lies hidden in the very names of the hero and the heroine. Though the name Agnimitra is historical, yet it symbolizes in the poet's mind the destructive force of uncontrolled desire—just as did the name Agnivarna in Raghuvamsha. Agnimitra, 'the friend of the fire,' the reckless person who in his love-making is playing with fire, not knowing that all the time it is scorching him black. And what a great name is Dharini, signifying the fortitude and forbearance that comes from majesty of soul! What an association it carries of the infinite dignity of love, purified by a self-abnegation that rises far above all insult and baseness of betrayal!

In Shakuntala this conflict of ideals has been shown, all through the drama, by the contrast of the pompous heartlessness of the king's court and the natural purity of the forest hermitage. The drama opens with a hunting scene, where the king is in pursuit of an antelope. The cruelty of the chase appears like a menace symbolizing the spirit of the king's life clashing against the spirit of the forest retreat, which is sharanyam sarva-bhutanam (where all creatures find their protection of love). And the pleading of the forest dwellers with the king to spare the life of the deer, helplessly innocent and beautiful, is the pleading that rises from the heart of the whole drama. 'Never, oh, never is the arrow meant to pierce the tender body of a deer, even as the fire is not for the burning of flowers.'

In the Ramayana, Rama and his companions, in their banishment, had to traverse forest after forest; they had to live in leaf-thatched huts, to sleep on the bare ground. But as their hearts felt their kinship with woodland, hill, and stream, they were not in exile amidst these. Poets, brought up in an atmosphere of different ideals, would have taken this opportunity of depicting in dismal colours the hardship of the forest-life in order to bring out the martyrdom of Ramachandra with all the emphasis of a strong contrast. But, in the Ramayana, we are led to realise the greatness of the hero, not in a fierce struggle with Nature, but in sympathy with it, Sita, the daughter-in-law of a great kingly house, goes along the forest paths. We read: 'She asks Rama about the flowering trees, and shrubs and creepers which she has not seen before. At her request Lakshmana gathers and brings her plants of all kinds, exuberant with flowers, and it delights her heart to see the forest rivers, variegated with their streams and sandy banks, resounding with the call of heron and duck.'

‘When Rama first took his abode in the Chitrakuta peak, that delightful Chitrakuta, by the Malyavati river, with its easy slopes for landing, he forgot all the pain of leaving his home in the capital at the sight of those woodlands, alive with beast and bird.’ Having lived on that hill for long, Rama, who was giri-vana-priya (lover of the mountain and the forest), said one day to Sita: ‘When I look upon the beauties of this hill, the loss of my kingdom troubles me no longer, nor does the separation from my friends cause me any pang.’

Thus passed Ramachandra’s exile, now in woodland, now in hermitage. The love which Rama and Sita bore to each other united them, not only to each other, but to the universe of life. That is why, when Sita was taken away, the loss seemed to be so great to the forest itself.

III

Strangely enough, in Shakespeare’s dramas, like those of Kalidasa, we find a secret vein of complaint against the artificial life of the king’s court—the life of ungrateful treachery and falsehood. And almost everywhere, in his dramas, foreign scenes have been introduced in connection with some working of the life of unscrupulous ambition. It is perfectly obvious in Timon of Athens—but there Nature offers no message or balm to the injured soul of man. In Cymbeline the mountainous forest and the cave appear in their aspect of obstruction to life’s opportunities. These only seem tolerable in comparison with the vicissitudes of fortune in the artificial court life. In As You Like It the forest of Arden is didactic in its lessons. It does not bring peace, but preaches, when it says: Hath not old custom made this life more sweet Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods More free from peril than the envious court?

In the Tempest, through Prospero’s treatment of Ariel and Caliban we realize man’s struggle with Nature and his longing to sever connection with her. In Macbeth, as a prelude to a bloody crime of treachery and treason, we are introduced to a scene of barren heath where the three witches appear as personifications of Nature’s malignant forces; and in King Lear it is the fury of a father’s love turned into curses by the ingratitude born of the unnatural life of the court that finds its symbol in the storm on the heath. The tragic intensity of Hamlet and Othello is unrelieved by any touch of Nature’s eternity. Except in a passing glimpse of a moonlight night in the love scene in the Merchant of Venice, Nature has not been allowed in other dramas of this series, including Romeo and Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra, to contribute her own music to the

music of man's love. In *The Winter's Tale* the cruelty of a king's suspicion stands bare in its relentlessness, and Nature cowers before it, offering no consolation.

I hope it is needless for me to say that these observations are not intended to minimize Shakespeare's great power as a dramatic poet, but to show in his works the gulf between Nature and human nature owing to the tradition of his race and time. It cannot be said that beauty of nature is ignored in his writings; only he fails to recognize in them the truth of the interpenetration of human life with the cosmic life of the world. We observe a completely different attitude of mind in the later English poets like Wordsworth and Shelley, which can be attributed in the main to the great mental change in Europe, at that particular period, through the influence of the newly discovered philosophy of India which stirred the soul of Germany and aroused the attention of other Western countries.

In Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the very subject—Man dwelling in the garden of Paradise—seems to afford a special opportunity for bringing out the true greatness of man's relationship with Nature. But though the poet has described to us the beauties of the garden, though he has shown to us the animals living there in amity and peace among themselves, there is no reality of kinship between them and man. They were created for man's enjoyment; man was their lord and master. We find no trace of the love between the first man and woman gradually surpassing themselves and overflowing the rest of creation, such as we find in the love scenes in *Kumara-Sambhava* and *Shakuntala*. In the seclusion of the bower, where the first man and woman rested in the garden of Paradise—Bird, beast, insect or worm Durst enter none, such was their awe of man.

Not that India denied the superiority of man, but the test of that superiority lay, according to her, in the comprehensiveness of sympathy, not in the aloofness of absolute distinction.

IV

India holds sacred, and counts as places of pilgrimage, all spots which display a special beauty or splendour of nature. These had no original attraction on account of any special fitness for cultivation or settlement. Here, man is free, not to look upon Nature as a source of supply of his necessities, but to realise his soul beyond himself. The Himalayas of India are sacred and the Vindhya Hills. Her majestic rivers are sacred. Lake Manasa and the confluence of the Ganges and the Jamuna are sacred. India has saturated with her love and worship the

great Nature with which her children are surrounded, whose light fills their eyes with gladness, and whose water cleanses them, whose food gives them life, and from whose majestic mystery comes forth the constant revelation of the infinite in music, scent, and colour, which brings its awakening to the soul of man. India gains the world through worship, through spiritual communion; and the idea of freedom to which she aspired was based upon the realization of her spiritual unity.

When, in my recent voyage to Europe, our ship left Aden and sailed along the sea which lay between the two continents, we passed by the red and barren rocks of Arabia on our right side and the gleaming sands of Egypt on our left. They seemed to me like two giant brothers exchanging with each other burning glances of hatred, kept apart by the tearful entreaty of the sea from whose womb they had their birth.

There was an immense stretch of silence on the left shore as well as on the right, but the two shores spoke to me of the two different historical dramas enacted. The civilization which found its growth in Egypt was continued across long centuries, elaborately rich with sentiments and expressions of life, with pictures, sculptures, temples, and ceremonials. This was a country whose guardian-spirit was a noble river, which spread the festivities of life on its banks across the heart of the land. There man never raised the barrier of alienation between himself and the rest of the world.

On the opposite shore of the Red Sea the civilization which grew up in the inhospitable soil of Arabia had a contrary character to that of Egypt. There man felt himself isolated in his hostile and bare surroundings. His idea of God became that of a jealous God. His mind naturally dwelt upon the principle of separateness. It roused in him the spirit of fight, and this spirit was a force that drove him far and wide. These two civilizations represented two fundamental divisions of human nature. The one contained in it the spirit of conquest and the other the spirit of harmony. And both of these have their truth and purpose in human existence.

The characters of two eminent sages have been described in our mythology. One was Vashishtha and another Vishvamitra. Both of them were great, but they represented two different types of wisdom; and there was conflict between them. Vishvamitra sought to achieve power and was proud of it; Vashishtha was rudely smitten by that power. But his hurt and his loss could not touch the illumination of his soul; for he rose above them and could forgive. Ramachandra, the great hero of our epic, had his initiation to the spiritual life from Vashishtha, the life of inner peace and perfection. But he had his initiation to war from Vishvamitra,

who called him to kill the demons and gave him weapons that were irresistible.

Those two sages symbolize in themselves the two guiding spirits of civilization. Can it be true that they shall never be reconciled? If so, can even the age of peace and co-operation dawn upon the human world? Creation is the harmony of contrary forces—the forces of attraction and repulsion. When they join hands, all the Fire and fight are changed into tin' smile of flowers and the songs of birds. When there is only one of them triumphant and the other defeated, then either there is the death of cold rigidity or that of suicidal explosion.

Humanity, for ages, has been busy with the one great creation of spiritual life. Its best wisdom, its discipline, its literature and art, all the teachings and self-sacrifice of its noblest teachers, have been for this. But the harmony of contrary forces, which give their rhythm to all creation, has not yet been perfected by man in his civilization, and the Creator in him is baffled over and over again. He comes back to his work, however, and makes himself busy building his world in the midst of desolation and ruins. His history is the history of his aspiration interrupted and renewed. And one truth of which he must be reminded, therefore, is that the power which accomplishes the miracle of creation, by bringing conflicting forces into the harmony of the One, is no passion, but a love which accepts the bonds of self-control from the joy of its own immensity—a love whose sacrifice is the manifestation of its endless wealth within itself.

2.9. The Spirit of Freedom

A Letter from New York to the Author's Own Countrymen

When freedom is not an inner idea which imparts strength to our activities and breadth to our creations, when it is merely a thing of external circumstance, it is like an open space to one who is blindfolded.

In my recent travels in the West I have felt that out there freedom as an idea has become feeble and ineffectual. Consequently a spirit of repression and coercion is fast spreading in the politics and social relationships of the people.

In the age of monarchy the king lived surrounded by a miasma of intrigue. At court there was an endless whispering of lies and calumny, and much plotting and planning among the conspiring courtiers to manipulate the king as the instrument of their own purposes.

In the present age intrigue plays a wider part, and affects the whole country. The people are drugged with the hashish of false hopes and urged to deeds of frightfulness by the goading of manufactured panics; their higher feelings are exploited by devious channels of unctuous hypocrisy, their pockets picked under anaesthetics of flattery, their very psychology affected by a conspiracy of money and unscrupulous diplomacy.

In the old order the king was given to understand that he was the freest individual in the world. A greater semblance of external freedom, no doubt, he had than other individuals. But they built for him a gorgeous prison of unreality.

The same thing is happening now with the people of the West. They are flattered into believing that they are free, and they have the sovereign power in their hands. But this power is robbed by hosts of self-seekers, and the horse is captured and stabled because of his gift of freedom over space. The mob-mind is allowed the enjoyment of an apparent liberty, while its true freedom is curtailed on every side. Its thoughts are fashioned according to the plans of organized interests; in its choosing of ideas and forming of opinions it is hindered either by some punitive force or by the constant insinuation of untruths; it is made to dwell in an artificial world of hypnotic phrases. In fact, the people have become the storehouse of a power that attracts round it a swarm of adventurers who are

secretly investing its walls to exploit it for their own devices.

Thus it has become more and more evident to me that the ideal of freedom has grown tenuous in the atmosphere of the West. The mentality is that of a slave-owning community, with a mutilated multitude of men tied to its commercial and political treadmill. It is the mentality of mutual distrust and fear. The appalling scenes of inhumanity and injustice, which are growing familiar to us, are the outcome of a psychology that deals with terror. No cruelty can be uglier in its ferocity than the cruelty of the coward. The people who have sacrificed their souls to the passion of profit-making and the drunkenness of power are constantly pursued by phantoms of panic and suspicion, and therefore they are ruthless even where they are least afraid of mischances. They become morally incapable of allowing freedom to others, and in their eagerness to curry favour with the powerful they not only connive at the injustice done by their own partners in political gambling, but participate in it. A perpetual anxiety for the protection of their gains at any cost strikes at the love of freedom and justice, until at length they are ready to forgo liberty for themselves and for others.

My experience in the West, where I have realized the immense power of money and of organized propaganda,—working everywhere behind screens of camouflage, creating an atmosphere of distrust, timidity, and antipathy,—has impressed me deeply with the truth that real freedom is of the mind and spirit; it can never come to us from outside. He only has freedom who ideally loves freedom himself and is glad to extend it to others. He who cares to have slaves must chain himself to them; he who builds walls to create exclusion for others builds walls across his own freedom; he who distrusts freedom in others loses his moral right to it. Sooner or later he is lured into the meshes of physical and moral servility.

Therefore I would urge my own countrymen to ask themselves if the freedom to which they aspire is one of external conditions. Is it merely a transferable commodity? Have they acquired a true love of freedom? Have they faith in it? Are they ready to make space in their society for the minds of their children to grow up in the ideal of human dignity, unhindered by restrictions that are unjust and irrational?

Have we not made elaborately permanent the walls of our social compartments? We are tenaciously proud of their exclusiveness. We boast that, in this world, no other society but our own has come to finality in the classifying of its living members. Yet in our political agitations we conveniently forget that any unnaturalness in the relationship of governors and governed which humiliates us, becomes an outrage when it is artificially fixed under the threat of

military persecution.

When India gave voice to immortal thoughts, in the time of fullest vigour of vitality, her children had the fearless spirit of the seekers of truth. The great epic of the soul of our people—the Mahabharata—gives us a wonderful vision of an overflowing life, full of the freedom of inquiry and experiment. When the age of the Buddha came, humanity was stirred in our country to its uttermost depth. The freedom of mind which it produced expressed itself in a wealth of creation, spreading everywhere in its richness over the continent of Asia. But with the ebb of life in India the spirit of creation died away. It hardened into an age of inert construction. The organic unity of a varied and elastic society gave way to a conventional order which proved its artificial character by its inexorable law of exclusion.

Life has its inequalities, I admit, but they are natural and are in harmony with our vital functions. The head keeps its place apart from the feet, not through some external arrangement or any conspiracy of coercion. If the body is compelled to turn somersaults for an indefinite period, the head never exchanges its relative function for that of the feet. But have our social divisions the same inevitableness of organic law? If we have the hardihood to say ‘yes’ to that question, then how can we blame an alien people for subjecting us to a political order which they are tempted to believe eternal?

By squeezing human beings in the grip of an inelastic system and forcibly holding them fixed, we have ignored the laws of life and growth. We have forced living souls into a permanent passivity, making them incapable of moulding circumstance to their own intrinsic design, and of mastering their own destiny. Borrowing our ideal of life from a dark period of our degeneracy, we have covered up our sensitiveness of soul under the immovable weight of a remote past. We have set up an elaborate ceremonial of cage-worship, and plucked all the feathers from the wings of the living spirit of our people. And for us,—with our centuries of degradation and insult, with the amorphousness of our national unity, with our helplessness before the attack of disasters from without and our unreasoning self-obstructions from within,—the punishment has been terrible. Our stupefaction has become so absolute that we do not even realize that this persistent misfortune, dogging our steps for ages, cannot be a mere accident of history, removable only by another accident from outside.

Unless we have true faith in freedom, knowing it to be creative, manfully taking all its risks, not only do we lose the right to claim freedom in politics, but we also lack the power to maintain it with all our strength. For that would be like assigning the service of God to a confirmed atheist. And men, who

contemptuously treat their own brothers and sisters as eternal babies, never to be trusted in the most trivial details of their personal life,—coercing them at every step by the cruel threat of persecution into following a blind lane leading to nowhere, driving a number of them into hypocrisy and into moral inertia,—will fail over and over again to rise to the height of their true and severe responsibility. They will be incapable of holding a just freedom in politics, and of fighting in freedom's cause.

The civilization of the West has in it the spirit of the machine which must move; and to that blind movement human lives are offered as fuel, keeping up the steam-power. It represents the active aspect of inertia which has the appearance of freedom, but not its truth, and therefore gives rise to slavery both within its boundaries and outside. The present civilization of India has the constraining power of the mould. It squeezes living man in the grip of rigid regulations, and its repression of individual freedom makes it only too easy for men to be forced into submission of all kinds and degrees. In both of these traditions life is offered up to something which is not life; it is a sacrifice, which has no God for its worship, and is therefore utterly in vain. The West; continually producing mechanical power in excess of its spiritual control, an India has produced a system of mechanical control in excess of its vitality.

2.10. Woman and Home

Creative expressions attain their perfect form through emotions modulated. Woman has that expression natural to her—a cadence of restraint in her behaviour, producing poetry of life. She has been an inspiration to man, guiding, most often unconsciously, his restless energy into an immense variety of creations in literature, art, music and religion. This is why, in India, woman has been described as the symbol of Shakti, the creative power.

But if woman begins to believe that, though biologically her function is different from that of man, psychologically she is identical with him; if the human world in its mentality becomes exclusively male, then before long it will be reduced to utter inanity. For life finds its truth and beauty, not in any exaggeration of sameness, but in harmony.

If woman's nature were identical with man's, if Eve were a mere tautology of Adam, it would only give rise to a monotonous superfluity. But that she was not so was proved by the banishment she secured from a ready-made Paradise. She had the instinctive wisdom to realize that it was her mission to help her mate in creating Paradise of their own on earth, whose ideal she was to supply with her life, whose materials were to be produced and gathered by her comrade.

However, it is evident than an increasing number of women in the West are ready to assert hat their difference from men is unimportant. The reason for the vehement utterance of such a paradox cannot be ignored. It is rebellion against a necessity, which is not equal for both the partners.

Love in all forms has its obligations, and the love that binds women to their children binds them to their homes. But necessity is a tyrant, making us submit to injury and indignity, allowing advantage over us to those who are wholly or comparatively free from its burden. Such has been the case in the social relationship between man and woman. Along with the difference inherent in their respective natures, there have grown up between them inequalities fostered by circumstances. Man is not handicapped by the same biological and psychological responsibilities as woman, and therefore he has the liberty to give her the security of home. This liberty exacts payment when it offers its boon, because to give to withhold the gift is within its power. It is the unequal freedom

in their mutual relationships which has made the weight of life's tragedies so painfully heavy for woman to bear.

Some mitigation of her disadvantage has been effected by her rendering herself and her home a luxury to man. She has accentuated those qualities in herself which insidiously impose their bondage over her mate, some by pandering to his weakness, and some by satisfying his higher nature, till the sex-consciousness in our society has grown abnormal and overpowering. There is no actual objection to this in itself, for it offers a stimulus, acting in the depth of life, which leads to creative exuberance. But a great deal of it is a forced growth of compulsion bearing seeds of degradation. In those ages when men acknowledged spiritual perfection to be their object, women were denounced as the chief obstacle in their way. The constant and conscious exercise of allurements, which gave women their power, attacked the weak spots in man's nature, and doing so added to its weakness. For all relationships tainted with repression of freedom must become sources of degeneracy to the strong who impose such repressions.

Balance of power, however, between man and woman was in a measure established when home wielded a strong enough attraction to make men accept its obligations. But at last the time has come when the material ambition of man has assumed such colossal proportions that home is in danger of losing its centre of gravity for him, and he is receding farther and farther from its orbit.

The arid zone in the social life is spreading fast. The simple comforts of home, made precious by the touch of love, are giving way to luxuries that can only have their full extension in the isolation of self-centred life. Hotels are being erected on the ruins of homes; productions are growing more stupendous than creations; and most men have, for the materials of their happiness and recreation, their dogs and horses, their pipes, guns, and gambling clubs.

Reactions and rebellions, not being normal in their character, go on hurting truth until peace is restored. Therefore, when woman refuses to acknowledge the distinction between her life and that of man, she does not convince us of its truth, but only proves to us that she is suffering. All great suffering indicate some wrong somewhere. In the present case, the wrong is in woman's lack of freedom in her relationship with man, which compels her to turn her disabilities into attractions, and to use untruths as her allies in the battle of life, while she is suffering from the precariousness of her position.

From the beginning of our society, women have naturally accepted the training which imparts to their life and to their home a spirit of harmony. It is their instinct to perform their services in such a manner that these, through beauty, might be raised from the domain of slavery to the realm of grace. Women have

tried to prove that in the building up of social life they are artists and not artisans. But all expressions of beauty lose their truth when compelled to accept the patronage of the gross and the indifferent. Therefore when necessity drives women to fashion their lives to the taste of the insensitive or the sensual, then the whole thing becomes a tragedy of desecration. Society is full of such tragedies. Many of the laws and social regulations guiding the relationships of man and woman are relics of a barbaric age, when the brutal pride of an exclusive possession had its dominance in human relations, such as those of parents and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants, teachers and disciples. The vulgarity of it still persists in the social bond between the sexes because of the economic helplessness of woman. Nothing makes us so stupidly mean as the sense of superiority which the power of the purse confers upon us.

The powers of muscle and of money have opportunities of immediate satisfaction, but the power of the ideal must have infinite patience. The man who sells his goods, or fulfils his contract, is cheated if he fails to realize payment, but he who gives form to some ideal may never get his due and be fully paid. What I have felt in the women of India is the consciousness of this ideal—their simple faith in the sanctity of devotion lighted by love which is held to be divine. True womanliness is regarded in our country as the saintliness of love. It is not merely praised there, but literally worshipped; and she who is gifted with it is called Devi, as one revealing in herself Woman, the Divine. That this has not been a mere metaphor to us is because, in India, our mind is familiar with the idea of God in an eternal feminine aspect. Thus the Eastern woman, who is deeply aware in her heart of the sacredness of her mission, is a constant education to man. It has to be admitted that there are chances of such an influence failing to penetrate the callousness of the coarse-minded; but that is the destiny of all manifestations whose value is not in success or reward in honour.

Woman has to be ready to suffer. She cannot allow her emotions to be dulled or polluted, for these are to create her life's atmosphere, apart from which her world would be dark and dead. This leaves her heart without any protection of insensibility, at the mercy of the hurts and insults of life. Women of India, like women everywhere, have their share of suffering, but it radiates through the ideal, and becomes, like sunlight, a creative force in their world. Our women know by heart the legends of the great women of the epic age—Savitri who by the power of love conquered death, and Sita who had no other reward for her life of sacrifice but the sacred majesty of sorrow. They know that it is their duty to make this life an image of the life eternal, and that love's mission truly performed has a spiritual meaning. It is a religious responsibility for them to live the life which is their own. For their activity is not for money-making, or

organizing power, or intellectually probing the mystery of existence, but for establishing and maintaining human relationships requiring the highest moral qualities. It is the consciousness of the spiritual character of their life's work, which lifts them above the utilitarian standard of the immediate and the passing, surrounds them with the dignity of the eternal, and transmutes their suffering and sorrow into a crown of light.

I must guard myself from the risk of a possible misunderstanding. The permanent significance of home is not in the narrowness of its enclosure, but in an eternal moral idea. It represents the truth of human relationship; it reveals loyalty and love for the personality of man. Let us take a wider view, in a perspective truer than can be found in its present conventional associations. With the discovery and development of agriculture there came a period of settled life in our history. The nomad ever moved on with his tents and cattle; he explored space and exploited its contents. The cultivator of land explored time in its immensity, for he had leisure. Comparatively secured from the uncertainty of his outer resources, he had the opportunity to deal with his moral resources in the realm of human truth. This is why agricultural civilization, like that of India and China, is essentially a civilization of human relationship, of the adjustment of mutual obligations. It is deep-rooted in the inner life of man. Its basis is co-operation and not competition. In other words, its principle is the principle of home, to which all its outer adventures are subordinated.

In the meanwhile, the nomadic life with its predatory instinct of exploitation has developed into a great civilization. It is immensely proud and strong, killing leisure and pursuing opportunities. It minimises the claims of personal relationship and is jealously careful of its unhampered freedom for acquiring wealth and asserting its will upon others. Its burden is the burden of things, which grows heavier and more complex every day, disregarding the human and the spiritual. Its powerful pressure from all sides narrows the limits of home, the personal region of the human world. Thus, in this region of life, women are every day hustled out of their shelter for want of accommodation.

But such a state of things can never have the effect of changing woman into man. On the contrary, it will lead her to find her place in the unlimited range of society, and the Guardian Spirit of the personal in human nature will extend the ministry of woman over all developments of life. Habituated to deal with the world as machine, man is multiplying his materials, banishing away his happiness and sacrificing love to comfort, which is an illusion. At last the present age has sent its cry to women, asking her to come out from her segregation in order to restore the spiritual supremacy of all that is human in the

world of humanity. She has been aroused to remember that womanliness is not chiefly decorative. It is like that vital health, which not only imparts the bloom of beauty to the body, but joy to the mind and perfection to life.

3. Nationalism

3.1. Nationalism in India

Our real problem in India is not political. It is social. This is a condition not only prevailing in India, but among all nations. I do not believe in an exclusive political interest. Politics in the West have dominated Western ideals, and we in India are trying to imitate you. We have to remember that in Europe, where peoples had their racial unity from the beginning, and where natural resources were insufficient for the inhabitants, the civilization has naturally taken the character of political and commercial aggressiveness. For on the one hand they had no internal complications, and on the other they had to deal with neighbours who were strong and rapacious. To have perfect combination among themselves and a watchful attitude of animosity against others was taken as the solution of their problems. In former days they organized and plundered, in the present age the same spirit continues—and they organize and exploit the whole world.

But from the earliest beginnings of history, India has had her own problem constantly before her—it is the race problem. Each nation must be conscious of its mission and we, in India, must realize that we cut a poor figure when we are trying to be political, simply because we have not yet been finally able to accomplish what was set before us by our providence.

This problem of race unity which we have been trying to solve for so many years has likewise to be faced by you here in America. Many people in this country ask me what is happening as to the caste distinctions in India. But when this question is asked me, it is usually done with a superior air. And I feel tempted to put the same question to our American critics with a slight modification, ‘What have you done with the Red Indian and the Negro?’ For you have not got over your attitude of caste toward them. You have used violent methods to keep aloof from other races, but until you have solved the question here in America, you have no right to question India.

In spite of our great difficulty, however, India has done something. She has tried to make an adjustment of races, to acknowledge the real differences between them where these exist, and yet seek for some basis of unity. This basis has come through our saints, like Nanak, Kabir, Chaitanya and others, preaching one God to all races of India.

In finding the solution of our problem we shall have helped to solve the world problem as well. What India has been, the whole world is now. The whole world is becoming one country through scientific facility. And the moment is arriving when you also must find a basis of unity which is not political. If India can offer to the world her solution, it will be a contribution to humanity. There is only one history—the history of man. All national histories are merely chapters in the larger one. And we are content in India to suffer for such a great cause.

Each individual has his self-love. Therefore his brute instinct leads him to fight with others in the sole pursuit of his self-interest. But man has also his higher instincts of sympathy and mutual help. The people who are lacking in this higher moral power and who therefore cannot combine in fellowship with one another must perish or live in a state of degradation. Only those peoples have survived and achieved civilization who have this spirit of cooperation strong in them. So we find that from the beginning of history men had to choose between fighting with one another and combining, between serving their own interest or the common interest of all.

In our early history when the geographical limits of each country and also the facilities of communication were small, this problem was comparatively small in dimension. It was sufficient for men to develop their sense of unity within their area of segregation. In those days they combined among themselves and fought against others. But it was this moral spirit of combination which was the true basis of their greatness, and this fostered their art, science and religion. At that-early time the most important fact that man had to take count of was the fact of the members of one particular race of men coming in close contact with one another. Those who truly grasped this fact through their higher nature made their mark in history.

The most important fact of the present age is that all the different races of men have come close together. And again we are confronted with two alternatives. The problem is whether the different groups of peoples shall go on fighting with one another or find out some true basis of reconciliation and mutual help; whether it will be interminable competition or cooperation.

I have no hesitation in saying that those who are gifted with the moral power of love and vision of spiritual unity, who have the least feeling of enmity against aliens, and the sympathetic insight to place themselves in the position of others will be the fittest to take their permanent place in the age that is lying before us, and those who are constantly developing their instinct of fight and intolerance of aliens will be eliminated. For this is the problem before us, and we have to prove our humanity by solving it through the help of our higher nature. The gigantic

organizations for hurting others and warding off their blows, for making money by dragging others back, will not help us. On the contrary, by their crushing weight, their enormous cost and their deadening effect upon the living humanity they will seriously impede our freedom in the larger life of a higher civilization.

During the evolution of the Nation the moral culture of brotherhood was limited by geographical boundaries, because at that time those boundaries were true. Now they have become imaginary lines of tradition divested of the qualities of real obstacles. So the time has come when man's moral nature must deal with this great fact with all seriousness or perish. The first impulse of this change of circumstance has been the churning up of man's baser passions of greed and cruel hatred. If this persists indefinitely and armaments go on exaggerating themselves to unimaginable absurdities, and machines and store-houses envelop this fair earth with their dirt and smoke and ugliness, then it will end in a conflagration of suicide. Therefore man will have to exert all his power of love and clarity of vision to make another great moral adjustment which will comprehend the whole world of men and not merely the fractional groups of nationality. The call has come to every individual in the present age to prepare himself and his surroundings for this dawn of a new era when man shall discover his soul in the spiritual unity of all human beings.

If it is given at all to the West to struggle out of these tangles of the lower slopes to the spiritual summit of humanity, then I cannot but think that it is the special mission of America to fulfil this hope of God and man. You are the country of expectation, desiring something else than what is. Europe has her subtle habits of mind and her conventions. But America, as yet, has come to no conclusions. I realize how much America is untrammeled by the traditions of the past, and I can appreciate that experimentalism is a sign of America's youth. The foundation of her glory is in the future, rather than in the past; and if one is gifted with the power of clairvoyance, one will be able to love the America that is to be.

America is destined to justify Western civilization to the East. Europe has lost faith in humanity, and has become distrustful and sickly. America, on the other hand, is not pessimistic or blasé. You know, as a people, that there is such a thing as a better and a best; and that knowledge drives you on. There are habits that are not merely passive but aggressively arrogant. They are not like mere walls but are like hedges of stinging nettles. Europe has been cultivating these hedges of habits for long years till they have grown round her dense and strong and high. The pride of her traditions has sent its roots deep into her heart. I do not wish to contend that it is unreasonable. But pride in every form breeds

blindness at the end. Like all artificial stimulants its first effect is a heightening of consciousness and then with the increasing dose it muddles it and brings in exultation that is misleading. Europe has gradually grown hardened in her pride of all her outer and inner habits. She not only cannot forget that she is Western, but she takes every opportunity to hurl this fact against others to humiliate them. This is why she is growing incapable of imparting to the East what is best in herself, and of accepting in a right spirit the wisdom that the East has stored for centuries.

In America national habits and traditions have not had time to spread their clutching roots round your hearts. You have constantly felt and complained of its disadvantages when you compared your nomadic restlessness with the settled traditions of Europe—the Europe which can show her picture of greatness to the best advantage because she can fix it against the background of the Past. But in this present age of transition, when a new era of civilization is sending its trumpet call to all peoples of the world across an unlimited future, this very freedom of detachment will enable you to accept its invitation and to achieve the goal for which Europe began her journey but lost herself midway. For she was tempted out of her path by her pride of power and greed of possession.

Not merely your freedom from habits of mind in the individuals but also the freedom of your history from all unclean entanglements fits you in your career of holding the banner of civilization of the future. All the great nations of Europe have their victims in other parts of the world. This not only deadens their moral sympathy but also their intellectual sympathy, which is so necessary for the understanding of races which are different from one's own. Englishmen can never truly understand India because their minds are not disinterested with regard to that country. If you compare England with Germany or France you will find she has produced the smallest number of scholars who have studied Indian literature and philosophy with any amount of sympathetic insight or thoroughness. This attitude of apathy and contempt is natural where the relationship is abnormal and founded upon national selfishness and pride. But your history has been disinterested and that is why you have been able to help Japan in her lessons in Western civilization and that is why China can look upon you with her best confidence in this her darkest period of danger. In fact you are carrying all the responsibility of a great future because you are untrammeled by the grasping miserliness of a past. Therefore of all countries of the earth America has to be fully conscious of this future, her vision must not be obscured and her faith in humanity must be strong with the strength of youth.

A parallelism exists between America and India—the parallelism of welding

together into one body various races.

In my country, we have been seeking to find out something common to all races, which will prove their real unity. No nation looking for a mere political or commercial basis of unity will find such a solution sufficient. Men of thought and power will discover the spiritual unity, will realize it, and preach it.

India has never had a real sense of nationalism. Even though from childhood I had been taught that the idolatry of Nation is almost better than reverence for God and humanity, I believe I have outgrown that teaching, and it is my conviction that my countrymen will gain truly their India by fighting against that education which teaches them that a country is greater than the ideals of humanity.

The educated Indian at present is trying to absorb some lessons from history contrary to the lessons of our ancestors. The East, in fact, is attempting to take unto itself a history which is not the outcome of its own living. Japan, for example, thinks she is getting powerful through adopting Western methods, but, after she has exhausted her inheritance, only the borrowed weapons of civilization will remain to her. She will not have developed herself from within.

Europe has her past. Europe's strength therefore lies in her history. We, in India, must make up our minds that we cannot borrow other people's history, and that if we stifle our own, we are committing suicide. When you borrow things that do not belong to your life, they only serve to crush your life.

And therefore I believe that it does India no good to compete with Western civilization in its own field. But we shall be more than compensated if, in spite of the insults heaped upon us, we follow our own destiny.

There are lessons which impart information or train our minds for intellectual pursuits. These are simple and can be acquired and used with advantage. But there are others which affect our deeper nature and change our direction of life. Before we accept them and pay their value by selling our own inheritance, we must pause and think deeply. In man's history there come ages of fireworks which dazzle us by their force and movement. They laugh not only at our modest household lamps but also at the eternal stars. But let us not for that provocation be precipitate in our desire to dismiss our lamps. Let us patiently bear our present insult and realize that these fireworks have splendour but not permanence, because of the extreme explosiveness which is the cause of their power, and also of their exhaustion. They are spending a fatal quantity of energy and substance compared to their gain and production.

Anyhow our ideals have been evolved through our own history and even if we wished we could only make poor fireworks of them, because their materials are

different from yours, as is also their moral purpose. If we cherish the desire of paying our all for buying a political nationality it will be as absurd as if Switzerland had staked her existence in her ambition to build up a navy powerful enough to compete with that of England. The mistake that we make is in thinking that man's channel of greatness is only one—the one which has made itself painfully evident for the time being by its depth of insolence.

We must know for certain that there is a future before us and that future is waiting for those who are rich in moral ideals and not in mere things. And it is the privilege of man to work for fruits that are beyond his immediate reach, and to adjust his life not in slavish conformity to the examples of some present success or even to his own prudent past, limited in its aspiration, but to an infinite future bearing in its heart the ideals of our highest expectations.

We must, however, know it is providential that the West has come to India. Yet, someone must show the East to the West, and convince the West that the East has her contribution to make in the history of civilization. India is no beggar of the West. And yet even though the West may think she is, I am not for thrusting off Western civilization and becoming segregated in our independence. Let us have a deep association. If Providence wants England to be the channel of that communication, of that deeper association, I am willing to accept it with all humility. I have great faith in human nature, and I think the West will find its true mission. I speak bitterly of Western civilization when I am conscious that it is betraying its trust and thwarting its own purpose.

The West must not make herself a curse to the world by using her power for her own selfish needs, but by teaching the ignorant and helping the weak, by saving herself from the worst danger that the strong is liable to incur by making the feeble to acquire power enough to resist her intrusion. And also she must not make her materialism to be the final thing, but must realize that she is doing a service in freeing the spiritual being from the tyranny of matter.

I am not against one nation in particular, but against the general idea of all nations. What is the Nation?

It is the aspect of a whole people as an organized power. This organization incessantly keeps up the insistence of the population on becoming strong and efficient. But this strenuous effort after strength and efficiency drains man's energy from his higher nature where he is self-sacrificing and creative.

For thereby man's power of sacrifice is diverted from his ultimate object, which is moral, to the maintenance of this organization, which is mechanical. Yet in this he feels all the satisfaction of moral exaltation and therefore becomes supremely dangerous to humanity. He feels relieved of the urging of his

conscience when he can transfer his responsibility to this machine which is the creation of his intellect and not of his complete moral personality. By this device the people which loves freedom perpetuates slavery in a large portion of the world with the comfortable feeling of pride of having done its duty; men who are naturally just can be cruelly unjust both in their act and their thought, accompanied by a feeling that they are helping the world in receiving its deserts; men who are honest can blindly go on robbing others of their human rights for self-aggrandizement, all the while abusing the deprived for not deserving better treatment. We have seen in our everyday life even small organizations of business and profession produce callousness of feeling in men who are not naturally bad, and we can well imagine what a moral havoc it is causing in a world where whole peoples are furiously organizing themselves for gaining wealth and power.

Nationalism is a great menace. It is the particular thing which for years has been at the bottom of India's troubles. And inasmuch as we have been ruled and dominated by a nation that is strictly political in its attitude, we have tried to develop within ourselves, despite our inheritance from the past, a belief in our eventual political destiny.

There are different parties in India, with different ideals. Some are struggling for political independence. Others think that the time has not arrived for that, and yet believe that India should have the rights that the English colonies have. They wish to gain autonomy as far as possible.

In the beginning of our history of political agitation in India there was not that conflict between parties which there is today. In that time there was a party known as the Indian congress; it had no real programme. They had a few grievances for redress by the authorities. They wanted larger representation in the Council House, and more freedom in the Municipal government. They wanted scraps of things, but they had no constructive ideal. Therefore I was lacking in enthusiasm for their methods. It was my conviction that what India most needed was constructive work coming from within herself. In this work we must take all risks and go on doing our duties which by right are ours, though in the teeth of persecution; winning moral victory at every step, by our failure, and suffering. We must show those who are over us that we have the strength of moral power in ourselves, the power to suffer for truth. Where we have nothing to show, we only have to beg. It would be mischievous if the gifts we wish for were granted to us right now, and I have told my countrymen, time and time again, to combine for the work of creating opportunities to give vent to our spirit of self-sacrifice, and not for the purpose of begging.

The party, however, lost power because the people soon came to realize how futile was the half policy adopted by them. The party split, and there arrived the Extremists, who advocated independence of action, and discarded the begging method,—the easiest method of relieving one's mind from his responsibility towards his country. Their ideals were based on Western history. They had no sympathy with the special problems of India. They did not recognize the patent fact that there were causes in our social organization which made the Indian incapable of coping with the alien. What would we do if, for any reason, England was driven away? We should simply be victims for other nations. The same social weaknesses would prevail. The thing we, in India, have to think of is this—to remove those social customs and ideals which have generated a want of self-respect and a complete dependence on those above us,—a state of affairs which has been brought about entirely by the domination in India of the caste system, and the blind and lazy habit of relying upon the authority of traditions that are incongruous anachronisms in the present age.

Once again I draw your attention to the difficulties India has had to encounter and her struggle to overcome them. Her problem was the problem of the world in miniature. India is too vast in its area and too diverse in its races. It is many countries packed in one geographical receptacle. It is just the opposite of what Europe truly is, namely one country made into many. Thus Europe in its culture and growth has had the advantage of the strength of the many, as well as the strength of the one. India, on the contrary, being naturally many, yet adventitiously one has all along suffered from the looseness of its diversity and the feebleness of its unity. A true unity is like a round globe, it rolls on, carrying its burden easily; but diversity is a many-cornered thing which has to be dragged and pushed with all force. Be it said to the credit of India that this diversity was not her own creation; she has had to accept it as a fact from the beginning of her history. In America and Australia, Europe has simplified her problem by almost exterminating the original population. Even in the present age this spirit of extermination is making itself manifest, by inhospitably shutting out aliens, through those who themselves were aliens in the lands they now occupy. But India tolerated difference of races from the first, and that spirit of toleration has acted all through her history.

Her caste system is the outcome of this spirit of toleration. For India has all along been trying experiments in evolving a social unity within which all the different peoples could be held together, yet fully enjoying the freedom of maintaining their own differences. The tie has been as loose as possible, yet as close as the circumstances permitted. This has produced something like a United States of a social federation, whose common name is Hinduism.

India had felt that diversity of races there must be and should be whatever may be its drawback, and you can never coerce nature into your narrow limits of convenience without paying one day very dearly for it. In this India was right; but what she failed to realize was that in human beings differences are not like the physical barriers of mountains, fixed forever—they are fluid with life's flow, they are changing their courses and their shapes and volume.

Therefore in her caste regulations India recognized differences, but not the mutability which is the law of life. In trying to avoid collisions she set up boundaries of immovable walls, thus giving to her numerous races the negative benefit of peace and order but not the positive opportunity of expansion and movement. She accepted nature where it produces diversity, but ignored it where it uses that diversity for its world-game of infinite permutations and combinations. She treated life in all truth where it is manifold, but insulted it where it is ever moving. Therefore Life departed from her social system and in its place she is worshipping with all ceremony the magnificent cage of countless compartments that she has manufactured.

The same thing happened where she tried to ward off the collisions of trade interests. She associated different trades and professions with different castes. It had the effect of allaying for good the interminable jealousy and hatred of competition—the competition which breeds cruelty and makes the atmosphere thick with lies and deception. In this also India laid all her emphasis upon the law of heredity, ignoring the law of mutation, and thus gradually reduced arts into crafts and genius into skill.

However, what Western observers fail to discern is that in her caste system India in all seriousness accepted her responsibility to solve the race problem in such a manner as to avoid all friction, and yet to afford each race freedom within its boundaries. Let us admit in this India has not achieved a full measure of success. But this you must also concede, that the West, being more favourably situated as to homogeneity of races, has never given her attention to this problem, and whenever confronted with it she has tried to make it easy by ignoring it altogether. And this is the source of her anti-Asiatic agitations for depriving the aliens of their right to earn their honest living on these shores. In most of your colonies you only admit them on condition of their accepting the menial position of hewers of wood and drawers of water. Either you shut your doors against the aliens or reduce them into slavery. And this is your solution of the problem of race-conflict. Whatever may be its merits you will have to admit that it does not spring from the higher impulses of civilization, but from the lower passions of greed and hatred. You say this is human nature—and India

also thought she knew human nature when she strongly barricaded her race distinctions by the fixed barriers of social gradations. But we have found out to our cost that human nature is not what it seems, but what it is in truth; which is in its infinite possibilities. And when we in our blindness insult humanity for its ragged appearance it sheds its disguise to disclose to us that we have insulted our God. The degradation which we cast upon others in our pride or self-interest degrades our own humanity—and this is the punishment which is most terrible because we do not detect it till it is too late.

Not only in your relation with aliens but also with the different sections of your own society you have not brought harmony of reconciliation. The spirit of conflict and competition is allowed the full freedom of its reckless career. And because its genesis is the greed of wealth and power it can never come to any other end but a violent death. In India the production of commodities was brought under the law of social adjustments. Its basis was cooperation having for its object the perfect satisfaction of social needs. But in the West it is guided by the impulse of competition whose end is the gain of wealth for individuals. But the individual is like the geometrical line; it is length without breadth. It has not got the depth to be able to hold anything permanently. Therefore its greed or gain can never come to finality. In its lengthening process of growth it can cross other lines and cause entanglements, but will ever go on missing the ideal of completeness in its thinness of isolation.

In all our physical appetites we recognize a limit. We know that to exceed that limit is to exceed the limit of health. But has this lust for wealth and power no bounds beyond which is death's dominion? In these national carnivals of materialism are not the Western peoples spending most of their vital energy in merely producing things and neglecting the creation of ideals? And can a civilization ignore the law of moral health and go on in its endless process of inflation by gorging upon material things? Man in his social ideals naturally tries to regulate his appetites, subordinating them to the higher purpose of his nature. But in the economic world our appetites follow no other restrictions but those of supply and demand which can be artificially fostered, affording individuals opportunities for indulgence in an endless feast of grossness. In India our social instincts imposed restrictions upon our appetites,—maybe it went to the extreme of repression,—but in the West, the spirit of the economic organization having no moral purpose goads the people into the perpetual pursuit of wealth;—but has this no wholesome limit?

The ideals that strive to take form in social institutions have two objects. One is to regulate our passions and appetites for harmonious development of man, and

the other is to help him in cultivating disinterested love for his fellow-creatures. Therefore society is the expression of moral and spiritual aspirations of man which belong to his higher nature.

Our food is creative, it builds our body; but not so wine, which stimulates. Our social ideals create the human world, but when our mind is diverted from them to greed of power then in that state of intoxication we live in a world of abnormality where our strength is not health and our liberty is not freedom. Therefore political freedom does not give us freedom when our mind is not free. An automobile does not create freedom of movement, because it is a mere machine. When I myself am free I can use the automobile for the purpose of my freedom.

We must never forget in the present day that those people who have got their political freedom are not necessarily free, they are merely powerful. The passions which are unbridled in them are creating huge organizations of slavery in the disguise of freedom. Those who have made the gain of money their highest end are unconsciously selling their life and soul to rich persons or to the combinations that represent money. Those who are enamoured of their political power and gloat over their extension of dominion over foreign races gradually surrender their own freedom and humanity to the organizations necessary for holding other peoples in slavery. In the so-called free countries the majority of the people are not free; they are driven by the minority to a goal which is not even known to them. This becomes possible only because people do not acknowledge moral and spiritual freedom as their object. They create huge eddies with their passions and they feel dizzily inebriated with the mere velocity of their whirling movement, taking that to be freedom. But the doom which is waiting to overtake them is as certain as death—for man's truth is moral truth and his emancipation is in the spiritual life.

The general opinion of the majority of the present day nationalists in India is that we have come to a final completeness in our social and spiritual ideals, the task of the constructive work of society having been done several thousand years before we were born, and that now we are free to employ all our activities in the political direction. We never dream of blaming our social inadequacy as the origin of our present helplessness, for we have accepted as the creed of our nationalism that this social system has been perfected for all time to come by our ancestors who had the superhuman vision of all eternity, and supernatural power for making infinite provision for future ages. Therefore for all our miseries and shortcomings we hold responsible the historical surprises that burst upon us from outside. This is the reason why we think that our one task is to build a political

miracle of freedom upon the quicksand of social slavery. In fact we want to dam up the true course of our own historical stream and only borrow power from the sources of other peoples' history.

Those of us in India who have come under the delusion that mere political freedom will make us free have accepted their lessons from the West as the gospel truth and lost their faith in humanity. We must remember whatever weakness we cherish in our society will become the source of danger in politics. The same inertia which leads us to our idolatry of dead forms in social institutions will create in our politics prison houses with immovable walls. The narrowness of sympathy which makes it possible for us to impose upon a considerable portion of humanity the galling yoke of inferiority will assert itself in our politics in creating tyranny of injustice.

When our nationalists talk about ideals, they forget that the basis of nationalism is wanting. The very people who are upholding these ideals are themselves the most conservative in their social practice. Nationalists say, for example, look at Switzerland, where, in spite of race differences, the peoples have solidified into a nation. Yet, remember that in Switzerland the races can mingle, they can intermarry, because they are of the same blood. In India there is no common birthright. And when we talk of Western Nationality we forget that the nations there do not have that physical repulsion, one for the other, that we have between different castes. Have we an instance in the whole world where a people who are not allowed to mingle their blood shed their blood for one another except by coercion or for mercenary purposes? And can we ever hope that these moral barriers against our race amalgamation will not stand in the way of our political unity?

Then again we must give full recognition to this fact that our social restrictions are still tyrannical, so much so as to make men cowards. If a man tells me he has heterodox ideas, but that he cannot follow them because he would be socially ostracized, I excuse him for having to live a life of untruth, in order to live at all. The social habit of mind which impels us to make the life of our fellow-beings a burden to them where they differ from us even in such a thing as their choice of food is sure to persist in our political organization and result in creating engines of coercion to crush every rational difference which, is the sign of life. And tyranny will only add to the inevitable lies and hypocrisy in our political life. Is the mere name of freedom so valuable that we should be willing to sacrifice for its sake our moral freedom?

The intemperance of our habits does not immediately show its effects when we are in the vigour of our youth. But it gradually consumes that vigour, and when

the period of decline sets in then we have to settle accounts and pay off our debts, which leads us to insolvency. In the West you are still able to carry your head high though your humanity is suffering every moment from its dipsomania of organizing power. India also in the heyday of her youth could carry in her vital organs the dead weight of her social organizations stiffened to rigid perfection, but it has been fatal to her, and has produced a gradual paralysis of her living nature. And this is the reason why the educated community of India has become insensible of her social needs. They are taking the very immobility of our social structures as the sign of their perfection,—and because the healthy feeling of pain is dead in the limbs of our social organism they delude themselves into thinking that it needs no ministration. Therefore they think that all their energies need their only scope in the political field. It is like a man whose legs have become shrivelled and useless, trying to delude himself that these limbs have grown still because they have attained their ultimate salvation, and all that is wrong about him is the shortness of his sticks.

So much for the social and the political regeneration of India. Now we come to her industries, and I am very often asked whether there is in India any industrial regeneration since the advent of the British Government. It must be remembered that at the beginning of the British rule in India our industries were suppressed and since then we have not met with any real help or encouragement to enable us to make a stand against the monster commercial organizations of the world. The nations have decreed that we must remain purely an agricultural people, even forgetting the use of arms for all time to come. Thus India in being turned into so many predigested morsels of food ready to be swallowed at any moment by any nation which has even the most rudimentary set of teeth in its head.

India, therefore has very little outlet for her industrial originality. I personally do not believe in the unwieldy organizations of the present day. The very fact that they are ugly shows that they are in discordance with the whole creation. The vast powers of nature do not reveal their truth in hideousness, but in beauty. Beauty is the signature which the Creator stamps upon his works when he is satisfied with them. All our products that insolently ignore the laws of perfection and are unashamed in their display of ungainliness bear the perpetual weight of God's displeasure. So far as your commerce lacks the dignity of grace it is untrue. Beauty and her twin brother Truth require leisure, and self-control for their growth. But the greed of gain has no time or limit to its capaciousness. Its one object is to produce and consume.

It has neither pity for beautiful nature, nor for living human beings. It is ruthlessly ready without a moment's hesitation to crush beauty and life out of

them, moulding them into money. It is this ugly vulgarity of commerce which brought upon it the censure of contempt in our earlier days when men had leisure to have an unclouded vision of perfection in humanity. Men in those times were rightly ashamed of the instinct of mere money-making. But in this scientific age money, by its very abnormal bulk, has won its throne. And when from its eminence of piled-up things it insults the higher instincts of man, banishing beauty and noble sentiments from its surroundings, we submit. For we in our meanness have accepted bribes from its hands and our imagination has grovelled in the dust before its immensity of flesh.

But its unwieldiness itself and its endless complexities are its true signs of failure. The swimmer who is an expert does not exhibit his muscular force by violent movements, but exhibits some power which is invisible and which shows itself in perfect grace and reposefulness. The true distinction of man from animals is in his power and worth which are inner and invisible. But the present-day commercial civilization of man is not only taking too much time and space but killing time and space. Its movements are violent, its noise is discordantly loud. It is carrying its own damnation because it is trampling into distortion the humanity upon which it stands. It is strenuously turning out money at the cost of happiness. Man is reducing himself to his minimum, in order to be able to make amplest room for his organizations. He is deriding his human sentiments into shame because they are apt to stand in the way of his machines.

In our mythology we have the legend that the man who performs penances for attaining immortality has to meet with temptations sent by Indra, the Lord of the immortals. If he is lured by them he is lost. The West has been striving for centuries after its goal of immortality. Indra has sent her the temptation to try her. It is the gorgeous temptation of wealth. She has accepted it and her civilization of humanity has lost its path in the wilderness of machinery.

This commercialism with its barbarity of ugly decorations is a terrible menace to all humanity. Because it is setting up the ideal of power over that of perfection. It is making the cult of self-seeking exult in its naked shamelessness. Our nerves are more delicate than our muscles. Things that are the most precious in us are helpless as babes when we take away from them the careful protection which they claim from us for their very preciousness. Therefore when the callous rudeness of power runs amuck in the broad-way of humanity it scares away by its grossness the ideals which we have cherished with the martyrdom of centuries.

The temptation which is fatal for the strong is still more so for the weak. And I do not welcome it in our Indian life even though it be sent by the lord of the

Immortals. Let our life be simple in its outer aspect and rich in its inner gain. Let our civilization take its firm stand upon its basis of social cooperation and not upon that of economic exploitation and conflict. How to do it in the teeth of the drainage of our life-blood by the economic dragons is the task set before the thinkers of all oriental nations who have faith in the human soul. It is a sign of laziness and impotency to accept conditions imposed upon us by others who have other ideals than ours. We should actively try to adapt the world powers to guide our history to its own perfect end.

From the above you will know that I am not an economist. I am willing to acknowledge that there is a law of demand and supply and an infatuation of man for more things than are good for him. And yet I will persist in believing that there is such a thing as the harmony of completeness in humanity, where poverty does not take away his riches, where defeat may lead him to victory, death to immortality, and in the compensation of Eternal Justice those who are the last may yet have their insult transmuted into a golden triumph.

3.2. Nationalism in Japan

I

The worst form of bondage is the bondage of dejection which keeps men hopelessly chained in loss of faith in themselves. We have been repeatedly told, with some justification, that Asia lives in the past,—it is like a rich mausoleum which displays all its magnificence in trying to immortalize the dead. It was said of Asia that it could never move in the path of progress, its face was so inevitably turned backwards. We accepted this accusation, and came to believe it. In India, I know, a large section of our educated community, grown tired of feeling the humiliation of this charge against us, is trying all its resources of self-deception to turn it into a matter of boasting. But boasting is only a masked shame, it does not truly believe in itself.

When things stood still like this, and we in Asia hypnotized ourselves into the belief that it could never by any possibility be otherwise, Japan rose from her dreams, and in giant strides left centuries of inaction behind, overtaking the present time in its foremost achievement. This has broken the spell under which we lay in torpor for ages, taking it to be the normal condition of certain races living in certain geographical limits. We forgot that in Asia great kingdoms were founded, philosophy, science, arts and literatures flourished, and all the great religions of the world had their cradles. Therefore it cannot be said, that there is anything inherent in the soil and climate of Asia that produces mental inactivity and atrophies the faculties which impel men to go forward. For centuries we did hold torches of civilization in the East when the West slumbered in darkness, and that could never be the sign of sluggish mind or narrowness of vision.

Then fell the darkness of night upon all the lands of the East. The current of time seemed to stop at once, and Asia ceased to take any new food, feeding upon its own past, which is really feeding upon itself. The stillness seemed like death, and the great voice was silenced which sent forth messages of eternal truth that have saved man's life from pollution for generations, like the ocean of air that keeps the earth sweet, ever cleansing its impurities.

But life has its sleep, its periods of inactivity, when it loses its movements, takes no new food, living upon its past storage. Then it grows helpless, its muscles relaxed, and it easily lends itself to be jeered at for its stupor. In the rhythm of life, pauses there must be for the renewal of life. Life in its activity is ever spending itself, burning all its fuel. This extravagance cannot go on indefinitely, but is always followed by a passive stage, when all expenditure is stopped and all adventures abandoned in favour of rest and slow recuperation.

The tendency of mind is economical, it loves to form habits and move in grooves which save it the trouble of thinking anew at each of its steps. Ideals once formed make the mind lazy. It becomes afraid to risk its acquisitions in fresh endeavours. It tries completely to enjoy security by shutting up its belongings behind fortifications of habits. But this is really shutting oneself up from the fullest enjoyment of one's own possessions. It is miserliness. The living ideals must not lose their touch with the growing and changing life. Their real freedom is not within the boundaries of security, but in the highroad of adventures full of the risk of new experiences.

One morning the whole world looked up in surprise, when Japan broke through her walls of old habits in a night and came out triumphant. It was done in such an incredibly short time, that it seemed like a change of dress and not like the building up of a new structure. She showed the confident strength of maturity and the freshness and infinite potentiality of new life at the same moment. The fear was entertained that it was a mere freak of history, a child's game of Time, the blowing up of a soap bubble, perfect in its rondeur and colouring, hollow in its heart and without substance. But Japan has proved conclusively that this sudden revealment of her power is not a short-lived wonder, a chance product of time and tide, thrown up from the depth of obscurity to be swept away the next moment into the sea of oblivion.

The truth is that Japan is old and new at the same time. She has her legacy of ancient culture from the East,—the culture that enjoins man to look for his true wealth and power in his inner soul, the culture that gives self-possession in the face of loss and danger, self-sacrifice without counting the cost or hoping for gain, defiance of death, acceptance of countless social obligations that we owe to men as social beings. In a word modern Japan has come out of the immemorial East like a lotus blossoming in easy grace, all the while keeping its firm hold upon the profound depth from which it has sprung.

And Japan, the child of the Ancient East, has also fearlessly claimed all the gifts of the modern age for herself. She has shown her bold spirit in breaking through the confinements of habits, useless accumulations of the lazy mind,

seeking safety in its thrift and its locks and keys. Thus she has come in contact with the living time and has accepted with eagerness and aptitude the responsibilities of modern civilization.

This it is which has given heart to the rest of Asia. We have seen that the life and the strength are there in us, only the dead crust has to be removed. We have seen that taking shelter in the dead is death itself, and only taking all the risk of life to the fullest extent is living.

I, for myself, cannot believe that Japan has become what she is by imitating the West. We cannot imitate life, we cannot simulate strength for long, nay, what is more, a mere imitation is a source of weakness. For it hampers our true nature, it is always in our way. It is like dressing our skeleton with another man's skin, giving rise to eternal feuds between the skin and the bones at every movement.

The real truth is that science is not man's nature, it is mere knowledge and training. By knowing the laws of the material universe you do not change your deeper humanity. You can borrow knowledge from others, but you cannot borrow temperament.

But at the imitative stage of our schooling we cannot distinguish between the essential and the non-essential, between what is transferable and what is not. It is something like the faith of the primitive mind in the magical properties of the accidents of outward forms which accompany some real truth. We are afraid of leaving out something valuable and efficacious by not swallowing the husk with the kernel. But while our greed delights in wholesale appropriation, it is the function of our vital nature to assimilate, which is the only true appropriation for a living organism. Where there is life it is sure to assert itself by its choice of acceptance and refusal according to its constitutional necessity. The living organism does not allow itself to grow into its food, it changes its food into its own body. And only thus can it grow strong and not by mere accumulation, or by giving up its personal identity.

Japan has imported her food from the West, but not her vital nature. Japan cannot altogether lose and merge herself in the scientific paraphernalia she has acquired from the West and be turned into a mere borrowed machine. She has her own soul which must assert itself over all her requirements. That she is capable of doing so, and that the process of assimilation is going on, have been amply proved by the signs of vigorous health that she exhibits. And I earnestly hope that Japan may never lose her faith in her own soul in the mere pride of her foreign acquisition. For that pride itself is a humiliation, ultimately leading to poverty and weakness. It is the pride of the fop who sets more store on his new head-dress than on his head itself.

The whole world waits to see what this great Eastern nation is going to do with the opportunities and responsibilities she has accepted from the hands of the modern time. If it be a mere reproduction of the West, then the great expectation she has raised will remain unfulfilled. For there are grave questions that the Western civilization has presented before the world but not completely answered. The conflict between the individual and the state, labour and capital, the man and the woman; the conflict between the greed of material gain and the spiritual life of man, the organized selfishness of nations and the higher ideals of humanity; the conflict between all the ugly complexities inseparable from giant organizations of commerce and state and the natural instincts of man crying for simplicity and beauty and fulness of leisure,—all these have to be brought to a harmony in a manner not yet dreamt of.

We have seen this great stream of civilization choking itself from debris carried by its innumerable channels. We have seen that with all its vaunted love of humanity it has proved itself the greatest menace to Man, far worse than the sudden outbursts of nomadic barbarism from which men suffered in the early ages of history. We have seen that, in spite of its boasted love of freedom, it has produced worse forms of slavery than ever were current in earlier societies,—slavery whose chains are unbreakable, either because they are unseen, or because they assume the names and appearance of freedom. We have seen, under the spell of its gigantic sordidness, man losing faith in all the heroic ideals of life which have made him great.

Therefore you cannot with a light heart accept the modern civilization with all its tendencies, methods and structures, and dream that they are inevitable. You must apply your Eastern mind, your spiritual strength, your love of simplicity, your recognition of social obligation, in order to cut out a new path for this great unwieldy car of progress, shrieking out its loud discords as it runs. You must minimize the immense sacrifice of man's life and freedom that it claims in its every movement. For generations you have felt and thought and worked, have enjoyed and worshipped in your own special manner; and this cannot be cast off like old clothes. It is in your blood, in the marrow of your bones, in the texture of your flesh, in the tissue of your brains; and it must modify everything you lay your hands upon, without your knowing, even against your wishes. Once you did solve the problems of man to your own satisfaction, you had your philosophy of life and evolved your own art of living. All this you must apply to the present situation and out of it will arise a new creation and not a mere repetition, a creation which the soul of your people will own for itself and proudly offer to the world as its tribute to the welfare of man. Of all countries in Asia, here in Japan you have the freedom to use the materials you have gathered from the

West according to your genius and your need. Therefore your responsibility is all the greater, for in your voice Asia shall answer the questions that Europe has submitted to the conference of Man. In your land the experiments will be carried on by which the East will change the aspects of the modern civilization, infusing life in it where it is a machine, substituting human heart for cold expediency, not caring so much for power and success as for harmonious and living growth, for truth and beauty.

I cannot but bring to your mind those days when the whole of Eastern Asia from Burma to Japan was united with India in the closest tie of friendship, the only natural tie which can exist between nations. There was a living communication of hearts, a nervous system evolved through which messages ran between us about the deepest needs of humanity. We did not stand in fear of each other, we had not to arm ourselves to keep each other in check; our relation was not that of self-interest, of exploration and spoliation of each other's pockets; ideas and ideals were exchanged, gifts of the highest love were offered and taken; no difference of languages and customs hindered us in approaching each other heart to heart; no pride of race or insolent consciousness of superiority, physical or mental, marred our relation; our arts and literatures put forth new leaves and flowers under the influence of this sunlight of united hearts; and races belonging to different lands and languages and histories acknowledged the highest unity of man and the deepest bond of love. May we not also remember that in those days of peace and goodwill, of men uniting for those supreme ends of life, your nature laid by for itself the balm of immortality which has helped your people to be born again in a new age, to be able to survive its old outworn structures and take on a new young body, to come out unscathed from the shock of the most wonderful revolution that the world has ever seen?

The political civilization which has sprung up from the soil of Europe and is overrunning the whole world, like some prolific weed, is based upon exclusiveness. It is always watchful to keep at bay the aliens or to exterminate them. It is carnivorous and cannibalistic in its tendencies, it feeds upon the resources of other peoples and tries to swallow their whole future. It is always afraid of other races achieving eminence, naming it as a peril, and tries to thwart all symptoms of greatness outside its own boundaries, forcing down races of men who are weaker, to be eternally fixed in their weakness. Before this political civilization came to its power and opened its hungry jaws wide enough to gulp down great continents of the earth, we had wars, pillages, changes of monarchy and consequent miseries, but never such a sight of fearful and hopeless voracity, such wholesale feeding of nation upon nation, such huge machines for turning

great portions of the earth into mincemeat, never such terrible jealousies with all their ugly teeth and claws ready for tearing open each other's vitals. This political civilization is scientific, not human. It is powerful because it concentrates all its forces upon one purpose, like a millionaire acquiring money at the cost of his soul. It betrays its trust, it weaves its meshes of lies without shame, it enshrines gigantic idols of greed in its temples, taking great pride in the costly ceremonials of its worship, calling this patriotism. And it can be safely prophesied that this cannot go on, for there is a moral law in this world which has its application both to individuals and to organized bodies of men. You cannot go on violating these laws in the name of your nation, yet enjoy their advantage as individuals. This public sapping of the ethical ideas slowly reacts upon each member of society, gradually breeding weakness, where it is not seen, and causing that cynical distrust of all things sacred in human nature, which is the true symptom of senility. You must keep in mind that this political civilization, this creed of national patriotism, has not been given a long trial. The lamp of ancient Greece is extinct in the land where it was first lighted, the power of Rome lies dead and buried under the ruins of its vast empire. But the civilization, whose basis is society and the spiritual ideal of man, is still a living thing in China and in India. Though it may look feeble and small, judged by the standard of the mechanical power of modern days, yet like small seeds it still contains life and will sprout and grow, and spread its beneficent branches, producing flowers and fruits when its time comes, and showers of grace descend upon it from heaven. But ruins of sky-scrapers of power and broken machinery of greed, even God's rain is powerless to rise up again; for they were not of life, but went against life as a whole,—they are relics of the rebellion that shattered itself to pieces against the eternal.

But the charge is brought against us that the ideals we cherish in the East are static, that they have not the impetus in them to move, to open out new vistas of knowledge and power, that the systems of philosophy which are the mainstays of the time-worn civilizations of the East despise all outward proofs, remaining stolidly satisfied in their subjective certainty. This proves that when our knowledge is vague, we are apt to accuse of vagueness our object of knowledge itself. To a Western observer our civilization appears as all metaphysics, as to a deaf man piano playing appears to be mere movements of fingers and no music. He cannot think that we have found some deep basis of reality upon which we have built our institutions.

Unfortunately all proofs of reality are in realization. The reality of the scene before you depends only upon the fact that you can see, and it is difficult for us to prove to an unbeliever that our civilization is not a nebulous system of

abstract speculations, that it has achieved something which is a positive truth,—a truth that can give man's heart its shelter and sustenance. It has evolved an inner sense,—a sense of vision, the vision of the infinite reality in all finite things.

But he says, 'You do not make any progress, there is no movement in you.' I ask him, 'How do you know it? You have to judge progress according to its aim. A railway train makes its progress towards the terminus station,—it is movement. But a full-grown tree has no definite movement of that kind, its progress is the inward progress of life. It lives, with its aspiration towards light tingling in its leaves and creeping in its silent sap.' We also have lived for centuries, we still live, and we have our aspiration for a reality that has no end to its realization,—a reality that goes beyond death, giving it a meaning, that rises above all evils of life, bringing its peace and purity, its cheerful renunciation of self. The product of this inner life is a living product. It will be needed when the youth returns home weary and dust-laden, when the soldier is wounded, when the wealth is squandered away and pride is humbled, when man's heart cries for truth in the immensity of facts and harmony in the contradiction of tendencies. Its value is not in its multiplication of materials, but in its spiritual fulfilment.

There are things that cannot wait. You have to rush and run and march, if you must fight or take the best place in the market. You strain your nerves and are on the alert, when you chase opportunities that are always on their wings. But there are ideals which do not play hide and seek with our life; they slowly grow from seed to flower, from flower to fruit; they require infinite space and heaven's light to mature and the fruits that they produce can survive years of insult and neglect. The East with her ideals, in whose bosom are stored the ages of sunlight and silence of stars, can patiently wait till the West, hurrying after the expedient, loses breath and stops. Europe, while busily speeding to her engagements, disdainfully casts her glance from her carriage window to the reaper reaping his harvest in the field, and in her intoxication of speed cannot but think him as slow and ever receding backwards. But the speed comes to its end, the engagement loses its meaning and the hungry heart clamours for food, till at last she comes to the lowly reaper reaping his harvest in the sun. For if the office cannot wait, or the buying and selling, or the craving for excitement, love waits and beauty and the wisdom of suffering and the fruits of patient devotion and reverent meekness of simple faith. And thus shall wait the East till her time comes.

I must not hesitate to acknowledge where Europe is great, for great she is without doubt. We cannot help loving her with all our heart, and paying her the best homage of our admiration,—the Europe who, in her literature and art, is pouring an inexhaustible cascade of beauty and truth fertilizing all countries and

all time; the Europe who, with a mind which is titanic in its untiring power, is sweeping the height and the depth of the universe, winning her homage of knowledge from the infinitely great and the infinitely small, applying all the resources of her great intellect and heart in healing the sick and alleviating those miseries of man which up till now we were contented to accept in a spirit of hopeless resignation; the Europe who is making the earth yield more fruit than seemed possible, coaxing and compelling the great forces of nature into man's service. Such true greatness must have its motive power in spiritual strength. For only the spirit of man can defy all limitations, have faith in its ultimate success, throw its search-light beyond the immediate and the apparent, gladly suffer martyrdom for ends which cannot be achieved in its lifetime and accept failure without acknowledging defeat. In the heart of Europe runs the purest stream of human love, of love of justice, of spirit of self-sacrifice for higher ideals. The Christian culture of centuries has sunk deep in her life's core. In Europe we have seen noble minds who have ever stood up for the rights of man irrespective of colour and creed; who have braved calumny and insult from their own people in fighting for humanity's cause and raising their voices against the mad orgies of militarism, against the rage for brutal retaliation or rapacity that sometimes takes possession of a whole people; who are always ready to make reparation for wrongs done in the past by their own nations and vainly attempt to stem the tide of cowardly injustice that flows unchecked because the resistance is weak and innocuous on the part of the injured. There are these knight-errant's of modern Europe who have not lost their faith in the disinterested love of freedom, in the ideals which own no geographical boundaries or national self-seeking. These are there to prove that the fountainhead of the water of everlasting life has not run dry in Europe, and from thence she will have her rebirth time after time. Only there, where Europe is too consciously busy in building up her power, defying her deeper nature and mocking it, she is heaping up her iniquities to the sky crying for God's vengeance and spreading the infection of ugliness, physical and moral, over the face of the earth with her heartless commerce heedlessly outraging man's sense of the beautiful and the good. Europe is supremely good in her beneficence where her face is turned to all humanity; and Europe is supremely evil in her malefic aspect where her face is turned only upon her own interest, using all her power of greatness for ends which are against the infinite and the eternal in Man.

Eastern Asia has been pursuing its own path, evolving its own civilization, which was not political but social, not predatory and mechanically efficient, but spiritual and based upon all the varied and deeper relations of humanity. The solutions of the life problems of peoples were thought out in seclusion and

carried out behind the security of aloofness, where all the dynastic changes and foreign invasions hardly touched them. But now we are over-taken by the outside world, our seclusion is lost forever. Yet this we must not regret, as a plant should never regret when the obscurity of its seed-time is broken. Now the time has come when we must make the world problem our own problem; we must bring the spirit of our civilization into harmony with the history of all nations of the earth; we must not, in foolish pride, still keep ourselves fast within the shell of the seed and the crust of the earth which protected and nourished our ideals; for these, the shell and the crust, were meant to be broken, so that life may spring up in all its vigour and beauty, bringing its offerings to the world in open light.

In this task of breaking the barrier and facing the world Japan has come out the first in the East. She has infused hope in the heart of all Asia. This hope provides the hidden fire which is needed for all works of creation. Asia now feels that she must prove her life by producing living work; she must not lie passively dormant, or feebly imitate the West, in the infatuation of fear or flattery. For this we offer our thanks to this land of the rising sun and solemnly ask her to remember that she has the mission of the East to fulfil. She must infuse the sap of a fuller humanity into the heart of the modern civilization. She must never allow it to get choked with the noxious undergrowth, but lead it up towards light and freedom, towards the pure air and broad space, where it can receive, in the dawn of its day and the darkness of its night, heaven's inspiration. Let the greatness of her ideals become visible to all men like her snow-crowned Fuji rising from the heart of the country into the region of the infinite, supremely distinct from its surroundings, beautiful like a maiden in its magnificent sweep of curve, yet firm and strong and serenely majestic.

II

I have travelled in many countries and have met with men of all classes, but never in my travels did I feel the presence of the human so distinctly as in this land. In other great countries, signs of man's power loomed large, and I saw vast organizations which showed efficiency in all their features. There, display and extravagance, in dress, in furniture, in costly entertainments, are startling. They seem to push you back into a corner, like a poor intruder at a feast; they are apt to make you envious, or take your breath away with amazement. There, you do not feel man as supreme; you are hurled against a stupendousness of things that alienates. But in Japan, it is not the display of power, or wealth that is the

predominating element. You see everywhere emblems of love and admiration, and not mostly of ambition and greed. You see a people, whose heart has come out and scattered itself in profusion in its commonest utensils of everyday life, in its social institutions, in its manners, which are carefully perfect, and in its dealings with things which are not only deft, but graceful in every movement.

What has impressed me most in this country is the conviction that you have realized nature's secrets, not by methods of analytical knowledge, but by sympathy. You have known her language of lines, and music of colours, the symmetry in her irregularities, and the cadence in her freedom of movements; you have seen how she leads her immense crowds of things yet avoids all frictions; how the very conflicts in her creations break out in dance and music; how her exuberance has the aspect of the fulness of self-abandonment, and not a mere dissipation of display. You have discovered that nature reserves her power in forms of beauty; and it is this beauty which, like a mother, nourishes all the giant forces at her breast, keeping them in active vigour, yet in repose. You have known that energies of nature save themselves from wearing out by the rhythm of a perfect grace, and that she with the tenderness of her curved lines takes away fatigue from the world's muscles. I have felt that you have been able to assimilate these secrets into your life, and the truth which lies in the beauty of all things has passed into your souls. A mere knowledge of things can be had in a short enough time, but their spirit can only be acquired by centuries of training and self-control. Dominating nature from outside is a much simpler thing than making her your own in love's delight, which is a work of true genius. Your race has shown that genius, not by acquirements, but by creations; not by display of things, but by manifestation of its own inner being. This creative power there is in all nations, and it is ever active in getting hold of men's natures and giving them a form according to its ideals. But here, in Japan, it seems to have achieved its success, and deeply sunk into the minds of all men, and permeated their muscles and nerves. Your instincts have become true, your senses keen, and your hands have acquired natural skill. The genius of Europe has given her people the power of organization which has specially made itself manifest in politics and commerce and in coordinating scientific knowledge. The genius of Japan has given you the vision of beauty in nature and the power of realizing it in your life.

All particular civilization is the interpretation of particular human experience. Europe seems to have felt emphatically the conflict of things in the universe, which can only be brought under control by conquest. Therefore she is ever ready for fight, and the best portion of her attention is occupied in organizing forces. But Japan has felt, in her world, the touch of some presence, which has

evoked in her soul a feeling of reverent adoration. She does not boast of her mastery of nature, but to her she brings, with infinite care and joy, her offerings of love. Her relationship with the world is the deeper relationship of heart. This spiritual bond of love she has established with the hills of her country, which the sea and the streams, with the forests in all their flowery moods and varied physiognomy of branches; she has taken into her heart all the rustling whispers and sighing of the woodlands and sobbing of the waves; the sun and the moon she has studied in all the modulations of their lights and shades, and she is glad to close her shops to greet the seasons in her orchards and gardens and corn-fields. This opening of the heart to the soul of the world is not confined to a section of your privileged classes, it is not the forced product of exotic culture, but it belongs to all your men and women of all conditions. This experience of your soul, in meeting a personality in the heart of the world, has been embodied in your civilization. It is a civilization of human relationship. Your duty towards your state has naturally assumed the character of filial duty, your nation becoming one family with your Emperor as its head. Your national unity has not been evolved from the comradeship of arms for defensive and offensive purpose, or from partnership in raiding adventures, dividing among each member the danger and spoils of robbery. It is not an outcome of the necessity of organization for some ulterior purpose, but it is an extension of the family and the obligations of the heart in a wide field of space and time. The ideal of '*maitri*' is at the bottom of your culture,—'*maitri*' with men and '*maitri*' with Nature. And the true expression of this love is in the language of beauty, which is so abundantly universal in this land. This is the reason why a stranger, like myself, instead of feeling envy or humiliation before these manifestations of beauty, these creations of love, feels a readiness to participate in the joy and glory of such revealment of the human heart.

And this has made me all the more apprehensive of the change, which threatens Japanese civilization, as something like a menace to one's own person. For the huge heterogeneity of the modern age, whose only common bond is usefulness, is nowhere so pitifully exposed against the dignity and hidden power of reticent beauty, as in Japan.

But the danger lies in this, that organized ugliness storms the mind and carries the day by its mass, by its aggressive persistence, by its power of mockery directed against the deeper sentiments of heart. Its harsh obtrusiveness makes it forcibly visible to us, overcoming our senses,—and we bring to its altar sacrifices, as does a savage to the fetish which appears powerful because of its hideousness. Therefore its rivalry to things that are modest and profound and have the subtle delicacy of life is to be dreaded.

I am quite sure that there are men in your country who are not in sympathy with your inherited ideals; whose object is to gain, and not to grow. They are loud in their boast that they have modernized Japan. While I agree with them so far as to say, that the spirit of the race should harmonize with the spirit of the time, I must warn them that modernizing is a mere affectation of modernism, just as affectation of poesy is poetizing. It is nothing but mimicry, only affectation is louder than the original, and it is too literal. One must bear in mind, that those who have the true modern spirit need not modernize, just as those who are truly brave are not braggarts. Modernism is not in the dress of the Europeans; or in the hideous structures, where their children are interned when they take their lessons; or in the square houses with flat straight wall-surfaces, pierced with parallel lines of windows, where these people are caged in their lifetime; certainly modernism is not in their ladies' bonnets, carrying on them loads of incongruities. These are not modern, but merely European. True modernism is freedom of mind, not slavery of taste. It is independence of thought and action, not tutelage under European school-masters. It is science, but not its wrong application in life,—a mere imitation of our science teachers who reduce it into a superstition absurdly invoking its aid for all impossible purposes.

Life based upon mere science is attractive to some men, because it has all the characteristics of sport; it feigns seriousness, but is not profound. When you go a-hunting, the less pity you have the better; for your one object is to chase the game and kill it, to feel that you are the greater animal, that your method of destruction is thorough and scientific. And the life of science is that superficial life. It pursues success with skill and thoroughness, and takes no account of the higher nature of man. But those whose minds are crude enough to plan their lives upon the supposition, that man is merely a hunter and his paradise the paradise of sportsmen, will be rudely awakened in the midst of their trophies of skeletons and skulls.

I do not for a moment suggest, that Japan should be unmindful of acquiring modern weapons of self-protection. But this should never be allowed to go beyond her instinct of self-preservation. She must know that the real power is not in the weapons themselves, but in the man who wields those weapons; and when he, in his eagerness for power, multiplies his weapons at the cost of his own soul, then it is he who is in even greater danger than his enemies.

Things that are living are so easily hurt; therefore they require protection. In nature, life protects itself within its coverings, which are built with life's own material. Therefore they are in harmony with life's growth, or else when the time comes they easily give way and are forgotten. The living man has his true

protection in his spiritual ideals, which have their vital connection with his life and grow with his growth. But, unfortunately, all his armour is not living,—some of it is made of steel, inert and mechanical. Therefore, while making use of it, man has to be careful to protect himself from its tyranny. If he is weak enough to grow smaller to fit himself to his covering, then it becomes a process of gradual suicide by shrinkage of the soul. And Japan must have a firm faith in the moral law of existence to be able to assert to herself that the Western nations are following that path of suicide, where they are smothering their humanity under the immense weight of organizations in order to keep themselves in power and hold others in subjection.

What is dangerous for Japan is, not the imitation of the outer features of the West, but the acceptance of the motive force of the Western nationalism as her own. Her social ideals are already showing signs of defeat at the hands of politics. I can see her motto, taken from science, ‘Survival of the Fittest,’ writ large at the entrance of her present-day history—the motto whose meaning is, ‘Help yourself, and never heed what it costs to others’; the motto of the blind man who only believes in what he can touch, because he cannot see. But those who can see, know that men are so closely knit, that when you strike others the blow comes back to yourself. The moral law, which is the greatest discovery of man, is the discovery of this wonderful truth, that man becomes all the truer, the more he realizes himself in others. This truth has not only a subjective value, but is manifested in every department of our life. And nations, who sedulously cultivate moral blindness as the cult of patriotism, will end their existence in a sudden and violent death. In past ages we had foreign invasions, but they never touched the soul of the people deeply. They were merely the outcome of individual ambitions. The people themselves, being free from the responsibilities of the baser and more heinous side of those adventures, had all the advantage of the heroic and the human disciplines derived from them. This developed their unflinching loyalty, their single-minded devotion to the obligations of honour, their power of complete self-surrender and fearless acceptance of death and danger. Therefore the ideals, whose seats were in the hearts of the people, would not undergo any serious change owing to the policies adopted by the kings or generals. But now, where the spirit of the Western nationalism prevails, the whole people is being taught from boyhood to foster hatreds and ambitions by all kinds of means,—by the manufacture of half-truths and untruths in history, by persistent misrepresentation of other races and the culture of unfavourable sentiments towards them, by setting up memorials of events, very often false, which for the sake of humanity should be speedily forgotten, thus continually brewing evil menace towards neighbours and nations other than their own. This

is poisoning the very fountainhead of humanity. It is discrediting the ideals, which were born of the lives of men, who were our greatest and best. It is holding up gigantic selfishness as the one universal religion for all nations of the world. We can take anything else from the hands of science, but not this elixir of moral death. Never think for a moment, that the hurts you inflict upon other races will not infect you, and the enmities you sow around your homes will be a wall of protection to you for all time to come. To imbue the minds of a whole people with an abnormal vanity of its own superiority, to teach it to take pride in its moral callousness and ill-begotten wealth, to perpetuate humiliation of defeated nations by exhibiting trophies won from war, and using these in schools in order to breed in children's minds contempt for others, is imitating the West where she has a festering sore, whose swelling is a swelling of disease eating into its vitality.

Our food crops, which are necessary for our sustenance, are products of centuries of selection and care. But the vegetation, which we have not to transform into our lives, does not require the patient thoughts of generations. It is not easy to get rid of weeds; but it is easy, by process of neglect, to ruin your food crops and let them revert to their primitive state of wildness. Likewise the culture, which has so kindly adapted itself to your soil,—so intimate with life, so human,—not only needed tilling and weeding in past ages, but still needs anxious work and watching. What is merely modern—as science and methods of organization—can be transplanted; but what is vitally human has fibres so delicate, and roots so numerous and far reaching, that it dies when moved from its soil. Therefore I am afraid of the rude pressure of the political ideals of the West upon your own. In political civilization, the state is an abstraction and relationship of men utilitarian. Because it has no root in sentiments, it is so dangerously easy to handle. Half a century has been enough for you to master this machine; and there are men among you, whose fondness for it exceeds their love for the living ideals, which were born with the birth of your nation and nursed in your centuries. It is like a child who, in the excitement of his play, imagines he likes his playthings better than his mother.

