

THREE PLAYS

MUKTA-DHARA ~ NATIR PUJA
CHANDALIKA

THREE PLAYS

*Mukta-dhara Natir Puja
Chandalika*

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Translated by

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P R E F A C E

THE TRANSLATION of writings so steeped in vivid imagery as those of Rabindranath Tagore is a fascinating and delightful task, but a very baffling one. Not only do flowers of speech that are redolent of the beautiful land of their birth shrivel in an alien atmosphere, but the genius of Tagore imposes an additional and peculiar difficulty. For he has united in the closest harmony the homeliest and most familiar language of daily life with that of the most exalted mystical experience, so that the very words which on one man's lips are prosaic, on the lips of another are instinct with poetry. The problem this raises for the translator becomes acute in the three plays here presented, and most acute of all in the numerous mystical songs they contain. The solution, such as it is, is purely pragmatic; rhymed verse, rhythmic *vers libre*, and emotionally heightened prose have all been used as seemed best in each particular context; a number of songs have been omitted altogether as defying all ingenuity, and others reproduced only in part. Some are included, though the translation is very imperfect, because they are *dramatically* necessary. In one or two cases a translation made by the author himself has been included. Full particulars of these variations are found in the notes.

The first draft of these translations was undertaken during the poet's lifetime and with his approval. All three plays have been drastically revised for this volume, and have been made to follow as closely as possible the letter of the original text. The aim has been to enable the educated English-speaking reader to enjoy the plays, without demanding of him more than a minimal knowledge of things Indian, and therefore in the body of the text English equivalents have been used for all except a very few well-known or self-explanatory words.

Preface

I owe a great debt of gratitude to friends at Santiniketan for their encouragement and advice. Dr Amiya Chakravarty and Sjt Khitis Roy have given invaluable guidance, and Sjt K. R. Kripalani's contribution to the volume goes far beyond his stimulating introductory essays for the plays.

M.S.

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MUKTA-DHARA

AN APPRECIATION

MUKTA-DHARA, from which the play takes its name, is a mountain spring whose waters, rushing down the slopes of Uttarakut, irrigate the plain of Shiv-tarai, whose people are held in subjection to the King of Uttarakut. In order to enforce this subjection more effectively, the King of Uttarakut desires to control the source of their economic well-being, and to that end has had a great dam erected to prevent the waters of Mukta-dhara from reaching the plains below. It was a difficult and hazardous operation, but the skill of the royal engineer Bibhuti, utilizing the resources of modern science and with the help of conscripted labour, has at last successfully achieved the feat, though with considerable loss of life. A mighty engine-tower, out-soaring the trident of the Temple of Siva on a mountain peak, has been erected. The play opens with the King and the citizens of Uttarakut preparing to participate in a religious festival in honour of the Machine. The King as well as the bulk of the people of Uttarakut (for the little imperialism depicted in the play is of the modern 'democratic' type in which the people are more 'royal' than their ruler, where a subject race is concerned) are very proud of the Machine and quite confident that the poor and defenceless people of Shiv-tarai will now for ever be at their mercy. Neither the recurring wail of the poor, demented mother, looking for her son, one of the conscripted victims sacrificed in the building of the dam, nor the warnings of the simple, god-fearing folk who presage ill for such colossal pride and greed, touch their hearts.

The Crown Prince Abhijit, however, professes open sympathy for the people of Shiv-tarai and protests against

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Bibhuti's soulless achievement. The character of the Prince provides the main psychological interest in the play. In him, love of freedom and sympathy for the oppressed discover their appropriate symbolism, or as the author so aptly puts it, their objective counterpart, in the fate of Mukta-dhara, whose free current has been imprisoned by the dam. The emotional significance of this symbolism gains in intensity till it becomes a passion, when the Prince learns that he is not the son of the King but a foundling picked up near the source of Mukta-dhara. 'This unexpected revelation profoundly affects his mind, making him believe that his life has a spiritual relationship with this waterfall; that its voice was the first voice which greeted him with a message when he came to the world. From that moment the fulfilment of that message becomes the sole aim of his life, which is to open out paths for the adventurous spirit of Man.' The Prince determines to sacrifice his life in an attempt to liberate the imprisoned current by forcing the dam at a point which he happens to know was weakly built. He succeeds. The leaping torrent breaks free, carrying away the body of its foster-child in its turbulent rush. The social motive of the play, if it had any, seems to dissolve at the end in an undefined sense of mystic self-fulfilment, as in some of Ibsen's later dramas.

The author has also re-introduced into the play that remarkable character, the Ascetic Dhananjaya, who first appeared in *Prayaschitta* (*Atonement*), published in 1909. In that play as in the present one, Dhananjaya teaches the people to resist their ruler's unjust claims non-violently but fearlessly. He exhorts the subject people, 'As soon as you can hold up your head and say that nothing has power to hurt you, the roots of violence will be cut. . . . Nothing can hurt your real manhood, for that is a flame of fire. The animal, that is flesh, feels the blow and whines. But

you stand there gaping—don't you understand?' A disciple answers, 'We understand you, but your words we don't understand.' Dhananjaya replies, 'Then you are done for.' Both the personality and the words of Dhananjaya are a remarkable anticipation of the shape that the struggle for Indian Independence was to assume later under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. In the earlier play Dhananjaya even leads the people in a sort of no-rent campaign.

Perhaps no other play of Rabindranath expresses his political convictions with such directness and force. Technically too the drama is not overburdened with any subplot or extraneous incidents, which might break the continuity of the main theme. (Incidentally the Greek classical unities of time and place are fully observed.) Against the grim background of the towering menace of man's diabolical skill, symbolized in the Machine, pass and re-pass processions of men and women, tyrants and sycophants, idealists and devotees, passionate rebels against a pitiless imperialism and its servile agents (so amusingly portrayed in the schoolmaster), and the multitude of simple folk, with their quaint humour and unsophisticated wisdom. In their innocent contentions and wayside comments the author has found ample scope for his irony. Indeed, it is these spectators rather than the main actors themselves who keep the stage occupied for most of the time. Very little of the real drama takes place before our eyes, the rest we watch through the reactions on the minds of these different spectators.

The drama is packed with meaning and rich in suggestions which may tempt critics into a variety of interpretations. But the author has gently warned his readers against missing the main significance of the play, which is psychological and lies in the growing identity that is achieved in the Prince's mind between his own

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spirit and the current of *Mukta-dhara*. The last desperate act of self-sacrifice, the awful nature of the consummation sought and achieved by the Prince, which brings the play to its close, leaves one with a sense of the tragic splendour of man's spirit, silencing all contentions for the moment. What happens to the people of Shiv-tarai, we have forgotten to inquire.