Where man is at his greatest, he is unconscious. Your civilization, whose mainspring is the bond of human relationship, has been nourished in the depth of a healthy life beyond reach of prying self-analysis. But a mere political relationship is all conscious; it is an eruptive inflammation of aggressiveness. It has forcibly burst upon your notice. And the time has come, when you have to be roused into full consciousness of the truth by which you live, so that you may not be taken unawares. The past has been God's gift to you; about the present, you must make your own choice.

So the questions you have to put to yourselves are these,—‘Have we read the world wrong, and based our relation to it upon an ignorance of human nature? Is the instinct of the West right, where she builds her national welfare behind the barricade of a universal distrust of humanity?’

You must have detected a strong accent of fear, whenever the West has discussed the possibility of the rise of an Eastern race. The reason of it is this, that the power, by whose help she thrives, is an evil power; so long as it is held on her own side she can be safe, while the rest of the world trembles. The vital ambition of the present civilization of Europe is to have the exclusive possession of the devil. All her armaments and diplomacy are directed upon this one object. But these costly rituals for invocation of the evil spirit lead through a path of prosperity to the brink of cataclysm. The furies of terror, which the West has let loose upon God’s world, come back to threaten herself and goad her into preparations of more and more frightfulness; this gives her no rest and makes her forget all else but the perils that she causes to others and incurs her-self. To the worship of this devil of politics she sacrifices other countries as victims. She feeds upon their dead flesh and grows fat upon it, so long as the carcasses remain fresh,—but they are sure to rot at last, and the dead will take their revenge, by spreading pollution far and wide and poisoning the vitality of the feeder. Japan had all her wealth of humanity, her harmony of heroism and beauty, her depth of self-control and richness of self-expression; yet the Western nations felt no respect for her, till she proved that the bloodhounds of Satan are not only bred in the kennels of Europe, but can also be domesticated in Japan and fed with man’s miseries. They admit Japan’s equality with themselves, only when they know that Japan also possesses the key to open the floodgate of hell-fire upon the fair earth, whenever she chooses, and can dance, in their own measure, the devil dance of pillage, murder and ravishment of innocent women, while the world goes to ruin. We know that, in the early stage of man’s moral immaturity, he only feels reverence for the god whose malevolence he dreads. But is this the ideal of man which we can look up to with pride? After centuries of civilization nations fearing each other like the prowling wild beasts of the night-time; shutting their doors of hospitality; combining only for purpose of aggression or defence; hiding in their holes their trade secrets, state secrets, secrets of their armaments; leaking peace offerings to the barking dogs of each other with the meat which does not belong to them; holding down fallen races struggling to stand upon their feet; with their right hands dispensing religion to weaker peoples, while robbing them with their left,—is there anything in this to make us envious? Are we to bend our knees to the spirit of this nationalism, which is sowing broadcast over all the world seeds of fear, greed, suspicion, unashamed

lies of its diplomacy, and unctuous lies of its profession of peace and goodwill and universal brotherhood of Man? Can we have no doubt in our minds, when we rush to the Western market to buy this foreign product in exchange for our own inheritance? I am aware how difficult it is to know one's self; and the man who is intoxicated furiously denies his drunkenness; yet the West herself is anxiously thinking of her problems and trying experiments. But she is like a glutton, who has not the heart to give up his intemperance in eating, and fondly clings to the hope that he can cure his nightmares of indigestion by medicine. Europe is not ready to give up her political inhumanity, with all the baser passions of man attendant upon it; she believes only in modification of systems, and not in change of heart.

We are willing to buy their machine-made systems, not with our hearts, but with our brains. We shall try them and build sheds for them, but not enshrine them in our homes, or temples. There are races who worship the animals they kill; we can buy meat from them, when we are hungry, but not the worship which goes with the killing. We must not vitiate our children's minds with the superstition, that business is business, war is war, politics is politics. We must know that man's business has to be more than mere business, and so have to be his war and politics. You had your own industry in Japan; how scrupulously honest and true it was, you can see by its products,—by their grace and strength, their conscientiousness in details, where they can hardly be observed. But the tidal wave of falsehood has swept over your land from that part of the world, where business is business and honesty is followed in it merely as the best policy. Have you never felt shame, when you see the trade advertisements, not only plastering the whole town with lies and exaggerations, but invading the green fields, where the peasants do their honest labour, and the hill-tops, which greet the first pure light of the morning? It is so easy to dull our sense of honour and delicacy of mind with constant abrasion, while falsehoods stalk abroad with proud steps in the name of trade, politics and patriotism, that any protest against their perpetual intrusion into our lives is considered to be sentimentalism, unworthy of true manliness.

And it has come to pass that the children of those heroes who would keep their word at the point of death, who would disdain to cheat men for vulgar profit, who even in their fight would much rather court defeat than be dishonourable, have become energetic in dealing with falsehoods and do not feel humiliated by gaining advantage from them. And this has been effected by the charm of the word 'modern.' But if undiluted utility be modern, beauty is of all ages; if mean selfishness be modern, the human ideals are no new inventions. And we must know for certain, that however modern may be the proficiency which cripples

man for the sake of methods and machines, it will never live to be old.

But while trying to free our minds from the arrogant claims of Europe and to help ourselves out of the quicksands of our infatuation, we may go to the other extreme and blind ourselves with a wholesale suspicion of the West. The reaction of disillusionment is just as unreal as the first shock of illusion. We must try to come to that normal state of mind, by which we can clearly discern our own danger and avoid it, without being unjust towards the source of that danger. There is always the natural temptation in us of wishing to pay back Europe in her own coin, and return contempt for contempt and evil for evil. But that again would be to imitate Europe in one of her worst features which comes out in her behaviour to people whom she describes as yellow or red, brown or black. And this is a point on which we in the East have to acknowledge our guilt and own that our sin has been as great, if not greater, when we insulted humanity by treating with utter disdain and cruelty men who belonged to a particular creed, colour or caste. It is really because we are afraid of our own weakness, which allows itself to be overcome by the sight of power, that we try to substitute for it another weakness which makes itself blind to the glories of the West. When we truly know the Europe which is great and good, we can effectively save ourselves from the Europe which is mean and grasping. It is easy to be unfair in one's judgment when one is faced with human miseries,—and pessimism is the result of building theories while the mind is suffering. To despair of humanity is only possible, if we lose faith in truth which brings to it strength, when its defeat is greatest, and calls out new life from the depth of its destruction. We must admit that there is a living soul in the West which is struggling unobserved against the hugeness of the organizations under which men, women and children are being crushed, and whose mechanical necessities are ignoring laws that are spiritual and human,—the soul whose sensibilities refuse to be dulled completely by dangerous habits of heedlessness in dealings with races for whom it lacks natural sympathy. The West could never have risen to the eminence she has reached, if her strength were merely the strength of the brute, or of the machine. The divine in her heart is suffering from the injuries inflicted by her hands upon the world, and from this pain of her higher nature flows the secret balm which will bring healing to those injuries. Time after time she has fought against herself and has undone the chains, which with her own hands she had fastened round helpless limbs; and though she forced poison down the throat of a great nation at the point of sword for gain of money, she herself woke up to withdraw from it, to wash her hands clean again. This shows hidden springs of humanity in spots which look dead and barren. It proves that the deeper truth in her nature, which can survive such a career of cruel cowardliness,

is not greed, but reverence for unselfish ideals. It would be altogether unjust, both to us and to Europe, to say that she has fascinated the modern Eastern mind by the mere exhibition of her power. Through the smoke of cannons and dust of markets the light of her moral nature has shone bright, and she has brought to us the ideal of ethical freedom, whose foundation lies deeper than social conventions and whose province of activity is world-wide.

The East has instinctively felt, even through her aversion, that she has a great deal to learn from Europe, not merely about the materials of power, but about its inner source, which is of mind and of the moral nature of man. Europe has been teaching us the higher obligations of public good above those of the family and the clan, and the sacredness of law, which makes society independent of individual caprice, secures for it continuity of progress, and guarantees justice to all men of all positions in life. Above all things Europe has held high before our minds the banner of liberty, through centuries of martyrdom and achievement, liberty of conscience, liberty of thought and action, liberty in the ideals of art and literature. And because Europe has won our deep respect, she has become so dangerous for us where she is turbulently weak and false,-dangerous like poison when it is served along with our best food. There is one safety for us upon which we hope we may count, and that is, that we can claim Europe herself, as our ally, in our resistance to her temptations and to her violent encroachments; for she has ever carried her own standard of perfection, by which we can measure her falls and gauge her degrees of failure, by which we can call her before her own tribunal and put her to shame, the shame which is the sign of the true pride of nobleness.

But our fear is, that the poison may be more powerful than the food, and what is strength in her today may not be the sign of health, but the contrary; for it may be temporarily caused by the upsetting of the balance of life. Our fear is that evil has a fateful fascination, when it assumes dimensions which are colossal,-and though at last it is sure to lose its centre of gravity by its abnormal disproportion, the mischief which it creates before its fall may be beyond reparation.

Therefore I ask you to have the strength of faith and clarity of mind to know for certain, that the lumbering structure of modern progress, riveted by the iron bolts of efficiency, which runs upon the wheels of ambition, cannot hold together for long. Collisions are certain to occur; for it has to travel upon organized lines, it is too heavy to choose its own course freely; and once it is off the rails, its endless train of vehicles is dislocated. A day will come, when it will fall in a heap of ruin and cause serious obstruction to the traffic of the world. Do we not see signs of this even now? Does not the voice come to us, through the

din of war, the shrieks of hatred, the wailings of despair, through the churning up of the unspeakable filth which has been accumulating for ages in the bottom of this nationalism,—the voice which cries to our soul, that the tower of national selfishness, which goes by the name of patriotism, which has raised its banner of treason against heaven, must totter and fall with a crash, weighed down by its own bulk, its flag kissing the dust, its light extinguished? My brothers, when the red light of conflagration sends up its crackle of laughter to the stars, keep your faith upon those stars and not upon the fire of destruction. For when this conflagration consumes itself and dies down, leaving its memorial in ashes, the eternal light will again shine in the East,—the East which has been the birth-place of the morning sun of man's history. And who knows if that day has not already dawned, and the sun not risen, in the Easternmost horizon of Asia? And I offer, as did my ancestor *rishis*, my salutation to that sunrise of the East, which is destined once again to illumine the whole world.

I know my voice is too feeble to raise itself above the uproar of this bustling time, and it is easy for any street urchin to fling against me the epithet of 'unpractical.' It will stick to my coat-tail, never to be washed away, effectively excluding me from the consideration of all respectable persons. I know what a risk one runs from the vigorously athletic crowds to be styled an idealist in these days, when thrones have lost their dignity and prophets have become an anachronism, when the sound that drowns all voices is the noise of the market-place. Yet when, one day, standing on the outskirts of Yokohama town, bristling with its display of modern miscellanies, I watched the sunset in your southern sea, and saw its peace and majesty among your pine-clad hills,—with the great Fujiyama growing faint against the golden horizon, like a god overcome with his own radiance,—the music of eternity welled up through the evening silence, and I felt that the sky and the earth and the lyrics of the dawn and the dayfall are with the poets and idealists, and not with the market men robustly contemptuous of all sentiments,—that, after the forgetfulness of his own divinity, man will remember again that heaven is always in touch with his world, which can never be abandoned for good to the bounding wolves of the modern era, scenting human blood and howling to the skies.

3.3. Nationalism in the West

Man's history is being shaped according to the difficulties it encounters. These have offered us problems and claimed their solutions from us, the penalty of non-fulfilment being death or degradation.

These difficulties have been different in different peoples of the earth, and in the manner of our overcoming them lies our distinction.

The Scythians of the earlier period of Asiatic history had to struggle with the scarcity of their natural resources. The easiest solution that they could think of was to organize their whole population, men, women, and children, into bands of robbers. And they were irresistible to those who were chiefly engaged in the constructive work of social cooperation.

But fortunately for man the easiest path is not his truest path. If his nature were not as complex as it is, if it were as simple as that of a pack of hungry wolves, then, by this time, those hordes of marauders would have overrun the whole earth. But man, when confronted with difficulties, has to acknowledge that he is man, that he has his responsibilities to the higher faculties of his nature, by ignoring which he may achieve success that is immediate, perhaps, but that will become a death trap to him. For what are obstacles to the lower creatures are opportunities to the higher life of man.

To India has been given her problem from the beginning of history—it is the race problem. Races ethnologically different have come in this country in close contact. This fact has been and still continues to be the most important one in our history. It is our mission to face it and prove our humanity in dealing with it in the fullest truth. Until we fulfil our mission all other benefits will be denied us.

There are other peoples in the world who have obstacles in their physical surroundings to overcome, or the menace of their powerful neighbours. They have organized their power till they are not only reasonably free from the tyranny of Nature and human neighbours, but have a surplus of it left in their hands to employ against others. But in India, our difficulties being internal, our history has been the history of continual social adjustment and not that of organized power for defence and aggression.

Neither the colourless vagueness of cosmopolitanism, nor the fierce self-idolatry of nation-worship is the goal of human history. And India has been trying to accomplish her task through social regulation of differences, on the one hand, and the spiritual recognition of unity, on the other. She has made grave errors in setting up the boundary walls too rigidly between races, in perpetuating the results of inferiority in her classifications; often she has crippled her children's minds and narrowed their lives in order to fit them into her social forms; but for centuries new experiments have been made and adjustments carried out.

Her mission has been like that of a hostess to provide proper accommodation to her numerous guests whose habits and requirements are different from one another. It is giving rise to infinite complexities whose solution depends not merely upon tactfulness but sympathy and true realization of the unity of man. Towards this realization have worked from the early time of the Upanishads up to the present moment, a series of great spiritual teachers, whose one object has been to set at naught all differences of man by the overflow of our consciousness of God. In fact, our history has not been of the rise and fall of kingdoms, of fights for political supremacy. In our country records of these days have been despised and forgotten. For they in no way represent the true history of our people. Our history is that of our social life and attainment of spiritual ideals.

But we feel that our task is not yet done. The world-flood has swept over our country, new elements have been introduced, and wider adjustments are waiting to be made.

We feel this all the more, because the teaching and example of the West have entirely run counter to what we think was given to India to accomplish. In the West the national machinery of commerce and politics turns out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value; but they are bound in iron hoops, labelled and separated off with scientific care and precision. Obviously God made man to be human; but this modern product has such marvellous square-cut finish of spirit and a creature made in his own divine image.

But I am anticipating. What I was about to say is this, take it in whatever spirit you like, here is India, of about fifty centuries at least, who tried to live peacefully and think deeply, the India devoid of all politics, the India of no nations, whose one ambition has been to know this world as of soul, to live here every moment of her life in the meek spirit of adoration, in the glad consciousness of an eternal and personal relationship with it. This is the remote portion of humanity, childlike in its manner, with the wisdom of the old, upon

which burst the Nation of the West.

Through all the fights and intrigues and deceptions of her earlier history India had remained aloof. Because her homes, her fields, her temples of worship, her schools, where her teachers and students lived together in the atmosphere of simplicity and devotion and learning, her village self-government with its simple laws and peaceful administration—all these truly belonged to her. But her thrones were not her concern. They passed over her head like clouds, now tinged with purple gorgeousness, now black with the threat of thunder. Often they brought devastations in their wake, but they were like catastrophes of nature whose traces are soon forgotten.

But this time it was different. It was not a mere drift over her surface of life,—drift of cavalry and foot soldiers, richly caparisoned elephants, white tents and canopies, strings of patient camels bearing the loads of royalty, bands of kettledrums and flutes, marble domes of mosques, palaces and tombs, like the bubbles of the foaming wine of extravagance; stories of treachery and loyal devotion, of changes of fortune, of dramatic surprises of fate. This time it was the Nation of the West driving its tentacles of machinery deep down into the soil.

Therefore, I say to you, it is we who are called as witnesses to give evidence as to what the Nation has been to humanity. We had known the hordes of Moghals and Pathans who invaded India, but we had known them as human races, with their own religions and customs, likes and dislikes,—we had never known them as a nation. We loved and hated them as occasions arose; we fought for them and against them, talked with them in a language which was theirs as well as our own, and guided the destiny of the Empire in which we had our active share. But this time we had to deal, not with kings, not with human races, but with a nation,—we, who are no nation ourselves.

Now let us from our own experience answer the question. What is this Nation?

A nation, in the sense of the political and economic union of a people, is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose. Society as such has no ulterior purpose. It is an end in itself. It is a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. It is a natural regulation of human relationships, so that men can develop ideals of life in cooperation with one another. It has also a political side, but this is only for a special purpose. It is for self-preservation. It is merely the side of power, not of human ideals. And in the early days it had its separate place in society, restricted to the professionals. But when with the help of science and the perfecting of organization this power begins to grow and brings in harvests of wealth, then it crosses its boundaries

with amazing rapidity. For then it goads all its neighbouring societies with greed of material prosperity, and consequent mutual jealousy, and by the fear of each other's growth into powerfulness. The time comes when it can stop no longer, for the competition grows keener, organization grows vaster, and selfishness attains supremacy. Trading upon the greed and fear of man, it occupies more and more space in society, and at last becomes its ruling force.

It is just possible that you have lost through habit consciousness that the living bonds of society are breaking up, and giving place to merely mechanical organization. But you see signs of it everywhere. It is owing to this that war has been declared between man and woman, because the natural thread is snapping which holds them together in harmony; because man is driven to professionalism, producing wealth for himself and others, continually turning the wheel of power for his own sake or for the sake of the universal officialdom, leaving woman alone to wither and to die or to fight her own battle unaided. And thus there where cooperation is natural has intruded competition. The very psychology of men and women about their mutual relation is changing and becoming the psychology of the primitive fighting elements rather than of humanity seeking its completeness through the union based upon mutual self-surrender. For the elements which have lost their living bond of reality have lost the meaning of their existence. They, like gaseous particles, forced into a too narrow space, come in continual conflict with each other till they burst the very arrangement which holds them in bondage.

Then look at those who call themselves anarchists, who resent the imposition of power, in any form whatever, upon the individual. The only reason for this is that power has become too abstract—it is a scientific product made in the political laboratory of the Nation, through the dissolution of the personal humanity.

And what is the meaning of these strikes in the economic world, which like the prickly shrubs in a barren soil shoot up with renewed vigour each time they are cut down? What, but that the wealth-producing mechanism is incessantly growing into vast stature, out of proportion to all other needs of society,—and the full reality of man is more and more crushed under its weight. This state of things inevitably gives rise to eternal feuds among the elements freed from the wholeness and wholesomeness of human ideals, and interminable economic war is waged between capital and labour. For greed of wealth and power can never have a limit, and compromise of self-interest can never attain the final spirit of reconciliation. They must go on breeding jealousy and suspicion to the end—the end which only comes through some sudden catastrophe or a spiritual rebirth.

When this organization of politics and commerce, whose other name is the Nation, becomes all powerful at the cost of the harmony of the higher social life, then it is an evil day for humanity. When a father becomes a gambler and his obligations to his family take the secondary place in his mind, then he is no longer a man, but an automaton led by the power of greed. Then he can do things which, in his normal state of mind, he would be ashamed to do. It is the same thing with society. When it allows itself to be turned into a perfect organization of power, then there are few crimes which it is unable to perpetrate. Because success is the object and justification of a machine, while goodness only is the end and purpose of man. When this engine of organization begins to attain a vast size, and those who are mechanics are made into parts of the machine, then the personal man is eliminated to a phantom, everything becomes a revolution of policy carried out by the human parts of the machine, requiring no twinge of pity or moral responsibility. It is not unusual that even through this apparatus the moral nature of man tries to assert itself, but the whole series of ropes and pulleys creak and cry, the forces of the human heart become entangled among the forces of the human automaton, and only with difficulty can the moral purpose transmit itself into some tortured shape of result.

This abstract being, the Nation, is ruling India. We have seen in our country some brand of tinned food advertised as entirely made and packed without being touched by hand. This description applies to the governing of India, which is as little touched by the human hand as possible. The governors need not know our language, need not come into personal touch with us except as officials; they can aid or hinder our aspirations from a disdainful distance, they can lead us on a certain path of policy and then pull us back again with the manipulation of office red tape; the newspapers of England, in whose columns London street accidents are recorded with some decency of pathos, need but take the scantiest notice of calamities happening in India over areas of land sometimes larger than the British Isles.

But we, who are governed, are not a mere abstraction. We, on our side, are individuals with living sensibilities. What comes to us in the shape of a mere bloodless policy may pierce into the very core of our life, may threaten the whole future of our people with a perpetual helplessness of emasculation, and yet may never touch the chord of humanity on the other side, or touch it in the most inadequately feeble manner. Such wholesale and universal acts of fearful responsibility man can never perform, with such a degree of systematic unawareness, where he is an individual human being. These only become possible where the man is represented by an octopus of abstractions, sending out its wriggling arms in all directions of space, and fixing its innumerable suckers

even into the far-away future. In this reign of the nation, the governed are pursued by suspicions; and these are the suspicions of a tremendous mass of organized brain and muscle. Punishments are meted out, leaving a trail of miseries across a large bleeding tract of the human heart; but these punishments are dealt by a mere abstract force, in which a whole population of a distant country has lost its human personality.

I have not come here, however, to discuss the question as it affects my own country, but as it affects the future of all humanity. It is not about the British Government, but the government by the Nation—the Nation which is the organized self-interest of a whole people, where it is the least human and the least spiritual. Our only intimate experience of the Nation is with the British Nation, and as far as the government by the Nation goes there are reasons to believe that it is one of the best. Then again we have to consider that the West is necessary to the East. We are complementary to each other because of our different outlooks upon life which have given us different aspects of truth. Therefore if it be true that the spirit of the West has come upon our fields in the guise of a storm it is all the same scattering living seeds that are immortal. And when in India we shall be able to assimilate in our life what is permanent in Western civilization we shall be in the position to bring about a reconciliation of these two great worlds. Then will come to an end the one-sided dominance which is galling. What is more, we have to recognize that the history of India does not belong to one particular race but is of a process of creation to which various races of the world contributed—the Dravidians and the Aryans, the ancient Greeks and the Persians, the Mohamedans of the West and those of central Asia. At last now has come the turn of the English to become true to this history and bring to it the tribute of their life, and we neither have the right nor the power to exclude this people from the building of the destiny of India. Therefore what I say about the Nation has more to do with the history of Man than specially with that of India.

This history has come to a stage when the moral man, the complete man, is more and more giving way, almost without knowing it, to make room for the political and the commercial man, the man of the limited purpose. This, aided by the wonderful progress in science, is assuming gigantic proportion and power, causing the upset of man's moral balance, obscuring his human side under the shadow of soul-less organization. Its iron grip we have felt at the root of our life, and for the sake of humanity we must stand up and give warning to all, that this nationalism is a cruel epidemic of evil that is sweeping over the human world of the present age, eating into its moral vitality.

I have a deep love and a great respect for the British race as human beings. It has produced great-hearted men, thinkers of great thoughts, doers of great deeds. It has given rise to a great literature. I know that these people love justice and freedom, and hate lies. They are clean in their minds, frank in their manners, true in their friendships; in their behaviour they are honest and reliable. The personal experience which I have had of their literary men has roused my admiration not merely for their power of thought or expression but for their chivalrous humanity. We have felt the greatness of this people as we feel the sun; but as for the Nation, it is for us a thick mist of a stifling nature covering the sun itself.

This government by the Nation is neither British nor anything else; it is an applied science and therefore more or less similar in its principles wherever it is used. It is like a hydraulic press, whose pressure is impersonal and on that account completely effective. The amount of its power may vary in different engines. Some may even be driven by hand, thus leaving a margin of comfortable looseness in their tension, but in spirit and in method their differences are small. Our government might have been Dutch, or French, or Portuguese, and its essential features would have remained much the same as they are now. Only perhaps, in some cases, the organization might not have been so densely perfect, and, therefore, some shreds of the human might still have been clinging to the wreck, allowing us to deal with something which resembles our own throbbing heart.

Before the Nation came to rule over us we had other governments which were foreign, and these, like all governments, had some element of the machine in them. But the difference between them and the government by the Nation is like the difference between the hand loom and the power loom. In the products of the hand loom the magic of man's living fingers finds its expression, and its hum harmonizes with the music of life. But the power loom is relentlessly lifeless and accurate and monotonous in its production.

We must admit that during the personal government of the former days there have been instances of tyranny, injustice and extortion. They caused sufferings and unrest from which we are glad to be rescued. The protection of law is not only a boon, but it is a valuable lesson to us. It is teaching us the discipline which is necessary for the stability of civilization and continuity of progress. We are realizing through it that there is a universal standard of justice to which all men irrespective of their caste and colour have their equal claim.

This reign of law in our present Government in India has established order in this vast land inhabited by peoples different in their races and customs. It has made it possible for these peoples to come in closer touch with one another and

cultivate a communion of aspiration.

But this desire for a common bond of comradeship among the different races of India has been the work of the spirit of the West, not that of the Nation of the West. Wherever in Asia the people have received the true lesson of the West it is in spite of the Western Nation. Only because Japan had been able to resist the dominance of this Western Nation could she acquire the benefit of the Western Civilization in fullest measure. Though China has been poisoned at the very spring of her moral and physical life by this Nation, her struggle to receive the best lessons of the West may yet be successful if not hindered by the Nation. It was only the other day that Persia woke up from her age-long sleep at the call of the West to be instantly trampled into stillness by the Nation. The same phenomenon prevails in this country also, where the people are hospitable but the nation has proved itself to be otherwise, making an Eastern guest feel humiliated to stand before you as a member of the humanity of his own motherland.

In India we are suffering from this conflict between the spirit of the West and the Nation of the West. The benefit of the Western civilization is doled out to us in a miserly measure by the Nation trying to regulate the degree of nutrition as near the zero point of vitality as possible. The portion of education allotted to us is so raggedly insufficient that it ought to outrage the sense of decency of a Western humanity. We have seen in these countries how the people are encouraged and trained and given every facility to fit themselves for the great movements of commerce and industry spreading over the world, while in India the only assistance we get is merely to be jeered at by the Nation for lagging behind. While depriving us of our opportunities and reducing our education to a minimum required for conducting a foreign government, this Nation pacifies its conscience by calling us names, by sedulously giving currency to the arrogant cynicism that the East is east and the West is west and never the twain shall meet. If we must believe our schoolmaster in his taunt that after nearly two centuries of his tutelage, India not only remains unfit for self-government but unable to display originality in her intellectual attainments, must we ascribe it to something in the nature of Western culture and our inherent incapacity to receive it or to the judicious niggardliness of the Nation that has taken upon itself the white man's burden of civilizing the East? That Japanese people have some qualities which we lack we may admit, but that our intellect is naturally unproductive compared to theirs we cannot accept even from them whom it is dangerous for us to contradict.

The truth is that the spirit of conflict and conquest is at the origin and in the

centre of the Western nationalism; its basis is not social cooperation. It has evolved a perfect organization of power but not spiritual idealism. It is like the pack of predatory creatures that must have its victims. With all its heart it cannot bear to see its hunting grounds converted into cultivated fields. In fact, these nations are fighting among themselves for the extension of their victims and their reserve forests. Therefore the Western Nation acts like a dam to check the free flow of the Western civilization into the country of the NoNation. Because this civilization is the civilization of power, therefore it is exclusive, it is naturally unwilling to open its sources of power to those whom it has selected for its purposes of exploitation.

But all the same moral law is the law of humanity, and the exclusive civilization which thrives upon others who are barred from its benefit carries its own death sentence in its moral limitations. The slavery that it gives rise to unconsciously drains its own love of freedom dry. The helplessness with which it weighs down its world of victims exerts its force of gravitation every moment upon the power that creates it. And the greater part of the world which is being denuded of its self-sustaining life by the Nation will one day become the most terrible of all its burdens ready to drag it down into the bottom of destruction. Whenever Power removes all checks from its path to make its career easy, it triumphantly rides into its ultimate crash of death. Its moral brake becomes slacker every day without its knowing it, and its slippery path of ease becomes its path of doom.

Of all things in Western civilization, those which this Western Nation has given us in a most generous measure are law and order. While the small feeding bottle of our education is nearly dry, and sanitation sucks its own thumb in despair, the military organization, the magisterial offices, the police, the Criminal Investigation Department, the secret spy system, attain to an abnormal girth in their waists, occupying every inch of our country. This is to maintain order. But is not this order merely a negative good? Is it not for giving people's life greater opportunities for the freedom of development? Its perfection is the perfection of an egg-shell whose true value lies in the security it affords to the chick and its nourishment and not in the convenience it offers to the person at the breakfast table. Mere administration is unproductive, it is not creative, not being a living thing. It is a steam-roller, formidable in its weight and power, having its uses, but it does not help the soil to become fertile. When after its enormous toil it comes to offer us its boon of peace we can but murmur under our breath that 'peace is good but not more so than life which is God's own great boon.' On the other hand, our former governments were woefully lacking in many of the advantages of the modern government. But because those were not

the governments by the Nation, their texture was loosely woven, leaving big gaps through which our own life sent its threads and imposed its designs. I am quite sure in those days we had things that were extremely distasteful to us. But we know that when we walk barefooted upon a ground strewn with gravel, gradually our feet come to adjust themselves to the caprices of the inhospitable earth; while if the tiniest particle of a gravel finds its lodgment inside our shoes we can never forget and forgive its intrusion. And these shoes are the government by the Nation,—it is tight, it regulates our steps with a closed up system, within which our feet have only the slightest liberty to make their own adjustments. Therefore, when you produce your statistics to compare the number of gravels which our feet had to encounter in former days with the paucity in the present regime, they hardly touch the real points. It is not the numerousness of the outside obstacles but the comparative powerlessness of the individual to cope with them. This narrowness of freedom is an evil which is more radical not because of its quantity but because of its nature.

And we cannot but acknowledge this paradox, that while the spirit of the West marches under its banner of freedom, the Nation of the West forges its iron chains of organization which are the most relentless and unbreakable that have ever been manufactured in the whole history of man.

When the humanity of India was not under the government of the Organization, the elasticity of change was great enough to encourage men of power and spirit to feel that they had their destinies in their own hands. The hope of the unexpected was never absent, and a freer play of imagination, both on the part of the governor and the governed, had its effect in the making of history. We were not confronted with a future which was a dead white wall of granite blocks eternally guarding against the expression and extension of our own powers, the hopelessness of which lies in the reason that these powers are becoming atrophied at their very roots by the scientific process of paralysis. For every single individual in the country of the nation is completely in the grip of a whole nation,—whose tireless vigilance, being the vigilance of a machine, has not the human power to overlook or to discriminate. At the least pressing of its button the monster organization becomes all eyes, whose ugly stare of inquisitiveness cannot be avoided by a single person amongst the immense multitude of the ruled. At the least turn of its screw, by the fraction of an inch, the grip is tightened to the point of suffocation around every man, woman and child of a vast population, for whom no escape is imaginable in their own country, or even in any country outside their own.

It is the continual and stupendous dead pressure of this unhuman upon the

living human under which the modern world is groaning. Not merely the subject races, but you who live under the delusion that you are free, are every day sacrificing your freedom and humanity to this fetish of nationalism, living in the dense poisonous atmosphere of world-wide suspicion and greed and panic.

I have seen in Japan the voluntary submission of the whole people to the trimming of their minds and clipping of their freedom by their government, which through various educational agencies regulates their thoughts, manufactures their feelings, becomes suspiciously watchful when they show signs of inclining toward the spiritual, leading them through a narrow path not toward what is true but what is necessary for the complete welding of them into one uniform mass according to its own recipe. The people accept this all-pervading mental slavery with cheerfulness and pride because of their nervous desire to turn themselves into a machine of power, called the Nation, and emulate other machines in their collective worldliness.

When questioned as to the wisdom of its course the newly converted fanatic of nationalism answers that 'so long as nations are rampant in this world we have not the option freely to develop our higher humanity. We must utilize every faculty that we possess to resist the evil by assuming it ourselves in the fullest degree. For the only brotherhood possible in the modern world is the brotherhood of hooliganism.' The recognition of the fraternal bond of love between Japan and Russia, which has lately been celebrated with an immense display of rejoicing in Japan, was not owing to any sudden recrudescence of the spirit of Christianity or of Buddhism,—but it was a bond established according to the modern faith in a surer relationship of mutual menace of blood-shedding. Yes, one cannot but acknowledge that these facts are the facts of the world of the Nation, and the only moral of it is that all the peoples of the earth should strain their physical, moral and intellectual resources to the utmost to defeat one another in the wrestling match of powerfulness. In the ancient days Sparta paid all her attention to becoming powerful—and she did become so by crippling her humanity, and she died of the amputation.

But it is no consolation to us to know that the weakening of humanity from which the present age is suffering is not limited to the subject races, and that its ravages are even more radical because insidious and voluntary in peoples who are hypnotized into believing that they are free. This bartering of your higher aspirations of life for profit and power has been your own free choice, and I leave you there, at the wreckage of your soul, contemplating your protuberant prosperity. But will you never be called to answer for organizing the instincts of self-aggrandizement of whole peoples into perfection, and calling it good? I ask

you what disaster has there ever been in the history of man, in its darkest period, like this terrible disaster of the Nation fixing its fangs deep into the naked flesh of the world, taking permanent precautions against its natural relaxation?

You, the people of the West, who have manufactured this abnormality, can you imagine the desolating despair of this haunted world of suffering man possessed by the ghastly abstraction of the organizing man? Can you put yourself into the position of the peoples, who seem to have been doomed to an eternal damnation of their own humanity, who not only must suffer continual curtailment of their manhood, but even raise their voices in paeans of praise for the benignity of a mechanical apparatus in its interminable parody of providence?

Have you not seen, since the commencement of the existence of the Nation, that the dread of it has been the one goblin-dread with which the whole world has been trembling? Wherever there is a dark corner, there is the suspicion of its secret malevolence; and people live in a perpetual distrust of its back where it has no eyes. Every sound of footstep, every rustle of movement in the neighbourhood, sends a thrill of terror all around. And this terror is the parent of all that is base in man's nature. It makes one almost openly unashamed of inhumanity. Clever lies become matters of self-congratulation.

Solemn pledges become a farce,—laughable for their very solemnity. The Nation, with all its paraphernalia of power and prosperity, its flags and pious hymns, its blasphemous prayers in the churches, and the literary mock thunders of its patriotic bragging, cannot hide the fact that the Nation is the greatest evil for the Nation, that all its precautions are against it, and any new birth of its fellow in the world is always followed in its mind by the dread of a new peril. Its one wish is to trade on the feebleness of the rest of the world, like some insects that are bred in the paralyzed flesh of victims kept just enough alive to make them toothsome and nutritious. Therefore it is ready to send its poisonous fluid into the vitals of the other living peoples, who, not being nations, are harmless. For this the Nation has had and still has its richest pasture in Asia. Great China, rich with her ancient wisdom and social ethics, her discipline of industry and self-control, is like a whale awakening the lust of spoil in the heart of the Nation. She is already carrying in her quivering flesh harpoons sent by the unerring aim of the Nation, the creature of science and selfishness. Her pitiful attempt to shake off her traditions of humanity, her social ideals, and spend her last exhausted resources to drill herself into modern efficiency, is thwarted at every step by the Nation. It is tightening its financial ropes round her, trying to drag her up on the shore and cut her into pieces, and then go and offer public thanksgiving to God for supporting the one existing evil and shattering the

possibility of a new one. And for all this the Nation has been claiming the gratitude of history, and all eternity for its exploitation; ordering its band of praise to be struck up from end to end of the world, declaring itself to be the salt of the earth, the flower of humanity, the blessing of God hurled with all his force upon the naked skulls of the world of no nations.

I know what your advice will be. You will say, form yourselves into a nation, and resist this encroachment of the Nation. But is this the true advice? That of a man to a man? Why should this be a necessity? I could well believe you, if you had said, Be more good, more just, more true in your relation to man, control your greed, make your life wholesome in its simplicity and let your consciousness of the divine in humanity be more perfect in its expression. But must you say that it is not the soul, but the machine, which is of the utmost value to ourselves, and that man's salvation depends upon his disciplining himself into a perfection of the dead rhythm of wheels and counter wheels? That machine must be pitted against machine, and nation against nation, in an endless bull-fight of politics?

You say, these machines will come into an agreement, for their mutual protection, based upon a conspiracy of fear. But will this federation of steam-boilers supply you with a soul, a soul which has her conscience and her God? What is to happen to that larger part of the world, where fear will have no hand in restraining you? Whatever safety they now enjoy, those countries of no nation, from the unbridled license of forge and hammer and turn-screw, results from the mutual jealousy of the powers. But when, instead of being numerous separate machines, they become riveted into one organized gregariousness of gluttony, commercial and political, what remotest chance of hope will remain for those others, who have lived and suffered, have loved and worshipped, have thought deeply and worked with meekness, but whose only crime has been that they have not organized?

But, you say, 'That does not matter, the unfit must go to the wall—they shall die, and this is science,'

No, for the sake of your own salvation, I say, they shall live, and this is truth. It is extremely bold of me to say so, but I assert that man's world is amoral world, not because we blindly agree to believe it, but because it is so in truth which would be dangerous for us to ignore. And this moral nature of man cannot be divided into convenient compartments for its preservation. You cannot secure it for your home consumption with protective tariff walls, while in foreign parts making it enormously accommodating in its free trade of license.

Has not this truth already come home to you now, when this cruel war has

driven its claws into the vitals of Europe? When her hoard of wealth is bursting into smoke and her humanity is shattered into bits on her battlefields? You ask in amazement what has she done to deserve this? The answer is, that the West has been systematically petrifying her moral nature in order to lay a solid foundation for her gigantic abstractions of efficiency. She has all along been starving the life of the personal man into that of the professional.

In your medieval age in Europe, the simple and the natural man, with all his violent passions and desires, was engaged in trying to find out reconciliation in the conflict between the flesh and the spirit. All through the turbulent career of her vigorous youth the temporal and the spiritual forces both acted strongly upon her nature, and were moulding it into completeness of moral personality. Europe owes all her greatness in humanity to that period of discipline,—the discipline of the man in his human integrity.

Then came the age of intellect, of science. We all know that intellect is impersonal. Our life is one with us, also our heart, but our mind can be detached from the personal man and then only can it freely move in its world of thoughts. Our intellect is an ascetic who wears no clothes, takes no food, knows no sleep, has no wishes, feels no love or hatred or pity for human limitations, who only reasons, unmoved through the vicissitudes of life. It burrows to the roots of things, because it has no personal concern with the thing itself. The grammarian walks straight through all poetry and goes to the root of words without obstruction. Because he is not seeking reality, but law. When he finds the law, he is able to teach people how to master words. This is a power,—the power which fulfils some special usefulness, some particular need have man.

Reality is the harmony which gives to the component parts of a thing the equilibrium of the whole. You break it, and have in your hands the nomadic atoms fighting against one another, therefore unmeaning. Those who covet power try to get mastery of these aboriginal fighting elements and through some narrow channels force them into some violent service for some particular need of man.

This satisfaction of man's needs is a great thing. It gives him freedom in the material world. It confers on him the benefit of a greater range of time and space. He can do things in a shorter time and occupies a larger space with more thoroughness of advantage. Therefore he can easily outstrip those who live in a world of a slower time and of space less fully occupied.

This progress of power attains more and more rapidity of pace. And, for the reason that it is a detached part of man, it soon outruns the complete humanity. The moral man remains behind, because it has to deal with the whole reality, not

merely with the law of things, which is impersonal and therefore abstract.

Thus, man with his mental and material power far outgrowing his moral strength, is like an exaggerated giraffe whose head has suddenly shot up miles away from the rest of him, making normal communication difficult to establish. This greedy head, with its huge dental organization, has been munching all the topmost foliage of the world, but the nourishment is too late in reaching his digestive organs, and his heart is suffering from want of blood. Of this present disharmony in man's nature the West seems to have been blissfully unconscious. The enormity of its material success has diverted all its attention toward self-congratulation on its bulk. The optimism of its logic goes on basing the calculations of its good fortune upon the indefinite prolongation of its railway lines toward eternity. It is superficial enough to think that all tomorrows are merely todays with the repeated additions of twenty-four hours. It has no fear of the chasm, which is opening wider every day, between man's ever-growing storehouses and the emptiness of his hungry humanity. Logic does not know that, under the lowest bed of endless strata of wealth and comforts, earthquakes are being hatched to restore the balance of the moral world, and one day the gaping gulf of spiritual vacuity will draw into its bottom the store of things that have their eternal love for the dust.

Man in his fulness is not powerful, but perfect. Therefore, to turn him into mere power, you have to curtail his soul as much as possible. When we are fully human, we cannot fly at one another's throats; our instincts of social life, our traditions of moral ideals stand in the way. If you want me to take to butchering human beings, you must break up that wholeness of my humanity through some discipline which makes my will dead, my thoughts numb, my movements automatic, and then from the dissolution of the complex personal man will come out that abstraction, that destructive force, which has no relation to human truth, and therefore can be easily brutal or mechanical.

Take away man from his natural surroundings, from the fulness of his communal life, with all its living associations of beauty and love and social obligations, and you will be able to turn him into so many fragments of a machine for the production of wealth on a gigantic scale. Turn a tree into a log and it will burn for you, but it will never bear living flowers and fruit. This process of dehumanizing has been going on in commerce and politics. And out of the long birth-throes of mechanical energy has been born this fully developed apparatus of magnificent power and surprising appetite, which has been christened in the West as the Nation. As I have hinted before, because of its quality of abstraction it has, with the greatest ease, gone far ahead of the

complete moral man. And having the conscience of a ghost and the callous perfection of an automaton, it is causing disasters of which the volcanic dissipations of the youthful moon would be ashamed to be brought into comparison. As a result, the suspicion of man for man stings all the limbs of this civilization like the hairs of the nettle. Each country is casting its net of espionage into the slimy bottom of the others, fishing for their secrets, the treacherous secrets brewing in the oozy depths of diplomacy. And what is their secret service but the nation's underground trade in kidnapping, murder and treachery and all the ugly crimes bred in the depth of rottenness? Because each nation has its own history of thieving and lies and broken faith, therefore there can only flourish international suspicion and jealousy, and international moral shame becomes anaemic to a degree of ludicrousness. The nation's bagpipe of righteous indignation has so often changed its tune according to the variation of time and to the altered groupings of the alliances of diplomacy, that it can be enjoyed with amusement as the variety performance of the political music hall.

I am just coming from my visit to Japan, where I exhorted this young nation to take its stand upon the higher ideals of humanity and never to follow the West in its acceptance of the organized selfishness of Nationalism as its religion, never to gloat upon the feebleness of its neighbours, never to be unscrupulous in its behaviour to the weak, where it can be gloriously mean with impunity, while turning its right cheek of brighter humanity for the kiss of admiration to those who have the power to deal it a blow. Some of the newspapers praised my utterances for their poetical qualities while adding with a leer that it was the poetry of a defeated people. I felt they were right. Japan had been taught in a modern school the lesson how to become powerful. The schooling is done and she must enjoy the fruits of her lessons. The West in the voice of her thundering cannon had said at the door of Japan, Let there be a Nation—and there was a Nation. And now that it has come into existence, why do you not feel in your heart of hearts a pure feeling of gladness and say that it is good? Why is it that I saw in an English paper an expression of bitterness at Japan's boasting of her superiority of civilization—the thing that the British, along with other nations, has been carrying on for ages without blushing? Because the idealism of selfishness must keep itself drunk with a continual dose of self-laudation. But the same vices which seem so natural and innocuous in its own life make it surprised and angry at their unpleasantness when seen in other nations. Therefore when you see the Japanese nation, created in your own image, launched in its career of national boastfulness you shake your head and say it is not good. Has it not been one of the causes that raise the cry on these shores for preparedness to meet one more power of evil with a greater power of injury?

Japan protests that she has her bushido, that she can never be treacherous to America to whom she owes her gratitude. But you find it difficult to believe her,—for the wisdom of the Nation is not in its faith in humanity but in its complete distrust. You say to yourself that it is not with Japan of the bushido, the Japan of the moral ideals, that you have to deal—it is with the abstraction of the popular selfishness, it is with the Nation; and Nation can only trust Nation where their interests coalesce, or at least do not conflict. In fact your instinct tells you that the advent of another people into the arena of nationality makes another addition to the evil which contradicts all that is highest in Man and proves by its success that unscrupulousness is the way to prosperity,—and goodness is good for the weak and God is the only remaining consolation of the defeated.

Yes, this is the logic of the Nation. And it will never heed the voice of truth and goodness. It will go on in its ring-dance of moral corruption, linking steel unto steel, and machine unto machine; trampling under its tread all the sweet flowers of simple faith and the living ideals of man.

But we delude ourselves into thinking that humanity in the modern days is more to the front than ever before. The reason of this self-delusion is because man is served with the necessities of life in greater profusion and his physical ills are being alleviated with more efficacy. But the chief part of this is done, not by moral sacrifice, but by intellectual power. In quantity it is great, but it springs from the surface and spreads over the surface. Knowledge and efficiency are powerful in their outward effect, but they are the servants of man, not the man himself. Their service is like the service in a hotel, where it is elaborate, but the host is absent; it is more convenient than hospitable.

Therefore we must not forget that the scientific organizations vastly spreading in all directions are strengthening our power, but not our humanity. With the growth of power the cult of the self-worship of the Nation grows in ascendancy; and the individual willingly allows the nation to take donkey rides upon his back; and there happens the anomaly which must have its disastrous effects, that the individual worships with all sacrifices a god which is morally much inferior to himself. This could never have been possible if the god had been as real as the individual.

Let me give an illustration of this in point. In some parts of India it has been enjoined as an act of great piety for a widow to go without food and water on a particular day every fortnight. This often leads to cruelty, unmeaning and inhuman. And yet men are not by nature cruel to such a degree. But this piety being a mere unreal abstraction completely deadens the moral sense of the individual, just as the man who would not hurt an animal unnecessarily, would

cause horrible suffering to a large number of innocent creatures when he drugs his feelings with the abstract idea of ‘sport.’ Because these ideas are the creations of our intellect, because they are logical classifications, therefore they can so easily hide in their mist the personal man.

And the idea of the Nation is one of the most powerful anesthetics that man has invented. Under the influence of its fumes the whole people can carry out its systematic programme of the most virulent self-seeking without being in the least aware of its moral perversion,—in fact feeling dangerously resentful if it is pointed out.

But can this go on indefinitely? Continually producing barrenness of moral insensibility upon a large tract of our living nature? Can it escape its nemesis forever? Has this giant power of mechanical organization no limit in this world against which it may shatter itself all the more completely because of its terrible strength and velocity? Do you believe that evil can be permanently kept in check by competition with evil, and that conference of prudence can keep the devil chained in its makeshift cage of mutual agreement?

This European war of Nations is the war of retribution. Man, the person, must protest for his very life against the heaping up of things where there should be the heart, and systems and policies where there should flow living human relationship. The time has come when, for the sake of the whole outraged world, Europe should fully know in her own person the terrible absurdity of the thing called the Nation.

The Nation has thriven long upon mutilated humanity. Men, the fairest creations of God, came out of the National manufactory in huge numbers as war-making and money-making puppets, ludicrously vain of their pitiful perfection of mechanism. Human society grew more and more into a marionette show of politicians, soldiers, manufacturers and bureaucrats, pulled by wire arrangements of wonderful efficiency.

But the apotheosis off selfishness can never make its interminable breed of hatred and greed, fear and hypocrisy, suspicion and tyranny, an end in themselves. These monsters grow into huge shapes but never into harmony. And this Nation may grow on to an unimaginable corpulence, not of a living body, but of steel and steam and office buildings, till its deformity can contain no longer its ugly voluminousness,—till it begins to crack and gape, breathe gas and fire in gasps, and its death-rattles sound in cannon roars. In this war, the death-throes of the Nation have commenced. Suddenly, all its mechanism going mad, it has begun the dance of the furies, shattering its own limbs, scattering them into the dust. It is the fifth act of the tragedy of the unreal.

Those who have any faith in Man cannot but fervently hope that the tyranny of the Nation will not be restored to all its former teeth and claws, to its far-reaching iron arms and its immense inner cavity, all stomach and no heart; that man will have his new birth, in the freedom of his individuality, from the enveloping vagueness of abstraction.

The veil has been raised, and in this frightful war the West has stood face to face with her own creation, to which she had offered her soul. She must know what it truly is.

She had never let herself suspect what slow decay and decomposition were secretly going on in her moral nature, which often broke out in doctrines of scepticism, but still oftener and in still more dangerously subtle manner showed itself in her unconsciousness of the mutilation and insult that she had been inflicting upon a vast part of the world. Now she must know the truth nearer home.

And then there will come from her own children those who will break themselves free from the slavery of this illusion, this perversion of brotherhood founded upon self-seeking, those who will own themselves as God's children and as no bond slaves of machinery, which turns souls into commodities and life into compartments, which, with its iron claws, scratches out the heart of the world and knows not what it has done.

And we of no nations of the world, whose heads have been bowed to the dust, will know that his dust is more sacred than the bricks which build the pride of power. For this dust is fertile of life, and of beauty and worship. We shall thank God that we were made to wait in silence through the night of despair, had to bear the insult of the proud and the strong man's burden, yet all through it, though our hearts quaked with doubt and fear, never could we blindly believe in the salvation which machinery offered to man, but we held fast to our trust in God and the truth of the human soul. And we can still cherish the hope, that, when power becomes ashamed to occupy its throne and is ready to make way for love, when the morning comes for cleansing the bloodstained steps of the Nation along the highroad of humanity, we shall be called upon to bring our own vessel of sacred water—the water of worship—to sweeten the history of man into purity, and with its sprinkling make the trampled dust of the centuries blessed with fruitfulness.

3.4. The Sunset of the Century

Written in the Bengali on the last day of last century

The last sun of the century sets amidst the blood-red clouds of the West and the whirlwind of hatred.

The naked passion of self-love of Nations, in its drunken delirium of greed, is dancing to the clash of steel and the howling verses of vengeance.

The hungry self of the Nation shall burst in a violence of fury from its own shameless feeding.

For it has made the world its food,
And licking it, crunching it, and swallowing it in big morsels,

It swells and swells
Till in the midst of its unholy feast descends the sudden heaven piercing its heart of grossness.

The crimson glow of light on the horizon is not the light of thy dawn of peace, my Motherland.

It is the glimmer of the funeral pyre burning to ashes the vast flesh,—the self-love of the Nation,—dead under its own excess.

Thy morning waits behind the patient dark of the East, Meek and silent.

Keep watch, India.

Bring your offerings of worship for that sacred sunrise.

Let the first hymn of its welcome sound in your voice, and sing,
'Come, Peace, thou daughter of God's own great suffering.'

Come with thy treasure of contentment, the sword of fortitude,
And meekness crowning thy forehead.'

Be not ashamed, my brothers, to stand before the proud and the powerful
With your white robe of simpleness.

Let your crown be of humility, your freedom the freedom of the soul.
Build God's throne daily upon the ample barenness of your poverty
And know that what is huge is not great and pride is not everlasting.

4. Sadhana

4.1. The Problem of Evil

The question why there is evil in existence is the same as why there is imperfection, or, in other words, why there is creation at all. We must take it for granted that it could not be otherwise; that creation must be imperfect, must be gradual, and that it is futile to ask the question, why are we?

But this is the real question we ought to ask: Is this imperfection the final truth, is evil absolute and ultimate? The river has its boundaries, its banks, but is a river all banks? Or are the banks the final facts about the river? Do not these obstructions themselves give its water an onward motion? The towing rope binds a boat, but is the bondage its meaning? Does it not at the same time draw the boat forward?

The current of the world has its boundaries, otherwise it could have no existence, but its purpose is not shown in the boundaries which restrain it, but in its movement, which is towards perfection. The wonder is not that there should be obstacles and sufferings in this world, but that there should be law and order, beauty and joy, goodness and love. The idea of God that man has in his being is the wonder of all wonders. He has felt in the depths of his life that what appears as imperfect is the manifestation of the perfect; just as a man who has an ear for music realizes the perfection of a song, while in fact he is only listening to a succession of notes. Man has found out the great paradox that what is limited is not imprisoned within its limits; it is ever moving, and therewith shedding its finitude every moment. In fact, imperfection is not a negation of perfectness; finitude is not contradictory to infinity: they are but completeness manifested in parts, infinity revealed within bounds.

Pain, which is the feeling of our finiteness, is not a fixture in our life. It is not an end in itself, as joy is. To meet with it is to know that it has no part in the true permanence of creation. It is what error is in our intellectual life. To go through the history of the development of science is to go through the maze of mistakes it made current at different times. Yet no one really believes that science is the one perfect mode of disseminating mistakes. The progressive ascertainment of truth is the important thing to remember in the history of science, not its innumerable mistakes. Error, by its nature, cannot be stationary; it cannot remain

with truth; like a tramp, it must quit its lodging as soon as it fails to pay its score to the full.

As in intellectual error, so in evil of any other form, its essence is impermanence, for it cannot accord with the whole. Every moment it is being corrected by the totality of things and keeps changing its aspect. We exaggerate its importance by imagining it as at a standstill. Could we collect the statistics of the immense amount of death and putrefaction happening every moment in this earth, they would appeal us. But evil is ever moving; with all its incalculable immensity it does not effectually clog the current of our life; and we find that the earth, water, and air remain sweet and pure for living beings. All such statistics consist of our attempts to represent statically what is in motion; and in the process things assume a weight in our mind which they have not in reality. For this reason a man, who by his profession is concerned with any particular aspect of life, is apt to magnify its proportions; in laying undue stress upon facts he loses his hold upon truth. A detective may have the opportunity of studying crimes in detail, but he loses his sense of their relative place in the whole social economy. When science collects facts to illustrate the struggle for existence that is going on in the animal kingdom, it raises a picture in our minds of 'nature red in tooth and claw.' But in these mental pictures we give fixity to colours and forms which are really evanescent. It is like calculating the weight of the air on each square inch of our body to prove that it must be crushingly heavy for us. With every weight, however, there is an adjustment, and we lightly bear our burden. With the struggle for existence in nature there is reciprocity.

There is the love for children and for comrades; there is the sacrifice of self, which springs from love; and this love is the positive element in life.

If we kept the search-light of our observation turned upon the fact of death, the world would appear to us like a huge charnel-house; but in the world of life the thought of death has, we find, the least possible hold upon our minds. Not because it is the least apparent, but because it is the negative aspect of life; just as, in spite of the fact that we shut our eyelids ever) second, it is the openings of the eyes that count. Life as a whole never takes death seriously. It laughs, dances and plays, it builds, hoards and loves in death's face. Only when we detach one individual fact of death do we see its blankness and become dismayed. We lose sight of the wholeness of a life of which death is part. It is like looking at a piece of cloth through a microscope. It appears like a net; we gaze at the big holes and shiver in imagination. But the truth is, death is not the ultimate reality. It looks black, as the sky looks blue; but it does not blacken existence, just as the sky does not leave its stain upon the wings of the bird.

When we watch a child trying to walk, we see its countless failures; its successes are but few. If we had to limit our observation within a narrow space of time, the sight would be cruel. But we find that in spite of its repeated failures there is an impetus of joy in the child which sustains it in its seemingly impossible task. We see it does not think of its falls so much as of its power to keep its balance though for only a moment.

Like these accidents in a child's attempts to walk, we meet with sufferings in various forms in our life every day, showing the imperfections in our knowledge and our available power, and in the application of our will. But if these revealed our weakness to us only, we should die of utter depression. When we select for observation a limited area of our activities, our individual failures and miseries loom large in our minds; but our life leads us instinctively to take a wider view. It gives us an ideal of perfection which ever carries us beyond our present limitations. Within us we have a hope which always walks in front of our present narrow experience; it is the undying faith in the infinite in us; it will never accept any of our disabilities as a permanent fact; it sets no limit to its own scope; it dares to assert that man has oneness with God; and its wild dreams become true every day.

We see the truth when we set our mind towards the infinite. The ideal of truth is not in the narrow present, not in our immediate sensations, but in the consciousness of the whole which gives us a taste of what we should have in what we do have. Consciously or unconsciously we have in our life this feeling of Truth which is ever larger than its appearance; for our life is facing the infinite, and it is in movement. Its aspiration is therefore infinitely more than its achievement, and as it goes on it finds that no realization of truth ever leaves it stranded on the desert of finality, but carries it to a region beyond. Evil cannot altogether arrest the course of life on the highway and rob it of its possessions. For the evil has to pass on, it has to grow into good; it cannot stand and give battle to the All. If the least evil could stop anywhere indefinitely, it would sink deep and cut into the very roots of existence. As it is, man does not really believe in evil, just as he cannot believe that violin strings have been purposely made to create the exquisite torture of discordant notes, though by the aid of statistics it can be mathematically proved that the probability of discord is far greater than that of harmony, and for one who can play the violin there are thousands who cannot. The potentiality of perfection outweighs actual contradictions. No doubt there have been people who asserted existence to be an absolute evil, but man can never take them seriously. Their pessimism is a mere pose, either intellectual or sentimental, but life itself is optimistic: it wants to go on. Pessimism is a form of mental dipsomania, it disdains healthy nourishment, indulges in the strong

drink of denunciation, and creates an artificial dejection which thirsts for a stronger draught. If existence were an evil, it would wait for no philosopher to prove it. It is like convicting a man of suicide, while all the time he stands before you in the flesh. Existence itself is here to prove that it cannot be an evil.

An imperfection which is not all imperfection, but which has perfection for its ideal, must go through a perpetual realization. Thus, it is the function of our intellect to realize the truth through untruths, and knowledge is nothing but the continually burning up of error to set free the light of truth. Our will, our character, has to attain perfection by continually overcoming evils, either inside or outside us, or both; our physical life is consuming bodily materials every moment to maintain the life fire; and our moral life too has its fuel to burn. This life process is going on—we know it, we have felt it; and we have a faith which no individual instances to the contrary can shake, that the direction of humanity is from evil to good. For we feel that good is the positive element in man's nature, and in every age and every clime what man values most is his ideal of goodness. We have known the good, we have loved it, and we have paid our highest reverence to men who have shown in their lives what goodness is.

The question will be asked, what is goodness; what does our moral nature mean? My answer is, that when a man begins to have an extended vision of his true self, when he realizes that he is much more than at present he seems to be, he begins to get conscious of his moral nature. Then he grows aware of that which he is yet to be, and the state not yet experienced by him becomes more real than that under his direct experience. Necessarily, his perspective of life changes, and his will takes the place of his wishes. For will is the supreme wish of the larger life, the life whose greater portion is out of our present reach, whose objects are not for the most part before our sight. Then comes the conflict of our lesser man with our greater man, of our wishes with our will, of the desire for things affecting our senses with the purpose that is within our heart. Then we begin to distinguish between what we immediately desire and what is good. For good is that which is desirable for our greater self. Thus the sense of goodness comes out of a truer view of our life, which is the connected view of the wholeness of the field of life, and which takes into account not only what is present before us but what is not, and perhaps never humanly can be. Man, who is provident, feels for that life of his which is not yet existent, feels much more for that than for the life that is with him; therefore he is ready to sacrifice his present inclination for the unrealized future. In this he becomes great, for he realizes truth. Even to be efficiently selfish a man has to recognize this truth, and has to curb his immediate impulses—in other words, has to be moral. For our moral faculty is the faculty by which we know that life is not made up of

fragments, purposeless and discontinuous. This moral sense of man not only gives him the power to see that the self has a continuity in time, but it also enables him to see that he is not true when he is only restricted to his own self. He is more in truth than he is in fact. He truly belongs to individuals who are not included in his own individuality, and whom he is never even likely to know. As he has a feeling for his future self which is outside his present consciousness, so he has a feeling for his greater self which is outside the limits of his personality. There is no man who has not this feeling to some extent, who has never sacrificed his selfish desire for the sake of some other person, who has never felt a pleasure in undergoing some loss or trouble because it pleased somebody else. It is a truth that man is not a detached being that he has a universal aspect; and when he recognizes this, he becomes great. Even the most evilly-disposed selfishness has to recognize this when he seeks the power to do evil; for it cannot ignore truth and yet be strong. So in order to claim the aid of truth, selfishness has to be unselfish to some extent. A band of robbers must be moral in order to hold together as a band; they may rob the whole world but not each other. To make an immoral intention successful, some of its weapons must be moral. In fact, very often it is our very moral strength which gives us most effectively the power to do evil, to exploit other individuals for our own benefit, to rob other people of their just rights. The life of an animal is unmoral, for it is aware only of an immediate present; the life of a man can be immoral, but that only means that it must have a moral basis. What is immoral is imperfectly moral just as what is false is true to a small extent, or it cannot even be false. Not to see is to be blind, but to see wrongly is to see only in an imperfect manner. Man's selfishness is a beginning to see some connection, some purpose in life; and to act in accordance with its dictates requires self-restraint and regulation of conduct. A selfish man willingly undergoes troubles for the sake of the self, he suffers hardship and privation without a murmur, simply because he knows that what is pain and trouble, looked at from the point of view of a short space of time, and is just the opposite when seen in a larger perspective. Thus what is a loss to the smaller man is a gain to the greater, and vice versa.

To the man who lives for an idea, for his country for the good of humanity, life has an extended meaning, and to that extent pain becomes important to him. To live the life of goodness is to live the life of all. Pleasure is for one's own self, but goodness is concerned with the happiness of all humanity and for all time. From the point of view of the good, pleasure and pain appear in a different meaning; so much so, that pleasure may be shunned, and pain be courted in its place, and death itself be made welcome as giving a higher value to life. From these higher standpoints of a man's life, the standpoints of the good, pleasure

and pain lose their absolute value. Martyrs prove it in history, and we prove it every day in our life in our little martyrdoms. When we take a pitchersful of water from the sea it has its weight, but when we take a dip into the sea itself a thousand pitchersful of water flow above our head, and we do not feel their weight. We have to carry the pitcher of self with our strength; and so, while on the plane of selfishness pleasure and pain have their full weight, on the moral plane they are so much lightened that the man who has reached it appears to us almost super-human in his patience under crushing trials, and his forbearance in the face of malignant persecution.

To live in perfect goodness is to realize one's life in the infinite. This is the most comprehensive view of life which we can have by our inherent power of the moral vision of the wholeness of life. And the teaching of Buddha is to cultivate this moral power to the highest extent, to know that our field of activities is not bound to the plane of our narrow self. This is the vision of the heavenly kingdom of Christ. When we attain to that universal life, which is the moral life, we become free from bonds of pleasure and pain, and the place vacated by our self becomes filled with an unspeakable joy which springs from measureless love. In this state the soul's activity is all the more heightened, only its motive power is not from desires, but in its own joy. This is the Karma-yoga of the Gita, the way to become one with the infinite activity by the exercise of the activity of disinterested goodness.

When Buddha meditated upon the way of releasing mankind from the grip of misery he came to this truth: that when man attains his highest end by merging the individual in the universal, he becomes free from the thralldom of pain. Let us consider this point more fully.

A student of mine once related to me his adventure in a storm, and complained that all the time he was troubled with the feeling that this great commotion in nature behaved to him as if he were no more than a mere handful of dust. That he was a distinct personality with a will of his own had not the least influence upon what was happening.

I said, 'If consideration for our individuality could sway nature from her path, then it would be the individuals who would suffer most.'

But he persisted in his doubt, saying that there was this fact which could not be ignored—the feeling that I am. The 'I' in us seeks for a relation which is individual to it.

I replied that the relation of the 'I' is with something which is 'not-I.' So we must have a medium which is common to both, and we must be absolutely certain that it is the same to the 'I' as it is to the 'not – I'.

This is what needs repeating here. We have to keep in mind that our individuality by its nature is impelled to seek for the universal. Our body can only die if it tries to eat its own substance, and our eye loses the meaning of its function if it can only see itself.

Just as we find that the stronger the imagination the less is it merely imaginary and the more is it in harmony with truth, so we see the more vigorous our individuality the more does it widen towards the universal. For the greatness of a personality is not in itself but in its content, which is universal, just as the depth of a lake is judged not by the size of its cavity but by the depth of its water.

So, if it is a truth that the yearning of our nature is for reality, and that our personality cannot be happy with a fantastic universe of its own creation, then it is clearly best for it that our will can only deal with things by following their law, and cannot do with them just as it pleases. This unyielding sureness of reality sometimes crosses our will, and very often leads us to disaster, just as the firmness of the earth invariably hurts the falling child who is learning to walk. Nevertheless it is the same firmness that hurts him which makes his walking possible. Once, while passing under a bridge, the mast of my boat got stuck in one of its girders. If only for a moment the mast would have bent an inch or two, or the bridge raised its back like a yawning cat, or the river given in, it would have been all right with me. But they took no notice of my helplessness. That is the very reason why I could make use of the river, and sail upon it with the help of the mast, and that is why, when its current was inconvenient, I could rely upon the bridge. Things are what they are, and we have to know them if we would deal with them, and knowledge of them is possible because our wish is not their law. This knowledge is a joy to us, for the knowledge is one of the channels of our relation with the things outside us; it is making them our own, and thus widening the limit of our self.

At every step we have to take into account others than ourselves. For only in death are we alone. A poet is a true poet when he can make his personal idea joyful to all men, which he could not do if he had not a medium common to all his audience. This common language has its own law which the poet must discover and follow, by doing which he becomes true and attains poetical immortality.

We see then that man's individuality is not his highest truth; there is that in him which is universal. If he were made to live in a world where his own self was the only factor to consider, then that would be the worst prison imaginable to him, for man's deepest joy is in growing greater and greater by more and more union with the all. This, as we have seen, would be an impossibility if there were no

law common to all. Only by discovering the law and following it, do we become great, do we realize the universal; while, so long as our individual desires are at conflict with the universal law, we suffer pain and are futile.

There was a time when we prayed for special concessions, we expected that the laws of nature should be held in abeyance for our own convenience. But now we know better. We know that law cannot be set aside, and in this knowledge we have become strong. For this law is not something apart from us; it is our own. The universal power which is manifested in the universal law is one with our own power. It will thwart us where we are small, where we are against the current of things; but it will help us where we are great, where we are in unison with the all. Thus, through the help of science, as we come to know more of the laws of nature, we gain in power; we tend to attain a universal body. Our organ of sight, our organ of locomotion, our physical strength becomes world-wide; steam and electricity become our nerve and muscle. Thus we find that, just as throughout our bodily organisation there is a principle of relation by virtue of which we can call the entire body our own, and can use it as such, so all through the universe there is that principle of uninterrupted relation by virtue of which we can call the whole world our extended body and use it accordingly. And in this age of science it is our endeavour fully to establish our claim to our world-self. We know all our poverty and sufferings are owing to our inability to realize this legitimate claim of ours. Really, there is no limit to our powers, for we are not outside the universal power which is the expression of universal law. We are on our way, to overcome disease and death, to conquer pain and poverty; for through scientific knowledge we are ever on our way to realize the universal in its physical aspect. And as we make progress we find that pain, disease, and poverty of power are not absolute, but that it is only the want of adjustment of our individual self to our universal self which gives rise to them.

It is the same with our spiritual life. When the individual man in us chafes against the lawful rule of the universal man we become morally small, and we must suffer. In such a condition our successes are our greatest failures, and the very fulfilment of our desires leaves us poorer. We bank after special gains for ourselves, we want to enjoy privileges which none else can share with us. But everything that is absolutely special must keep up a perpetual warfare with what is general. In such a state of civil war man always lives behind barricades, and in any civilization which is selfish our homes are not real homes, but artificial barriers around us. Yet we complain that we are not happy, as if there were something inherent in the nature of things to make us miserable. The universal spirit is waiting to crown us with happiness, but our individual spirit would not accept it. It is our life of the self that causes conflicts and complications

everywhere, upsets the normal balance of society and gives rise to miseries of all kinds. It brings things to such a pass that to maintain order we have to create artificial coercions and organized forms of tyranny, and tolerate infernal institutions in our midst, whereby at every moment humanity is humiliated.

We have seen that in order to be powerful we have to submit to the laws of the universal forces, and to realize in practice that they are our own. So, in order to be happy, we have to submit our individual will to the sovereignty of the universal will, and to feel in truth that it is our own will. When we reach that state wherein the adjustment of the finite in us to the infinite is made perfect, then pain itself becomes a valuable asset. It becomes a measuring rod with which to gauge the true value of our joy.

The most important lesson that man can learn from his life is not that there is pain in this world, but that it depends upon him to turn it into good account, that it is possible for him to transmute it into joy. That lesson has not been lost altogether to us, and there is no man living who would willingly be deprived of his right to suffer pain, for that is his right to be a man. One day the wife of a poor labourer complained bitterly to me that her eldest boy was going to be sent away to a rich relative's house for part of the year. It was the implied kind intention of trying to relieve her of her trouble that gave her the shock, for a mother's trouble is a mother's own by her inalienable right of love, and she was not going to surrender it to any dictates of expediency. Man's freedom is never in being saved troubles, but it is the freedom to take trouble for his own good, to make the trouble an element in his joy. It can be made so only when we realize that our individual self is not the highest meaning of our being, that in us we have the world-man who is immortal, who is not afraid of death or sufferings, and who looks upon pain as only the other side of joy. He who has realized this knows that it is pain which is our true wealth as imperfect beings, and has made us great and worthy to take our seat with the perfect. He knows that we are not beggars; that it is the hard coin which must be paid for everything valuable in this life, for our power, our wisdom, our love; that in pain is symbolised the infinite possibility of perfection, the eternal unfolding of joy; and the man who loses all pleasure in accepting pain sinks down and down to the lowest depth of penury and degradation. It is only when we invoke the aid of pain for our self-gratification that she becomes evil and takes her vengeance for the insult done to her by hurling us into misery. For she is the vestal virgin consecrated to the service of the immortal perfection, and when she takes her true place before the altar of the infinite she casts off her dark veil and bares her face to the beholder as a revelation of supreme joy.

4.2. The Problem of Self

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At one pole of my being I am one with stocks and stones. There I have to acknowledge the rule of universal law. That is where the foundation of my existence lies, deep down below. Its strength lies in its being held firm in the clasp of the comprehensive world, and in the fullness of its community with all things.

But at the other pole of my being I am separate from all. There I have broken through the cordon of equality and stand alone as an individual. I am absolutely unique, I am I, I am incomparable. The whole weight of the universe cannot crush out this individuality of mine. I maintain it in spite of the tremendous gravitation of all things. It is small in appearance but great in reality. For it holds its own against the forces that would rob it of its distinction and make it one with the dust.

This is the superstructure of the self which rises from the indeterminate depth and darkness of its foundation into the open, proud of its isolation, proud of having given shape to a single individual idea of the architect's which has no duplicate in the whole universe. If this individuality be demolished then though no material be lost, not an atom destroyed the creative joy which was crystallised therein is gone. We are absolutely bankrupt if we are deprived of this speciality, this individuality, which is the only thing we can call our own; and which, if lost, is also a loss to the whole world. It is most valuable because it is not universal. And therefore only through it can we gain the universe more truly than if we were lying within its breast unconscious of our distinctiveness. The universal is ever seeking its consummation in the unique. And the desire we have to keep our uniqueness intact is really the desire of the universe acting in us. It is our joy of the infinite in us that gives us our joy in ourselves.

That this separateness of self is considered by man as his most precious possession is proved by the sufferings he undergoes and the sins he commits for its sake. But the consciousness of separation has come from the eating of the fruit of knowledge. It has led man to shame and crime and death; yet it is dearer to him than any paradise where the self lies, securely slumbering in perfect

innocence in the womb of mother nature.

It is a constant striving and suffering for us to maintain the separateness of this self of ours. And in fact it is this suffering which measures its value. One side of the value is sacrifice, which represents how much the cost has been. The other side of it is the attainment, which represents how much has been gained. If the self meant nothing to us but pain and sacrifice, it could have no value for us, and on no account would we willingly undergo such sacrifice. In such case there could be no doubt at all that the highest object of humanity would be the annihilation of self.

But if there is a corresponding gain, if it does not end in a void but in a fullness, then it is clear that its negative qualities, its very sufferings and sacrifices, make it all the more precious. That it is so has been proved by those who have realized the positive significance of self, and have accepted its responsibilities with eagerness and undergone sacrifices without flinching.

With the foregoing introduction it will be easy for me to answer the question once asked by one of my audience as to whether the annihilation of self was not been held by India as the supreme goal of humanity?

In the first place we must keep in mind the fact that man is never literal in the expression of his ideas, except in matters most trivial. Very often man's words are not a language at all, but merely a local gesture of the dumb. They may indicate, but do not express his thoughts. The more vital his thoughts the more have his words to be explained by the context of his life. Those who seek to know his meaning by the aid of the dictionary only technically reach the house, for they are stopped by the outside wall and find no entrance to the hall. This is the reason why the teachings of our greater prophets give rise to endless disputations when we try to understand them by following their words and not by realising them in our own lives. The men who are cursed with the gift of the literal mind are the unfortunate ones who are always busy with the nets and neglect the fishing.

It is not only in Buddhism and the Indian religion but in Christianity too, that the ideal of selflessness is preached with all fervour. In the last the symbol of death has been used for expressing the idea of man's deliverance from the life which is not true. This is the same as Nirvana, the symbol of the extinction of the lamp.

In the typical thought of India it is held that the true deliverance of man is the deliverance from *avidya*, from ignorance. It is not in destroying anything that is positive and real, for that cannot be possible, but that which is negative, which obstruct our vision of truth. When this obstruction, which is ignorance, is

removed, then only is the eye lid drawn up which is no loss to the eye.

It is our ignorance which makes us think that our self, as self, is real, that it has its complete meaning in itself. When we take that wrong view of self then we try to live in such a manner as to make self the ultimate object of our life. Then are we doomed to disappointment like the man who tries to reach his destination by firmly clutching the dust of the road. Our self has no means of holding us, for its own nature is to pass on; and by clinging to this thread of self which is passing through the loom of life we cannot make it serve the purpose of the cloth into which it is being woven. When a man, with elaborate care, arranges for an enjoyment of the self, he lights a fire but has no dough to make his bread with; the fire flares up and consumes itself to extinction, like an unnatural beast that eats its own progeny and dies.

In an unknown language the words are tyrannically prominent. They stop us but say nothing. To be rescued from this fetter of words we must rid ourselves of the *avidya*, our ignorance, and then our mind will find its freedom in the inner idea. But it could be foolish to say that our ignorance of the language can be dispelled only by the destruction of the words. No, when the perfect knowledge comes, every word remains in its place, only they do not bind us to themselves, but let us pass through them and lead us to the idea which is emancipation.

Thus it is only *avidya* which makes the self our fetter by making us think that it is an end in itself, and by preventing our seeing that it contains the idea that transcends its limits. That is why the wise man comes and says, ‘Set yourselves free from the *avidya*’, know your true soul and be saved from the grasp of the self which imprisons you.

We gain our freedom when we attain our truest nature. The man who is an artist finds his artistic freedom when he finds his ideal of art. Then is he freed from laborious attempts at imitation, from the goadings of popular approbation. It is the function of religion not to destroy our nature but to fulfil it.

The Sanskrit word dharma which is usually translated into English as religion has a deeper meaning in our language. Dharma is the innermost nature, the essence, the implicit truth, of all things. Dharma is the ultimate purpose that is working in our self. When any wrong is done we say that dharma is violated, meaning that the lie has been given to our true nature.

But this dharma, which is the truth in us, is not apparent, because it is inherent. So much so, that it has been held that sinfulness is the nature of man, and only by the special grace of God can a particular person be saved. This is like saying that the nature of the seed is to remain enfolded within its shell, and it is only by some special miracle that it can be grown into a tree. But do we not know that

the appearance of the seed contradicts its true nature. When you submit it to chemical analysis you may find in it carbon and protein and a good many other things, but not the idea of a branching tree. Only when the tree begins to take shape do you come to see its dharma, and then you can affirm without doubt that the seed which has been wasted and allowed to rot in the ground has been thwarted in its dharma, in the fulfilment of its true nature. In the history of humanity we have known the living seed in us to sprout. We have seen the great purpose in us taking shape in the lives of our greatest men, and have felt certain that though there are numerous individual lives that seem ineffectual, still it is not their dharma to remain barren; but it is for them to burst their cover and transform themselves into a vigorous spiritual shoot, growing up into the air and light, and branching out in all directions.

The freedom of the seed is in the attainment of its dharma, its nature and destiny of becoming a tree; it is the non-accomplishment which is its prison. The sacrifice by which a thing attains its fulfilment is not a sacrifice which ends in death; it is the casting-off of bonds which wins freedom.

When we know the highest ideal of freedom which a man has, we know his dharma, the essence of his nature, the real meaning of his self. At first sight it seems that man counts that as freedom by which he gets unbounded opportunities of self-gratification and self-aggrandizement. But surely this is not borne out by history. Our revelatory men have always been those who have lived the life of self-sacrifice. The higher nature in man always seeks for something which transcends itself and yet is its deepest truth; which claims all its sacrifice, yet makes this sacrifice its own recompense. This is man's dharma, man's religion, and man's self is the vessel which is to carry this sacrifice to the altar.

We can look at our self in its two different aspects. The self which displays itself, and the self which transcends itself and thereby reveals its own meaning. To display itself it tries to be big, to stand upon the pedestal of its accumulations, and to retain everything to itself. To reveal itself it gives up everything it has, thus becoming perfect like a flower that has blossomed out from the bud, pouring from its chalice of beauty all its sweetness.

The lamp contains its oil, which it holds securely in its close grasp and guards from the least loss. Thus is it separate from all other objects around it and is miserly. But when lighted it finds its meaning at once; its relation with all things far and near is established, and it freely sacrifices its fund of oil to feed the flame.

Such a lamp is our self. So long as it hoards its possessions it keeps itself dark, its conduct contradicts its true purpose. When it finds illumination it forgets

itself in a moment, holds the light high, and serves it with everything it has; for therein is its revelation. This revelation is the freedom which Buddha preached. He asked the lamp to give up its oil. But purposeless giving up is a still darker poverty which he never could have meant. The lamp must give up its oil to the light and thus set free the purpose it has in its hoarding. This is emancipation. The path Buddha pointed out was not merely the practice of self-abnegation, but the widening of love. And therein lies the true meaning of Buddha's preaching.

When we find that the state of Nirvana preached by Buddha is through love, then we know for certain that Nirvana is the highest culmination of love. For love is an end unto itself. Everything else raises the question 'Why?' in our mind, and we require a reason for it. But when we say, 'I love,' then there is no room for the 'why'; it is the final answer in itself.

Doubtless, even selfishness impels one to give away. But the selfish man does it on compulsion. That is like plucking fruit when it is unripe; you have to tear it from the tree and bruise the branch. But when a man loves, giving becomes a matter of joy to him, like the tree's surrender of the ripe fruit. All our belongings assume a weight by the ceaseless gravitation of our selfish desires; we cannot easily cast them away from us. They seem to belong to our very nature, to stick to us as a second skin, and we bleed as we detach them. But when we are possessed by love, its force acts in the opposite direction. The things that closely adhered to us lose their adhesion and weight, and we find that they are not of us. Far from being a loss to give them away, we find in that the fulfilment of our nature.

Thus we find in perfect love the freedom of our self. That only which is done for love is done freely, however much pain it may cause. Therefore working for love is freedom in action. This is the meaning of the teaching of disinterested work in the Gita.

The Gita says action we must have, for only in action do we manifest our nature. But this manifestation is not perfect so long as our action is not free. In fact, our nature is obscured by work done by the compulsion of want or fear. The mother reveals herself in the service of her children, so our true freedom is not the freedom from action but freedom in action, which can only be attained in the work of love.

God's manifestation is in his work of creation, and it is said in the Upanishad, Knowledge, power, and action are of his nature they are not imposed upon him from outside. Therefore his work is his freedom, and in his creation he realizes himself. The same thing is said elsewhere in other words: From joy does spring all this creation, by joy is it maintained, towards joy does it-progress, and into

joy does it enter.' This means that God's creation has not its source in any necessity; it comes from his fullness of joy; it is his love that creates, therefore in creation is his own revealment.

The artist who has a joy in the fullness of his artistic idea objectifies it and thus gains it more fully by holding it afar. It is joy which detaches ourselves from us, and then gives it form in creations of love in order to make it more perfectly our own. Hence there must be this separation, not a separation of repulsion but a separation of love. Repulsion has only the one element, the element of severance. But love has two, the element of severance, which is only an appearance, and the element of union which is the ultimate truth. Just as when the father tosses his child up from his arms it has the appearance of rejection but its truth is quite the reverse.

So we must know that the meaning of our self is not to be found in its separateness from God and others, but in the ceaseless realization of yoga, of union; not on the side of the canvas where it is blank, but on the side where the picture is being painted.

This is the reason why the separateness of our self has been described by our philosophers as *maya*, as an illusion, because it has no intrinsic reality of its own. It looks perilous; it raises its isolation to a giddy height and casts a black shadow upon the fair face of existence; from the outside it has an aspect of a sudden disruption, rebellious and destructive; it is proud, domineering and wayward, it is ready to rob the world of all its wealth to gratify its craving of a moment; to pluck with a reckless, cruel hand all the plumes from the divine bird of beauty to deck its ugliness for a day; indeed man's legend has it that it bears the black mark of disobedience stamped on its forehead for ever; but still all this is *maya*, envelopment of *avidya* it is the mist, it is not the sun; it is the black smoke that presages the fire of love.

Imagine some savage who, in his ignorance, thinks that it is the paper of the banknote that has the magic, by virtue of which the possessor of it gets all he wants. He piles up the papers, hides them, handles them in all sorts of absurd ways, and then at last, wearied by his efforts, comes to the sad conclusion that they are absolutely worthless, only fit to be thrown into the fire. But the wise man knows that the paper of the banknote is all *maya*, and until it is given up to the bank it is futile. It is only *avidya*, our ignorance, that makes us believe that the separateness of our self like the paper of the banknote is precious in itself, and by acting on this belief our self is rendered valueless. It is only when the *avidya* is removed that this very self comes to us with a wealth which is priceless. For He manifests Himself in deathless forms which His joy assumes.

These forms are separate from Him, and the value that these forms have is only what his joy has imparted to them. When we transfer back these forms into that original joy, which is love, then we cash them in the bank and we find their truth.

When pure necessity drives man to his work it takes an accidental and contingent character, it becomes a mere makeshift arrangement; it is deserted and left in ruins when necessity changes its course. But when his work is the outcome of joy, the forms that it takes have the elements of immortality. The immortal in man imparts to it its own quality of permanence.

Our self, as a form of God's joy, is deathless. For his joy is *amritam*, eternal. This it is in us which makes us skeptical of death, even when the fact of death cannot be doubted. In reconciliation of this contradiction in us we come to the truth that in the dualism of death and life there is a harmony. We know that the life of a soul, which is finite in its expression and infinite in its principle, must go through the portals of death in its journey to realize the infinite. It is death which is monistic, it has no life in it. But life is dualistic; it has an appearance as well as truth; and death is that appearance, that *maya*, which is an inseparable companion to life. Our self to live must go through a continual change and growth of form, which may be termed a continual death and a continual life going on at the same time. It is really courting death when we refuse to accept death; when we wish to give the form of the self some fixed changelessness; when the self feels no impulse which urges it to grow out of itself; when it treats its limits as final and acts accordingly. Then comes our teacher's call to die to this death; not a call to annihilation but so eternal life. It is the extinction of the lamp in the morning light; not the abolition of the sun. It is really asking us consciously to give effect to the innermost wish that we have in the depths of our nature.

We have a dual set of desires in our being, which it should be our endeavour to bring into a harmony. In the region of our physical nature we have one set of which we are conscious always. We wish to enjoy our food and drink, we banker after bodily pleasure and comfort. These desires are self-centred; they are solely concerned with their respective impulses. The wishes of our palate often run counter to what our stomach can allow.

But we have another set, which is the desire of our physical system as a whole, of which we are usually unconscious. It is the wish for health. This is always doing its work, mending and repairing, making new adjustments in cases of accident, and skilfully restoring the balance wherever disturbed. It has no concern with the fulfilment of our immediate bodily desires, but it goes beyond

the present time. It is the principle of our physical wholeness, it links our life with its past and its future and maintains the unity of its parts. He who is wise knows it, and makes his other physical wishes harmonise with it.

We have a greater body which is the social body. Society is an organism, of which we as parts have our individual wishes. We want our own pleasure and licence. We want to pay less and gain more than anybody else. This causes scramblings and fights. But there is that other wish in us which does its work in the depths of the social being. It is the wish for the welfare of the society. It transcends the limits of the present and the personal. It is on the side of the infinite.

He who is wise tries to harmonise the wishes that seek for self-gratification with the wish for the social good, and only thus can be realize his higher self. In its finite aspect the self is conscious of its separateness, and there it is ruthless in its attempt to have more distinction than all others. But in its infinite aspect its wish is to gain that harmony which leads to its perfection and not its mere aggrandizement.

The emancipation of our physical nature is in attaining health, of our social being in attaining goodness, and of our self in attaining love. This last is what Buddha describes as extinction—the extinction of selfishness. This is the function of love, and it does not lead to darkness but to illumination. This is the attainment of bodhi, or the true awakening; it is the revealing in us of the infinite joy by the light of love.

The passage of our self is through its selfhood, which is independent, to its attainment of soul, which is harmonious. This harmony can never be reached through compulsion. So our will, in the history of its growth, must come through independence and rebellion to the ultimate completion. We must have the possibility of the negative form of freedom, which is licence, before we can attain the positive freedom, which is love.

This negative freedom, the freedom of self-will, can turn its back upon its highest realization, but it cannot cut itself away from it altogether, for then it will lose its own meaning. Our self-will has freedom up to a certain extent; it can know what it is to break away from the path, but it cannot continue in that direction indefinitely. For we are finite on our negative side. We must come to an end in our evil doing, in our career of discord. For evil is not infinite, and discord cannot be an end in itself. Our will has freedom in order that it may find out that its true course is towards goodness and love. For goodness and love are infinite, and only in the infinite is the perfect realization of freedom possible. So our will can be free not towards the limitations of our self, not where it is *maya*

and negation, but towards the unlimited, where is truth and love. Our freedom cannot go against its own principle of freedom and yet be free; it cannot commit suicide and yet live. We cannot say that we should have infinite freedom to fetter ourselves, for the fettering ends the freedom.

So in the freedom of our will, we have the same dualism of appearance and truth—our self-will is only the appearance of freedom and love is the truth. When we try to make this appearance independent of truth, then our attempt brings misery and proves its own futility in the end. Everything has this dualism of *maya* and *satyam*, appearance and truth. Words are *maya* where they are merely sounds and finite, they are *satyam* where they are ideas and infinite. Our self is *maya* where it is merely individual and finite, where it considers its separateness as absolute; it is *satyam* where it recognizes its essence in the universal and infinite, in the supreme self, in *paramatman*. This is what Christ means when he says, ‘Before Abraham was I am.’ This is the eternal I am that speaks through the I am that is in me. The individual I am attains its perfect end when it realizes its freedom of harmony in the infinite I am. Then is its *mukti*, its deliverance from the thraldom of *maya*, of appearance which springs from *avidya*, from ignorance; its emancipation in *cantam civam advaitam*, in the perfect repose in truth, in the perfect activity in goodness, and in the perfect union in love.

Not only in our self but also in nature is there this separateness from God, which has been described as *maya* by our philosophers, because the separateness does not exist by itself, it does not limit God’s infinity from outside. It is his own will that has imposed limits to itself, just as the chess-player restricts his will with regard to the moving of the chessmen. The player willingly enters into definite relations with each particular piece and realizes the joy of his power by these very restrictions. It is not that he cannot move the chessmen just as he pleases, but if he does so then there can be no play. If God assumes his role of omnipotence, then his creation is at an end and his power loses all its meaning. For power to be a power must act within limits. God’s water must be water, his earth can never be other than earth. The law that has made them water and earth is his own law by which he has separated the play from the player, for therein the joy of the player consists.

As by the limits of law nature is separated from God, so it is the limits of its egoism which separates the self from him. He has willingly set limits to his will, and has given us mastery over the little world of our own. It is like a father’s settling upon his son some allowance within the limit of which he is free to do what he likes. Though it remains a portion of the father’s own property, yet he

frees it from the operation of his own will. The reason of it is that the will, which is love's will and therefore free, can have its joy only in a union with another free will. The tyrant who must have slaves looks upon them as instruments of his purpose. It is the consciousness of his own necessity which makes him crush the will out of them, to make his self-interest absolutely secure. This self-interest cannot brook the least freedom in others, because it is not itself free. The tyrant is really dependent on his slaves, and therefore he tries to make them completely useful by making them subservient to his own will. But a lover must have two wills for the realization of his love, because the consummation of love is in harmony, the harmony between freedom and freedom. So God's love from which our self has taken form has made it separate from God; and it is God's love which again establishes a reconciliation and unites God with our self through the separation. That is why our self has to go through endless renewals. For in its career of separateness it cannot go on forever. Separateness is the finitude where it finds its barriers to come back again and again to its infinite source. Our self has ceaselessly to cast off its age, repeatedly shed its limits in oblivion and death, in order to realize its immortal youth. Its personality must merge in the universal time after time, in fact pass through it every moment, ever to refresh its individual life. It must follow the eternal rhythm and touch the fundamental unity at every step, and thus maintain its separation balanced in beauty and strength.

The play of life and death we see everywhere—this transmutation of the old into the new. The day comes to us every morning, naked and white, fresh as a flower. But we know it is old. It is age itself. It is that very ancient day which took up the newborn earth in its arms, covered it with its white mantle of light, and sent it forth on its pilgrimage among the stars.

Yet its feet are untired and its eyes undimmed. It carries the golden amulet of ageless eternity, at whose touch all wrinkles vanish from the forehead of creation. In the very core of the world's heart stands immortal youth. Death and decay cast over its face momentary shadows and pass on; they leave no marks of their steps—and truth remains fresh and young.

This old, old day of our earth is born again and again every morning. It comes back to the original refrain of its music. If its march were the march of an infinite straight line, if it had not the awful pause of its plunge in the abysmal darkness and its repeated rebirth in the life of the endless beginning, then it would gradually soil and bury truth with its dust and spread ceaseless aching over the earth under its heavy tread. Then every moment would leave its load of weariness behind, and decrepitude would reign supreme on its throne of eternal

dirt.

But every morning the day is reborn among the newly—blossomed flowers with the same message retold and the same assurance renewed that death eternally dies, that the waves of turmoil are on the surface, and that the sea of tranquillity is fathomless. The curtain of night is drawn aside and truth emerges without a speck of dust on its garment, without a furrow of age on its lineaments.

We see that he who is before everything else is the same today. Every note of the song of creation comes fresh from his voice. The universe is not a mere echo, reverberating from sky to sky, like a homeless wanderer—the echo of an old song sung once for all in the dim beginning of things and then left orphaned. Every moment it comes from the heart of the master, it is breathed in his breath.

And that is the reason why it overspreads the sky like a thought taking shape in a poem, and never has to break into pieces with the burden of its own accumulating weight. Hence the surprise of endless variations, the advent of the unaccountable, the ceaseless procession of individuals, each of whom is without a parallel in creation. As at the first so to the last, the beginning never ends—the world is ever old and ever new.

It is for our self to know that it must be born anew every moment of its life. It must break through all illusions that encase it in their crust to make it appear old, burdening it with death.

For life is immortal youthfulness, and it hates age that tries to clog its movements—age that belongs not to life in truth, but follows it as the shadow follows the lamp.

Our life, like a river, strikes its banks not to find itself closed in by them, but to realize anew every moment that it has its unending opening towards the sea. It is as a poem that strikes its metre at every step not to be silenced by its rigid regulations, but to give expression every moment to the inner freedom of its harmony.

The boundary walls of our individuality thrust us back within our limits, on the one hand, and thus lead us, on the other, to the unlimited. Only when we try to make these limits infinite are we launched into an impossible contradiction and court miserable failure.

This is the cause which leads to the great revolutions in human history. Whenever the part, spurning the whole, tries to run a separate course of its own, the great pull of the all gives it a violent wrench, stops it suddenly, and brings it to the dust. Whenever the individual tries to dam the ever-flowing current of the world-force and imprison it within the area of his particular use, it brings on disaster. However powerful a king may be, he cannot raise his standard of

rebellion against the infinite source of strength, which is unity, and yet remain powerful.

It has been said, “By unrighteousness men prosper, gain what they desire, and triumph over their enemies, but at the end they are cut off at the root and suffer extinction.”

Our roots must go deep down into the universal if we would attain the greatness of personality.

It is the end of our self to seek that union. It must bend its head low in love and meekness and take its stand where great and small all meet. It has to gain by its loss and rise by its surrender. His games would be a horror to the child if he could not come back to his mother, and our pride of personality will be a curse to us if we cannot give it up in love. We must know that it is only the revelation of the Infinite which is endlessly new and eternally beautiful in us and gives the only meaning to our self.

4.3. Realization in Action

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It is only those who have known that joy expresses itself through law who have learnt to transcend the law. Not that the bonds of law have ceased to exist for them—but that the bonds have become to them as the form of freedom incarnate. The freed soul delights in accepting bonds, and does not seek to evade any of them, for in each does it feel the manifestation of an infinite energy whose joy is in creation.

As a matter of fact, where there are no bonds, where there is the madness of licence, the soul ceases to be free. There is its hurt; there is its separation from the infinite, its agony of sin. Wherever at the call of temptation the soul falls away from the bondage of law, then, like a child deprived of the support of its mother's arms, it cries out, Smite me not! 'Bind me,' it prays, 'oh, bind me in the bonds of thy law; bind me within and without; hold me tight; let me in the clasp of law be bound up together with thy joy; protect me by thy firm hold from the deadly laxity of sin.'

As some, under the idea that law is the opposite of joy, mistake intoxication for joy, so there are many in our country who imagine action to be opposed to freedom. They think that activity being in the material plane is a restriction of the free spirit of the soul. But we must remember that as joy expresses itself in law, so the soul finds its freedom in action. It is because joy cannot find expression in itself alone that it desires the law which is outside. Likewise it is because the soul cannot find freedom within itself that it wants external action. The soul of man is ever freeing itself from its own folds by its activity; had it been otherwise it could not have done any voluntary work.

The more man acts and makes actual what was latent in him, the nearer does he bring the distant Yet-to-be. In that actualisation man is ever making himself more and yet more distinct, and seeing himself clearly under newer and newer aspects in the midst of his varied activities, in the state, in society. This vision makes for freedom.

Freedom is not in darkness, nor in vagueness. There is no bondage so fearful as that of obscurity. It is to escape from this obscurity that the seed struggles to

sprout, the bud to blossom. It is to rid itself of this envelope of vagueness that the ideas in our mind are constantly seeking opportunities to take on outward form. In the same way our soul, in order to release itself from the mist of indistinctness and come out into the open, is continually creating for itself fresh fields of action, and is busy contriving new forms of activity, even such as are not needful for the purposes of its earthly life. And why? Because it wants freedom. It wants to see itself, to realize itself.

When man cuts down the pestilential jungle and makes unto himself a garden, the beauty that he thus sets free from within its enclosure of ugliness is the beauty of his own soul: without giving it this freedom outside, he cannot make it free within. When he implants law and order in the midst of the waywardness of society, the good which he sets free from the obstruction of the bad is the goodness of his own soul: without being thus made free outside it cannot find freedom within. Thus is man continually engaged in setting free in action his powers, his beauty, his goodness, his very soul. And the more he succeeds in so doing, the greater does he see himself to be, the broader becomes the field of his knowledge of self.

The Upanishad says: In the midst of activity alone wilt thou desire to live a hundred years. It is the saying of those who had amply tasted of the joy of the soul. Those who have fully realized the soul have never talked in mournful accents of the sorrowfulness of life or of the bondage of action. They are not like the weakling flower whose stem-hold is so light that it drops away before attaining fruition. They hold on to life with all their might and say, ‘never will we let go till the fruit is ripe.’ They desire in their joy to express themselves strenuously in their life and in their work. Pain and sorrow dismay them not, they are not bowed down to the dust by the weight of their own heart. With the erect head of the victorious hero they march through life seeing themselves and showing themselves in increasing resplendence of soul through both joys and sorrows. The joy of their life keeps step with the joy of that energy which is playing at building and breaking throughout the universe. The joy of the sunlight, the joy of the free air, mingling with the joy of their lives, makes one sweet harmony reign within and without. It is they who say, In the midst of activity alone wilt thou desire to live a hundred years.

This joy of life, this joy of work, in man is absolutely true. It is no use saying that it is a delusion of ours; that unless we cast it away we cannot enter upon the path of self-realization. It will never do the least good to attempt the realization of the infinite apart from the world of action.

It is not the truth that man is active on compulsion. If there is compulsion on

one side, on the other there is pleasure; on the one hand action is spurred on by want, on the other it has to its natural fulfilment. That is why, as man's civilization advances, he increases his obligations and the work that he willingly creates for himself. One would have thought that nature had given him quite enough to do to keep him busy, in fact that it was working him to death with the lash of hunger and thirst,—but no. Man does not think that sufficient; he cannot rest content with only doing the work that nature prescribes for him in common with the birds and beasts. He needs must surpass all, even in activity. No creature has to work so hard as man; he has been impelled to contrive for himself a vast field of action in society; and in this field he is forever building up and pulling down, making and unmaking laws, piling up heaps of material, and incessantly thinking, seeking and suffering. In this field he has fought his mightiest battles, gained continual new life, made death glorious, and, far from evading troubles, has willingly and continually taken up the burden of fresh trouble. He has discovered the truth that he is not complete in the cage of his immediate surroundings, that he is greater than his present, and that while to stand still in one place may be comforting, the arrest of life destroys his true function and the real purpose of his existence.

This *mahati vinashthih*—this great destruction he cannot bear, and accordingly he toils and suffers in order that he may gain in stature by transcending his present, in order to become that which he yet is not. In this travail is man's glory, and it is because he knows it, that he has not sought to circumscribe his field of action, but is constantly occupied in extending the bounds. Sometimes he wanders so far that his work tends to lose its meaning, and his rushings to and fro create fearful eddies round different centres—eddies of self-interest, of pride of power. Still, so long as the strength of the current is not lost, there is no fear; the obstructions and the dead accumulations of his activity are dissipated and carried away; the impetus corrects its own mistakes. Only when the soul sleeps in stagnation do its enemies gain overmastering strength, and these obstructions become too clogging to be fought through. Hence have we been warned by our teachers that to work we must live, to live we must work; that life and activity are inseparably connected.

It is the very characteristic of life that it is not complete within itself; it must come out. Its truth is in the commerce of the inside and the outside. In order to live, the body must maintain its various relations with the outside light and air—not only to gain life-force, but also to manifest it. Consider how fully employed the body is with its own inside activities; its heart-beat must not stop for a second, its stomach, its brain, must be ceaselessly working. Yet this is not enough; the body is outwardly restless all the while. Its life leads it to an endless

dance of work and play outside; it cannot be satisfied with the circulations of its internal economy, and only finds the fulfilment of joy in its outward excursions.

The same with the soul. It cannot live on its own internal feelings and imaginings. It is ever in need of external objects; not only to feed its inner consciousness but to apply itself in action, not only to receive but also to give.

The real truth is, we cannot live if we divide him who is truth itself into two parts. We must abide in him within as well as without. In whichever aspect we deny him we deceive ourselves and incur a loss. Brahma has not left me, let me not leave Brahma. If we say that we would realize him in introspection alone and leave him out of our external activity, that we would enjoy him by the love in our heart, but not worship him by outward ministrations; or if we say the opposite, and overweight ourselves on one side in the journey of our life's quest, we shall alike totter to our downfall.

In the great western continent we see that the soul of man is mainly concerned with extending itself outwards; the open field of the exercise of power is its field. Its partiality is entirely for the world of extension, and it would leave aside —nay, hardly believe in—that field of inner consciousness which is the field of fulfilment. It has gone so far in this that the perfection of fulfilment seems to exist for it nowhere. Its science has always talked of the never-ending evolution of the world. Its metaphysics has now begun to talk of the evolution of God himself. They will not admit that he is~, they would have it that he also is becoming.

They fail to realize that while the infinite is always greater than any assignable limit, it is also complete; that on the one hand Brahma is evolving, on the other he is perfection; that in the one aspect he is essence, in the other manifestation—both together at the same time, as is the song and the act of singing. This is like ignoring the consciousness of the singer and saying that only the singing is in progress, that there is no song. Doubtless we are directly aware only of the singing, and never at any one time of the song as a whole; but do we not all the time know that the complete song is in the soul of the singer?

It is because of this insistence on the doing and the becoming that we perceive in the west the intoxication or power. These men seem to have determined to despoil and grasp everything by force. They would always obstinately be doing and never be done—they would not allow to death its natural place in the scheme of things—they know not the beauty of completion.

In our country the danger comes from the opposite side. Our partiality is for the internal world. We would cast aside with contumely the field of power and of extension. We would realize Brahma in meditation only in his aspect of

completeness, we have determined not to see him in the commerce of the universe in his aspect of evolution. That is why in our seekers we so often find the intoxication of the spirit and its consequent degradation. Their faith would acknowledge no bondage of law, their imagination soars unrestricted, their conduct disdains to offer any explanation to reason. Their intellect, in its vain attempts to see Brahma inseparable from his creation, works itself stone-dry, and their heart, seeking to confine him within its own outpourings, swoons in a drunken ecstasy of emotion. They have not even kept within reach any standard whereby they can measure the loss of strength and character which manhood sustains by thus ignoring the bonds of law and the claims of action in the external universe.

But true spirituality, as taught in our sacred lore, is calmly balanced in strength, in the correlation of the within and the without. The truth has its law, it has its joy. On one side of it is being chanted the *Bhayadasyagnistapati*, on the other the *Anandadhyeva khalvimani bhutani jayante*. Freedom is impossible of attainment without submission to law, for Brahma is in one aspect bound by his truth, in the other free in his joy.

As for ourselves, it is only when we wholly submit to the bonds of truth that we fully gain the joy of freedom. And how? As does the string that is bound to the harp. When the harp is truly strung, when there is not the slightest laxity in the strength of the bond, then only does music result; and the string transcending itself in its melody finds and every chord its true freedom. It is because it is bound by such hard and fast rules on the one side that it can find this range of freedom in music on the other. While the string was not true, it was indeed merely bound; but a loosening of its bondage would not have been the way to freedom, which it can only fully achieve by being bound tighter and tighter till it has attained the true pitch.

The bass and treble strings of our duty are only bonds so long as we cannot maintain them steadfastly attuned according to the law of truth; and we cannot call by the name of freedom the loosening of them into the nothingness of inaction. That is why I would say that the true striving in the quest of truth, of dharma, consists not in the neglect of action but in the effort to attune it closer and closer to the eternal harmony. The text of this striving should be. Whatever works thou doest, consecrate them to Brahma. That is to say, the soul is to dedicate itself to Brahma through all its activities. This dedication is the song of the soul, in this is its freedom. Joy reigns when all work becomes the path to the union with Brahma; when the soul ceases to return constantly to its own desires; when in it our self-offering grows more and more intense. Then there is

completion, then there is freedom, then, in this world, comes the kingdom of God.

Who is there that, sitting in his corner, would decide this grand self-expression of humanity in action, this incessant self-consecration? Who is there that thinks the union of God and man is to be found in some secluded enjoyment of his own imaginings, away from the sky-towering temple of the greatness of humanity, which the whole of mankind, in sunshine and storm, is foiling to erect through the ages? Who is there that thinks this secluded communion is the highest form of religion?

O thou distraught wanderer, thou *Sannyasin*, drunk in the wine of self-intoxication, dost thou not already hear the progress of the human soul along the highway traversing the wide fields of humanity—the thunder of its progress in the car of its achievements, which is destined to overpass the bounds that prevent its expansion into the universe? The very mountains are cleft asunder and give way before the march of its banners waving triumphantly in the heavens; as the mist before the rising sun, the tangled obscurities of material things vanish at its irresistible approach. Pain, disease, and disorder are at every steep receding before its onset; the obstructions of ignorance are being thrust aside; the darkness of blindness is being pierced through; and behold, the promised land of wealth and health, of poetry and art, of knowledge and righteousness is gradually being revealed to view. Do you in your lethargy desire to say that this car of humanity, which is shaking the very earth with the triumph of its progress along the mighty vistas of history, has no charioteer leading it on to its fulfilment? Who is there who refuses to respond to his call to join in this triumphal progress? Who so foolish as to run away from the gladsome throng and seek him in the listlessness of inaction? Who so steeped in untruth as to dare to call all this untrue—this great world of men, this civilization of expanding humanity, this eternal effort of man, through depths of sorrow, through heights of gladness, through innumerable impediments within and without, to win victory for his powers? He who can think of this immensity of achievement as an immense fraud, can he truly believe in God who is the truth? He who thinks to reach God by running away from the world, when and where does he expect to meet him? How far can he fly—can he fly and fly, till he flies into nothingness itself? No, the coward who would fly can nowhere find him. We must be brave enough to be able to say: We are reaching him here in this very spot, now at this very moment. We must be able to assure ourselves that as in our actions we are realising ourselves, so in ourselves we are realising him who is the self of self. We must earn the right to say so unhesitatingly by clearing away with our own effort all obstruction, all disorder, all discords from our path of activity; we must

be able to say, ‘In my work is my joy, and in that joy does the joy of my joy abide.’

Whom does the Upanishad call the chief among the knower’s of Brahma! He is defined as He whose joy is in Brahma, whose play is in Brahma, the active one. Joy without the play of joy is no joy at all—plays without activity is no play. Activity is the play of joy. He whose joy is in Brahma, how can he live in inaction? For must he not by his activity provides that in which the joy of Brahma is to take form and manifest itself? That is why he who knows Brahma, who has his joy in Brahma, must also have all his activity in Brahma—his eating and drinking, his earning of livelihood and his beneficence. Just as the joy of the poet in his poem, of the artist in his art, of the brave man in the output of his courage, of the wise man in his discernment of truths, ever seeks expression in their several activities, so the joy of the knower of Brahma, in the whole of his everyday work, little and big, in truth, in beauty, in orderliness and in beneficence, seeks to give expression to the infinite.

Brahma himself gives expression to his joy in just the same way. By his many-sided activity, which radiates in all directions, does he fulfil the inherent want of his different creatures. That inherent want is he himself, and so he is in so many ways, in so many forms, giving himself. He works, for without working how could he give himself? His joy is ever dedicating itself in the dedication which is his creation.

In this very thing does our own true meaning lie, in this is our likeness to our father. We must also give up ourselves in many-sided variously aimed activity. In the Vedas he is called the giver of himself, the giver of strength. He is not content with giving us himself, but he gives us strength that we may likewise give ourselves. That is why the seer of the Upanishad prays to him who is thus fulfilling our wants, May he grant us the beneficent mind, may he fulfil that uttermost want of ours by granting us the beneficent mind. That is to say, it is not enough he alone should work to remove our want, but he should give us the desire and the strength to work with him in his activity and in the exercise of the good. Then, indeed, will our union with him alone be accomplished. The beneficent mind is that which shows us the want (*swartha*) of another self to be the inherent want (*nihitartha*) of our own self; that which shows that our joy consists in the varied aiming of our many-sided powers in the work of humanity. When we work under the guidance of this beneficent mind, then our activity is regulated, but does not become mechanical; it is action not goaded on by want, but stimulated by the satisfaction of the soul. Such activity ceases to be a blind imitation of that of the multitude, a cowardly following of the dictates of

fashion. Therein we begin to see that He is in the beginning and in the end of the universe, and likewise see that of our own work is he the fount and the inspiration, and at the end thereof is he, and therefore that all our activity is pervaded by peace and good and joy.

The Upanishad says: Knowledge, power, and action are of his nature. It is because this naturalness has not yet been born in us that we tend to divide joy from work. Our day of work is not our day of joy—for that we require a holiday; for, miserable that we are, we cannot find our holiday in our work. The river finds its holiday in its onward flow, the fire in its outburst of flame, the scent of the flower in its permeation of the atmosphere; but in our everyday work there is no such holiday for us. It is because we do not let ourselves go, because we do not give ourselves joyously and entirely up to it, that our work overpowers us.

O giver of thyself! At the vision of thee as joy let our souls flame up to thee as the fire, flow on to thee as the river, permeate thy being as the fragrance of the flower. Give us strength to love, to love fully, our life in its joys and sorrows, in its gains and losses, in its rise and fall. Let us have strength enough fully to see and hear thy universe and to work with full vigour therein. Let us fully live the life thou hast given us, let us bravely take and bravely give. This is our prayer to thee. Let us once for all dislodge from our minds the feeble fancy that would make out thy joy to be a thing apart from action, thin, formless, and unsustained. Wherever the peasant tills the hard earth, there does thy joy gust out in the green of the corn, wherever man displaces the entangled forest, smooths the stony ground, and clears for himself a homestead, there does thy joy enfold it in orderliness and peace.

O worker of the universe! We would pray to thee to let the irresistible current of thy universal energy come like the impetuous south wind of spring let it come rushing over the vast field of the life of man, let it bring the seen of many flowers, the murmurings of many woodlands, let it make sweet and vocal the lifelessness of our dried-up soul-life. Let our newly awakened power cry out for unlimited fulfilment in leaf and flower and fruit.

4.4. Realization in Love

We come now to the eternal problem of the coexistence of the infinite and the finite, of the supreme being and our soul. There is the sublime paradox that lies at the root of existence. We never can go round it, because we never can stand outside the problem and weigh it against any other possible alternative. But the problem exists in logic only; in reality it does not offer us any difficulty at all. Logically speaking, the distance between two points, however near, may be said to be infinite, because it is infinitely divisible. But we do cross the infinite at every step, and meet the eternal in every second. Therefore some of our philosophers say there is no such thing as finitude; it is but a *maya*, an illusion. The real is the infinite, and it is only *maya*, the unreality, which causes the appearance of the finite. But the word *maya* is a mere name, it is no explanation. It is merely saying that with truth there is this appearance which is the opposite of truth; but how they come to exist at one and the same time in incomprehensible.

We have what we call in Sanskrit *dvandva*, a series of opposites in creation; such as, positive pole and die negative, the centripetal force and the centrifugal, attraction and repulsion. These are also mere names, they are no explanations.

They are only different ways of asserting that the world in its essence is a reconciliation of pairs of opposing forces. These forces, like the left and he the right hands of the creator, are acting in absolute harmony, yet acting from opposite directions.

There is a bond of harmony between our two eyes, which makes them act in unison. Likewise there is an unbreakable continuity of relation in the physical world between heat and cold, light and darkness, motion and rest, as between the bass and treble notes of a piano. That is why these opposites do not bring confusion in the universe, but harmony. If creation were but a chaos, we should have to imagine the two opposing principles as trying to get the better of each other. But the universe is not under martial law, arbitrary and provisional. Here we find no force which can run amok, or go on indefinitely in its wild road, like an exiled outlaw, breaking all harmony with its surroundings; each force, on the

contrary, has to come back in a curved line to its equilibrium. Waves rise, each to its individual height in a seeming attitude of unrelenting competition, but only up to a certain point; and thus we know of the great repose of the sea to which they are all related, and to which they must all return in a rhythm which is marvellously beautiful.

In fact, these undulations and vibrations, these risings and fallings, are not due to the erratic contortions of disparate bodies, they are a rhythmic dance. Rhythm never can be born of the haphazard struggle of combat. Its underlying principle must be unity, not opposition.

This principle of unity is the mystery of all mysteries. The existence of a duality at once raises a question in our minds, and we seek its solution in the One. When at last we find a relation between these two, and thereby see them as one in essence, we feel that we have come to the truth. And then we give utterance to this most startling of all paradoxes, that the One appears as many, that the appearance is the opposite of truth and yet is inseparably related to it.

Curiously enough, there are men who lose that feeling of mystery, which is at the root of all our delights, when they discover the uniformity of law among the diversity of nature. As if gravitation is not more of a mystery than the fall of an apple, as if the evolution from one scale of being to the other is not something which is even more shy of explanation than a succession of creations. The trouble is that we very often stop at such a law as if it were the final end of our search, and then we find that it does not even begin to emancipate our spirit. It only gives satisfaction to our intellect, and as it does not appeal to our whole being it only deadens in us the sense of the infinite. A great poem, when analysed, is a set of detached sounds. The reader who finds out the meaning, which is the inner medium that connects these outer sounds, discovers a perfect law all through, which is never violated in the least; the law of the evolution of ideas, the law of the music and the form.

But law in itself is a limit. It only shows that whatever is can never be otherwise. When a man is exclusively occupied with the search for the links of causality, his mind succumbs to the tyranny of law in escaping from the tyranny of facts. In learning a language, when from mere words we reach the laws of words we have gained a great deal. But if we stop at that point, and only concern ourselves with the marvels of the formation of a language, seeking the hidden reason of all its apparent caprices, we do not reach the end—for grammar is not literature, prosody is not a poem.

When we come to literature we find that though it conforms to rules of grammar it is yet a thing of joy, it is freedom itself. The beauty of a poem is

bound by strict laws, yet it transcends them. The laws are its wings, they do not keep it weighed down, they carry it to freedom. Its form is in law but its spirit is in beauty. Law is the first step towards freedom, and beauty is the complete liberation which stands on the pedestal of law. Beauty harmonises in itself the limit and the beyond, the law and the liberty.

In the world-poem, the discovery of the law of its rhythms, the measurement of its expansion and contraction, movement and pause, the pursuit of its evolution of forms and characters, are true achievements of the mind; but we cannot stop there. It is like a railway station; but the station platform is not our home. Only he has attained the final truth who knows that the whole world is a creation of joy.

This leads me to think how mysterious the relation of the human heart with nature must be. In the outer world of activity nature has one aspect, but in our hearts, in the inner world, it presents an altogether different picture.

Take an instance—the flower of a plant. However fine and dainty it may look, it is pressed to do a great service, and its colours and forms are all suited to its work. It must bring forth the fruit, or the continuity of plant life will be broken and the earth will be turned into a desert ere long. The colour and the smell of the flower are all for some purpose therefore; no sooner is it fertilised by the bee, and the time of its fruition arrives, than it sheds its exquisite petals and a cruel economy compels it to give up its sweet perfume. It has no time to flaunt its finery, for it is busy beyond measure.

Viewed from without, necessity seems to be the only factor in nature for which everything works and moves. There the bud develops into the flower, the flower into the fruit, the fruit into the seed, the seed into a new plant again, and so forth, the chain of activity running on unbroken. Should there crop up any disturbance or impediment, no excuse would be accepted, and the unfortunate thing thus choked in its movement would at once be labelled as rejected, and be bound to die and disappear post-haste. In the great office of nature there are innumerable departments with endless work going on, and the fine flower that you behold there, gaudily attired and scented like a dandy, is by no means what it appears to be, but rather, is like a labourer toiling in sun and shower, who has to submit a clear account of his work and has no breathing space to enjoy himself in playful frolic.

But when this same flower enters the heart of men its aspect of busy practicality is gone, and it becomes the very emblem of leisure and repose. The same object that is the embodiment of endless activity without is the perfect expression of beauty and peace within.

Science here warns us that we are mistaken, that the purpose of a flower is nothing but what is outwardly manifested, and that the relation of beauty and sweetness which we think it bears to us is all our own making, gratuitous and imaginary.

But our heart replies that we are not in the least mistaken. In the sphere of nature the flower carries with it a certificate which recommends it as having immense capacity for doing useful work, but it brings an altogether different letter of introduction when it knocks at the door of our hearts. Beauty becomes its only qualification. At one place it comes as a slave, and at another as a free thing. How, then, should we give credit to its first recommendation and disbelieve the second one? That the flower has got its being in the unbroken chain of causation is true beyond doubt; but that is an outer truth. The inner truth is: Verily from the everlasting joy do all objects have their birth.

A flower, therefore, has not its only function in nature, but has another great function to exercise in the mind of man. And what is that function? In nature its work is that of a servant who has to make his appearance at appointed times, but in the heart of man it comes like a messenger from the King. In the Ramayana, when Sita, forcibly separated from her husband, was bewailing her evil fate in Ravana's golden palace, she was met by a messenger who brought with him a ring of her beloved Ramchandra himself. The very sight of it convinced Sita of the truth of the tidings he bore. She was at once reassured that he came indeed from her beloved one, who had not forgotten her and was at hand to rescue her.

Such a messenger is a flower from our great lover. Surrounded with the pomp and pageantry of worldliness, which may be likened to Ravana's golden city, we still live in exile, while the insolent spirit of worldly prosperity tempts us with allurements and claims us as its bride. In the meantime the flower comes across with a message from the other shore, and whispers in our ears, I am come. He has sent me. I am a messenger of the beautiful, the one whose soul is the bliss of love. This island of isolation has been bridged over by him, and he has not forgotten thee, and will rescue thee even now. He will draw thee unto him and make thee his own. This illusion will not hold thee in thraldom for ever.

If we happen to be awake then, we question him: 'How are we to know that thou art come from him indeed?' The messenger says, 'Look! I have this ring from him. How lovely are its hues and charms!'

Ah, doubtless it is his—indeed, it is our wedding ring. Now all else passes into oblivion, only this sweet symbol of the touch of the eternal love fills us with a deep longing. We realise that the palace of gold where we are has nothing to do with us—our deliverance is outside it—and there our love has its fruition and

our life its fulfilment.

What to the bee in nature is merely colour and scent, and the marks or spots which show the right track to the honey, is to the human heart beauty and by untrammelled by necessity. They bring a love-letter to the heart written in many-coloured inks.

I was telling you, therefore, that however busy our active nature outwardly may be, she has a secret chamber within the heart where she comes and goes freely, without any design whatsoever. There the fire of her workshop is transformed into lamps of a festival, the noise of her factory is heard like music. The iron chain of cause and effect sounds heavily outside in nature, but in the human heart its unalloyed delight seems to sound, as it were, like the golden strings of a harp.

It indeed seems to be wonderful that nature has these two aspects at one and the same time, and so antithetical—one being of thraldom and the other of freedom. In the same form, sound, colour, and taste two contrary notes are heard, one of necessity and the other of joy. Outwardly nature is busy and restless, inwardly she is all silence and peace. She has toil on one side and leisure on the other. You see her bondage only when you see her from without, but within her heart is a limitless beauty.

Our seer says, ‘From joy are born all creatures, by joy they are sustained, towards joy they progress, and into joy they enter.’

Not that he ignores law, or that his contemplation of this infinite joy is born of the intoxication produced by an indulgence in abstract thought. He fully recognises the inexorable laws of nature, and says, ‘Fire burns for fear of him (i.e. by his law); the sun shines by fear of him; and for fear of him the wind, the clouds, and death perform their offices.’ It is a reign of iron rule, ready to punish the least transgression. Yet the poet chants the glad song, ‘From joy are born all creatures, by joy they are sustained, towards joy they progress, and into joy they enter.’

The immortal being manifests himself in joy-form. His manifestation in creation is out of his fulness of joy. It is the nature of this abounding joy to realise itself in form which is law. The joy, which is without form, must create, must translate itself into forms. The joy of the singer is expressed in the form of a song, that of the poet in the form of a poem. Man in his role of a creator is ever creating forms, and they come out of his abounding joy.

This joy, whose other name is love, must by in very nature have duality for its realization. When the singer has his inspiration he makes himself into two; he has within him his other self as the hearer, and the outside audience is merely an

extension of this other self of his. The lover seeks his own other self in his beloved. It is the joy that creates this separation, in order to realise through obstacles the union.

The *amritam*, the immortal bliss, has made himself into two. Our soul is the loved one, it is his other self. We are separate; but if this separation were absolute, then there would have been absolute misery and unmitigated evil in this world. Then from untruth we never could reach truth, and from sin we never could hope to attain purity of heart; then all opposites would ever remain opposites, and we could never find a medium through which our differences could ever tend to meet. Then we could have no language, no understanding, no blending of hearts, no co-operation in life. But on the contrary, we find that the separateness of objects is in a fluid state. Their individualities are ever changing, they are meeting and merging into each other, till science itself is turning into metaphysics, matter losing its boundaries, and the definition of life becoming more and more indefinite.

Yes, our individual soul has been separated from the supreme soul, but this has not been from alienation but from the fulness of love. It is for that reason that untruths, sufferings, and evils are not at a standstill; the human soul can deny them, can overcome them, nay, can altogether transform them into new power and beauty.

The singer is translating his song into singing, to joy into forms, and the hearer has to translate back the singing into the original joy; then the communion between the singer and the hearer is complete. The infinite joy is manifesting itself in manifold forms, taking upon itself the bondage of law, and we fulfil our destiny when we go back from forms to joy, from law to the love, when we untie the knot of the finite and hark back to the infinite.

The human soul is on its journey from the law to love, from discipline to liberation, from the moral plane to the spiritual. Buddha preached the discipline of self-restraint and moral life; it is a complete acceptance of law. But this bondage of law cannot be an end by itself; by mastering it thoroughly we acquire the means of getting beyond it. It is going back to Brahma, to the infinite love, which is manifesting itself through the finite forms of law. Buddha names it Brahma-vihara, the joy of living in Brahma. He who wants to reach this stage, according to Buddha, 'shall deceive none, entertain no hatred for anybody, and never wish to injure through anger. He shall have measureless love for all creatures, even as a mother has for her only child, whom she protects with her own life. Up above, below, and all around him he shall extend his love, which is without bounds and obstacles, and which is free from all cruelty and antagonism.'

While standing, sitting, walking, lying down, till he falls asleep, he shall keep his mind active in this exercise of universal goodwill.

Want of love is a degree of callousness; for love is the perfection of consciousness. We do not love because we do not comprehend, or rather we do not comprehend because we do not love. For love is the ultimate meaning of everything around us. It is not a mere sentiment; it is truth; it is the joy that is at the root of all creation. It is the white light of pure consciousness that emanates from Brahma. So, to be one with this *sarvanubhuh*, this all-feeling being who is in the external sky, as well as in our inner soul, we must attain to that summit of consciousness,, which is love: Who could have breathed or moved if the sky were not filled with joy, with love~ It is through the heightening of our consciousness into love, and extending it all over the world, that we can attain Brahma-vihara, communion with this infinite joy.

Love spontaneously gives itself in endless gifts. But these gifts lose their fullest significance if through them we do not reach that love, which is the giver. To do that, we must have love in our own heart. He who has no love in him values the gifts of his lover only according to their usefulness. But utility is temporary and partial. It can never occupy our whole being; what is useful only touches us at the point where we have some want. When the want is satisfied, utility becomes a burden if it still persists. On the other hand, a mere token is of permanent worth to us when we have love in our heart. For it is not for any special use. It is an end in itself; it is for our whole being and therefore can never tire us.

The question is. In what manner do we accept this world, which is a perfect gift of joy? Have we been able to receive it in our heart where we keep enshrined things that are of deathless value to us? We are frantically busy making use of the forces of the universe to gain more and more power; we feed and we clothe ourselves from its stores, we scramble for its riches, and it becomes for us a field of fierce competition. But were we born for this, to extend our proprietary rights over this world and make of it a marketable commodity? When our whole mind is bent only upon making use of this world it loses for us its true value. We make it cheap by our sordid desires; and thus to the end of our days we only try to feed upon it and miss its truth, just like the greedy child who tears leaves from a precious book and tries to swallow them.

In the lands where cannibalism is prevalent man looks upon man as his food. In such a country civilization can never thrive, for there man loses his higher value and is made common indeed. But there are other kinds of cannibalism, perhaps not so gross, but not less heinous, for which one need not travel far. In countries higher in the scale of civilization we find sometimes man looked upon as a mere

body, and he is bought and sold in the market by the price of his flesh only. And sometimes he gets his sole value from being useful; he is made into a machine, and is traded upon by the man of money to acquire for him more money. Thus our lust, our greed, our love of comfort result in cheapening man to his lowest value. It is self-deception on a large scale. Our desires blind us to the truth that there is in man, and this is the greatest wrong done by ourselves to our own soul. It deadens our consciousness, and is but a gradual method of spiritual suicide. It produces ugly sores in the body of civilization, gives rise to its hovels and brothels, its vindictive penal codes, its cruel prison systems, its organised method of exploiting foreign races to the extent of permanently injuring them by depriving them of the discipline of self-government and means of self-defence.

Of course man is useful to man, because his body is a marvellous machine and his mind an organ of wonderful efficiency. But he is a spirit as well, and this spirit is truly known only by love. When we define a man by the market value of the service we can expect of him, we know him imperfectly. With this limited knowledge of him it becomes easy for us to be unjust to him and to entertain feelings of triumphant self-congratulation when, on account of some cruel advantage on our side, we can get out of him much more than we have paid for. But when we know him as a spirit we know him as our own. We at once feel that cruelty to him is cruelty to ourselves, to make him small is stealing from our own humanity, and in seeking to make use of him solely for personal profit we merely gain in money or comfort what we pay for in truth.

One day I was out in a boat on the Ganges. It was a beautiful evening in autumn. The sun had just set; the silence of the sky was full to the brim with ineffable peace and beauty. The vast expanse of water was without a ripple, mirroring all the changing shades of the sunset glow. Miles and miles of a desolate sandbank lay like a huge amphibious reptile of some antediluvian age, with its scales glistening in shining colours. As our boat was silently gliding by the precipitous river-bank, riddled with the nest-holes of a colony of birds, suddenly a big fish leapt up to the surface of the water and then disappeared, displaying on its vanishing figure all the colours of the evening sky. It drew aside for a moment the many-coloured screen behind which there was a silent world full of the joy of life. It came up from the depths of its mysterious dwelling with a beautiful dancing motion and added its own music to the silent symphony of the dying day. I felt as if I had a friendly greeting from an alien world in its own language, and it touched my heart with a flash of gladness. Then suddenly the man at the helm exclaimed with a distinct note of regret, ‘Ah, what a big fish!’ It at once brought before his vision the picture of the fish caught and made ready for his supper. He could only look at the fish through his

desire, and thus missed the whole truth of its existence. But man is not entirely an animal. He aspires to a spiritual vision, which is the vision of the whole truth. This gives him the highest delight, because it reveals to him the deepest harmony that exists between him and his surroundings. It is our desires that limit the scope of our self-realization, hinder our extension of consciousness, and give rise to sin, which is the innermost barrier that keeps us apart from our God, setting up disunion and the arrogance of exclusiveness. For sin is not one mere action, but it is an attitude of life which takes for granted that our goal is finite, that our self is the ultimate truth, and that we are not all essentially one but exist each for his own separate individual existence.

So I repeat we never can have a true view of man unless we have a love for him. Civilization must be judged and prized, not by the amount of power it has developed, but by how much it has evolved and given expression to, by its laws and institutions, the love of humanity. The first question and the last which it has to answer is, whether and how far it recognises man more as a spirit than as a machine? Whenever some ancient civilization fell into decay and died, it was owing to causes which produced callousness of heart and led to the cheapening of man's worth; when either the state or some powerful group of men began to look upon the people as a mere instrument of their power; when, by compelling weaker races to slavery and trying to keep them down by every means, man struck at the foundation of his greatness, his own love of freedom and fair-play. Civilization can never sustain itself upon cannibalism of any form. For that by which alone man is true can only be nourished by love and justice.

As with man, so with this universe. When we look at the world through the veil of our desires we make it small and narrow, and fail to perceive its full truth. Of course it is obvious that the world serves us and fulfils our needs, but our relation to it does not end there. We are bound to it with a deeper and truer bond than that of necessity. Our soul is drawn to it; our love of life is really our wish to continue our relation with this great world. This relation is one of love. We are glad that we are in it; we are attached to it with numberless threads, which extend from this earth to the stars. Man foolishly tries to prove his superiority by imagining his radical separateness from what he calls his physical world, which, in his blind fanaticism, he sometimes goes to the extent of ignoring 'altogether, holding it as his direst enemy. Yet the more his knowledge progresses, the more it becomes difficult for man to establish this separateness, and all the imaginary boundaries he had set up around himself vanish one after another. Every time we lose some of our badges of absolute distinction by which we conferred upon our humanity the right to hold itself apart from its surroundings, it gives us a shock of humiliation. But we have to submit to this. If we set up our pride on the path

of our self-realization to create divisions and disunion, then it must sooner or later come under the wheels of truth and be ground to dust. No, we are not burdened with some monstrous superiority, unmeaning in its singular abruptness. It would be utterly degrading for us to live in a world immeasurably less than ourselves in the quality of soul, just as it would be repulsive and degrading to be surrounded and served by a host of slaves, day and night, from birth to the moment of death. On the contrary, this world is our compeer, nay, we are one with it.

Through our progress in science the wholeness of the world and our oneness with it is becoming clearer to our mind. When this perception of the perfection of unity is not merely intellectual, when it opens out our whole being into a luminous consciousness of the all, then it becomes a radiant joy, an overspreading love. Our spirit finds its larger self in the whole world, and is filled with an absolute certainty that it is immortal. It dies a hundred times in its enclosures of self; for separateness is doomed to die, it cannot be made eternal. But it never can die where it is one with the all, for there is its truth, its joy. When a man feels the rhythmic throb of the soul-life of the whole world in his own soul, then is he free. Then he enters into the secret courting that goes on between this beautiful world-bride, view with the veil of the many-coloured finiteness and the *paramatmam*, the bridegroom, in his spotless white. Then he knows that he is the partaker in this gorgeous love festival, and he is the honoured guest at the feast of immortality. Then he understands the meaning of the seer-poet who sings, ‘From love the world is born, by love it is sustained, towards love it moves, and into love it enters.’ In love all the contradictions of existence merge themselves and are lost. Only in love are unity and duality not at variance. Love must be one and two at the same time.

Only love is motion and rest in one. Our heart ever changes its place till it finds love, and then it has its rest. But this rest itself is an intense form of activity where utter quiescence and unceasing energy meet at the same point in love.

In love, loss and gain are harmonised. In its balance-sheet, credit and debit accounts are in the same column, and gifts are added to gains. In this wonderful festival of creation, this great ceremony of self-sacrifice of God, the lover constantly gives himself up to gain himself in love. Indeed, love is what brings together and inseparably connects both the act of abandoning and that of receiving.

In love at one of its poles you find the personal, and at the other the impersonal. At one you have the positive assertion—Here I am; at the other the equally strong denial—I am not. Without this ego what is love? And again, with

only this ego how can love be possible?

Bondage and liberation are not antagonistic in love. For love is most free and at the same time most bound. If God were absolutely free there would be no creation. The infinite being has assumed unto himself the mystery of finitude. And in him who is love the finite and the infinite are made one.

Similarly, when we talk about the relative values of freedom and non-freedom, it becomes a mere play of words. It is not that we desire freedom alone, we want thraldom as well. It is the high function of love to welcome all limitations and to transcend them. For nothing is more independent than love, and where else, again, shall we find so much of dependence? In love, thraldom is as glorious as freedom.

The *Vaishnava* religion has boldly declared that God has bound himself to man, and in that consists the greatest glory of human existence. In the spell of the wonderful rhythm of the finite he fetters himself at every step, and thus gives his love out in music in his most perfect lyrics of beauty. Beauty is his wooing of our heart; it can have no other purpose. It tells us everywhere that the display of power is not the ultimate meaning of creation; wherever there is a bit of colour, a note of song, a grace of form, there comes the call for our love. Hunger compels us to obey its behests, but hunger is not the last word for a man. There have been men who have deliberately defied its commands to show that the human soul is not to be let by the pressure of wants and threat of pain. In fact, to live the life of man we have to resist its demands every day, the least of us as well as the greatest. But, on the other hand, there is a beauty in the world, which never insults our freedom, never raises even its little finger to make us acknowledge its sovereignty. We can absolutely ignore it and suffer no penalty in consequence. It is a call to us, but not a command. It seeks for love in us, and love can never be had by compulsion. Compulsion is not indeed the final appeal to man, but joy is. And joy is everywhere; it is in the earth's green covering of grass; in the blue serenity of the sky; in the reckless exuberance of spring; in the severe abstinence of grey winter; in the living flesh that animates our bodily frame; in the perfect poise of the human figure, noble and upright; in living; in the exercise of all our powers; in the acquisition of knowledge; in fighting evils; in dying for gains we never can share. Joy is there everywhere; it is superfluous, unnecessary; nay, it very often contradicts the most peremptory behests of necessity. It exists to show that the bonds of law can only be explained by love; they are like body and soul. Joy is the realization of the truth of oneness, the oneness of our soul with the world and of the world-soul with the supreme lover.

4.5. The Realization of Beauty

Things in which we do not take joy are either a burden upon our minds to be got rid of at any cost; or they are useful, and therefore in temporary and partial relation to us, becoming burdensome when their utility is lost; or they are like wandering vagabonds, loitering for a moment on the outskirts of our recognition, and then passing on. A thing is only completely our own when it is a thing of joy to us.

The greater part of this world is to us as if it were nothing. But we cannot allow it to remain so, for thus it belittles our own self. The entire world is given to us, and all our powers have their final meaning in the faith that by their help we are to take possession of our patrimony.

But what is the function of our sense of beauty in this process of the extension of our consciousness? Is it there to separate truth into strong lights and shadows, and bring it before us in its uncompromising distinction of beauty and ugliness? If that were so, then we should have to admit that this sense of beauty creates a dissension in our universe and sets up a wall of hindrance across the highway of communication that leads from each individual thing to all things.

But that cannot be true. As long as our realization is incomplete a division necessarily remains between things known and unknown, pleasant and unpleasant. But in spite of the dictum of some philosophers man does not accept any arbitrary and absolute limit to his knowable world. Every day his science is penetrating into the region formerly marked in his map as unexplored or inexplorable. Our sense of beauty is similarly engaged in ever pushing on its conquests. Truth is everywhere; therefore everything is the object of our knowledge. Beauty is omnipresent, therefore everything is capable of giving us joy.

In the early days of his history man took everything as a phenomenon of life. His science of life began by creating a sharp distinction between life and non-life. But as it is proceeding farther and farther the line of demarcation between the animate and inanimate is growing more and more dim. In the beginning of our apprehension these sharp lines of contrast are helpful to us, but as our comprehension becomes clearer they gradually fade away.

The Upanishads have said that all things are created and sustained by an infinite joy. To realise this principle of creation we have to start with a division—the division into the beautiful and the non-beautiful. Then the apprehension of beauty has to come to us with a vigorous blow to awaken our consciousness from its primitive lethargy, and it attains its object by the urgency of the contrast. Therefore our first acquaintance with beauty is in her dress of motley colours, that affects us with its stripes and feathers, nay, with its disfigurements. But as our acquaintance ripens, the apparent discords are resolved into modulations of rhythm. At first we detach beauty from its surroundings, we hold it apart from the rest, but at the end we realise its harmony with all. Then the music of beauty has no more need of exciting us with loud noise; it renounces violence, and appeals to our heart with the truth that it is meekness inherits the earth.

In some stage of our growth, in some period of our history, we try to set up a special cult of beauty, and pare it down to a narrow circle, so as to make it a matter of pride for a chosen few. Then it breeds in its votaries affectations and exaggerations as it did with the Brahmins in the time of the decadence of Indian civilization, when the perception of the higher truth fell away and superstitions grew up unchecked.

In the history of aesthetics there also comes an age of emancipation when the recognition of beauty in things great and small becomes easy, and when we see it more in the unassuming harmony of common objects than in things startling in their singularity. So much so, that we have to go through the stages of reaction when in the representation of beauty we try to avoid everything that is obviously pleasing and that has been crowned by the sanction of convention. We are then tempted in defiance to exaggerate the commonness of commonplace things, thereby making them aggressively uncommon. To restore harmony we create the discords which are a feature of all reactions. We already see in the present age the sign of this aesthetic reaction, which proves that man has at last come to know that it is only the narrowness of perception which sharply divides the field of his aesthetic consciousness into ugliness and beauty. When he has the power to see things detached from self-interest and from the insistent claims of the lust of the senses, then alone can he have the true vision of the beauty that is everywhere. Then only can he see that what is unpleasant to us is not necessarily unbeautiful, but has its beauty in truth.

When we say that beauty is everywhere we do not mean that the word ugliness should be abolished from our language, just as it would be absurd to say that there is no such thing as untruth. Untruth there certainly is, not in the system of the universe, but in our power of comprehension, as its negative element. In the

same manner there is ugliness in the distorted expression of beauty in our life and in our art which comes from our imperfect realization of Truth. To a certain extent we can set our life against the law of truth which is in us and which is in all, and likewise we can give rise to ugliness by going counter to the eternal law of harmony which is everywhere.

Through our sense of truth we realise law in creation, and through our sense of beauty we realise harmony in the universe. When we recognize the law in nature we extend our mastery over physical forces and become powerful; when we recognize the law in our moral nature we attain mastery over self and become free. In like manner the more we comprehend the harmony in the physical world the more our life shares the gladness of creation, and our expression of beauty in art becomes more truly catholic. As we become conscious of the harmony in our soul, our apprehension of the blissfulness of the spirit of the world becomes universal, and the expression of beauty in our life moves in goodness and love towards the infinite. This is the ultimate object of our existence, that we must ever know that 'beauty is truth, truth beauty'; we must realise the whole world in love, for love gives it birth, sustains it, and takes it back to its bosom. We must have that perfect emancipation of heart which gives us the power to stand at the innermost centre of things and have the taste of that fulness of disinterested joy which belongs to Brahma.

Music is the purest form of art, and therefore the most direct expression of beauty, with a form and spirit which is one and simple, and least encumbered with anything extraneous. We seem to feel that the manifestation of the infinite in the finite forms of creation is music itself, silent and visible. The evening sky, tirelessly repeating the starry constellations, seems like a child struck with wonder at the mystery of its own first utterance, lisping the same word over and over again, and listening to it in unceasing joy. When in the rainy night of July the darkness is thick upon the meadows and the pattering rain draws veil upon veil over the stillness of the slumbering earth, this monotony of the rain patter seems to be the darkness of sound itself. The gloom of the dim and dense line of trees, the thorny bushes scattered in the bare heath like floating heads of swimmers with bedraggled hair, the smell of the damp grass and the wet earth, the spire of the temple rising above the undefined mass of blackness grouped around the village huts—everything seems like notes rising from the heart of the night, mingling and losing themselves in the one sound of ceaseless rain filling the sky.

Therefore the true poets, they who are seers, seek to express the universe in terms of music.

They rarely use symbols of painting to express the unfolding of forms, the mingling of endless lines and colours that goes on every moment on the canvas of the blue sky.

They have their reason. For the man who paints must have canvas, brush, and colour-box. The first touch of his brush is very far from the complete idea. And then when the work is finished and the artist is gone, the widowed picture stands alone, the incessant touches of love of the creative hand are withdrawn:

But the singer has everything within him. The notes come out from his very life. They are not materials gathered from outside. His idea and his expression are brother and sister; very often they are born as twins. In music the heart reveals itself immediately; it suffers not from any barrier of alien material.

Therefore though music has to wait for its completeness like any other art, yet at every step it gives out the beauty of the whole. As the material of expression even words are barriers, for their meaning has to be construed by thought. But music never has to depend upon any obvious meaning; it expresses what no words can ever express.

What is more, music and the musician are inseparable. When the singer departs, his singing dies with him; it is in eternal union with the life and joy of the master.

This world-song is never for a moment separated from its singer. It is not fashioned from any outward material. It is his joy itself taking never-ending form. It is the great heart sending the tremor of its thrill over the sky.

There is a perfection in each individual strain of this music, which is the revelation of completion in the incomplete. No one of its notes is final, yet each reflects the infinite.

What does it matter if we fail to derive the exact meaning of this great harmony? Is it not like the hand meeting the string and drawing out at once all its tones at the touch? It is the language of beauty the caress, that comes from the heart of the world and straightway reaches our heart.

Last night, in the silence which pervaded the darkness, I stood alone and heard the voice of the singer of eternal melodies. When I went to sleep I closed my eyes with this last thought in my mind, that even when I remain unconscious in slumber the dance of life will still go on in the hushed arena of my sleeping body, keeping step with the stars. The heart will throb, the blood will leap in the veins, and the millions of living atoms of my body will vibrate in tune with the note of the harp-string that thrills at the touch of the master.

4.6. The Realization of the Infinite

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The Upanishads Say: ‘Man becomes true if in this life he can apprehend God; if not, it is the greatest calamity for him.’

But what is the nature of this attainment of God? It is quite evident that the infinite is not like one object among many, to be definitely classified and kept among our possessions, to be used as an ally specially favouring us in our politics, warfare, money-making, or in social competitions. We cannot put our God in the same list with our summer-houses, motor-cars, or our credit at the bank, as so many people seem to want to do.

We must try to understand the true character of the desire that a man has when his soul longs for his God. Does it consist of his wish to make an addition, however valuable, to his belongings? Emphatically no! It is an endlessly wearisome task, this continual adding to our stores. In fact, when the soul seeks God she seeks her final escape from this incessant gathering and heaping and never coming to an end. It is not an additional object that she seeks, but it is the *nityo*, *nityanam*, the permanent in all that is impermanent, the *rasanam*, *rasatamah*, the highest abiding joy unifying all enjoyments. Therefore when the Upanishads teach us to realise everything in Brahma, it is not to seek something extra, not to manufacture something new.

Know everything that there is in the universe as enveloped by God. Enjoy whatever is given by him and harbour not in your mind the greed for wealth which is not your own.

When you know that whatever there is filled by him and whatever you have is his gift, then you realise the infinite in the finite, and the giver in the gifts. Then you know that all the facts of the reality have their only meaning in the manifestation of the one truth, and all your possessions have their only significance for you, not in themselves but in the relation they establish with the infinite.

So it cannot be said that we can find Brahma as we find other objects; there is no question of searching for him in one thing in preference to another, in one place instead of somewhere else. We do not have to run to the grocer’s shop for

our morning light; we open our eyes and there it is; so we need only give ourselves up to find that Brahma is everywhere.

This is the reason why Buddha admonished us to free ourselves from the confinement of the life of the self. If there were nothing else to take its place more positively perfect and satisfying, then such admonition would be absolutely unmeaning. No man can seriously consider the advice much less have any enthusiasm for it, of surrendering everything one has for gaining nothing whatever.

So our daily worship of God is not really the process of gradual acquisition of him, but the daily process of surrendering ourselves, removing all obstacles to union and extending our consciousness of him in devotion and service, in goodness and to love.

The Upanishads say: Be lost altogether in Brahma like an arrow that has completely penetrated its target. Thus to be conscious of being absolutely enveloped by Brahma is not an act of mere concentration of mind. It must be the aim of the whole of our life. In all our thoughts and deeds we must be conscious of the infinite. Let the realization of this truth become easier every day of our life, that none could live or move if the energy of the all-pervading joy did not fill the sky. In all our actions let us feel that impetus of the infinite energy and be glad.

It may be said that the infinite is beyond our attainment, so it is for us as if it were naught. Yes, if the word attainment implies any idea of possession, then it must be admitted that the infinite is unattainable. But we must keep in mind that the highest enjoyment of man is not in the having but in a getting, which is at the same time not getting. Our physical pleasures leave no margin for the unrealised. They, like the dead satellite of the earth, have but little atmosphere around them. When we take food and satisfy our hunger it is a complete act of possession. So long as the hunger is not satisfied it is a pleasure to eat. For then our enjoyment of eating touches at every point the infinite.

But, when it attains completion, or in other words, when our desire for eating reaches the end of the stage of its non-realization, it reaches the end of its pleasure. In all our intellectual pleasures the margin is broader, the limit is far off. In all our deeper love getting and non-getting run ever parallel. In one of our Vaishnava lyrics the lover says to his beloved: 'I feel as if I have gazed upon the beauty of thy face from my birth, yet my eyes are hungry still: as if I have kept thee pressed to my heart for millions of years, yet my heart is not satisfied.'

This makes it clear that it is really the infinite whom we seek in our pleasures. Our desire for being wealthy is not a desire for a particular sum of money but it

is indefinite, and the most fleeting of our enjoyments are but the momentary touches of the eternal. The tragedy of human life consists in our vain attempts to stretch the limits of things which can never become unlimited,—to reach the infinite by absurdly adding to the rungs of the ladder of the finite.

It is evident from this that the real desire of our soul is to get beyond all our possessions. Surrounded by things she can touch and feel, she cries, I am weary of getting; ah, where is he who is never to be got?’

We see everywhere in the history of man that the spirit of renunciation is the deepest reality of the human soul. When the soul says of anything, I do not want it, for I am above it,’ she gives utterance to the highest truth that is in her. When a girl’s life outgrows her doll, when she realises that in every respect she is more than her doll is, then she throws it away. By the very act of possession we know that we are greater than the things we possess. It is a perfect misery to be kept bound up with things lesser than ourselves. This it is that Maitreyi felt when her husband gave her his property on the eve of leaving home. She asked him, ‘Would these material things help one to attain the highest?’—or, in other words, ‘Are they more than my soul to me?’ When her husband answered, ‘They will make you rich in worldly possessions,’ she said at once, ‘Then what am I to do with these?’ It is only when a man truly realises what his possessions are that he has no more illusions about them; then he knows his soul is far above these things and he becomes free from their bondage. Thus man truly realises his soul by outgrowing his possessions, and man’s progress in the path of eternal life is through a series of renunciations.

That we cannot absolutely possess the infinite being is not a mere intellectual proposition. It has to be experienced, and this experience is bliss.

The bird, while taking its flight in the sky, experiences at every beat of its wings that the sky is boundless, that its wings can never carry it beyond. Therein lies its joy. In the cage the sky is limited; it may be quite enough for all the purposes of the bird’s life, only it is not more than is necessary. The bird cannot rejoice within the limits of the necessary. It must feel that what it has immeasurably more than it ever can want or comprehend, and then only can it be glad.

Thus our soul must soar in the infinite, and she must feel every moment that in the sense of not being able to come to the end of her attainment is her supreme joy, her final freedom.

Man’s abiding happiness is not in getting anything but in giving himself up to what is greater than himself, to ideas which are larger than his individual life, the idea of his country, of humanity, of God. They make it easier for him to part

with all that he has, not excepting his life. His existence is miserable and sordid till he finds some great idea which can truly claim his all, which can release him from all attachment to his belongings. Buddha and Jesus, and all our great prophets, represent such great ideas. They hold before us opportunities for surrendering our all. When they bring forth their divine alms-bowl we feel we cannot help giving, and we find that in giving is our truest joy and liberation, for it is uniting ourselves to that extent with the infinite.

Man is not complete; he is yet to be. In what he is he is small, and if we could conceive him stopping there for eternity we should have an idea of the most awful hell that man can imagine. In his to be he is infinite, there is his heaven, his deliverance. His is occupied every moment with what it can get and have done with; his to be is hungering for something which is more than can be got, which he never can lose because he never has possessed.

The finite pole of our existence has its place in the world of necessity.

There man goes about searching for food to live, clothing to get warmth. In this region—the region of nature—it is his function to get things. The natural man is occupied with enlarging his possessions.

But this act of getting is partial. It is limited to man's necessities. We can have a thing only to the extent of our requirements, just as a vessel can contain water only to the extent of its emptiness. Our relation to food is only in feeding, our relation to a house is only in habitation. We call it a benefit when a thing is fitted only to some particular want of ours. Thus to get is always to get partially, and it never can be otherwise. So this craving for acquisition belongs to our finite self.

But that side of our existence whose direction is towards the infinite seeks not wealth, but freedom and joy. There the reign of necessity ceases, and there our function is not to get but to be. To be what? To be one with Brahma. For the region of the infinite is the region of unity. Therefore the Upanishads say: If man apprehends God he becomes true. Here it is becoming, it is not having more. Words do not gather bulk when you know their meaning; they become true by being one with the idea.

Though the West has accepted as its teacher him who boldly proclaimed his oneness with his Father, and who exhorted his followers to be perfect as God, it has never been reconciled to this idea of our unity with the infinite being. It condemns, as a piece of blasphemy, any implication of man's becoming God. This idea of absolute transcendence is certainly not that which Christ preached, nor perhaps the idea of the Christian mystics, but this seems to be the idea that has become popular in the Christian west.

But the highest wisdom in the East holds that it is not the function of our soul

to gain God, to utilise him for any special material purpose. All that we can ever aspire to is to become more and more one with God. In the region of nature, which is the region of diversity, we grow by acquisition; in the spiritual world, which is the region of unity, we grow by losing ourselves, by uniting. Gaining a thing, as we have said, is by its nature partial, it is limited only to a particular want; but being is complete, it belongs to our wholeness, it springs not from any necessity but from our affinity with the infinite, which is the principle of perfection that we have in our soul.

Yes, we must become Brahma. We must not shrink from avowing this.

Our existence is meaningless if we never can expect to realise the highest perfection that there is. If we have an aim and yet can never reach it, then it is no aim at all.

But can it then be said that there is no difference between Brahma and our individual soul? Of course the difference is obvious. Call it illusion or ignorance, or whatever name you may give it, it is there. You can offer explanations but you cannot explain it away. Even illusion is true as illusion.

Brahma is Brahma, he is the infinite ideal of perfection. But we are not what we truly are; we are ever to become true, ever to become Brahma. There is the eternal play of love in the relation between this being and the becoming; and in the depth of this mystery is the source of all truth and beauty that sustains the endless march of creation.

In the music of the rushing stream sounds the joyful assurance, I shall become the sea.' It is not a vain assumption; it is true humility, for it is the truth. The river has no other alternative. On both sides of its banks it has numerous fields and forests, villages and towns; it can serve them in various ways, cleanse them and feed them, carry their produce from place to place. But it can have only partial relations with these, and however long it may linger among them it remains separate; it never can become a town or a forest.

But it can and does become the sea. The lesser moving water has its affinity with the great motionless water of the ocean. It moves through the thousand objects on its onward course, and its motion finds its finality when it reaches the sea.

The river can become the sea, but she can never make the sea part and parcel of herself. If, by some chance, she has encircled some broad sheet of water and pretends that she has made the sea a part of herself, we at once know that it is not so, that her current is still seeking rest in the great ocean to which it can never set boundaries.

In the same manner, our soul can only become Brahma as the river can become

the sea. Everything else she touches at one of her points, then leaves and moves on, but she never can leave Brahma and move beyond him. Once our soul realises her ultimate object of repose in Brahma, all her movements acquire a purpose. It is this ocean of infinite rest which gives significance to endless activities. It is this perfectness of being that lends to the imperfection of becoming that quality of beauty which finds its expression in all poetry, drama, and art.

There must be a complete idea that animates a poem. Every sentence of the poem touches that idea. When the reader realises that pervading idea, as he reads on, then the reading of the poem is full of joy to him. Then every part of the poem becomes radiantly significant by the light of the whole. But if the poem goes on interminably, never expressing the idea of the whole, only throwing off disconnected images, however beautiful, it becomes wearisome and unprofitable in the extreme. The progress of our soul is like a perfect poem. It has an infinite idea which once realised makes all movements full of meaning and joy. But if we detach its movements from that ultimate idea, if we do not see the infinite rest and only see the infinite motion, then existence appears to us a monstrous evil, impetuously rushing towards an unending aimlessness.

I remember in our childhood we had a teacher who used to make us learn by heart the whole book of Sanskrit grammar, which is written in symbols, without explaining their meaning to us. Day after day we went toiling on, but on towards what, we had not the least notion. So, as regards our lessons, we were in the position of the pessimist who only counts the breathless activities of the world, but cannot see the infinite repose of the perfection whence these activities are gaining their equilibrium every moment in absolute fitness and harmony. We lose all joy in thus contemplating existence, because we miss the truth. We see the gesticulations of the dancer, and we imagine these are directed by a ruthless tyranny of chance, while we are deaf to the eternal music which makes every one of these gestures inevitably spontaneous and beautiful.

These motions are ever growing into that music of perfection, becoming one with it, dedicating to that melody at every step the multitudinous forms they go on creating.

And this is the truth of our soul, and this is her joy, that she must ever be growing into Brahma, that all her movements should be modulated by this ultimate idea, and all her creations should be given as offerings to the supreme spirit of perfection.

There is a remarkable saying in the Upanishads: I think not that I know him well, or that I know him, or even that I know him not.

By the process of knowledge we can never know the infinite being. But if he is altogether beyond our reach, then he is absolutely nothing to us. The truth is that we know him not, yet we know him.

This has been explained in another saying of the Upanishads: From Brahma words come back baffled, as well as the mind, but he who knows him by the joy of him is free from all fears.

Intellectual knowledge is partial, because our intellect is an instrument, it is only a part of us, it can give us information about things which can be divided and analysed, and whose properties can be classified, part by part. But Brahma is perfect, and knowledge which is partial can never be a knowledge of him.

But he can be known by joy, by love. For joy is knowledge in its completeness, it is knowing by our whole being. Intellect sets us apart from the things to be known, but love knows its object by fusion. Such knowledge is immediate and admits no doubt. It is the same as knowing our own selves, only more so.

Therefore, as the Upanishads say, mind can never know Brahma, words can never describe him; he can only be known by our soul, by her joy in him, by her love. Or, in other words, we can only come into relation with him by union—union of our whole being. We must be one with our Father, we must be perfect as he is.

But how can that be? There can be no grade in infinite perfection. We cannot grow more and more into Brahma. He is the absolute one, and there can be no more or less in him.

Indeed, the realization of the *paramatman*, the supreme soul, within our *antaratman*, our inner individual soul, is in a state of absolute completion. We cannot think of it as non-existent and depending on our limited powers for its gradual construction. If our relation with the divine were all a thing of our own making, how should we rely on it as true, and how should it lend us support?

Yes, we must know that within us we have that where space and time cease to rule and where the links of evolution are merged in unity. In that everlasting abode of the atman, the soul, the revelation of the *paramatman*, the supreme soul, is already complete. Therefore the Upanishads say: He who knows Brahman, the true, the all-conscious, and the infinite as hidden in the depths of the soul, which is the supreme sky (the inner sky of consciousness), enjoys all objects of desire in union with the all-knowing Brahman.

The union is already accomplished. The *paramatman*, the supreme soul, has himself chosen this soul of ours as his bride and the marriage has been completed. The solemn *mantram* has been uttered: Let thy heart be even as my heart is. There is no room in this marriage for evolution to act the part of the

master of ceremonies. The eshah, who cannot otherwise be described than as This, the nameless immediate presence, is ever here in our innermost being. ‘This eshah, or This, is the supreme end of the other this’; ‘this This is the supreme treasure of the other this’; ‘this This is the supreme dwelling of the other this’; ‘this This is the supreme joy of the other this.’ Because the marriage of supreme love has been accomplished in timeless time. And now goes on the endless *lila*, the play of love. He who has been gained in eternity is now being pursued in time and space, in joys and sorrows, in this world and in the worlds beyond. When the soul-bride understands this well, her heart is blissful and at rest. She knows that she, like a river, has attained the ocean of her fulfilment at one end of her being, and at the other end she is ever attaining it; at one end it is eternal rest and completion, at the other it is incessant movement and change. When she knows both ends as inseparably connected, then she knows the world as her own household by the right of knowing the master of the world as her own lord. Then all her services become services of love, all the troubles and tribulations of life come to her as trials triumphantly borne to prove the strength of her love, smilingly to win the wager from her lover. But so long as she remains obstinately in the dark, lifts not her veil, does not recognise her lover, and only knows the world dissociated from him, she serves as’ a handmaid here, where by right she might reign as a queen; she sways in doubt, and weeps in sorrow and dejection. She passes from starvation to starvation, from trouble to trouble, and from fear to fear.

I can never forget that scrap of a song I once heard in the early dawn in the midst of the din of the crowd that had collected for a festival the night before: ‘Ferryman, take me across to the other shore!’

In the bustle of all our work there comes out this cry, ‘Take me across.’

The carter in India sings while driving his cart, ‘Take me across.’ The itinerant grocer deals out his goods to his customers and sings, ‘Take me across.’

What is the meaning of this cry? We feel we have not reached our goal; and we know with all our striving and toiling we do not come to the end, we do not attain our object. Like a child dissatisfied with its dolls, our heart cries, ‘Not this, not this.’ But what is that other? Where is the further shore?

Is it something else than what we have? Is it somewhere else than where we are? Is it to take rest from all our works, to be relieved from all the responsibilities of life?

No, in the very heart of our activities we are seeking for our end. We are crying for the across, even where we stand. So, while our lips utter their prayer to be carried away, our busy hands are never idle.

In truth, thou ocean of joy, this shore and the other shore are one and the same in thee. When I call this my own, the other lies estranged; and missing the sense of that completeness which is in me, my heart incessantly cries out for the other. All my this, and that other, are waiting to be completely reconciled in thy love.

This 'I' of mine toils hard, day and night, for a home which it knows as its own. Alas, there will be no end of its sufferings so long as it is not able to call this home thine. Till then it will struggle on, and its heart will ever cry, 'Ferryman, lead me across.' When this home of mine is made thine, that very moment is it taken across, even while its old walls enclose it. This 'I' is restless. It is working for a gain which can never be assimilated with its spirit, which it never can hold and retain. In its efforts to clasp in its own arms that which is for all, it hurts others and is hurt in its turn, and cries, 'Lead me across.' But as soon as it is able to say, 'All my work is thine,' everything remains the same, only it is taken across.

Where can I meet thee unless in this my home made thine? Where can I join thee unless in this my work transformed into thy work? If I leave my home I shall not reach thy home; if I cease my work I can never join thee in thy work. For thou dwellest in me and I in thee. Thou without me or I without thee are nothing.

Therefore, in the midst of our home and our work, the prayer rises, 'Lead me across! ' For here rolls the sea, and even here lies the other shore waiting to be reached—yes, here is this everlasting present, not distant, not anywhere else.

4.7. The Relation of the Individual to the Universe

The civilization of ancient Greece was nurtured within city walls. In fact, all the modern civilizations have their cradles of brick and mortar.

These walls leave their mark deep in the minds of men. They set up a principle of ‘divide and rule’ in our mental outlook, which begets in us a habit of securing all our conquests by fortifying them and separating them from one another. We divide nation and nation, knowledge and knowledge, man and nature. It breeds in us a strong suspicion of whatever is beyond the barriers we have built, and everything has to fight hard for its entrance into our recognition. When the first Aryan invaders appeared in India it was a vast land of forests, and the newcomers rapidly took advantage of them. These forests afforded them shelter from the fierce heat of the sun and the ravages of tropical storms, pastures for cattle, fuel for sacrificial fire, and materials for building cottages. And the different Aryan clans with their patriarchal heads settled in the different forest tracts which had some special advantage of natural protection, and food and water in plenty.

Thus in India it was in the forests that our civilization had its birth, and it took a distinct character from this origin and environment. It was surrounded by the vast life of nature, was fed and clothed by her, and had the closest and most constant intercourse with her varying aspects.

Such a life, it may be thought, tends to have the effect of dulling human intelligence and dwarfing the incentives to progress by lowering the standards of existence. But in ancient India we find that the circumstances of forest life did not overcome man’s mind, and did not enfeeble the current of his energies, but only gave to it a particular direction. Having been in constant contact with the living growth of nature, his mind was free from the desire to extend his dominion by erecting boundary walls around his acquisitions. His aim was not to acquire but to realize, to enlarge his consciousness by growing with and growing into his surroundings. He felt that truth is all-comprehensive, that there is no

such thing as absolute isolation in existence, and the only way of attaining truth is through the interpenetration of our being into all objects. To realize this great harmony between man's spirit and the spirit of the world was the endeavour of the forest-dwelling sages of ancient India.

In later days there came a time when these primeval forests gave way to cultivated fields, and wealthy cities sprang up on all sides. Mighty kingdoms were established, which had communications with all the great powers of the world. But even in the heyday of its material prosperity the heart of India ever looked back with adoration upon the early ideal of strenuous self-realization, and the dignity of the simple life of the forest hermitage, and drew its best inspiration from the wisdom stored there.

The west seems to take a pride in thinking that it is subduing nature; as if we are living in a hostile world where we have to wrest everything we want from an unwilling and alien arrangement of things. This sentiment is the product of the city-wall habit and training of mind. For in the city life man naturally directs the concentrated light of his mental vision upon his own life and works, and this creates an artificial dissociation between himself and the Universal Nature within whose bosom he lies.

But in India the point of view was different; it included the world with the man as one great truth. India put all her emphasis on the harmony that exists between the individual and the universal. She felt we could have no communication whatever with our surroundings if they were absolutely foreign to us. Man's complaint against nature is that he has to acquire most of his necessaries by his own efforts. Yes, but his efforts are not in vain; he is reaping success every day, and that shows there is a rational connection between him and nature, for we never can make anything our own except that which is truly related to us.

We can look upon a road from two different points of view. One regards it as dividing us from the object of our desire; in that case we count every step of our journey over it as something attained by force in the face of obstruction. The other sees it as the road which leads us to our destination; and as such it is part of our goal. It is already the beginning of our attainment, and by journeying over it we can only gain that which in itself it offers to us. This last point of view is that of India with regard to nature. For her, the great fact is that we are in harmony with nature; that man can think because his thoughts are in harmony with things; that he can use the forces of nature for his own purpose only because his power is in harmony with the power which is universal, and that in the long run his purpose never can knock against the purpose which works through nature.

In the west the prevalent feeling is that nature belongs exclusively to inanimate

things and to beasts, that there is a sudden unaccountable break where human-nature begins. According to it, everything that is low in the scale of beings is merely nature, and whatever has the stamp of perfection on it, intellectual or moral, is human-nature. It is like dividing the bud and the blossom into two separate categories, and putting their grace to the credit of two different and antithetical principles. But the Indian mind never has any hesitation in acknowledging its kinship with nature, its unbroken relation with all.

The fundamental unity of creation was not simply & philosophical speculation for India; it was her life-object to realize this great harmony in feeling and in action. With meditation and service, with a regulation of her life, she cultivated her consciousness in such a way that everything had a spiritual meaning to her. The earth, water and light, fruits and flowers, to her were not merely physical phenomena to be turned to use and then left aside. They were necessary to her in the attainment of her ideal of perfection, as every note is necessary to the completeness of the symphony. India intuitively felt that the essential fact of this world has a vital meaning for us; we have to be fully alive to it and establish a conscious relation with it, not merely impelled by scientific curiosity or greed of material advantage, but realising it in the spirit of sympathy, with a large feeling of joy and peace.

The man of science knows, in one aspect, that the world is not merely what it appears to be to our senses; he knows that earth and water are really the play of forces that manifest themselves to us as earth and water—how, we can but partially apprehend. Likewise the man who has his spiritual eyes open knows that the ultimate truth about earth and water lies in our apprehension of the eternal will which works in time and takes shape in the forces we realize under those aspects. This is not mere knowledge, as science is, but it is a perception of the soul by the soul. This does not lead us to power, as knowledge does, but it gives us joy, which is the product of the union of kindred things. The man whose acquaintance with the world does not lead him deeper than science leads him, will never understand what it is that the man with the spiritual vision finds in these natural phenomena. The water does not merely cleanse his limbs, but it purifies his heart; for it touches his soul. The earth does not merely hold his body, but it gladdens his mind; for its contact is more than a physical contact—it is a living presence. When a man does not realize his kinship with the world, he lives in a prison-house whose walls are alien to him. When he meets the eternal spirit in all objects, then is he emancipated for then he discovers the fullest significance of the world into which he is born; then he finds himself in perfect truth, and his harmony with the all is established. In India men are enjoined to be fully awake to the fact that they are in the closest relation to things around them,

body and soul, and that they are to hail the morning sun, the flowing water, the fruitful earth, as the manifestation of the same living truth which holds them in its embrace.

Thus the text of our everyday meditation is the *Gayatri*, a verse which is considered to be the epitome of all the Vedas. By its help we try to realize the essential unity of the world with the conscious soul of man; we learn to perceive the unity held together by the one Eternal Spirit, whose power creates the earth, the sky, and the stars, and at the same time irradiates our minds with the light of a consciousness that moves and exists in unbroken continuity with the outer world.

It is not true that India has tried to ignore differences of value in different things, for she knows that would make life impossible. The sense of the superiority of man in the scale of creation has not been absent from her mind. But she has had her own idea as to that in which his superiority really consists. It is not in the power of possession but in the power of union. Therefore India chose her places of pilgrimage wherever there was in nature some special grandeur or beauty, so that her mind could come out of its world of narrow necessities and realize its place in the infinite. This was the reason why in India a whole people who once were meat-eaters gave up taking animal food to cultivate the sentiment of universal sympathy for life, an event unique in the history of mankind.

India knew that when by physical and mental barriers we violently detach ourselves from the inexhaustible life of nature; when we become merely man, not man-in-the-universe, we create bewildering problems, and having shut off the source of their solution, we try all kinds of artificial methods each of which brings its own crop of interminable difficulties. When man leaves his resting-place in universal nature, when he walks on the single rope of humanity, it means either a dance or a fall for him, he has ceaselessly to strain every nerve and muscle to keep his balance at each step, and then, in the intervals of his weariness, he fulminates against Providence and feels a secret pride and satisfaction in thinking that he has been unfairly dealt with by the whole scheme of things.