There is no doubt that *Mukta-dhara* is one of the most moving and well-knit of the author's dramas. Mr Edward Thompson has called it 'the best of his prose dramas'. Without endorsing so categorical a judgement, it is well worth quoting the English critic's excellent appreciation of the play.

'It is a reasoned though highly allegorical presentation of his convictions, as expressed during many previous years, on modern politics. It has many strands of significance woven into it, so that it is like shot silk suggesting many colours; the play's achievement is that in it he has attained a synthesis of his different convictions and messages. His deep distrust of all government by machinery and of all prostitution of science to serve violence and oppression, his hatred of a slavish system of education, his scorn of race-hatred and of all politics which seek to make one tribe dependent on another instead of risking the gift of the fullest freedom, his certitude that it is in freedom that God is found—all these are so prominent that each may with justice be claimed as the play's message. Through all, as a tender undertone, runs the murmur of the Free Current, a haunting sound in the soul of the boy whose foster-mother she was and whose lifeless body, after he has broken her fetters, her waves are to carry majestically away. There are impressive passages, as where the Machine is seen, sinister against the sunset, crouching over the land and its life, overtopping even God's temple; or where the noise of the breaking dam and the raging waters

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is first heard. All through the play sounds the menace of God's gathering anger at the hardness of men's hearts and the sordidness of their hopes. Finest of all is the constant quiet drift of folk along the roads, the procession of life. It is the greatest of his symbolical plays.¹

K.R.K.

¹ Edward Thompson, *Rabindranath Tagore* (Oxford University Press).

MUKTA-DHARA

The scene is laid in the mountainous land of Uttarakut, 'The Peak of the North', on a road leading to its mountain temple of Bhairava. In the distance a great Machine towers into the sky, its crest seemingly touching the clouds, and confronting it is the trident which crowns the temple of Bhairava. In a mango garden by the roadside stands the tent of King Ranajit, for tonight at new moon the lights of solemn worship will be lit in the temple; the king goes there on foot, and is now resting by the wayside. Bibhuti, the royal engineer, has succeeded after many years of endeavour in damming the springs of Mukta-dhara, with the might of his steel Machine. In honour of this extraordinary feat the people of Uttarakut have come to hold festival in the temple courts. The company of sannyasis who perform the temple rites are spending the whole day in processional pæans. Some hold censers of burning incense, some carry conches and gongs, and accompany their song by rhythmic beating of the gong.

ACT I

The procession of devotees passes across the stage, singing.

The Chant. Victory! Lord of Terror, Sankara!
Wrecker of flood-wrath Sankara,
Sankara!

Victory! doubtings piercé,
Victory! bondage shattered.
Masterer He of the Evil, Sankara,
Sankara!

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They go out. A pilgrim from a foreign land enters, carrying the prescribed worship offerings. He meets and addresses a citizen of Uttarakut.

PILGRIM. What's that, up in the sky there? It's a fear-some sight.

CITIZEN. Don't you know? You are a stranger. I suppose. That is the Machine.

PILGRIM. Machine? What Machine?

CITIZEN. Our royal engineer, Bibhuti, has been working at it for twenty-five years. It's just finished, so today is a festival.

PILGRIM. And what does it do?

CITIZEN. It stops up the springs of Mukta-dhara.

PILGRIM. Ugh! It looks like a demon's head, a grinning skeleton head, lying in wait to devour your city in its sleep. To have it before your eyes night and day will dry up your souls like dead wood.

CITIZEN. Our souls are pretty tough, don't worry about that.

PILGRIM. Perhaps so; but that thing isn't fit to be set up against the sun and stars. It ought to be covered up. Don't you see? It seems to irritate the whole sky.

CITIZEN. Aren't you going to evening worship today?

PILGRIM. That's what I have come for. I come every year at this season. But I've never known such a blocking up of the sky above the temple. The sight of that thing so suddenly today makes me shudder. It seems like blasphemy that it should soar so high above the temple tower. I'll go and make my offering, but I'm not easy in my mind.

He goes out. A woman comes in, wearing a white cloth over her head, which covers her whole body and trails upon the ground.

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WOMAN. Suman! My Suman! [*To the Citizen*] All the rest have come back. *baba*. but my Suman hasn't come home yet.

CITIZEN. What is your name?

WOMAN. I'm Amba, of Jonai village. He is the light of my eyes, my Suman, the breath of my life.

CITIZEN. What happened to him?

AMBA. They took him away somewhere. I had gone to worship in the temple, when I came back they had taken him.

CITIZEN. Then they must have taken him to work on the Mukta-dhara dam.

AMBA. I heard that they had taken him this way, away to the west of Gouri's Peak there. But my eyes can't see so far, I can see no road across it.

CITIZEN. What is the use of crying? We are just going to evening worship in the Bhairava temple. It is our great day today, you come with us.

AMBA. Not I, *baba*; that is where I went that day, to evening worship. Since then I've been afraid to go to worship. And mark my words, our prayers don't reach the Father, they get snatched away on the road.

CITIZEN. Why, who snatches them?

AMBA. *He* does—the one who took Suman from me. I don't know yet who he is. Suman, Suman, *baba* Suman!

They go out. A messenger from Abhijit, the Yuvaraja of Uttarakut, meets Bibhuti on his way to the temple.

MESSENGER. Lord Bibhuti, the Yuvaraja has sent me to you.

BIBHUTI. What is his will?

MESSENGER. After all these years, you have finished the dam on the Mukta-dhara waterfall. Again and again it has burst, many men have been crushed under earth and

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sand, many others have been swept away in floods. Today at last . . .

BIBHUTI. Their lives were not given in vain. My dam is completed.

MESSENGER. The Shiv-tarai folk don't yet know what has happened. They cannot believe that any human being has power to withhold the water the gods have given them.

BIBHUTI. To them the gods gave only water; to me they gave power to imprison the water.

MESSENGER. They are without a thought of evil; they still don't know, within a week their growing fields . . .

BIBHUTI. Fields? What's that you say?

MESSENGER. Was that not the purpose of your dam—to make their fields wither and die?

BIBHUTI. The purpose of my dam was that human intelligence should win through to its goal, though sand and stone and water all conspired to block its path. I had no time to think of whether some farmer's paltry maize crop would die.

MESSENGER. The Yuvaraja asks, has not the time to think now arrived?

BIBHUTI. My thoughts are full of the splendour of the power of the Machine.

MESSENGER. Cannot the wailing of the hungry break upon your thoughts?

BIBHUTI. No. The rushing waters cannot break my dam—and the stress of their tears cannot shake my Machine.

MESSENGER. Have you no fear of curses?

BIBHUTI. Curses! See here, at one time there were no labourers to be had in Uttarakut. We went at the king's command to every house in Chandapattana. We seized every boy of eighteen years upwards. Most of them never

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returned. *All* their mothers cursed me, yet my Machine has triumphed. When a man fights the power of the gods, does he care for the curses of men?