But this cannot go on forever. Man must realize the wholeness of his existence, his place in the infinite; he must know that hard as he may strive he can never create his honey within the cells of his hive, for the perennial supply of his life food is outside their walls. He must know that when man shuts himself out from the vitalising and purifying touch of the infinite, and falls back upon himself for his sustenance and his healing, then he goads himself into madness, tears himself

into shreds, and eats his own substance. Deprived of the background of the whole, his poverty loses its one great quality, which is simplicity, and becomes squalid and shamefaced. His wealth is no longer magnanimous; it grows merely extravagant. His appetites do not minister to his life, keeping to the limits of their purpose; they become an end in themselves and set fire to his life and play the fiddle in the lurid light of the conflagration. Then it is that in our self-expression we try to startle and not to attract; in art we strive for originality and lose sight of truth which is old and yet ever new; in literature we miss the complete view of man which is simple and yet great. Man appears instead as a psychological problem, or as the embodiment of a passion that is intense because abnormal, being exhibited in the glare of a fiercely emphatic artificial light. When man's consciousness is restricted only to the immediate vicinity of his human self, the deeper roots of his nature do not find their permanent soil, his spirit is ever on the brink of starvation, and in the place of healthful strength he substitutes rounds of stimulation. Then it is that man misses his inner perspective and measures his greatness by its bulk and not by its vital link with the infinite, judges his activity by its movement and not by the repose of perfection—the repose which is in the starry heavens, in the ever-flowing rhythmic dance of creation.

The first invasion of India has its exact parallel in the invasion of America by the European settlers. They also were confronted with primeval forests and a fierce struggle with aboriginal races. But this struggle between man and man, and man and nature lasted till the very end; they never came to any terms. In India the forests which were the habitation of barbarians became the sanctuary of sages, but in America these great living cathedrals of nature had no deeper significance to man. They brought wealth and power to him, and perhaps at times they ministered to his enjoyment of beauty, and inspired a solitary poet. They never acquired a sacred association in the hearts of men as the site of some great spiritual reconciliation where man's soul had its meeting-place with the soul of the world.

I do not for a moment wish to suggest that things should have been otherwise, It would be an utter waste of opportunities if history were to repeat itself exactly in the same manner in every place. It is best for the commerce of the spirit that people differently situated should bring their different products into the market of humanity, each of which is complementary and necessary to the others. All that I wish to say is that India at the outset of her career met with a special combination of circumstances which was not lost upon her. She had, according to her opportunities, thought and pondered, striven and suffered, dived into the depths of existence, and achieved something which surely cannot be without its

value to people whose evolution in history took a different way altogether. Man for his perfect growth requires all the living elements that constitute his complex life; that is why his food has to be cultivated in different fields and brought from different sources.

Civilization is a kind of mould that each nation is busy making for itself to shape its men and women according to its best ideal. All its institutions, its legislature, its standard of approbation and condemnation, its conscious and unconscious teachings tend toward that object. The modern civilization of the west, by all its organised efforts, is trying to turn out men perfect in physical, intellectual, and moral efficiency. There the vast energies of the nations are employed in extending man's power over his surroundings, and people are combining and straining every faculty to possess and to turn to account all that they can lay their hands upon, to overcome every obstacle on their path of conquest. They are ever disciplining themselves to fight nature and other races; their armaments are getting more and more stupendous every day; their machines, their appliances, their organisations go on multiplying at an amazing rate. This is a splendid achievement, no doubt, and a wonderful manifestation of man's masterfulness, which knows no obstacle and has for its object the supremacy of himself over everything else.

The ancient civilization of India had its own ideal of perfection towards which its efforts were directed. Its aim was not attaining power, and it neglected to cultivate to the utmost its capacities, and to organize men for defensive and offensive purposes, for co-operation in the acquisition of wealth and for military and political ascendancy. The ideal that India tried to realize led her best men to the isolation of a contemplative life, and the treasures that she gained for mankind by penetrating into the mysteries of reality cost her dear in the sphere of worldly success. Yet, this also was a sublime achievement,—it was a supreme manifestation of that human aspiration which knows no limit, and which has for its object nothing less than the realization of the Infinite. There were the virtuous, the wise, the courageous; there were the statesmen, kings and emperors of India; but whom amongst all these classes did she look up to and choose to be the representative of men?

They were the *rishis*. What were the *rishis*? They who having attained the supreme soul in knowledge' were filled with wisdom, and having found him in union with the soul were in perfect harmony with the inner self; they having realized him in the heart were free from all selfish desires, and having experienced him in all the activities of the world, had attained calmness. The *rishis* were they who having reached the supreme God from all sides had found

abiding peace, had become united with all, had entered into the life of the Universe.

Thus the state of realising our relationship with all, of entering into everything through union with God, was considered in India to be the ultimate end and fulfilment of humanity.

Man can destroy and plunder, earn and accumulate, invent and discover, but he is great because his soul comprehends all. It is dire destruction for him when he envelopes his soul in a dead shell of callous habits, and when a blind fury of works whirls round him like an eddying dust storm, shutting out the horizon. That indeed kills the very spirit of his being, which is the spirit of comprehension. Essentially man is not a slave either of himself or of the world; but he is a lover. His freedom and fulfilment is in love, which is another name for perfect comprehension. By this power of comprehension, this permeation of his being, he is united with the all-pervading Spirit, who is also the breath of his soul. Where a man tries to raise himself to eminence by pushing and jostling all others, to achieve a distinction by which he prides himself to be more than everybody else, there he is alienated from that Spirit. This is why the Upanishads describe those who have attained the goal of human life as ‘peaceful’ and as ‘at-one-with-God,’ meaning that they are in perfect harmony with man and nature, and therefore in undisturbed union with God.

We have a glimpse of the same truth in the teachings of Jesus when he says. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of Heaven—which implies that whatever we treasure for ourselves separates us from others; our possessions are our limitations. He who is bent upon accumulating riches is unable, with his ego continually bulging, to pass through the gates of comprehension of the spiritual world, which is the world of perfect harmony; he is shut up within the narrow walls of his limited acquisitions.

Hence the spirit of the teachings of the Upanishads is: In order to find him you must embrace all. In the pursuit of wealth you really give up everything to gain a few things, and that is not the way to attain him who is completeness.

Some modern philosophers of Europe, who are directly or indirectly indebted to the Upanishads, far from realising their debt, maintain that the Brahma of India is a mere abstraction, a negation of all that is in the world. In a word, that the Infinite Being is to be found nowhere except in metaphysics.

It may be, that such a doctrine has been and still is prevalent with a section of our countrymen. But this is certainly not in accord with the pervading spirit of the Indian mind. Instead, it is the practice of realising and affirming the presence

of the infinite in all things which has been its constant inspiration.

We are enjoined to see whatever there is in the world as being enveloped by God.

I bow to God over and over again who is in fire and in water, who permeates the whole world, who is in the annual crops as well as in the perennial trees.

Can this be God abstracted from the world? Instead, it signifies not merely seeing him in all things, but saluting him, in all the objects of the world. The attitude of the God-conscious man of the Upanishad towards the universe is one of a deep feeling of adoration. His object of worship, is present everywhere. It is the one living truth that makes all realities true. This truth is not only of knowledge but of devotion. '*Namonamah*,'—we bow to him everywhere, and over and over again. It is recognized in the outburst of the Rishi, who addresses the whole world in a sudden ecstasy of joy: Listen to me, ye sons of the immortal spirit, ye who live in the heavenly abode, I have known the Supreme Person whose light shines forth from beyond the darkness. Do we not find the overwhelming delight of a direct and positive experience where there is not the least trace of vagueness or passivity?

Buddha, who developed the practical side of the teaching of the Upanishads, preached the same message when he said, "With everything, whether it is above or below, remote or near, visible or invisible, thou shall preserve a relation of unlimited love without any animosity or without a desire to kill. To live in such a consciousness while standing or walking, sitting or lying down till you are asleep, is Brahma vihara, or, in other words, is living and moving and having your joy in the spirit of Brahma."

What is that spirit? The Upanishad says, "The being who is in his essence the light and life of all, who is world-conscious, is Brahma. To feel all, to be conscious of everything, is his spirit. We are immersed in his consciousness body and soul. It is through his consciousness that the sun attracts the earth; it is through his consciousness that the light-waves are being transmitted from planet to planet."

Not only in space, but this light and life, this all-feeling being is in our souls' He is all-conscious in space, or the world of extension; and he is all-conscious in soul, or the world of intension.

Thus to attain our world-consciousness, we have to unite our feeling with this all-pervasive infinite feeling. In fact, the only true human progress is coincident with this widening of the range of feeling. All our poetry, philosophy, science, art, and religion are serving to extend the scope of our consciousness towards higher and larger spheres. Man does not acquire rights through occupation of

larger space, nor through external conduct, but his rights extend only so far as he is real, and his reality is measured by the scope of his consciousness.

We have, however, to pay a price for this attainment of the freedom of consciousness. What is the price? It is to give one's self away. Our soul can realize itself truly only by denying itself. The Upanishad says, "Thou shalt gain by giving away," 'Thou shalt not covet.'

In the Gita we are advised to work disinterestedly, abandoning all lust for the result. Many outsiders conclude from this teaching that the conception of the world as something unreal lies at the root of the so-called disinterestedness preached in India. But the reverse is the truth.

The man who aims at his own aggrandizement underrates everything else. Compared with himself the rest of the world is unreal. Thus in order to be fully conscious of the reality of all, man has to be free himself from the bonds of personal desires. This discipline we have to go through to prepare ourselves for our social duties—for sharing the burdens of our fellow-beings. Every endeavour to attain a larger life requires of man 'to gain by giving away, and not to be greedy.' And thus to expand gradually the consciousness of one's unity with all is the striving of humanity.

The Infinite in India was not a thin nonentity, void of all content. The Rishis of India asserted emphatically, 'To know him in this life is to be true; not to know him in this life is the desolation of death.' How to know him then?

'By realising him in each and all.' Not only in nature, but in the family, in society, and in the state, the more we realize the World-conscious in all, the better for us. Failing to realize this, we turn our faces to destruction.

It fills me with great joy and a high hope for the future of humanity when I realize that there was a time in the remote past when our poet-prophets stood under the lavish sunshine of an Indian sky and greeted the world with the glad recognition of kindred. It was not an anthropomorphic hallucination. It was not seeing man reflected everywhere in grotesquely exaggerated images, and witnessing the human drama acted on a gigantic scale in nature's arena of flitting lights and shadows. On the contrary, it meant crossing the limiting barriers of the individual, to become more than man, to become one with the All. It was not a mere play of the imagination, but it was the liberation of consciousness from all the mystifications and exaggerations of the self. These ancient seers felt in the serene depth of their mind that the same energy, which vibrates and passes into the endless forms of the world, manifests itself in our inner being as consciousness; and there is no break in unity. For these seers there was no gap in their luminous vision of perfection. They never acknowledged even death itself

as creating a chasm in the field of reality. They said, His reflection is death as well as immortality. They did not recognize any essential opposition between life and death, and they said with absolute assurance. It is life that is death.' They saluted with the same serenity of gladness 'life in its aspect of appearing and in its aspect of departure'—Then which is past is hidden in life, and that which is to come. They knew that mere appearance and disappearance are on the surface like waves on the sea, but life which is permanent knows no decay or diminution.

Everything has sprung from immortal life and is vibrating with life, for life is immense.

This is the noble heritage from our forefathers waiting to be claimed by us as our own, this ideal of the supreme freedom of consciousness. It is not merely intellectual or emotional, it has an ethical basis, and it must be translated into action. In the Upanishad it is said, The supreme being is all-pervading, therefore he is the innate good in all.' To be truly united in knowledge, love, and service with all beings, and thus to realize one's self in the all-pervading God is the essence of goodness, and this is the keynote of the teachings of the Upanishads: Life is immense!

4.8. Soul Consciousness

We have seen that it was the aspiration of ancient India to live and move and have its joy in Brahma, the all-conscious and all-pervading Spirit, by extending its field of consciousness over all the world. But that, it may be urged, is an impossible task for man to achieve. If this extension of consciousness be an outward process, then it is endless; it is like attempting to cross the ocean after ladling out its water. By beginning to try to realize all, one has to end by realising nothing.

But, in reality, it is not so absurd as it sounds. Man has every day to solve this problem of enlarging his region and adjusting his burdens. His burdens are many, too numerous for him to carry, but he knows that by adopting a system he can lighten the weight of his load. Whenever they feel too complicated and unwieldy, he knows it is because he has not been able to hit upon the system which would have set everything in place and distributed the weight evenly. This search for system is really a search for unity, for synthesis; it is our attempt to harmonise the heterogeneous complexity of outward materials by an inner adjustment. In the search we gradually become aware that to find out the One is to possess the All; that there, indeed, is our last and highest privilege. It is based on the law of that unity which is, if we only know it, our abiding strength. Its living principle is the power that is in truth; the truth of that unity which comprehends multiplicity. Facts are many, but the truth is one. The animal intelligence knows facts, the human mind has power to apprehend truth. The apple falls from the tree, the rain descends upon the earth—you can go on burdening your memory with such facts and never come to an end. But once you get hold of the law of gravitation you can dispense with the necessity of collecting facts ad infinitum. You have got at one truth which governs numberless facts. This discovery of a truth is pure joy to man—it is a liberation of his mind. For, a mere fact is like a blind lane, it leads only to itself—it has no beyond. But a truth opens up a whole horizon, it leads us to the infinite. That is the reason why, when a man like Darwin discovers some simple general truth about Biology, it does not stop there, but like a lamp shedding its light far

beyond the object for which it was lighted, it illuminates the whole region of human life and thought, transcending its original purpose. Thus we find that truth, while investing all facts, is not a mere aggregate of facts—it surpasses them on all sides and points to the infinite reality.

As in the region of knowledge so in that of consciousness, man must clearly realize some central truth which will give him an outlook over the widest possible field. And that is the object which the Upanishad has in view when it says, Know thine own Soul. Or, in other words, realize the one great principle of unity that there is in every man.

All our egoistic impulses, our selfish desires, obscure our true vision of the soul. For they only indicate our own narrow self. When we are conscious of our soul, we perceive the inner being that transcends our ego and has its deeper affinity with the All.

Children, when they begin to learn each separate letter of the alphabet, find no pleasure in it, because they miss the real purpose of the lesson; in fact, while letters claim our attention only in themselves and as isolated things, they fatigue us. They become a source of joy to us only when they combine into words and sentences and convey an idea.

Likewise, our soul when detached and imprisoned within the narrow limits of a self loses its significance. For its very essence is unity. It can only find out its truth by unifying itself with others, and only then it has its joy. Man was troubled and he lived in a state of fear so long as he had not discovered the uniformity of law in nature; till then the world was alien to him. The law that he discovered is nothing but the perception of harmony that prevails between reason, which is the soul of man, and the workings of the world. This is the bond of union through which man is related to the world in which he lives, and he feels an exceeding joy when he finds this out, for then he realizes himself in his surroundings. To understand anything is to find in it something which is our own, and it is the discovery of ourselves outside us which makes us glad. This relation of understanding is partial, but the relation of love is complete. In love the sense of difference is obliterated and the human soul fulfils its purpose in perfection, transcending the limits of itself and reaching across the threshold of the infinite. Therefore love is the highest bliss that man can attain to, for through it alone he truly knows that he is more than himself, and that he is at one with the All.

This principle of unity which man has in his soul is ever active, establishing relations far and wide through literature, art, and science, society, state-craft, and religion. Our great Revealers are they who make manifest the true meaning of

the soul by giving up self for the love of mankind. They face calumny and persecution, deprivation and death in their service of love. They live the life of the soul, not of the self, and thus they prove to us the ultimate truth of humanity. We call them Mahatmas, ‘the men of the great soul.’

It is said in one of the Upanishads: It is not that thou lovest thy son because thou desirest him, but thou lovest thy son because thou desirest thine own soul. The meaning of this is, that whomsoever we love, in him we find our own soul in the highest sense. The final truth of our existence lies in this. *Paramatma*, the supreme soul, is in me, as well as in my son, and my joy in my son is the realization of this truth. It has become quite a commonplace fact, yet it is wonderful to think upon, that the joys and sorrows of our loved ones are joys and sorrows to us—nay, they are more. Why so? Because in them we have grown larger, in them we have touched that great truth which comprehends the whole universe.

It very often happens that our love for our children, our friends, or other loved ones, debars us from the further realization of our soul. It enlarges our scope of consciousness, no doubt, yet it sets a limit to its freest expansion. Nevertheless it is the first step, and all the wonder lies in this first step itself. It shows to us the true nature of our soul. From it we know, for certain, that our highest joy is in the losing of our egoistic self and in the uniting with others. This love gives us a new power and insight and beauty of mind to the extent of the limits we set around it, but ceases to do so if those limits lose their elasticity, and militate against the spirit of love altogether; then our friendships become exclusive, our families selfish and inhospitable, our nations insular and aggressively inimical to other races. It is like putting a burning light within a sealed enclosure, which shines brightly till the poisonous gases accumulate and smother the flame. Nevertheless it has proved its truth before it dies, and made known the joy of freedom from the grip of the darkness, blind and empty and cold.

According to the Upanishads, the key to cosmic consciousness, to God-consciousness, is in the consciousness of the soul. To know our soul apart from the self is the first step towards the realization of the supreme deliverance. We must know with absolute certainty that essentially we are spirit. This we can do by winning mastery over self, by rising above all pride and greed and fear, by knowing that worldly losses and physical death can take nothing away from the truth and the greatness of our soul. The chick knows when it breaks through the self-centered isolation of its egg that the hard shell which covered it so long was not really a part of its life. That shell is a dead thing, it has no growth, it affords no glimpse whatever of the vast beyond that lies outside it. However pleasantly

perfect and rounded it may be, it must be given a blow to, it must be burst through and thereby the freedom of light and air be won, and the complete purpose of bird life be achieved. In Sanskrit, the bird has been called the twice-born: so too the man is named, who has gone through the ceremony of the discipline of self-restraint and high thinking for a period of at least twelve years; who has come out simple in wants, pure in heart, and ready to take up all the responsibilities of life in a disinterested largeness of spirit. He is considered to have had his rebirth from the blind envelopment of self to the freedom of soul life; to have come into living relation with his surroundings; to have become at one with the All.

I have already warned my hearers, and must once more warn them against the idea that the teachers of India preached a renunciation of the world and of self which leads only to the blank emptiness of negation. Their aim was the realization of the soul, or, in other words, gaining the world in perfect truth. When Jesus said, ‘Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth,’ he meant this. He proclaimed the truth that when man gets rid of his pride of self then he comes into his true inheritance. No more has he to fight his way into his position in the world; it is secure for him everywhere by the immortal right of his soul. Pride of self interferes with the proper function of the soul which is to realize, itself by perfecting its union with the world and the world’s God.

In his sermon to Sadhu Simha Buddha says, ‘It is true, Simha, that I denounce activities, but only the activities that lead to the evil in words, thoughts, or deeds. It is true, Simha, that I preach extinction, but only the extinction of pride, lust, evil thought, and ignorance, not that of forgiveness, love, charity, and truth.’

The doctrine of deliverance that Buddha preached was the freedom from the thraldom of *avidya*. *Avidya* is the ignorance that darkens our consciousness, and tends to limit it within the boundaries of our personal self. It is this *avidya*, this ignorance, this limiting of consciousness that creates the hard separateness of the ego, and thus becomes the source of all pride and greed and cruelty incidental to self-seeking. When a man sleeps he is shut up within the narrow activities of his physical life. He lives, but he knows not the varied relations of his life to his surroundings,—therefore he knows not himself. So when a man lives the life of *Avidya* he is confined within his own self. It is a spiritual sleep; his consciousness is not fully awake to the highest reality that surrounds him, therefore he knows not the reality of his own soul. When he attains Bodhi, i.e. the awakening from the sleep of self to the perfection of consciousness, he becomes Buddha.

Once I met two ascetics of a certain religious sect in a village of Bengal. ‘Can

'you tell me,' I asked them, 'wherein lies the special features of your religion?' One of them hesitated for a moment and answered, 'It is difficult to define that.' The other said, 'No, it is quite simple. We hold that we have first of all to know our own soul under the guidance of our spiritual teacher, and when we have done that we can find him, who is the Supreme Soul, within us.' 'Why don't you preach your doctrine to all the people of the world?' I asked. 'Whoever feels thirsty will of himself come to the river,' was his reply. 'But then, do you find it so? Are they coming?' The man gave a gentle smile, and with an assurance which had not the least tinge of impatience or anxiety, he said, 'They must come, one and all.'

Yes, he is right, this simple ascetic of rural Bengal. Man is indeed abroad to satisfy needs which are more to him than food and clothing. He is out to find himself. Man's history is the history of his journey to the unknown in quest of the realization of his immortal self—his soul. Through the rise and fall of empires; through the building up gigantic piles of wealth and the ruthless scattering of them upon the dust; through the creation of vast bodies of symbols that give shape to his dreams and aspirations, and the casting of them away like the playthings of an outworn infancy; through his forging of magic keys with which to unlock the mysteries of creation, and through his throwing away of this labour of ages to go back to his workshop and work up afresh some new form; yes, through it all man is marching from epoch to epoch towards the fullest realization of his soul,—the soul which is greater than the things man accumulates, the deeds he accomplishes, the theories he builds, the soul whose onward course is never checked by death or dissolution. Man's mistakes and failures have by no means been trifling or small, they have strewn his path with colossal ruins; his sufferings have been immense, like birth-pangs for a giant child; they are the prelude of a fulfilment whose scope is infinite. Man has gone through and is still undergoing martyrdoms in various ways, and his institutions are the altars he has built whereto he brings his daily sacrifices, marvellous in kind and stupendous in quantity. All this would be absolutely unmeaning and unbearable if all along he did not feel that deepest joy of the soul within him, which tries its divine strength by suffering and proves its exhaustless riches by renunciation. Yes, they are coming, the pilgrims, one and all—coming to their true inheritance of the world; they are ever broadening their consciousness, ever seeking a higher and higher unity, ever approaching nearer to the one central Truth which is all-comprehensive.

Man's poverty is abysmal, his wants are endless till he becomes truly conscious of his soul. Till then, the world to him is in a state of continual flux—a phantasm that is and is not. For a man who has realized his soul there is a

determinate centre of the universe around which all else can find its proper place, and from thence only can he draw and enjoy the blessedness of a harmonious life.

There was a time when the earth was only a nebulous mass whose particles were scattered far apart through the expanding force of heat; when she had not yet attained her definiteness of form and had neither beauty nor purpose, but only heat and motion. Gradually, when her vapours were condensed into a unified rounded whole through a force that strove to bring all straggling matters under the control of a centre, she occupied her proper place among the planets of the solar system, like an emerald pendant in a necklace of diamonds. So with our soul. When the heat and motion of blind impulses and passions distract it on all sides, we can neither give nor receive anything truly. But when we find our centre in our soul by the power of self-restraint, by the force that harmonises all warring elements and unifies those that are apart, then all our isolated impressions reduce themselves to wisdom, and all our momentary impulses of heart find their completion in love; then all the petty details of our life reveal an infinite purpose, and all our thoughts and deeds unite themselves inseparably in an internal harmony.

The Upanishads say with great emphasis, Know thou the One, the Soul. It is the bridge leading to the immortal being.

This is the ultimate end of man, to find the One which is in him; which is his truth, which is his soul; the key with which he opens the gate of the spiritual life, the heavenly kingdom. His desires are many, and madly they run after the varied objects of the world, for therein they have their life and fulfilment. But that which is one in him is ever seeking for unity—unity in knowledge, unity in love, unity in purposes of will; its highest joy is when it reaches the infinite one within its eternal unity. Hence the saying of the Upanishad, Only those of tranquil minds, and none else, can attain abiding joy, by realising within their souls the Being who manifests one essence in a multiplicity of forms.

Through all the diversities of the world the one in us is threading its course towards the one in all; this is its nature and this is its joy. But by that devious path it could never reach its goal if it had not a light of its own by which it could catch in a flash the sight of what it was seeking. The vision of the Supreme One in our own soul is a direct and immediate intuition, not based on any ratiocination or demonstration at all. Our eyes naturally see an object as a whole, not by breaking it up into parts, but by bringing all the parts together into a unity with ourselves. So with the intuition of our Soul-consciousness, which naturally and totally realizes its unity in the Supreme One.

Says the Upanishad: This deity who is manifesting himself in the activities of the universe always dwells in the heart of man as the supreme soul. Those who realize him through the immediate perception of the heart attain immortality.

He is Vishvakarma; that is, in a multiplicity of forms and forces lies his outward manifestation in nature; but his inner manifestation in our soul is that which exists in unity. Our pursuit of truth in the domain of nature therefore is through analysis and the gradual methods of science, but our apprehension of truth in our soul is immediate and through direct intuition. We cannot attain the supreme soul by successive additions of knowledge acquired bit by bit even through all eternity, because he is one, he is not made up of parts; we can only know him as heart of our hearts and soul of our soul; we can only know him in the love and joy we feel when we give up our self and stand before him face to face.

The deepest and the most earnest prayer that has ever risen from the human heart has been uttered in our ancient tongue: O thou self-revealing one, reveal thyself in me. We are in misery because we are creatures of self—the self that is unyielding and narrow, that reflects no light, that is blind to the infinite. Our self is loud with its own discordant clamour—it is not the tuned harp whose chords vibrate with the music of the eternal. Sighs of discontent and weariness of failure, idle regrets for the past and anxieties for the future are troubling our shallow hearts because we have not found our souls, and the self-revealing spirit has not been manifest within us. Hence our cry, O thou awful one, save me with thy smile of grace ever and evermore. It is a stifling shroud of death, this self-gratification, this insatiable greed, this pride of possession, this insolent alienation of heart. Rudra, O thou awful are, rend this dark cover in twain and let the saving beam of thy smile of grace strike through this night of gloom and waken my soul.

From unreality lead me to the real, from darkness to the light, from death to immortality." But how can one hope to have this prayer granted? For infinite is the distance that lies between truth and untruth, between death and deathlessness. Yet this measureless gulf is bridged in a moment when the self-revealing one reveals himself in the soul. There the miracle happens, for there is the meeting-ground of the finite and infinite. Father, completely sweep away all my sins! For in sin man takes part with the finite against the infinite that is in him. It is the defeat of his soul by his self. It is a perilously losing game, in which man stakes his all to gain a part. Sin is the blurring of truth which clouds the purity of our consciousness. In sin we lust after pleasures, not because they are truly desirable, but because the red light of our passion makes them appear

desirable; we long for things not because they are great in themselves, but because our greed exaggerates them and makes them appear great. These exaggerations, these falsifications of the perspective of things, break the harmony of our life at every step; we lose the true standard of values and are distracted by the false claims of the varied interests of life contending with one another. It is this failure to bring all the elements of his nature under the unity and control of the Supreme One that makes man feel the pang of his separation from God and gives rise to the earnest prayer, O God, O Father, completely sweep away all our sins. Give into us that which is good, the good which is the daily bread of our souls. In our pleasures we are confined to ourselves, in the good we are freed and we belong to all. As the child in its mother's womb gets its sustenance through the union of its life with the larger life of its mother, so our soul is nourished only through the good which is the recognition of its inner kinship, the channel of its communication with the infinite by which it is surrounded and fed. Hence it is said, 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.' For righteousness is the divine food of the soul; nothing but this can untruth and unrighteousness hold its reign; and things can come to such a pass that we may cry out in our anguish, 'Such utter lawlessness could never prevail if there were a God! Indeed, God has stood aside from our self, where his watchful patience knows no bounds, and where he never forces open the doors if shut against him. For this self of ours has to attain its ultimate meaning, which is the soul, not through the compulsion of God's power but through love, and thus become united with God in freedom.

He whose spirit has been made one with God stands before man as the supreme flower of humanity. There man finds in truth what he is; for there the Avih is revealed to him in the soul of man as the most perfect revelation for him of God; for there we see the union of the supreme will with our will, our love with the love everlasting.

Therefore, in our country he who truly loves God receives such homage from men as would be considered almost sacrilegious in the west. We see in him God's wish fulfilled, the most difficult of all obstacles to his revealment removed, and God's own perfect joy fully blossoming in humanity. Through him we find the whole world of man overspread with a divine homeliness. His life, burning with God's love, makes all our earthly love resplendent. All the intimate associations of our life, all its experience of pleasure and pain, group themselves around this display of the divine love, and form the drama that we witness in him. The touch of an infinite mystery passes over the trivial and the familiar, making it break out into ineffable music. The trees and the stars and the blue hills appear to us as symbols aching with a meaning which can never be uttered

in words. We seem to watch the Master in the very act of creation of a new world when a man's soul draws her heavy curtain of self aside, when her veil is lifted and she is face to face with her eternal lover.

But what is this state? It is like a morning of spring, varied in its life and beauty, yet one and entire. When a man's life rescued from distractions finds its unity in the soul, then the consciousness of the infinite becomes at once direct and natural to it as the light is to the flame. All the conflicts and contradictions of life are reconciled; knowledge, love, and action harmonized; pleasure and pain become one in beauty, enjoyment and renunciation equal in goodness; the breach between the finite and the infinite fills with love and overflows; every moment carries its message of the eternal: the formless appears to us in the form of the flower, of the fruit; the boundless takes us up in his arms as a father and walks by our side as a friend. It is only the soul, the one in man which by its very nature can overcome all limits, and finds its affinity with the Supreme One. While yet we have not attained the internal harmony, and the wholeness of our being, our life remains a life of habits. The world still appears to us as a machine, to be mastered where it is useful, to be guarded against where it is dangerous, and never to be known in its full fellowship with us alike in its physical nature and in its spiritual life and beauty.

5. The Spirit of Japan

I am glad to have this opportunity once more of speaking to you before I leave Japan. My stay here has been so short that one may think I have not earned my right to speak to you about anything concerning your country. I feel sure that I shall be told, that I am idealising certain aspects, while leaving others unnoticed, and that there are chances of my disillusionment, if I remain here for long. For I have known foreigners, whose long experience has made them doubtful about your moral qualifications,—even of your full efficiency in modern equipments of progress.

But I am not going to be brow-beaten by the authority of long experience, which is likely to be an experience of blindness carried through long years. I have known such instances in my own country. The mental sense, by the help of which we feel the spirit of a people, is like the sense of sight, or of touch,—it is a natural gift. It finds its objects, not by analysis, but by direct apprehension. Those who have not this vision, merely see events and facts, and not their inner association. Those who have no ear for music, hear sounds, but not the song. Therefore when, by the mere reason of the lengthiness of their suffering, they threaten to establish the fact of the tune to be a noise, one need not be anxious about music. Very often it is mistakes that require longer time to develop their tangles, while the right answer comes promptly.

You ask me how I can prove, that I am right in my confidence that I can see. My answer is, because I see something which is positive. There are others, who affirm that they see something contrary. It only shows, that I am looking on the picture side of the canvas, and they on the blank side. Therefore my short view is of more value than their prolonged stare.

It is a truism to say that shadows accompany light. What you feel, as the truth of a people, has its numberless contradictions,—just as the roundness of the earth is contradicted at every step by its hills and hollows. Those who can boast of a greater familiarity with your country than myself, can bring before me loads of contradictions, but I remain firm upon my vision of a truth, which does not depend upon its dimension, but upon its vitality.

At first, I had my doubts. I thought that I might not be able to see Japan, as she is herself, but should have to be content to see the Japan that takes an acrobatic pride in violently appearing as something else. On my first arrival in this

country, when I looked out from the balcony of a house on the hillside, the town of Kobe,—that huge mass of corrugated iron roofs,—appeared to me like a dragon, with glistening scales, basking in the sun, after having devoured a large slice of the living flesh of the earth. This dragon did not belong to the mythology of the past, but of the present; and with its iron mask it tried to look real to the children of the age,—real as the majestic rocks on the shore, as the epic rhythm of the sea-waves. Anyhow it hid Japan from my view, and I felt myself like the traveller, whose time is short, waiting for the cloud to be lifted to have a sight of the eternal snow on the Himalayan summit. I asked myself,—‘Will the dense mist of the iron age give way for a moment, and let me see what is true and abiding in this land?’ I was enveloped in a whirlwind of reception, but I had my misgivings and thought that this might be a violent outbreak of curiosity,—or that these people felt themselves bound to show their appreciation of a man who had won renown from Europe, thus doing honour to the West in a vicarious form.

But the clouds showed rifts, and glimpses I had of Japan where she is true and more human. While travelling in a railway train I met, at a wayside station, some Buddhist priests and devotees. They brought their basket of fruits to me and held their lighted incense before my face, wishing to pay homage to a man who had come from the land of Buddha. The dignified serenity of their bearing, the simplicity of their devoutness, seemed to fill the atmosphere of the busy railway station with a golden light of peace. Their language of silence drowned the noisy effusion of the newspapers. I felt that I saw something which was at the root of Japan’s greatness. And, since then, I have had other opportunities of reaching the heart of the people; and I have come to the conclusion, that the welcome which flowed towards me, with such outburst of sincerity, was owing to the fact that Japan felt the nearness of India to herself, and realised that her own heart has room to expand beyond her boundaries and the boundaries of the modern time.

I have travelled in many countries and have met with men of all classes, but never in my travels did I feel the presence of the human so distinctly as in this land. In other great countries, signs of man’s power loomed large, and I saw vast organisations which showed efficiency in all their features. There, display and extravagance, in dress, in furniture, in costly entertainments, are startling. They seem to push you back into a corner, like a poor intruder at a feast; they are apt to make you envious, or take your breath away with amazement. There, you do not feel man as supreme; you are hurled against the stupendousness of things that alienates. But, in Japan, it is not the display of power, or wealth, that is the predominating element. You see everywhere emblems of love and admiration, and not mostly of ambition and greed. You see a people, whose heart has come

out and scattered itself in profusion in its commonest utensils of everyday life in its social institutions, in its manners, that are carefully perfect, and in its dealings with things that are not only deft, but graceful in every movement.

What has impressed me most in this country is the conviction that you have realised nature's secrets, not by methods of analytical knowledge, but by sympathy. You have known her language of lines and music of colours, the symmetry in her irregularities, and the cadence in her freedom of movements; you have seen how she leads her immense crowds of things yet avoids all frictions; how the very conflicts in her creations break out in dance and music; how her exuberance has the aspect of the fullness of self-abandonment, and not a mere dissipation of display. You have discovered that nature reserves her power in forms of beauty; and it is this beauty which, like a mother, nourishes all the giant forces at her breast, keeping them in active vigour, yet in repose. You have known that energies of nature save themselves from wearing out by the rhythm of a perfect grace, and that she with the tenderness of her curved lines takes away fatigue from the world's muscles. I have felt that you have been able to assimilate these secrets into your life, and the truth which lies in the beauty of all things has passed into your souls. A mere knowledge of things can be had in a short enough time, but their spirit can only be acquired by centuries of training and self-control. Dominating nature from outside is a much simpler thing than making her your own in love's delight, which is a work of true genius. Your race has shown that genius, not by acquirements, but by creations; not by display of things, but by manifestation of its own inner being. This creative power there is in all nations, and it is ever active in getting hold of men's natures and giving them a form according to its ideals. But here, in Japan, it seems to have achieved its success, and deeply sunk into the minds of all men, and permeated their muscles and nerves. Your instincts have become true, your senses keen, and your hands have acquired natural skill. The genius of Europe has given her people the power of organisation, which has specially made itself manifest in politics and commerce and in coordinating scientific knowledge. The genius of Japan has given you the vision of beauty in nature and the power of realising it in your life. And, because of this fact, the power of organisation has come so easily to your help when you needed it. For the rhythm of beauty is the inner spirit, whose outer body is organisation.

All particular civilisation is the interpretation of particular human experience. Europe seems to have felt emphatically the conflict of things in the universe, which can only be brought under control by conquest. Therefore she is ever ready for fight, and the best portion of her attention is occupied in organising forces. But Japan has felt, in her world, the touch of some presence, which has

evoked in her soul a feeling of reverent adoration. She does not boast of her mastery of nature, but to her she brings, with infinite care and joy, her offerings of love. Her relationship with the world is the deeper relationship of heart. This spiritual bond of love she has established with the hills of her country, with the sea and the streams, with the forests in all their flowery moods and varied physiognomy of branches; she has taken into her heart all the rustling whispers and sighing of the woodlands and sobbing of the waves; the sun and the moon she has studied in all the modulations of their lights and shades, and she is glad to close her shops to greet the seasons in her orchards and gardens and cornfields. This opening of the heart to the soul of the world is not confined to a section of your privileged classes, it is not the forced product of exotic culture, but it belongs to all your men and women of all conditions. This experience of your soul, in meeting a personality in the heart of the world, has been embodied in your civilisation. It is civilisation of human relationship. Your duty towards your state has naturally assumed the character of filial duty, your nation becoming one family with your Emperor as its head. Your national unity has not been evolved from the comradeship of arms for defensive and offensive purposes, or from partnership in raiding adventures, dividing among each member the danger and spoils of robbery. It is not an outcome of the necessity of organisation for some ulterior purpose, but it is an extension of the family and the obligations of the heart in a wide field of space and time. The ideal of "*maitri*" is at the bottom of your culture,—"*maitri*" with men and "*maitri*" with Nature. And the true expression of this love is in the language of beauty, which is so abundantly universal in this land. This is the reason why a stranger, like myself, instead of feeling envy or humiliation before these manifestations of beauty, these creations of love, feels a readiness to participate in the joy and glory of such revealment of the human heart.

And this has made me all the more apprehensive of the change, which threatens Japanese civilisation, as something like a menace to one's own person. For the huge heterogeneity of the modern age, whose only common bond is usefulness, is nowhere so pitifully exposed against the dignity and hidden power of reticent beauty, as in Japan.

But the danger lies in this, that organised ugliness storms the mind and carries the day by its mass, by its aggressive persistence, by its power of mockery directed against the deeper sentiments of heart. Its harsh obtrusiveness makes it forcibly visible to us, overcoming our senses,—and we bring to its altar sacrifices, as does a savage to the fetish which appears powerful because of its hideousness. Therefore its rivalry to things that are modest and profound and have the subtle delicacy of life is to be dreaded.

I am quite sure that there are men in your nation, who are not in sympathy with your national ideals; whose object is to gain, and not to grow. They are loud in their boast, that they have modernised Japan. While I agree with them so far as to say, that the spirit of the race should harmonise with the spirit of the time, I must warn them that modernising is a mere affectation of modernism, just as affectation of poesy is poetising. It is nothing but mimicry, only affectation is louder than the original, and it is too literal. One must bear in mind, that those who have the true modern spirit need not modernise, just as those who are truly brave are not braggarts. Modernism is not in the dress of the Europeans; or in the hideous structures, where their children are interned when they take their lessons; or in the square houses with flat straight wall-surfaces, pierced with parallel lines of windows, where these people are caged in their lifetime; certainly modernism is not in their ladies' bonnets, carrying on them loads of incongruities. These are not modern, but merely European. True modernism is freedom of mind, not slavery of taste. It is independence of thought and action, not tutelage under European schoolmasters. It is science, but not its wrong application in life,—a mere imitation of our science teachers who reduce it into a superstition absurdly invoking its aid for all impossible purposes.

Science, when it oversteps its limits and occupies the whole region of life, has its fascination. It looks so powerful because of its superficiality,—as does a hippopotamus which is very little else but physical. Science speaks of the struggle for existence, but forgets that man's existence is not merely of the surface. Man truly exists in the ideal of perfection, whose depth and height are not yet measured. Life based upon science is attractive to some men, because it has all the characteristics of sport; it feigns seriousness, but is not profound. When you go a-hunting, the less pity you have the better; for your one object is to chase the game and kill it, to feel that you are the greater animal, that your method of destruction is thorough and scientific. Because, therefore, a sportsman is only a superficial man,—his fullness of humanity not being there to hamper him,—he is successful in killing innocent life and is happy. And the life of science is that superficial life. It pursues success with skill and thoroughness, and takes no account of the higher nature of man. But even science cannot tow humanity against truth and be successful; and those whose minds are crude enough to plan their lives upon the supposition, that man is merely a hunter and his paradise the paradise of sportsman, will be rudely awakened in the midst of their trophies of skeletons and skulls. For man's struggle for existence is to exist in the fullness of his nature,—not by curtailing all that is best in him and dwarfing his existence itself, but by accepting all the responsibilities of his spiritual life, even through death and defeat.

I do not for a moment suggest, that Japan should be unmindful of acquiring modern weapons of self-protection. But this should never be allowed to go beyond her instinct of self-preservation. She must know that the real power is not in the weapons themselves, but in the man who wields those weapons; and when he, in his eagerness for power, multiplies his weapons at the cost of his own soul, then it is he who is in even greater danger than his enemies.

Things that are living are so easily hurt; therefore they require protection. In nature, life protects itself within in coverings, which are built with life's own material. Therefore they are in harmony with life's growth, or else when the time comes they easily give way and are forgotten. The living man has his true protection in his spiritual ideals, which have their vital connection with his life and grow with his growth. But, unfortunately, all his armour is not living,—some of it is made of steel, inert and mechanical. Therefore, while making use of it, man has to be careful to protect himself from its tyranny. If he is weak enough to grow smaller to fit himself to his covering, then it becomes a process of gradual suicide by shrinkage of the soul. And Japan must have a firm faith in the moral law of existence to be able to assert to herself, that the Western nations are following that path of suicide, where they are smothering their humanity under the immense weight of organisations in order to keep themselves in power and hold others in subjection.

Therefore I cannot think that the imitation of the outward aspects of the West, which is becoming more and more evident in modern Japan, is essential to her strength or stability. It is burdening her true nature and causing weakness, which will be felt more deeply as time goes on. The habits, which are being formed by the modern Japanese from their boyhood,—the habits of the Western life, the habits of the alien culture,—will prove, one day, a serious obstacle to the understanding of their own true nature. And then, if the children of Japan forget their past, if they stand as barriers, choking the stream that flows from the mountain peak of their ancient history, their future will be deprived of the water of life that has made her culture so fertile with richness of beauty and strength.

What is still more dangerous for Japan is, not this imitation of the outer features of the West, but the acceptance of the motive force of the Western civilisation as her own. Her social ideals are already showing signs of defeat at the hands of politics, and her modern tendency seems to incline towards political gambling in which the players stake their souls to win their game. I can see her motto, taken from science, "Survival of the Fittest," writ large at the entrance of her present-day history—the motto whose meaning is, "Help yourself, and never heed what it costs to others"; the motto of the blind man, who only believes in

what he can touch, because he cannot see. But those who can see, know that men are so closely knit, that when you strike others the blow comes back to yourself. The moral law, which is the greatest discovery of man, is the discovery of this wonderful truth, that man becomes all the truer, the more he realises himself in others. This truth has not only a subjective value, but is manifested in every department of our life. And nations, who sedulously cultivate moral blindness as the cult of patriotism, will end their existence in a sudden and violent death. In past ages we had foreign invasions, there had been cruelty and bloodshed, intrigues of jealousy and avarice, but they never touched the soul of the people deeply; for the people, as a body, never participated in these games. They were merely the outcome of individual ambitions. The people themselves, being free from the responsibilities of the baser and more heinous side of those adventures, had all the advantage of the heroic and the human disciplines derived from them. This developed their unflinching loyalty, their single-minded devotion to the obligations of honour, their power of complete self-surrender and fearless acceptance of death and danger. Therefore the ideals, whose seats were in the hearts of the people, would not undergo any serious change owing to the policies adopted by the kings or generals. But now, where the spirit of the Western civilisation prevails, the whole people is being taught from boyhood, to foster hatreds and ambitions by all kinds of means,—by the manufacture of half-truths and untruths in history, by persistent misrepresentation of other races and the culture of unfavourable sentiments towards them, by setting up memorials of events, very often false, which for the sake of humanity should be speedily forgotten, thus continually brewing evil menace towards neighbours and nations other than their own. This is poisoning the very fountain-head of humanity. It is discrediting the ideals, which were born of the lives of men, who were our greatest and best. It is holding up gigantic selfishness as the one universal religion for all nations of the world. We can take anything else from the hands of science, but not this elixir of moral death. Never think for a moment, that the hurts you inflict upon other races will not infect you, and the enmities you sow around your homes will be a wall of protection to you for all time to come. To imbue the minds of a whole people with an abnormal vanity of its own superiority, to teach it to take pride in its moral callousness and ill-begotten wealth, to perpetuate humiliation of defeated nations by exhibiting trophies won from war, and using these in schools in order to breed in children's minds contempt for others, is imitating the West where she has a festering sore, whose swelling is a swelling of disease eating into its vitality.

Our food crops, which are necessary for our sustenance, are products of centuries of selection and care. But the vegetation, which we have not to

transform into our lives, does not require the patient thoughts of generations. It is not easy to get rid of weeds; but it is easy, by process of neglect, to ruin your food crops and let them revert to their primitive state of wildness. Likewise the culture, which has so kindly adapted itself to your soil,—so intimate with life, so human,—not only needed tilling and weeding in past ages, but still needs anxious work and watching. What is merely modern,—as science and methods of organisation,—can be transplanted; but what is vitally human has fibres so delicate, and roots so numerous and far reaching, that it dies when moved from its soil. Therefore I am afraid of the rude pressure of the political ideals of the West upon your own. In political civilisation, the state is an abstraction and relationship of men utilitarian. Because it has no roots in sentiments, it is so dangerously easy to handle. Half a century has been enough for you to master this machine; and there are men among you, whose fondness for it exceeds their love for the living ideals which were born with the birth of your nation and nursed in your centuries. It is like a child, who, in the excitement of his play, imagines he likes his playthings better than his mother.

Where man is at his greatest, he is unconscious. Your civilisation, whose mainspring is the bond of human relationship, has been nourished in the depth of a healthy life beyond reach of prying self-analysis. But a mere political relationship is all conscious; it is an eruptive inflammation of aggressiveness. It has forcibly burst upon your notice. And the time has come, when you have to be roused into full consciousness of the truth by which you live, so that you may not be taken unawares. The past has been God's gift to you; about the present, you must make your own choice.

So the questions you have to put to yourselves are these,—“Have we read the world wrong, and based our relation to it upon an ignorance of human nature? Is the instinct of the West right, where she builds her national welfare behind the barricade of a universal distrust of humanity?”

You must have detected a strong accent of fear, whenever the West has discussed the possibility of the rise of an Eastern race. The reason of it is this, that the power, by whose help she thrives, is an evil power; so long as it is held on her own side she can be safe, while the rest of the world trembles. The vital ambition of the present civilisation of Europe is to have the exclusive possession of the devil. All her armaments and diplomacy are directed upon this one object. But these costly rituals for invocation of the evil spirit lead through a path of prosperity to the brink of cataclysm. The furies of terror, which the West has let loose upon God's world, come back to threaten herself and goad her into preparations of more and more frightfulness; this gives her no rest and makes her

forget all else but the perils that she causes to others, and incurs herself. To the worship of this devil of politics she sacrifices other countries as victims. She feeds upon their dead flesh and grows fat upon it, so long as the carcasses remain fresh,—but they are sure to rot at last, and the dead will take their revenge, by spreading pollution far and wide and poisoning the vitality of the feeder. Japan had all her wealth of humanity, her harmony of heroism and beauty, her depth of self-control and richness of self-expression; yet the Western nations felt no respect for her, till she proved that the bloodhounds of Satan are not only bred in the kennels of Europe, but can also be domesticated in Japan and fed with man's miseries. They admit Japan's equality with themselves, only when they know that Japan also possesses the key to open the floodgate of hell-fire upon the fair earth, whenever she chooses, and can dance, in their own measure, the devil dance of pillage, murder, and ravishment of innocent women, while the world goes to ruin. We know that, in the early stage of man's moral immaturity, he only feels reverence for the god whose malevolence he dreads. But is this the ideal of man which we can look up to with pride? After centuries of civilisation nations fearing each other like the prowling wild beasts of the night time; shutting their doors of hospitality; combining only for purpose of aggression or defence; hiding in their holes their trade secrets, state secrets, secrets of their armaments; making peace offerings to the barking dogs of each other with the meat which does not belong to them; holding down fallen races struggling to stand upon their feet; counting their safety only upon the feebleness of the rest of humanity; with their right hands dispensing religion to weaker peoples, while robbing them with their left,—is there anything in this to make us envious? Are we to bend our knees to the spirit of this civilisation, which is sowing broadcast over all the world seeds of fear, greed, suspicion, unashamed lies of its diplomacy, and unctuous lies of its profession of peace and good-will and universal brotherhood of Man? Can we have no doubt in our minds, when we rush to the Western market to buy this foreign product in exchange for our own inheritance? I am aware how difficult it is to know one's self; and the man, who is intoxicated, furiously denies his drunkenness; yet the West herself is anxiously thinking of her problems and trying experiments. But she is like a glutton, who has not the heart to give up his intemperance in eating, and fondly clings to the hope that he can cure his nightmares of indigestion by medicine. Europe is not ready to give up her political inhumanity, with all the baser passions of man attendant upon it; she believes only in modification of systems, and not in change of heart.

We are willing to buy their machine-made systems, not with our hearts, but with our brains. We shall try them and build sheds for them, but not enshrine

them in our homes, or temples. There are races, who worship the animals they kill; we can buy meat from them, when we are hungry, but not the worship which goes with the killing. We must not vitiate our children's minds with the superstition, that business is business, war is war, politics is politics. We must know that man's business has to be more than mere business, and so have to be his war and politics. You had your own industry in Japan; how scrupulously honest and true it was, you can see by its products,—by their grace and strength, their conscientiousness in details, where they can hardly be observed. But the tidal wave of falsehood has swept over your land from that part of the world, where business is business, and honesty is followed in it merely as the best policy. Have you never felt shame, when you see the trade advertisements, not only plastering the whole town with lies and exaggerations, but invading the green fields, where the peasants do their honest labour, and the hill-tops, which greet the first pure light of the morning? It is so easy to dull our sense of honour and delicacy of mind with constant abrasion, while falsehoods stalk abroad with proud steps in the name of trade, politics and patriotism, that any protest against their perpetual intrusion into our lives is considered to be sentimentalism, unworthy of true manliness.

And it has come to pass, that the children of those heroes, who would keep their word at the point of death, who would disdain to cheat men for vulgar profit, who even in their fight would much rather court defeat than be dishonourable, have become energetic in dealing with falsehoods and do not feel humiliated by gaining advantage from them. And this has been effected by the charm of the word 'modern.' But if undiluted utility be modern, beauty is of all ages; if mean selfishness be modern, the human ideals are no new inventions. And we must know for certain, that however modern may be the proficiency, which clips and cripples man for the sake of methods and machines, it will never live to be old.

When Japan is in imminent peril of neglecting to realise where she is great, it is the duty of a foreigner like myself to remind her, that she has given rise to a civilisation which is perfect in its form, and has evolved a sense of sight which clearly sees truth in beauty and beauty in truth. She has achieved something, which is positive and complete. It is easier for a stranger to know what it is in her, which is truly valuable for all mankind,—what is there, which only she, of all other races, has produced from her inner life and not from her mere power of adaptability. Japan must be reminded, that it is her sense of the rhythm of life and of all things, her genius for simplicity, her love for cleanliness, her definiteness of thought and action, her cheerful fortitude, her immense reserve of force in self-control, her sensitiveness to her code of honour and defiance of

death, which have given her the power to resist the cyclonic storm of exploitation that has sprung from the shores of Europe circling round and round the world. All these qualities are the outcome of a civilisation, whose foundation is in the spiritual ideals of life. Such a civilisation has the gift of immortality; for it does not offend against the laws of creation and is not assailed by all the forces of nature. I feel it is an impiety to be indifferent to its protection from the incursion of vulgarity of power.

But while trying to free our minds from the arrogant claims of Europe and to help ourselves out of the quicksands of our infatuation, we may go to the other extreme and blind ourselves with a wholesale suspicion of the West. The reaction of disillusionment is just as unreal as the first shock of illusion. We must try to come to that normal state of mind, by which we can clearly discern our own danger and avoid it, without being unjust towards the source of that danger. There is always the natural temptation in us of wishing to pay back Europe in her own coin, and return contempt for contempt and evil for evil. But that again would be to imitate Europe in one of her worst features which comes out in her behaviour to people whom she describes as yellow or red, brown or black. And this is a point on which we in the East have to acknowledge our guilt and own that our sin has been as great, if not greater, when we insulted humanity by treating with utter disdain and cruelty men who belonged to a particular creed, colour or caste. It is really because we are afraid of our own weakness, which allows itself to be overcome by the sight of power, that we try to substitute for it another weakness which makes itself blind to the glories of the West. When we truly know the Europe which is great and good, we can effectively save ourselves from the Europe which is mean and grasping. It is easy to be unfair in one's judgment when one is faced with human miseries,—and pessimism is the result of building theories while the mind is suffering. To despair of humanity is only possible, if we lose faith in the power which brings to it strength, when its defeat is greatest, and calls out new life from the depth of its destruction. We must admit that there is a living soul in the West which is struggling unobserved against the hugeness of the organisations under which men, women and children are being crushed, and whose mechanical necessities are ignoring laws that are spiritual and human,—the soul whose sensibilities refuse to be dulled completely by dangerous habits of heedlessness in dealings with races for whom it lacks natural sympathy. The West could never have risen to the eminence she has reached, if her strength were merely the strength of the brute, or of the machine. The divine in her heart is suffering from the injuries inflicted by her hands upon the world,—and from this pain of her higher nature flows the secret balm which will bring healing to those injuries. Time after time

she has fought against herself and has undone the chains, which with her own hands she had fastened round helpless limbs; and though she forced poison down the throat of a great nation at the point of sword for gain of money, she herself woke up to withdraw from it, to wash her hands clean again. This shows hidden springs of humanity in spots which look dead and barren. It proves that the deeper truth in her nature, which can survive such career of cruel cowardliness, is not greed, but reverence for unselfish ideals. It would be altogether unjust, both to us and to Europe, to say that she has fascinated the modern Eastern mind by the mere exhibition of her power. Through the smoke of cannons and dust of markets the light of her moral nature has shone bright, and she has brought to us the ideal of ethical freedom, whose foundation lies deeper than social conventions and whose province of activity is world-wide.

The East has instinctively felt, even through her aversion, that she has a great deal to learn from Europe, not merely about the materials of power, but about its inner source, which is of mind and of the moral nature of man. Europe has been teaching us the higher obligations of public good above those of the family and the clan, and the sacredness of law, which makes society independent of individual caprice, secures for it continuity of progress, and guarantees justice to all men of all positions in life. Above all things Europe has held high before our minds the banner of liberty, through centuries of martyrdom and achievement,—liberty of conscience, liberty of thought and action, liberty in the ideals of art and literature. And because Europe has won our deep respect, she has become so dangerous for us where she is turbulently weak and false,—dangerous like poison when it is served along with our best food. There is one safety for us upon which we hope we may count, and that is, that we can claim Europe herself, as our ally, in our resistance to her temptations and to her violent encroachments; for she has ever carried her own standard of perfection, by which we can measure her falls and gauge her degrees of failure, by which we can call her before her own tribunal and put her to shame,—the shame which is the sign of the true pride of nobleness.

But our fear is, that the poison may be more powerful than the food, and what is strength in her today may not be the sign of health, but the contrary; for it may be temporarily caused by the upsetting of the balance of life. Our fear is that evil has a fateful fascination, when it assumes dimensions which are colossal,—and though at last, it is sure to lose its centre of gravity, by its abnormal disproportion, the mischief which it creates before its fall may be beyond reparation.

Therefore I ask you to have the strength of faith and clarity of mind to know

for certain, that the lumbering structure of modern progress, riveted by the iron bolts of efficiency, which runs upon the wheels of ambition, cannot hold together for long. Collisions are certain to occur; for it has to travel upon organised lines, it is too heavy to choose its own course freely; and once it is off the rails, its endless train of vehicles is dislocated. A day will come, when it will fall in a heap of ruin and cause serious obstruction to the traffic of the world. Do we not see signs of this even now? Does not the voice come to us, through the din of war, the shrieks of hatred, the wailings of despair, through the churning up of the unspeakable filth which has been accumulating for ages in the bottom of this civilisation,—the voice which cries to our soul, that the tower of national selfishness, which goes by the name of patriotism, which has raised its banner of treason against heaven, must totter and fall with a crash, weighed down by its own bulk, its flag kissing the dust, its light extinguished? My brothers, when the red light of conflagration sends up its crackle of laughter to the stars, keep your faith upon those stars and not upon the fire of destruction. For when this conflagration consumes itself and dies down, leaving its memorial in ashes, the eternal light will again shine in the East,—the East which has been the birth-place of the morning sun of man's history. And who knows if that day has not already dawned, and the sun not risen, in the Easternmost horizon of Asia? And I offer, as did my ancestor *rishis*, my salutation to that sunrise of the East, which is destined once again to illumine the whole world.

I know my voice is too feeble to raise itself above the uproar of this bustling time, and it is easy for any street urchin to fling against me the epithet of 'unpractical.' It will stick to my coat-tail, never to be washed away, effectively excluding me from the consideration of all respectable persons. I know what a risk one runs from the vigorously athletic crowds to be styled an idealist in these days, when thrones have lost their dignity and prophets have become an anachronism, when the sound that drowns all voices is the noise of the market-place. Yet when, one day, standing on the outskirts of Yokohama town, bristling with its display of modern miscellanies, I watched the sunset in your southern sea, and saw its peace and majesty among your pine-clad hills,—with the great Fujiyama growing faint against the golden horizon, like a god overcome with his own radiance,—the music of eternity welled up through the evening silence, and I felt that the sky and the earth and the lyrics of the dawn and the day fall are with the poets and idealists, and not with the markets men robustly contemptuous of all sentiments,—that, after the forgetfulness of his own divinity, man will remember again that heaven is always in touch with his world, which can never be abandoned for good to the hounding wolves of the modern era, scenting human blood and howling to the skies.

Non-Fiction

1. Glimpses of Bengal

Introduction

The letters translated in this book span the most productive period of my literary life, when, owing to great good fortune, I was young and less known.

Youth being exuberant and leisure ample, I felt the writing of letters other than business ones to be a delightful necessity. This is a form of literary extravagance only possible when a surplus of thought and emotion accumulates. Other forms of literature remain the author's and are made public for his good; letters that have been given to private individuals once for all, are therefore characterised by the more generous abandonment.

It so happened that selected extracts from a large number of such letters found their way back to me years after they had been written. It had been rightly conjectured that they would delight me by bringing to mind the memory of days when, under the shelter of obscurity, I enjoyed the greatest freedom my life has ever known.

Since these letters synchronise with a considerable part of my published writings, I thought their parallel course would broaden my readers' understanding of my poems as a track is widened by retreading the same ground. Such was my justification for publishing them in a book for my countrymen. Hoping that the descriptions of village scenes in Bengal contained in these letters would also be of interest to English readers, the translation of a selection of that selection has been entrusted to one who, among all those whom I know, was best fitted to carry it out.

—Rabindranath Tagore
20th June 1920.

1885

BANDORA, BY THE SEA

October, 1885

The unsheltered sea heaves and heaves and blanches into foam. It sets me thinking of some tied-up monster straining at its bonds, in front of whose gaping jaws we build our homes on the shore and watch it lashing its tail. What immense strength, with waves swelling like the muscles of a giant!

From the beginning of creation there has been this feud between land and water: the dry earth slowly and silently adding to its domain and spreading a broader and broader lap for its children; the ocean receding step by step, heaving and sobbing and beating its breast in despair. Remember the sea was once sole monarch, utterly free.

Land rose from its womb, usurped its throne, and ever since the maddened old creature, with hoary crest of foam, wails and laments continually, like King Lear exposed to the fury of the elements.

1887

July, 1887

I am in my twenty-seventh year. This event keeps thrusting itself before my mind—nothing else seems to have happened of late.

But to reach twenty-seven—is that a trifling thing?—to pass the meridian of the twenties on one's progress towards thirty?—thirty—that is to say maturity—the age at which people expect fruit rather than fresh foliage. But, alas, where is the promise of fruit? As I shake my head, it still feels brimful of luscious frivolity, with not a trace of philosophy.

Folk are beginning to complain: “Where is that which we expected of you—that in hope of which we admired the soft green of the shoot? Are we to put up with immaturity forever? It is high time for us to know what we shall gain from you. We want an estimate of the proportion of oil which the blindfold, mill-turning, unbiased critic can squeeze out of you.”

It has ceased to be possible to delude these people into waiting expectantly any longer. While I was under age they trustfully gave me credit; it is sad to disappoint them now that I am on the verge of thirty. But what am I to do? Words of wisdom will not come! I am utterly incompetent to provide things that may profit the multitude. Beyond a snatch of song, some tittle-tattle, a little merry fooling, I have been unable to advance. And as the result, those who held high hopes will turn their wrath on me; but did anyone ever beg them to nurse these expectations?

Such are the thoughts which assail me since one fine Bysakh morning I awoke amidst fresh breeze and light, new leaf and flower, to find that I had stepped into my twenty-seventh year.

1888

SHELIDAH, 1888

Our house-boat is moored to a sandbank on the farther side of the river. A vast expanse of sand stretches away out of sight on every side, with here and there a streak, as of water, running across, though sometimes what gleams like water is only sand.

Not a village, not a human being, not a tree, not a blade of grass—the only breaks in the monotonous whiteness are gaping cracks which in places show the layer of moist, black clay underneath.

Looking towards the East, there is endless blue above, endless white beneath. Sky empty, earth empty too—the emptiness below hard and barren, that overhead arched and ethereal—one could hardly find elsewhere such a picture of stark desolation.

But on turning to the West, there is water, the currentless bend of the river, fringed with its high bank, up to which spread the village groves with cottages peeping through—all like an enchanting dream in the evening light. I say “the evening light,” because in the evening we wander out, and so that aspect is impressed on my mind.

1890

SHAZADPUR, 1890

The magistrate was sitting in the verandah of his tent dispensing justice to the crowd awaiting their turns under the shade of a tree. They set my palanquin down right under his nose, and the young Englishman received me courteously. He had very light hair, with darker patches here and there, and a moustache just beginning to show. One might have taken him for a white-haired old man but for his extremely youthful face. I asked him over to dinner, but he said he was due elsewhere to arrange for a pig-sticking party.

As I returned home, great black clouds came up and there was a terrific storm with torrents of rain. I could not touch a book, it was impossible to write, so in the I-know-not-what mood I wandered about from room to room. It had become quite dark, the thunder was continually pealing, the lightning gleaming flash after flash, and every now and then sudden gusts of wind would get hold of the big *lichi* tree by the neck and give its shaggy top a thorough shaking. The hollow in front of the house soon filled with water, and as I paced about, it suddenly struck me that I ought to offer the shelter of the house to the magistrate.

I sent off an invitation; then after investigation I found the only spare room encumbered with a platform of planks hanging from the beams, piled with dirty old quilts and bolsters. Servants' belongings, an excessively grimy mat, bubble-bubble pipes, tobacco, tinder, and two wooden chests littered the floor, besides sundry packing-cases full of useless odds and ends, such as a rusty kettle lid, a bottomless iron stove, a discoloured old nickel teapot, a soup-plate full of treacle blackened with dust. In a corner was a tub for washing dishes, and from nails in the wall hung moist dish-clouts and the cook's livery and skull-cap. The only piece of furniture was a rickety dressing-table with water stains, oil stains, milk stains, black, brown, and white stains, and all kinds of mixed stains. The mirror, detached from it, rested against another wall, and the drawers were receptacles for a miscellaneous assortment of articles from soiled napkins down to bottle wires and dust.

For a moment I was overwhelmed with dismay; then it was a case of—send for the manager, send for the storekeeper, call up all the servants, get hold of extra men, fetch water, put up ladders, unfasten ropes, pull down planks, take away bedding, pick up broken glass bit by bit, wrench nails from the wall one by one.

—The chandelier falls and its pieces strew the floor; pick them up again piece by piece.—I myself whisk the dirty mat off the floor and out of the window, dislodging a horde of cockroaches, messmates, who dine off my bread, my treacle, and the polish on my shoes.

The magistrate's reply is brought back; his tent is in an awful state and he is coming at once. Hurry up! Hurry up! Presently comes the shout: "The sahib has arrived." All in a flurry I brush the dust off hair, beard, and the rest of myself, and as I go to receive him in the drawing-room, I try to look as respectable as if I had been reposing there comfortably all the afternoon.

I went through the shaking of hands and conversed with the magistrate outwardly serene; still, misgivings about his accommodation would now and then well up within. When at length I had to show my guest to his room, I found it passable, and if the homeless cockroaches do not tickle the soles of his feet, he may manage to get a night's rest.

1891

KALIGRAM, 1891

I am feeling listlessly comfortable and delightfully irresponsible.

This is the prevailing mood all round here. There is a river but it has no current to speak of, and, lying snugly tucked up in its coverlet of floating weeds, seems to think—"Since it is possible to get on without getting along, why should I bestir myself to stir?" So the sedge which lines the banks knows hardly any disturbance until the fishermen come with their nets.

Four or five large-sized boats are moored nearby, alongside each other. On the upper deck of one the boatman is fast asleep, rolled up in a sheet from head to foot. On another, the boatman—also basking in the sun—leisurely twists some yarn into rope. On the lower deck in a third, an oldish-looking, bare-bodied fellow is leaning over an oar, staring vacantly at our boat.

Along the bank there are various other people, but why they come or go, with the slowest of idle steps, or remain seated on their haunches embracing their knees, or keep on gazing at nothing in particular, no one can guess.

The only signs of activity are to be seen amongst the ducks, who, quacking clamorously, thrust their heads under and bob up again to shake off the water with equal energy, as if they repeatedly tried to explore the mysteries below the surface, and every time, shaking their heads, had to report, "Nothing there! Nothing there!"

The days here drowse all their twelve hours in the sun, and silently sleep away the other twelve, wrapped in the mantle of darkness. The only thing you want to do in a place like this is to gaze and gaze on the landscape, swinging your fancies to and fro, alternately humming a tune and nodding dreamily, as the mother on a winter's noonday, her back to the sun, rocks and croons her baby to sleep.

KALIGRAM, 1891

Yesterday, while I was giving audience to my tenants, five or six boys made their appearance and stood in a primly proper row before me. Before I could put any question their spokesman, in the choicest of high-flown language, started: "Sire! The grace of the Almighty and the good fortune of your benighted children have once more brought about your lordship's auspicious arrival into

this locality." He went on in this strain for nearly half an hour. Here and there he would get his lesson wrong, pause, look up at the sky, correct himself, and then go on again. I gathered that their school was short of benches and stools. "For want of these wood-built seats," as he put it, "we know not where to sit ourselves, where to seat our revered teachers, or what to offer our most respected inspector when he comes on a visit."

I could hardly repress a smile at this torrent of eloquence gushing from such a bit of a fellow, which sounded specially out of place here, where the ryots are given to stating their profoundly vital wants in plain and direct vernacular, of which even the more unusual words get sadly twisted out of shape. The clerks and ryots, however, seemed duly impressed, and likewise envious, as though deplored their parents' omission to endow them with so splendid a means of appealing to the *Zamindar*.

I interrupted the young orator before he had done, promising to arrange for the necessary number of benches and stools. Nothing daunted, he allowed me to have my say, then took up his discourse where he had left it, finished it to the last word, saluted me profoundly, and marched off his contingent. He probably would not have minded had I refused to supply the seats, but after all his trouble in getting it by heart he would have resented bitterly being robbed of any part of his speech. So, though it kept more important business waiting, I had to hear him out.

NEARING SHAZADPUR

January, 1891

We left the little river of Kaligram, sluggish as the circulation in a dying man, and dropped down the current of a briskly flowing stream which led to a region where land and water seemed to merge in each other, river and bank without distinction of garb, like brother and sister in infancy.

The river lost its coating of sliminess, scattered its current in many directions, and spread out, finally, into a *beel* (marsh), with here a patch of grassy land and there a stretch of transparent water, reminding me of the youth of this globe when through the limitless waters land had just begun to raise its head, the separate provinces of solid and fluid as yet undefined.

Round about where we have moored, the bamboo poles of fishermen are planted. Kites hover ready to snatch up fish from the nets. On the ooze at the water's edge stand the saintly-looking paddy birds in meditation. All kinds of waterfowl abound. Patches of weeds float on the water. Here and there rice-fields, untilled, untended, ¹ rise from the moist, clay soil. Mosquitoes swarm

over the still waters...

1. On the rich riverside silt, rice seed is simply scattered and the harvest reaped when ripe; nothing else has to be done.

We start again at dawn this morning and pass through Kachikata, where the waters of the *beel* find an outlet in a winding channel only six or seven yards wide, through which they rush swiftly. To get our unwieldy house-boat through is indeed an adventure. The current hurries it along at lightning speed, keeping the crew busy using their oars as poles to prevent the boat being dashed against the banks. We thus come out again into the open river.

The sky had been heavily clouded, a damp wind blowing, with occasional showers of rain. The crew were all shivering with cold. Such wet and gloomy days in the cold weather are eminently disagreeable, and I have spent a wretched lifeless morning. At two in the afternoon the sun came out, and since then it has been delightful. The banks are now high and covered with peaceful groves and the dwellings of men, secluded and full of beauty.

The river winds in and out, an unknown little stream in the inmost *zenana* of Bengal, neither lazy nor fussy; lavishing the wealth of her affection on both sides, she prattles about common joys and sorrows and the household news of the village girls, who come for water, and sit by her side, assiduously rubbing their bodies to a glowing freshness with their moistened towels.

This evening we have moored our boat in a lonely bend. The sky is clear. The moon is at its full. Not another boat is to be seen. The moonlight glimmers on the ripples. Solitude reigns on the banks. The distant village sleeps, nestling within a thick fringe of trees. The shrill, sustained chirp of the cicadas is the only sound.

SHAZADPUR

February, 1891

Just in front of my window, on the other side of the stream, a band of gypsies have ensconced themselves, putting up bamboo frameworks covered over with split-bamboo mats and pieces of cloth. There are only three of these little structures, so low that you cannot stand upright inside. Their life is lived in the open, and they only creep under these shelters at night, to sleep huddled together.

That is always the gypsies' way: no home anywhere, no landlord to pay rent to, wandering about as it pleases them with their children, their pigs, and a dog or two; and on them the police keep a vigilant eye.

I frequently watch the doings of the family nearest me. They are dark but good-looking, with fine, strongly-built bodies, like north-west country folk. Their

women are handsome, and have tall, slim, well-knit figures; and with their free and easy movements, and natural independent airs, they look to me like swarthy Englishwomen.

The man has just put the cooking-pot on the fire, and is now splitting bamboos and weaving baskets. The woman first holds up a little mirror to her face, then puts a deal of pains into wiping and rubbing it, over and over again, with a moist piece of cloth; and then, the folds of her upper garment adjusted and tidied, she goes, all spick and span, up to her man and sits beside him, helping him now and then in his work.

These are truly children of the soil, born on it somewhere, bred by the wayside, here, there, and everywhere, dying anywhere. Night and day under the open sky, in the open air, on the bare ground, they lead a unique kind of life; and yet work, love, children, and household duties—everything is there.

They are not idle for a moment, but always doing something. Her own particular task over, one woman plumps herself down behind another, unties the knot of her hair and cleans and arranges it for her; and whether at the same time they fall to talking over the domestic affairs of the three little mat-covered households I cannot say for certain from this distance, but shrewdly suspect it.

This morning a great disturbance invaded the peaceful gypsy settlement. It was about half-past eight or nine. They were spreading out over the mat roofs tattered quilts and sundry other rags, which serve them for beds, in order to sun and air them. The pigs with their litters, lying in a hollow all of a heap and looking like a dab of mud, had been routed out by the two canine members of the family, who fell upon them and sent them roaming in search of their breakfasts, squealing their annoyance at being interrupted in enjoyment of the sun after the cold night. I was writing my letter and absently looking out now and then when the hubbub suddenly commenced.

I rose and went to the window, and found a crowd gathered round the gypsy hermitage. A superior-looking personage was flourishing a stick and indulging in the strongest language. The headman of the gypsies, cowed and nervous, was apparently trying to offer explanations. I gathered that some suspicious happenings in the locality had led to this visitation by a police officer.

The woman, so far, had remained sitting, busily scraping lengths of split bamboo as serenely as if she had been alone and no sort of row going on. Suddenly, however, she sprang to her feet, advanced on the police officer, gesticulated violently with her arms right in his face, and gave him, in strident tones, a piece of her mind. In the twinkling of an eye three-quarters of the officer's excitement had subsided; he tried to put in a word or two of mild

protest but did not get a chance, and so departed crestfallen, a different man.

After he had retreated to a safe distance, he turned and shouted back: "All I say is, you'll have to clear out from here!"

I thought my neighbours opposite would forthwith pack up their mats and bamboos and move away with their bundles, pigs, and children. But there is no sign of it yet. They are still nonchalantly engaged in splitting bamboos, cooking food, or completing a toilet.

SHAZADPUR

February, 1891

The post office is in a part of our estate office building,—this is very convenient, for we get our letters as soon as they arrive. Some evenings the postmaster comes up to have a chat with me. I enjoy listening to his yarns.

He talks of the most impossible things in the gravest possible manner.

Yesterday he was telling me in what great reverence people of this locality hold the sacred river Ganges. If one of their relatives dies, he said, and they have not the means of taking the ashes to the Ganges, they powder a piece of bone from his funeral pyre and keep it till they come across someone who, some time or other, has drunk of the Ganges. To him they administer some of this powder, hidden in the usual offering of *pán* ², and thus are content to imagine that a portion of the remains of their deceased relative has gained purifying contact with the sacred water.

². Spices wrapped in betel leaf.

I smiled as I remarked: "This surely must be an invention."

He pondered deeply before he admitted after a pause: "Yes, it may be."

ON THE WAY

February, 1891

We have got past the big rivers and just turned into a little one.

The village women are standing in the water, bathing or washing clothes; and some, in their dripping saris, with veils pulled well over their faces, move homeward with their water vessels filled and clasped against the left flank, the right arm swinging free. Children, covered all over with clay, are sporting boisterously, splashing water on each other, while one of them shouts a song, regardless of the tune.

Over the high banks, the cottage roofs and the tops of the bamboo clumps are visible. The sky has cleared and the sun is shining. Remnants of clouds cling to the horizon like fluffs of cotton wool. The breeze is warmer.

There are not many boats in this little river; only a few dinghies, laden with dry branches and twigs, are moving leisurely along to the tiredplash! Plash! Of their oars. At the river's edge the fishermen's nets are hung out to dry between bamboo poles. And work everywhere seems to be over for the day.

CHUHALI June, 1891

I had been sitting out on the deck for more than a quarter of an hour when heavy clouds rose in the west. They came up, black, tumbled, and tattered, with streaks of lurid light showing through here and there. The little boats scurried off into the smaller arm of the river and clung with their anchors safely to its banks. The reapers took up the cut sheaves on their heads and hied homewards; the cows followed, and behind them frisked the calves waving their tails.

Then came an angry roar. Torn-off scraps of cloud hurried up from the west, like panting messengers of evil tidings. Finally, lightning and thunder, rain and storm, came on altogether and executed a mad dervish dance. The bamboo clumps seemed to howl as the raging windswept the ground with them, now to the east, now to the west. Over all, the storm droned like a giant snake-charmer's pipe, and to its rhythm swayed hundreds and thousands of crested waves, like so many hooded snakes. The thunder was incessant, as though a whole world was being pounded to pieces away there behind the clouds.

With my chin resting on the ledge of an open window facing away from the wind, I allowed my thoughts to take part in this terrible revelry; they leapt into the open like a pack of schoolboys suddenly set free. When, however, I got a thorough drenching from the spray of the rain, I had to shut up the window and my poetising, and retire quietly into the darkness inside, like a caged bird.

SHAZADPUR

June, 1891

From the bank to which the boat is tied a kind of scent rises out of the grass, and the heat of the ground, given off in gasps, actually touches my body. I feel that the warm, living Earth is breathing upon me, and that she, also, must feel my breath.

The young shoots of rice are waving in the breeze, and the ducks are in turn thrusting their heads beneath the water and preening their feathers. There is no sound save the faint, mournful creaking of the gangway against the boat, as she imperceptibly swings to and fro in the current.

Not far off there is a ferry. A motley crowd has assembled under the banyan tree awaiting the boat's return; and as soon as it arrives, they eagerly scramble

in. I enjoy watching this for hours together. It is market-day in the village on the other bank; that is why the ferry is so busy. Some carry bundles of hay, some baskets, some sacks; some are going to the market, others coming from it. Thus, in this silent noonday, the stream of human activity slowly flows across the river between two villages.

I sat wondering: Why is there always this deep shade of melancholy over the fields arid river banks, the sky and the sunshine of our country? And I came to the conclusion that it is because with us Nature is obviously the more important thing. The sky is free, the fields limitless; and the sun merges them into one blazing whole. In the midst of this, man seems so trivial. He comes and goes, like the ferry-boat, from this shore to the other; the babbling hum of his talk, the fitful echo of his song, is heard; the slight movement of his pursuit of his own petty desires is seen in the world's market-places: but how feeble, how temporary, how tragically meaningless it all seems amidst the immense aloofness of the Universe!

The contrast between the beautiful, broad, unalloyed peace of Nature—calm, passive, silent, unfathomable,—and our own everyday worries—paltry, sorrow-laden, strife-tormented, puts me beside myself as I keep staring at the hazy, distant, blue line of trees which fringe the fields across the river.

Where Nature is ever hidden, and cowers under mist and cloud, snow and darkness, there man feels himself master; he regards his desires, his works, as permanent; he wants to perpetuate them, he looks towards posterity, he raises monuments, he writes biographies; he even goes the length of erecting tombstones over the dead. So busy is he that he has not time to consider how many monuments crumble, how often names are forgotten!

SHAZDPUR

June, 1891

There was a great, big mast lying on the river bank, and some little village urchins, with never a scrap of clothing, decided, after a long consultation, that if it could be rolled along to the accompaniment of a sufficient amount of vociferous clamour, it would be a new and altogether satisfactory kind of game. The decision was no sooner come to than acted upon, with a “*Shabash, brothers! All together! Heave ho!*” And at every turn it rolled, there was uproarious laughter.

The demeanour of one girl in the party was very different. She was playing with the boys for want of other companions, but she clearly viewed with disfavour these loud and strenuous games. At last she stepped up to the mast

and, without a word, deliberately sat on it.

So rare a game to come to so abrupt a stop! Some of the players seemed to resign themselves to giving it up as a bad job; and retiring a little way off, they sulkily glared at the girl in her impassive gravity. One made as if he would push her off, but even this did not disturb the careless ease of her pose. The eldest lad came up to her and pointed to other equally suitable places for taking a rest; at which she energetically shook her head, and putting her hands in her lap, steadied herself down still more firmly on her seat. Then at last they had recourse to physical argument and were completely successful.

Once again joyful shouts rent the skies, and the mast rolled along so gloriously that even the girl had to cast aside her pride and her dignified exclusiveness and make a pretence of joining in the unmeaning excitement. But one could see all the time that she was sure boys never know how to play properly, and are always so childish! If only she had the regulation yellow earthen doll handy, with its big, black top-knot, would she ever have deigned to join in this silly game with these foolish boys?

All of a sudden the idea of another splendid pastime occurred to the boys. Two of them got hold of a third by the arms and legs and began to swing him. This must have been great fun, for they all waxed enthusiastic over it. But it was more than the girl could stand, so she disdainfully left the playground and marched off home.

Then there was an accident. The boy who was being swung was let fall. He left his companions in a pet, and went and lay down on the grass with his arms crossed under his head, desiring to convey thereby that never again would he have anything to do with this bad, hard world, but would forever lie, alone by himself, with his arms under his head, and count the stars and watch the play of the clouds.

The eldest boy, unable to bear the idea of such untimely world-renunciation, ran up to the disconsolate one and taking his head on his own knees repentantly coaxed him. "Come, my little brother! Do get up, little brother! Have we hurt you, little brother?" And before long I found them playing, like two pups, at catching and snatching away each other's hands! Two minutes had hardly passed before the little fellow was swinging again.

SHAZADPUR

June, 1891

I had a most extraordinary dream last night. The whole of Calcutta seemed enveloped in some awful mystery, the houses being only dimly visible through a

dense, dark mist, within the veil of which there were strange doings.

I was going along Park Street in a hackney carriage, and as I passed St. Xavier's College I found it had started growing rapidly and was fast getting impossibly high within its enveloping haze. Then it was borne in on me that a band of magicians had come to Calcutta who, if they were paid for it, could bring about many such wonders.

When I arrived at our Jorasanko house, I found these magicians had turned up there too. They were ugly-looking, of a Mongolian type, with scanty moustaches and a few long hairs sticking out of their chins. They could make men grow. Some of the girls wanted to be made taller, and the magician sprinkled some powder over their heads and they promptly shot up. To everyone I met I kept repeating: "This is most extraordinary,—just like a dream!"

Then someone proposed that our house should be made to grow. The magicians agreed, and as a preliminary began to take down some portions. The dismantling over, they demanded money, or else they would not go on. The cashier strongly objected. How could payment be made before the work was completed? At this the magicians got wild and twisted up the building most fearsomely, so that men and brickwork got mixed together, bodies inside walls and only head and shoulders showing.

It had altogether the look of a thoroughly devilish business, as I told my eldest brother. "You see," said I, "the kind of thing it is. We had better call upon God to help us!" But try as I might to anathematise them in the name of God, my heart felt like breaking and no words would come. Then I awoke.

A curious dream, was it not? Calcutta in the hands of Satan and growing diabolically, within the darkness of an unholy mist!

SHAZADPUR

June, 1891

The schoolmasters of this place paid me a visit yesterday.

They stayed on and on, while for the life of me I could not find a word to say. I managed a question or so every five minutes, to which they offered the briefest replies; and then I sat vacantly, twirling my pen, and scratching my head.

At last I ventured on a question about the crops, but being schoolmasters they knew nothing whatever about crops.

About their pupils I had already asked them everything I could think of, so I had to start over again: How many boys had they in the school? One said eighty, another said a hundred and seventy-five. I hoped that this might lead to an argument, but no, they made up their difference.

Why, after an hour and a half, they should have thought of taking leave, I cannot tell. They might have done so with as good a reason an hour earlier, or, for the matter of that, twelve hours later! Their decision was clearly arrived at empirically, entirely without method.

SHAZADPUR

July, 1891

There is another boat at this landing-place and on the shore in front of it a crowd of village women. Some are evidently embarking on a journey and the others seeing them off; infants, veils, and grey hairs are all mixed up in the gathering.

One girl in particular attracts my attention. She must be about eleven or twelve; but, buxom and sturdy, she might pass for fourteen or fifteen. She has a winsome face—very dark, but very pretty. Her hair is cut short like a boy's, which well becomes her simple, frank, and alert expression. She has a child in her arms and is staring at me with unabashed curiosity, and certainly no lack of straightforwardness or intelligence in her glance. Her half-boyish, half-girlish manner is singularly attractive—a novel blend of masculine nonchalance and feminine charm. I had no idea there were such types among our village women in Bengal.

None of this family, apparently, is troubled with too much bashfulness. One of them has unfastened her hair in the sun and is combing it out with her ringers, while conversing about their domestic affairs at the top of her voice with another, on board. I gather she has no other children except a girl, a foolish creature who knows neither how to behave or talk, nor even the difference between kin and stranger. I also learn that Gopal's son-in-law has turned out a ne'er-do-well, and that his daughter refuses to go to her husband.

When, at length, it was time to start, they escorted my short-haired damsel, with plump shapely arms, her gold bangles and her guileless, radiant face, into the boat. I could divine that she was returning from her father's to her husband's home. They all stood there, following the boat with their gaze as it cast off, one or two wiping their eyes with the loose end of their *saris*. A little girl, with her hair tightly tied into a knot, clung to the neck of an older woman and silently wept on her shoulder. Perhaps she was losing a darling *Didimani* ³ who joined in her doll games and also slapped her when she was naughty...

³. An elder sister is often called sister-jewel (*Didimani*).

The quiet floating away of a boat on the stream seems to add to the pathos of a separation—it is so like death—the departing one lost to sight, those left behind returning to their daily life, wiping their eyes. True, the pang lasts but a while,

and is perhaps already wearing off both in those who have gone and those who remain,—pain being temporary, oblivion permanent. But none the less it is not the forgetting, but the pain which is true; and every now and then, in separation or in death, we realise how terribly true.

ON BOARD A CANAL STEAMER GOING TO CUTTACK

August, 1891

My bag left behind, my clothes daily get more and more intolerably disreputable,—this thought continually uppermost is not compatible with a due sense of self-respect. With the bag I could have faced the world of men head erect and spirits high; without it, I fain would skulk in corners, away from the glances of the crowd. I go to bed in these clothes and in them I appear in the morning, and on the top of that the steamer is full of soot, and the unbearable heat of the day keeps one unpleasantly moist.

Apart from this, I am having quite a time of it on board the steamer. My fellow-passengers are of inexhaustible variety. There is one, Aghore Babu, who cannot allude to anything, animate or inanimate, except in terms of personal abuse. There is another, a lover of music, who persists in attempting variations on the Bhairab ⁴ mode at dead of night, convincing me of the untimeliness of his performance in more senses than one.

4. A Raga, or mode of Indian classical music, supposed to be appropriate to the early dawn.

The steamer has been aground in a narrow ditch of a canal ever since last evening, and it is now past nine in the morning. I spent the night in a corner of the crowded deck, more dead than alive. I had asked the steward to fry some *luchis* for my dinner, and he brought me some nondescript slabs of fried dough with no vegetable accompaniments to eat them with. On my expressing a pained surprise, he was all contrition and offered to make me some hotch-potch at once. But the night being already far advanced, I declined his offer, managed to swallow a few mouthfuls of the stuff dry, and then, all lights on and the deck packed with passengers, laid myself down to sleep.

Mosquitoes hovered above, cockroaches wandered around. There was a fellow-sleeper stretched crosswise at my feet whose body my soles every now and then came up against. Four or five noses were engaged in snoring. Several mosquito-tormented, sleepless wretches were consoling themselves by pulls at their hubble-bubble pipes; and above all, there rose those variations on the mode *Bhairab!* Finally, at half-past three in the morning, some fussy busy-bodies began loudly inciting each other to get up. In despair, I also left my bed and dropped into my deck-chair to await the dawn. Thus passed that variegated

nightmare of a night.

One of the hands tells me that the steamer has stuck so fast that it may take the whole day to get her off. I inquire of another whether any Calcutta-bound steamer will be passing, and get the smiling reply that this is the only boat on this line, and I may come back in her, if I like, after she has reached Cuttack! By a stroke of luck, after a great deal of tugging and hauling, they have just got her afloat at about ten o'clock.

TIRAN

7th September, 1891

The landing-place at Balia makes a pretty picture with its fine big trees on either side, and on the whole the canal somehow reminds me of the little river at Poona. On thinking it over I am sure I should have liked the canal much better had it really been a river.

Cocoanut palms as well as mangoes and other shady trees line its banks, which, turfed with beautifully green grass, slope gently down to the water, and are sprinkled over with sensitive plants in flower. Here and there are screwpine groves, and through gaps in the border of trees glimpses can be caught of endless fields, stretching away into the distance, their crops so soft and velvety after the rains that the eye seems to sink into their depths. Then again, there are the little villages under their clusters of cocoanut and date palms, nestling under the moist cool shade of the low seasonal clouds.

Through all these the canal, with its gentle current, winds gracefully between its clean, grassy banks, fringed, in its narrower stretches, with clusters of water-lilies with reeds growing among them. And yet the mind keeps fretting at the idea that after all it is nothing but an artificial canal.

The murmur of its waters does not reach back to the beginning of time. It knows naught of the mysteries of some distant, inaccessible mountain cave. It has not flowed for ages, graced with an old-world feminine name, giving the villages on its sides the milk of its breast. Even old artificial lakes have acquired a greater dignity.

However when, a hundred years hence, the trees on its banks will have grown statelier; its brand-new milestones been worn down and moss-covered into mellowness; the date 1871, inscribed on its lock-gates, left behind at a respectable distance; then, if I am reborn as my great-grandson and come again to inspect the Cuttack estates along this canal, I may feel differently towards it.

SHELIDAH

October, 1891

Boat after boat touches at the landing-place, and after a whole year exiles are returning home from distant fields of work for the Poojah vacation, their boxes, baskets, and bundles loaded with presents. I notice one who, as his boat nears the shore, changes into a freshly folded and crinkled muslin *dhoti*, dons over his cotton tunic a China silk coat, carefully adjusts round his neck a neatly twisted scarf, and walks off towards the village, umbrella held aloft.

Rustling waves pass over the rice-fields. Mango and cocoanut tree-tops rise into the sky, and beyond them there are fluffy clouds on the horizon. The fringes of the palm leaves wave in the breeze. The reeds on the sand-bank are on the point of flowering. It is altogether an exhilarating scene.

The feelings of the man who has just arrived home, the eager expectancy of his folk awaiting him, this autumn sky, this world, the gentle morning breeze, the universal responsive tremor in tree and shrub and in the wavelets on the river, conspire to overwhelm this lonely youth, gazing from his window, with unutterable joys and sorrows.

Glimpses of the world received from wayside windows bring new desires, or rather, make old desires take on new forms. The day before yesterday, as I was sitting at the window of the boat, a little fisher-dinghy floated past, the boatman singing a song—not a very tuneful song. But it reminded me of a night, years ago, when I was a child. We were going along the Padma in a boat. I awoke one night at about 2 o'clock, and, on raising the window and putting out my head, I saw the waters without a ripple, gleaming in the moonlight, and a youth in a little dinghy paddling along all by himself and singing, oh so sweetly,—such sweet melody I had never heard before.

A sudden longing came upon me to go back to the day of that song; to be allowed to make another essay at life, this time not to leave it thus empty and unsatisfied; but with a poet's song on my lips to float about the world on the crest of the rising tide, to sing it to men and subdue their hearts; to see for myself what the world holds and where; to let men know me, to get to know them; to burst forth through the world in life and youth like the eager rushing breezes; and then return home to a fulfilled and fruitful old age to spend it as a poet should.

Not a very lofty ideal, is it? To benefit the world would have been much higher, no doubt; but being on the whole what I am, that ambition does not even occur to me. I cannot make up my mind to sacrifice this precious gift of life in a self-wrought famine, and disappoint the world and the hearts of men by fasts and

meditations and constant argument. I count it enough to live and die as a man, loving and trusting the world, unable to look on it either as a delusion of the Creator or a snare of the Devil. It is not for me to strive to be wafted away into the airiness of an Angel.

SHELIDAH

2nd Kartik (October), 1891

When I come to the country I cease to view man as separate from the rest. As the river runs through many a clime, so does the stream of men babble on, winding through woods and villages and towns. It is not a true contrast that *men may come and men may go, but I go on forever*. Humanity, with all its confluent streams, big and small, flows on and on, just as does the river, from its source in birth to its sea of death;—two dark mysteries at either end, and between them various play and work and chatter unceasing.

Over there the cultivators sing in the fields: here the fishing-boats float by. The day wears on and the heat of the sun increases. Some bathers are still in the river, others are finished and are taking home their filled water-vessels. Thus, past both banks of the river, hundreds of years have hummed their way, while the refrain rises in a mournful chorus: *I go on forever!*

Amid the noonday silence some youthful cowherd is heard calling at the top of his voice for his companion; some boat splashes its way homewards; the ripples lap against the empty jar which some village woman rests on the water before dipping it; and with these mingle several other less definite sounds,—the twittering of birds, the humming of bees, the plaintive creaking of the house-boat as it gently swings to and fro,—the whole making a tender lullaby, as of a mother trying to quiet a suffering child. “Fret not,” she sings, as she soothingly pats its fevered forehead. “Worry not; weep no more. Let be your strugglings and grabbings and fightings; forget a while, sleep a while.”

SHELIDAH

3rd Kartik (October), 1891

It was the *Kojagar* full moon, and I was slowly pacing the riverside conversing with myself. It could hardly be called a conversation, as I was doing all the talking and my imaginary companion all the listening. The poor fellow had no chance of speaking up for himself, for was not mine the power to compel him helplessly to answer like a fool?

But what a night it was! How often have I tried to write of such, but never got it done! There was not a line of ripple on the river; and from away over there,

where the farthest shore of the distant main stream is seen beyond the other edge of the midway belt of sand, right up to this shore, glimmers a broad band of moonlight. Not a human being, not a boat in sight; not a tree, nor blade of grass on the fresh-formed island sand-bank.

It seemed as though a desolate moon was rising upon a devastated earth; a random river wandering through a lifeless solitude; a long-drawn fairy-tale coming to a close over a deserted world,—all the kings and the princesses, their ministers and friends and their golden castles vanished, leaving the Seven Seas and Thirteen Rivers and the Unending Moor, over which the adventurous princes fared forth, wanly gleaming in the pale moonlight. I was pacing up and down like the last pulse-beats of this dying world. Everyone else seemed to be on the opposite shore—the shore of life—where the British Government and the Nineteenth Century hold sway, and tea and cigarettes.

1892

SHELIDAH

9th January, 1892

For some days the weather here has been wavering between Winter and Spring. In the morning, perhaps, shivers will run over both land and water at the touch of the north wind; while the evening will thrill with the south breeze coming through the moonlight.

There is no doubt that Spring is well on its way. After a long interval the *papiya* once more calls out from the groves on the opposite bank. The hearts of men too are stirred; and after evening falls, sounds of singing are heard in the village, showing that they are no longer in such a hurry to close doors and windows and cover themselves up snugly for the night.

Tonight the moon is at its full, and its large, round face peers at me through the open window on my left, as if trying to make out whether I have anything to say against it in my letter,—it suspects, maybe, that we mortals concern ourselves more with its stains than its beams.

A bird is plaintively crying tee-tee on the sandbank. The river seems not to move. There are no boats. The motionless groves on the bank cast an unquivering shadow on the waters. The haze over the sky makes the moon look like a sleepy eye kept open.

Henceforward the evenings will grow darker and darker; and when, tomorrow, I come over from the office, this moon, the favourite companion of my exile, will already have drifted a little farther from me, doubting whether she had been wise to lay her heart so completely bare last evening, and so covering it up again little by little.

Nature becomes really and truly intimate in strange and lonely places. I have been actually worrying myself for days at the thought that after the moon is past her full I shall daily miss the moonlight more and more; feeling further and further exiled when the beauty and peace which awaits my return to the riverside will no longer be there, and I shall have to come back through darkness.

Anyhow I put it on record that today is the full moon—the first full moon of

this year's springtime. In years to come I may perchance be reminded of this night, with the tee-tee of the bird on the bank, the glimmer of the distant light on the boat off the other shore, the shining expanse of river, the blur of shade thrown by the dark fringe of trees along its edge, and the white sky gleaming overhead in unconcerned aloofness.

SHELIDAH

7th April, 1892

The river is getting low, and the water in this arm of it is hardly more than waist-deep anywhere. So it is not at all extraordinary that the boat should be anchored in mid-stream. On the bank, to my right, the ryots are ploughing and cows are now and then brought down to the water's edge for a drink. To the left there are the mango and coconut trees of the old Shelidah garden above, and on the bathing slope below there are village women washing clothes, filling water jars, bathing, laughing and gossiping in their provincial dialect.

The younger girls never seem to get through their sporting in the water; it is a delight to hear their careless, merry laughter. The men gravely take their regulation number of dips and go away, but girls are on much more intimate terms with the water. Both alike babble and chatter and ripple and sparkle in the same simple and natural manner; both may languish and fade away under a scorching glare, yet both can take a blow without hopelessly breaking under it. The hard world, which, but for them, would be barren, cannot fathom the mystery of the soft embrace of their arms.

Tennyson has it that woman to man is as water to wine. I feel today it should be as water is to land. Woman is more at home with the water, laving in it, playing with it, holding her gatherings beside it; and while, for her, other burdens are not seemly, the carrying of water from the spring, the well, the bank of river or pool, has ever been held to become her.

BOLPUR

2nd May, 1892

There are many paradoxes in the world and one of them is this, that wherever the landscape is immense, the sky unlimited, clouds intimately dense, feelings unfathomable—that is to say where infinitude is manifest—its fit companion is

one solitary person; a multitude there seems so petty, so distracting.

An individual and the infinite are on equal terms, worthy to gaze on one another, each from his own throne. But where many men are, how small both humanity and infinitude become, how much they have to knock off each other, in order to fit in together! Each soul wants so much room to expand that in a crowd it needs must wait for gaps through which to thrust a little craning piece of a head from time to time.

So the only result of our endeavour to assemble is that we become unable to fill our joined hands, our outstretched arms, with this endless, fathomless expanse.

BOLPUR

8th Jaistha (May), 1892

Women who try to be witty, but only succeed in being pert, are insufferable; and as for attempts to be comic they are disgraceful in women whether they succeed or fail. The comic is ungainly and exaggerated, and so is in some sort related to the sublime. The elephant is comic, the camel and the giraffe are comic, all overgrowth is comic.

It is rather keenness that is akin to beauty, as the thorn to the flower. So sarcasm is not unbecoming in woman, though coming from her it hurts. But ridicule which savours of bulkiness woman had better leave to our sublime sex. The masculine Falstaff makes our sides split, but a feminine Falstaff would only rack our nerves.

BOLPUR

12th Jaistha (May), 1892

I usually pace the roof-terrace, alone, of an evening. Yesterday afternoon I felt it my duty to show my visitors the beauties of the local scenery, so I strolled out with them, taking Aghore as a guide.

On the verge of the horizon, where the distant fringe of trees was blue, a thin line of dark blue cloud had risen over them and was looking particularly beautiful. I tried to be poetical and said it was like blue collyrium on the fringe of lashes enhancing a beautiful blue eye. Of my companions one did not hear the remark, another did not understand, while the third dismissed it with the reply: "Yes, very pretty." I did not feel encouraged to attempt a second poetical flight.

After walking about a mile we came to a dam, and along the pool of water there was a row of *tâl* (fan palm) trees, under which was a natural spring. While we stood there looking at this, we found that the line of cloud which we had seen in the North was making for us, swollen and grown darker, flashes of lightning

gleaming the while.

We unanimously came to the conclusion that viewing the beauties of nature could be better done from within the shelter of the house, but no sooner had we turned homewards than a storm, making giant strides over the open moorland, was on us with an angry roar. I had no idea, while I was admiring the collyrium on the eyelashes of beauteous dame Nature, that she would fly at us like an irate housewife, threatening so tremendous a slap!

It became so dark with the dust that we could not see beyond a few paces. The fury of the storm increased, and flying stony particles of the rubbly soil stung our bodies like shot, as the wind took us by the scruff of the neck and thrust us along, to the whipping of drops of rain which had begun to fall.

Run! Run! But the ground was not level, being deeply scarred with watercourses, and not easy to cross at any time, much less in a storm. I managed to get entangled in a thorny shrub, and was nearly thrown on my face by the force of the wind as I stopped to free myself.

When we had almost reached the house, a host of servants came hurrying towards us, shouting and gesticulating, and fell upon us like another storm. Some took us by the arms, some bewailed our plight, some were eager to show the way, others hung on our backs as if fearing that the storm might carry us off altogether. We evaded their attentions with some difficulty and managed at length to get into the house, panting, with wet clothes, dusty bodies, and tumbled hair.

One thing I had learnt; and will never again write in novel or story the lie that the hero with the picture of his lady-love in his mind can pass unruffled through wind and rain. No one could keep any face in mind, however lovely, in such a storm,—he has enough to do to keep the sand out of his eyes!...

The Vaishnava-poets have sung ravishingly of Radha going to her tryst with Krishna through a stormy night. Did they ever pause to consider, I wonder, in what condition she must have reached him? The kind of tangle her hair got into is easily imaginable, and also the state of the rest of her toilet. When she arrived in her bower with the dust on her body soaked by the rain into a coating of mud, she must have been a sight!

But when we read the Vaishnava poems, these thoughts do not occur. We only see on the canvas of our mind the picture of a beautiful woman, passing under the shelter of the flowering *kadambas* in the darkness of a stormy *Shravan* ⁵ night, towards the bank of the Jumna, forgetful of wind or rain, as in a dream, drawn by her surpassing love. She has tied up her anklets lest they should tinkle; she is clad in dark blue raiment lest she be discovered; but she holds no umbrella

lest she get wet, carries no lantern lest she fall!

5. July-August, the rainy season.

Alas for useful things—how necessary in practical life, how neglected in poetry! But poetry strives in vain to free us from their bondage—they will be with us always; so much so, we are told, that with the march of civilisation it is poetry that will become extinct, but patent after patent will continue to be taken out for the improvement of shoes and umbrellas.

BOLPUR

16th Jaistha (May), 1892

No church tower clock chimes here, and there being no other human habitation nearby, complete silence falls with the evening, as soon as the birds have ceased their song. There is not much difference between early night and midnight. A sleepless night in Calcutta flows like a huge, slow river of darkness; one can count the varied sounds of its passing, lying on one's back in bed. But here the night is like a vast, still lake, placidly reposing, with no sign of movement. And as I tossed from side to side last night I felt enveloped within a dense stagnation.

This morning I left my bed a little later than usual and, coming downstairs to my room, leant back on a bolster, one leg resting over the other knee. There, with a slate on my chest, I began to write a poem to the accompaniment of the morning breeze and the singing birds. I was getting along splendidly—a smile playing over my lips, my eyes half closed, my head swaying to the rhythm, the thing I hummed gradually taking shape—when the post arrived.

There was a letter, the last number of the *Sadhana Magazine*, one of the *Monist*, and some proof-sheets. I read the letter, raced my eyes over the uncut pages of the *Sadhana*, and then again fell to nodding and humming through my poem. I did not do another thing till I had finished it.

I wonder why the writing of pages of prose does not give one anything like the joy of completing a single poem. One's emotions take on such perfection of form in a poem; they can, as it were, be taken up by the fingers. But prose is like a sackful of loose material, heavy and unwieldy, incapable of being lifted as you please.

If I could finish writing one poem a day, my life would pass in a kind of joy; but though I have been busy tending poetry for many a year it has not been tamed yet, and is not the kind of winged steed to allow me to bridle it whenever I like! The joy of art is in freedom to take a distant flight as fancy will; then, even after return within the prison-world, an echo lingers in the ear, an exaltation in the mind.

Short poems keep coming to me unsought, and so prevent my getting on with the play. Had it not been for these, I could have let in ideas for two or three plays which have been knocking at the door. I am afraid I must wait for the cold weather. All my plays except "*Chitra*" were written in the winter. In that season lyrical fervour is apt to grow cold, and one gets the leisure to write drama.

BOLPUR

31st May, 1892

It is not yet five o'clock, but the light has dawned, there is a delightful breeze, and all the birds in the garden are awake and have started singing. The *koel* seems beside itself. It is difficult to understand why it should keep on cooing so untiringly. Certainly not to entertain us, nor to distract the pining lover ⁶—it must have some personal purpose of its own. But, sadly enough, that purpose never seems to get fulfilled. Yet it is not down-hearted, and its Coo-oo! Coo-oo! Keeps going, with now and then an ultra-fervent trill. What can it mean?

6. A favourite conceit of the old Sanskrit poets.

And then in the distance there is some other bird with only a faint chuck-chuck that has no energy or enthusiasm, as if all hope were lost; none the less, from within some shady nook it cannot resist uttering this little plaint: chuck, chuck, chuck.

How little we really know of the household affairs of these innocent winged creatures, with their soft, breasts and necks and their many-coloured feathers! Why on earth do they find it necessary to sing so persistently?

SHELIDAH

31st Jaistha (June), 1892

I hate these polite formalities. Nowadays I keep repeating the line: "Much rather would I be an Arab Bedouin!" A fine, healthy, strong, and free barbarity.

I feel I want to quit this constant ageing of mind and body, with incessant argument and nicety concerning ancient decaying things, and to feel the joy of a free and vigorous life; to have,—be they good or bad,—broad, unhesitating, unfettered ideas and aspirations, free from everlasting friction between custom and sense, sense and desire, desire and action.

If only I could set utterly and boundlessly free this hampered life of mine, I would storm the four quarters and raise wave upon wave of tumult all round; I would career away madly, like a wild horse, for very joy of my own speed! But I

am a Bengali, not a Bedouin! I go on sitting in my corner, and mope and worry and argue. I turn my mind now this way up, now the other—as a fish is fried—and the boiling oil blisters first this side, then that.

Let it pass. Since I cannot be thoroughly wild, it is but proper that I should make an endeavour to be thoroughly civil. Why foment a quarrel between the two?

SHELIDAH

16th June, 1892

The more one lives alone on the river or in the open country, the clearer it becomes that nothing is more beautiful or great than to perform the ordinary duties of one's daily life simply and naturally. From the grasses in the field to the stars in the sky, each one is doing just that; and there is such profound peace and surpassing beauty in nature because none of these tries forcibly to transgress its limitations.

Yet what each one does is by no means of little moment. The grass has to put forth all its energy to draw sustenance from the uttermost tips of its rootlets simply to grow where it is as grass; it does not vainly strive to become a banyan tree; and so the earth gains a lovely carpet of green. And, indeed, what little of beauty and peace is to be found in the societies of men is owing to the daily performance of small duties, not to big doings and fine talk.

Perhaps because the whole of our life is not vividly present at each moment, some imaginary hope may lure, some glowing picture of a future, untrammelled with everyday burdens, may tempt us; but these are illusory.

SHELIDAH

2nd Asarh (June), 1892

Yesterday, the first day of *Asarh*, ⁷ the enthronement of the rainy season was celebrated with due pomp and circumstance. It was very hot the whole day, but in the afternoon dense clouds rolled up in stupendous masses.

⁷. June-July, the commencement of the rainy season.

I thought to myself, this first day of the rains, I would rather risk getting wet than remain confined in my dungeon of a cabin.

The year 1293 ⁸ will not come again in my life, and, for the matter of that, how many more even of these first days of *Asarh* will come? My life would be sufficiently long could it number thirty of these first days of *Asarh* to which the

poet of the *Meghaduta* ⁹ has, for me at least, given special distinction.

8. Of the Bengal era.

9. In the *Meghaduta* (Cloud Messenger) of Kalidas a famous description of the burst of the Monsoon begins with the words: *On the first day of Asarh*.

It sometimes strikes me how immensely fortunate I am that each day should take its place in my life, either reddened with the rising and setting sun, or refreshingly cool with deep, dark clouds, or blooming like a white flower in the moonlight. What untold wealth!

A thousand years ago Kalidas welcomed that first day of *Asarh*; and once in every year of my life that same day of *Asarh* dawns in all its glory—that self-same day of the poet of old Ujjain, which has brought to countless men and women their joys of union, their pangs of separation.

Every year one such great, time-hallowed day drops out of my life; and the time will come when this day of Kalidas, this day of the *Meghaduta*, this eternal first day of the Rains in Hindustan, shall come no more for me. When I realise this I feel I want to take a good look at nature, to offer a conscious welcome to each day's sunrise, to say farewell to each day's setting sun, as to an intimate friend.

What a grand festival, what a vast theatre of festivity! And we cannot even fully respond to it, so far away do we live from the world! The light of the stars travels millions of miles to reach the earth, but it cannot reach our hearts—so many millions of miles further off are we!

The world into which I have tumbled is peopled with strange beings. They are always busy erecting walls and rules round themselves, and how careful they are with their curtains lest they should see! It is a wonder to me they have not made drab covers for flowering plants and put up a canopy to ward off the moon. If the next life is determined by the desires of this, then I should be reborn from our enshrouded planet into some free and open realm of joy.

Only those who cannot steep themselves in beauty to the full, despise it as an object of the senses. But those who have tasted of its inexpressibility know how far it is beyond the highest powers of mere eye or ear—nay, even the heart is powerless to attain the end of its yearning.

P.S.—I have left out the very thing I started to tell of. Don't be afraid, it won't take four more sheets. It is this, that on the evening of the first day of *Asarh* it came on to rain very heavily, in great lance-like showers. That is all.

ON THE WAY TO GOALUNDA

21st June, 1892

Pictures in an endless variety, of sandbanks, fields and their crops, and villages, glide into view on either hand—of clouds floating in the sky, of colours blossoming when day meets night. Boats steal by, fishermen catch fish; the waters make liquid, caressing sounds throughout the livelong day; their broad expanse calms down in the evening stillness, like a child lulled to sleep, over whom all the stars in the boundless sky keep watch—then, as I sit up on wakeful nights, with sleeping banks on either side, the silence is broken only by an occasional cry of a jackal in the woods near some village, or by fragments undermined by the keen current of the *Padma*, that tumble from the high cliff-like bank into the water.

Not that the prospect is always of particular interest—a yellowish sandbank, innocent of grass or tree, stretches away; an empty boat is tied to its edge; the bluish water, of the same shade as the hazy sky, flows past; yet I cannot tell how it moves me. I suspect that the old desires and longings of my servant-ridden childhood—when in the solitary imprisonment of my room I pored over the *Arabian Nights*, and shared with Sinbad the Sailor his adventures in many a strange land—are not yet dead within me, but are roused at the sight of any empty boat tied to a sandbank.

If I had not heard fairy tales and read the *Arabian Nights* and *Robinson Crusoe* in childhood, I am sure views of distant banks, or the farther side of wide fields, would not have stirred me so—the whole world, in fact, would have had for me a different appeal.

What a maze of fancy and fact becomes tangled up within the mind of man! The different strands—petty and great—of story and event and picture, how they get knotted together!

SHELIDAH

22nd June, 1892

Early this morning, while still lying in bed, I heard the women at the bathing-place sending forth joyous peals of *Ulu! Ulu!* ¹⁰ The sound moved me curiously, though it is difficult to say why.

¹⁰. A peculiar shrill cheer given by women on auspicious or festive occasions.

Perhaps such joyful outbursts put one in mind of the great stream of festive activity which goes on in this world, with most of which the individual man has no connection. The world is so immense, the concourse of men so vast, yet with

how few has one any tie! Distant sounds of life, wafted near, bearing tidings from unknown homes, make the individual realise that the greater part of the world of men does not, cannot own or know him; then he feels deserted, loosely attached to the world, and a vague sadness creeps over him.

Thus these cries of *Ulu! Ulu!* Made my life, past and future, seem like a long, long road, from the very ends of which they come to me. And this feeling colours for me the beginning of my day.

As soon as the manager with his staff, and the ryots seeking audience, come upon the scene, this faint vista of past and future will be promptly elbowed out, and a very robust present will salute and stand before me.

SHAZADPUR

25th June, 1892

In today's letters there was a touch about A——'s singing which made my heart yearn with a nameless longing. Each of the little joys of life, which remain unappreciated amid the hubbub of the town, sends in their claims to the heart when far from home. I love music, and there is no dearth of voices and instruments in Calcutta, yet I turn a deaf ear to them. But, though I may fail to realise it at the time, this needs must leave the heart athirst.

As I read today's letters, I felt such a poignant desire to hear A——'s sweet song, I was at once sure that one of the many suppressed longings of creation which cry after fulfilment is for neglected joys within reach; while we are busy pursuing chimerical impossibilities we famish our lives...

The emptiness left by easy joys, untasted, is ever growing in my life. And the day may come when I shall feel that, could I but have the past back, I would strive no more after the unattainable, but drain to the full these little, unsought, everyday joys which life offers.

SHAZADPUR

27th June, 1892

Yesterday, in the afternoon, it clouded over so threateningly, I felt a sense of dread. I do not remember ever to have seen before such angry-looking clouds.

Swollen masses of the deepest indigo blue were piled, one on top of the other, just above the horizon, looking like the puffed-out moustaches of some raging

demon.

Under the jagged lower edges of the clouds there shone forth a blood-red glare, as through the eyes of a monstrous, sky-filling bison, with tossing mane and with head lowered to strike the earth in fury.

The crops in the fields and the leaves of the trees trembled with fear of the impending disaster; shudder after shudder ran across the waters; the crows flew wildly about, distractedly cawing.

SHAZADPUR

29th June, 1892

I wrote yesterday that I had an engagement with Kalidas, the poet, for this evening. As I lit a candle, drew my chair up to the table, and made ready, not Kalidas, but the postmaster, walked in. A live postmaster cannot but claim precedence over a dead poet, so I could not very well tell him to make way for Kalidas, who was due by appointment,—he would not have understood me! Therefore I offered him a chair and gave old Kalidas the go-by.

There is a kind of bond between this postmaster and me. When the post office was in a part of this estate building, I used to meet him every day. I wrote my story of “The Postmaster” one afternoon in this very room. And when the story was out in the *Hitabadi* he came to me with a succession of bashful smiles, as he deprecatingly touched on the subject. Anyhow, I like the man. He has a fund of anecdote which I enjoy listening to. He has also a sense of humour.

Though it was late when the postmaster left, I started at once on the *Raghuvansa*, ¹¹ and read all about the *swayamuara* ¹² of Indumati.

¹¹. Book of poems by Kalidas, who is perhaps best known to European readers as the author of *Sakuntala*.

¹². An old Indian custom, according to which a princess chooses among assembled rival suitors for her hand by placing a garland round the neck of the one whose love she returns.

The handsome, gaily adorned princes are seated on rows of thrones in the assembly hall. Suddenly a blast of conch-shell and trumpet resounds, as Indumati, in bridal robes, supported by Sunanda, is ushered in and stands in the walk left between them. It was delightful to dwell on the picture.

Then as Sunanda introduces to her each one of the suitors, Indumati bows low in loveless salutation, and passes on. How beautiful is this humble courtesy! They are all princes. They are all her seniors. For she is a mere girl. Had she not atoned for the inevitable rudeness of her rejection by the grace of her humility, the scene would have lost its beauty.

SHELIDAH

20th August, 1892

"If only I could live there!" is often thought when looking at a beautiful landscape painting. That is the kind of longing which is satisfied here, where one feels alive in a brilliantly coloured picture, with none of the hardness of reality. When I was a child, illustrations of woodland and sea, in *Paul and Virginia*, or *Robinson Crusoe*, would waft me away from the everyday world; and the sunshine here brings back to my mind the feeling with which I used to gaze on those pictures.

I cannot account for this exactly, or explain definitely what kind of longing it is which is roused within me. It seems like the throb of some current flowing through the artery connecting me with the larger world. I feel as if dim, distant memories come to me of the time when I was one with the rest of the earth; when on me grew the green grass, and on me fell the autumn light; when a warm scent of youth would rise from every pore of my vast, soft, green body at the touch of the rays of the mellow sun, and a fresh life, a sweet joy, would be half-consciously secreted and inarticulately poured forth from all the immensity of my being, as it lay dumbly stretched, with its varied countries and seas and mountains, under the bright blue sky.

My feelings seem to be those of our ancient earth in the daily ecstasy of its sun-kissed life; my own consciousness seems to stream through each blade of grass, each sucking root, to rise with the sap through the trees, to break out with joyous thrills in the waving fields of corn, in the rustling palm leaves.

I feel impelled to give expression to my blood-tie with the earth, my kinsman's love for her; but I am afraid I shall not be understood.

BOALIA

18th November, 1892

I am wondering where your train has got to by now. This is the time for the sun to rise over the ups and downs of the treeless, rocky region near Nawadih station. The scene around there must be brightened by the fresh sunlight, through which distant, blue hills are beginning to be faintly visible.

Cultivated fields are scarcely to be seen, except where the primitive tribesmen have done a little ploughing with their buffaloes; on each side of the railway

cutting there are the heaped-up black rocks—the boulder-marked footprints of dried-up streams—and the fidgety, black wagtails, perched along the telegraph wires. A wild, seamed, and scarred nature lies there in the sun, as though tamed at the touch of some soft, bright, cherubic hand.

Do you know the picture which this calls up for me? In the *Sakuntala* of Kalidas there is a scene where Bharat, the infant son of King Dushyanta, is playing with a lion cub. The child is lovingly passing his delicate, rosy fingers through the rough mane of the great beast, which lies quietly stretched in trustful repose, now and then casting affectionate glances out of the corner of its eyes at its little human friend.

And shall I tell you what those dry, boulder-strewn watercourses put me in mind of? We read in the English fairy tale of the Babes in the Wood, how the little brother and sister left a trace of their wanderings, through the unknown forest into which their stepmother had turned them out, by dropping pebbles as they went. These streamlets are like lost babes in the great world into which they are sent adrift, and that is why they leave stones, as they go forth, to mark their course, so as not to lose their way when they may be returning. But for them there is no return journey!

NATORE

2nd December, 1892

There is a depth of feeling and breadth of peace in a Bengal sunset behind the trees which fringe the endless solitary fields, spreading away to the horizon.

Lovingly, yet sadly withal, does our evening sky bend over and meet the earth in the distance. It casts a mournful light on the earth it leaves behind—a light which gives us a taste of the divine grief of the Eternal Separation [13](#) and eloquent is the silence which then broods over earth, sky, and waters.

[13.](#) i.e. between Purusha and Prakriti—God and Creation.

As I gaze on in rapt motionlessness, I fall to wondering—if ever this silence should fail to contain itself, if the expression for which this hour has been seeking from the beginning of time should break forth, would a profoundly solemn, poignantly moving music rise from earth to starland?

With a little steadfast concentration of effort we can, for ourselves, translate the grand harmony of light and colour which permeates the universe into music. We have only to close our eyes and receive with the ear of the mind the vibration of this ever-flowing panorama.

But how often shall I write of these sunsets and sunrises? I feel their renewed freshness every time; yet how am I to attain such renewed freshness in my attempts at expression?

SHELIDAH

9th December, 1892

I am feeling weak and relaxed after my painful illness, and in this state the ministrations of nature are sweet indeed. I feel as if, like the rest, I too am lazily glittering out my delight at the rays of the sun, and my letter-writing progresses but absent-mindedly.

The world is ever new to me; like an old friend loved through this and former lives, the acquaintance between us is both long and deep.

I can well realise how, in ages past, when the earth in her first youth came forth from her sea-bath and saluted the sun in prayer, I must have been one of the trees sprung from her new-formed soil, spreading my foliage in all the freshness of a primal impulse.

The great sea was rocking and swaying and smothering, like a foolishly fond mother, its first-born land with repeated caresses; while I was drinking in the sunlight with the whole of my being, quivering under the blue sky with the unreasoning rapture of the new-born, holding fast and sucking away at my mother earth with all my roots. In blind joy my leaves burst forth and my flowers bloomed; and when the dark clouds gathered, their grateful shade would comfort me with a tender touch.

From age to age, thereafter, have I been diversely reborn on this earth. So whenever we now sit face to face, alone together, various ancient memories, gradually, one after another, come back to me.

My mother earth sits today in the cornfields by the riverside, in her raiment of sunlit gold; and near her feet, her knees, her lap, I roll about and play. Mother of a multitude of children, she attends but absently to their constant calls on her, with an immense patience, but also with a certain aloofness. She is seated there, with her far-away look fastened on the verge of the afternoon sky, while I keep chattering on untiringly.

1893

BALJA Tuesday, February 1893

I do not want to wander about any more. I am pining for a corner in which to nestle down snugly, away from the crowd.

India has two aspects—in one she is a householder, in the other a wandering ascetic. The former refuses to budge from the home corner, the latter has no home at all. I find both these within me. I want to roam about and see all the wide world, yet I also yearn for a little sheltered nook; like a bird with its tiny nest for a dwelling, and the vast sky for flight.

I hanker after a corner because it serves to bring calmness to my mind. My mind really wants to be busy, but in making the attempt it knocks so repeatedly against the crowd as to become utterly frenzied and to keep buffeting me, its cage, from within. If only it is allowed a little leisurely solitude, and can look about and think to its heart's content, it will express its feelings to its own satisfaction.

This freedom of solitude is what my mind is fretting for; it would be alone with its imaginings, as the Creator broods over His own creation.

CUTTACK

February, 1893

Till we can achieve something, let us live incognito, say I. So long as we are only fit to be looked down upon, on what shall we base our claim to respect? When we have acquired a foothold of our own in the world, when we have had some share in shaping its course, then we can meet others smilingly. Till then let us keep in the background, attending to our own affairs.

But our countrymen seem to hold the opposite opinion. They set no store by our more modest, intimate wants which have to be met behind the scenes,—the whole of their attention is directed to momentary attitudinising and display.

Ours is truly a God-forsaken country. Difficult, indeed, is it for us to maintain the strength of will to *do*. We get no help in any real sense. There is no one, within miles of us, in converse with whom we might gain an accession of vitality. No one near seems to be thinking, or feeling, or working. Not a soul has any experience of big striving, or of really and truly living. They all eat and

drink, do their office work, smoke and sleep, and chatter nonsensically. When they touch upon emotion they grow sentimental, when they reason they are childish. One yearns for a full-blooded, sturdy, and capable personality; these are all so many shadows, flitting about, out of touch with the world.

CUTTACK

10th February, 1893

He was a fully developed John Bull of the outrageous type—with a huge beak of a nose, cunning eyes, and a yard-long chin. The curtailment of our right to be tried by jury is now under consideration by the Government. The fellow dragged in the subject by the ears and insisted on arguing it out with our host, poor B — Babu. He said the moral standard of the people of this country was low; that they had no real belief in the sacredness of life; so that they were unfit to serve on juries.

The utter contempt with which we are regarded by these people was brought home to me when I saw how they can accept a Bengali's hospitality and talk thus, seated at his table, without a quiver of compunction.

As I sat in a corner of the drawing-room after dinner, everything round me looked blurred to my eyes. I seemed to be seated by the head of my great, insulted Motherland, who lay there in the dust before me, disconsolate, shorn of her glory. I cannot tell what a profound distress overpowered my heart.

How incongruous seemed the *mem-sahibs* there, in their evening-dresses, the hum of English conversation, and the ripples of laughter! How richly true for us is our India of the ages; how cheap and false the hollow courtesies of an English dinner-party!

CUTTACK

March, 1893

If we begin to attach too much importance to the applause of Englishmen, we shall have to be rid of much in us that is good, and to accept from them much that is bad.

We shall grow ashamed of going about without socks, and cease to feel shame at the sight of their ball dresses. We shall have no compunction in throwing overboard our ancient manners, nor any in emulating their lack of courtesy.

We shall leave off wearing our *achgans* because they are susceptible of improvement, but think nothing of surrendering our heads to their hats, though

no headgear could well be uglier.

In short, consciously or unconsciously, we shall have to cut our lives down according as they clap their hands or not.

Wherefore I apostrophise myself and say: "O Earthen Pot! For goodness sake keep away from that Metal Pot! Whether he comes to you in anger or merely to give you a patronising pat on the back, you are done for, cracked in either case. So pay heed to old Aesop's sage counsel, I pray—and keep your distance."

Let the metal pot ornament wealthy homes; you have work to do in those of the poor. If you let yourself be broken, you will have no place in either, but merely return to the dust; or, at best, you may secure a corner in a bric-a-brac cabinet—as a curiosity, and it is more glorious far to be used for fetching water by the meanest of village women.

SHELIDAH

8th May, 1893

Poetry is a very old love of mine—I must have been engaged to her when I was only Rathi's ¹⁴ age. Long ago the recesses under the old banyan tree beside our tank, the inner gardens, the unknown regions on the ground floor of the house, the whole of the outside world, the nursery rhymes and tales told by the maids, created a wonderful fairyland within me. It is difficult to give a clear idea of all the vague and mysterious happenings of that period, but this much is certain, that my exchange of garlands ¹⁵ with Poetic Fancy was already duly celebrated.

¹⁴. Rathi, his son, was then five years old.

¹⁵. The betrothal ceremony.

I must admit, however, that my betrothed is not an auspicious maiden—whatever else she may bring one, it is not good fortune. I cannot say she has never given me happiness, but peace of mind with her is out of the question. The lover whom she favours may get his fill of bliss, but his heart's blood is wrung out under her relentless embrace. It is not for the unfortunate creature of her choice ever to become a staid and sober householder, comfortably settled down on a social foundation.

Consciously or unconsciously, I may have done many things that were untrue, but I have never uttered anything false in my poetry—that is the sanctuary where the deepest truths of my life find refuge.

SHELIDAH

10th May, 1893

Here come black, swollen masses of cloud; they soak up the golden sunshine from the scene in front of me like great pads of blotting-paper. Rain must be near, for the breeze feels moist and tearful.

Over there, on the sky-piercing peaks of Simla, you will find it hard to realise exactly what an important event the coming of the clouds is here, or how many are anxiously looking up to the sky, hailing their advent.

I feel a great tenderness for these peasant folk—our ryots—big, helpless, infantile children of Providence, who must have food brought to their very lips, or they are undone. When the breasts of Mother Earth dry up they are at a loss what to do, and can only cry. But no sooner is their hunger satisfied than they forget all their past sufferings.

I know not whether the socialistic ideal of a more equal distribution of wealth is attainable, but if not, the dispensation of Providence is indeed cruel, and man a truly unfortunate creature. For if in this world misery must exist, so be it; but let some little loophole, some glimpse of possibility at least, be left, which may serve to urge the nobler portion of humanity to hope and struggle unceasingly for its alleviation.

They say a terribly hard thing who assert that the division of the world's production to afford each one a mouthful of food, a bit of clothing, is only an Utopian dream. All these social problems are hard indeed! Fate has allowed humanity such a pitifully meagre coverlet, that in pulling it over one part of the world, another has to be left bare. In allaying our poverty we lose our wealth, and with this wealth what a world of grace and beauty and power is lost to us.

But the sun shines forth again, though the clouds are still banked up in the West.

SHELIDAH

11th May, 1893

There is another pleasure for me here. Sometimes one or other of our simple, devoted, old ryots comes to see me—and their worshipful homage is so unaffected! How much greater than I are they in the beautiful simplicity and sincerity of their reverence. What if I am unworthy of their veneration—their feeling loses nothing of its value.

I regard these grown-up children with the same kind of affection that I have for little children—but there is also a difference. They are more infantile still. Little children will grow up later on, but these big children never.

A meek and radiantly simple soul shines through their worn and wrinkled, old bodies. Little children are merely simple, they have not the unquestioning, unwavering devotion of these. If there be any undercurrent along which the souls of men may have communication with one another, then my sincere blessing will surely reach and serve them.

SHELIDAH

16th May, 1893

I walk about for an hour on the river bank, fresh and clean after my afternoon bath. Then I get into the new jolly-boat, anchor in mid-stream, and on a bed, spread on the planked over-stern, I lie silently there on my back, in the darkness of the evening. Little S—— sits beside me and chatters away, and the sky becomes more and more thickly studded with stars.

Each day the thought recurs to me: Shall I be reborn under this star-spangled sky? Will the peaceful rapture of such wonderful evenings ever again be mine, on this silent Bengal river, in so secluded a corner of the world?

Perhaps not. The scene may be changed; I may be born with a different mind. Many such evenings may come, but they may refuse to nestle so trustfully, so lovingly, with such complete abandon, to my breast.

Curiously enough, my greatest fear is lest I should be reborn in Europe! For there one cannot recline like this with one's whole being laid open to the infinite above—one is liable, I am afraid, to be soundly rated for lying down at all. I should probably have been hustling strenuously in some factory or bank, or Parliament. Like the roads there, one's mind has to be stone-metalled for heavy traffic—geometrically laid out, and kept clear and regulated.

I am sure I cannot exactly say why this lazy, dreamy, self-absorbed, sky-filled state of mind seems to me the more desirable. I feel no whit inferior to the busiest men of the world as I lie here in my jolly-boat. Rather, had I girded up my loins to be strenuous, I might have seemed ever so feeble compared to those chips of old oaken blocks.

SHELIDAH

5th July, 1893

All last night the wind howled like a stray dog, and the rain still pours on without a break. The water from the fields is rushing in numberless, purling streams to the river. The dripping ryots are crossing the river in the ferryboat, some with their *tokas* ¹⁶ on, others with yam leaves held over their heads. Big cargo-boats are gliding along, the boatman sitting drenched at his helm, the crew straining at the tow-ropes through the rain. The birds remain gloomily confined to their nests, but the sons of men fare forth, for in spite of the weather the world's work must go on.

16. Conical hats of straw or of split bamboo.

Two cowherd lads are grazing their cattle just in front of my boat. The cows are munching away with great gusto, their noses plunged into the lush grass, their tails incessantly busy flicking off the flies. The raindrops and the sticks of the cowherd boys fall on their backs with the same unreasonable persistency, and they bear both with equally uncritical resignation, steadily going on with their munch, munch, munch. These cows have such mild, affectionate, mournful eyes; why, I wonder, should Providence have thought fit to impose all the burden of man's work on the submissive shoulders of these great, gentle beasts?

The river is rising daily. What I could see yesterday only from the upper deck, I can now see from my cabin windows. Every morning I awake to find my field of vision growing larger. Not long since, only the tree-tops near those distant villages used to appear, like dark green clouds. Today the whole of the wood is visible.

Land and water are gradually approaching each other like two bashful lovers. The limit of their shyness has nearly been reached—their arms will soon be round each other's necks. I shall enjoy my trip along this brimful river at the height of the rains. I am fidgeting to give the order to cast off.

SHELIDAH

4th July, 1893

A little gleam of sunlight shows this morning. There was a break in the rains yesterday, but the clouds are banked up so heavily along the skirts of the sky that there is not much hope of the break lasting. It looks as if a heavy carpet of cloud had been rolled up to one side, and at any moment a fussy breeze may come along and spread it over the whole place again, covering every trace of blue sky

and golden sunshine.

What a store of water must have been laid up in the sky this year. The river has already risen over the low *chur*-lands, ¹⁷ threatening to overwhelm all the standing crops. The wretched ryots, in despair, are cutting and bringing away in boats sheaves of half-ripe rice. As they pass my boat I hear them bewailing their fate. It is easy to understand how heart-rending it must be for cultivators to have to cut down their rice on the very eve of its ripening, the only hope left them being that some of the ears may possibly have hardened into grain.

17. Old sand-banks consolidated by the deposit of a layer of culturable soil.

There must be some element of pity in the dispensations of Providence, else how did we get our share of it? But it is so difficult to see where it comes in. The lamentations of these hundreds of thousands of unoffending creatures do not seem to get anywhere. The rain pours on as it lists, the river still rises, and no amount of petitioning seems to have the effect of bringing relief from any quarter. One has to seek consolation by saying that all this is beyond the understanding of man. And yet, it is so vitally necessary for man to understand that there are such things as pity and justice in the world.

However, this is only sulking. Reason tells us that creation never can be perfectly happy. So long as it is incomplete it must put up with imperfection and sorrow. It can only be perfect when it ceases to be creation, and is God. Do our prayers dare go so far?

The more we think over it, the oftener we come back to the starting-point—Why this creation at all? If we cannot make up our minds to object to the thing itself, it is futile complaining about its companion, sorrow.

SHAZADPUR

7th July, 1893

The flow of village life is not too rapid, neither is it stagnant. Work and rest go together, hand in hand. The ferry crosses to and fro, the passers-by with umbrellas up wend their way along the tow-path, women are washing rice on the split-bamboo trays which they dip in the water, the ryots are coming to the market with bundles of jute on their heads. Two men are chopping away at a log of wood with regular, ringing blows. The village carpenter is repairing an upturned dinghy under a big *aswatha* tree. A mongrel dog is prowling aimlessly along the canal bank. Some cows are lying there chewing the cud, after a huge meal off the luxuriant grass, lazily moving their ears backwards and forwards,

flicking off flies with their tails, and occasionally giving an impatient toss of their heads when the crows perched on their backs take too much of a liberty.

The monotonous blows of woodcutter's axe or carpenter's mallet, the splashing of oars, the merry voices of the naked little children at play, the plaintive tune of the ryot's song, the more dominant creaking of the turning oil-mill, all these sounds of activity do not seem out of harmony with murmuring leaves and singing birds, and all combine like moving strains of some grand dream-orchestra, rendering a composition of immense though restrained pathos.

SHAZADPUR

10th July, 1893

All I have to say about the discussion that is going on over "silent poets" is that, though the strength of feeling may be the same in those who are silent as in those who are vocal, that has nothing to do with poetry. Poetry is not a matter of feeling, it is the creation of form.

Ideas take shape by some hidden, subtle skill at work within the poet. This creative power is the origin of poetry. Perceptions, feelings, or language, are only raw material. One may be gifted with feeling, a second with language, a third with both; but he who has as well a creative genius, alone is a poet.

PATISAR

13th August, 1893

Coming through these *beels* ¹⁸ to Kaligram, an idea took shape in my mind. Not that the thought was new, but sometimes old ideas strike one with new force.

18. Translator's Note.—Sometimes a stream passing through the flat Bengal country encounters a stretch of low land and spreads out into a sheet of water, called a *beel*, of indefinite extent, ranging from a large pool in the dry season to a shoreless expanse during the rains.

Villages consisting of a cluster of huts, built on mounds, stand out here and there like islands, and boats or round, earthen vessels are the only means of getting about from village to village.

Where the waters cover cultivated tracts the rice grows through, often from considerable depths, giving to the boats sailing over them the curious appearance of gliding over a cornfield, so clear is the water. Elsewhere these *beels* have a peculiar flora and fauna of water-lilies and irises and various water-fowl. As a result, they resemble neither a marsh nor a lake, but have a distinct character of their own.

The water loses its beauty when it ceases to be defined by banks and spreads out into a monotonous vagueness. In the case of language, metre serves for

banks and gives form and beauty and character. Just as the banks give each river a distinct personality, so does rhythm make each poem an individual creation; prose is like the featureless, impersonal *beel*. Again, the waters of the river have movement and progress; those of the *beel* engulf the country by expanse alone. So, in order to give language power, the narrow bondage of metre becomes necessary; otherwise it spreads and spreads, but cannot advance.

The country people call these *beels* “dumb waters”—they have no language, no self-expression. The river ceaselessly babbles; so the words of the poem sing, they are not “dumb words.” Thus bondage creates beauty of form, motion, and music; bounds make not only for beauty but power.

Poetry gives itself up to the control of metre, not led by blind habit, but because it thus finds the joy of motion. There are foolish persons who think that metre is a species of verbal gymnastics, or legerdemain, of which the object is to win the admiration of the crowd. That is not so. Metre is born as all beauty is born the universe through. The current set up within well-defined bounds gives metrical verse power to move the minds of men as vague and indefinite prose cannot.

This idea became clear to me as I glided on from river to *beel* and *beel* to river.

PATISAR

26th (*Straven*) August, 1893

For some time it has struck me that man is a rough-hewn and woman a finished product.

There is an unbroken consistency in the manners, customs, speech, and adornment of woman. And the reason is, that for ages Nature has assigned to her the same definite rôle and has been adapting her to it. No cataclysm, no political revolution, no alteration of social ideal, has yet diverted woman from her particular functions, nor destroyed their inter-relations. She has loved, tended, and caressed, and done nothing else; and the exquisite skill which she has acquired in these, permeates all her being and doing. Her disposition and action have become inseparably one, like the flower and its scent. She has, therefore, no doubts or hesitations.

But the character of man has still many hollows and protuberances; each of the varied circumstances and forces which have contributed to his making has left its mark upon him. That is why the features of one will display an indefinite spread of forehead, of another an irresponsible prominence of nose, of a third an unaccountable hardness about the jaws. Had man but the benefit of continuity and uniformity of purpose, Nature must have succeeded in elaborating a definite

mould for him, enabling him to function simply and naturally, without such strenuous effort. He would not have so complicated a code of behaviour; and he would be less liable to deviate from the normal when disturbed by outside influences.

Woman was cast in the mould of mother. Man has no such primal design to go by, and that is why he has been unable to rise to an equal perfection of beauty.

1894

PATISAR

19th February, 1894

We have two elephants which come to graze on this bank of the river. They greatly interest me. They give the ground a few taps with one foot, and then taking hold of the grass with the end of their trunks wrench off an enormous piece of turf, roots, soil, and all. This they go on swinging till all the earth leaves the roots; they then put it into their mouths and eat it up.

Sometimes the whim takes them to draw up the dust into their trunks, and then with a snort they squirt it all over their bodies; this is their elephantine toilet.

I love to look on these overgrown beasts, with their vast bodies, their immense strength, their ungainly proportions, their docile harmlessness. Their very size and clumsiness make me feel a kind of tenderness for them—their unwieldy bulk has something infantile about it. Moreover, they have large hearts. When they get wild they are furious, but when they calm down they are peace itself.

The uncouthness which goes with bigness does not repel, it rather attracts.

PATISAR

27th February, 1894

The sky is every now and then overcast and again clears up. Sudden little puffs of wind make the boat lazily creak and groan in all its seams. Thus the day wears on.

It is now past one o'clock. Steeped in this countryside noonday, with its different sounds—the quacking of ducks, the swirl of passing boats, bathers splashing the clothes they wash, the distant shouts from drovers taking cattle across the ford,—it is difficult even to imagine the chair-and-table, monotonously dismal routine-life of Calcutta.

Calcutta is as ponderously proper as a Government office. Each of its days comes forth, like coin from a mint, clear-cut and glittering. Ah! Those dreary,

deadly days, so precisely equal in weight, so decently respectable!

Here I am quit of the demands of my circle, and do not feel like a wound up machine. Each day is my own. And with leisure and my thoughts I walk the fields, unfettered by bounds of space or time. The evening gradually deepens over earth and sky and water, as with bowed head I stroll along.

PATISAR

22nd March, 1894

As I was sitting at the window of the boat, looking out on the river, I saw, all of a sudden, an odd-looking bird making its way through the water to the opposite bank, followed by a great commotion. I found it was a domestic fowl which had managed to escape impending doom in the galley by jumping overboard and was now trying frantically to win across. It had almost gained the bank when the clutches of its relentless pursuers closed on it, and it was brought back in triumph, gripped by the neck. I told the cook I would not have any meat for dinner.

I really must give up animal food. We manage to swallow flesh only because we do not think of the cruel and sinful thing we do. There are many crimes which are the creation of man himself, the wrongfulness of which is put down to their divergence from habit, custom, or tradition. But cruelty is not of these. It is a fundamental sin, and admits of no argument or nice distinctions. If only we do not allow our heart to grow callous, its protest against cruelty is always clearly heard; and yet we go on perpetrating cruelties easily, merrily, all of us—in fact, anyone who does not join in is dubbed a crank.

How artificial is our apprehension of sin! I feel that the highest commandment is that of sympathy for all sentient beings. Love is the foundation of all religion. The other day I read in one of the English papers that 50,000 pounds of animal carcasses had been sent to some army station in Africa, but the meat being found to have gone bad on arrival, the consignment was returned and was eventually auctioned off for a few pounds at Portsmouth. What a shocking waste of life! What callousness to its true worth! How many living creatures are sacrificed only to grace the dishes at a dinner-party, a large proportion of which will leave the table untouched!

So long as we are unconscious of our cruelty we may not be to blame. But if, after our pity is aroused, we persist in throttling our feelings simply in order to join others in their preying upon life, we insult all that is good in us. I have

decided to try a vegetarian diet.

PATISAR

28th March, 1894

It is getting rather warm here, but I do not mind the heat of the sun much. The heated wind whistles on its way, now and then pauses in a whirl, then dances away twirling its skirt of dust and sand and dry leaves and twigs.

This morning, however, it was quite cold—almost like a cold-weather morning; in fact, I did not feel over-enthusiastic for my bath. It is so difficult to account for what veritably happens in this big thing called Nature. Some obscure cause turns up in some unknown corner, and all of a sudden things look completely different.

The mind of man works in just the same mysterious fashion as outside Nature—so it struck me yesterday. A wondrous alchemy is being wrought in artery, vein, and nerve, in brain and marrow. The blood-stream rushes on, the nerve—strings vibrate, the heart-muscle rises and falls, and the seasons in man's being change from one to another. What kind of breezes will blow next, when and from what quarter—of that we know nothing.

One day I am sure I shall get along splendidly; I feel strong enough to leap over all the obstructing sorrows and trials of the world; and, as if I had a printed programme for the rest of my life tucked safely away in my pocket, I am at ease. The next day there is a nasty wind, sprung up from some unknown *inferno*, the aspect of the sky is threatening, and I begin to doubt whether I shall ever weather the storm. Merely because something has gone wrong in some blood-vessel or nerve-fiber, all my strength and intelligence seem to fail me.

This mystery within frightens me. It makes me diffident about talking of what I shall or shall not do. Why was this tacked on to me—this immense mystery which I can neither understand nor control? I know not where it may lead me or I lead it. I cannot see what is happening, nor am I consulted about what is going to happen, and yet I have to keep up an appearance of mastery and pretend to be the doer...

I feel like a living pianoforte with a vast complication of machinery and wires inside, but with no means of telling who the player is, and with only a guess as to why the player plays at all. I can only know what is being played, whether the mode is merry or mournful, when the notes are sharp or flat, the tune in or out of time, the key high-pitched or low. But do I really know even that?

PATISAR

30th March, 1894

Sometimes when I realise that Life's journey is long, and that the sorrows to be encountered are many and inevitable, a supreme effort is required to keep up my strength of mind. Some evenings, as I sit alone staring at the flame of the lamp on the table, I vow I will live as a brave man should—unmoved, silent, uncomplaining. The resolve puffs me up, and for the moment I mistake myself for a very, very brave person indeed. But as soon as the thorns on the road worry my feet, I writhe and begin to feel serious misgivings as to the future. The path of life again seems long, and my strength inadequate.

But this last conclusion cannot be the true one, for it is these petty thorns which are the most difficult to bear. The household of the mind is a thrifty one, and only so much is spent as is necessary. There is no squandering on trifles, and its wealth of strength is saved up with miserly strictness to meet the really big calamities. So any amount of weeping and wailing over the lesser griefs fails to evoke a charitable response. But when sorrow is deepest there is no stint of effort. Then the surface crust is pierced, and consolation wells up, and all the forces of patience and courage are banded together to do their duty. Thus great suffering brings with it the power of great endurance.

One side of man's nature has the desire for pleasure—there is another side which desires self-sacrifice. When the former meets with disappointment, the latter gains strength, and on its thus finding fuller scope a grand enthusiasm fills the soul. So while we are cowards before petty troubles, great sorrows make us brave by rousing our truer manhood. And in these, therefore, there is a joy.

It is not an empty paradox to say that there is joy in sorrow, just as, on the other hand, it is true that there is a dissatisfaction in pleasure. It is not difficult to understand why this should be so.

SHELIDAH

24th June, 1894

I have been only four days here, but, having lost count of the hours, it seems such a long while, I feel that if I were to return to Calcutta today I should find much of it changed—as if I alone had been standing still outside the current of time, unconscious of the gradually changing position of the rest of the world.

The fact is that here, away from Calcutta, I live in my own inner world, where the clocks do not keep ordinary time; where duration is measured only by the intensity of the feelings; where, as the outside world does not count the minutes, moments change into hours and hours into moments. So it seems to me that the subdivisions of time and space are only mental illusions. Every atom is immeasurable and every moment infinite.

There is a Persian story which I was greatly taken with when I read it as a boy—I think I understood, even then, something of the underlying idea, though I was a mere child. To show the illusory character of time, a *faquir* put some magic water into a tub and asked the King to take a dip. The King no sooner dipped his head in than he found himself in a strange country by the sea, where he spent a good long time going through a variety of happenings and doings. He married, had children, his wife and children died, he lost all his wealth, and as he writhed under his sufferings he suddenly found himself back in the room, surrounded by his courtiers. On his proceeding to revile the *faquir* for his misfortunes, they said: “But, Sire, you have only just dipped your head in, and raised it out of the water!”

The whole of our life with its pleasures and pains is in the same way enclosed in one moment of time. However long or intense we may feel it to be while it lasts, as soon as we have finished our dip in the tub of the world, we shall find how like a slight, momentary dream the whole thing has been...

SHELIDAH

9th August, 1894

I saw a dead bird floating down the current today. The history of its death may easily be divined. It had a nest in some mango tree at the edge of a village. It returned home in the evening, nestling there against soft-feathered companions, and resting a wearied little body in sleep. All of a sudden, in the night, the mighty Padma tossed slightly in her bed, and the earth was swept away from the roots of the mango tree. The little creature bereft of its nest awoke just for a moment before it went to sleep again forever.

When I am in the presence of the awful mystery of all-destructive Nature, the difference between myself and the other living things seems trivial. In town, human society is to the fore and looms large; it is cruelly callous to the happiness and misery of other creatures as compared with its own.

In Europe, also, man is so complex and so dominant, that the animal is too

merely an animal to him. To Indians the idea of the transmigration of the soul from animal to man, and man to animal, does not seem strange, and so from our scriptures pity for all sentient creatures has not been banished as a sentimental exaggeration.

When I am in close touch with Nature in the country, the Indian in me asserts itself and I cannot remain coldly indifferent to the abounding joy of life throbbing within the soft down-covered breast of a single tiny bird.

SHELIDAH

10th August, 1894

Last night a rushing sound in the water awoke me—a sudden boisterous disturbance of the river current—probably the onslaught of a freshet: a thing that often happens at this season. One's feet on the planking of the boat become aware of a variety of forces at work beneath it. Slight tremors, little rockings, gentle heaves, and sudden jerks, all keep me in touch with the pulse of the flowing stream.

There must have been some sudden excitement in the night, which sent the current racing away. I rose and sat by the window. A hazy kind of light made the turbulent river look madder than ever. The sky was spotted with clouds. The reflection of a great big star quivered on the waters in a long streak, like a burning gash of pain. Both banks were vague with the dimness of slumber, and between them was this wild, sleepless unrest, running and running regardless of consequences.

To watch a scene like this in the middle of the night makes one feel altogether a different person, and the daylight life an illusion. Then again, this morning, that midnight world faded away into some dreamland, and vanished into thin air. The two are so different, yet both are true for man.

The day-world seems to me like European Music—its concords and discords resolving into each other in a great progression of harmony; the night-world like Indian Music—pure, unfettered melody, grave and poignant. What if their contrast be so striking—both move us. This principle of opposites is at the very root of creation, which is divided between the rule of the King and the Queen; Night and Day; the One and the Varied; the Eternal and the Evolving.

We Indians are under the rule of Night. We are immersed in the Eternal, the One. Our melodies are to be sung alone, to oneself; they take us out of the everyday world into a solitude aloof. European Music is for the multitude and

takes them along, dancing, through the ups and downs of the joys and sorrows of men.

SHELIDAH

13th August, 1894

Whatever I truly think, truly feel, truly realise,—its natural destiny is to find true expression. There is some force in me which continually works towards that end, but is not mine alone,—it permeates the universe. When this universal force is manifested within an individual, it is beyond his control and acts according to its own nature; and in surrendering our lives to its power is our greatest joy. It not only gives us expression, but also sensitiveness and love; this makes our feelings so fresh to us every time, so full of wonder.

When my little daughter delights me, she merges into the original mystery of joy which is the Universe; and my loving caresses are called forth like worship. I am sure that all our love is but worship of the Great Mystery, only we perform it unconsciously. Otherwise it is meaningless.

Like universal gravitation, which governs large and small alike in the world of matter, this universal joy exerts its attraction throughout our inner world, and baffles our understanding when we see it in a partial view. The only rational explanation of why we find joy in man and nature is given in the Upanishad: For of joy are born all created things.

SHELIDAH

19th August 1894

The Vedanta seems to help many to free their minds from all doubt as to the Universe and its First Cause, but my doubts remain undispersed. It is true that the Vedanta is simpler than most other theories. The problem of Creation and its Creator is more complex than appears at first sight; but the Vedanta has certainly simplified it half way, by cutting the Gordian knot and leaving out Creation altogether.

There is only Brahma, and the rest of us merely imagine that we are,—it is wonderful how the human mind should have found room for such a thought. It is still more wonderful to think that the idea is not so inconsistent as it sounds, and the real difficulty is, rather, to prove that anything does exist.

Anyhow, when as now the moon is up, and with half-closed eyes I am stretched beneath it on the upper deck, the soft breeze cooling my problem vexed head, then the earth, waters, and sky around, the gentle rippling of the river, the casual wayfarer passing along the tow-path, the occasional dinghy gliding by, the trees across the fields, vague in the moonlight, the sleepy village beyond, bounded by the dark shadows of its groves,—verily seem an illusion of *Maya*; and yet they cling to and draw the mind and heart more truly than truth itself, which is abstraction, and it becomes impossible to realise what kind of salvation there can be in freeing oneself from them.

SHAZADPUR

5th September, 1894

I realise how hungry for space I have become, and take my fill of it in these rooms where I hold my state as sole monarch, with all doors and windows thrown open. Here the desire and power to write are mine as they are nowhere else. The stir of outside life comes into me in waves of verdure, and with its light and scent and sound stimulated my fancy into story-writing.

The afternoons have a special enchantment of their own. The glare of the sun, the silence, the solitude, the bird cries, especially the cawings of crows, and the delightful, restful leisure—these conspire to carry me away altogether.

Just such noondays seem to have gone to the making of the Arabian Nights,—in Damascus, Bokhara, or Samarkhand, with their desert roadways, files of camels, wandering horsemen, crystal springs, welling up under the shade of feathery date groves; their wilderness of roses, songs of nightingales, wines of Shiraz; their narrow bazaar paths with bright overhanging canopies, the men, in loose robes and multi-coloured turbans, selling dates and nuts and melons; their palaces, fragrant with incense, luxurious with kincob-covered divans and bolsters by the window-side; their Zobedia or Amina or Sufia with gaily decorated jacket, wide trousers, and gold-embroidered slippers, a long narghilah pipe curled up at her feet, with gorgeously liveried eunuchs on guard,—and all the possible and impossible tales of human deeds and desires, and the laughter and wailing, of that distant mysterious region.

ON THE WAY TO DIGHAPATIAYA

20th September, 1894

Big trees are standing in the flood water, their trunks wholly submerged, their branches and foliage bending over the waters. Boats are tied up under shady groves of mango and bo tree, and people bathe screened behind them. Here and there cottages stand out in the current, their inner quadrangles under water.

As my boat rustles its way through standing crops it now and then comes across what was a pool and is still to be distinguished by its clusters of water-lilies, and diver-birds pursuing fish.

The water has penetrated every possible place. I have never before seen such a complete defeat of the land. A little more and the water will be right inside the cottages, and their occupants will have to put up *machans* to live on. The cows will die if they have to remain standing like this in water up to their knees. All the snakes have been flooded out of their holes, and they, with sundry other homeless reptiles and insects, will have to chum with man and take refuge on the thatch of his roof.

The vegetation rotting in the water, refuse of all kinds floating about, naked children with shrivelled limbs and enlarged spleens splashing everywhere, the long-suffering patient housewives exposed in their wet clothes to wind and rain, wading through their daily tasks with tucked-up skirts, and over all a thick pall of mosquitoes hovering in the noxious atmosphere—the sight is hardly pleasing!

Colds and fevers and rheumatism in every home, the malaria-stricken infants constantly crying,—nothing can save them. How is it possible for men to live in such unlovely, unhealthy, squalid, neglected surroundings? The fact is we are so used to bear everything, hands down,—the ravages of Nature, the oppression of rulers, the pressure of our *shastras* to which we have not a word to say, while they keep eternally grinding us down.

ON THE WAY TO BOALIA

22nd September, 1894

It feels strange to be reminded that only thirty-two Autumns have come and gone in my life; for my memory seems to have receded back into the dimness of time immemorial; and when my inner world is flooded with a light, as of an unclouded autumn morning, I feel I am sitting at the window of some magic palace, gazing entranced on a scene of distant reminiscence, soothed with soft breezes laden with the faint perfume of all the Past.

Goethe on his death-bed wanted “more light.” If I have any desire left at all at such a time, it will be for “more space” as well; for I dearly love both light and

space. Many look down on Bengal as being only a flat country, but that is just what makes me revel in its scenery all the more. Its unobstructed sky is filled to the brim, like an amethyst cup, with the descending twilight and peace of the evening; and the golden skirt of the still, silent noonday spreads over the whole of it without let or hindrance.

Where is there another such country for the eye to look on, the mind to take in?

CALCUTTA

5th October, 1894

Tomorrow is the Durga Festival. As I was going to S——'s yesterday, I noticed images being made in almost every big house on the way. It struck me that during these few days of the Poojahs, old and young alike had become children.

When we come to think of it, all preparation for enjoyment is really a playing with toys which are of no consequence in themselves. From outside it may appear wasteful, but can that be called futile which raises such a wave of feeling through and through the country? Even the driest of worldly-wise people are moved out of their self-centred interests by the rush of the pervading emotion.

Thus, once every year there comes a period when all minds are in a melting mood, fit for the springing of love and affection and sympathy. The songs of welcome and farewell to the goddess, the meeting of loved ones, the strains of the festive pipes, the limpid sky and molten gold of autumn, are all parts of one great paean of joy.

Pure joy is the children's joy. They have the power of using any and every trivial thing to create their world of interest, and the ugliest doll is made beautiful with their imagination and lives with their life. He who can retain this faculty of enjoyment after he has grown up, is indeed the true Idealist. For him things are not merely visible to the eye or audible to the ear, but they are also sensible to the heart, and their narrowness and imperfections are lost in the glad music which he himself supplies.

Every one cannot hope to be an Idealist, but a whole people approaches nearest to this blissful state at such seasons of festivity. And then what may ordinarily appear to be a mere toy loses its limitations and becomes glorified with an ideal radiance.

BOLPUR

19th October, 1894

We know people only in dotted outline, that is to say, with gaps in our knowledge which we have to fill in ourselves, as best we can. Thus, even those we know well are largely made up of our imagination. Sometimes the lines are so broken, with even the guiding dots missing, that a portion of the picture remains darkly confused and uncertain. If, then, our best friends are only pieces of broken outline strung on a thread of imagination, do we really know anybody at all, or does anybody know us except in the same disjointed fashion? But perhaps it is these very loopholes, allowing entrance to each other's imagination, which make for intimacy; otherwise each one, secure in his inviolate individuality, would have been unapproachable to all but the Dweller within.

Our own self, too, we know only in bits, and with these scraps of material we have to shape the hero of our life-story,—likewise with the help of our imagination. Providence has, doubtless, deliberately omitted portions so that we may assist in our own creation.

BOLPUR

31st October, 1894

The first of the north winds has begun to blow today, shiveringly. It looks as if there had been a visitation of the tax-gatherer in the *Amlaki* groves,—everything beside itself, sighing, trembling, withering. The tired impassiveness of the noonday sunshine, with its monotonous cooing of doves in the dense shade of the mango-tops, seems to overcast the drowsy watches of the day with a pang, as of some impending parting.

The ticking of the clock on my table, and the pattering of the squirrels which scamper in and out of my room, are in harmony with all other midday sounds.

It amuses me to watch these soft, grey and black striped, furry squirrels, with their bushy tails, their twinkling bead-like eyes, their gentle yet busily practical demeanour. Everything eatable has to be put away in the wire-gauze cupboard in the corner, safe from these greedy creatures. So, sniffing with an irrepressible eagerness, they come nosing round and round the cupboard, trying to find some hole for entrance. If any grain or crumb has been dropped outside they are sure to find it, and, taking it between their forepaws, nibble away with great industry, turning it over and over to adjust it to their mouths. At the least movement of mine up go their tails over their backs and off they run, only to stop short half-

way, sit up on their tails on the door-mat, scratching their ears with their hind-paws, and then come back.

Thus little sounds continue all day long—gnawing teeth, scampering feet, and the tinkling of the china on the shelves.

SHELIDAH

7th December, 1894

As I walk on the moonlit sands, S——usually comes up for a business talk.

He came last evening; and when silence fell upon me after the talk was over, I became aware of the eternal universe standing before me in the evening light. The trivial chatter of one person had been enough to obscure the presence of its all-pervading manifestation.

As soon as the patter of words came to an end, the peace of the stars descended, and filled my heart to overflowing. I found my seat in one corner, with these assembled millions of shining orbs, in the great mysterious conclave of Being.

I have to start out early in the evening so as to let my mind absorb the tranquillity outside, before S—— comes along with his jarring inquiries as to whether the milk has agreed with me, and if I have finished going through the Annual Statement.

How curiously placed are we between the Eternal and the Ephemeral! Any allusion to the affairs of the stomach sounds so hopelessly discordant when the mind is dwelling on the things of the spirit,—and yet the soul and the stomach have been living together so long. The very spot on which the moonlight falls is my landed property, but the moonlight tells me that my *zamindari* is an illusion, and my *zamindari* tells me that this moonlight is all emptiness. And as for poor me, I remain distracted between the two.

1895

SHELIDAH

23rd February, 1895

I grow quite absent-minded when I try to write for the *Sadhana* magazine.

I raise my eyes to every passing boat and keep staring at the ferry going to and fro. And then on the bank, close to my boat, there are a herd of buffaloes thrusting their massive snouts into the herbage, wrapping their tongues round it to get it into their mouths, and then munching away, blowing hard with great big gasps of contentment, and flicking the flies off their backs with their tails.

All of a sudden a naked weakling of a human cub appears on the scene, makes sundry noises, and pokes one of the patient beasts with a cudgel, whereupon, throwing occasional glances at the human sprig out of a corner of its eye, and snatching at tufts of leaves or grass here and there on the way, the unruffled beast leisurely moves on a few paces, and that imp of a boy seems to feel that his duty as herdsman has been done.

I fail to penetrate this mystery of the boy-cowherd's mind. Whenever a cow or a buffalo has selected a spot to its liking and is comfortably grazing there, I cannot divine what purpose is served by worrying it, as he insists on doing, till it shifts somewhere else. I suppose it is man's masterfulness glorying in triumph over the powerful creature it has tamed. Anyhow, I love to see these buffaloes amongst the lush grass.

But this is not what I started to say. I wanted to tell you how the least thing distracts me nowadays from my duty to the *Sadhana*. In my last letter [19](#) I told you of the bumble-bees which hover round me in some fruitless quest, to the tune of a meaningless humming, with tireless assiduity.

[19.](#) Not included in this selection.

They come every day at about nine or ten in the morning, dart up to my table, shoot down under the desk, go bang on to the coloured glass window-pane, and then with a circuit or two round my head are off again with a whizz.

I could easily have thought them to be departed spirits who had left this world unsatisfied, and so keep coming back to it again and again in the guise of bees,

paying me an inquiring visit in passing. But I think nothing of the kind. I am sure they are real bees, otherwise known, in Sanskrit, as honey-suckers, or on still rarer occasions as double-proboscideans.

SHELIDAH

16th (*Phalgun*) February, 1895

We have to tread every single moment of the way as we go on living our life, but when taken as a whole it is such a very small thing, two hours uninterrupted thought can hold all of it.

After thirty years of strenuous living Shelley could only supply material for two volumes of biography, of which, moreover, a considerable space is taken up by Dowden's chatter. The thirty years of my life would not fill even one volume.

What a to-do there is over this tiny bit of life! To think of the quantity of land and trade and commerce which go to furnish its commissariat alone, the amount of space occupied by each individual throughout the world, though one little chair is large enough to hold the whole of him! Yet, after all is over and done, there remains only material for two hours' thought, some pages of writing!

What a negligible fraction of my few pages would this one lazy day of mine occupy! But then, will not this peaceful day, on the desolate sands by the placid river, leave nevertheless a distinct little gold mark even upon the scroll of my eternal past and eternal future?

SHELIDAH

28th February, 1895

I have got an anonymous letter today which begins: To give up one's self at the feet of another, is the truest of all gifts.

The writer has never seen me, but knows me from my writings, and goes on to say: *However petty or distant, the Sun* ²⁰—worshipper gets a share of the Sun's rays. You are the world's poet, yet to me it seems you are my own poet!

²⁰. Rabi, the author's name, means the Sun.

and more in the same strain.

Man is so anxious to bestow his love on some object, that he ends by falling in love with his own Ideal. But why should we suppose the idea to be less true than the reality? We can never know for certain the truth of the substance underlying

what we get through the senses. Why should the doubt be greater in the case of the entity behind the ideas which are the creation of mind?

The mother realises in her child the great Idea, which is in every child, the ineffableness of which, however, is not revealed to anyone else. Are we to say that what draws forth the mother's very life and soul is illusory, but what fails to draw the rest of us to the same extent is the real truth?

Every person is worthy of an infinite wealth of love—the beauty of his soul knows no limit... But I am departing into generalities. What I wanted to express is, that in one sense I have no right to accept this offering of my admirer's heart; that is to say, for me, seen within my everyday covering, such a person could not possibly have had these feelings. But there is another sense in which I am worthy of all this, or of even greater adoration.

ON THE WAY TO PABNA

9th July, 1895

I am gliding through this winding little *Ichamati*, this streamlet of the rainy season. With rows of villages along its banks, its fields of jute and sugar-cane, its reed patches, its green bathing slopes, it is like a few lines of a poem, often repeated and as often enjoyed. One cannot commit to memory a big river like the Padma, but this meandering little *Ichamati*, the flow of whose syllables is regulated by the rhythm of the rains, I am gradually making my very own...

It is dusk, the sky getting dark with clouds. The thunder rumbles fitfully, and the wild casuarinas clumps bend in waves to the stormy gusts which pass through them. The depths of bamboo thickets look black as ink. The pallid twilight glimmers over the water like the herald of some weird event.

I am bending over my desk in the dimness, writing this letter. I want to whisper low-toned, intimate talk, in keeping with this penumbra of the dusk. But it is just wishes like these which baffle all effort. They either get fulfilled of themselves, or not at all. That is why it is a simple matter to warm up to a grim battle, but not to an easy, inconsequential talk.

SHELIDAH

14th August, 1895

One great point about work is that for its sake the individual has to make light of

his personal joys and sorrows; indeed, so far as may be, to ignore them. I am reminded of an incident at Shazadpur. My servant was late one morning, and I was greatly annoyed at his delay. He came up and stood before me with his usual *salaam*, and with a slight catch in his voice explained that his eight-year-old daughter had died last night. Then, with his duster, he set to tidying up my room.

When we look at the field of work, we see some at their trades, some tilling the soil, some carrying burdens, and yet underneath, death, sorrow, and loss are flowing, in an unseen undercurrent, every day,—their privacy not intruded upon. If ever these should break forth beyond control and come to the surface, then all this work would at once come to a stop. Over the individual sorrows, flowing beneath, is a hard stone track, across which the trains of duty, with their human load, thunder their way, stopping for none save at appointed stations. This very cruelty of work proves, perhaps, man's sternest consolation.

KUSHTEA

5th October, 1895

The religion that only comes to us from external scriptures never becomes our own; our only tie with it is that of habit. To gain religion within is man's great lifelong adventure. In the extremity of suffering must it be born; on his life-blood it must live; and then, whether or not it brings him happiness, the man's journey shall end in the joy of fulfilment.

We rarely realise how false for us is that which we hear from other lips, or keep repeating with our own, while all the time the temple of our Truth is building within us, brick by brick, day after day. We fail to understand the mystery of this eternal building when we view our joys and sorrows apart by themselves, in the midst of fleeting time; just as a sentence becomes unintelligible if one has to spell through every word of it.

When once we perceive the unity of the scheme of that creation which is going on in us, we realise our relation to the ever-unfolding universe. We realise that we are in the process of being created in the same way as are the glowing heavenly orbs which revolve in their courses,—our desires, our sufferings, all finding their proper place within the whole.

We may not know exactly what is happening: we do not know exactly even about a speck of dust. But when we feel the flow of life in us to be one with the universal life outside, then all our pleasures and pains are seen strung upon one long thread of joy. The facts: *I am, I move, I grow*, are seen in all their

immensity in connection with the fact that everything else is there along with me, and not the tiniest atom can do without me.

The relation of my soul to this beautiful autumn morning, this vast radiance, is one of intimate kinship; and all this colour, scent, and music is but the outward expression of our secret communion. This constant communion, whether realised or unrealised, keeps my mind in movement; out of this intercourse between my inner and outer worlds I gain such religion, be it much or little, as my capacity allows: and in its light I have to test scriptures before I can make them really my own.

SHELIDAH

12th December, 1895

The other evening I was reading an English book of criticisms, full of all manner of disputations about Poetry, Art, Beauty, and so forth and so on. As I plodded through these artificial discussions, my tired faculties seemed to have wandered into a region of empty mirage, filled with the presence of a mocking demon.

The night was far advanced. I closed the book with a bang and flung it on the table. Then I blew out the lamp with the idea of turning into bed. No sooner had I done so than, through the open windows, the moonlight burst into the room, with a shock of surprise.

That little bit of a lamp had been sneering drily at me, like some Mephistopheles: and that tiniest sneer had screened off this infinite light of joy issuing forth from the deep love which is in all the world. What, forsooth, had I been looking for in the empty wordiness of the book? There was the very thing itself, filling the skies, silently waiting for me outside, all these hours!