MESSENGER. You have built your monument and won your fame, says the Yuvaraja. Now break it down yourself, and win a greater fame.

BIBHUTI. Now that the monument is finished it is no longer mine. It belongs to all Uttarakut; I have no authority to destroy it.

MESSENGER. The Yuvaraja says that he himself will assume the authority to destroy.

BIBHUTI. What! He says that, the Yuvaraja of Uttarakut? Isn't he one of us? Is he a Shiv-tarayan?

MESSENGER. Uttarakut is not ruled by the Machine alone, he says. The law of the gods runs here too, and he will prove it.

BIBHUTI. The gods?—in the strength of my Machine I can take over their divine office myself, and I undertake to prove it. Tell the Yuvaraja, I have left open no way by which the grip of the Machine may be loosened.

MESSENGER. The god of destruction does not always travel by the highway. The cracks that await him are seen by no human eye.

BIBHUTI. Cracks! What's that you say? What do you know of cracks?

MESSENGER. What should I know? He that needs them will find them out.

The messenger goes out. Some citizens of Uttarakut, on their way to the temple festivities, come in and see Bibhuti.

FIRST CITIZEN. Well, your Machine Majesty! You are a wonderful fellow. We had no inkling that you had given us all the slip, and gone ahead like this.

SECOND CITIZEN. That is the sort of thing he has always

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done. He was for ever worming himself forward on the quiet, when you least expected it, and leaving everyone behind. Crop-headed Bibhuti of Chabua, our own village! We were at school together, Kailas the schoolmaster used to box our ears, all alike. And now look at him, making such a name for himself, while we are all nowhere!

THIRD CITIZEN. Hi, Gobru, you with the basket there, why do you stand gaping like that? You've seen Bibhuti before, haven't you? Get out the garlands, let's garland him.

BIBHUTI. Stop, stop, that's enough . . .

THIRD CITIZEN. Enough? Why, you have suddenly become a great man, and we must do the thing properly, you know. If only your neck were as long as a camel's! All Uttarakut ought to be loading you with garlands up to the tip of your nose!

SECOND CITIZEN. You know, Harish the drummer hasn't turned up yet.

FIRST CITIZEN. The rascally lazy-bones, he needs a drumming himself, on the skin of his back!

THIRD CITIZEN. What is the use of talking like that? If it comes to drumming, he can beat the lot of us.

FOURTH CITIZEN. I thought we might have got hold of Bishai Shamonta's ceremonial car today, and taken old Bibhuti in procession. But they say that even the king is going to the temple on foot.

FIFTH CITIZEN. Well, it's a good thing you didn't. Do you realize what a state it is in? I borrowed it the other day for my boy's wedding. I had to pull it far more than it pulled me!

FOURTH CITIZEN. I say, why not carry Bibhuti on our shoulders? Let's do that.

BIBHUTI. Hi! What are you trying to do?

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FIFTH CITIZEN. No, no, this is just as it should be. You were born in the lap of Uttarakut, but you've climbed on her back now. You're head and shoulders above everyone else.

They rest their staves on their shoulders and lift Bibhuti.

ALL. Hurrah, hurrah for Bibhuti, the Royal Engineer.

Song. All hail, Machine, we worship thee,
We bow to thee, we honour thee,
Machine, O Lord Machine.
Thy flames and thunders rend the sky,
And all thy rumbling wheels reply
In swift and sonorous majesty;
We bow to thee, Machine.

In one defiant onrush hurled
Thy conquering fires sweep the world,
Machine, O Lord Machine.
Thy power melts the stubborn ore,
Shatters the old rock's living core,
Breaks down the stable things of yore.
All hail, all hail, Machine.

A vulture thou, whose talons tear
The bowels of earth, and lay them bare,
Machine, O Lord Machine.
Thou art a cloud, beneath whose lee
Sinister tempests scud and flee
To darken earth and air and sea.
All hail, Machine, Machine.

Thou grim magician, binding still
The very elements to thy will,
All hail to thee, Machine.

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Thou hast the captive world in fee,
And we thy servants worship thee,
We bow to thee, we honour thee,
O Lord, O Lord Machine.

*All go out singing, carrying Bibhuti shoulder-high.
King Ranajit enters from the tent, with his Minister.*

RANAJIT. You have never been able to manage those Shiv-tarayans at all. Now that Bibhuti has Mukta-dhara under control at last, we have a way of making them submit. But you don't seem very enthusiastic, *mantri*. Are you jealous?

MINISTER. Your pardon, Maharaja, far from it. It is none of *our* business to wrestle with earth and stones. *We* handle diplomacy, not pickaxes and spades. We deal with the minds of men. My advice to you was to put the Yuvaraja in charge of Shiv-tarai. A real tie might have come out of that, a bond worth having.

RANAJIT. And what *did* come out of it? Taxes two years in arrears! There have been plenty of famines in Shiv-tarai before this, but they always used to pay their taxes.

MINISTER. He was beginning to win for you something more valuable than taxes, when you ordered him to return. We should not despise the young in matters of government. When things get intolerable, the young by the power of their suffering grow greater than their elders.

RANAJIT. You are for ever changing your tune. You used to tell me again and again that it is easy to put pressure on folk, provided one is on top—that keeping them under in that way is the whole art of ruling foreigners. Didn't you say so?

MINISTER. Yes, I did. The position was different then, and my counsel suited the times. But now . . .

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RANAJIT. I had no desire whatever to send the Yuvaraja to Shiv-tarai.

MINISTER. Why, Maharaja?

RANAJIT. They are foreigners. If we rub shoulders with them like this they get too familiar. One's own folk may be won by affection; outsiders must be held by fear.

MINISTER. Maharaja, you are forgetting our real reason for sending the Yuvaraja to Shiv-tarai. He seemed so unsettled in mind, and we suspected, you know, that he had somehow got a hint of the truth, that he is not of royal birth, but was picked up below the falls of Mukta-dhara. So, to take his mind off it . . .

RANAJIT. Yes, I remember. Every night he used to go and sleep below the fall. When I heard about it I went to him there one night and asked him straight, 'What's the matter, Abhijit, why are you here?' And he replied. 'In the sound of this water I hear my mother's voice.'

MINISTER. I once asked the Yuvaraja what had come over him, and why I hardly even saw him in the palace. He said, 'My work in the world has been shown me. I was born to open roads.'

RANAJIT. I'm beginning to lose my faith in the boy's imperial destiny.

MINISTER. It was Abhiramswami himself, your majesty's guru's guru, who told us of the signs.

RANAJIT. He must have been mistaken. I've had nothing but loss from this lad. Ever since my grandfather's time the road over the Nandi Pass has been blocked, to prevent the wool trade of Shiv-tarai going to foreign markets. Now Abhijit has thrown open that road, and here in Uttarakut the price of food and clothing will go up.