If I had gone off to bed leaving the shutters closed, and thus missed this vision, it would have stayed there all the same without any protest against the mocking lamp inside. Even if I had remained blind to it all my life,—letting the lamp triumph to the end,—till for the last time I went darkling to bed,—even then the moon would have still been there, sweetly smiling, unperturbed and unobtrusive, waiting for me as she has throughout the ages.

2. My Reminiscences

Part 1

1. My Reminiscences

I know not who paints the pictures on memory's canvas; but whoever he may be, what he is painting are pictures; by which I mean that he is not there with his brush simply to make a faithful copy of all that is happening. He takes in and leaves out according to his taste. He makes many a big thing small and small thing big. He has no compunction in putting into the background that which was to the fore, or bringing to the front that which was behind. In short he is painting pictures, and not writing history.

Thus, over Life's outward aspect passes the series of events, and within is being painted a set of pictures. The two correspond but are not one.

We do not get the leisure to view thoroughly this studio within us. Portions of it now and then catch our eye, but the greater part remains out of sight in the darkness. Why the ever-busy painter is painting; when he will have done; for what gallery his pictures are destined—who can tell?

Some years ago, on being questioned as to the events of my past life, I had occasion to pry into this picture-chamber. I had thought to be content with selecting some few materials for my Life's story. I then discovered, as I opened the door, that Life's memories are not Life's history, but the original work of an unseen Artist. The variegated colours scattered about are not reflections of outside lights, but belong to the painter himself, and come passion-tinged from his heart; thereby unfitting the record on the canvas for use as evidence in a court of law.

But though the attempt to gather precise history from memory's storehouse may be fruitless, there is a fascination in looking over the pictures, a fascination which cast its spell on me.

The road over which we journey, the wayside shelter in which we pause, are not pictures while yet we travel—they are too necessary, too obvious. When, however, before turning into the evening rest house, we look back upon the cities, fields, rivers and hills which we have been through in Life's morning, then, in the light of the passing day, are they pictures indeed. Thus, when my opportunity came, did I look back, and was engrossed.

Was this interest aroused within me solely by a natural affection for my own past? Some personal feeling, of course, there must have been, but the pictures

had also an independent artistic value of their own. There is no event in my reminiscences worthy of being preserved for all time. But the quality of the subject is not the only justification for a record. What one has truly felt, if only it can be made sensible to others, is always of importance to one's fellow men. If pictures which have taken shape in memory can be brought out in words, they are worth a place in literature.

It is as literary material that I offer my memory pictures. To take them as an attempt at autobiography would be a mistake. In such a view these reminiscences would appear useless as well as incomplete.

2. Teaching Begins

We three boys were being brought up together. Both my companions were two years older than I. When they were placed under their tutor, my teaching also began, but of what I learnt nothing remains in my memory.

What constantly recurs to me is “The rain patters, the leaf quivers.” ²¹ I am just come to anchor after crossing the stormy region of the *kara, khala* ²² series; and I am reading “The rain patters, the leaf quivers,” for me the first poem of the Arch Poet. Whenever the joy of that day comes back to me, even now, I realise why rhyme is so needful in poetry. Because of it the words come to an end, and yet end not; the utterance is over, but not its ring; and the ear and the mind can go on and on with their game of tossing the rhyme to each other. Thus did the rain patter and the leaves quiver again and again, the live-long day in my consciousness.

²¹. A jingling sentence in the Bengali Child’s Primer.

²². Exercises in two-syllables.

Another episode of this period of my early boyhood is held fast in my mind.

We had an old cashier, Kailash by name, who was like one of the family. He was a great wit, and would be constantly cracking jokes with everybody, old and young; recently married sons-in-law, new comers into the family circle, being his special butts. There was room for the suspicion that his humour had not deserted him even after death. Once my elders were engaged in an attempt to start a postal service with the other world by means of a planchette. At one of the sittings the pencil scrawled out the name of Kailash. He was asked as to the sort of life one led where he was. Not a bit of it, was the reply. “Why should you get so cheap what I had to die to learn?”

This Kailash used to rattle off for my special delectation a doggerel ballad of his own composition. The hero was myself and there was a glowing anticipation of the arrival of a heroine. And as I listened my interest would wax intense at the picture of this world-charming bride illuminating the lap of the future in which she sat enthroned. The list of the jewellery with which she was bedecked from head to foot, and the unheard of splendour of the preparations for the bridal, might have turned older and wiser heads; but what moved the boy, and set wonderful joy pictures flitting before his vision, was the rapid jingle of the

frequent rhymes and the swing of the rhythm.

These two literary delights still linger in my memory—and there is the other, the infants' classic: "The rain falls pit-a-pat, the tide comes up the river."

The next thing I remember is the beginning of my school-life. One day I saw my elder brother, and my sister's son Satya, also a little older than myself, starting off to school, leaving me behind, accounted unfit. I had never before ridden in a carriage nor even been out of the house. So when Satya came back, full of unduly glowing accounts of his adventures on the way, I felt I simply could not stay at home. Our tutor tried to dispel my illusion with sound advice and a resounding slap: "You're crying to go to school now, you'll have to cry a lot more to be let off later on." I have no recollection of the name, features or disposition of this tutor of ours, but the impression of his weighty advice and weightier hand has not yet faded. Never in my life have I heard a truer prophecy.

My crying drove me prematurely into the Oriental Seminary. What I learnt there I have no idea, but one of its methods of punishment I still bear in mind. The boy who was unable to repeat his lessons was made to stand on a bench with arms extended, and on his upturned palms were piled a number of slates. It is for psychologists to debate how far this method is likely to conduce to a better grasp of things. I thus began my schooling at an extremely tender age.

My initiation into literature had its origin, at the same time, in the books which were in vogue in the servants' quarters. Chief among these were a Bengali translation of Chanakya's aphorisms, and the Ramayana of Krittivasa.

A picture of one day's reading of the Ramayana comes clearly back to me.

The day was a cloudy one. I was playing about in the long verandah overlooking the road. All of a sudden Satya, for some reason I do not remember, wanted to frighten me by shouting, "Policeman! Policeman!" My ideas of the duties of policemen were of an extremely vague description. One thing I was certain about, that a person charged with crime once placed in a policeman's hands would, as sure as the wretch caught in a crocodile's serrated grip, go under and be seen no more. Not knowing how an innocent boy could escape this relentless penal code, I bolted towards the inner apartments, with shudders running down my back for blind fear of pursuing policemen. I broke to my mother the news of my impending doom, but it did not seem to disturb her much. However, not deeming it safe to venture out again, I sat down on the sill of my mother's door to read the dog-eared Ramayana, with a marbled paper cover, which belonged to her old aunt. Alongside stretched the verandah running round the four sides of the open inner quadrangle, on which had fallen the faint afternoon glow of the clouded sky, and finding me weeping over one of its

sorrowful situations my great-aunt came and took away the book from me.

23. Roofed colonnade or balcony. The writer's family house is an irregular three-storied mass of buildings, which had grown with the joint family it sheltered, built round several courtyards or quadrangles, with long colonnades along the outer faces, and narrower galleries running round each quadrangle, giving access to the single rows of rooms.

3. Within and Without

Luxury was a thing almost unknown in the days of my infancy. The standard of living was then, as a whole, much more simple than it is now. Apart from that, the children of our household were entirely free from the fuss of being too much looked after. The fact is that, while the process of looking after may be an occasional treat for the guardians, to the children it is always an unmitigated nuisance.

We used to be under the rule of the servants. To save themselves trouble they had almost suppressed our right of free movement. But the freedom of not being petted made up even for the harshness of this bondage, for our minds were left clear of the toils of constant coddling, pampering and dressing-up.

Our food had nothing to do with delicacies. A list of our articles of clothing would only invite the modern boy's scorn. On no pretext did we wear socks or shoes till we had passed our tenth year. In the cold weather a second cotton tunic over the first one sufficed. It never entered our heads to consider ourselves ill-off for that reason. It was only when old Niyamat, the tailor, would forget to put a pocket into one of our tunics that we complained, for no boy has yet been born so poor as not to have the wherewithal to stuff his pockets; nor, by a merciful dispensation of providence, is there much difference between the wealth of boys of rich and of poor parentage. We used to have a pair of slippers each, but not always where we had our feet. Our habit of kicking the slippers on ahead, and catching them up again, made them work none the less hard, through effectually defeating at every step the reason of their being.

Our elders were in every way at a great distance from us, in their dress and food, living and doing, conversation and amusement. We caught glimpses of these, but they were beyond our reach. Elders have become cheap to modern children; they are too readily accessible, and so are all objects of desire. Nothing ever came so easily to us. Many a trivial thing was for us a rarity, and we lived mostly in the hope of attaining, when we were old enough, the things which the distant future held in trust for us. The result was that what little we did get we enjoyed to the utmost; from skin to core nothing was thrown away. The modern child of a well-to-do family nibbles at only half the things he gets; the greater part of his world is wasted on him.

Our days were spent in the servants' quarters in the south-east corner of the

outer apartments. One of our servants was Shyam, a dark chubby boy with curly locks, hailing from the District of Khulna. He would put me into a selected spot and, tracing a chalk line all round, warn me with solemn face and uplifted finger of the perils of transgressing this ring. Whether the threatened danger was material or spiritual I never fully understood, but a great fear used to possess me. I had read in the Ramayana of the tribulations of Sita for having left the ring drawn by Lakshman, so it was not possible for me to be sceptical of its potency.

Just below the window of this room was a tank with a flight of masonry steps leading down into the water; on its west bank, along the garden wall, an immense banyan tree; to the south a fringe of cocoanut palms. Ringed round as I was near this window I would spend the whole day peering through the drawn Venetian shutters, gazing and gazing on this scene as on a picture book. From early morning our neighbours would drop in one by one to have their bath. I knew the time for each one to arrive. I was familiar with the peculiarities of each one's toilet. One would stop up his ears with his fingers as he took his regulation number of dips, after which he would depart. Another would not venture on a complete immersion but be content with only squeezing his wet towel repeatedly over his head. A third would carefully drive the surface impurities away from him with a rapid play of his arms, and then on a sudden impulse take his plunge. There was one who jumped in from the top steps without any preliminaries at all. Another would walk slowly in, step by step, muttering his morning prayers the while. One was always in a hurry, hastening home as soon as he was through with his dip. Another was in no sort of hurry at all, taking his bath leisurely, followed with a good rub-down, and a change from wet bathing clothes into clean ones, including a careful adjustment of the folds of his waist cloth, ending with a turn or two in the outer [24](#) garden, and the gathering of flowers, with which he would finally saunter slowly homewards, radiating the cool comfort of his refreshed body, as he went. This would go on till it was past noon. Then the bathing places would be deserted and become silent. Only the ducks remained, paddling about after water snails, or busy preening their feathers, the live-long day.

[24.](#) The men's portion of the house is the outer; and the women's the inner.

When solitude thus reigned over the water, my whole attention would be drawn to the shadows under the banyan tree. Some of its aerial roots, creeping down along its trunk, had formed a dark complication of coils at its base. It seemed as if into this mysterious region the laws of the universe had not found entrance; as if some old-world dream-land had escaped the divine vigilance and lingered on into the light of modern day. Whom I used to see there, and what those beings

did, it is not possible to express in intelligible language. It was about this banyan tree that I wrote later: With tangled roots hanging down from your branches, O ancient banyan tree, You stand still day and night, like an ascetic at his penances, Do you ever remember the child whose fancy played with your shadows?

Alas! That banyan tree is no more, nor the piece of water which served to mirror the majestic forest-lord! Many of those who used to bathe there have also followed into oblivion the shade of the banyan tree. And that boy, grown older, is counting the alternations of light and darkness which penetrate the complexities with which the roots he has thrown off on all sides have encircled him.

Going out of the house was forbidden to us, in fact we had not even the freedom of all its parts. We perforce took our peeps at nature from behind the barriers. Beyond my reach there was this limitless thing called the Outside, of which flashes and sounds and scents used momentarily to come and touch me through its interstices. It seemed to want to play with me through the bars with so many gestures. But it was free and I was bound—there was no way of meeting. So the attraction was all the stronger. The chalk line has been wiped away today, but the confining ring is still there. The distant is just as distant, the outside is still beyond me; and I am reminded of the poem I wrote when I was older: The tame bird was in a cage, the free bird was in the forest, They met when the time came, it was a decree of fate.

The free bird cries, “O my love, let us fly to wood.”

The cage bird whispers, “Come hither, let us both live in the cage.”

Says the free bird, “Among bars, where is there room to spread one’s wings?”

“Alas,” cries the cage bird, “I should not know where to sit perched in the sky.”

The parapets of our terraced roofs were higher than my head. When I had grown taller; when the tyranny of the servants had relaxed; when, with the coming of a newly married bride into the house, I had achieved some recognition as a companion of her leisure, then did I sometimes come up to the terrace in the middle of the day. By that time everybody in the house would have finished their meal; there would be an interval in the business of the household; over the inner apartments would rest the quiet of the midday siesta; the wet bathing clothes would be hanging over the parapets to dry; the crows would be picking at the leavings thrown on the refuse heap at the corner of the yard; in the solitude of

that interval the caged bird would, through the gaps in the parapet, commune bill to bill with the free bird!

I would stand and gaze... My glance first falls on the row of coconut trees on the further edge of our inner garden. Through these are seen the "Singhi's Garden" with its cluster of huts ²⁵ and tank, and on the edge of the tank the dairy of our milk woman, Tara; still further on, mixed up with the tree-tops, the various shapes and different heights of the terraced roofs of Calcutta, flashing back the blazing whiteness of the midday sun, stretch right away into the grayish blue of the eastern horizon. And some of these far distant dwellings from which stand forth their roofed stair-ways leading up to the terrace, look as if with uplifted finger and a wink they are hinting to me of the mysteries of their interiors. Like the beggar at the palace door who imagines impossible treasures to be held in the strong rooms closed to him, I can hardly tell of the wealth of play and freedom which these unknown dwellings seem to me crowded with. From the furthest depth of the sky full of burning sunshine overhead the thin shrill cry of a kite reaches my ear; and from the lane adjoining Singhi's Garden comes up, past the houses silent in their noonday slumber, the sing-song of the bangle-seller—*chai choori chai* ... and my whole being would fly away from the work-a-day world.

²⁵. These Bustees or settlements consisting of tumbledown hovels, existing side by side with palatial buildings, are still one of the anomalies of Calcutta. Tr.

My father hardly ever stayed at home, he was constantly roaming about. His rooms on the third storey used to remain shut up. I would pass my hands through the venetian shutters, and thus opening the latch get the door open, and spend the afternoon lying motionless on his sofa at the south end. First of all it was a room always closed, and then there was the stolen entry, this gave it a deep flavour of mystery; further the broad empty expanse of terrace to the south, glowing in the rays of the sun would set me day-dreaming.

There was yet another attraction. The water-works had just been started in Calcutta, and in the first exuberance of its triumphant entry it did not stint even the Indian quarters of their supply. In that golden age of pipe water, it used to flow even up to my father's third storey rooms. And turning on the shower tap I would indulge to my heart's content in an untimely bath. Not so much for the comfort of it, as to give rein to my desire to do just as I fancied. The alternation of the joy of liberty, and the fear of being caught, made that shower of municipal water send arrows of delight thrilling into me.

It was perhaps because the possibility of contact with the outside was so remote that the joy of it came to me so much more readily. When material is in profusion, the mind gets lazy and leaves everything to it, forgetting that for a

successful feast of joy its internal equipment counts for more than the external. This is the chief lesson which his infant state has to teach to man. There his possessions are few and trivial, yet he needs no more for his happiness. The world of play is spoilt for the unfortunate youngster who is burdened with an unlimited quantity of playthings.

To call our inner garden a garden is to say a deal too much. Its properties consisted of a citron tree, a couple of plum trees of different varieties, and a row of coconut trees. In the centre was a paved circle the cracks of which various grasses and weeds had invaded and planted in them their victorious standards. Only those flowering plants which refused to die of neglect continued uncomplainingly to perform their respective duties without casting any aspersions on the gardener. In the northern corner was a rice-husking shed, where the inmates of the inner apartments would occasionally foregather when household necessity demanded. This last vestige of rural life has since owned defeat and slunk away ashamed and unnoticed.

None the less I suspect that Adam's garden of Eden could hardly have been better adorned than this one of ours; for he and his paradise were alike naked; they needed not to be furnished with material things. It is only since his tasting of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, and till he can fully digest it, that man's need for external furniture and embellishment persistently grows. Our inner garden was my paradise; it was enough for me. I well remember how in the early autumn dawn I would run there as soon as I was awake. A scent of dewy grass and foliage would rush to meet me, and the morning with its cool fresh sunlight would peep out at me over the top of the Eastern garden wall from below the trembling tassels of the coconut palms.

There is another piece of vacant land to the north of the house which to this day we call the *golabari* (barn house). The name shows that in some remote past this must have been the place where the year's store of grain used to be kept in a barn. Then, as with brother and sister in infancy, the likeness between town and country was visible all over. Now the family resemblance can hardly be traced. This *golabari* would be my holiday haunt if I got the chance. It would hardly be correct to say that I went there to play—it was the place not play, which drew me. Why this was so, is difficult to tell. Perhaps it's being a deserted bit of waste land lying in an out-of-the-way corner gave it its charm for me. It was entirely outside the living quarters and bore no stamp of usefulness; moreover it was as unadorned as it was useless, for no one had ever planted anything there; it was doubtless for these reasons that this desert spot offered no resistance to the free play of the boy's imagination. Whenever I got any loop-hole to evade the

vigilance of my warders and could contrive to reach the *golabari* I felt I had a holiday indeed.

There was yet another place in our house which I have even yet not succeeded in finding out. A little girl playmate of my own age called this the "King's palace." ²⁶ "I have just been there," she would sometimes tell me. But somehow the propitious moment never turned up when she could take me along with her. That was a wonderful place, and its playthings were as wonderful as the games that were played there. It seemed to me it must be somewhere very near—perhaps in the first or second storey; the only thing was one never seemed to be able to get there. How often have I asked my companion, "Only tell me, is it really inside the house or outside?" And she would always reply, "No, no, it's in this very house." I would sit and wonder: "Where then can it be? Don't I know all the rooms of the house?" Who the king might be I never cared to inquire; where his palace is still remains undiscovered; this much was clear—the king's palace was within our house.

²⁶. Corresponding to "Wonderland."

Looking back on childhood's days the thing that recurs most often is the mystery which used to fill both life and world. Something undreamt of was lurking everywhere and the uppermost question every day was: when, Oh! When would we come across it? It was as if nature held something in her closed hands and was smilingly asking us: "What do you think I have?" What was impossible for her to have was the thing we had no idea of.

Well do I remember the custard apple seed which I had planted and kept in a corner of the south verandah, and used to water every day. The thought that the seed might possibly grow into a tree kept me in a great state of fluttering wonder. Custard apple seeds still have the habit of sprouting, but no longer to the accompaniment of that feeling of wonder. The fault is not in the custard apple but in the mind. We had once stolen some rocks from an elder cousin's rockery and started a little rockery of our own. The plants which we sowed in its interstices were cared for so excessively that it was only because of their vegetable nature that they managed to put up with it till their untimely death. Words cannot recount the endless joy and wonder which this miniature mountain-top held for us. We had no doubt that this creation of ours would be a wonderful thing to our elders also. The day that we sought to put this to the proof, however, the hillock in the corner of our room, with all its rocks, and all its vegetation, vanished. The knowledge that the schoolroom floor was not a proper foundation for the erection of a mountain was imparted so rudely, and with such suddenness, that it gave us a considerable shock. The weight of stone

of which the floor was relieved settled on our minds when we realised the gulf between our fancies and the will of our elders.

How intimately did the life of the world throb for us in those days! Earth, water, foliage and sky, they all spoke to us and would not be disregarded. How often were we struck by the poignant regret that we could only see the upper storey of the earth and knew nothing of its inner storey. All our planning was as to how we could pry beneath its dust-coloured cover. If, thought we, we could drive in bamboo after bamboo, one over the other, we might perhaps get into some sort of touch with its inmost depths.

During the *Magh* festival a series of wooden pillars used to be planted round the outer courtyard for supporting the chandeliers. Digging holes for these would begin on the first of *Magh*. The preparations for festivity are ever interesting to young folk. But this digging had a special attraction for me. Though I had watched it done year after year—and seen the hole grow bigger and bigger till the digger had completely disappeared inside, and yet nothing extraordinary, nothing worthy of the quest of prince or knight, had ever appeared—yet every time I had the feeling that the lid being lifted off a chest of mystery. I felt that a little bit more digging would do it. Year after year passed, but that bit never got done. There was a pull at the curtain but it was not drawn. The elders, thought I, can do whatever they please, why do they rest content with such shallow delving? If we young folk had the ordering of it, the inmost mystery of the earth would no longer be allowed to remain smothered in its dust covering.

And the thought that behind every part of the vault of blue reposed the mysteries of the sky would also spur our imaginings. When our Pundit, in illustration of some lesson in our Bengali science primer, told us that the blue sphere was not an enclosure, how thunderstruck we were! “Put ladder upon ladder,” said he, “and go on mounting away, but you will never bump your head.” He must be sparing of his ladders, I opined, and questioned with a rising inflection, “And what if we put more ladders, and more, and more?” When I realised that it was fruitless multiplying ladders I remained dumbfounded pondering over the matter. Surely, I concluded, such an astounding piece of news must be known only to those who are the world’s schoolmasters!

Part 2

4. Servocracy

In the history of India the regime of the Slave Dynasty was not a happy one. In going back to the reign of the servants in my own life's history I can find nothing glorious or cheerful touching the period. There were frequent changes of king, but never a variation in the code of restraints and punishments with which we were afflicted. We, however, had no opportunity at the time for philosophising on the subject; our backs bore as best they could the blows which befell them: and we accepted as one of the laws of the universe that it is for the Big to hurt and for the Small to be hurt. It has taken me a long time to learn the opposite truth that it is the Big who suffer and the Small who cause suffering.

The quarry does not view virtue and vice from the standpoint of the hunter. That is why the alert bird, whose cry warns its fellows before the shot has sped, gets abused as vicious. We howled when we were beaten, which our chastisers did not consider good manners; it was in fact counted sedition against the servocracy. I cannot forget how, in order effectively to suppress such sedition, our heads used to be crammed into the huge water jars then in use; distasteful, doubtless, was this outcry to those who caused it; moreover, it was likely to have unpleasant consequences.

I now sometimes wonder why such cruel treatment was meted out to us by the servants. I cannot admit that there was on the whole anything in our behaviour or demeanour to have put us beyond the pale of human kindness. The real reason must have been that the whole of our burden was thrown on the servants, and the whole burden is a thing difficult to bear even for those who are nearest and dearest. If children are only allowed to be children, to run and play about and satisfy their curiosity, it becomes quite simple. Insoluble problems are only created if you try to confine them inside, keep them still or hamper their play. Then does the burden of the child, so lightly borne by its own childishness, fall heavily on the guardian—like that of the horse in the fable which was carried instead of being allowed to trot on its own legs: and though money procured bearers even for such a burden it could not prevent them taking it out of the unlucky beast at every step.

Of most of these tyrants of our childhood I remember only their cuffings and boxings, and nothing more. Only one personality stands out in my memory.

His name was Iswar. He had been a village schoolmaster before. He was a

prim, proper and sedately dignified personage. The Earth seemed too earthy for him, with too little water to keep it sufficiently clean; so that he had to be in a constant state of warfare with its chronic soiled state. He would shoot his water-pot into the tank with a lightning movement so as to get his supply from an uncontaminated depth. It was he who, when bathing in the tank, would be continually thrusting away the surface impurities till he took a sudden plunge expecting, as it were, to catch the water unawares. When walking his right arm stood out at an angle from his body, as if, so it seemed to us, he could not trust the cleanliness even of his own garments. His whole bearing had the appearance of an effort to keep clear of the imperfections which, through unguarded avenues, find entrance into earth, water and air, and into the ways of men. Unfathomable was the depth of his gravity. With head slightly tilted he would mince his carefully selected words in a deep voice. His literary diction would give food for merriment to our elders behind his back, some of his high-flown phrases finding a permanent place in our family repertoire of witticisms. But I doubt whether the expressions he used would sound as remarkable today; showing how the literary and spoken languages, which used to be as sky from earth asunder, are now coming nearer each other.

This erstwhile schoolmaster had discovered a way of keeping us quiet in the evenings. Every evening he would gather us round the cracked castor-oil lamp and read out to us stories from the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Some of the other servants would also come and join the audience. The lamp would be throwing huge shadows right up to the beams of the roof, the little house lizards catching insects on the walls, the bats doing a mad dervish dance round and round the verandahs outside, and we listening in silent open-mouthed wonder.

I still remember, on the evening we came to the story of Kusha and Lava, and those two valiant lads were threatening to humble to the dust the renown of their father and uncles, how the tense silence of that dimly lighted room was bursting with eager anticipation. It was getting late, our prescribed period of wakefulness was drawing to a close, and yet the denouement was far off.

At this critical juncture my father's old follower Kishori came to the rescue, and finished the episode for us, at express speed, to the quickstep of Dasuraya's jingling verses. The impression of the soft slow chant of Krittivasa's ²⁷ fourteen-syllabled measure was swept clean away and we were left overwhelmed by a flood of rhymes and alliterations.

²⁷. There are innumerable renderings of the Ramayana in the Indian languages.

On some occasions these readings would give rise to *shastric* discussions, which would at length be settled by the depth of Iswar's wise pronouncements.

Though, as one of the children's servants, his rank in our domestic society was below that of many, yet, as with old Grandfather Bhisma in the Mahabharata, his supremacy would assert itself from his seat, below his juniors.

Our grave and reverend servitor had one weakness to which, for the sake of historical accuracy, I feel bound to allude. He used to take opium. This created a craving for rich food. So that when he brought us our morning goblets of milk the forces of attraction in his mind would be greater than those of repulsion. If we gave the least expression to our natural repugnance for this meal, no sense of responsibility for our health could prompt him to press it on us a second time.

Iswar also held somewhat narrow views as to our capacity for solid nourishment. We would sit down to our evening repast and a quantity of *luchis* ²⁸ heaped on a thick round wooden tray would be placed before us. He would begin by gingerly dropping a few on each platter, from a sufficient height to safeguard himself from contamination ²⁹—like unwilling favours, wrested from the gods by dint of importunity, did they descend, so dexterously inhospitable was he. Next would come the inquiry whether he should give us any more. I knew the reply which would be most gratifying, and could not bring myself to deprive him by asking for another help.

²⁸. A kind of crisp unsweetened pancake taken like bread along with the other courses.

²⁹. Food while being eaten, and utensils or anything else touched by the hand engaged in conveying food to the mouth, are considered ceremonially unclean.

Then again Iswar was entrusted with a daily allowance of money for procuring our afternoon light refreshment. He would ask us every morning what we should like to have. We knew that to mention the cheapest would be accounted best, so sometimes we ordered a light refection of puffed rice, and at others an indigestible one of boiled gram or roasted groundnuts. It was evident that Iswar was not as painstakingly punctilious in regard to our diet as with the *shastric* proprieties.

5. The Normal School

While at the Oriental Seminary I had discovered a way out of the degradation of being a mere pupil. I had started a class of my own in a corner of our verandah. The wooden bars of the railing were my pupils, and I would act the schoolmaster, cane in hand, seated on a chair in front of them. I had decided which were the good boys and which the bad—nay, further, I could distinguish clearly the quiet from the naughty, the clever from the stupid. The bad rails had suffered so much from my constant caning that they must have longed to give up the ghost had they been alive. And the more scarred they got with my strokes the worse they angered me, till I knew not how to punish them enough. None remain to bear witness today how tremendously I tyrannised over that poor dumb class of mine. My wooden pupils have since been replaced by cast-iron railings, nor have any of the new generation taken up their education in the same way—they could never have made the same impression.

I have since realised how much easier it is to acquire the manner than the matter. Without an effort had I assimilated all the impatience, the short temper, the partiality and the injustice displayed by my teachers to the exclusion of the rest of their teaching. My only consolation is that I had not the power of venting these barbarities on any sentient creature. Nevertheless the difference between my wooden pupils and those of the Seminary did not prevent my psychology from being identical with that of its schoolmasters.

I could not have been long at the Oriental Seminary, for I was still of tender age when I joined the Normal School. The only one of its features which I remember is that before the classes began all the boys had to sit in a row in the gallery and go through some kind of singing or chanting of verses—evidently an attempt at introducing an element of cheerfulness into the daily routine.

Unfortunately the words were English and the tune quite as foreign, so that we had not the faintest notion what sort of incantation we were practising; neither did the meaningless monotony of the performance tend to make us cheerful. This failed to disturb the serene self-satisfaction of the school authorities at having provided such a treat; they deemed it superfluous to inquire into the practical effect of their bounty; they would probably have counted it a crime for the boys not to be dutifully happy. Anyhow they rested content with taking the song as they found it, words and all, from the self-same English book which had

furnished the theory.

The language into which this English resolved itself in our mouths cannot but be edifying to philologists. I can recall only one line:

Kallokee pullokee singill mellaling mellaling mellaling.

After much thought I have been able to guess at the original of a part of it. Of what words *kallokee* is the transformation still baffles me. The rest I think was:

...full of glee, singing merrily, merrily, merrily!

As my memories of the Normal School emerge from haziness and become clearer they are not the least sweet in any particular. Had I been able to associate with the other boys, the woes of learning might not have seemed so intolerable. But that turned out to be impossible—so nasty were most of the boys in their manners and habits. So, in the intervals of the classes, I would go up to the second storey and while away the time sitting near a window overlooking the street. I would count: one year—two years—three years—; wondering how many such would have to be got through like this.

Of the teachers I remember only one, whose language was so foul that, out of sheer contempt for him, I steadily refused to answer any one of his questions. Thus I sat silent throughout the year at the bottom of his class, and while the rest of the class was busy I would be left alone to attempt the solution of many an intricate problem.

One of these, I remember, on which I used to cogitate profoundly, was how to defeat an enemy without having arms. My preoccupation with this question, amidst the hum of the boys reciting their lessons, comes back to me even now. If I could properly train up a number of dogs, tigers and other ferocious beasts, and put a few lines of these on the field of battle, that, I thought, would serve very well as an inspiring prelude. With our personal prowess let loose thereafter, victory should by no means be out of reach. And, as the picture of this wonderfully simple strategy waxed vivid in my imagination, the victory of my side became assured beyond doubt.

While work had not yet come into my life I always found it easy to devise short cuts to achievement; since I have been working I find that what is hard is hard indeed, and what is difficult remains difficult. This, of course, is less comforting; but nowhere near so bad as the discomfort of trying to take shortcuts.

When at length a year of that class had passed, we were examined in Bengali by Pandit Madhusudan Vachaspati. I got the largest number of marks of all the boys. The teacher complained to the school authorities that there had been favouritism in my case. So I was examined a second time, with the

superintendent of the school seated beside the examiner. This time, also, I got a top place.

6. Versification

I could not have been more than eight years old at the time. Jyoti, a son of a niece of my father's, was considerably older than I. He had just gained an entrance into English literature, and would recite Hamlet's soliloquy with great gusto. Why he should have taken it into his head to get a child, as I was, to write poetry I cannot tell. One afternoon he sent for me to his room, and asked me to try and make up a verse; after which he explained to me the construction of the *payar* metre of fourteen syllables.

I had up to then only seen poems in printed books—no mistakes penned through, no sign to the eye of doubt or trouble or any human weakness. I could not have dared even to imagine that any effort of mine could produce such poetry.

One day a thief had been caught in our house. Overpowered by curiosity, yet in fear and trembling, I ventured to the spot to take a peep at him. I found he was just an ordinary man! And when he was somewhat roughly handled by our door-keeper I felt a great pity. I had a similar experience with poetry.

When, after stringing together a few words at my own sweet will, I found them turned into a *payar* verse I felt I had no illusions left about the glories of poetising. So when poor Poetry is mishandled, even now I feel as unhappy as I did about the thief. Many a time have I been moved to pity and yet been unable to restrain impatient hands itching for the assault. Thieves have scarcely suffered so much, and from so many.

The first feeling of awe once overcome there was no holding me back. I managed to get hold of a blue-paper manuscript book by the favour of one of the officers of our estate. With my own hands I ruled it with pencil lines, at not very regular intervals, and thereon I began to write verses in a large childish scrawl.

Like a young deer which butts here, there and everywhere with its newly sprouting horns, I made myself a nuisance with my budding poetry. More so my elder ³⁰ brother, whose pride in my performance impelled him to hunt about the house for an audience.

³⁰. The writer is the youngest of seven brothers. The sixth brother is here meant.

I recollect how, as the pair of us, one day, were coming out of the estate offices on the ground floor, after a conquering expedition against the officers, we came

across the editor of "The National Paper," Nabagopal Mitter, who had just stepped into the house. My brother tackled him without further ado: "Look here, Nabagopal Babu! won't you listen to a poem which Rabi has written?" The reading forthwith followed.

My works had not as yet become voluminous. The poet could carry all his effusions about in his pockets. I was writer, printer and publisher, all in one; my brother, as advertiser, being my only colleague. I had composed some verses on The Lotus which I recited to Nabagopal Babu then and there, at the foot of the stairs, in a voice pitched as high as my enthusiasm. "Well done!" said he with a smile. "But what is a *dwirepha*?" [31](#)

[31](#). Obsolete word meaning bee.

How I had got hold of this word I do not remember. The ordinary name would have fitted the metre quite as well. But this was the one word in the whole poem on which I had pinned my hopes. It had doubtless duly impressed our officers. But curiously enough Nabagopal Babu did not succumb to it—on the contrary he smiled! He could not be an understanding man, I felt sure. I never read poetry to him again. I have since added many years to my age but have not been able to improve upon my test of what does or does not constitute understanding in my hearer. However Nabagopal Babu might smile, the word *dwirepha*, like a bee drunk with honey, stuck to its place, unmoved.

7. Various Learning

One of the teachers of the Normal School also gave us private lessons at home. His body was lean, his features dry, his voice sharp. He looked like a cane incarnate. His hours were from six to half-past-nine in the morning. With him our reading ranged from popular literary and science readers in Bengali to the epic of Meghnadvadha.

My third brother was very keen on imparting to us a variety of knowledge. So at home we had to go through much more than what was required by the school course. We had to get up before dawn and, clad in loin-cloths, begin with a bout or two with a blind wrestler. Without a pause we donned our tunics on our dusty bodies, and started on our courses of literature, mathematics, geography and history. On our return from school our drawing and gymnastic masters would be ready for us. In the evening Aghore Babu came for our English lessons. It was only after nine that we were free.

On Sunday morning we had singing lessons with Vishnu. Then, almost every Sunday, came Sitanath Dutta to give us demonstrations in physical science. The last were of great interest to me. I remember distinctly the feeling of wonder which filled me when he put some water, with sawdust in it, on the fire in a glass vessel, and showed us how the lightened hot water came up, and the cold water went down and how finally the water began to boil. I also felt a great elation the day I learnt that water is a separable part of milk, and that milk thickens when boiled because the water frees itself as vapour from the connexion. Sunday did not feel Sunday-like unless Sitanath Babu turned up.

There was also an hour when we would be told all about human bones by a pupil of the Campbell Medical School, for which purpose a skeleton, with the bones fastened together by wires was hung up in our schoolroom. And finally, time was also found for Pandit Heramba Tatwaratna to come and get us to learn by rote rules of Sanscrit grammar. I am not sure which of them, the names of the bones or the *sutras* of the grammarian, were the more jaw-breaking. I think the latter took the palm.

We began to learn English after we had made considerable progress in learning through the medium of Bengali. Aghore Babu, our English tutor, was attending the Medical College, so he came to teach us in the evening.

Books tell us that the discovery of fire was one of the biggest discoveries of

man. I do not wish to dispute this. But I cannot help feeling how fortunate the little birds are that their parents cannot light lamps of an evening. They have their language lessons early in the morning and you must have noticed how gleefully they learn them. Of course we must not forget that they do not have to learn the English language!

The health of this medical-student tutor of ours was so good that even the fervent and united wishes of his three pupils were not enough to cause his absence even for a day. Only once was he laid up with a broken head when, on the occasion of a fight between the Indian and Eurasian students of the Medical College, a chair was thrown at him. It was a regrettable occurrence; nevertheless we were not able to take it as a personal sorrow, and his recovery somehow seemed to us needlessly swift.

It is evening. The rain is pouring in lance-like showers. Our lane is under knee-deep water. The tank has over flown into the garden, and the bushy tops of the Bael trees are seen standing out over the waters. Our whole being, on this delightful rainy evening, is radiating rapture like the *Kadamba* flower its fragrant spikes. The time for the arrival of our tutor is over by just a few minutes. Yet there is no certainty...! We are sitting on the verandah overlooking the lane [32](#) watching and watching with a piteous gaze. All of a sudden, with a great big thump, our hearts seem to fall in a swoon. The familiar black umbrella has turned the corner undefeated even by such weather! Could it not be somebody else? It certainly could not! In the wide wide world there might be found another, his equal in pertinacity, but never in this little lane of ours.

[32.](#) The lane, a blind one, leads, at right angles to the front verandah, from the public main road to the grounds round the house.

Looking back on his period as a whole, I cannot say that Aghore Babu was a hard man. He did not rule us with a rod. Even his rebukes did not amount to scoldings. But whatever may have been his personal merits, his time was *evening*, and his subject *English*! I am certain that even an angel would have seemed a veritable messenger of Yama [33](#) to any Bengali boy if he came to him at the end of his miserable day at school, and lighted a dismally dim lamp to teach him English.

[33.](#) God of Death.

How well do I remember the day our tutor tried to impress on us the attractiveness of the English language. With this object he recited to us with great unction some lines—prose or poetry we could not tell—out of an English book. It had a most unlooked for effect on us. We laughed so immoderately that he had to dismiss us for that evening. He must have realised that he held no easy

brief—that to get us to pronounce in his favour would entail a contest ranging over years.

Aghore Babu would sometimes try to bring the zephyr of outside knowledge to play on the arid routine of our schoolroom. One day he brought a paper parcel out of his pocket and said: "I'll show you today a wonderful piece of work of the Creator." With this he untied the paper wrapping and, producing a portion of the vocal organs of a human being, proceeded to expound the marvels of its mechanism.

I can still call to mind the shock this gave me at the time. I had always thought the whole man spoke—had never even imagined that the act of speech could be viewed in this detached way. However wonderful the mechanism of a part may be, it is certainly less so than the whole man. Not that I put it to myself in so many words, but that was the cause of my dismay. It was perhaps because the tutor had lost sight of this truth that the pupil could not respond to the enthusiasm with which he was discoursing on the subject.

Another day he took us to the dissecting room of the Medical College. The body of an old woman was stretched on the table. This did not disturb me so much. But an amputated leg which was lying on the floor upset me altogether. To view man in this fragmentary way seemed to me so horrid, so absurd that I could not get rid of the impression of that dark, unmeaning leg for many a day.

After getting through Peary Sarkar's first and second English readers we entered upon McCulloch's Course of Reading. Our bodies were weary at the end of the day, our minds yearning for the inner apartments, the book was black and thick with difficult words, and the subject-matter could hardly have been more inviting, for in those days, Mother Saraswati's [34](#) maternal tenderness was not in evidence. Children's books were not full of pictures then as they are now. Moreover, at the gateway of every reading lesson stood sentinel an array of words, with separated syllables, and forbidding accent marks like fixed bayonets, barring the way to the infant mind. I had repeatedly attacked their serried ranks in vain.

[34.](#) Goddess of Learning.

Our tutor would try to shame us by recounting the exploits of some other brilliant pupil of his. We felt duly ashamed, and also not well-disposed towards that other pupil, but this did not help to dispel the darkness which clung to that black volume.

Providence, out of pity for mankind, has instilled a soporific charm into all tedious things. No sooner did our English lessons begin than our heads began to nod. Sprinkling water into our eyes, or taking a run round the verandahs, were

palliatives which had no lasting effect. If by any chance my eldest brother happened to be passing that way, and caught a glimpse of our sleep-tormented condition, we would get let off for the rest of the evening. It did not take our drowsiness another moment to get completely cured.

8. My First Outing

Once, when the dengue fever was raging in Calcutta, some portion of our extensive family had to take shelter in Chhatu Babu's river-side villa. We were among them.

This was my first outing. The bank of the Ganges welcomed me into its lap like a friend of a former birth. There, in front of the servants' quarters, was a grove of guava trees; and, sitting in the verandah under the shade of these, gazing at the flowing current through the gaps between their trunks, my days would pass. Every morning, as I awoke, I somehow felt the day coming to me like a new gilt-edged letter, with some unheard-of news awaiting me on the opening of the envelope. And, lest I should lose any fragment of it, I would hurry through my toilet to my chair outside. Every day there was the ebb and flow of the tide on the Ganges; the various gait of so many different boats; the shifting of the shadows of the trees from west to east; and, over the fringe of shade-patches of the woods on the opposite bank, the gush of golden life-blood through the pierced breast of the evening sky. Some days would be cloudy from early morning; the opposite woods black; black shadows moving over the river. Then with a rush would come the vociferous rain, blotting out the horizon; the dim line of the other bank taking its leave in tears: the river swelling with suppressed heavings; and the moist wind making free with the foliage of the trees overhead.

I felt that out of the bowels of wall, beam and rafter, I had a new birth into the outside. In making fresh acquaintance with things, the dingy covering of petty habits seemed to drop off the world. I am sure that the sugar-cane molasses, which I had with cold *luchis* for my breakfast, could not have tasted different from the ambrosia which *Indra* ³⁵ quaffs in his heaven; for, the immortality is not in the nectar but in the taster, and thus is missed by those who seek it.

35. The Jupiter Pluvius of Hindu Mythology.

Behind the house was a walled-in enclosure with a tank and a flight of steps leading into the water from a bathing platform. On one side of the platform was an immense Jambolan tree, and all round were various fruit trees, growing in thick clusters, in the shade of which the tank nestled in its privacy. The veiled beauty of this retired little inner garden had a wonderful charm for me, so different from the broad expanse of the river-bank in front. It was like the bride

of the house, in the seclusion of her midday siesta, resting on a many-coloured quilt of her own embroidering, murmuring low the secrets of her heart. Many a midday hour did I spend alone under that Jambolan tree dreaming of the fearsome kingdom of the Yakshas [36](#) within the depths of the tank.

[36.](#) The King of the Yakshas is the Pluto of Hindu Mythology.

I had a great curiosity to see a Bengal village. Its clusters of cottages, its thatched pavilions, its lanes and bathing places, its games and gatherings, its fields and markets, its life as a whole as I saw it in imagination, greatly attracted me. Just such a village was right on the other side of our garden wall, but it was forbidden to us. We had come out, but not into freedom. We had been in a cage, and were now on a perch, but the chain was still there.

One morning two of our elders went out for a stroll into the village. I could not restrain my eagerness any longer, and, slipping out unperceived, followed them for some distance. As I went along the deeply shaded lane, with its close thorny *seora* hedges, by the side of the tank covered with green water weeds, I rapturously took in picture after picture. I still remember the man with bare body, engaged in a belated toilet on the edge of the tank, cleaning his teeth with the chewed end of a twig. Suddenly my elders became aware of my presence behind them. "Get away, get away, go back at once!" they scolded. They were scandalised. My feet were bare, I had no scarf or upper-robe over my tunic, I was not dressed fit to come out; as if it was my fault! I never owned any socks or superfluous apparel, so not only went back disappointed for that morning, but had no chance of repairing my shortcomings and being allowed to come out any other day. However though the Beyond was thus shut out from behind, in front the Ganges freed me from all bondage, and my mind, whenever it listed, could embark on the boats gaily sailing along, and hie away to lands not named in any geography.

This was forty years ago. Since then I have never set foot again in that *champak*-shaded villa garden. The same old house and the same old trees must still be there, but I know it cannot any longer be the same—for where am I now to get that fresh feeling of wonder which made it what it was?

We returned to our Jorasanko house in town. And my days were as so many mouthfuls offered up to be gulped down into the yawning interior of the Normal School.

9. Practising Poetry

That blue manuscript book was soon filled, like the hive of some insect, with a network of variously slanting lines and the thick and thin strokes of letters. The eager pressure of the boy writer soon crumpled its leaves; and then the edges got frayed, and twisted up claw-like as if to hold fast the writing within, till at last, down what river *Baitarani* ³⁷ I know not, its pages were swept away by merciful oblivion. Anyhow they escaped the pangs of a passage through the printing press and need fear no birth into this vale of woe.

³⁷. Corresponding to Lethe.

I cannot claim to have been a passive witness of the spread of my reputation as a poet. Though Satkari Babu was not a teacher of our class he was very fond of me. He had written a book on Natural History—wherein I hope no unkind humorist will try to find a reason for such fondness. He sent for me one day and asked: “So you write poetry, do you?” I did not conceal the fact. From that time on, he would now and then ask me to complete a quatrain by adding a couple of my own to one given by him.

Gobinda Babu of our school was very dark, and short and fat. He was the Superintendent. He sat, in his black suit, with his account books, in an office room on the second storey. We were all afraid of him, for he was the rod-bearing judge. On one occasion I had escaped from the attentions of some bullies into his room. The persecutors were five or six older boys. I had no one to bear witness on my side—except my tears. I won my case and since then Govinda Babu had a soft corner in his heart for me.

One day he called me into his room during the recess. I went in fear and trembling but had no sooner stepped before him than he also accosted me with the question: “So you write poetry?” I did not hesitate to make the admission. He commissioned me to write a poem on some high moral precept which I do not remember. The amount of condescension and affability which such a request coming from him implied can only be appreciated by those who were his pupils. When I finished and handed him the verses next day, he took me to the highest class and made me stand before the boys. “Recite,” he commanded. And I recited loudly.

The only praiseworthy thing about this moral poem was that it soon got lost. Its moral effect on that class was far from encouraging—the sentiment it aroused

being not one of regard for its author. Most of them were certain that it was not my own composition. One said he could produce the book from which it was copied, but was not pressed to do so; the process of proving is such a nuisance to those who want to believe. Finally the number of seekers after poetic fame began to increase alarmingly; moreover their methods were not those which are recognised as roads to moral improvement.

Nowadays there is nothing strange in a youngster writing verses. The glamour of poesy is gone. I remember how the few women who wrote poetry in those days were looked upon as miraculous creations of the Deity. If one hears today that some young lady does not write poems one feels sceptical. Poetry now sprouts long before the highest Bengali class is reached; so that no modern Gobinda Babu would have taken any notice of the poetic exploit I have recounted.

Part 3

10. Srikantha Babu

At this time I was blessed with a hearer the like of whom I shall never get again. He had so inordinate a capacity for being pleased as to have utterly disqualified him for the post of critic in any of our monthly Reviews. The old man was like a perfectly ripe Alfonso mango—not a trace of acid or coarse fibre in his composition. His tender clean-shaven face was rounded off by an all-pervading baldness; there was not the vestige of a tooth to worry the inside of his mouth; and his big smiling eyes gleamed with a constant delight. When he spoke in his soft deep voice, his mouth and eyes and hands all spoke likewise. He was of the old school of Persian culture and knew not a word of English. His inseparable companions were a hubble-bubble at his left, and a *sitar* on his lap; and from his throat flowed song unceasing.

Srikantha Babu had no need to wait for a formal introduction, for none could resist the natural claims of his genial heart. Once he took us to be photographed with him in some big English photographic studio. There he so captivated the proprietor with his artless story, in a jumble of Hindusthani and Bengali, of how he was a poor man, but badly wanted this particular photograph taken, that the man smilingly allowed him a reduced rate. Nor did such bargaining sound at all incongruous in that unbending English establishment, so naïve was Srikantha Babu, so unconscious of any possibility of giving offence. He would sometimes take me along to a European missionary's house. There, also, with his playing and singing, his caresses of the missionary's little girl and his unstinted admiration of the little booted feet of the missionary's lady, he would enliven the gathering as no one else could have done. Another behaving so absurdly would have been deemed a bore, but his transparent simplicity pleased all and drew them to join in his gaiety.

Srikantha Babu was impervious to rudeness or insolence. There was at the time a singer of some repute retained in our establishment. When the latter was the worse for liquor he would rail at poor Srikantha Babu's singing in no very choice terms. This he would bear unflinchingly, with no attempt at retort. When at last the man's incorrigible rudeness brought about his dismissal Srikantha Babu anxiously interceded for him. "It was not he, it was the liquor," he insisted.

He could not bear to see anyone sorrowing or even to hear of it. So when any one of the boys wanted to torment him they had only to read out passages from

Vidyasagar's "Banishment of Sita"; whereat he would be greatly exercised, thrusting out his hands in protest and begging and praying of them to stop.

This old man was the friend alike of my father, my elder brothers and ourselves. He was of an age with each and every one of us. As any piece of stone is good enough for the freshet to dance round and gambol with, so the least provocation would suffice to make him beside himself with joy. Once I had composed a hymn, and had not failed to make due allusion to the trials and tribulations of this world. Srikantha Babu was convinced that my father would be overjoyed at such a perfect gem of a devotional poem. With unbounded enthusiasm he volunteered personally to acquaint him with it. By a piece of good fortune I was not there at the time but heard afterwards that my father was hugely amused that the sorrows of the world should have so early moved his youngest son to the point of versification. I am sure Gobinda Babu, the superintendent, would have shown more respect for my effort on so serious a subject.

In singing I was Srikantha Babu's favorite pupil. He had taught me a song: "No more of Vraja [38](#) for me," and would drag me about to everyone's rooms and get me to sing it to them. I would sing and he would thrum an accompaniment on his *sitar* and when we came to the chorus he would join in, and repeat it over and over again, smiling and nodding his head at each one in turn, as if nudging them on to a more enthusiastic appreciation.

[38.](#) Krishna's playground.

He was a devoted admirer of my father. A hymn had been set to one of his tunes, "For He is the heart of our hearts." When he sang this to my father Srikantha Babu got so excited that he jumped up from his seat and in alternation violently twanged his *sitar* as he sang: "For He is the heart of our hearts" and then waved his hand about my father's face as he changed the words to "For you are the heart of our hearts."

When the old man paid his last visit to my father, the latter, himself bed-ridden, was at a river-side villa in Chinsurah. Srikantha Babu, stricken with his last illness, could not rise unaided and had to push open his eyelids to see. In this state, tended by his daughter, he journeyed to Chinsurah from his place in Birbhook. With a great effort he managed to take the dust of my father's feet and then return to his lodgings in Chinsurah where he breathed his last a few days later. I heard afterwards from his daughter that he went to his eternal youth with the song "How sweet is thy mercy, Lord!" on his lips.

11. Our Bengali Course Ends

At School we were then in the class below the highest one. At home we had advanced in Bengali much further than the subjects taught in the class. We had been through Akshay Datta's book on Popular Physics, and had also finished the epic of Meghnadvadha. We read our physics without any reference to physical objects and so our knowledge of the subject was correspondingly bookish. In fact the time spent on it had been thoroughly wasted; much more so to my mind than if it had been wasted in doing nothing. The Meghnadvadha, also, was not a thing of joy to us. The tastiest tit-bit may not be relished when thrown at one's head. To employ an epic to teach language is like using a sword to shave with—sad for the sword, bad for the chin. A poem should be taught from the emotional standpoint; inveigling it into service as grammar-cum-dictionary is not calculated to propitiate the divine Saraswati.

All of a sudden our Normal School career came to an end; and thereby hangs a tale. One of our school teachers wanted to borrow a copy of my grandfather's life by Mitra from our library. My nephew and classmate Satya managed to screw up courage enough to volunteer to mention this to my father. He came to the conclusion that everyday Bengali would hardly do to approach him with. So he concocted and delivered himself of an archaic phrase with such meticulous precision that my father must have felt our study of the Bengali language had gone a bit too far and was in danger of over-reaching itself. So the next morning, when according to our wont our table had been placed in the south verandah, the blackboard hung up on a nail in the wall, and everything was in readiness for our lessons with Nilkamal Babu, we three were sent for by my father to his room upstairs. "You need not do any more Bengali lessons," he said. Our minds danced for very joy.

Nilkamal Babu was waiting downstairs, our books were lying open on the table, and the idea of getting us once more to go through the Meghnadvadha doubtless still occupied his mind. But as on one's death-bed the various routine of daily life seems unreal, so, in a moment, did everything, from the Pandit down to the nail on which the blackboard was hung, become for us as empty as a mirage. Our sole trouble was how to give this news to Nilkamal Babu with due decorum. We did it at last with considerable restraint, while the geometrical figures on the blackboard stared at us in wonder and the blank verse of the

Meghnadvadha looked blankly on.

Our Pandit's parting words were: "At the call of duty I may have been sometimes harsh with you—do not keep that in remembrance. You will learn the value of what I have taught you later on."

Indeed I have learnt that value. It was because we were taught in our own language that our minds quickened. Learning should as far as possible follow the process of eating. When the taste begins from the first bite, the stomach is awakened to its function before it is loaded, so that its digestive juices get full play. Nothing like this happens, however, when the Bengali boy is taught in English. The first bite bids fair to wrench loose both rows of teeth—like a veritable earthquake in the mouth! And by the time he discovers that the morsel is not of the genus stone, but a digestible bonbon, half his allotted span of life is over. While one is choking and spluttering over the spelling and grammar, the inside remains starved, and when at length the taste is felt, the appetite has vanished. If the whole mind does not work from the beginning its full powers remain undeveloped to the end. While all around was the cry for English teaching, my third brother was brave enough to keep us to our Bengali course. To him in heaven my grateful reverence.

12. The Professor

On leaving the Normal School we were sent to the Bengal Academy, a Eurasian institution. We felt we had gained an access of dignity, that we had grown up—at least into the first storey of freedom. In point of fact the only progress we made in that academy was towards freedom. What we were taught there we never understood, nor did we make any attempt to learn, nor did it seem to make any difference to anybody that we did not. The boys here were annoying but not disgusting—which was a great comfort. They wrote ASS on their palms and slapped it on to our backs with a cordial “hello!” They gave us a dig in the ribs from behind and looked innocently another way. They dabbed banana pulp on our heads and made away unperceived. Nevertheless it was like coming out of slime on to rock—we were worried but not soiled.

This school had one great advantage for me. No one there cherished the forlorn hope that boys of our sort could make any advance in learning. It was a petty institution with an insufficient income, so that we had one supreme merit in the eyes of its authorities—we paid our fees regularly. This prevented even the Latin Grammar from proving a stumbling block, and the most egregious of blunders left our backs unscathed. Pity for us had nothing to do with it—the school authorities had spoken to the teachers!

Still, harmless though it was, after all it was a school. The rooms were cruelly dismal with their walls on guard like policemen. The house was more like a pigeon-holed box than a human habitation. No decoration, no pictures, not a touch of colour, not an attempt to attract the boyish heart. The fact that likes and dislikes form a large part of the child mind was completely ignored. Naturally our whole being was depressed as we stepped through its doorway into the narrow quadrangle—and playing truant became chronic with us.

In this we found an accomplice. My elder brothers had a Persian tutor. We used to call him Munshi. He was of middle age and all skin and bone, as though dark parchment had been stretched over his skeleton without any filling of flesh and blood. He probably knew Persian well, his knowledge of English was quite fair, but in neither of these directions lay his ambition. His belief was that his proficiency in singlestick was matched only by his skill in song. He would stand in the sun in the middle of our courtyard and go through a wonderful series of antics with a staff—his own shadow being his antagonist. I need hardly add that

his shadow never got the better of him and when at the end he gave a great big shout and whacked it on the head with a victorious smile, it lay submissively prone at his feet. His singing, nasal and out of tune, sounded like a gruesome mixture of groaning and moaning coming from some ghost-world. Our singing master Vishnu would sometimes chaff him: "Look here, Munshi, you'll be taking the bread out of our mouths at this rate!" To which his only reply would be a disdainful smile.

This shows that the Munshi was amenable to soft words; and in fact, whenever we wanted we could persuade him to write to the school authorities to excuse us from attendance. The school authorities took no pains to scrutinise these letters, they knew it would be all the same whether we attended or not, so far as educational results were concerned.

I have now a school of my own in which the boys are up to all kinds of mischief, for boys will be mischievous—and schoolmasters unforgiving. When any of us are beset with undue uneasiness at their conduct and are stirred into a resolution to deal out condign punishment, the misdeeds of my own schooldays confront me in a row and smile at me.

I now clearly see that the mistake is to judge boys by the standard of grown-ups, to forget that a child is quick and mobile like a running stream; and that, in the case of such, any touch of imperfection need cause no great alarm, for the speed of the flow is itself the best corrective. When stagnation sets in then comes the danger. So it is for the teacher, more than the pupil, to beware of wrongdoing.

There was a separate refreshment room for Bengali boys for meeting their caste requirements. This was where we struck up a friendship with some of the others. They were all older than we. One of these will bear to be dilated upon.

His specialty was the art of Magic, so much so that he had actually written and published a little booklet on it, the front page of which bore his name with the title of Professor. I had never before come across a schoolboy whose name had appeared in print, so that my reverence for him—as a professor of magic I mean—was profound. How could I have brought myself to believe that anything questionable could possibly find place in the straight and upright ranks of printed letters? To be able to record one's own words in indelible ink—was that a slight thing? To stand unscreened yet unabashed, self-confessed before the world,—how could one withhold belief in the face of such supreme self-confidence? I remember how once I got the types for the letters of my name from some printing press, and what a memorable thing it seemed when I inked and pressed them on paper and found my name imprinted.

We used to give a lift in our carriage to this schoolfellow and author-friend of ours. This led to visiting terms. He was also great at theatricals. With his help we erected a stage on our wrestling ground with painted paper stretched over a split bamboo framework. But a peremptory negative from upstairs prevented any play from being acted thereon.

A comedy of errors was however played later on without any stage at all. The author of this has already been introduced to the reader in these pages. He was none other than my nephew *Satya*. Those who behold his present calm and sedate demeanour would be shocked to learn of the tricks of which he was the originator.

The event of which I am writing happened sometime afterwards when I was twelve or thirteen. Our magician friend had told of so many strange properties of things that I was consumed with curiosity to see them for myself. But the materials of which he spoke were invariably so rare or distant that one could hardly hope to get hold of them without the help of Sindbad the sailor. Once, as it happened, the Professor forgot himself so far as to mention accessible things. Who could ever believe that a seed dipped and dried twenty-one times in the juice of a species of cactus would sprout and flower and fruit all in the space of an hour? I was determined to test this, not daring withal to doubt the assurance of a Professor whose name appeared in a printed book.

I got our gardener to furnish me with a plentiful supply of the milky juice, and betook myself, on a Sunday afternoon, to our mystic nook in a corner of the roof terrace, to experiment with the stone of a mango. I was wrapt in my task of dipping and drying—but the grown-up reader will probably not wait to ask me the result. In the meantime, I little knew that *Satya*, in another corner, had, in the space of an hour, caused to root and sprout a mystical plant of his own creation. This was to bear curious fruit later on.

After the day of this experiment the Professor rather avoided me, as I gradually came to perceive. He would not sit on the same side in the carriage, and altogether seemed to fight shy of me.

One day, all of a sudden, he proposed that each one in turn should jump off the bench in our schoolroom. He wanted to observe the differences in style, he said. Such scientific curiosity did not appear queer in a professor of magic. Everyone jumped, so did I. He shook his head with a subdued “him.” No amount of persuasion could draw anything further out of him.

Another day he informed us that some good friends of his wanted to make our acquaintance and asked us to accompany him to their house. Our guardians had no objection, so off we went. The crowd in the room seemed full of curiosity.

They expressed their eagerness to hear me sing. I sang a song or two. Mere child as I was I could hardly have bellowed like a bull. "Quite a sweet voice," they all agreed.

When refreshments were put before us they sat round and watched us eat. I was bashful by nature and not used to strange company; moreover the habit I acquired during the attendance of our servant Iswar left me a poor eater for good. They all seemed impressed with the delicacy of my appetite.

In the fifth act I got some curiously warm letters from our Professor which revealed the whole situation. And here let the curtain fall.

I subsequently learnt from Satya that while I had been practising magic on the mango seed, he had successfully convinced the Professor that I was dressed as a boy by our guardians merely for getting me a better schooling, but that really this was only a disguise. To those who are curious in regard to imaginary science I should explain that a girl is supposed to jump with her left foot forward, and this is what I had done on the occasion of the Professor's trial. I little realised at the time what a tremendously false step mine had been!

13. My Father

Shortly after my birth my father took to constantly travelling about. So it is no exaggeration to say that in my early childhood I hardly knew him. He would now and then come back home all of a sudden, and with him came foreign servants with whom I felt extremely eager to make friends. Once there came in this way a young Panjabi servant named Lenu. The cordiality of the reception he got from us would have been worthy of Ranjit Singh himself. Not only was he a foreigner, but a Panjabi to boot,—what wonder he stole our hearts away?

We had the same reverence for the whole Panjabi nation as for Bhima and Arjuna of the Mahabharata. They were warriors; and if they had sometimes fought and lost, that was clearly the enemy's fault. It was glorious to have Lenu, of the Panjab, in our very home.

My sister-in-law had a model war-ship under a glass case, which, when wound up, rocked on blue-painted silken waves to the tinkling of a musical box. I would beg hard for the loan of this to display its marvels to the admiring Lenu.

Caged in the house as we were, anything savouring of foreign parts had a peculiar charm for me. This was one of the reasons why I made so much of Lenu. This was also the reason why Gabriel, the Jew, with his embroidered gaberdine, who came to sell *attars* and scented oils, stirred me so; and the huge Kabulis, with their dusty, baggy trousers and knapsacks and bundles, wrought on my young mind a fearful fascination.

Anyhow, when my father came, we would be content with wandering round about his entourage and in the company of his servants. We did not reach his immediate presence.

Once while my father was away in the Himalayas, that old bogey of the British Government, the Russian invasion, came to be a subject of agitated conversation among the people. Some well-meaning lady friend had enlarged on the impending danger to my mother with all the circumstance of a prolific imagination. How could a body tell from which of the Tibetan passes the Russian host might suddenly flash forth like a baleful comet?

My mother was seriously alarmed. Possibly the other members of the family did not share her misgivings; so, despairing of grown-up sympathy, she sought my boyish support. "Won't you write to your father about the Russians?" she

asked.

That letter, carrying the tidings of my mother's anxieties, was my first one to my father. I did not know how to begin or end a letter, or anything at all about it.

I went to Mahananda, the estate munshi. [39](#) The resulting style of address was doubtless correct enough, but the sentiments could not have escaped the musty flavour inseparable from literature emanating from an estate office.

[39.](#) Correspondence clerk.

I got a reply to my letter. My father asked me not to be afraid; if the Russians came he would drive them away himself. This confident assurance did not seem to have the effect of relieving my mother's fears, but it served to free me from all timidity as regards my father. After that I wanted to write to him every day and pestered Mahananda accordingly. Unable to withstand my importunity he would make out drafts for me to copy. But I did not know that there was the postage to be paid for. I had an idea that letters placed in Mahananda's hands got to their destination without any need for further worry. It is hardly necessary to mention that, Mahananda being considerably older than myself, these letters never reached the Himalayan hill-tops.

When, after his long absences, my father came home even for a few days, the whole house seemed filled with the weight of his presence. We would see our elders at certain hours, formally robed in their *chogas*, passing to his rooms with restrained gait and sobered mien, casting away any *pan* [40](#) they might have been chewing. Everyone seemed on the alert. To make sure of nothing going wrong, my mother would superintend the cooking herself. The old mace-bearer, Kinu, with his white livery and crested turban, on guard at my father's door, would warn us not to be boisterous in the verandah in front of his rooms during his midday siesta. We had to walk past quietly, talking in whispers, and dared not even take a peep inside.

[40.](#) Spices wrapped in betel leaf.

On one occasion my father came home to invest the three of us with the sacred thread. With the help of Pandit Vedantavagish he had collected the old Vedic rites for the purpose. For days together we were taught to chant in correct accents the selections from the Upanishads, arranged by my father under the name of "Brahma Dharma," seated in the prayer hall with Becharam Babu. Finally, with shaven heads and gold rings in our ears, we three budding Brahmins went into a three-days' retreat in a portion of the third storey.

It was great fun. The earrings gave us a good handle to pull each other's ears with. We found a little drum lying in one of the rooms; taking this we would stand out in the verandah, and, when we caught sight of any servant passing

alone in the storey below, we would rap a tattoo on it. This would make the man look up, only to beat a hasty retreat the next moment with averted eyes. [41](#) In short we cannot claim that these days of our retirement were passed in ascetic meditation.

[41.](#) It is considered sinful for non-brahmins to cast glances on neophytes during the process of their sacred-thread investiture, before the ceremony is complete.

I am however persuaded that boys like ourselves could not have been rare in the hermitages of old. And if some ancient document has it that the ten or twelve-year old *Saradwata* or *Sarngarava* [42](#) is spending the whole of the days of his boyhood offering oblations and chanting *mantras*, we are not compelled to put unquestioning faith in the statement; because the book of Boy Nature is even older and also more authentic.

[42.](#) Two novices in the hermitage of the sage Kanva, mentioned in the Sanskrit drama, *Sakuntala*.

After we had attained full brahminhood I became very keen on repeating the *gayatri*. [43](#) I would meditate on it with great concentration. It is hardly a text the full meaning of which I could have grasped at that age. I well remember what efforts I made to extend the range of my consciousness with the help of the initial invocation of “Earth, firmament and heaven.” How I felt or thought it is difficult to express clearly, but this much is certain that to be clear about the meaning of words is not the most important function of the human understanding.

[43.](#) The text for self-realisation.

The main object of teaching is not to explain meanings, but to knock at the door of the mind. If any boy is asked to give an account of what is awakened in him at such knocking, he will probably say something very silly. For what happens within is much bigger than what he can express in words. Those who pin their faith on University examinations as a test of all educational results take no account of this fact.

I can recollect many things which I did not understand, but which stirred me deeply. Once, on the roof terrace of our river-side villa, my eldest brother, at the sudden gathering of clouds, repeated aloud some stanzas from Kalidas’s “Cloud Messenger.” I could not, nor had I the need to, understand a word of the Sanskrit. His ecstatic declamation of the sonorous rhythm was enough for me.

Then, again, before I could properly understand English, a profusely illustrated edition of “The Old Curiosity Shop” fell into my hands. I went through the whole of it, though at least nine-tenths of the words were unknown to me. Yet, with the vague ideas I conjured up from the rest, I spun out a variously coloured thread on which to string the illustrations. Any university examiner would have

given me a great big zero, but the reading of the book had not proved for me quite so empty as all that.

Another time I had accompanied my father on a trip on the Ganges in his houseboat. Among the books he had with him was an old Fort William edition of Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*. It was in the Bengali character. The verses were not printed in separate lines, but ran on like prose. I did not then know anything of Sanskrit, yet because of my knowledge of Bengali many of the words were familiar. I cannot tell how often I read that *Gita Govinda*. I can well remember this line: The night that was passed in the lonely forest cottage.

It spread an atmosphere of vague beauty over my mind. That one Sanskrit word, Nibhrita-nikunja-griham, meaning "the lonely forest cottage" was quite enough for me.

I had to discover for myself the intricate metre of Jayadeva, because its divisions were lost in the clumsy prose form of the book. And this discovery gave me very great delight. Of course I did not fully comprehend Jayadeva's meaning. It would hardly be correct to aver that I had got it even partly. But the sound of the words and the lilt of the metre filled my mind with pictures of wonderful beauty, which impelled me to copy out the whole of the book for my own use.

The same thing happened, when I was a little older, with a verse from Kalidas's "Birth of the War God." The verse moved me greatly, though the only words of which I gathered the sense, were "the breeze carrying the spray-mist of the falling waters of the sacred Mandakini and shaking the deodar leaves." These left me pining to taste the beauties of the whole. When, later, a Pandit explained to me that in the next two lines the breeze went on "splitting the feathers of the peacock plume on the head of the eager deer-hunter," the thinness of this last conceit disappointed me. I was much better off when I had relied only upon my imagination to complete the verse.

Whoever goes back to his early childhood will agree that his greatest gains were not in proportion to the completeness of his understanding. Our Kathakas ⁴⁴ I know this truth well. So their narratives always have a good proportion of ear-filling Sanskrit words and abstruse remarks not calculated to be fully understood by their simple hearers, but only to be suggestive.

⁴⁴. Bards or reciters.

The value of such suggestion is by no means to be despised by those who measure education in terms of material gains and losses. These insist on trying to sum up the account and find out exactly how much of the lesson imparted can be

rendered up. But children, and those who are not over-educated, dwell in that primal paradise where men can come to know without fully comprehending each step. And only when that paradise is lost comes the evil day when everything needs must be understood. The road which leads to knowledge, without going through the dreary process of understanding, that is the royal road. If that be barred, though the world's marketing may yet go on as usual, the open sea and the mountain top cease to be possible of access.

So, as I was saying, though at that age I could not realise the full meaning of the *Gayatri*, there was something in me which could do without a complete understanding. I am reminded of a day when, as I was seated on the cement floor in a corner of our schoolroom meditating on the text, my eyes overflowed with tears. Why those tears came I knew not; and to a strict cross-questioner I would probably have given some explanation having nothing to do with the *Gayatri*. The fact of the matter is that what is going on in the inner recesses of consciousness is not always known to the dweller on the surface.

14. A journey with my Father

My shaven head after the sacred thread ceremony caused me one great anxiety. However partial Eurasian lads may be to things appertaining to the Cow, their reverence for the Brahmin ⁴⁵ is notoriously lacking. So that, apart from other missiles, our shaven heads were sure to be pelted with jeers. While I was worrying over this possibility I was one day summoned upstairs to my father. ‘How would I like to go with him to the Himalayas,’ I was asked. Away from the Bengal Academy and off to the Himalayas! Would I like it? O that I could have rent the skies with a shout, that might have given some idea of the How!

45. The Cow and the Brahmin are watchwords of modern Hindu Orthodoxy.

On the day of our leaving home my father, as was his habit, assembled the whole family in the prayer hall for divine service. After I had taken the dust of the feet of my elders I got into the carriage with my father. This was the first time in my life that I had a full suit of clothes made for me. My father himself had selected the pattern and colour. A gold embroidered velvet cap completed my costume. This I carried in my hand, being assailed with misgivings as to its effect in juxtaposition to my hairless head. As I got into the carriage my father insisted on my wearing it, so I had to put it on. Every time he looked another way I took it off. Every time I caught his eye it had to resume its proper place.

My father was very particular in all his arrangements and orderings. He disliked leaving things vague or undetermined and never allowed slovenliness or makeshifts. He had a well-defined code to regulate his relations with others and theirs with him. In this he was different from the generality of his countrymen. With the rest of us a little carelessness this way or that did not signify; so in our dealings with him we had to be anxiously careful. It was not so much the little less or more that he objected to as the failure to be up to the standard.

My father had also a way of picturing to himself every detail of what he wanted done. On the occasion of any ceremonial gathering, at which he could not be present, he would think out and assign the place for each thing, the duty for each member of the family, the seat for each guest; nothing would escape him. After it was all over he would ask each one for a separate account and thus gain a complete impression of the whole for himself. So, while I was with him on his travels, though nothing would induce him to put obstacles in the way of my amusing myself as I pleased, he left no loophole in the strict rules of conduct

which he prescribed for me in other respects.

Our first halt was to be for a few days at Bolpur. Satya had been there a short time before with his parents. No self-respecting nineteenth century infant would have credited the account of his travels which he gave us on his return. But we were different, and had had no opportunity of learning to determine the line between the possible and the impossible. Our Mahabharata and Ramayana gave us no clue to it. Nor had we then any children's illustrated books to guide us in the way a child should go. All the hard and fast laws which govern the world we learnt by knocking up against them.

Satya had told us that, unless one was very expert, getting into a railway carriage was a terribly dangerous affair—the least slip, and it was all up. Then, again, a fellow had to hold on to his seat with all his might, otherwise the jolt at starting was so tremendous there was no telling where one would get thrown off to. So when we got to the railway station I was all a-quiver. So easily did we get into our compartment, however, that I felt sure the worst was yet to come. And when, at length, we made an absurdly smooth start, without any semblance of adventure, I felt woefully disappointed.

The train sped on; the broad fields with their blue-green border trees, and the villages nestling in their shade flew past in a stream of pictures which melted away like a flood of mirages. It was evening when we reached Bolpur. As I got into the palanquin I closed my eyes. I wanted to preserve the whole of the wonderful vision to be unfolded before my waking eyes in the morning light. The freshness of the experience would be spoilt, I feared, by incomplete glimpses caught in the vagueness of the dusk.

When I woke at dawn my heart was thrilling tremulously as I stepped outside. My predecessor had told me that Bolpur had one feature which was to be found nowhere else in the world. This was the path leading from the main buildings to the servants' quarters which, though not covered over in any way, did not allow a ray of the sun or a drop of rain to touch anybody passing along it. I started to hunt for this wonderful path, but the reader will perhaps not wonder at my failure to find it to this day.

Town bred as I was, I had never seen a rice-field, and I had a charming portrait of the cowherd boy, of whom we had read, pictured on the canvas of my imagination. I had heard from Satya that the Bolpur house was surrounded by fields of ripening rice, and that playing in these with cowherd boys was an everyday affair, of which the plucking, cooking and eating of the rice was the crowning feature. I eagerly looked about me. But where, oh, where was the rice-field on all that barren heath? Cowherd boys there might have been somewhere

about, yet how to distinguish them from any other boys, that was the question!

However it did not take me long to get over what I could not see,—what I did see was quite enough. There was no servant rule here, and the only ring which encircled me was the blue of the horizon which the presiding goddess of these solitudes had drawn round them. Within this I was free to move about as I chose.

Though I was yet a mere child my father did not place any restriction on my wanderings. In the hollows of the sandy soil the rainwater had ploughed deep furrows, carving out miniature mountain ranges full of red gravel and pebbles of various shapes through which ran tiny streams, revealing the geography of Lilliput. From this region I would gather in the lap of my tunic many curious pieces of stone and take the collection to my father. He never made light of my labours. On the contrary he waxed enthusiastic.

“How wonderful!” he exclaimed. “Wherever did you get all these?”

“There are many more, thousands and thousands!” I burst out. “I could bring as many every day.”

“That *would* be nice!” he replied. “Why not decorate my little hill with them?”

An attempt had been made to dig a tank in the garden, but the subsoil water proving too low, it had been abandoned, unfinished, with the excavated earth left piled up into a hillock. On the top of this height my father used to sit for his morning prayer, and as he sat the sun would rise at the edge of the undulating expanse which stretched away to the eastern horizon in front of him. This was the hill he asked me to decorate.

I was very troubled, on leaving Bolpur, that I could not carry away with me my store of stones. It is still difficult for me to realise that I have no absolute claim to keep up a close relationship with things, merely because I have gathered them together. If my fate had granted me the prayer, which I had pressed with such insistence, and undertaken that I should carry this load of stones about with me forever, then I should scarcely have had the hardihood to laugh at it today.

In one of the ravines I came upon a hollow full of spring water which overflowed as a little rivulet, where sported tiny fish battling their way up the current.

“I’ve found such a lovely spring,” I told my father. “Couldn’t we get our bathing and drinking water from there?”

“The very thing,” he agreed, sharing my rapture, and gave orders for our water supply to be drawn from that spring.

I was never tired of roaming about among those miniature hills and dales in hopes of lighting on something never known before. I was the Livingstone of this undiscovered land which looked as if seen through the wrong end of a

telescope. Everything there, the dwarf date palms, the scrubby wild plums and the stunted jambolans, was in keeping with the miniature mountain ranges, the little rivulet and the tiny fish I had discovered.

Probably in order to teach me to be careful my father placed a little small change in my charge and required me to keep an account of it. He also entrusted me with the duty of winding his valuable gold watch for him. He overlooked the risk of damage in his desire to train me to a sense of responsibility. When we went out together for our morning walk he would ask me to give alms to any beggars we came across. But I never could render him a proper account at the end of it. One day my balance was larger than the account warranted.

"I really must make you my cashier," observed my father. "Money seems to have a way of growing in your hands!"

That watch of his I wound up with such indefatigable zeal that it had very soon to be sent to the watchmaker's in Calcutta.

I am reminded of the time when, later in life, I was appointed to manage the estate and had to lay before my father, owing to his failing eye-sight, a statement of accounts on the second or third of every month. I had first to read out the totals under each head, and if he had any doubts on any point he would ask for the details. If I made any attempt to slur over or keep out of sight any item which I feared he would not like, it was sure to come out. So these first few days of the month were very anxious ones for me.

As I have said, my father had the habit of keeping everything clearly before his mind,—whether figures of accounts, or ceremonial arrangements, or additions or alterations to property. He had never seen the new prayer hall built at Bolpur, and yet he was familiar with every detail of it from questioning those who came to see him after a visit to Bolpur. He had an extraordinary memory, and when once he got hold of a fact it never escaped him.

My father had marked his favourite verses in his copy of the *Bhagavad Gita*. He asked me to copy these out, with their translation, for him. At home, I had been a boy of no account, but here, when these important functions were entrusted to me, I felt the glory of the situation.

By this time I was rid of my blue manuscript book and had got hold of a bound volume of one of Lett's diaries. I now saw to it that my poetising should not lack any of the dignity of outward circumstance. It was not only a case of writing poems, but of holding myself forth as a poet before my own imagination. So when I wrote poetry at Bolpur I loved to do it sprawling under a young coconut palm. This seemed to me the true poetic way. Resting thus on the hard unturfed gravel in the burning heat of the day I composed a martial ballad on the "Defeat

of King Prithwi." In spite of the superabundance of its martial spirit, it could not escape an early death. That bound volume of Lett's diary has now followed the way of its elder sister, the blue manuscript book, leaving no address behind.

We left Bolpur and making short halts on the way at Sahebganj, Dinapore, Allahabad and Cawnpore we stopped at last at Amritsar.

An incident on the way remains engraved on my memory. The train had stopped at some big station. The ticket examiner came and punched our tickets. He looked at me curiously as if he had some doubt which he did not care to express. He went off and came back with a companion. Both of them fidgetted about for a time near the door of our compartment and then again retired. At last came the station master himself. He looked at my half-ticket and then asked: "Is not the boy over twelve?"

"No," said my father.

I was then only eleven, but looked older than my age.

"You must pay the full fare for him," said the station master.

My father's eyes flashed as, without a word, he took out a currency note from his box and handed it to the station master. When they brought my father his change he flung it disdainfully back at them, while the station master stood abashed at this exposure of the meanness of his implied doubt.

The golden temple of Amritsar comes back to me like a dream. Many a morning have I accompanied my father to this *Gurudarbar* of the Sikhs in the middle of the lake. There the sacred chanting resounds continually. My father, seated amidst the throng of worshippers, would sometimes add his voice to the hymn of praise, and finding a stranger joining in their devotions they would wax enthusiastically cordial, and we would return loaded with the sanctified offerings of sugar crystals and other sweets.

One day my father invited one of the chanting choir to our place and got him to sing us some of their sacred songs. The man went away probably more than satisfied with the reward he received. The result was that we had to take stern measures of self-defence,—such an insistent army of singers invaded us. When they found our house impregnable, the musicians began to waylay us in the streets. And as we went out for our walk in the morning, every now and then would appear a *Tambura*, ⁴⁶ slung over a shoulder, at which we felt like game birds at the sight of the muzzle of the hunter's gun. Indeed, so wary did we become that the twang of the *Tambura*, from a distance, scared us away and utterly failed to bag us.

⁴⁶. An instrument on which the keynote is strummed to accompany singing.

When evening fell, my father would sit out in the verandah facing the garden. I

would then be summoned to sing to him. The moon has risen; its beams, passing though the trees, have fallen on the verandah floor; I am singing in the *Behaga* mode: O Companion in the darkest passage of life...

My father with bowed head and clasped hands is intently listening. I can recall this evening scene even now.

I have told of my father's amusement on hearing from Srikantha Babu of my maiden attempt at a devotional poem. I am reminded how, later, I had my recompense. On the occasion of one of our *Magh* festivals several of the hymns were of my composition. One of them was "The eye sees thee not, who art the pupil of every eye..."

My father was then bed-ridden at Chinsurah. He sent for me and my brother Jyoti. He asked my brother to accompany me on the harmonium and got me to sing all my hymns one after the other,—some of them I had to sing twice over. When I had finished he said: "If the king of the country had known the language and could appreciate its literature, he would doubtless have rewarded the poet. Since that is not so, I suppose I must do it." With which he handed me a cheque.

My father had brought with him some volumes of the Peter Parley series from which to teach me. He selected the life of Benjamin Franklin to begin with. He thought it would read like a story book and be both entertaining and instructive. But he found out his mistake soon after we began it. Benjamin Franklin was much too business-like a person. The narrowness of his calculated morality disgusted my father. In some cases he would get so impatient at the worldly prudence of Franklin that he could not help using strong words of denunciation. Before this I had nothing to do with Sanskrit beyond getting some rules of grammar by rote. My father started me on the second Sanskrit reader at one bound, leaving me to learn the declensions as we went on. The advance I had made in Bengali ⁴⁷ stood me in good stead. My father also encouraged me to try Sanskrit composition from the very outset. With the vocabulary acquired from my Sanskrit reader I built up grandiose compound words with a profuse sprinkling of sonorous 'm's and 'n's making altogether a most diabolical medley of the language of the gods. But my father never scoffed at my temerity.

⁴⁷. A large proportion of words in the literary Bengali are derived unchanged from the Sanskrit.

Then there were the readings from Proctor's Popular Astronomy which my father explained to me in easy language and which I then rendered into Bengali.

Among the books which my father had brought for his own use, my attention would be mostly attracted by a ten or twelve volume edition of Gibbon's Rome. They looked remarkably dry. "Being a boy," I thought, "I am helpless and read many books because I have to. But why should a grown up person, who need not

read unless he pleases, bother himself so?"

15. At the Himalayas

We stayed about a month in Amritsar, and, towards the middle of April, started for the Dalhousie Hills. The last few days at Amritsar seemed as if they would never pass, the call of the Himalayas was so strong upon me.

The terraced hill sides, as we went up in a *jhampān*, were all aflame with the beauty of the flowering spring crops. Every morning we would make a start after our bread and milk, and before sunset take shelter for the night in the next staging bungalow. My eyes had no rest the livelong day, so great was my fear lest anything should escape them. Wherever, at a turn of the road into a gorge, the great forest trees were found clustering closer, and from underneath their shade a little waterfall trickling out, like a little daughter of the hermitage playing at the feet of hoary sages wrapt in meditation, babbling its way over the black moss-covered rocks, there the *jhampān* bearers would put down their burden, and take a rest. Why, oh why, had we to leave such spots behind, cried my thirsting heart, why could we not stay on there forever?

This is the great advantage of the first vision: the mind is not then aware that there are many more such to come. When this comes to be known to that calculating organ it promptly tries to make a saving in its expenditure of attention. It is only when it believes something to be rare that the mind ceases to be miserly in assigning values. So in the streets of Calcutta I sometimes imagine myself a foreigner, and only then do I discover how much is to be seen, which is lost so long as its full value in attention is not paid. It is the hunger to really see which drives people to travel to strange places.

My father left his little cash-box in my charge. He had no reason to imagine that I was the fittest custodian of the considerable sums he kept in it for use on the way. He would certainly have felt safer with it in the hands of Kishori, his attendant. So I can only suppose he wanted to train me to the responsibility. One day as we reached the staging bungalow, I forgot to make it over to him and left it lying on a table. This earned me a reprimand.

Every time we got down at the end of a stage, my father had chairs placed for us outside the bungalow and there we sat. As dusk came on the stars blazed out wonderfully through the clear mountain atmosphere, and my father showed me the constellations or treated me to an astronomical discourse.

The house we had taken at Bakrota was on the highest hill-top. Though it was

nearing May it was still bitterly cold there, so much so that on the shady side of the hill the winter frosts had not yet melted.

My father was not at all nervous about allowing me to wander about freely even here. Some way below our house there stretched a spur thickly wooded with Deodars. Into this wilderness I would venture alone with my iron-spiked staff. These lordly forest trees, with their huge shadows, towering there like so many giants—what immense lives had they lived through the centuries! And yet this boy of only the other day was crawling round about their trunks unchallenged. I seemed to feel a presence, the moment I stepped into their shade, as of the solid coolness of some old-world saurian, and the checkered light and shade on the leafy mould seemed like its scales.

My room was at one end of the house. Lying on my bed I could see, through the uncurtained windows, the distant snowy peaks shimmering dimly in the starlight. Sometimes, at what hour I could not make out, I, half awakened, would see my father, wrapped in a red shawl, with a lighted lamp in his hand, softly passing by to the glazed verandah where he sat at his devotions. After one more sleep I would find him at my bedside, rousing me with a push, before yet the darkness of night had passed. This was my appointed hour for memorising Sanscrit declensions. What an excruciatingly wintry awakening from the caressing warmth of my blankets!

By the time the sun rose, my father, after his prayers, finished with me our morning milk, and then, I standing at his side, he would once more hold communion with God, chanting the Upanishads.

Then we would go out for a walk. But how should I keep pace with him? Many an older person could not! So, after a while, I would give it up and scramble back home through some short cut up the mountain side.

After my father's return I had an hour of English lessons. After ten o'clock came the bath in icy-cold water; it was no use asking the servants to temper it with even a jugful of hot water without my father's permission. To give me courage my father would tell of the unbearably freezing baths he had himself been through in his younger days.

Another penance was the drinking of milk. My father was very fond of milk and could take quantities of it. But whether it was a failure to inherit this capacity, or that the unfavourable environment of which I have told proved the stronger, my appetite for milk was grievously wanting. Unfortunately we used to have our milk together. So I had to throw myself on the mercy of the servants; and to their human kindness (or frailty) I was indebted for my goblet being thenceforth more than half full of foam.

After our midday meal lessons began again. But this was more than flesh and blood could stand. My outraged morning sleep *would* have its revenge and I would be toppling over with uncontrollable drowsiness. Nevertheless, no sooner did my father take pity on my plight and let me off, than my sleepiness was off likewise. Then ho! for the mountains.

Staff in hand I would often wander away from one peak to another, but my father did not object. To the end of his life, I have observed, he never stood in the way of our independence. Many a time have I said or done things repugnant alike to his taste and his judgment; with a word he could have stopped me; but he preferred to wait till the prompting to refrain came from within. A passive acceptance by us of the correct and the proper did not satisfy him; he wanted us to love truth with our whole hearts; he knew that mere acquiescence without love is empty. He also knew that truth, if strayed from, can be found again, but a forced or blind acceptance of it from the outside effectually bars the way in.

In my early youth I had conceived a fancy to journey along the Grand Trunk Road, right up to Peshawar, in a bullock cart. No one else supported the scheme, and doubtless there was much to be urged against it as a practical proposition. But when I discoursed on it to my father he was sure it was a splendid idea—travelling by railroad was not worth the name! With which observation he proceeded to recount to me his own adventurous wanderings on foot and horseback. Of any chance of discomfort or peril he had not a word to say.

Another time, when I had just been appointed Secretary of the Adi Brahma Samaj, I went over to my father, at his Park Street residence, and informed him that I did not approve of the practice of only Brahmins conducting divine service to the exclusion of other castes. He unhesitatingly gave me permission to correct this if I could. When I got the authority I found I lacked the power. I was able to discover imperfections but could not create perfection! Where were the men? Where was the strength in me to attract the right man? Had I the means to build in the place of what I might break? Till the right man comes any form is better than none—this, I felt, must have been my father's view of the existing order. But he did not for a moment try to discourage me by pointing out the difficulties.

As he allowed me to wander about the mountains at my will, so in the quest for truth he left me free to select my path. He was not deterred by the danger of my making mistakes, he was not alarmed at the prospect of my encountering sorrow. He held up a standard, not a disciplinary rod.

I would often talk to my father of home. Whenever I got a letter from anyone at home I hastened to show it to him. I verily believe I was thus the means of giving him many a picture he could have got from none else. My father also let

me read letters to him from my elder brothers. This was his way of teaching me how I ought to write to him; for he by no means underrated the importance of outward forms and ceremonial.

I am reminded of how in one of my second brother's letters he was complaining in somewhat sanscritised phraseology of being worked to death tied by the neck to his post of duty. My father asked me to explain the sentiment. I did it in my way, but he thought a different explanation would fit better. My overweening conceit made me stick to my guns and argue the point with him at length. Another would have shut me up with a snub, but my father patiently heard me out and took pains to justify his view to me.

My father would sometimes tell me funny stories. He had many an anecdote of the gilded youth of his time. There were some exquisites for whose delicate skins the embroidered borders of even Dacca muslins were too coarse, so that to wear muslins with the border torn off became, for a time, the tip-top thing to do.

I was also highly amused to hear from my father for the first time the story of the milkman who was suspected of watering his milk, and the more men one of his customers detailed to look after his milking the bluer the fluid became, till, at last, when the customer himself interviewed him and asked for an explanation, the milkman avowed that if more superintendents had to be satisfied it would only make the milk fit to breed fish!

After I had thus spent a few months with him my father sent me back home with his attendant Kishori.

Part 4

16. My Return

The chains of the rigorous regime which had bound me snapped for good when I set out from home. On my return I gained an accession of rights. In my case my very nearness had so long kept me out of mind; now that I had been out of sight I came back into view.

I got a foretaste of appreciation while still on the return journey. Travelling alone as I was, with an attendant, brimming with health and spirits, and conspicuous with my gold-worked cap, all the English people I came across in the train made much of me.

When I arrived it was not merely a home-coming from travel, it was also a return from my exile in the servants' quarters to my proper place in the inner apartments. Whenever the inner household assembled in my mother's room I now occupied a seat of honour. And she who was then the youngest bride of our house lavished on me a wealth of affection and regard.

In infancy the loving care of woman is to be had without the asking, and, being as much a necessity as light and air, is as simply accepted without any conscious response; rather does the growing child often display an eagerness to free itself from the encircling web of woman's solicitude. But the unfortunate creature who is deprived of this in its proper season is beggared indeed. This had been my plight. So after being brought up in the servants' quarters when I suddenly came in for a profusion of womanly affection, I could hardly remain unconscious of it.

In the days when the inner apartments were as yet far away from me, they were the elysium of my imagination. The *zenana*, which from an outside view is a place of confinement, for me was the abode of all freedom. Neither school nor Pandit were there; nor, it seemed to me, did anybody have to do what they did not want to. Its secluded leisure had something mysterious about it; one played about, or did as one liked and had not to render an account of one's doings. Specially so with my youngest sister, to whom, though she attended Nilkamal Pandit's class with us, it seemed to make no difference in his behaviour whether she did her lessons well or ill. Then again, while, by ten o'clock, we had to hurry through our breakfast and be ready for school, she, with her queue dangling behind, walked unconcernedly away, with inwards, tantalising us to distraction.

And when the new bride, adorned with her necklace of gold, came into our house, the mystery of the inner apartments deepened. She, who came from

outside and yet became one of us, who was unknown and yet our own, attracted me strangely—with her I burned to make friends. But if by much contriving I managed to draw near, my youngest sister would hustle me off with: “What d’you boys want here—get away outside.” The insult added to the disappointment cut me to the quick. Through the glass doors of their cabinets one could catch glimpses of all manner of curious playthings—creations of porcelain and glass—gorgeous in colouring and ornamentation. We were not deemed worthy even to touch them, much less could we muster up courage to ask for any to play with. Nevertheless these rare and wonderful objects, as they were to us boys, served to tinge with an additional attraction the lure of the inner apartments.

Thus had I been kept at arm’s length with repeated rebuffs. As the outer world, so, for me, the interior, was unattainable. Wherefore the impressions of it that I did get appeared to me like pictures.

After nine in the evening, my lessons with Aghore Babu over, I am retiring within for the night. A murky flickering lantern is hanging in the long venetian-screened corridor leading from the outer to the inner apartments. At its end this passage turns into a flight of four or five steps, to which the light does not reach, and down which I pass into the galleries running round the first inner quadrangle. A shaft of moonlight slants from the eastern sky into the western angle of these verandahs, leaving the rest in darkness. In this patch of light the maids have gathered and are squatting close together, with legs outstretched, rolling cotton waste into lamp-wicks, and chatting in undertones of their village homes. Many such pictures are indelibly printed on my memory.

Then after our supper, the washing of our hands and feet on the verandah before stretching ourselves on the ample expanse of our bed; whereupon one of the nurses Tinkari or Sankari comes and sits by our heads and softly croons to us the story of the prince travelling on and on over the lonely moor, and, as it comes to an end, silence falls on the room. With my face to the wall I gaze at the black and white patches, made by the plaster of the walls fallen off here and there, showing faintly in the dim light; and out of these I conjure up many a fantastic image as I drop off to sleep. And sometimes, in the middle of the night, I hear through my half-broken sleep the shouts of old Swarup, the watchman, going his rounds from verandah to verandah.

Then came the new order, when I got in profusion from this inner unknown dreamland of my fancies the recognition for which I had all along been pining; when that which naturally should have come day by day was suddenly made good to me with accumulated arrears. I cannot say that my head was not turned.

The little traveller was full of the story of his travels, and, with the strain of each repetition, the narrative got looser and looser till it utterly refused to fit into the facts. Like everything else, alas, a story also gets stale and the glory of the teller suffers likewise; that is why he has to add fresh colouring every time to keep up its freshness.

After my return from the hills I was the principal speaker at my mother's open air gatherings on the roof terrace in the evenings. The temptation to become famous in the eyes of one's mother is as difficult to resist as such fame is easy to earn. While I was at the Normal School, when I first came across the information in some reader that the Sun was hundreds and thousands of times as big as the Earth, I at once disclosed it to my mother. It served to prove that he who was small to look at might yet have a considerable amount of bigness about him. I used also to recite to her the scraps of poetry used as illustrations in the chapter on prosody or rhetoric of our Bengali grammar. Now I retailed at her evening gatherings the astronomical tit-bits I had gleaned from Proctor.

My father's follower Kishori belonged at one time to a band of reciters of Dasarathi's jingling versions of the Epics. While we were together in the hills he often said to me: "Oh, my little brother, [48](#) if I only had had you in our troupe we could have got up a splendid performance." This would open up to me a tempting picture of wandering as a minstrel boy from place to place, reciting and singing. I learnt from him many of the songs in his repertoire and these were in even greater request than my talks about the photosphere of the Sun or the many moons of Saturn.

[48.](#) Servants call the master and mistress father, and mother, and the children brothers and sisters.

But the achievement of mine which appealed most to my mother was that while the rest of the inmates of the inner apartments had to be content with Krittivasa's Bengali rendering of the Ramayana, I had been reading with my father the original of Maharshi Valmiki himself, Sanscrit metre and all. "Read me some of that *Ramayana*, do!" she said, overjoyed at this news which I had given her.

Alas, my reading of Valmiki had been limited to the short extract from his Ramayana given in my Sanskrit reader, and even that I had not fully mastered. Moreover, on looking over it now, I found that my memory had played me false and much of what I thought I knew had become hazy. But I lacked the courage to plead "I have forgotten" to the eager mother awaiting the display of her son's marvellous talents; so that, in the reading I gave, a large divergence occurred between Valmiki's intention and my explanation. That tender-hearted sage, from his seat in heaven, must have forgiven the temerity of the boy seeking the glory

of his mother's approbation, but not so Madhusudan, [49](#) the taker down of Pride.

[49](#). Name of Vishnu in his aspect of slayer of the proud demon, Madhu.

My mother, unable to contain her feelings at my extraordinary exploit, wanted all to share her admiration. "You must read this to Dwijendra," (my eldest brother), she said.

"In for it!" thought I, as I put forth all the excuses I could think of, but my mother would have none of them. She sent for my brother Dwijendra, and, as soon as he arrived, greeted him, with: "Just hear Rabi read Valmiki's Ramayan, how splendidly he does it."

It had to be done! But Madhusudan relented and let me off with just a taste of his pride-reducing power. My brother must have been called away while busy with some literary work of his own. He showed no anxiety to hear me render the Sanscrit into Bengali, and as soon as I had read out a few verses he simply remarked "Very good" and walked away.

After my promotion to the inner apartments I felt it all the more difficult to resume my school life. I resorted to all manner of subterfuges to escape the Bengal Academy. Then they tried putting me at St. Xavier's. But the result was no better.

My elder brothers, after a few spasmodic efforts, gave up all hopes of me—they even ceased to scold me. One day my eldest sister said: "We had all hoped Rabi would grow up to be a man, but he has disappointed us the worst." I felt that my value in the social world was distinctly depreciating; nevertheless I could not make up my mind to be tied to the eternal grind of the school mill which, divorced as it was from all life and beauty, seemed such a hideously cruel combination of hospital and gaol.

One precious memory of St. Xavier's I still hold fresh and pure—the memory of its teachers. Not that they were all of the same excellence. In particular, in those who taught in our class I could discern no reverential resignation of spirit. They were in nowise above the teaching-machine variety of school masters. As it is, the educational engine is remorselessly powerful; when to it is coupled the stone mill of the outward forms of religion the heart of youth is crushed dry indeed. This power-propelled grindstone type we had at St. Xavier's. Yet, as I say, I possess a memory which elevates my impression of the teachers there to an ideal plane.

This is the memory of Father DePeneranda. He had very little to do with us—if I remember right he had only for a while taken the place of one of the masters of our class. He was a Spaniard and seemed to have an impediment in speaking English. It was perhaps for this reason that the boys paid but little heed to what

he was saying. It seemed to me that this inattentiveness of his pupils hurt him, but he bore it meekly day after day. I know not why, but my heart went out to him in sympathy. His features were not handsome, but his countenance had for me a strange attraction. Whenever I looked on him his spirit seemed to be in prayer, a deep peace to pervade him within and without.

We had half-an-hour for writing our copybooks; that was a time when, pen in hand, I used to become absent-minded and my thoughts wandered hither and thither. One day Father DePeneranda was in charge of this class. He was pacing up and down behind our benches. He must have noticed more than once that my pen was not moving. All of a sudden he stopped behind my seat. Bending over me he gently laid his hand on my shoulder and tenderly inquired: "Are you not well, Tagore?" It was only a simple question, but one I have never been able to forget.

I cannot speak for the other boys but I felt in him the presence of a great soul, and even today the recollection of it seems to give me a passport into the silent seclusion of the temple of God.

There was another old Father whom all the boys loved. This was Father Henry. He taught in the higher classes; so I did not know him well. But one thing about him I remember. He knew Bengali. He once asked Nirada, a boy in his class, the derivation of his name. Poor Nirada ⁵⁰ had so long been supremely easy in mind about himself—the derivation of his name, in particular, had never troubled him in the least; so that he was utterly unprepared to answer this question. And yet, with so many abstruse and unknown words in the dictionary, to be worsted by one's own name would have been as ridiculous a mishap as getting run over by one's own carriage, so Nirada unblushingly replied: "Ni—privative, *rode*—sun-rays; thence Nirode—that which causes an absence of the sun's rays!"

⁵⁰. Nirada is a Sanscrit word meaning *cloud*, being a compound of *nira* = water and *da* = giver. In Bengali it is pronounced *nirode*.

17. Home Studies

Gyan Babu, son of Pandit Vedantavagish, was now our tutor at home. When he found he could not secure my attention for the school course, he gave up the attempt as hopeless and went on a different tack. He took me through Kalidas's "Birth of the War-god," translating it to me as we went on. He also read Macbeth to me, first explaining the text in Bengali, and then confining me to the school room till I had rendered the day's reading into Bengali verse. In this way he got me to translate the whole play. I was fortunate enough to lose this translation and so am relieved to that extent of the burden of my *karma*.

It was Pandit Ramsarvaswa's duty to see to the progress of our Sanskrit. He likewise gave up the fruitless task of teaching grammar to his unwilling pupil, and read Sakuntala with me instead. One day he took it into his head to show my translation of Macbeth to Pandit Vidyasagar and took me over to his house.

Rajkrishna Mukherji had called at the time and was seated with him. My heart went pit-a-pat as I entered the great Pandit's study, packed full of books; nor did his austere visage assist in reviving my courage. Nevertheless, as this was the first time I had had such a distinguished audience, my desire to win renown was strong within me. I returned home, I believe, with some reason for an access of enthusiasm. As for Rajkrishna Babu, he contented himself with admonishing me to be careful to keep the language and metre of the Witches' parts different from that of the human characters.

During my boyhood Bengali literature was meagre in body, and I think I must have finished all the readable and unreadable books that there were at the time. Juvenile literature in those days had not evolved a distinct type of its own—but that I am sure did me no harm. The watery stuff into which literary nectar is now diluted for being served up to the young takes full account of their childishness, but none of them as growing human beings. Children's books should be such as can partly be understood by them and partly not. In our childhood we read every available book from one end to the other; and both what we understood, and what we did not, went on working within us. That is how the world itself reacts on the child consciousness. The child makes its own what it understands, while that which is beyond leads it on a step forward.

When Dinabandhu Mitra's satires came out I was not of an age for which they were suitable. A kinswoman of ours was reading a copy, but no entreaties of

mine could induce her to lend it to me. She used to keep it under lock and key. Its inaccessibility made me want it all the more and I threw out the challenge that read the book I must and would.

One afternoon she was playing cards, and her keys, tied to a corner of her *sari*, hung over her shoulder. I had never paid any attention to cards, in fact I could not stand card games. But my behaviour that day would hardly have borne this out, so engrossed was I in their playing. At last, in the excitement of one side being about to make a score, I seized my opportunity and set about untying the knot which held the keys. I was not skilful, and moreover excited and hasty and so got caught. The owner of the *sari* and of the keys took the fold off her shoulder with a smile, and laid the keys on her lap as she went on with the game.

Then I hit on a stratagem. My kinswoman was fond of *pan*, [51](#) and I hastened to place some before her. This entailed her rising later on to get rid of the chewed *pan*, and, as she did so, her keys fell off her lap and were replaced over her shoulder. This time they got stolen, the culprit got off, and the book got read! Its owner tried to scold me, but the attempt was not a success, we both laughed so.

[51.](#) Betel-leaf and spices.

Dr. Rajendralal Mitra used to edit an illustrated monthly miscellany. My third brother had a bound annual volume of it in his bookcase. This I managed to secure and the delight of reading it through, over and over again, still comes back to me. Many a holiday noontide has passed with me stretched on my back on my bed, that square volume on my breast, reading about the Narwhal whale, or the curiosities of justice as administered by the Kazis of old, or the romantic story of Krishna-kumari.

Why do we not have such magazines now-a-days? We have philosophical and scientific articles on the one hand, and insipid stories and travels on the other, but no such unpretentious miscellanies which the ordinary person can read in comfort—such as Chambers's or Cassell's or the Strand in England—which supply the general reader with a simple, but satisfying fare and are of the greatest use to the greatest number.

I came across another little periodical in my young days called the *Abodhabandhu* (ignorant man's friend). I found a collection of its monthly numbers in my eldest brother's library and devoured them day after day, seated on the doorsill of his study, facing a bit of terrace to the South. It was in the pages of this magazine that I made my first acquaintance with the poetry of Viharilal Chakravarti. His poems appealed to me the most of all that I read at the time. The artless flute-strains of his lyrics awoke within me the music of fields

and forest-glades.

Into these same pages I have wept many a tear over a pathetic translation of Paul and Virginie. That wonderful sea, the breeze-stirred cocoanut forests on its shore, and the slopes beyond lively with the gambols of mountain goats,—a delightfully refreshing mirage they conjured up on that terraced roof in Calcutta. And oh! The romantic courting that went on in the forest paths of that secluded island, between the Bengali boy reader and little Virginie with the many-coloured kerchief round her head!

Then came Bankim's *Bangadarsan*, taking the Bengali heart by storm. It was bad enough to have to wait till the next monthly number was out, but to be kept waiting further till my elders had done with it was simply intolerable! Now he who will may swallow at a mouthful the whole of Chandrashekhar or Bishabriksha but the process of longing and anticipating, month after month; of spreading over the long intervals the concentrated joy of each short reading, revolving every instalment over and over in the mind while watching and waiting for the next; the combination of satisfaction with unsatisfied craving, of burning curiosity with its appeasement; these long drawn out delights of going through the original serial none will ever taste again.

The compilations from the old poets by Sarada Mitter and Akshay Sarkar were also of great interest to me. Our elders were subscribers, but not very regular readers, of these series, so that it was not difficult for me to get at them. Vidyapati's quaint and corrupt Maithili language attracted me all the more because of its unintelligibility. I tried to make out his sense without the help of the compiler's notes, jotting down in my own note book all the more obscure words with their context as many times as they occurred. I also noted grammatical peculiarities according to my lights.

18. My Home Environment

One great advantage which I enjoyed in my younger days was the literary and artistic atmosphere which pervaded our house. I remember how, when I was quite a child, I would be leaning against the verandah railings which overlooked the detached building comprising the reception rooms. These rooms would be lighted up every evening. Splendid carriages would draw up under the portico, and visitors would be constantly coming and going. What was happening I could not very well make out, but would keep staring at the rows of lighted casements from my place in the darkness. The intervening space was not great but the gulf between my infant world and these lights was immense.

My elder cousin Ganendra had just got a drama written by Pandit Tarkaratna and was having it staged in the house. His enthusiasm for literature and the fine arts knew no bounds. He was the centre of the group who seem to have been almost consciously striving to bring about from every side the renascence which we see today. A pronounced nationalism in dress, literature, music, art and the drama had awakened in and around him. He was a keen student of the history of different countries and had begun but could not complete a historical work in Bengali. He had translated and published the Sanskrit drama, Vikramorvasi, and many a well-known hymn is his composition. He may be said to have given us the lead in writing patriotic poems and songs. This was in the days when the Hindu Mela was an annual institution and there his song “Ashamed am I to sing of India’s glories” used to be sung.

I was still a child when my cousin Ganendra died in the prime of his youth, but for those who have once beheld him it is impossible to forget his handsome, tall and stately figure. He had an irresistible social influence. He could draw men round him and keep them bound to him; while his powerful attraction was there, disruption was out of the question. He was one of those—a type peculiar to our country—who, by their personal magnetism, easily establish themselves in the centre of their family or village. In any other country, where large political, social or commercial groups are being formed, such would as naturally become national leaders. The power of organising a large number of men into a corporate group depends on a special kind of genius. Such genius in our country runs to waste, a waste, as pitiful, it seems to me, as that of pulling down a star from the firmament for use as a lucifer match.

I remember still better his younger brother, my cousin Gunendra. [52](#) He likewise kept the house filled with his personality. His large, gracious heart embraced alike relatives, friends, guests and dependants. Whether in his broad south verandah, or on the lawn by the fountain, or at the tank-edge on the fishing platform, he presided over self-invited gatherings, like hospitality incarnate. His wide appreciation of art and talent kept him constantly radiant with enthusiasm. New ideas of festivity or frolic, theatricals or other entertainments, found in him a ready patron, and with his help would flourish and find fruition.

[52.](#) Father of the well-known artists Gaganendra and Abanindra. *Ed.*

We were too young then to take any part in these doings, but the waves of merriment and life to which they gave rise came and beat at the doors of our curiosity. I remember how a burlesque composed by my eldest brother was once being rehearsed in my cousin's big drawing room. From our place against the verandah railings of our house we could hear, through the open windows opposite, roars of laughter mixed with the strains of a comic song, and would also occasionally catch glimpses of Akshay Mazumdar's extraordinary antics. We could not gather exactly what the song was about, but lived in hopes of being able to find that out sometime.

I recall how a trifling circumstance earned for me the special regard of cousin Gunendra. Never had I got a prize at school except once for good conduct. Of the three of us my nephew Satya was the best at his lessons. He once did well at some examination and was awarded a prize. As we came home I jumped off the carriage to give the great news to my cousin who was in the garden. "Satya has got a prize" I shouted as I ran to him. He drew me to his knees with a smile. "And have *you* not got a prize?" he asked. "No," said I, "not I, it's Satya." My genuine pleasure at Satya's success seemed to touch my cousin particularly. He turned to his friends and remarked on it as a very creditable trait. I well remember how mystified I felt at this, for I had not thought of my feeling in that light. This prize that I got for not getting a prize did not do me good. There is no harm in making gifts to children, but they should not be rewards. It is not healthy for youngsters to be made self-conscious.

After the mid-day meal cousin Gunendra would attend the estate offices in our part of the house. The office room of our elders was a sort of club where laughter and conversation were freely mixed with matters of business. My cousin would recline on a couch, and I would seize some opportunity of edging up to him.

He usually told me stories from Indian History. I still remember the surprise with which I heard how Clive, after establishing British rule in India, went back

home and cut his own throat. On the one hand new history being made, on the other a tragic chapter hidden away in the mysterious darkness of a human heart. How could there be such dismal failure within and such brilliant success outside? This weighed heavily on my mind the whole day.

Some days cousin Gunendra would not be allowed to remain in any doubt as to the contents of my pocket. At the least encouragement out would come my manuscript book, unabashed. I need hardly state that my cousin was not a severe critic; in point of fact the opinions he expressed would have done splendidly as advertisements. None the less, when in any of my poetry my childishness became too obtrusive, he could not restrain his hearty "Ha! Ha!"

One day it was a poem on "Mother India" and as at the end of one line the only rhyme I could think of meant a cart, I had to drag in that cart in spite of there not being the vestige of a road by which it could reasonably arrive,—the insistent claims of rhyme would not hear of any excuses mere reason had to offer. The storm of laughter with which cousin Gunendra greeted it blew away the cart back over the same impossible path it had come by, and it has not been heard of since.

My eldest brother was then busy with his masterpiece "The Dream Journey," his cushion seat placed in the south verandah, a low desk before him. Cousin Gunendra would come and sit there for a time every morning. His immense capacity for enjoyment, like the breezes of spring, helped poetry to sprout. My eldest brother would go on alternately writing and reading out what he had written, his boisterous mirth at his own conceits making the verandah tremble. My brother wrote a great deal more than he finally used in his finished work, so fertile was his poetic inspiration. Like the super abounding mango flowerets which carpet the shade of the mango topes in spring time, the rejected pages of his "Dream Journey" were to be found scattered all over the house. Had anyone preserved them they would have been today a basketful of flowers adorning our Bengali literature.

Eavesdropping at doors and peeping round corners, we used to get our full share of this feast of poetry, so plentiful was it, with so much to spare. My eldest brother was then at the height of his wonderful powers; and from his pen surged, in untiring wave after wave, a tidal flood of poetic fancy, rhyme and expression, filling and overflowing its banks with an exuberantly joyful pæan of triumph. Did we quite understand "The Dream Journey"? But then did we need absolutely to understand in order to enjoy it? We might not have got at the wealth in the ocean depths—what could we have done with it if we had?—but we revelled in the delights of the waves on the shore; and how gaily, at their buffettings, did

our life-blood course through every vein and artery!

The more I think of that period the more I realise that we have no longer the thing called a *mujlis*. ⁵³ In our boyhood we beheld the dying rays of that intimate sociability which was characteristic of the last generation. Neighbourly feelings were then so strong that the *mujlis* was a necessity, and those who could contribute to its amenities were in great request. People now-a-days call on each other on business, or as a matter of social duty, but not to foregather by way of *mujlis*. They have not the time, nor are there the same intimate relations! What goings and comings we used to see, how merry were the rooms and verandahs with the hum of conversation and the snatches of laughter! The faculty our predecessors had of becoming the centre of groups and gatherings, of starting and keeping up animated and amusing gossip, has vanished. Men still come and go, but those same verandahs and rooms seem empty and deserted.

53. In Bengali this word has come to mean an informal uninvited gathering.

In those days everything from furniture to festivity was designed to be enjoyed by the many, so that whatever of pomp or magnificence there might have been did not savour of hauteur. These appendages have since increased in quantity, but they have become unfeeling, and know not the art of making high and low alike feel at home. The bare-bodied, the indigently clad, no longer have the right to use and occupy them, without a permit, on the strength of their smiling faces alone. Those whom we now-a-days seek to imitate in our house-building and furnishing, they have their own society, with its wide hospitality. The mischief with us is that we have lost what we had, but have not the means of building up afresh on the European standard, with the result that our home-life has become joyless. We still meet for business or political purposes, but never for the pleasure of simply meeting one another. We have ceased to contrive opportunities to bring men together simply because we love our fellow-men. I can imagine nothing more ugly than this social miserliness; and, when I look back on those whose ringing laughter, coming straight from their hearts, used to lighten for us the burden of household cares, they seem to have been visitors from some other world.

19. Literary Companions

There came to me in my boyhood a friend whose help in my literary progress was invaluable. Akshay Chowdhury was a school-fellow of my fourth brother. He was an M. A. in English Literature for which his love was as great as his proficiency therein. On the other hand he had an equal fondness for our older Bengali authors and Vaishnava Poets. He knew hundreds of Bengali songs of unknown authorship, and on these he would launch, with voice uplifted, regardless of tune, or consequence, or of the express disapproval of his hearers. Nor could anything, within him or without, prevent his loudly beating time to his own music, for which the nearest table or book served his nimble fingers to rap a vigorous tattoo on, to help to enliven the audience.

He was also one of those with an inordinate capacity for extracting enjoyment from all and sundry. He was as ready to absorb every bit of goodness in a thing as he was lavish in singing its praises. He had an extraordinary gift as a lightning composer of lyrics and songs of no mean merit, but in which he himself had no pride of authorship. He took no further notice of the heaps of scattered scraps of paper on which his pencil writings had been indited. He was as indifferent to his powers as they were prolific.

One of his longer poetic pieces was much appreciated when it appeared in the *Bangadarsan*, and I have heard his songs sung by many who knew nothing at all about their composer.

A genuine delight in literature is much rarer than erudition, and it was this enthusiastic enjoyment in Akshay Babu which used to awaken my own literary appreciation. He was as liberal in his friendships as in his literary criticisms. Among strangers he was as a fish out of water, but among friends discrepancies in wisdom or age made no difference to him. With us boys he was a boy. When he took his leave, late in the evening, from the *mujlis* of our elders, I would buttonhole and drag him to our school room. There, with undiminished geniality he would make himself the life and soul of our little gathering, seated on the top of our study table. On many such occasions I have listened to him going into a rapturous dissertation on some English poem; engaged him in some appreciative discussion, critical inquiry, or hot dispute; or read to him some of my own writings and been rewarded in return with praise unsparing.

My fourth brother Jyotirindra was one of the chief helpers in my literary and

emotional training. He was an enthusiast himself and loved to evoke enthusiasm in others. He did not allow the difference between our ages to be any bar to my free intellectual and sentimental intercourse with him. This great boon of freedom which he allowed me, none else would have dared to do; many even blamed him for it. His companionship made it possible for me to shake off my shrinking sensitiveness. It was as necessary for my soul after its rigorous repression during my infancy as are the monsoon clouds after a fiery summer.

But for such snapping of my shackles I might have become crippled for life. Those in authority are never tired of holding forth the possibility of the abuse of freedom as a reason for withholding it, but without that possibility freedom would not be really free. And the only way of learning how to use properly a thing is through its misuse. For myself, at least, I can truly say that what little mischief resulted from my freedom always led the way to the means of curing mischief. I have never been able to make my own anything which they tried to compel me to swallow by getting hold of me, physically or mentally, by the ears. Nothing but sorrow have I ever gained except when left freely to myself.

My brother Jyotirindra unreservedly let me go my own way to self-knowledge, and only since then could my nature prepare to put forth its thorns, it may be, but likewise its flowers. This experience of mine has led me to dread, not so much evil itself, as tyrannical attempts to create goodness. Of punitive police, political or moral, I have a wholesome horror. The state of slavery which is thus brought on is the worst form of cancer to which humanity is subject.

My brother at one time would spend days at his piano engrossed in the creation of new tunes. Showers of melody would stream from under his dancing fingers, while Akshay Babu and I, seated on either side, would be busy fitting words to the tunes as they grew into shape to help to hold them in our memories. [54](#) This is how I served my apprenticeship in the composition of songs.

[54.](#) Systems of notation were not then in use. One of the most popular of the present-day systems was subsequently devised by the writer's brother here mentioned. *Tr.*

While we were growing to boyhood music was largely cultivated in our family. This had the advantage of making it possible for me to imbibe it, without an effort, into my whole being. It had also the disadvantage of not giving me that technical mastery which the effort of learning step by step alone can give. Of what may be called proficiency in music, therefore, I acquired none.

Ever since my return from the Himalayas it was a case of my getting more freedom, more and more. The rule of the servants came to an end; I saw to it with many a device that the bonds of my school life were also loosened; nor to my home tutors did I give much scope. Gyan Babu, after taking me through

“The Birth of the War-god” and one or two other books in a desultory fashion, went off to take up a legal career. Then came Braja Babu. The first day he put me on to translate “The Vicar of Wakefield.” I found that I did not dislike the book; but when this encouraged him to make more elaborate arrangements for the advancement of my learning I made myself altogether scarce.

As I have said, my elders gave me up. Neither I nor they were troubled with any more hopes of my future. So I felt free to devote myself to filling up my manuscript book. And the writings which thus filled it were no better than could have been expected. My mind had nothing in it but hot vapour, and vapour-filled bubbles frothed and eddied round a vortex of lazy fancy, aimless and unmeaning. No forms were evolved, there was only the distraction of movement, a bubbling up, a bursting back into froth. What little of matter there was in it was not mine, but borrowed from other poets. What was my own was the restlessness, the seething tension within me. When motion has been born, while yet the balance of forces has not matured, then is there blind chaos indeed.

My sister-in-law ⁵⁵ was a great lover of literature. She did not read simply to kill time, but the Bengali books which she read filled her whole mind. I was a partner in her literary enterprises. She was a devoted admirer of “The Dream Journey.” So was I; the more particularly as, having been brought up in the atmosphere of its creation, its beauties had become intertwined with every fibre of my heart. Fortunately it was entirely beyond my power of imitation, so it never occurred to me to attempt anything like it.

55. The new bride of the house, wife of the writer’s fourth brother, above-mentioned. *Tr.*

“The Dream Journey” may be likened to a superb palace of Allegory, with innumerable halls, chambers, passages, corners and niches full of statuary and pictures, of wonderful design and workmanship; and in the grounds around gardens, bowers, fountains and shady nooks in profusion. Not only do poetic thought and fancy abound, but the richness and variety of language and expression is also marvellous. It is not a small thing, this creative power which can bring into being so magnificent a structure complete in all its artistic detail, and that is perhaps why the idea of attempting an imitation never occurred to me.

At this time Viharilal Chakravarti’s series of songs called *Sarada Mangal* were coming out in the *Arya Darsan*. My sister-in-law was greatly taken with the sweetness of these lyrics. Most of them she knew by heart. She used often to invite the poet to our house and had embroidered for him a cushion-seat with her own hands. This gave me the opportunity of making friends with him. He came to have a great affection for me, and I took to dropping in at his house at all times of the day, morning, noon or evening. His heart was as large as his body,

and a halo of fancy used to surround him like a poetic astral body which seemed to be his truer image. He was always full of true artistic joy, and whenever I have been to him I have breathed in my share of it. Often have I come upon him in his little room on the third storey, in the heat of noonday, sprawling on the cool polished cement floor, writing his poems. Mere boy though I was, his welcome was always so genuine and hearty that I never felt the least awkwardness in approaching him. Then, wrapt in his inspiration and forgetful of all surroundings, he would read out his poems or sing his songs to me. Not that he had much of the gift of song in his voice; but then he was not altogether tuneless, and one could get a fair idea of the intended melody. [56](#) When with eyes closed he raised his rich deep voice, its expressiveness made up for what it lacked in execution. I still seem to hear some of his songs as he sang them. I would also sometimes set his words to music and sing them to him.

[56.](#) It may be helpful to the foreign reader to explain that the expert singer of Indian music improvises more or less on the tune outline made over to him by the original composer, so that the latter need not necessarily do more than give a correct idea of such outline. *Tr.*

He was a great admirer of Valmiki and Kalidas. I remember how once after reciting a description of the Himalayas from Kalidas with the full strength of his voice, he said: "The succession of long [=a] sounds here is not an accident. The poet has deliberately repeated this sound all the way from *Devatatma* down to *Nagadhiraja* as assistance in realising the glorious expanse of the Himalayas."

At the time the height of my ambition was to become a poet like Vihari Babu. I might have even succeeded in working myself up to the belief that I was actually writing like him, but for my sister-in-law, his zealous devotee, who stood in the way. She would keep reminding me of a Sanskrit saying that the unworthy aspirant after poetic fame departs in jeers! Very possibly she knew that if my vanity was once allowed to get the upper hand it would be difficult afterwards to bring it under control. So neither my poetic abilities nor my powers of song readily received any praise from her; rather would she never let slip an opportunity of praising somebody else's singing at my expense; with the result that I gradually became quite convinced of the defects of my voice. Misgivings about my poetic powers also assailed me; but, as this was the only field of activity left in which I had any chance of retaining my self-respect, I could not allow the judgment of another to deprive me of all hope; moreover, so insistent was the spur within me that to stop my poetic adventure was a matter of sheer impossibility.

20. Publishing

My writings so far had been confined to the family circle. Then was started the monthly called the *Gyanankur*, Sprouting Knowledge, and, as befitted its name it secured an embryo poet as one of its contributors. It began to publish all my poetic ravings indiscriminately, and to this day I have, in a corner of my mind, the fear that, when the day of judgment comes for me, some enthusiastic literary police-agent will institute a search in the inmost *zenana* of forgotten literature, regardless of the claims of privacy, and bring these out before the pitiless public gaze.

My first prose writing also saw the light in the pages of the *Gyanankur*. It was a critical essay and had a bit of a history.

A book of poems had been published entitled *Bhubanmohini Pratibha*. [57](#) Akshay Babu in the *Sadharani* and Bhudeb Babu in the *Education Gazette* hailed this new poet with effusive acclamation. A friend of mine, older than myself, whose friendship dates from then, would come and show me letters he had received signed *Bhubanmohini*. He was one of those whom the book had captivated and used frequently to send reverential offerings of books or cloth [58](#) to the address of the reputed authoress.

[57](#). This would mean “the genius of Bhubanmohini” if that be taken as the author’s name.

[58](#). Gifts of cloth for use as wearing apparel are customary by way of ceremonial offerings of affection, respect or seasonable greeting.

Some of these poems were so wanting in restraint both of thought and language that I could not bear the idea of their being written by a woman. The letters that were shown to me made it still less possible for me to believe in the womanliness of the writer. But my doubts did not shake my friend’s devotion and he went on with the worship of his idol.

Then I launched into a criticism of the work of this writer. I let myself go, and eruditely held forth on the distinctive features of lyrics and other short poems, my great advantage being that printed matter is so unblushing, so impassively unbetraying of the writer’s real attainments. My friend turned up in a great passion and hurled at me the threat that a B.A. was writing a reply. A B.A.! I was struck speechless. I felt the same as in my younger days when my nephew Satya had shouted for a policeman. I could see the triumphal pillar of argument, erected upon my nice distinctions, crumbling before my eyes at the merciless

assaults of authoritative quotations; and the door effectually barred against my ever showing my face to the reading public again. Alas, my critique, under what evil star wert thou born! I spent day after day in the direst suspense. But, like Satya's policeman, the B.A. failed to appear.

21. Bhanu Singha

As I have said I was a keen student of the series of old Vaishnava poems which were being collected and published by Babus Akshay Sarkar and Saroda Mitter. Their language, largely mixed with Maithili, I found difficult to understand; but for that very reason I took all the more pains to get at their meaning. My feeling towards them was that same eager curiosity with which I regarded the ungerminated sprout within the seed, or the undiscovered mystery under the dust covering of the earth. My enthusiasm was kept up with the hope of bringing to light some unknown poetical gems as I went deeper and deeper into the unexplored darkness of this treasure-house.

While I was so engaged, the idea got hold of me of enfolding my own writings in just such a wrapping of mystery. I had heard from Akshay Chowdhury the story of the English boy-poet Chatterton. What his poetry was like I had no idea, nor perhaps had Akshay Babu himself. Had we known, the story might have lost its charm. As it happened the melodramatic element in it fired my imagination; for had not so many been deceived by his successful imitation of the classics? And at last the unfortunate youth had died by his own hand. Leaving aside the suicide part I girded up my loins to emulate young Chatterton's exploits.

One noon the clouds had gathered thickly. Rejoicing in the grateful shade of the cloudy midday rest-hour, I lay prone on the bed in my inner room and wrote on a slate the imitation *Maithili* poem *Gahana kusuma kunja majhe*. I was greatly pleased with it and lost no time in reading it out to the first one I came across; of whose understanding a word of it there happened to be not the slightest danger, and who consequently could not but gravely nod and say, "Good, very good indeed!"

To my friend mentioned a while ago I said one day: "A tattered old manuscript has been discovered while rummaging in the *Adi Brahma Samaj* library and from this I have copied some poems by an old Vaishnava Poet named Bhanu Singha;" ⁵⁹ with which I read some of my imitation poems to him. He was profoundly stirred. "These could not have been written even by *Vidyapati* or *Chandidas!*" he rapturously exclaimed. "I really must have that MS. to make over to Akshay Babu for publication."

⁵⁹. The old Vaishnava poets used to bring their name into the last stanza of the poem, this serving as their signature. Bhanu and Rabi both mean the Sun. Tr.

Then I showed him my manuscript book and conclusively proved that the poems could not have been written by either *Vidyapati* or *Chandidas* because the author happened to be myself. My friend's face fell as he muttered, "Yes, yes, they're not half bad."

When these Bhanu Singha poems were coming out in the *Bharati*, Dr. Nishikanta Chatterjee was in Germany. He wrote a thesis on the lyric poetry of our country comparing it with that of Europe. Bhanu Singha was given a place of honour as one of the old poets such as no modern writer could have aspired to. This was the thesis on which Nishikanta Chatterjee got his Ph. D.!

Whoever Bhanu Singha might have been, had his writings fallen into the hands of latter-day me, I swear I would not have been deceived. The language might have passed muster; for that which the old poets wrote in was not their mother tongue, but an artificial language varying in the hands of different poets. But there was nothing artificial about their sentiments. Any attempt to test Bhanu Singha's poetry by its ring would have shown up the base metal. It had none of the ravishing melody of our ancient pipes, but only the tinkle of a modern, foreign barrel organ.

22. Patriotism

From an outside point of view many a foreign custom would appear to have gained entry into our family, but at its heart flames a national pride which has never flickered. The genuine regard which my father had for his country never forsook him through all the revolutionary vicissitudes of his life, and this in his descendants has taken shape as a strong patriotic feeling. Love of country was, however, by no means a characteristic of the times of which I am writing. Our educated men then kept at arms' length both the language and thought of their native land. Nevertheless my elder brothers had always cultivated Bengali literature. When on one occasion some new connection by marriage wrote my father an English letter it was promptly returned to the writer.

The *Hindu Mela* was an annual fair which had been instituted with the assistance of our house. Babu Nabagopal Mitter was appointed its manager. This was perhaps the first attempt at a reverential realisation of India as our motherland. My second brother's popular national anthem "*Bharater Jaya*," was composed, then. The singing of songs glorifying the motherland, the recitation of poems of the love of country, the exhibition of indigenous arts and crafts and the encouragement of national talent and skill were the features of this *Mela*.

On the occasion of Lord Curzon's Delhi durbar I wrote a prose-paper—at the time of Lord Lytton's it was a poem. The British Government of those days feared the Russians it is true, but not the pen of a 14-year old poet. So, though my poem lacked none of the fiery sentiments appropriate to my age, there were no signs of any consternation in the ranks of the authorities from Commander-in-chief down to Commissioner of Police. Nor did any lachrymose letter in the *Times* predict a speedy downfall of the Empire for this apathy of its local guardians. I recited my poem under a tree at the Hindu Mela and one of my hearers was Nabin Sen, the poet. He reminded me of this after I had grown up.

My fourth brother, Jyotirindra, was responsible for a political association of which old Rajnarain Bose was the president. It held its sittings in a tumbledown building in an obscure Calcutta lane. Its proceedings were enshrouded in mystery. This mystery was its only claim to be awe-inspiring, for as a matter of fact there was nothing in our deliberations or doings of which government or people need have been afraid. The rest of our family had no idea where we were spending our afternoons. Our front door would be locked, the meeting room in

darkness, the watchword a Vedic *mantra*, our talk in whispers. These alone provided us with enough of a thrill, and we wanted nothing more. Mere child as I was, I also was a member. We surrounded ourselves with such an atmosphere of pure frenzy that we always seemed to be soaring aloft on the wings of our enthusiasm. Of bashfulness, diffidence or fear we had none, our main object being to bask in the heat of our own fervour.

Bravery may sometimes have its drawbacks; but it has always maintained a deep hold on the reverence of mankind. In the literature of all countries we find an unflagging endeavour to keep alive this reverence. So in whatever state a particular set of men in a particular locality may be, they cannot escape the constant impact of these stimulating shocks. We had to be content with responding to such shocks, as best we could, by letting loose our imagination, coming together, talking tall and singing fervently.

There can be no doubt that closing up all outlets and barring all openings to a faculty so deep-seated in the nature of man, and moreover so prized by him, creates an unnatural condition favourable to degenerate activity. It is not enough to keep open only the avenues to clerical employment in any comprehensive scheme of Imperial Government—if no road be left for adventurous daring the soul of man will pine for deliverance, and secret passages still be sought, of which the pathways are tortuous and the end unthinkable. I firmly believe that if in those days Government had paraded a frightfulness born of suspicion, then the comedy which the youthful members of this association had been at might have turned into grim tragedy. The play, however, is over, not a brick of Fort-William is any the worse, and we are now smiling at its memory.

My brother Jyotirindra began to busy himself with a national costume for all India, and submitted various designs to the association. The *Dhoti* was not deemed business-like; trousers were too foreign; so he hit upon a compromise which considerably detracted from the dhoti while failing to improve the trousers. That is to say, the trousers were decorated with the addition of a false dhoti-fold in front and behind. The fearsome thing that resulted from combining a turban with a *Sola-topo* our most enthusiastic member would not have had the temerity to call ornamental. No person of ordinary courage could have dared it, but my brother unflinchingly wore the complete suit in broad day-light, passing through the house of an afternoon to the carriage waiting outside, indifferent alike to the stare of relation or friend, door-keeper or coachman. There may be many a brave Indian ready to die for his country, but there are but few, I am sure, who even for the good of the nation would face the public streets in such pan-Indian garb.

Every Sunday my brother would get up a *Shikar* party. Many of those who joined in it, uninvited, we did not even know. There was a carpenter, a smith and others from all ranks of society. Bloodshed was the only thing lacking in this *shikar*, at least I cannot recall any. Its other appendages were so abundant and satisfying that we felt the absence of dead or wounded game to be a trifling circumstance of no account. As we were out from early morning, my sister-in-law furnished us with a plentiful supply of *luchis* with appropriate accompaniments; and as these did not depend upon the fortunes of our chase we never had to return empty.

The neighbourhood of Maniktola is not wanting in Villa-gardens. We would turn into any one of these at the end, and high-and low-born alike, seated on the bathing platform of a tank, would fling ourselves on the *luchis* in right good earnest, all that was left of them being the vessels they were brought in.

Braja Babu was one of the most enthusiastic of these blood-thirstless *shikaris*. He was the Superintendent of the Metropolitan Institution and had also been our private tutor for a time. One day he had the happy idea of accosting the *mali* (gardener) of a villa-garden into which we had thus trespassed with: "Hallo, has uncle been here lately!" The *mali* lost no time in saluting him respectfully before he replied: "No, Sir, the master hasn't been lately." "All right, get us some green cocoanuts off the trees." We had a fine drink after our *luchis* that day.

A Zamindar in a small way was among our party. He owned a villa on the river side. One day we had a picnic there together, in defiance of caste rules. In the afternoon there was a tremendous storm. We stood on the river-side stairs leading into the water and shouted out songs to its accompaniment. I cannot truthfully assert that all the seven notes of the scale could properly be distinguished in Rajnarain Babu's singing, nevertheless he sent forth his voice and, as in the old Sanskrit works the text is drowned by the notes, so in Rajnarain Babu's musical efforts the vigorous play of his limbs and features overwhelmed his feebler vocal performance; his head swung from side to side marking time, while the storm played havoc with his flowing beard. It was late in the night when we turned homewards in a hackney carriage. By that time the storm clouds had dispersed and the stars twinkled forth. The darkness had become intense, the atmosphere silent, the village roads deserted, and the thickets on either side filled with fireflies like a carnival of sparks scattered in some noiseless revelry.

One of the objects of our association was to encourage the manufacture of lucifer matches, and similar small industries. For this purpose each member had

to contribute a tenth of his income. Matches had to be made, but matchwood was difficult to get; for though we all know with what fiery energy a bundle of *khangras* [60](#) can be wielded in capable hands, the thing that burns at its touch is not a lamp wick. After many experiments we succeeded in making a boxful of matches. The patriotic enthusiasm which was thus evidenced did not constitute their only value, for the money that was spent in their making might have served to light the family hearth for the space of a year. Another little defect was that these matches could not be got to burn unless there was a light handy to touch them up with. If they could only have inherited some of the patriotic flame of which they were born they might have been marketable even today.

[60.](#) The dried and stripped centre-vein of a cocoanut leaf gives a long tapering stick of the average thickness of a match stick, and a bundle of these goes to make the common Bengal household broom which in the hands of the housewife is popularly supposed to be useful in keeping the whole household in order from husband downwards. Its effect on a bare back is here alluded to.—*Tr.*

News came to us that some young student was trying to make a power loom. Off we went to see it. None of us had the knowledge with which to test its practical usefulness, but in our capacity for believing and hoping we were inferior to none. The poor fellow had got into a bit of debt over the cost of his machine which we repaid for him. Then one day we found Braja Babu coming over to our house with a flimsy country towel tied round his head. “Made in our loom!” he shouted as with hands uplifted he executed a wardance. The outside of Braja Babu’s head had then already begun to ripen into grey!

At last some worldly-wise people came and joined our society, made us taste of the fruit of knowledge, and broke up our little paradise.

When I first knew Rajnarain Babu, I was not old enough to appreciate his many-sidedness. In him were combined many opposites. In spite of his hoary hair and beard he was as young as the youngest of us, his venerable exterior serving only as a white mantle for keeping his youth perpetually fresh. Even his extensive learning had not been able to do him any damage, for it left him absolutely simple. To the end of his life the incessant flow of his hearty laughter suffered no check, neither from the gravity of age, nor ill-health, nor domestic affliction, nor profundity of thought, nor variety of knowledge, all of which had been his in ample measure. He had been a favourite pupil of Richardson and brought up in an atmosphere of English learning, nevertheless he flung aside all obstacles due to his early habit and gave himself up lovingly and devotedly to Bengali literature. Though the meekest of men, he was full of fire which flamed its fiercest in his patriotism, as though to burn to ashes the shortcomings and destitution of his country. The memory of this smile-sweetened fervour-illumined lifelong-youthful saint is one that is worth cherishing by our

countrymen.

23. The Bharati

On the whole the period of which I am writing was for me one of ecstatic excitement. Many a night have I spent without sleep, not for any particular reason but from a mere desire to do the reverse of the obvious. I would keep up reading in the dim light of our school room all alone; the distant church clock would chime every quarter as if each passing hour was being put up to auction; and the loud *Haribols* of the bearers of the dead, passing along Chitpore Road on their way to the Nimtollah cremation ground, would now and then resound. Through some summer moonlight nights I would be wandering about like an unquiet spirit among the lights and shadows of the tubs and pots on the garden of the roof-terrace.

Those who would dismiss this as sheer poetising would be wrong. The very earth in spite of its having aged considerably surprises us occasionally by its departure from sober stability; in the days of its youth, when it had not become hardened and crusty, it was effusively volcanic and indulged in many a wild escapade. In the days of man's first youth the same sort of thing happens. So long as the materials which go to form his life have not taken on their final shape they are apt to be turbulent in the process of their formation.

This was the time when my brother Jyotirindra decided to start the *Bharati* with our eldest brother as editor, giving us fresh food for enthusiasm. I was then just sixteen, but I was not left out of the editorial staff. A short time before, in all the insolence of my youthful vanity, I had written a criticism of the *Meghanadabhadha*. As acidity is characteristic of the unripe mango so is abuse of the immature critic. When other powers are lacking, the power of pricking seems to be at its sharpest. I had thus sought immortality by leaving my scratches on that immortal epic. This impudent criticism was my first contribution to the *Bharati*.

In the first volume I also published a long poem called *Kavikahini*, The Poet's Story. It was the product of an age when the writer had seen practically nothing of the world except an exaggerated image of his own nebulous self. So the hero of the story was naturally a poet, not the writer as he was, but as he imagined or desired himself to seem. It would hardly be correct to say that he desired to *be* what he portrayed; that represented more what he thought was expected of him, what would make the world admiringly nod and say: "Yes, a poet indeed,

quite the correct thing." In it was a great parade of universal love, that pet subject of the budding poet, which sounds as big as it is easy to talk about. While yet any truth has not dawned upon one's own mind, and others' words are one's only stock-in-trade, simplicity and restraint in expression are not possible. Then, in the endeavour to display magnified that which is really big in itself, it becomes impossible to avoid a grotesque and ridiculous exhibition.

When I blush to read these effusions of my boyhood I am also struck with the fear that very possibly in my later writings the same distortion, wrought by straining after effect, lurks in a less obvious form. The loudness of my voice, I doubt not, often drowns the thing I would say; and some day or other Time will find me out.

The *Kavikahini* was the first work of mine to appear in book form. When I went with my second brother to Ahmedabad, some enthusiastic friend of mine took me by surprise by printing and publishing it and sending me a copy. I cannot say that he did well, but the feeling that was roused in me at the time did not resemble that of an indignant judge. He got his punishment, however, not from the author, but from the public who hold the purse strings. I have heard that the dead load of the books lay, for many a long day, heavy on the shelves of the booksellers and the mind of the luckless publisher.

Writings of the age at which I began to contribute to the *Bharati* cannot possibly be fit for publication. There is no better way of ensuring repentance at maturity than to rush into print too early. But it has one redeeming feature: the irresistible impulse to see one's writings in print exhausts itself during early life. Who are the readers, what do they say, what printers' errors have remained uncorrected, these and the like worries run their course as infantile maladies and leave one leisure in later life to attend to one's literary work in a healthier frame of mind.

Bengali literature is not old enough to have elaborated those internal checks which can serve to control its votaries. As experience in writing is gained the Bengali writer has to evolve the restraining force from within himself. This makes it impossible for him to avoid the creation of a great deal of rubbish during a considerable length of time. The ambition to work wonders with the modest gifts at one's disposal is bound to be an obsession in the beginning, so that the effort to transcend at every step one's natural powers, and therewith the bounds of truth and beauty, is always visible in early writings. To recover one's normal self, to learn to respect one's powers as they are, is a matter of time.

However that may be, I have left much of youthful folly to be ashamed of, besmirching the pages of the *Bharati*; and this shames me not for its literary

defects alone but for its atrocious impudence, its extravagant excesses and its high-sounding artificiality. At the same time I am free to recognise that the writings of that period were pervaded with an enthusiasm the value of which cannot be small. It was a period to which, if error was natural, so was the boyish faculty of hoping, believing and rejoicing. And if the fuel of error was necessary for feeding the flame of enthusiasm then while that which was fit to be reduced to ashes will have become ash, the good work done by the flame will not have been in vain in my life.

Part 5

24. Ahmedabad

When the *Bharati* entered upon its second year, my second brother proposed to take me to England; and when my father gave his consent, this further unasked favour of providence came on me as a surprise.

As a first step I accompanied my brother to Ahmedabad where he was posted as judge. My sister-in-law with her children was then in England, so the house was practically empty.

The Judge's house is known as *Shahibagh* and was a palace of the *Badshahs* of old. At the foot of the wall supporting a broad terrace flowed the thin summer stream of the Savarmati river along one edge of its ample bed of sand. My brother used to go off to his court, and I would be left all alone in the vast expanse of the palace, with only the cooing of the pigeons to break the midday stillness; and an unaccountable curiosity kept me wandering about the empty rooms.

Into the niches in the wall of a large chamber my brother had put his books. One of these was a gorgeous edition of Tennyson's works, with big print and numerous pictures. The book, for me, was as silent as the palace, and, much in the same way I wandered among its picture plates. Not that I could not make anything of the text, but it spoke to me more like inarticulate cooings than words. In my brother's library I also found a book of collected Sanskrit poems edited by Dr. Haberlin and printed at the old Serampore press. This was also beyond my understanding but the sonorous Sanskrit words, and the march of the metre, kept me tramping among the *Amaru Shataka* poems to the mellow roll of their drum call.

In the upper room of the palace tower was my lonely hermit cell, my only companions being a nest of wasps. In the unrelieved darkness of the night I slept there alone. Sometimes a wasp or two would drop off the nest on to my bed, and if perchance I happened to roll on one, the meeting was unpleasing to the wasp and keenly discomforting to me.

On moonlight nights pacing round and round the extensive terrace overlooking the river was one of my caprices. It was while so doing that I first composed my own tunes for my songs. The song addressed to the Rose-maiden was one of these, and it still finds a place in my published works.

Finding how imperfect was my knowledge of English I set to work reading through some English books with the help of a dictionary. From my earliest years it was my habit not to let any want of complete comprehension interfere with my reading on, quite satisfied with the structure which my imagination reared on the bits which I understood here and there. I am reaping even today both the good and bad effects of this habit.

25. England

After six months thus spent in Ahmedabad we started for England. In an unlucky moment I began to write letters about my journey to my relatives and to the *Bharati*. Now it is beyond my power to call them back. These were nothing but the outcome of youthful bravado. At that age the mind refuses to admit that its greatest pride is in its power to understand, to accept, to respect; and that modesty is the best means of enlarging its domain. Admiration and praise are looked upon as a sign of weakness or surrender, and the desire to cry down and hurt and demolish with argument gives rise to this kind of intellectual fireworks. These attempts of mine to establish my superiority by revilement might have occasioned me amusement today, had not their want of straightness and common courtesy been too painful.

From my earliest years I had had practically no commerce with the outside world. To be plunged in this state, at the age of 17, into the midst of the social sea of England would have justified considerable misgiving as to my being able to keep afloat. But as my sister-in-law happened to be in Brighton with her children I weathered the first shock of it under her shelter.

Winter was then approaching. One evening as we were chatting round the fireside, the children came running to us with the exciting news that it had been snowing. We at once went out. It was bitingly cold, the sky filled with white moonlight, the earth covered with white snow. It was not the face of Nature familiar to me, but something quite different—like a dream. Everything near seemed to have receded far away, leaving the still white figure of an ascetic steeped in deep meditation. The sudden revelation, on the mere stepping outside a door, of such wonderful, such immense beauty had never before come upon me.

My days passed merrily under the affectionate care of my sister-in-law and in boisterous rompings with the children. They were greatly tickled at my curious English pronunciation, and though in the rest of their games I could wholeheartedly join, this I failed to see the fun of. How could I explain to them that there was no logical means of distinguishing between the sound of *a* in warm and *o* in worm. Unlucky that I was, I had to bear the brunt of the ridicule which was more properly the due of the vagaries of English spelling.

I became quite an adept in inventing new ways of keeping the children

occupied and amused. This art has stood me in good stead many a time thereafter, and its usefulness for me is not yet over. But I no longer feel in myself the same unbounded profusion of ready contrivance. That was the first opportunity I had for giving my heart to children, and it had all the freshness and overflowing exuberance of such a first gift.

But I had not set out on this journey to exchange a home beyond the seas for the one on this side. The idea was that I should study Law and come back a barrister. So one day I was put into a public school in Brighton. The first thing the Headmaster said after scanning my features was: "What a splendid head you have!" This detail lingers in my memory because she, who at home was an enthusiast in her self-imposed duty of keeping my vanity in check, had impressed on me that my cranium ⁶¹ and features generally, compared with that of many another were barely of a medium order. I hope the reader will not fail to count it to my credit that I implicitly believed her, and inwardly deplored the parsimony of the Creator in the matter of my making. On many another occasion, finding myself estimated by my English acquaintances differently from what I had been accustomed to be by her, I was led to seriously worry my mind over the divergence in the standard of taste between the two countries!

^{61.} There was a craze for phrenology at the time. *Tr.*

One thing in the Brighton school seemed very wonderful: the other boys were not at all rude to me. On the contrary they would often thrust oranges and apples into my pockets and run away. I can only ascribe this uncommon behaviour of theirs to my being a foreigner.

I was not long in this school either—but that was no fault of the school. Mr. Tarak Palit ⁶² was then in England. He could see that this was not the way for me to get on, and prevailed upon my brother to allow him to take me to London, and leave me there to myself in a lodging house. The lodgings selected faced the Regent Gardens. It was then the depth of winter. There was not a leaf on the row of trees in front which stood staring at the sky with their scraggy snow-covered branches—a sight which chilled my very bones.

^{62.} Latterly Sir Tarak Palit, a life-long friend of the writer's second brother. *Tr.*

For the newly arrived stranger there can hardly be a more cruel place than London in winter. I knew no one nearby, nor could I find my way about. The days of sitting alone at a window, gazing at the outside world, came back into my life. But the scene in this case was not attractive. There was a frown on its countenance; the sky turbid; the light lacking lustre like a dead man's eye; the horizon shrunk upon itself; with never an inviting smile from a broad hospitable world. The room was but scantily furnished, but there happened to be a

harmonium which, after the daylight came to its untimely end, I used to play upon according to my fancy. Sometimes Indians would come to see me; and, though my acquaintance with them was but slight, when they rose to leave I felt inclined to hold them back by their coat-tails.

While living in these rooms there was one who came to teach me Latin. His gaunt figure with its worn-out clothing seemed no more able than the naked trees to withstand the winter's grip. I do not know what his age was but he clearly looked older than his years. Some days in the course of our lessons he would suddenly be at a loss for some word and look vacant and ashamed. His people at home counted him a crank. He had become possessed of a theory. He believed that in each age someone dominant idea is manifested in every human society in all parts of the world; and though it may take different shapes under different degrees of civilisation, it is at bottom one and the same; nor is such idea taken from one by another by any process of adoption, for this truth holds good even where there is no intercourse. His great preoccupation was the gathering and recording of facts to prove this theory. And while so engaged his home lacked food, his body clothes. His daughters had but scant respect for his theory and were perhaps constantly upbraiding him for his infatuation. Some days one could see from his face that he had lighted upon some new proof, and that his thesis had correspondingly advanced. On these occasions I would broach the subject, and wax enthusiastic at his enthusiasm. On other days he would be steeped in gloom, as if his burden was too heavy to bear. Then would our lessons halt at every step; his eyes wander away into empty space; and his mind refuse to be dragged into the pages of the first Latin Grammar. I felt keenly for the poor body-starved theory-burdened soul, and though I was under no delusion as to the assistance I got in my Latin, I could not make up my mind to get rid of him. This pretence of learning Latin lasted as long as I was at these lodgings. When on the eve of leaving them I offered to settle his dues he said piteously: "I have done nothing, and only wasted your time, I cannot accept any payment from you." It was with great difficulty that I got him at last to take his fees.

Though my Latin tutor had never ventured to trouble me with the proofs of his theory, yet up to this day I do not disbelieve it. I am convinced that the minds of men are connected through some deep-lying continuous medium, and that a disturbance in one part is by it secretly communicated to others.

Mr. Palit next placed me in the house of a coach named Barker. He used to lodge and prepare students for their examinations. Except his mild little wife there was not a thing with any pretensions to attractiveness about this household. One can understand how such a tutor can get pupils, for these poor creatures do

not often get the chance of making a choice. But it is painful to think of the conditions under which such men get wives. Mrs. Barker had attempted to console herself with a pet dog, but when Barker wanted to punish his wife he tortured the dog. So that her affection for the unfortunate animal only made for an enlargement of her field of sensibility.

From these surroundings, when my sister-in-law sent for me to Torquay in Devonshire, I was only too glad to run off to her. I cannot tell how happy I was with the hills there, the sea, the flower-covered meadows, the shade of the pine woods, and my two little restlessly playful companions. I was nevertheless sometimes tormented with questionings as to why, when my eyes were so surfeited with beauty, my mind saturated with joy, and my leisure-filled days crossing over the limitless blue of space freighted with unalloyed happiness, there should be no call of poetry to me. So one day off I went along the rocky shore, armed with MS. Book and umbrella, to fulfil my poet's destiny. The spot I selected was of undoubted beauty, for that did not depend on my rhyme or fancy. There was a flat bit of overhanging rock reaching out as with a perpetual eagerness over the waters; rocked on the foam-flecked waves of the liquid blue in front, the sunny sky slept smilingly to its lullaby; behind, the shade of the fringe of pines lay spread like the slipped off garment of some languorous wood nymph. Enthroned on that seat of stone I wrote a poem *Magnatari* (the sunken boat). I might have believed today that it was good, had I taken the precaution of sinking it then in the sea. But such consolation is not open to me, for it happens to be existing in the body; and though banished from my published works, a writ might yet cause it to be produced.

The messenger of duty however was not idle. Again came its call and I returned to London. This time I found a refuge in the household of Dr. Scott. One fine evening with bag and baggage I invaded his home. Only the white haired Doctor, his wife and their eldest daughter were there. The two younger girls, alarmed at this incursion of an Indian stranger had gone off to stay with a relative. I think they came back home only after they got the news of my not being dangerous.

In a very short time I became like one of the family. Mrs. Scott treated me as a son, and the heartfelt kindness I got from her daughters is rare even from one's own relations.

One thing struck me when living in this family—that human nature is everywhere the same. We are fond of saying, and I also believed, that the devotion of an Indian wife to her husband is something unique, and not to be found in Europe. But I at least was unable to discern any difference between

Mrs. Scott and an ideal Indian wife. She was entirely wrapped up in her husband. With their modest means there was no fussing about of too many servants, and Mrs. Scott attended to every detail of her husband's wants herself. Before he came back home from his work of an evening, she would arrange his arm-chair and woollen slippers before the fire with her own hands. She would never allow herself to forget for a moment the things he liked, or the behaviour which pleased him. She would go over the house every morning, with their only maid, from attic to kitchen, and the brass rods on the stairs and the door knobs and fittings would be scrubbed and polished till they shone again. Over and above this domestic routine there were the many calls of social duty. After getting through all her daily duties she would join with zest in our evening readings and music, for it is not the least of the duties of a good housewife to make real the gaiety of the leisure hour.

Some evenings I would join the girls in a table-turning séance. We would place our fingers on a small tea table and it would go capering about the room. It got to be so that whatever we touched began to quake and quiver. Mrs. Scott did not quite like all this. She would sometimes gravely shake her head and say she had her doubts about its being right. She bore it bravely, however, not liking to put a damper on our youthful spirits. But one day when we put our hands on Dr. Scott's chimneypot to make it turn, that was too much for her. She rushed up in a great state of mind and forbade us to touch it. She could not bear the idea of Satan having anything to do, even for a moment, with her husband's head-gear.

In all her actions her reverence for her husband was the one thing that stood out. The memory of her sweet self-abnegation makes it clear to me that the ultimate perfection of all womanly love is to be found in reverence; that where no extraneous cause has hampered its true development woman's love naturally grows into worship. Where the appointments of luxury are in profusion, and frivolity tarnishes both day and night, this love is degraded, and woman's nature finds not the joy of its perfection.

I spent some months here. Then it was time for my brother to return home, and my father wrote to me to accompany him. I was delighted at the prospect. The light of my country, the sky of my country, had been silently calling me. When I said good bye Mrs. Scott took me by the hand and wept. "Why did you come to us," she said, "if you must go so soon?" That household no longer exists in London. Some of the members of the Doctor's family have departed to the other world, others are scattered in places unknown to me. But it will always live in my memory.

One winter's day, as I was passing through a street in Tunbridge Wells, I saw a

man standing on the road side. His bare toes were showing through his gaping boots, his breast was partly uncovered. He said nothing to me, perhaps because begging was forbidden, but he looked up at my face just for a moment. The coin I gave him was perhaps more valuable than he expected, for, after I had gone on a bit, he came after me and said: "Sir, you have given me a gold piece by mistake," with which he offered to return it to me. I might not have particularly remembered this, but for a similar thing which happened on another occasion. When I first reached the Torquay railway station a porter took my luggage to the cab outside. After searching my purse for small change in vain, I gave him half-a-crown as the cab started. After a while he came running after us, shouting to the cabman to stop. I thought to myself that finding me to be such an innocent he had hit upon some excuse for demanding more. As the cab stopped he said: "You must have mistaken a half-crown piece for a penny, Sir!"

I cannot say that I have never been cheated while in England, but not in any way which it would be fair to hold in remembrance. What grew chiefly upon me, rather, was the conviction that only those who are trustworthy know how to trust. I was an unknown foreigner, and could have easily evaded payment with impunity, yet no London shopkeeper ever mistrusted me.

During the whole period of my stay in England I was mixed up in a farcical comedy which I had to play out from start to finish. I happened to get acquainted with the widow of some departed high Anglo-Indian official. She was good enough to call me by the pet-name Ruby. Some Indian friend of hers had composed a doleful poem in English in memory of her husband. It is needless to expatiate on its poetic merit or felicity of diction. As my ill-luck would have it, the composer had indicated that the dirge was to be chanted to the mode *Behaga*. So the widow one day entreated me to sing it to her thus. Like the silly innocent that I was, I weakly acceded. There was unfortunately no one there but I who could realise the atrociously ludicrous way in which the *Behaga* mode combined with those absurd verses. The widow seemed intensely touched to hear the Indian's lament for her husband sung to its native melody. I thought that there the matter ended, but that was not to be.

I frequently met the widowed lady at different social gatherings, and when after dinner we joined the ladies in the drawing room, she would ask me to sing that *Behaga*. Everyone else would anticipate some extraordinary specimen of Indian music and would add their entreaties to hers. Then from her pocket would come forth printed copies of that fateful composition, and my ears begin to redden and tingle. And at last, with bowed head and quavering voice I would have to make a beginning—but too keenly conscious that to none else in the

room but me was this performance sufficiently heartrending. At the end, amidst much suppressed tittering, there would come a chorus of "Thank you very much!" "How interesting!" And in spite of its being winter I would perspire all over. Who would have predicted at my birth or at his death what a severe blow to me would be the demise of this estimable Anglo-Indian!

Then, for a time, while I was living with Dr. Scott and attending lectures at the University College, I lost touch with the widow. She was in a suburban locality some distance away from London, and I frequently got letters from her inviting me there. But my dread of that dirge kept me from accepting these invitations. At length I got a pressing telegram from her. I was on my way to college when this telegram reached me and my stay in England was then about to come to its close. I thought to myself I ought to see the widow once more before my departure, and so yielded to her importunity.

Instead of coming home from college I went straight to the railway station. It was a horrible day, bitterly cold, snowing and foggy. The station I was bound for was the terminus of the line. So I felt quite easy in mind and did not think it worthwhile to inquire about the time of arrival.

All the station platforms were coming on the right hand side, and in the right hand corner seat I had ensconced myself reading a book. It had already become so dark that nothing was visible outside. One by one the other passengers got down at their destinations. We reached and left the station just before the last one. Then the train stopped again, but there was nobody to be seen, nor any lights or platform. The mere passenger has no means of divining why trains should sometimes stop at the wrong times and places, so, giving up the attempt, I went on with my reading. Then the train began to move backwards. There seems to be no accounting for railway eccentricity, thought I as I once more returned to my book. But when we came right back to the previous station, I could remain indifferent no longer. "When are we getting to——" I inquired at the station. "You are just coming from there," was the reply. "Where are we going now, then?" I asked, thoroughly flurried. "To London." I thereupon understood that this was a shuttle train. On inquiring about the next train to—I was informed that there were no more trains that night. And in reply to my next question I gathered that there was no inn within five miles.

I had left home after breakfast at ten in the morning, and had had nothing since. When abstinence is the only choice, an ascetic frame of mind comes easy. I buttoned up my thick overcoat to the neck and seating myself under a platform lamp went on with my reading. The book I had with me was Spencer's *Data of Ethics*, then recently published. I consoled myself with the thought that I might

never get another such opportunity of concentrating my whole attention on such a subject.

After a short time a porter came and informed me that a special was running and would be in in half an hour. I felt so cheered up by the news that I could not go on any longer with the *Data of Ethics*. Where I was due at seven I arrived at length at nine. "What is this, Ruby?" asked my hostess. "Whatever have you been doing with yourself?" I was unable to take much pride in the account of my wonderful adventures which I gave her. Dinner was over; nevertheless, as my misfortune was hardly my fault, I did not expect condign punishment, especially as the dispenser was a woman. But all that the widow of the high Anglo-Indian official said to me was: "Come along, Ruby, have a cup of tea."

I never was a tea-drinker, but in the hope that it might be of some assistance in allaying my consuming hunger I managed to swallow a cup of strong decoction with a couple of dry biscuits. When I at length reached the drawing room I found a gathering of elderly ladies and among them one pretty young American who was engaged to a nephew of my hostess and seemed busy going through the usual premarital love passages.

"Let's have some dancing," said my hostess. I was neither in the mood nor bodily condition for that exercise. But it is the docile who achieve the most impossible things in this world; so, though the dance was primarily got up for the benefit of the engaged couple, I had to dance with the ladies of considerably advanced age, with only the tea and biscuits between myself and starvation.

But my sorrows did not end here. "Where are you putting up for the night?" asked my hostess. This was a question for which I was not prepared. While I stared at her, speechless, she explained that as the local inn would close at midnight I had better betake myself thither without further delay. Hospitality, however, was not entirely wanting for I had not to find the inn unaided, a servant showing me the way there with a lantern. At first I thought this might prove a blessing in disguise, and at once proceeded to make inquiries for food: flesh, fish or vegetable, hot or cold, anything! I was told that drinks I could have in any variety but nothing to eat. Then I looked to slumber for forgetfulness, but there seemed to be no room even in her world-embracing lap. The sand-stone floor of the bed-room was icy cold, an old bedstead and worn-out wash-stand being its only furniture.

In the morning the Anglo-Indian widow sent for me to breakfast. I found a cold repast spread out, evidently the remnants of last night's dinner. A small portion of this, lukewarm or cold, offered to me last night could not have hurt anyone, while my dancing might then have been less like the agonised wrigglings of a

landed carp.

After breakfast my hostess informed me that the lady for whose delectation I had been invited to sing was ill in bed, and that I would have to serenade her from her bed-room door. I was made to stand up on the staircase landing. Pointing to a closed door the widow said: "That's where she is." And I gave voice to that *Behaga* dirge facing the mysterious unknown on the other side. Of what happened to the invalid as the result I have yet received no news.

After my return to London I had to expiate in bed the consequences of my fatuous complaisance. Dr. Scott's girls implored me, on my conscience, not to take this as a sample of English hospitality. It was the effect of India's salt, they protested.

26. Loken Palit

While I was attending lectures on English literature at the University College, Loken Palit was my class fellow. He was about 4 years younger than I. At the age I am writing these reminiscences a difference of 4 years is not perceptible. But it is difficult for friendship to bridge the gulf between 17 and 13. Lacking the weight of years the boy is always anxious to keep up the dignity of seniority. But this did not raise any barrier in my mind in the case of the boy Loken, for I could not feel that he was in any way my junior.

Boy and girl students sat together in the College library for study. This was the place for our *tete-a-tete*. Had we been fairly quiet about it none need have complained, but my young friend was so surcharged with high spirits that at the least provocation they would burst forth as laughter. In all countries girls have a perverse degree of application to their studies, and I feel repentant as I recall the multitude of reproachful blue eyes which vainly showered disapprobation on our unrestrained merriment. But in those days I felt not the slightest sympathy with the distress of disturbed studiousness. By the grace of Providence I have never had a headache in my life, nor a moment of compunction for interrupted school studies.

With our laughter as an almost unbroken accompaniment we managed also to do a bit of literary discussion, and, though Loken's reading of Bengali literature was less extensive than mine, he made up for that by the keenness of his intellect. Among the subjects we discussed was Bengali orthography.

The way it arose was this. One of the Scott girls wanted me to teach her Bengali. When taking her through the alphabet I expressed my pride that Bengali spelling has a conscience, and does not delight in overstepping rules at every step. I made clear to her how laughable would have been the waywardness of English spelling but for the tragic compulsion we were under to cram it for our examinations. But my pride had a fall. It transpired that Bengali spelling was quite as impatient of bondage, but that habit had blinded me to its transgressions.

Then I began to search for the laws regulating its lawlessness. I was quite surprised at the wonderful assistance which Loken proved to be in this matter.

After Loken had got into the Indian Civil Service, and returned home, the work, which had in the University College library had its source in rippling merriment, flowed on in a widening stream. Loken's boisterous delight in

literature was as the wind in the sails of my literary adventure. And when at the height of my youth I was driving the tandem of prose and poetry at a furious rate, Loken's unstinted appreciation kept my energies from flagging for a moment. Many an extraordinary prose or poetical flight have I taken in his bungalow in the moffussil. On many an occasion did our literary and musical gatherings assemble under the auspices of the evening star to disperse, as did the lamplights at the breezes of dawn, under the morning star.

Of the many lotus flowers at *Saraswati's* ⁶³ feet the blossom of friendship must be her favorite. I have not come across much of golden pollen in her lotus bank, but have nothing to complain of as regards the profusion of the sweet savour of good-fellowship.

^{63.} Saraswati, the goddess of learning, is depicted in Bengal as clad in white and seated among a mass of lotus flowers. *Tr.*

27. The Broken Heart

While in England I began another poem, which I went on with during my journey home, and finished after my return. This was published under the name of *Bhagna Hriday*, The Broken Heart. At the time I thought it very good. There was nothing strange in the writer's thinking so; but it did not fail to gain the appreciation of the readers of the time as well. I remember how, after it came out, the chief minister of the late Raja of Tipperah called on me solely to deliver the message that the Raja admired the poem and entertained high hopes of the writer's future literary career.

About this poem of my eighteenth year let me set down here what I wrote in a letter when I was thirty: When I began to write the *Bhagna Hriday* I was eighteen—neither in my childhood nor my youth. This borderland age is not illumined with the direct rays of Truth;—its reflection is seen here and there, and the rest is shadow. And like twilight shades its imaginings are long-drawn and vague, making the real world seem like a world of phantasy. The curious part of it is that not only was I eighteen, but everyone around me seemed to be eighteen likewise; and we all flitted about in the same baseless, substanceless world of imagination, where even the most intense joys and sorrows seemed like the joys and sorrows of dreamland. There being nothing real to weigh them against, the trivial did duty for the great.

This period of my life, from the age of fifteen or sixteen to twenty-two or twenty-three, was one of utter disorderliness.

When, in the early ages of the Earth, land and water had not yet distinctly separated, huge misshapen amphibious creatures walked the trunk-less forests growing on the oozing silt. Thus do the passions of the dim ages of the immature mind, as disproportionate and curiously shaped, haunt the unending shades of its trackless, nameless wildernesses. They know not themselves, nor the aim of their wanderings; and, because they do not, they are ever apt to imitate something else. So, at this age of unmeaning activity, when my undeveloped powers, unaware of and unequal to their object, were jostling each other for an outlet, each sought to assert superiority through exaggeration.

When milk-teeth are trying to push their way through, they work the infant into a fever. All this agitation finds no justification till the teeth are out and have begun assisting in the absorption of food. In the same way do our early passions

torment the mind, like a malady, till they realise their true relationship with the outer world.

The lessons I learnt from my experiences at that stage are to be found in every moral text-book, but are not therefore to be despised. That which keeps our appetites confined within us, and checks their free access to the outside, poisons our life. Such is selfishness which refuses to give free play to our desires, and prevents them from reaching their real goal, and that is why it is always accompanied by festering untruths and extravagances. When our desires find unlimited freedom in good work they shake off their diseased condition and come back to their own nature;—that is their true end, there also is the joy of their being.

The condition of my immature mind which I have described was fostered both by the example and precept of the time, and I am not sure that the effects of these are not lingering on to the present day. Glancing back at the period of which I tell, it strikes me that we had gained more of stimulation than of nourishment out of English Literature. Our literary gods then were Shakespeare, Milton and Byron; and the quality in their work which stirred us most was strength of passion. In the social life of Englishmen passionate outbursts are kept severely in check, for which very reason, perhaps, they so dominate their literature, making its characteristic to be the working out of extravagantly vehement feelings to an inevitable conflagration. At least this uncontrolled excitement was what we learnt to look on as the quintessence of English literature.