MINISTER. He is young, isn't he? It was only Shiv-tarai's point of view that the Yuvaraja . . .

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RANAJIT. Treachery against his own people, I call it. Then there is that Vairagi Dhananjaya of Shiv-tarai, who wanders about stirring up disaffection. I'm certain he has a hand in it too. We shall have to suppress that fellow, rosary and all. He must be taken into custody.

MINISTER. I don't presume to argue with your Majesty. But, Sire, as you know well, there are some evils which are best left alone.

RANAJIT. That is enough. That is not your concern.

MINISTER. No, Sire; but I ask your Majesty to make it yours.

A sentinel enters.

SENTINEL. Sire, your uncle is approaching, Maharaja Visvajit of Mohangarh.

He goes out.

RANAJIT. There's another one. He is the ring-leader of that set that is spoiling Abhijit. An uncongenial kinsman is like a hunchback's hump—there it sticks and you can't cut it off, but it is a regular burden. . . . What is that noise?

MINISTER. It is the ritual procession, going round the temple.

The devotees pass across the stage singing, and go out.

The Chant. Cleaver of heart of darkness,
Fire inexorable flaming,
Barren death-pyres' denizen,
Sankara! Sankara!

Thou whose voice is thunder,
Rudra, Trident-wielder,
Breaster of Death's Ocean,
Sankara! Sankara!

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Ranajit's uncle, King Visvajit of Mohangarh, comes in. He has white hair, and is dressed in white clothes and turban.

RANAJIT. Welcome, uncle. This is good fortune. I did not expect you to join our worship today.

VISVAJIT. I have come to tell you that Bhairava will not accept today's worship.

RANAJIT. Such evil words from you, today at our great festival . . .

VISVAJIT. And why a festival? God pours out his water freely for all, for every thirsty soul on earth. Why have you blocked the stream?

RANAJIT. Why? To subdue my enemies!

VISVAJIT. Have you no fear of making Bhairava your enemy?

RANAJIT. Bhairava is Uttarakut's own god. Our victories are His. So Bhairava takes our side, and takes back his own gift. He will pierce Shiv-tarai with his thirst-spear, and fling it before the throne of Uttarakut.

VISVAJIT. Then your worship isn't worship, but wages.

RANAJIT. Uncle, you always take sides with foreigners, against your own kith and kin. It is because of your teaching that Abhijit cares nothing for his own country.

VISVAJIT. My teaching? I was your man once, wasn't I? Who put down that mutiny you provoked in Chanda-pattana? I did, with fire and sword. And then at last this boy Abhijit came into my heart—like light he came. I had injured men blindly in the darkness, now I saw they were flesh of my flesh. You accepted him because he bears the marks of an imperial destiny—do you want to limit him to your petty throne of Uttarakut?

RANAJIT. I suppose it was you who told Abhijit that he was picked up under the falls of Mukta-dhara?

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VISVAJIT. Yes, it was I. He was a guest in our palace for the Diwali festival. In the sunset light, I found him standing on the terrace, gazing towards Gouri's Peak: 'What do you see, brother?' I asked. 'I see roads,' he said, 'roads that are not yet made, the roads of the future across those forbidding passes, roads that will bring the distant near.' And as I listened I thought, 'Some vagrant mother bore him, by the springs of Mukta-dhara, and who can keep him bound?' I could no longer keep silent. 'Brother,' I said, 'from the moment of your birth the Lord of the Hills gave you welcome to the road. No conch-shell called you within doors.'

RANAJIT. I'm beginning to understand.

VISVAJIT. Understand what?

RANAJIT. That after hearing that story Abhijit's affections were alienated from the royal house of Uttarakut. He flaunts his alienation abroad by opening the Nandi Pass road.

VISVAJIT. Where is the harm in that? A road once opened is a road for all, for Uttarakut and Shiv-tarai alike.

RANAJIT. Uncle, you are my kinsman, and your age demands respect; I have therefore been patient for a long time, but my patience is at an end. You traitor! Leave this kingdom at once.

VISVAJIT. I can never abandon you. If you abandon me, I will endure it.

Visvajit goes out. Amba enters. She addresses the King.

AMBA. Who are you folk? See, the sun is setting, but my Suman hasn't come back.

RANAJIT. Who are you?

AMBA. I—I'm nobody. He was everything to me—they took him away along this road. Has it no end, this road? And Suman, is he walking still, on and on, on into the

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west beyond Gouri's Peak, where the sun goes down, and the light goes down, and all?

RANAJIT. *Mantri*, I suppose this must be . . .

MINISTER. Yes, in the building of that dam . . .

RANAJIT. Do not grieve. Your son has received today the world's great final gift.

AMBA. I'm his mother. If what you say is true, he would bring me his gift in the evening.

RANAJIT. He will bring it for you one evening. But that evening has not yet come.

AMBA. May it be as you say, *baba*! I will wait for him here along the temple road. Suman!

Amba goes out. The schoolmaster of Uttarakut enters with his boys.

MASTER. You'll be getting a taste of the cane, I can see. Loudly now, shout, Jai! Rajarajeswar!

BOYS. Jai, Rajara . . .

MASTER [*slapping a boy or two within his reach*]. . . . jeswar!

BOYS. Jeswar!

RANAJIT. Where are you all going?

MASTER. Sire, your Majesty is to confer honour on our royal engineer Bibhuti, so I am taking the boys to share the rejoicings. They have learned from childhood to honour everything that is to the glory of Uttarakut. I don't want them to miss any opportunity.

RANAJIT. They all know, I suppose, what Bibhuti has done?

BOYS [*jumping and clapping their hands*]. Yes, yes, he has stopped up Shiv-tarai's drinking water.

RANAJIT. Why did he do that?

BOYS. To make them smart!

RANAJIT. And why should he make them smart?

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BOYS. Because they are bad men.

RANAJIT. How bad?

BOYS. Everybody knows it, they are *very* bad, *awfully* bad.

RANAJIT. But you don't know why they are bad?

MASTER. Of course they know, Maharaja. Now, you, didn't you read? Didn't you read in your book? [*Whispering*] Their religion is very bad.

BOYS. Yes, yes, their religion is very bad.

MASTER. And besides, they are not like us. Come now, speak up! [*He points to his nose.*]

BOYS. They haven't got high-ridged noses.

MASTER. Right, now what has our professor proved? What does a high-ridged nose show?

BOYS. The greatness of our race!

MASTER. Good! And what will that great race do? Come, speak up! . . . they'll conquer . . . out with it, do! . . . they'll conquer everyone else in the world, won't they?

BOYS. Yes, everyone!

MASTER. Were the men of Uttarakut ever defeated in war?

BOYS. Never, never!

MASTER. Didn't our former king Pragjit, with two hundred and ninety-three men, drive back an army of thirty-one thousand seven hundred and ninety-three southern barbarians?

BOYS. Yes, yes!

MASTER. Rest assured, your Majesty, all these boys will be a terror one day to all wretched foreigners. If not, I am no true teacher. Not for a moment do I forget what a great responsibility is ours. It's we schoolmasters who

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mould men—your ministers have merely to use them. Yet think what a salary they get, compared with ours!

MINISTER. But these boys themselves are your reward.

MASTER. Well spoken, sir, the boys themselves *are* our reward. Alas, but food is dear. Just think; cow's ghee, which used to be . . .

MINISTER. All right, all right, I'll see about your ghee. Now go, it's nearly time for worship.

The Schoolmaster goes out with his boys.

RANAJIT. This schoolmaster of yours has nothing in his head but ghee, cow's ghee.

MINISTER. There is certainly a good deal of the cow about him. But, Maharaja, fellows of this kind have their uses. Day after day they repeat, mechanically, exactly what they have been told. Things wouldn't run so smoothly if they had more sense.

RANAJIT. What is that in the sky, *Mantri*?

MINISTER. You are forgetting, Maharaja. That is the tower of Bibhuti's machine.

RANAJIT. It has never showed so clearly before.

MINISTER. The storm this morning cleared the air, that is why we see it so well.

RANAJIT. It looks like the menacing fist of a demon. Don't you see, the sun behind it is crimson with anger. It ought not to have been made so enormously high.

MINISTER. Like a spear, isn't it? plunged in the breast of our sky.

RANAJIT. Well, it is time now to go to the temple.

They go out. A second band of Uttarakul citizens comes in.

FIRST CITIZEN. You saw how Bibhuti avoids us nowadays. He would like to rub his upbringing out of

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his skin altogether. One day he'll find out that it's not good for the sword to get too big for its sheath.

SECOND CITIZEN. Say what you like, brother, Bibhuti has given Uttarakut a name.

FIRST CITIZEN. O, drop it! You fellows make far too much of him. That dam of his nearly finished him, and it has given way at least ten times.

THIRD CITIZEN. And who knows that it won't give way again?

FIRST CITIZEN. You've seen that mound, have you, on the north side?

SECOND CITIZEN. Why, what about it?

FIRST CITIZEN. What about it? Don't you know that? Everyone who has seen it says . . .

SECOND CITIZEN. What? What do they say?

FIRST CITIZEN. What do they say! Shamming stupid, are you? It's as plain as the nose on your face. Why, from one end to the other . . . oh, why talk?

SECOND CITIZEN. No, tell us a bit more about it, go on.

FIRST CITIZEN. How you gape, Ranjan! You'll understand clearly enough when all of a sudden . . . [*He ends with a gesture.*]

SECOND CITIZEN. Whew! What are you saying, old man? All of a sudden? . . .

FIRST CITIZEN. Yes, my friends. Well, Jhogru will tell you. He has got everything taped out and weighed up.

SECOND CITIZEN. I will say this for Jhogru, he has a cool head. When everyone else is shouting Bravo, he just fishes out his measuring rod.

THIRD CITIZEN. Some folk say, you know, that all Bibhuti's learning . . .

FIRST CITIZEN. I know myself he stole it all from Benkot Varma. Now *he* was a really clever chap. What a head!

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My word! Yet Bibhuti gets a feather in his cap, while he, poor fellow, died from want of food.

THIRD CITIZEN. Merely from want of food, was it?

FIRST CITIZEN. Want of food, or certain food a certain person gave him—no use discussing that! Besides, who knows who might be within earshot . . . there are gossip-mongers everywhere. Men of this country can't bear to see other people fortunate.

SECOND CITIZEN. Say what you like, the man . . .

FIRST CITIZEN. Well, no wonder. Think where he was born. My great-grandfather was a man of that Chabua village—you have heard his name, haven't you?

SECOND CITIZEN. Naturally. Who in Uttarakut hasn't? He was that . . . what d'ye call it . . .

FIRST CITIZEN. Yes, yes, Bhaskar. There was no such expert snuff-maker in the whole district. King Satrujit would never go a day without his snuff.

THIRD CITIZEN. We'll talk about that some other day. Now let's go to the temple. We belong to Bibhuti's village after all; we will garland him, and get seats at his right side . . .

[*Voice off.*] Don't go there, don't go there, brothers! Go back!

SECOND CITIZEN. Hark to that! Old Batuk has come out.

Batuk enters, his hair unkempt, a tattered blanket thrown round him, a crooked branch in his hand for a staff.

FIRST CITIZEN. Why, Batuk, where are you going?

BATUK. Have a care, *baba*, have a care. Don't go that way, go back while there is time.

SECOND CITIZEN. Why? Why do you say that?

BATUK. There will be sacrifice, human sacrifice. They

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took my two lusty grandsons by force; they have not come back.

THIRD CITIZEN. To whom will they sacrifice, uncle?

BATUK. To Thirst, the demon of Thirst!

SECOND CITIZEN. And who may he be?

BATUK. The more he gets, the more he wants. His dry tongue grows longer and longer, like a flame fed with ghee.

FIRST CITIZEN. You are crazy! We are going to the Bhairava temple. There is no Thirst-demon there!

BATUK. Haven't you heard? Bhairava is being turned out of his temple today—Thirst will sit on the altar instead.

SECOND CITIZEN. Hush, hush, madman. If Uttarakut people hear you talk like that they will tear you to pieces.

BATUK. Yes, they throw mud at me; the boys pelt me with stones. They all say my two grandsons are fortunate to have given their lives.

FIRST CITIZEN. Well, that is not untrue.

BATUK. Not untrue? When no life springs from the life laid down? When death is the only fruit of death? It is utter loss. Bhairava will never endure it. Have a care, *baba*. Don't go that way.

Batuk goes out.

SECOND CITIZEN. He makes me shudder—look how my flesh creeps.

FIRST CITIZEN. Why, Ranju, you are afraid of shadows. Come, let us go.

All the citizens go out. The Yuvaraja Abhijit and Rajkumar Sanjaya come in.

SANJAYA. I don't understand. Yuvaraja, why you are leaving the palace.

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ABHIJIT. No, you can't understand fully. But I know it is my destiny on earth; my river of life must run free, overleaping the palace walls.

SANJAYA. For some time we have noticed how restless you have become. The ties between us have been getting weaker. Are they broken now?

ABHIJIT. Sanjaya, do you see that sunset shape over Gouri's Peak? It is like a bird of flame, spreading its wings of cloud and flying towards the night. That is my life's adventure. This setting sun has painted it on the sky.

SANJAYA. But don't you see also, Yuvaraja, how the machine tower thrusts itself into the heart of the sunset? The flying bird's breast is pierced by an arrow; its wings droop; it falls into the valley of night. I don't like that omen. It is time for rest, Yuvaraja, let us go to the palace.