In the impetuous declamation of English poetry by Akshay Chowdhury, our initiator into English literature, there was the wildness of intoxication. The frenzy of Romeo's and Juliet's love, the fury of King Lear's impotent lamentation, the all-consuming fire of Othello's jealousy, these were the things that roused us to enthusiastic admiration. Our restricted social life, our narrower field of activity, was hedged in with such monotonous uniformity that tempestuous feelings found no entrance;—all was as calm and quiet as could be. So our hearts naturally craved the life-bringing shock of the passionate emotion in English literature. Ours was not the æsthetic enjoyment of literary art, but the jubilant welcome by stagnation of a turbulent wave, even though it should stir up to the surface the slime of the bottom.

Shakespeare's contemporary literature represents the wardance of the day when the Renascence came to Europe in all the violence of its reaction against the severe curbing and cramping of the hearts of men. The examination of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, was not the main object,—man then seemed

consumed with the anxiety to break through all barriers to the inmost sanctuary of his being, there to discover the ultimate image of his own violent desire. That is why in this literature we find such poignant, such exuberant, such unbridled expression.

The spirit of this bacchanalian revelry of Europe found entrance into our demurely well-behaved social world, woke us up, and made us lively. We were dazzled by the glow of unfettered life which fell upon our custom-smothered heart, pining for an opportunity to disclose itself.

There was another such day in English literature when the slow-measure of Pope's common time gave place to the dance-rhythm of the French revolution. This had Byron for its poet. And the impetuosity of his passion also moved our veiled heart-bride in the seclusion of her corner.

In this wise did the excitement of the pursuit of English literature come to sway the heart of the youth of our time, and at mine the waves of this excitement kept beating from every side. The first awakening is the time for the play of energy, not its repression.

And yet our case was so different from that of Europe. There the excitability and impatience of bondage was a reflection from its history into its literature. Its expression was consistent with its feeling. The roaring of the storm was heard because a storm was really raging. The breeze there from that ruffled our little world sounded in reality but little above a murmur. Therein it failed to satisfy our minds, so that our attempts to imitate the blast of a hurricane led us easily into exaggeration,—a tendency which still persists and may not prove easy of cure.

And for this, the fact that in English literature the reticence of true art has not yet appeared, is responsible. Human emotion is only one of the ingredients of literature and not its end,—which is the beauty of perfect fulness consisting in simplicity and restraint. This is a proposition which English literature does not yet fully admit.

Our minds from infancy to old age are being moulded by this English literature alone. But other literatures of Europe, both classical and modern, of which the art-form shows the well-nourished development due to a systematic cultivation of self-control, are not subjects of our study; and so, as it seems to me, we are yet unable to arrive at a correct perception of the true aim and method of literary work.

Akshay Babu, who had made the passion in English literature living to us, was himself a votary of the emotional life. The importance of realising truth in the fulness of its perfection seemed less apparent to him than that of feeling it in the

heart. He had no intellectual respect for religion, but songs of *Shydma*, the dark Mother, would bring tears to his eyes. He felt no call to search for ultimate reality; whatever moved his heart served him for the time as the truth, even obvious coarseness not proving a deterrent.

Atheism was the dominant note of the English prose writings then in vogue,—Bentham, Mill and Comte being favourite authors. Theirs was the reasoning in terms of which our youths argued. The age of Mill constitutes a natural epoch in English History. It represents a healthy reaction of the body politic; these destructive forces having been brought in, temporarily, to rid it of accumulated thought-rubbish. In our country we received these in the letter, but never sought to make practical use of them, employing them only as a stimulant to incite ourselves to moral revolt. Atheism was thus for us a mere intoxication.

For these reasons educated men then fell mainly into two classes. One class would be always thrusting themselves forward with unprovoked argumentation to cut to pieces all belief in God. Like the hunter whose hands itch, no sooner he spies a living creature on the top or at the foot of a tree, to kill it, whenever these came to learn of a harmless belief lurking anywhere in fancied security, they felt stirred up to sally forth and demolish it. We had for a short time a tutor of whom this was a pet diversion. Though I was a mere boy, even I could not escape his onslaughts. Not that his attainments were of any account, or that his opinions were the result of any enthusiastic search for the truth, being mostly gathered from others' lips. But though I fought him with all my strength, unequally matched in age as we were, I suffered many a bitter defeat. Sometimes I felt so mortified I almost wanted to cry.

The other class consisted not of believers, but religious epicureans, who found comfort and solace in gathering together, and steeping themselves in pleasing sights, sounds and scents galore, under the garb of religious ceremonial; they luxuriated in the paraphernalia of worship. In neither of these classes was doubt or denial the outcome of the travail of their quest.

Though these religious aberrations pained me, I cannot say I was not at all influenced by them. With the intellectual impudence of budding youth this revolt also found a place. The religious services which were held in our family I would have nothing to do with, I had not accepted them for my own. I was busy blowing up a raging flame with the bellows of my emotions. It was only the worship of fire, the giving of oblations to increase its flame—with no other aim. And because my endeavour had no end in view it was measureless, always reaching beyond any assigned limit.

As with religion, so with my emotions, I felt no need for any underlying truth,

my excitement being an end in itself. I call to mind some lines of a poet of that time: My heart is mine I have sold it to none, Be it tattered and torn and worn away, My heart is mine!

From the standpoint of truth the heart need not worry itself so; for nothing compels it to wear itself to tatters. In truth sorrow is not desirable, but taken apart its pungency may appear savoury. This savour our poets often made much of; leaving out the god in whose worship they were indulging. This childishness our country has not yet succeeded in getting rid of. So even today, when we fail to see the truth of religion, we seek in its observance an artistic gratification. So, also, much of our patriotism is not service of the mother-land, but the luxury of bringing ourselves into a desirable attitude of mind toward the country.

Part 6

28. European Music

When I was in Brighton I once went to hear some Prima Donna. I forget her name. It may have been Madame Neilson or Madame Albani. Never before had I come across such an extraordinary command over the voice. Even our best singers cannot hide their sense of effort; nor are they ashamed to bring out, as best they can, top notes or bass notes beyond their proper register. In our country the understanding portion of the audience think no harm in keeping the performance up to standard by dint of their own imagination. For the same reason they do not mind any harshness of voice or uncouthness of gesture in the exponent of a perfectly formed melody; on the contrary, they seem sometimes to be of opinion that such minor external defects serve better to set off the internal perfection of the composition,—as with the outward poverty of the Great Ascetic, Mahadeva, whose divinity shines forth naked.

This feeling seems entirely wanting in Europe. There, outward embellishment must be perfect in every detail, and the least defect stands shamed and unable to face the public gaze. In our musical gatherings nothing is thought of spending half-an-hour in tuning up the *Tanpuras*, or hammering into tone the drums, little and big. In Europe such duties are performed beforehand, behind the scenes, for all that comes in front must be faultless. There is thus no room for any weak spot in the singer's voice. In our country a correct and artistic exposition ⁶⁴ of the melody is the main object, thereon is concentrated all the effort. In Europe the voice is the object of culture, and with it they perform impossibilities. In our country the virtuoso is satisfied if he has heard the song; in Europe, they go to hear the singer.

^{64.} With Indian music it is not a mere question of correctly rendering a melody exactly as composed, but the theme of the original composition is the subject of an improvised interpretative elaboration by the expounding Artist. *Tr.*

That is what I saw that day in Brighton. To me it was as good as a circus. But, admire the performance as I did, I could not appreciate the song. I could hardly keep from laughing when some of the *cadenzas* imitated the warbling of birds. I felt all the time that it was a misapplication of the human voice. When it came to the turn of a male singer I was considerably relieved. I specially liked the tenor voices which had more of human flesh and blood in them, and seemed less like the disembodied lament of a forlorn spirit.

After this, as I went on hearing and learning more and more of European music, I began to get into the spirit of it; but up to now I am convinced that our music and theirs abide in altogether different apartments, and do not gain entry to the heart by the self-same door.

European music seems to be intertwined with its material life, so that the text of its songs may be as various as that life itself. If we attempt to put our tunes to the same variety of use they tend to lose their significance, and become ludicrous; for our melodies transcend the barriers of everyday life, and only thus can they carry us so deep into Pity, so high into Aloofness; their function being to reveal a picture of the inmost inexpressible depths of our being, mysterious and impenetrable, where the devotee may find his hermitage ready, or even the epicurean his bower, but where there is no room for the busy man of the world.

I cannot claim that I gained admittance to the soul of European music. But what little of it I came to understand from the outside attracted me greatly in one way. It seemed to me so romantic. It is somewhat difficult to analyse what I mean by that word. What I would refer to is the aspect of variety, of abundance, of the waves on the sea of life, of the ever-changing light and shade on their ceaseless undulations. There is the opposite aspect—of pure extension, of the unwinking blue of the sky, of the silent hint of immeasurability in the distant circle of the horizon. However that may be, let me repeat, at the risk of not being perfectly clear, that whenever I have been moved by European music I have said to myself: it is romantic, it is translating into melody the evanescence of life.

Not that we wholly lack the same attempt in some forms of our music; but it is less pronounced, less successful. Our melodies give voice to the star-spangled night, to the first reddening of dawn. They speak of the sky-pervading sorrow which lowers in the darkness of clouds; the speechless deep intoxication of the forest-roaming spring.

29. Valmiki Pratibha

We had a profusely decorated volume of Moore's Irish Melodies: and often have I listened to the enraptured recitation of these by Akshay Babu. The poems combined with the pictorial designs to conjure up for me a dream picture of the Ireland of old. I had not then actually heard the original tunes, but had sung these Irish Melodies to myself to the accompaniment of the harps in the pictures. I longed to hear the real tunes, to learn them, and sing them to Akshay Babu. Some longings unfortunately do get fulfilled in this life, and die in the process. When I went to England I did hear some of the Irish Melodies sung, and learnt them too, but that put an end to my keenness to learn more. They were simple, mournful and sweet, but they somehow did not fit in with the silent melody of the harp which filled the halls of the Old Ireland of my dreams.

When I came back home I sung the Irish melodies I had learnt to my people. "What is the matter with Rabi's voice?" they exclaimed. "How funny and foreign it sounds!" They even felt my speaking voice had changed its tone.

From this mixed cultivation of foreign and native melody was born the *Valmiki Pratibha*.⁶⁵ The tunes in this musical drama are mostly Indian, but they have been dragged out of their classic dignity; that which soared in the sky was taught to run on the earth. Those who have seen and heard it performed will, I trust, bear witness that the harnessing of Indian melodic modes to the service of the drama has proved neither derogatory nor futile. This conjunction is the only special feature of *Valmiki Pratibha*. The pleasing task of loosening the chains of melodic forms and making them adaptable to a variety of treatment completely engrossed me.

^{65.} *Valmiki Pratibha* means the genius of Valmiki. The plot is based on the story of Valmiki, the robber chief, being moved to pity and breaking out into a metrical lament on witnessing the grief of one of a pair of cranes whose mate was killed by a hunter. In the metre which so came to him he afterwards composed his *Ramayana*. Tr.

Several of the songs of *Valmiki Pratibha* were set to tunes originally severely classic in mode; some of the tunes were composed by my brother Jyotirindra; a few were adapted from European sources. The *Telena*⁶⁶ style of Indian modes specially lends itself to dramatic purposes and has been frequently utilized in this work. Two English tunes served for the drinking songs of the robber band, and an Irish melody for the lament of the wood nymphs.

66. Some Indian classic melodic compositions are designed on a scheme of accentuation, for which purpose the music is set, not to words, but to unmeaning notation-sounds representing drum-beats or plectrum-impacts which in Indian music are of a considerable variety of tone, each having its own sound-symbol. The *Telena* is one such style of composition. *Tr.*

Valmiki Pratibha is not a composition which will bear being read. Its significance is lost if it is not heard sung and seen acted. It is not what Europeans call an Opera, but a little drama set to music. That is to say, it is not primarily a musical composition. Very few of the songs are important or attractive by themselves; they all serve merely as the musical text of the play.

Before I went to England we occasionally used to have gatherings of literary men in our house, at which music, recitations and light refreshments were served up. After my return one more such gathering was held, which happened to be the last. It was for an entertainment in this connection that the *Valmiki Pratibha* was composed. I played *Valmiki* and my niece, Pratibha, took the part of *Saraswati*—which bit of history remains recorded in the name.

I had read in some work of Herbert Spencer's that speech takes on tuneful inflexions whenever emotion comes into play. It is a fact that the tone or tune is as important to us as the spoken word for the expression of anger, sorrow, joy and wonder. Spencer's idea that, through a development of these emotional modulations of voice, man found music, appealed to me. Why should it not do, I thought to myself, to act a drama in a kind of recitative based on this idea.

The *Kathakas* ⁶⁷ of our country attempt this to some extent, for they frequently break into a chant which, however, stops short of full melodic form. As blank verse is more elastic than rhymed, so such chanting, though not devoid of rhythm, can more freely adapt itself to the emotional interpretation of the text, because it does not attempt to conform to the more rigorous canons of tune and time required by a regular melodic composition. The expression of feeling being the object, these deficiencies in regard to form do not jar on the hearer.

67. Reciters of Puranic legendary lore. *Tr.*

Encouraged by the success of this new line taken in the *Valmiki Pratibha*, I composed another musical play of the same class. It was called the *Kal Mrigaya*, The Fateful Hunt. The plot was based on the story of the accidental killing of the blind hermit's only son by King Dasaratha. It was played on a stage erected on our roof-terrace, and the audience seemed profoundly moved by its pathos. Afterwards, much of it was, with slight changes, incorporated in the *Valmiki Pratibha*, and this play ceased to be separately published in my works.

Long afterwards, I composed a third musical play, *Mayar Khela*, the Play of *Maya*, an operetta of a different type. In this the songs were important, not the drama. In the others a series of dramatic situations were strung on a thread of

melody; this was a garland of songs with just a thread of dramatic plot running through. The play of feeling, and not action, was its special feature. In point of fact I was, while composing it, saturated with the mood of song.

The enthusiasm which went to the making of *Valmiki Pratibha* and *Kal Mrigaya* I have never felt for any other work of mine. In these two the creative musical impulse of the time found expression.

My brother, Jyotirindra, was engaged the live-long day at his piano, refashioning the classic melodic forms at his pleasure. And, at every turn of his instrument, the old modes took on unthought-of shapes and expressed new shades of feeling. The melodic forms which had become habituated to their pristine stately gait, when thus compelled to march to more lively unconventional measures, displayed an unexpected agility and power; and moved us correspondingly. We could plainly hear the tunes speak to us while Akshay Babu and I sat on either side fitting words to them as they grew out of my brother's nimble fingers. I do not claim that our *libretto* was good poetry but it served as a vehicle for the tunes.

In the riotous joy of this revolutionary activity were these two musical plays composed, and so they danced merrily to every measure, whether or not technically correct, indifferent as to the tunes being homelike or foreign.

On many an occasion has the Bengali reading public been grievously exercised over some opinion or literary form of mine, but it is curious to find that the daring with which I had played havoc with accepted musical notions did not rouse any resentment; on the contrary those who came to hear departed pleased. A few of Akshay Babu's compositions find place in the *Valmiki Pratibha* and also adaptations from Vihari Chakravarti's *Sarada Mangal* series of songs.

I used to take the leading part in the performance of these musical dramas. From my early years I had a taste for acting, and firmly believed that I had a special aptitude for it. I think I proved that my belief was not ill-founded. I had only once before done the part of Aleek Babu in a farce written by my brother Jyotirindra. So these were really my first attempts at acting. I was then very young and nothing seemed to fatigue or trouble my voice.

In our house, at the time, a cascade of musical emotion was gushing forth day after day, hour after hour, its scattered spray reflecting into our being a whole gamut of rainbow colours. Then, with the freshness of youth, our new-born energy, impelled by its virgin curiosity, struck out new paths in every direction. We felt we would try and test everything, and no achievement seemed impossible. We wrote, we sang, we acted, we poured ourselves out on every side. This was how I stepped into my twentieth year.

Of these forces which so triumphantly raced our lives along, my brother Jyotirindra was the charioteer. He was absolutely fearless. Once, when I was a mere lad, and had never ridden a horse before, he made me mount one and gallop by his side, with no qualms about his unskilled companion. When at the same age, while we were at Sheldah, (the head-quarters of our estate,) news was brought of a tiger, he took me with him on a hunting expedition. I had no gun,—it would have been more dangerous to me than to the tiger if I had. We left our shoes at the outskirts of the jungle and crept in with bare feet. At last we scrambled up into a bamboo thicket, partly stripped of its thorn-like twigs, where I somehow managed to crouch behind my brother till the deed was done; with no means of even administering a shoe-beating to the unmannerly brute had he dared lay his offensive paws on me!

Thus did my brother give me full freedom both internal and external in the face of all dangers. No usage or custom was a bondage for him, and so was he able to rid me of my shrinking diffidence.

30. Evening Songs

In the state of being confined within myself, of which I have been telling, I wrote a number of poems which have been grouped together, under the title of the *Heart-Wilderness*, in Mohita Babu's edition of my works. In one of the poems subsequently published in a volume called *Morning Songs*, the following lines occur: There is a vast wilderness whose name is Heart; Whose interlacing forest branches dandle and rock darkness like an infant.

I lost my way in its depths.

from which came the idea of the name for this group of poems.

Much of what I wrote, when thus my life had no commerce with the outside, when I was engrossed in the contemplation of my own heart, when my imaginings wandered in many a disguise amidst causeless emotions and aimless longings, has been left out of that edition; only a few of the poems originally published in the volume entitled *Evening Songs* finding a place there, in the *Heart-Wilderness* group.

My brother Jyotirindra and his wife had left home travelling on a long journey, and their rooms on the third storey, facing the terraced-roof, were empty. I took possession of these and the terrace, and spent my days in solitude. While thus left in communion with myself alone, I know not how I slipped out of the poetical groove into which I had fallen. Perhaps being cut off from those whom I sought to please, and whose taste in poetry moulded the form I tried to put my thoughts into, I naturally gained freedom from the style they had imposed on me.

I began to use a slate for my writing. That also helped in my emancipation. The manuscript books in which I had indulged before seemed to demand a certain height of poetic flight, to work up to which I had to find my way by a comparison with others. But the slate was clearly fitted for my mood of the moment. "Fear not," it seemed to say. "Write just what you please, one rub will wipe all away!"

As I wrote a poem or two, thus unfettered, I felt a great joy well up within me. "At last," said my heart, "what I write is my own!" Let no one mistake this for an accession of pride. Rather did I feel a pride in my former productions, as being all the tribute I had to pay them. But I refuse to call the realisation of self, self-sufficiency. The joy of parents in their first-born is not due to any pride in

its appearance, but because it is their very own. If it happens to be an extraordinary child they may also glory in that—but that is different.

In the first flood-tide of that joy I paid no heed to the bounds of metrical form, and as the stream does not flow straight on but winds about as it lists, so did my verse. Before, I would have held this to be a crime, but now I felt no compunction. Freedom first breaks the law and then makes laws which brings it under true Self-rule.

The only listener I had for these erratic poems of mine was Akshay Babu. When he heard them for the first time he was as surprised as he was pleased, and with his approbation my road to freedom was widened.

The poems of Vihari Chakravarti were in a 3-beat metre. This triple time produces a rounded-off globular effect, unlike the square-cut multiple of 2. It rolls on with ease, it glides as it dances to the tinkling of its anklets. I was once very fond of this metre. It felt more like riding a bicycle than walking. And to this stride I had got accustomed. In the *Evening Songs*, without thinking of it, I somehow broke off this habit. Nor did I come under any other particular bondage. I felt entirely free and unconcerned. I had no thought or fear of being taken to task.

The strength I gained by working, freed from the trammels of tradition, led me to discover that I had been searching in impossible places for that which I had within myself. Nothing but want of self-confidence had stood in the way of my coming into my own. I felt like rising from a dream of bondage to find myself unshackled. I cut extraordinary capers just to make sure I was free to move.

To me this is the most memorable period of my poetic career. As poems my *Evening Songs* may not have been worth much, in fact as such they are crude enough. Neither their metre, nor language, nor thought had taken definite shape. Their only merit is that for the first time I had come to write what I really meant, just according to my pleasure. What if those compositions have no value, that pleasure certainly had.

31. An Essay on Music

I had been proposing to study for the bar when my father had recalled me home from England. Some friends concerned at this cutting short of my career pressed him to send me off once again. This led to my starting on a second voyage towards England, this time with a relative as my companion. My fate, however, had so strongly vetoed my being called to the bar that I was not even to reach England this time. For a certain reason we had to disembark at Madras and return home to Calcutta. The reason was by no means as grave as its outcome, but as the laugh was not against *me*, I refrain from setting it down here. From both my attempted pilgrimages to *Lakshmi's* ⁶⁸ shrine I had thus to come back repulsed. I hope, however, that the Law-god, at least, will look on me with a favourable eye for that I have not added to the encumbrances on the Bar-library premises.

[68.](#) The Goddess of Wealth.

My father was then in the Mussoorie hills. I went to him in fear and trembling. But he showed no sign of irritation, he rather seemed pleased. He must have seen in this return of mine the blessing of Divine Providence.

The evening before I started on this voyage I read a paper at the Medical College Hall on the invitation of the Bethune Society. This was my first public reading. The Reverend K. M. Banerji was the president. The subject was Music. Leaving aside instrumental music, I tried to make out that to bring out better what the words sought to express was the chief end and aim of vocal music. The text of my paper was but meagre. I sang and acted songs throughout illustrating my theme. The only reason for the flattering eulogy which the President bestowed on me at the end must have been the moving effect of my young voice together with the earnestness and variety of its efforts. But I must make the confession today that the opinion I voiced with such enthusiasm that evening was wrong.

The art of vocal music has its own special functions and features. And when it happens to be set to words the latter must not presume too much on their opportunity and seek to supersede the melody of which they are but the vehicle. The song being great in its own wealth, why should it wait upon the words? Rather does it begin where mere words fail. Its power lies in the region of the inexpressible; it tells us what the words cannot.

So the less a song is burdened with words the better. In the classic style of Hindustan [69](#) the words are of no account and leave the melody to make its appeal in its own way. Vocal music reaches its perfection when the melodic form is allowed to develop freely, and carry our consciousness with it to its own wonderful plane. In Bengal, however, the words have always asserted themselves so, that our provincial song has failed to develop her full musical capabilities, and has remained content as the handmaiden of her sister art of poetry. From the old Vaishnava songs down to those of Nidhu Babu she has displayed her charms from the background. But as in our country the wife rules her husband through acknowledging her dependence, so our music, though professedly in attendance only, ends by dominating the song.

[69.](#) As distinguished generally from different provincial styles, but chiefly from the Dravidian style prevalent in the South. *Tr.*

I have often felt this while composing my songs. As I hummed to myself and wrote the lines:

*Do not keep your secret to yourself, my love,
But whisper it gently to me, only to me.*

I found that the words had no means of reaching by themselves the region into which they were borne away by the tune. The melody told me that the secret, which I was so importunate to hear, had mingled with the green mystery of the forest glades, was steeped in the silent whiteness of moonlight nights, peeped out of the veil of the illimitable blue behind the horizon—and is the one intimate secret of Earth, Sky and Waters.

In my early boyhood I heard a snatch of a song:
Who dressed you, love, as a foreigner?

This one line painted such wonderful pictures in my mind that it haunts me still. One day I sat down to set to words a composition of my own while full of this bit of song. Humming my tune I wrote to its accompaniment:

*I know you, O Woman from the strange land!
Your dwelling is across the Sea.*

Had the tune not been there I know not what shape the rest of the poem might have taken; but the magic of the melody revealed to me the stranger in all her loveliness. It is she, said my soul, who comes and goes, a messenger to this world from the other shore of the ocean of mystery. It is she, of whom we now and again catch glimpses in the dewy Autumn mornings, in the scented nights of Spring, in the inmost recesses of our hearts—and sometimes we strain skywards

to hear her song. To the door of this world-charming stranger the melody, as I say, wafted me, and so to her were the rest of the words addressed.

Long after this, in a street in Bolpur, a mendicant Baul was singing as he walked along:

*How does the unknown bird flit in and out of the cage!
Ah, could I but catch it, I'd ring its feet with my love!*

I found this Baul to be saying the very same thing. The unknown bird sometimes surrenders itself within the bars of the cage to whisper tidings of the bondless unknown beyond. The heart would fain hold it near to itself forever, but cannot. What but the melody of song can tell us of the goings and comings of the unknown bird?

That is why I am always reluctant to publish books of the words of songs, for therein the soul must needs be lacking.

32. The Riverside

When I returned home from the outset of my second voyage to England, my brother Jyotirindra and sister-in-law were living in a riverside villa at Chandernagore, and there I went to stay with them.

The Ganges again! Again those ineffable days and nights, languid with joy, sad with longing, attuned to the plaintive babbling of the river along the cool shade of its wooded banks. This Bengal sky-full of light, this south breeze, this flow of the river, this right royal laziness, this broad leisure stretching from horizon to horizon and from green earth to blue sky, all these were to me as food and drink to the hungry and thirsty. Here it felt indeed like home, and in these I recognised the ministrations of a Mother.

That was not so very long ago, and yet time has wrought many changes. Our little riverside nests, clustering under their surrounding greenery, have been replaced by mills which now, dragon-like, everywhere rear their hissing heads, belching forth black smoke. In the midday glare of modern life even our hours of mental siesta have been narrowed down to the lowest limit, and hydra-headed unrest has invaded every department of life. Maybe, this is for the better, but I, for one, cannot account it wholly to the good.

These lovely days of mine at the riverside passed by like so many dedicated lotus blossoms floating down the sacred stream. Some rainy afternoons I spent in a veritable frenzy, singing away old *Vaishnava* songs to my own tunes, accompanying myself on a harmonium. On other afternoons, we would drift along in a boat, my brother Jyotirindra accompanying my singing with his violin.

And as, beginning with the *Puravi*, ⁷⁰ we went on varying the mode of our music with the declining day, we saw, on reaching the *Behaga*, ⁷¹ the western sky close the doors of its factory of golden toys, and the moon on the east rise over the fringe of trees.

⁷⁰. Many of the Hindustani classic modes are supposed to be best in keeping with particular seasons of the year, or times of the day. *Tr.*

⁷¹. Many of the Hindustani classic modes are supposed to be best in keeping with particular seasons of the year, or times of the day. *Tr.*

Then we would raw back to the landing steps of the villa and seat ourselves on a quilt spread on the terrace facing the river. By then a silvery peace rested on both land and water, hardly any boats were about, the fringe of trees on the bank

was reduced to a deep shadow, and the moonlight glimmered over the smooth flowing stream.

The villa we were living in was known as 'Moran's Garden'. A flight of stone-flagged steps led up from the water to a long, broad verandah which formed part of the house. The rooms were not regularly arranged, nor all on the same level, and some had to be reached by short flights of stairs. The big sitting room overlooking the landing steps had stained glass windows with coloured pictures.

One of the pictures was of a swing hanging from a branch half-hidden in dense foliage, and in the checkered light and shade of this bower, two persons were swinging; and there was another of a broad flight of steps leading into some castle-like palace, up and down which men and women in festive garb were going and coming. When the light fell on the windows, these pictures shone wonderfully, seeming to fill the riverside atmosphere with holiday music. Some far-away long-forgotten revelry seemed to be expressing itself in silent words of light; the love thrills of the swinging couple making alive with their eternal story the woodlands of the river bank.

The topmost room of the house was in a round tower with windows opening to every side. This I used as my room for writing poetry. Nothing could be seen from thence save the tops of the surrounding trees, and the open sky. I was then busy with the *Evening Songs* and of this room I wrote: There, where in the breast of limitless space clouds are laid to sleep, I have built my house for thee, O Poesy!

33. More about the Evening Songs

At this time my reputation amongst literary critics was that of being a poet of broken cadence and lisping utterance. Everything about my work was dubbed misty, shadowy. However little I might have relished this at the time, the charge was not wholly baseless. My poetry did in fact lack the backbone of worldly reality. How, amidst the ringed-in seclusion of my early years, was I to get the necessary material?

But one thing I refuse to admit. Behind this charge of vagueness was the sting of the insinuation of its being a deliberate affectation—for the sake of effect. The fortunate possessor of good eye-sight is apt to sneer at the youth with glasses, as if he wears them for ornament. While a reflection on the poor fellow's infirmity may be permissible, it is too bad to charge him with pretending not to see.

The nebula is not an outside creation—it merely represents a phase; and to leave out all poetry which has not attained definiteness would not bring us to the truth of literature. If any phase of man's nature has found true expression, it is worth preserving—it may be cast aside only if not expressed truly. There is a period in man's life when his feelings are the pathos of the inexpressible, the anguish of vagueness. The poetry which attempts its expression cannot be called baseless—at worst it may be worthless; but it is not necessarily even that. The sin is not in the thing expressed, but in the failure to express it.

There is a duality in man. Of the inner person, behind the outward current of thoughts, feelings and events, but little is known or racked; but for all that, he cannot be got rid of as a factor in life's progress. When the outward life fails to harmonise with the inner, the dweller within is hurt, and his pain manifests itself in the outer consciousness in a manner to which it is difficult to give a name, or even to describe, and of which the cry is more akin to an inarticulate wail than words with more precise meaning.

The sadness and pain which sought expression in the *Evening Songs* had their roots in the depths of my being. As one's sleep-smothered consciousness wrestles with a nightmare in its efforts to awake, so the submerged inner self struggles to free itself from its complexities and come out into the open. These *Songs* are the history of that struggle. As in all creation, so in poetry, there is the opposition of forces. If the divergence is too wide, or the unison too close, there is, it seems to me, no room for poetry. Where the pain of discord strives to

attain and express its resolution into harmony, there does poetry break forth into music, as breath through a flute.

When the *Evening Songs* first saw the light they were not hailed with any flourish of trumpets, but none the less they did not lack admirers. I have elsewhere told the story of how at the wedding of Mr. Ramesh Chandra Dutt's eldest daughter, Bankim Babu was at the door, and the host was welcoming him with the customary garland of flowers. As I came up Bankim Babu eagerly took the garland and placing it round my neck said: "The wreath to him, Ramesh, have you not read his *Evening Songs*?" And when Mr. Dutt avowed he had not yet done so, the manner in which Bankim Babu expressed his opinion of some of them amply rewarded me.

The *Evening Songs* gained for me a friend whose approval, like the rays of the sun, stimulated and guided the shoots of my newly sprung efforts. This was Babu Priyanath Sen. Just before this the *Broken Heart* had led him to give up all hopes of me. I won him back with these *Evening Songs*. Those who are acquainted with him know him as an expert navigator of all the seven seas [72](#) of literature, whose highways and byways, in almost all languages, Indian and foreign, he is constantly traversing. To converse with him is to gain glimpses of even the most out of the way scenery in the world of ideas. This proved of the greatest value to me.

[72.](#) The world, as the Indian boy knows it from fairy tale and folklore, has seven seas and thirteen rivers. *Tr.*

He was able to give his literary opinions with the fullest confidence, for he had not to rely on his unaided taste to guide his likes and dislikes. This authoritative criticism of his also assisted me more than I can tell. I used to read to him everything I wrote, and but for the timely showers of his discriminate appreciation it is hard to say whether these early ploughings of mine would have yielded as they have done.

34. Morning Songs

At the river-side I also did a bit of prose writing, not on any definite subject or plan, but in the spirit that boys catch butterflies. When spring comes within, many-coloured short-lived fancies are born and flit about in the mind, ordinarily unnoticed. In these days of my leisure, it was perhaps the mere whim to collect them which had come upon me. Or it may have been only another phase of my emancipated self which had thrown out its chest and decided to write just as it pleased; what I wrote not being the object, it being sufficient unto itself that it was I who wrote. These prose pieces were published later under the name of *Vividha Prabandha*, Various Topics, but they expired with the first edition and did not get a fresh lease of life in a second.

At this time, I think, I also began my first novel, *Bauthakuranir Hat*.

After we had stayed for a time by the river, my brother Jyotirindra took a house in Calcutta, on Sudder Street near the Museum. I remained with him. While I went on here with the novel and the *Evening Songs*, a momentous revolution of some kind came about within me.

One day, late in the afternoon, I was pacing the terrace of our Jorasanko house. The glow of the sunset combined with the wan twilight in a way which seemed to give the approaching evening a specially wonderful attractiveness for me. Even the walls of the adjoining house seemed to grow beautiful. Is this uplifting of the cover of triviality from the everyday world, I wondered, due to some magic in the evening light? Never!

I could see at once that it was the effect of the evening which had come within me; its shades had obliterated myself. While the self was rampant during the glare of day, everything I perceived was mingled with and hidden by it. Now, that the self was put into the background, I could see the world in its own true aspect. And that aspect has nothing of triviality in it, it is full of beauty and joy.

Since this experience I tried the effect of deliberately suppressing myself and viewing the world as a mere spectator, and was invariably rewarded with a sense of special pleasure. I remember I tried also to explain to a relative how to see the world in its true light, and the incidental lightening of one's own sense of burden which follows such vision; but, as I believe, with no success.

Then I gained a further insight which has lasted all my life.

The end of Sudder Street, and the trees on the Free School grounds opposite, were visible from our Sudder Street house. One morning I happened to be standing on the verandah looking that way. The sun was just rising through the leafy tops of those trees. As I continued to gaze, all of a sudden a covering seemed to fall away from my eyes, and I found the world bathed in a wonderful radiance, with waves of beauty and joy swelling on every side. This radiance pierced in a moment through the folds of sadness and despondency which had accumulated over my heart, and flooded it with this universal light.

That very day the poem, *The Awakening of the Waterfall*, gushed forth and coursed on like a veritable cascade. The poem came to an end, but the curtain did not fall upon the joy aspect of the Universe. And it came to be so that no person or thing in the world seemed to me trivial or unpleasing. A thing that happened the next day or the day following seemed specially astonishing.

There was a curious sort of person who came to me now and then, with a habit of asking all manner of silly questions. One day he had asked: "Have you, sir, seen God with your own eyes?" And on my having to admit that I had not, he averred that he had. "What was it you saw?" I asked. "He seethed and throbbed before my eyes!" was the reply.

It can well be imagined that one would not ordinarily relish being drawn into abstruse discussions with such a person. Moreover, I was at the time entirely absorbed in my own writing. Nevertheless as he was a harmless sort of fellow I did not like the idea of hurting his susceptibilities and so tolerated him as best I could.

This time, when he came one afternoon, I actually felt glad to see him, and welcomed him cordially. The mantle of his oddity and foolishness seemed to have slipped off, and the person I so joyfully hailed was the real man whom I felt to be in nowise inferior to myself, and moreover closely related. Finding no trace of annoyance within me at sight of him, nor any sense of my time being wasted with him, I was filled with an immense gladness, and felt rid of some enveloping tissue of untruth which had been causing me so much needless and uncalled for discomfort and pain.

As I would stand on the balcony, the gait, the figure, the features of each one of the passers-by, whoever they might be, seemed to me all so extraordinarily wonderful, as they flowed past,—waves on the sea of the universe. From infancy I had seen only with my eyes, I now began to see with the whole of my consciousness. I could not look upon the sight of two smiling youths, nonchalantly going their way, the arm of one on the other's shoulder, as a matter of small moment; for, through it I could see the fathomless depths of the eternal

spring of Joy from which numberless sprays of laughter leap up throughout the world.

I had never before marked the play of limbs and lineaments which always accompanies even the least of man's actions; now I was spell-bound by their variety, which I came across on all sides, at every moment. Yet I saw them not as being apart by themselves, but as parts of that amazingly beautiful greater dance which goes on at this very moment throughout the world of men, in each of their homes, in their multifarious wants and activities.

Friend laughs with friend, the mother fondles her child, one cow sidles up to another and licks its body, and the immeasurability behind these comes direct to my mind with a shock which almost savours of pain.

When of this period I wrote: I know not how of a sudden my heart flung open its doors, And let the crowd of worlds rush in, greeting each other,— it was no poetic exaggeration. Rather I had not the power to express all I felt.

For some time together I remained in this self-forgetful state of bliss. Then my brother thought of going to the Darjeeling hills. So much the better, thought I. On the vast Himalayan tops I shall be able to see more deeply into what has been revealed to me in Sudder Street; at any rate I shall see how the Himalayas display themselves to my new gift of vision.

But the victory was with that little house in Sudder Street. When, after ascending the mountains, I looked around, I was at once aware I had lost my new vision. My sin must have been in imagining that I could get still more of truth from the outside. However sky-piercing the king of mountains may be, he can have nothing in his gift for me; while He who is the Giver can vouchsafe a vision of the eternal universe in the dingiest of lanes, and in a moment of time.

I wandered about amongst the first, I sat near the falls and bathed in their waters, I gazed at the grandeur of Kinchinjunga through a cloudless sky, but in what had seemed to me these likeliest of places, I found *it* not. I had come to know it, but could see it no longer. While I was admiring the gem the lid had suddenly closed, leaving me staring at the enclosing casket. But, for all the attractiveness of its workmanship, there was no longer any danger of my mistaking it for merely an empty box.

My *Morning Songs* came to an end, their last echo dying out with *The Echo* which I wrote at Darjeeling. This apparently proved such an abstruse affair that two friends laid a wager as to its real meaning. My only consolation was that, as I was equally unable to explain the enigma to them when they came to me for a solution, neither of them had to lose any money over it. Alas! The days when I wrote excessively plain poems about *The Lotus* and *A Lake* had gone

forever.

But does one write poetry to explain any matter? What is felt within the heart tries to find outside shape as a poem. So when after listening to a poem anyone says he has not understood, I feel nonplussed. If someone smells a flower and says he does not understand, the reply to him is: there is nothing to understand, it is only a scent. If he persists, saying: *that* I know, but what does it all *mean*? Then one has either to change the subject, or make it more abstruse by saying that the scent is the shape which the universal joy takes in the flower.

That words have meanings is just the difficulty. That is why the poet has to turn and twist them in metre and verse, so that the meaning may be held somewhat in check, and the feeling allowed a chance to express itself.

This utterance of feeling is not the statement of a fundamental truth, or a scientific fact, or a useful moral precept. Like a tear or a smile it is but a picture of what is taking place within. If Science or Philosophy may gain anything from it they are welcome, but that is not the reason of its being. If while crossing a ferry you can catch a fish you are a lucky man, but that does not make the ferry boat a fishing boat, nor should you abuse the ferryman if he does not make fishing his business.

The Echo was written so long ago that it has escaped attention and I am now no longer called upon to render an account of its meaning. Nevertheless, whatever its other merits or defects may be, I can assure my readers that it was not my intention to propound a riddle, or insidiously convey any erudite teaching. The fact of the matter was that a longing had been born within my heart, and, unable to find any other name, I had called the thing I desired an Echo.

When from the original fount in the depths of the Universe streams of melody are sent forth abroad, their echo is reflected into our heart from the faces of our beloved and the other beauteous things around us. It must be, as I suggested, this Echo which we love, and not the things themselves from which it happens to be reflected; for that which one day we scarce deign to glance at, may be, on another, the very thing which claims our whole devotion.

I had so long viewed the world with external vision only, and so had been unable to see its universal aspect of joy. When of a sudden, from some innermost depth of my being, a ray of light found its way out, it spread over and illuminated for me the whole universe, which then no longer appeared like heaps of things and happenings, but was disclosed to my sight as one whole. This experience seemed to tell me of the stream of melody issuing from the very heart of the universe and spreading over space and time, re-echoing thence as waves of joy which flow right back to the source.

When the artist sends his song forth from the depths of a full heart that is joy indeed. And the joy is redoubled when this same song is wafted back to him as hearer. If, when the creation of the Arch-Poet is thus returning back to him in a flood of joy, we allow it to flow over our consciousness, we at once, immediately, become aware, in an inexpressible manner, of the end to which this flood is streaming. And as we become aware our love goes forth; and our *selves* are moved from their moorings and would fain float down the stream of joy to its infinite goal. This is the meaning of the longing which stirs within us at the sight of Beauty.

The stream which comes from the Infinite and flows toward the finite—that is the True, the Good; it is subject to laws, definite in form. Its echo which returns towards the Infinite is Beauty and Joy; which are difficult to touch or grasp, and so make us beside ourselves. This is what I tried to say by way of a parable or a song in *The Echo*. That the result was not clear is not to be wondered at, for neither was the attempt then clear unto itself.

Let me set down here part of what I wrote in a letter, at a more advanced age, about the *Morning Songs*.

“There is none in the World, all are in my heart”—is a state of mind belonging to a particular age. When the heart is first awakened it puts forth its arms and would grasp the whole world, like the teething infant which thinks everything meant for its mouth. Gradually it comes to understand what it really wants and what it does not. Then do its nebulous emanations shrink upon themselves, get heated, and heat in their turn.

To begin by wanting the whole world is to get nothing. When desire is concentrated, with the whole strength of one’s being upon any one object whatsoever it might be, then does the gateway to the Infinite become visible. The morning songs were the first throwing forth of my inner self outwards, and consequently they lack any signs of such concentration.

This all-pervading joy of a first outflow, however, has the effect of leading us to an acquaintance with the particular. The lake in its fulness seeks an outlet as a river. In this sense the permanent later love is narrower than first love. It is more definite in the direction of its activities, desires to realise the whole in each of its parts, and is thus impelled on towards the infinite. What it finally reaches is no longer the former indefinite extension of the heart’s own inner joy, but a merging in the infinite reality which was outside itself, and thereby the attainment of the complete truth of its own longings.

In Mohita Babu’s edition these *Morning Songs* have been placed in the group

of poems entitled *Nishkraman*, The Emergence. For in these was to be found the first news of my coming out of the *Heart Wilderness* into the open world. Thereafter did this pilgrim heart make its acquaintance with that world, bit by bit, part by part, in many a mood and manner. And at the end, after gliding past all the numerous landing steps of ever-changing impermanence, it will reach the infinite,—not the vagueness of indeterminate possibility, but the consummation of perfect fulness of Truth.

From my earliest years I enjoyed a simple and intimate communion with Nature. Each one of the cocoanut trees in our garden had for me a distinct personality. When, on coming home from the Normal School, I saw behind the skyline of our roof-terrace blue-grey water-laden clouds thickly banked up, the immense depth of gladness which filled me, all in a moment, I can recall clearly even now. On opening my eyes every morning, the blithely awakening world used to call me to join it like a playmate; the perfervid noonday sky, during the long silent watches of the siesta hours, would spirit me away from the work-a-day world into the recesses of its hermit cell; and the darkness of night would open the door to its phantom paths, and take me over all the seven seas and thirteen rivers, past all possibilities and impossibilities, right into its wonderland.

Then one day, when, with the dawn of youth, my hungry heart began to cry out for its sustenance, a barrier was set up between this play of inside and outside. And my whole being eddied round and round my troubled heart, creating a vortex within itself, in the whirls of which its consciousness was confined.

This loss of the harmony between inside and outside, due to the over-riding claims of the heart in its hunger, and consequent restriction of the privilege of communion which had been mine, was mourned by me in the *Evening Songs*. In the *Morning Songs* I celebrated the sudden opening of a gate in the barrier, by what shock I know not, through which I regained the lost one, not only as I knew it before, but more deeply, more fully, by force of the intervening separation.

Thus did the First Book of my life come to an end with these chapters of union, separation and reunion. Or, rather, it is not true to say it has come to an end. The same subject has still to be continued through more elaborate solutions of worse complexities, to a greater conclusion. Each one comes here to finish but one book of life, which, during the progress of its various parts, grows spiral-wise on an ever-increasing radius. So, while each segment may appear different from the others at a cursory glance, they all really lead back to the self-same starting centre.

The prose writings of the *Evening Songs* period were published, as I have said,

under the name of *Vividha Prabandha*. Those others which correspond to the time of my writing the *Morning Songs* came out under the title of *Alochana*, Discussions. The difference between the characteristics of these two would be a good index of the nature of the change that had in the meantime taken place within me.

Part 7

35. Rajendrahald Mitra

It was about this time that my brother Jyotirindra had the idea of founding a Literary Academy by bringing together all the men of letters of repute. To compile authoritative technical terms for the Bengali language and in other ways to assist in its growth was to be its object—therein differing but little from the lines on which the modern *Sahitya Parishat*, Academy of Literature, has taken shape.

Dr. Rajendrahald Mitra took up the idea of this Academy with enthusiasm, and he was eventually its president for the short time it lasted. When I went to invite Pandit Vidyasagar to join it, he gave a hearing to my explanation of its objects and the names of the proposed members, then said: "My advice to you is to leave us out—you will never accomplish anything with big wigs; they can never be got to agree with one another." With which he refused to come in. Bankim Babu became a member, but I cannot say that he took much interest in the work.

To be plain, so long as this academy lived Rajendrahald Mitra did everything single-handed. He began with Geographical terms. The draft list was made out by Dr. Rajendrahald himself and was printed and circulated for the suggestions of the members. We had also an idea of transliterating in Bengali the name of each foreign country as pronounced by itself.

Pandit Vidyasagar's prophecy was fulfilled. It did not prove possible to get the big wigs to do anything. And the academy withered away shortly after sprouting. But Rajendrahald Mitra was an all-round expert and was an academy in himself. My labours in this cause were more than repaid by the privilege of his acquaintance. I have met many Bengali men of letters in my time but none who left the impression of such brilliance.

I used to go and see him in the office of the Court of Wards in Maniktala. I would go in the mornings and always find him busy with his studies, and with the inconsiderateness of youth, I felt no hesitation in disturbing him. But I have never seen him the least bit put out on that account. As soon as he saw me he would put aside his work and begin to talk to me. It is a matter of common knowledge that he was somewhat hard of hearing, so he hardly ever gave me occasion to put him any question. He would take up some broad subject and talk away upon it, and it was the attraction of these discourses which drew me there. Converse with no other person ever gave me such a wealth of suggestive ideas

on so many different subjects. I would listen enraptured.

I think he was a member of the text-book committee and every book he received for approval, he read through and annotated in pencil. On some occasions he would select one of these books for the text of discourses on the construction of the Bengali language in particular or Philology in general, which were of the greatest benefit to me. There were few subjects which he had not studied and anything he had studied he could clearly expound.

If we had not relied on the other members of the Academy we had tried to found, but left everything to Dr. Rajendrahahal, the present *Sahitya Parishat* would have doubtless found the matters it is now occupied with left in a much more advanced state by that one man alone.

Dr. Rajendrahahal Mitra was not only a profound scholar, but he had likewise a striking personality which shone through his features. Full of fire as he was in his public life, he could also unbend graciously so as to talk on the most difficult subjects to a stripling like myself without any trace of a patronising tone. I even took advantage of his condescension to the extent of getting a contribution, *Yama's Dog*, from him for the Bharabi. There were other great contemporaries of his with whom I would not have ventured to take such liberties, nor would I have met with the like response if I had.

And yet when he was on the war path his opponents on the Municipal Corporation or the Senate of the University were mortally afraid of him. In those days Kristo Das Pal was the tactful politician, and Rajendrahahal Mitra the valiant fighter.

For the purposes of the Asiatic Society's publications and researches, he had to employ a number of Sanscrit Pandits to do the mechanical work for him. I remember how this gave certain envious and mean-minded detractors the opportunity of saying that everything was really done by these Pandits while Rajendrahahal fraudulently appropriated all the credit. Even today we very often find the tools arrogating to themselves the lion's share of the achievement, imagining the wielder to be a mere ornamental figurehead. If the poor pen had a mind it would as certainly have bemoaned the unfairness of its getting all the stain and the writer all the glory!

It is curious that this extraordinary man should have got no recognition from his countrymen even after his death. One of the reasons may be that the national mourning for Vidyasagar, whose death followed shortly after, left no room for a recognition of the other bereavement. Another reason may be that his main contributions being outside the pale of Bengali literature, he had been unable to reach the heart of the people.

36. Karwar

Our Sudder Street party next transferred itself to Karwar on the West Sea coast. Karwar is the headquarters of the Kanara district in the Southern portion of the Bombay Presidency. It is the tract of the Malaya Hills of Sanskrit literature where grow the cardamum creeper and the Sandal Tree. My second brother was then Judge there.

The little harbour, ringed round with hills, is so secluded that it has nothing of the aspect of a port about it. Its crescent shaped beach throws out its arms to the shoreless open sea like the very image of an eager striving to embrace the infinite. The edge of the broad sandy beach is fringed with a forest of casuarinas, broken at one end by the *Kalanadi* river which here flows into the sea after passing through a gorge flanked by rows of hills on either side.

I remember how one moonlit evening we went up this river in a little boat. We stopped at one of Shivaji's old hill forts, and stepping ashore found our way into the clean-swept little yard of a peasant's home. We sat on a spot where the moonbeams fell glancing off the top of the outer enclosure, and there dined off the eatables we had brought with us. On our way back we let the boat glide down the river. The night brooded over the motionless hills and forests, and on the silent flowing stream of this little *Kalanadi*, throwing over all its moonlight spell. It took us a good long time to reach the mouth of the river, so, instead of returning by sea, we got off the boat there and walked back home over the sands of the beach. It was then far into the night, the sea was without a ripple, even the ever-troubled murmur of the casuarinas was at rest. The shadow of the fringe of trees along the vast expanse of sand hung motionless along its border, and the ring of blue-grey hills around the horizon slept calmly beneath the sky.

Through the deep silence of this illimitable whiteness we few human creatures walked along with our shadows, without a word. When we reached home my sleep had lost itself in something still deeper. The poem which I then wrote is inextricably mingled with that night on the distant seashore. I do not know how it will appeal to the reader apart from the memories with which it is entwined. This doubt led to its being left out of Mohita Babu's edition of my works. I trust that a place given to it among my reminiscences may not be deemed unfitting.

Let me sink down, losing myself in the depths of midnight.

Let the Earth leave her hold of me, let her free me from her obstacle of dust.

*Keep your watch from afar, O stars, drunk though you be with moonlight,
And let the horizon hold its wings still around me.*

*Let there be no song, no word, no sound, no touch; nor sleep, nor awakening,
— But only the moonlight like a swoon of ecstasy over the sky and my being.*

*The world seems to me like a ship with its countless pilgrims, Vanishing in
the far-away blue of the sky, Its sailors' song becoming fainter and fainter in
the air, While I sink in the bosom of the endless night, fading away from
myself, dwindling into a point.*

It is necessary to remark here that merely because something has been written when feelings are brimming over, it is not therefore necessarily good. Such is rather a time when the utterance is thick with emotion. Just as it does not do to have the writer entirely removed from the feeling to which he is giving expression, so also it does not conduce to the truest poetry to have him too close to it. Memory is the brush which can best lay on the true poetic colour. Nearness has too much of the compelling about it and the imagination is not sufficiently free unless it can get away from its influence. Not only in poetry, but in all art, the mind of the artist must attain a certain degree of aloofness—the *creator* within man must be allowed the sole control. If the subject matter gets the better of the creation, the result is a mere replica of the event, not a reflection of it through the Artist's mind.

37. Nature's Revenge

Here in Karwar I wrote the *Prakritir Pratishodha*, Nature's Revenge, a dramatic poem. The hero was a Sanyasi (hermit) who had been striving to gain a victory over Nature by cutting away the bonds of all desires and affections and thus to arrive at a true and profound knowledge of self. A little girl, however, brought him back from his communion with the infinite to the world and into the bondage of human affection. On so coming back the *Sanyasi* realised that the great is to be found in the small, the infinite within the bounds of form, and the eternal freedom of the soul in love. It is only in the light of love that all limits are merged in the limitless.

The sea beach of Karwar is certainly a fit place in which to realise that the beauty of Nature is not a mirage of the imagination, but reflects the joy of the Infinite and thus draws us to lose ourselves in it. Where the universe is expressing itself in the magic of its laws it may not be strange if we miss its infinitude; but where the heart gets into immediate touch with immensity in the beauty of the meanest of things, is any room left for argument?

Nature took the *Sanyasi* to the presence of the Infinite, enthroned on the finite, by the pathway of the heart. In the *Nature's Revenge* there were shown on the one side the wayfarers and the villagers, content with their home-made triviality and unconscious of anything beyond; and on the other the *Sanyasi* busy casting away his all, and himself, into the self-evolved infinite of his imagination. When love bridged the gulf between the two, and the hermit and the householder met, the seeming triviality of the finite and the seeming emptiness of the infinite alike disappeared.

This was to put in a slightly different form the story of my own experience, of the entrancing ray of light which found its way into the depths of the cave into which I had retired away from all touch with the outer world, and made me more fully one with Nature again. This *Nature's Revenge* may be looked upon as an introduction to the whole of my future literary work; or, rather this has been the subject on which all my writings have dwelt—the joy of attaining the Infinite within the finite.

On our way back from Karwar I wrote some songs for the *Nature's Revenge* on board ship. The first one filled me with a great gladness as I sang, and wrote it sitting on the deck: Mother, leave your darling boy to us, *And let us take him to the field where we graze our cattle.* [73](#)

[73](#). This is addressed to Yashoda, mother of Krishna, by his playmates. Yashoda would dress up her darling every morning in his yellow garment with a peacock plume in his hair. But when it came to the point, she was nervous about allowing him, young as he was, to join the other cowherd boys at the pasturage. So it often required a great deal of persuasion before they would be allowed to take charge of him. This is part of the Vaishnava parable of the child aspect of Krishna's play with the world. *Tr.*

The sun has risen, the buds have opened, the cowherd boys are going to the pasture; and they would not have the sunlight, the flowers, and their play in the grazing grounds empty. They want their *Shyam* (Krishna) to be with them there, in the midst of all these. They want to see the Infinite in all its carefully adorned loveliness; they have turned out so early because they want to join in its gladsome play, in the midst of these woods and fields and hills and dales—not to admire from a distance, nor in the majesty of power. Their equipment is of the slightest. A simple yellow garment and a garland of wild-flowers are all the ornaments they require. For where joy reigns on every side, to hunt for it arduously, or amidst pomp and circumstances, is to lose it.

Shortly after my return from Karwar, I was married. I was then 22 years of age.

38. Pictures and Songs

Chhabi o Gan, Picture and Songs, was the title of a book of poems most of which were written at this time.

We were then living in a house with a garden in Lower Circular Road. Adjoining it on the south was a large *Busti*. ⁷⁴ I would often sit near a window and watch the sights of this populous little settlement. I loved to see them at their work and play and rest, and in their multifarious goings and comings. To me it was all like a living story.

⁷⁴. A *Busti* is an area thickly packed with shabby tiled huts, with narrow pathways running through, and connecting it with the main street. These are inhabited by domestic servants, the poorer class of artisans and the like. Such settlements were formerly scattered throughout the town even in the best localities, but are now gradually disappearing from the latter. *Tr.*

A faculty of many-sightedness possessed me at this time. Each little separate picture I ringed round with the light of my imagination and the joy of my heart; every one of them, moreover, being variously coloured by a pathos of its own. The pleasure of thus separately marking off each picture was much the same as that of painting it, both being the outcome of the desire to see with the mind what the eye sees, and with the eye what the mind imagines.

Had I been a painter with the brush I would doubtless have tried to keep a permanent record of the visions and creations of that period when my mind was so alertly responsive. But that instrument was not available to me. What I had was only words and rhythms, and even with these I had not yet learnt to draw firm strokes, and the colours went beyond their margins. Still, like young folk with their first paint box, I spent the livelong day painting away with the many coloured fancies of my new-born youth. If these pictures are now viewed in the light of that twenty-second year of my life, some features may be discerned even through their crude drawing and blurred colouring.

I have said that the first book of my literary life came to an end with the *Morning Songs*. The same subject was then continued under a different rendering. Many a page at the outset of this Book, I am sure, is of no value. In the process of making a new beginning much in the way of superfluous preliminary has to be gone through. Had these been leaves of trees they would have duly dropped off. Unfortunately, leaves of books continue to stick fast even when they are no longer wanted. The feature of these poems was the closeness

of attention devoted even to trifling things. *Pictures and Songs* seized every opportunity of giving value to these by colouring them with feelings straight from the heart.

Or, rather, that was not it. When the string of the mind is properly attuned to the universe then at each point the universal song can awaken its sympathetic vibrations. It was because of this music roused within that nothing then felt trivial to the writer. Whatever my eyes fell upon found a response within me. Like children who can play with sand or stones or shells or whatever they can get (for the spirit of play is within them), so also we, when filled with the song of youth, become aware that the harp of the universe has its variously tuned strings everywhere stretched, and the nearest may serve as well as any other for our accompaniment, there is no need to seek afar.

39. An Intervening Period

Between the *Pictures and Songs* and the *Sharps and Flats*, a child's magazine called the *Balaka* sprang up and ended its brief days like an annual plant. My second sister-in-law felt the want of an illustrated magazine for children. Her idea was that the young people of the family would contribute to it, but as she felt that that alone would not be enough, she took up the editorship herself and asked me to help with contributions. After one or two numbers of the *Balaka* had come out I happened to go on a visit to Rajnarayan Babu at Deoghur. On the return journey the train was crowded and as there was an unshaded light just over the only berth I could get, I could not sleep. I thought I might as well take this opportunity of thinking out a story for the *Balaka*. In spite of my efforts to get hold of the story it eluded me, but sleep came to the rescue instead. I saw in a dream the stone steps of a temple stained with the blood of victims of the sacrifice;—a little girl standing there with her father asking him in piteous accents: "Father, what is this, why all this blood?" and the father, inwardly moved, trying with a show of gruffness to quiet her questioning. As I awoke I felt I had got my story. I have many more such dream-given stories and other writings as well. This dream episode I worked into the annals of King Gobinda Manikya of Tipperah and made out of it a little serial story, *Rajarshi*, for the *Balaka*.

Those were days of utter freedom from care. Nothing in particular seemed to be anxious to express itself through my life or writings. I had not yet joined the throng of travellers on the path of Life, but was a mere spectator from my roadside window. Many a person hied by on many an errand as I gazed on, and every now and then Spring or Autumn, or the Rains would enter unasked and stay with me for a while.

But I had not only to do with the seasons. There were men of all kinds of curious types who, floating about like boats adrift from their anchorage, occasionally invaded my little room. Some of them sought to further their own ends, at the cost of my inexperience, with many an extraordinary device. But they need not have taken any extraordinary pains to get the better of me. I was then entirely unsophisticated, my own wants were few, and I was not at all clever in distinguishing between good and bad faith. I have often gone on imagining that I was assisting with their school fees students to whom fees were

as superfluous as their unread books.

Once a long-haired youth brought me a letter from an imaginary sister in which she asked me to take under my protection this brother of hers who was suffering from the tyranny of a stepmother as imaginary as herself. The brother was not imaginary, that was evident enough. But his sister's letter was as unnecessary for me as expert marksmanship to bring down a bird which cannot fly.

Another young fellow came and informed me that he was studying for the B.A., but could not go up for his examination as he was afflicted with some brain trouble. I felt concerned, but being far from proficient in medical science, or in any other science, I was at a loss what advice to give him. But he went on to explain that he had seen in a dream that my wife had been his mother in a former birth, and that if he could but drink some water which had touched her feet he would get cured. "Perhaps you don't believe in such things," he concluded with a smile. My belief, I said, did not matter, but if he thought he could get cured, he was welcome, with which I procured him a phial of water which was supposed to have touched my wife's feet. He felt immensely better, he said. In the natural course of evolution from water he came to solid food. Then he took up his quarters in a corner of my room and began to hold smoking parties with his friends, till I had to take refuge in flight from the smoke laden air. He gradually proved beyond doubt that his brain might have been diseased, but it certainly was not weak.

After this experience it took no end of proof before I could bring myself to put my trust in children of previous births. My reputation must have spread for I next received a letter from a daughter. Here, however, I gently but firmly drew the line.

All this time my friendship with Babu Srish Chandra Magundar ripened apace. Every evening he and Prija Babu would come to this little room of mine and we would discuss literature and music far into the night. Sometimes a whole day would be spent in the same way. The fact is *myself* had not yet been moulded and nourished into a strong and definite personality and so my life drifted along as light and easy as an autumn cloud.

40. Bankim Chandra

This was the time when my acquaintance with Bankim Babu began. My first sight of him was a matter of long before. The old students of Calcutta University had then started an annual reunion, of which Babu Chandranath Basu was the leading spirit. Perhaps he entertained a hope that at some future time I might acquire the right to be one of them; anyhow I was asked to read a poem on the occasion. Chandranath Babu was then quite a young man. I remember he had translated some martial German poem into English which he proposed to recite himself on the day, and came to rehearse it to us full of enthusiasm. That a warrior poet's ode to his beloved sword should at one time have been his favourite poem will convince the reader that even Chandranath Babu was once young; and moreover that those times were indeed peculiar.

While wandering about in the crush at the Students' reunion, I suddenly came across a figure which at once struck me as distinguished beyond that of all the others and who could not have possibly been lost in any crowd. The features of that tall fair personage shone with such a striking radiance that I could not contain my curiosity about him—he was the only one there whose name I felt concerned to know that day. When I learnt he was Bankim Babu I marvelled all the more, it seemed to me such a wonderful coincidence that his appearance should be as distinguished as his writings. His sharp aquiline nose, his compressed lips, and his keen glance all betokened immense power. With his arms folded across his breast he seemed to walk as one apart, towering above the ordinary throng—this is what struck me most about him. Not only that he looked an intellectual giant, but he had on his forehead the mark of a true prince among men.

One little incident which occurred at this gathering remains indelibly impressed on my mind. In one of the rooms a Pandit was reciting some Sanskrit verses of his own composition and explaining them in Bengali to the audience. One of the allusions was not exactly coarse, but somewhat vulgar. As the Pandit was proceeding to expound this Bankim Babu, covering his face with his hands, hurried out of the room. I was near the door and can still see before me that shrinking, retreating figure.

After that I often longed to see him, but could not get an opportunity. At last one day, when he was Deputy Magistrate of Hawrah, I made bold to call on him.

We met, and I tried my best to make conversation. But I somehow felt greatly abashed while returning home, as if I had acted like a raw and bumptious youth in thus thrusting myself upon him unasked and unintroduced.

Shortly after, as I added to my years, I attained a place as the youngest of the literary men of the time; but what was to be my position in order of merit was not even then settled. The little reputation I had acquired was mixed with plenty of doubt and not a little of condescension. It was then the fashion in Bengal to assign each man of letters a place in comparison with a supposed compeer in the West. Thus one was the Byron of Bengal, another the Emerson and so forth. I began to be styled by some the Bengal Shelley. This was insulting to Shelley and only likely to get me laughed at.

My recognised cognomen was the Lisping Poet. My attainments were few, my knowledge of life meagre, and both in my poetry and my prose the sentiment exceeded the substance. So that there was nothing there on which anyone could have based his praise with any degree of confidence. My dress and behaviour were of the same anomalous description. I wore my hair long and indulged probably in an ultra-poetical refinement of manner. In a word I was eccentric and could not fit myself into everyday life like the ordinary man.

At this time Babu Akshay Sarkar had started his monthly review, the *Nabajiban*, New Life, to which I used occasionally to contribute. Bankim Babu had just closed the chapter of his editorship of the *Banga Darsan*, the Mirror of Bengal, and was busy with religious discussions for which purpose he had started the monthly, *Prachar*, the Preacher. To this also I contributed a song or two and an effusive appreciation of *Vaishnava* lyrics.

From now I began constantly to meet Bankim Babu. He was then living in Bhabani Dutt's street. I used to visit him frequently, it is true, but there was not much of conversation. I was then of the age to listen, not to talk. I fervently wished we could warm up into some discussion, but my diffidence got the better of my conversational powers. Some days Sanjib Babu ⁷⁵ would be there reclining on his bolster. The sight would gladden me, for he was a genial soul. He delighted in talking and it was a delight to listen to his talk. Those who have read his prose writing must have noticed how gaily and airily it flows on like the sprightliest of conversation. Very few have this gift of conversation, and fewer still the art of translating it into writing.

⁷⁵. One of Bankim Babu's brothers.

This was the time when Pandit Sashadhar rose into prominence. Of him I first heard from Bankim Babu. If I remember right Bankim Babu was also responsible for introducing him to the public. The curious attempt made by

Hindu orthodoxy to revive its prestige with the help of western science soon spread all over the country. Theosophy for some time previously had been preparing the ground for such a movement. Not that Bankim Babu even thoroughly identified himself with this cult. No shadow of Sashadhar was cast on his exposition of Hinduism as it found expression in the *Prachar*—that was impossible.

I was then coming out of the seclusion of my corner as my contributions to these controversies will show. Some of these were satirical verses, some farcical plays, others letters to newspapers. I thus came down into the arena from the regions of sentiment and began to spar in right earnest.

In the heat of the fight I happened to fall foul of Bankim Babu. The history of this remains recorded in the *Prachar* and *Bharati* of those days and need not be repeated here. At the close of this period of antagonism Bankim Babu wrote me a letter which I have unfortunately lost. Had it been here the reader could have seen with what consummate generosity Bankim Babu had taken the sting out of that unfortunate episode.

Part 8

41. The Steamer Hulk

Lured by an advertisement in some paper my brother Jyotirindra went off one afternoon to an auction sale, and on his return informed us that he had bought a steel hulk for seven thousand rupees; all that now remained being to put in an engine and some cabins for it to become a full-fledged steamer.

My brother must have thought it a great shame that our countrymen should have their tongues and pens going, but not a single line of steamers. As I have narrated before, he had tried to light matches for his country, but no amount of rubbing availed to make them strike. He had also wanted power-looms to work, but after all his travail only one little country towel was born, and then the loom stopped. And now that he wanted Indian steamers to ply, he bought an empty old hulk, which in due course, was filled, not only with engines and cabins, but with loss and ruin as well. And yet we should remember that all the loss and hardship due to his endeavours fell on him alone, while the gain of experience remained in reserve for the whole country. It is these uncalculating, unbusinesslike spirits who keep the business-fields of the country flooded with their activities. And, though the flood subsides as rapidly as it comes, it leaves behind fertilising silt to enrich the soil. When the time for reaping arrives no one thinks of these pioneers; but those who have cheerfully staked and lost their all, during life, are not likely, after death, to mind this further loss of being forgotten.

On one side was the European Flotilla Company, on the other my brother Jyotirindra alone; and how tremendous waxed that battle of the mercantile fleets, the people of Khulna and Barisal may still remember. Under the stress of competition steamer was added to steamer, loss piled on loss, while the income dwindled till it ceased to be worthwhile to print tickets. The golden age dawned on the steamer service between Khulna and Barisal. Not only were the passengers carried free of charge, but they were offered light refreshments *gratis* as well! Then was formed a band of volunteers who, with flags and patriotic songs, marched the passengers in procession to the Indian line of steamers. So while there was no want of passengers to carry, every other kind of want began to multiply apace.

Arithmetic remained uninfluenced by patriotic fervour; and while enthusiasm flamed higher and higher to the tune of patriotic songs, three times three went on steadily making nine on the wrong side of the balance sheet.

One of the misfortunes which always pursue the unbusiness like is that, while they are as easy to read as an open book, they never learn to read the character of others. And since it takes them the whole of their lifetime and all their resources to find out this weakness of theirs, they never get the chance of profiting by experience. While the passengers were having free refreshments, the staff showed no signs of being starved either, but nevertheless the greatest gain remained with my brother in the ruin he so valiantly faced.

The daily bulletins of victory or disaster which used to arrive from the theatre of action kept us in a fever of excitement. Then one day came the news that the steamer *Swadeshi* had fouled the Howrah bridge and sunk. With this last loss my brother completely overstepped the limits of his resources, and there was nothing for it but to wind up the business.

42. Bereavements

In the meantime death made its appearance in our family. Before this, I had never met Death face to face. When my mother died I was quite a child. She had been ailing for quite a long time, and we did not even know when her malady had taken a fatal turn. She used all along to sleep on a separate bed in the same room with us. Then in the course of her illness she was taken for a boat trip on the river, and on her return a room on the third storey of the inner apartments was set apart for her.

On the night she died we were fast asleep in our room downstairs. At what hour I cannot tell, our old nurse came running in weeping and crying: "O my little ones, you have lost your all!" My sister-in-law rebuked her and led her away, to save us the sudden shock at dead of night. Half awakened by her words, I felt my heart sink within me, but could not make out what had happened. When in the morning we were told of her death, I could not realize all that it meant for me.

As we came out into the verandah we saw my mother laid on a bedstead in the courtyard. There was nothing in her appearance which showed death to be terrible. The aspect which death wore in that morning light was as lovely as a calm and peaceful sleep, and the gulf between life and its absence was not brought home to us.

Only when her body was taken out by the main gateway, and we followed the procession to the cremation ground, did a storm of grief pass through me at the thought that mother would never return by this door and take again her accustomed place in the affairs of her household. The day wore on, we returned from the cremation, and as we turned into our lane I looked up at the house towards my father's rooms on the third storey. He was still in the front verandah sitting motionless in prayer.

She who was the youngest daughter-in-law of the house took charge of the motherless little ones. She herself saw to our food and clothing and all other wants, and kept us constantly near, so that we might not feel our loss too keenly. One of the characteristics of the living is the power to heal the irreparable, to forget the irreplaceable. And in early life this power is strongest, so that no blow penetrates too deeply, no scar is left permanently. Thus the first shadow of death which fell on us left no darkness behind; it departed as softly as it came, only a

shadow.

When, in later life, I wandered about like a madcap, at the first coming of spring, with a handful of half-blown jessamines tied in a corner of my muslin scarf, and as I stroked my forehead with the soft, rounded, tapering buds, the touch of my mother's fingers would come back to me; and I clearly realised that the tenderness which dwelt in the tips of those lovely fingers was the very same as that which blossoms every day in the purity of these jessamine buds; and that whether we know it or not, this tenderness is on the earth in boundless measure.

The acquaintance which I made with Death at the age of twenty-four was a permanent one, and its blow has continued to add itself to each succeeding bereavement in an ever lengthening chain of tears. The lightness of infant life can skip aside from the greatest of calamities, but with age evasion is not so easy, and the shock of that day I had to take full on my breast.

That there could be any gap in the unbroken procession of the joys and sorrows of life was a thing I had no idea of. I could therefore see nothing beyond, and this life I had accepted as all in all. When of a sudden death came and in a moment made a gaping rent in its smooth-seeming fabric, I was utterly bewildered. All around, the trees, the soil, the water, the sun, the moon, the stars, remained as immovably true as before; and yet the person who was as truly there, who, through a thousand points of contact with life, mind, and heart, was ever so much more true for me, had vanished in a moment like a dream. What perplexing self-contradiction it all seemed to me as I looked around! How was I ever to reconcile that which remained with that which had gone?

The terrible darkness which was disclosed to me through this rent, continued to attract me night and day as time went on. I would ever and anon return to take my stand there and gaze upon it, wondering what there was left in place of what had gone. Emptiness is a thing man cannot bring himself to believe in; that which is *not*, is untrue; that which is untrue, is not. So our efforts to find something, where we see nothing, are unceasing.

Just as a young plant, surrounded by darkness, stretches itself, as it were on tiptoe, to find its way out into the light, so when death suddenly throws the darkness of negation round the soul it tries and tries to rise into the light of affirmation. And what other sorrow is comparable to the state wherein darkness prevents the finding of a way out of the darkness?

And yet in the midst of this unbearable grief, flashes of joy seemed to sparkle in my mind, now and again, in a way which quite surprised me. That life was not a stable permanent fixture was itself the sorrowful tidings which helped to lighten my mind. That we were not prisoners forever within a solid stone wall of

life was the thought which unconsciously kept coming uppermost in rushes of gladness. That which I had held I was made to let go—this was the sense of loss which distressed me,—but when at the same moment I viewed it from the standpoint of freedom gained, a great peace fell upon me.

The all-pervading pressure of worldly existence compensates itself by balancing life against death, and thus it does not crush us. The terrible weight of an unopposed life force has not to be endured by man,—this truth came upon me that day as a sudden, wonderful revelation.

With the loosening of the attraction of the world, the beauty of nature took on for me a deeper meaning. Death had given me the correct perspective from which to perceive the world in the fulness of its beauty, and as I saw the picture of the Universe against the background of Death I found it entrancing.

At this time I was attacked with a recrudescence of eccentricity in thought and behaviour. To be called upon to submit to the customs and fashions of the day, as if they were something soberly and genuinely real, made me want to laugh. I *could* not take them seriously. The burden of stopping to consider what other people might think of me was completely lifted off my mind. I have been about in fashionable book shops with a coarse sheet draped round me as my only upper garment, and a pair of slippers on my bare feet. Through hot and cold and wet I used to sleep out on the verandah of the third storey. There the stars and I could gaze at each other, and no time was lost in greeting the dawn.

This phase had nothing to do with any ascetic feeling. It was more like a holiday spree as the result of discovering the schoolmaster Life with his cane to be a myth, and thereby being able to shake myself free from the petty rules of his school. If, on waking one fine morning we were to find gravitation reduced to only a fraction of itself, would we still demurely walk along the high road? Would we not rather skip over many-storied houses for a change, or on encountering the monument take a flying jump, rather than trouble to walk round it? That was why, with the weight of worldly life no longer clogging my feet, I could not stick to the usual course of convention.

Alone on the terrace in the darkness of night I groped all over like a blind man trying to find upon the black stone gate of death some device or sign. Then when I woke with the morning light falling on that unscreened bed of mine, I felt, as I opened my eyes, that my enveloping haze was becoming transparent; and, as on the clearing of the mist the hills and rivers and forests of the scene shine forth, so the dew-washed picture of the world-life, spread out before me, seemed to become renewed and ever so beautiful.

43. The Rains and Autumn

According to the Hindu calendar, each year is ruled by a particular planet. So have I found that in each period of life a particular season assumes a special importance. When I look back to my childhood I can best recall the rainy days. The wind-driven rain has flooded the verandah floor. The row of doors leading into the rooms are all closed. Peari, the old scullery maid, is coming from the market, her basket laden with vegetables, wading through the slush and drenched with the rain. And for no rhyme or reason I am careering about the verandah in an ecstasy of joy.

This also comes back to me:—I am at school, our class is held in a colonnade with mats as outer screens; cloud upon cloud has come up during the afternoon, and they are now heaped up, covering the sky; and as we look on, the rain comes down in close thick showers, the thunder at intervals rumbling long and loud; some mad woman with nails of lightning seems to be rending the sky from end to end; the mat walls tremble under the blasts of wind as if they would be blown in; we can hardly see to read, for the darkness. The *Pandit* gives us leave to close our books. Then leaving the storm to do the romping and roaring for us, we keep swinging our dangling legs; and my mind goes right away across the far-off unending moor through which the Prince of the fairy tale passes.

I remember, moreover, the depth of the *Sravan* [76](#) nights. The pattering of the rain finding its way through the gaps of my slumber, creates within a gladsome restfulness deeper than the deepest sleep. And in the wakeful intervals I pray that the morning may see the rain continue, our lane under water, and the bathing platform of the tank submerged to the last step.

[76](#). The month corresponding to July-August, the height of the rainy season.

But at the age of which I have just been telling, Autumn is on the throne beyond all doubt. Its life is to be seen spread under the clear transparent leisure of *Aswin*. [77](#) And in the molten gold of this autumn sunshine, softly reflected from the fresh dewy green outside, I am pacing the verandah and composing, in the mode *Jogiya*, the song: [77](#). The month of *Aswin* corresponds to September-October, the long vacation time for Bengal.

In this morning light I do not know what it is that my heart desires.

The autumn day wears on, the house gong sounds 12 noon, the mode changes; though my mind is still filled with music, leaving no room for call of work or duty; and I sing: What idle play is this with yourself, my heart, through the listless hours?

Then in the afternoon I am lying on the white floor cloth of my little room, with a drawing book trying to draw pictures,—by no means an arduous pursuit of the pictorial muse, but just a toying with the desire to make pictures. The most important part is that which remains in the mind, and of which not a line gets drawn on the paper. And in the meantime the serene autumn afternoon is filtering through the walls of this little Calcutta room filling it, as a cup, with golden intoxication.

I know not why, but all my days of that period I see as if through this autumn sky, this autumn light—the autumn which ripened for me my songs as it ripens the corn for the tillers; the autumn which filled my granary of leisure with radiance; the autumn which flooded my unburdened mind with an unreasoning joy in fashioning song and story.

The great difference which I see between the Rainy-season of my childhood and the Autumn of my youth is that in the former it is outer Nature which closely hemmed me in keeping me entertained with its numerous troupe, its variegated make-up, its medley of music; while the festivity which goes on in the shining light of autumn is in man himself. The play of cloud and sunshine is left in the background, while the murmurs of joy and sorrow occupy the mind. It is our gaze which gives to the blue of the autumn sky its wistful tinge and human yearning which gives poignancy to the breath of its breezes.

My poems have now come to the doors of men. Here informal goings and comings are not allowed. There is door after door, chamber within chamber. How many times have we to return with only a glimpse of the light in the window, only the sound of the pipes from within the palace gates lingering in our ears. Mind has to treat with mind, will to come to terms with will, through many tortuous obstructions, before giving and taking can come about. The foundation of life, as it dashes into these obstacles, splashes and foams over in laughter and tears, and dances and whirls through eddies from which one cannot get a definite idea of its course.

44. Sharps and Flats

Sharps and Flats is a serenade from the streets in front of the dwelling of man, a plea to be allowed an entry and a place within that house of mystery.

This world is sweet,—I do not want to die.

I wish to dwell in the ever-living life of Man.

This is the prayer of the individual to the universal life.

When I started for my second voyage to England, I made the acquaintance on board ship of Asutosh Chaudhuri. He had just taken the M. A. degree of the Calcutta University and was on his way to England to join the Bar. We were together only during the few days the steamer took from Calcutta to Madras, but it became quite evident that depth of friendship does not depend upon length of acquaintance. Within this short time he so drew me to him by his simple natural qualities of heart, that the previous life-long gap in our acquaintance seemed always to have been filled with our friendship.

When Ashu came back from England he became one of us. [78](#) He had not as yet had time or opportunity to pierce through all the barriers with which his profession is hedged in, and so become completely immersed in it. The money-bags of his clients had not yet sufficiently loosened the strings which held their gold, and Ashu was still an enthusiast in gathering honey from various gardens of literature. The spirit of literature which then saturated his being had nothing of the mustiness of library morocco about it, but was fragrant with the scent of unknown exotics from over the seas. At his invitation I enjoyed many a picnic amidst the spring time of those distant woodlands.

[78.](#) Referring to his marriage with the writer's niece, Pratibha. Tr.

He had a special taste for the flavour of French literature. I was then writing the poems which came to be published in the volume entitled *Kadi o Komal*, *Sharps and Flats*. Ashu could discern resemblances between many of my poems and old French poems he knew. According to him the common element in all these poems was the attraction which the play of world-life had for the poet, and this had found varied expression in each and every one of them. The unfulfilled desire to enter into this larger life was the fundamental motive throughout.

"I will arrange and publish these poems for you," said Ashu, and accordingly that task was entrusted to him. The poem beginning *This World is Sweet* was the

one he considered to be the keynote of the whole series and so he placed it at the beginning of the volume.

Ashu was very possibly right. When in childhood I was confined to the house, I offered my heart in my wistful gaze to outside nature in all its variety through the openings in the parapet of our inner roof-terrace. In my youth the world of men in the same way exerted a powerful attraction on me. To that also I was then an outsider and looked out upon it from the roadside. My mind standing on the brink called out, as it were, with an eager waving of hands to the ferryman sailing away across the waves to the other side. For Life longed to start on life's journey.

It is not true that my peculiarly isolated social condition was the bar to my plunging into the midst of the world-life. I see no sign that those of my countrymen who have been all their lives in the thick of society feel, any more than I did, the touch of its living intimacy. The life of our country has its high banks, and its flight of steps, and, on its dark waters falls the cool shade of the ancient trees, while from within the leafy branches over-head the *koel* cooes forth its ravishing old-time song. But for all that it is stagnant water. Where is its current, where are the waves, when does the high tide rush in from the sea?

Did I then get from the neighbourhood on the other side of our lane an echo of the victorious pæan with which the river, falling and rising, wave after wave, cuts its way through walls of stone to the sea? No! My life in its solitude was simply fretting for want of an invitation to the place where the festival of world-life was being held.

Man is overcome by a profound depression while nodding through his voluptuously lazy hours of seclusion, because in this way he is deprived of full commerce with life. Such is the despondency from which I have always painfully struggled to get free. My mind refused to respond to the cheap intoxication of the political movements of those days, devoid, as they seemed, of all strength of national consciousness, with their complete ignorance of the country, their supreme indifference to real service of the motherland. I was tormented by a furious impatience, an intolerable dissatisfaction with myself and all around me. Much rather, I said to myself, would I be an Arab Bedouin!

While in other parts of the world there is no end to the movement and clamour of the revelry of free life, we, like the beggar maid, stand outside and longingly look on. When have we had the wherewithal to deck ourselves for the occasion and go and join in it? Only in a country where the spirit of separation reigns supreme, and innumerable petty barriers divide one from another, need this longing to realise the larger life of the world in one's own remain unsatisfied.

I strained with the same yearning towards the world of men in my youth, as I did in my childhood towards outside nature from within the chalk-ring drawn round me by the servants. How rare, how unattainable, how far away it seemed! And yet if we cannot get into touch with it, if from it no breeze can blow, no current come, if no road be there for the free goings and comings of travellers, then the dead things that accumulate around us never get removed, but continue to be heaped up till they smother all life.

During the Rains there are only dark clouds and showers. And in the Autumn there is the play of light and shade in the sky, but that is not all-absorbing; for there is also the promise of corn in the fields. So in my poetical career, when the rainy season was in the ascendant there were only my vaporous fancies which stormed and showered; my utterance was misty, my verses were wild. And with the *Sharps and Flats* of my Autumn, not only was there the play of cloud-effects in the sky, but out of the ground crops were to be seen rising. Then, in the commerce with the world of reality, both language and metre attempted definiteness and variety of form.

Thus ends another Book. The days of coming together of inside and outside, kin and stranger, are closing in upon my life. My life's journey has now to be completed through the dwelling places of men. And the good and evil, joy and sorrow, which it thus encountered, are not to be lightly viewed as pictures. What makings and breakings, victories and defeats, clashings and minglings, are here going on!

I have not the power to disclose and display the supreme art with which the Guide of my life is joyfully leading me through all its obstacles, antagonisms and crookednesses towards the fulfilment of its innermost meaning. And if I cannot make clear all the mystery of this design, whatever else I may try to show is sure to prove misleading at every step. To analyse the image is only to get at its dust, not at the joy of the artist.

So having escorted them to the door of the inner sanctuary I take leave of my readers .

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