ABHIJIT. Can one rest, if one is in prison?

SANJAYA. How is it that you now feel the palace to be a prison, after all this time?

ABHIJIT. It was when I heard that they had dammed up Mukta-dhara—then I knew.

SANJAYA. I don't understand what you mean.

ABHIJIT. Somewhere or other in the external world, God writes for us the secret mystery of each man's spirit. Mukta-dhara is His word to me, bearing the secret of my inner being. When her feet were bound in the iron fetters, I was startled out of a dream. I realized the truth—the throne of Uttarakut is the dam which binds my spirit. I have taken the road in order to set it free.

SANJAYA. Yuvaraja, take me too as your comrade.

ABHIJIT. No, brother, you must find your own path. If you follow me, I shall hide it from you.

SANJAYA. Do not be so harsh; it hurts me.

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ABHIJIT. You know my heart, so you will understand me even if it hurts.

SANJAYA. I will not ask whence your call comes, or where you are going. But night is falling, and the prisoners have started their evening song in the palace. Is there no call there for you? Glory there may be in austerity, but the grace of life has its value too.

ABHIJIT. It is to give it value, brother, that the stern fight must be fought.

SANJAYA. The other day, you remember, you were amazed to see a white lotus lying before the mat, where you sit for your morning worship. Who it was that brought it, in the dim dawn before you woke, you were never told. How much sweetness, in that one tiny act! Don't you remember that timid face?—for she hid herself, but she could not hide her worship.

ABHIJIT. I do remember. And that is why I cannot endure that monster, that mutes the music of earth, and guffaws with its iron fangs at the sky. I love this Paradise, that is why I shall fight its demons.

SANJAYA. The evening light lies swooning on those blue hills. Does it not bring to your heart the shadow of a tearful face?

ABHIJIT. It does, and my heart is very heavy. I take no pride in this harshness. Look at that bird, sitting on the topmost branch of the pine tree, all alone. Will it seek its nest, or will it travel on through the darkness to the forests of some far, strange land? I do not know. But as it sits so quietly, gazing into the sunset sky, the sight of it is like music. Beautiful is earth, it sings. To each smallest thing that has sweetened my life, I offer my reverence today.

Batuk enters.

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BATUK. They would not let me go on; they beat me and turned me back.

ABHIJIT. What has happened, Batuk? Your forehead is bruised and bleeding.

BATUK. I went out to warn everyone. I begged them not to go that way, but to turn back.

ABHIJIT. Why, what has happened?

BATUK. Don't you know, Yuvaraja? They are setting up the Thirst-demon today on the altar—the altar of the Machine. There will be human sacrifice.

ABHIJIT. What talk is this?

BATUK. The blood of my two grandsons was poured out when that altar was built. I thought such a shrine of sin would break of itself. But it has not broken yet; Bhairava has not awakened.

ABHIJIT. It will break; the time has come.

BATUK. Then you have heard? You have heard the call of Bhairava?

ABHIJIT. Yes.

BATUK. Alas! Then there is no release for you now?

ABHIJIT. No, none.

BATUK. Do you see, the blood runs from my head, my limbs are smeared with dust. Can you bear it, Yuvaraja, when your very heart is torn?

ABHIJIT. By His grace I will bear it.

BATUK. When all turn against you? When your own people revile you?

ABHIJIT. Bear it I must.

BATUK. Then there is nothing to fear.

ABHIJIT. No, there is nothing to fear.

BATUK. Good, then remember Batuk. I too shall be on that road. Bhairava has marked my forehead in blood, and by that sign you will know me even in the darkness.

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Batuk goes out. Uddhav, a captain of the royal guard, enters.

UDDHAV. Why did you open the Nandi Pass road, Yuvaraja?

ABHIJIT. To save the people of Shiv-tarai from continual famine.

UDDHAV. But the Maharaja has a kind heart, he is ready to help them.

ABHIJIT. When the right hand is niggardly enough to close the road against them, men cannot be saved by the bounty of the left. So I have opened a road by which food may freely come and go. I cannot bear to see a poverty that depends on charity.

UDDHAV. The Maharaja says that by clearing the Nandi Pass you have knocked the bottom out of Uttarakut's rice-bowl!

ABHIJIT. I have saved Uttarakut from the wretched fate of being for ever a parasite on Shiv-tarai.

UDDHAV. It was a foolhardy thing to do. I dare not say much more, but the Maharaja has received information. Get away at once, if you can. It's not safe even to stand and talk to you on the road.

Uddhav goes out. Amba enters.

AMBA. Suman! *Baba* Suman! Have none of you been that way, where they took him?

ABHIJIT. Have they taken away your son?

AMBA. Yes, westwards over there, where the sun sets and the day comes to an end.

ABHIJIT. I am going that way.

AMBA. Then take one message from a sorrowing woman. Tell him, when you see him, that his mother is watching the road for him.

ABHIJIT. I will tell him.

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AMBA. *Baba, may you live for ever! Suman, my Suman!*

Amba goes out. The procession of devotees crosses the stage.

The Chant. Victory! Lord of Terror, Sankara!
Wrecker of flood-wrath, Sankara,
Sankara!

Victory! doubtings piercéd,
Victory! bondage shatteréd!
Masterer He of the Evil, Sankara!
Sankara!

Vijayapal, the commander-in-chief, enters.

VIJAYAPAL. Princes, accept my respectful greetings. I come from the Maharaja.

ABHIJIT. What is his command?

VIJAYAPAL. I will tell you in secret.

SANJAYA. Why in secret? Is it secret even from me?

VIJAYAPAL. That is the order. Yuvaraja, I request you to enter the tent.

SANJAYA. I too will go with you.

VIJAYAPAL. The Maharaja does not wish it.

SANJAYA. Then I will wait for you on this road.

Vijayapal and Abhijit go out towards the tent. A Baul singer crosses the stage, singing, and goes out.

BAUL. He shall return no more,
He shall return no more,
The boat into the storm is gone,
Nor comes again to shore;
The path of liberty is won,
The hour of weeping o'er . . .

A flower-girl enters.

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FLOWER-GIRL. *Baba*, who is this man *Bibhuti* of *Uttarakut*?

SANJAYA. Why, what do you want with him?

FLOWER-GIRL. I'm a stranger, I come from *Deotali*. I hear that everyone in *Uttarakut* is raining flowers on his path. I suppose he is a *sadhu*? I wanted to see him, so I've brought flowers from my own garden.

SANJAYA. He may not be a *sadhu*, but he is a clever man, certainly.

FLOWER-GIRL. What is it that he has done?

SANJAYA. He has dammed up our waterfall.

FLOWER-GIRL. And is he worshipped for that? Does *that* serve the gods—a dam?

SANJAYA. Far from it. It ties their hands.

FLOWER-GIRL. And do they rain flowers on him for that? O, I don't understand!

SANJAYA. It is good that you don't. Do not squander the flowers of the gods on the undeserving, but go back . . . no, wait, won't you sell me that white lotus?

FLOWER-GIRL. I brought it as an offering to the *sadhu*, and I can't sell it now.

SANJAYA. There is a *sadhu* whom I reverence above all men—I'll give it to him.

FLOWER-GIRL. Then here, take it. No, I will take no money. But give him my humble greetings—the poor flower-girl of *Deotali*, tell him.

The flower-girl goes out. Vijayapal enters.

SANJAYA. Where is my brother?

VIJAYAPAL. He is a prisoner in the tent.

SANJAYA. The *Yuvaraja* a prisoner! What insolence!

VIJAYAPAL. Here is the *Maharaja's* warrant.

SANJAYA. Whose conspiracy is this? I must go to him, please.

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VIJAYAPAL. Forgive me, Rajkumar . . .

SANJAYA. Arrest me too, then! I'm a traitor.

VIJAYAPAL. I have no orders for that.

SANJAYA. Very well, I'll go and get an order at once.

[*He goes some way, then returns*] Vijayapal, give this lotus to my brother, please, in my name.

They go out severally.

ACT II

The Vairagi Dhananjaya of Shiv-tarai enters singing.

DHANANJAYA. A hurricane of tempest,

A sea of sorrow wide,

In fearless, proud assurance

My fragile boat shall ride.

Hearing Thy word, and lifting

Torn sails that scorn the seas,

My boat shall reach the haven,

Cool shadows of Thy trees.

Who thus my soul desireth,

He shall my Pilot be;

My only part, the fearless mind

That puts my boat to sea;

And landing in the sunset,

To bring an offering meet,

Red lotus of my sorrowing days,

For mercy to Thy feet.

Some Shiv-tarayans enter.

DHANANJAYA. Why, you are as white as chalk! What is the matter with you?

FIRST SHIV. Master, the king's brother-in-law Chandapal beats us past all enduring. What is worse still, he doesn't respect even our Yuvaraja himself.

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DHANANJAYA. So you are still unable to master this violence? It still hurts you?

SECOND SHIV. But to seize me and beat me in the very entrance of the king's court! What a dishonour!

DHANANJAYA. Don't hoard up honour for yourselves. Lay it at the feet of the One who dwells within. No insult or dishonour can enter there.

The Sardar Ganesh enters.

GANESH. It's not to be borne! My hands are itching to get at him!

DHANANJAYA. Your hands are out of hand, perhaps?

GANESH. Master, only say the word, and I'll get hold of that bully Chandapal's stick and show him what beating is.

DHANANJAYA. Can't you show him what not-beating is? That needs too much strength, I suppose? Beating the waves won't stop the storm. But hold your rudder steady, and you win.

FOURTH SHIV. What do you tell us to do, then?

DHANANJAYA. Strike at the root of violence itself.

THIRD SHIV. How can that be done, Master?

DHANANJAYA. As soon as you can hold up your head and say that it does not hurt, the roots of violence will be cut.

SECOND SHIV. It is not so easy to say that it doesn't hurt.

DHANANJAYA. Nothing can hurt your real manhood, for that is a flame of fire. The animal, that is the flesh, feels the blow, and whines. But you stand there gaping—don't you understand?)

SECOND SHIV. We understand you, but your words we don't understand.

DHANANJAYA. Then you are done for.

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GANESH. Time presses, Master, and your words take so long to understand. But we understand *you*, and so we shall have an early crossing.

DHANANJAYA. Early? But what of the evening time? When you find your boat sinking within sight of shore? If you can't make my words your own, you will be drowned.

GANESH. Don't say that, Master. We have found shelter at your feet, so we must have understood somehow.

DHANANJAYA. It is only too plain that you have not understood. Your eyes still see red, and there is no song on your lips. Shall I give you a tune?

[*Sings*] Strike yet again, my Lord,
Strike, O strike on . . .

Cowards! You either flee to avoid the blow, or fight to ward it off; it is all one. Whichever you do, you merely follow the flock—you do not see the Shepherd.

[*Sings*] Shrinking, I hide from thee,
Fear drives me on.
Wrest thou my all from me . . .

You see, *baba*, I go to make my final reckoning with this Conqueror-of-Death. I must ask him to try whether or not blows can hurt me. I must go forward. I cannot burden myself with those who fear, or those who frighten others.

[*Sings*] Do what thou wilt do,
Let the blow fall;
One of us, you or I,
Goes to the wall.

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I've played in the haunts of men
Gay through the years.
Shall all your buffeting
Force me to tears?

ALL. Bravo, Master! That's the spirit! 'Shall all your buffeting force me to tears?'

SECOND SHIV. But tell us, where are you going?

DHANANJAYA. To the king's festival.

THIRD SHIV. The king's festival won't be a festival for you, Master. What are you going to do there?

DHANANJAYA. To make my name known in the king's court.

FOURTH SHIV. If the king once catches you . . . no, no, such a thing couldn't happen!

DHANANJAYA. Why not? It will happen for sure, enough and to spare.

FIRST SHIV. You are not afraid of the king, but we are.

DHANANJAYA. Yes, you are, because in your hearts you still want to injure. I have no wish to injure, and so I have no fear. Fear fastens its fangs only in those who hate.

SECOND SHIV. All right, we will go with you.

THIRD SHIV. Yes, we will appeal to the king.

DHANANJAYA. What will you ask of him?

THIRD SHIV. There is plenty to ask for; the question is, what will he give?

DHANANJAYA. Will you not ask for your kingship?

THIRD SHIV. Are you mocking us, Master?

DHANANJAYA. Why should I mock you? What is worse than being crippled in one leg? Kingship is crippled, if it is the king's alone, and not the people's. *You* may shiver with fright to see that one-legged kingship limp along, but

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the eyes of the gods fill with tears. For the king's own sake, men, you must demand your kingship.

SECOND SHIV. And when he drives us away?

DHANANJAYA. When a higher than the king approves your claim, the king's violence will drive out the king.

[Sings] Moment by moment do we forget
That thou dost call aloud our names,
Desiring to seat us on thy throne.

Shall I tell you the truth, my friends? No claim to the throne can stand, neither the king's nor the people's, if you do not recognize it to be His. A throne is no place for getting puffed up, but for folding the hands in prayer.

[Sings] The door-keeper does not know us,
He halts us on the road.
We are standing without the gates,
Call us and bring us within.

And is it the door-keeper's fault that he does not know us? The badge of our royalty is covered with dust. You can't rule your own spirits, yet you run after an outward kingdom. A king takes his seat on a throne, but a throne does not make a king.

[Sings] Freely thy hand has given us life,
And with life, worth.
Yet our worth is grown worthless now.
By greed and fear and shame it is daily fouled,
And is covered and hidden in dust.

FIRST SHIV. But I really don't understand why you are going to the king's court.

DHANANJAYA. Shall I tell you why? Because I am full of misgivings.

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FIRST SHIV. What do you mean by that?

DHANANJAYA. You men all cling to me; the more you hold on, the less prospect there is of your learning to swim. And you make it so difficult for me to reach the shore. I am going where no one honours me, to get some freedom.

FIRST SHIV. But the king will not let you off easily.

DHANANJAYA. Why should he? If he can keep me bound, what is there to be anxious about?

SECOND SHIV. But Master, if he raises a hand against you, we can't endure it.

DHANANJAYA. If He chooses to endure it—He to whom I have given this body of mine—you also must be patient.

FIRST SHIV. Come then, Master, we will go to the court, and then let happen what will.

DHANANJAYA. Just wait here. I have never been here before. I will go and see how the land lies.

Dhananjaya goes out.

FIRST SHIV. What faces these Uttarakut fellows have! As if the Creator had started moulding a lump of flesh and never had time to finish it!

SECOND SHIV. And how ridiculously tight their clothes are! Did you ever see the like?

THIRD SHIV. They have done themselves up in packages, for fear a bit might get lost.

FIRST SHIV. They are born to drudgery, you see, and do nothing but loiter about the markets and ferries.

SECOND SHIV. They have no culture whatever. Their so-called scriptures, what is there in them?

FIRST SHIV. Nothing, nothing at all! And you saw their letters, like so many white ants crawling.

SECOND SHIV. You've hit it! White ants they are, gnawing everything to pieces with their 'culture'.

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THIRD SHIV. And then burying it under their mounds.

FIRST SHIV. Yes, killing our bodies with their weapons, and our minds with their books.

SECOND SHIV. They are soaked in sin. Our guru says it is a pollution even to cross their shadows. And do you know why?

THIRD SHIV. No—why?

SECOND SHIV. You don't know? Well, in the beginning of the world, after the churning of the ocean, some drops of nectar trickled down from the gods' cups and fell on the earth. From that earth our Shiv-tarayan ancestor was created. Then the demons licked out the gods' discarded cups and threw them into the gutter, and from the broken pieces was made the ancestor of Uttarakut. That is why they are so hard—and faugh! so unclean.

THIRD SHIV. Where did you get all this?

SECOND SHIV. Our own guru told me.

THIRD SHIV. Guru, you are truth incarnate!

A party of Uttarakut citizens enters.

FIRST CITIZEN. Everything else was splendid. But that the king should make Bibhuti a Kshatriya—him, a blacksmith's son—doesn't seem quite . . .

SECOND CITIZEN. That's a domestic affair. We'll deal with that when we get back home. Now, come on, boys, all together! [*Cheering*] Long live Bibhuti! Long live the Royal Engineer!

THIRD CITIZEN. The man who unites the weapons of the Kshatriya with the tools of the Vaisya! Long live Bibhuti! Long live the Royal Engineer!

FIRST CITIZEN. Hello, look there! Those men are from Shiv-tarai.

SECOND CITIZEN. How do you know?

FIRST CITIZEN. Don't you see how their caps come down

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over their ears? Don't they look queer?—and dwarfish, as though they had been thumped on the head and stopped growing.

SECOND CITIZEN. Why that cap, of all things? Why cover their ears? Do they think ears are a mistake of the Creator?

FIRST CITIZEN. They are afraid, perhaps, what little wit they have might escape that way. *[Laughter]*

SECOND CITIZEN. No, they are afraid some wit might accidentally get *in*. *[Laughter]*

FIRST CITIZEN. Or of having their ears pulled by some Uttarakut bogey. *[Laughter]* Well, you Shiv-tarayans, you clod-hopping boors, are you dumb? Can't you say a word? What is the matter with you?

THIRD CITIZEN. Don't you know it is a festival here? Shout—'Long live Bibhuti! Long live the Royal Engineer!'

FIRST CITIZEN. So you keep your mouths shut, do you? Must we squeeze the words out of your wretched throats? Shout, 'Long live Bibhuti!'

GANESH. Why, what has Bibhuti done?

FIRST CITIZEN. Just hark at him! 'What has he done?' Fancy, the big news hasn't reached them yet! They have those ear-caps of theirs to thank for that.

THIRD CITIZEN. He has got your drinking water in his hands, you innocents; and unless he chooses to let you have it, you will all dry up like toads when the rains fail.

SECOND SHIV. Our water in Bibhuti's hands? Has he suddenly become a god?

SECOND CITIZEN. He has sent the gods about their business and is going to take on the job himself.

FIRST SHIV. Really? You talk big, have you anything to show for it?

Mukta-dhara

FIRST CITIZEN. Yes, over yonder—the dam of Mukta-dhara.

The Shiv-tarayans roar with laughter.

FIRST CITIZEN. So you think it is a joke, do you?

GANESH. Of course it's a joke! Dam of Mukta-dhara, indeed! How can your blacksmith's son filch the water that Bhairava gave us?

FIRST CITIZEN. Well, see for yourself, there in the sky.

FIRST SHIV. Good God! What on earth is it?

SECOND SHIV. A grasshopper, a great iron grasshopper, leaping up against the stars.

FIRST CITIZEN. Yes, and damming up your water with his feet.

GANESH. Nonsense, don't try to fool us that way. You'll be telling us next that your blacksmith's son has mounted on the grasshopper and gone to catch the moon.

FIRST CITIZEN. That's the beauty of their ear-caps. They have ears, but they hear nothing, so they are done for.

FIRST SHIV. We are certainly not done for, I promise you!

THIRD CITIZEN. Very fine, but who is to save you?

GANESH. Haven't you seen our god, our god incarnate, our Dhananjaya? He has one body in the temple, and one outside.

THIRD CITIZEN. Just listen to them, with their ear-caps! Well, it is certain death for them—nobody can save them now.

The Uttarakut men go out. Dhananjaya enters.

DHANANJAYA. What have you been saying, you simpletons? Is it for me to save you? If you think that, you are seven times dead already.

GANESH. Those Uttarakut men were threatening us—saying that Bibhuti has dammed up Mukta-dhara.

Mukta-dhara

DHANANJAYA. Dammed up the stream, did they say?

GANESH. Yes, Master.

DHANANJAYA. I can see you did not bother to listen to it properly.

GANESH. It was not worth listening to. We simply laughed it off.

DHANANJAYA. Have you given all your ears into my keeping? Must I do all your hearing for you?

THIRD SHIV. What was there worth hearing in that, Master?

DHANANJAYA. Was there nothing? Is it nothing to have subdued such unruly power?—whether outside, or within?

GANESH. But, Master, will he really stop our drinking water?

DHANANJAYA. That is a different matter. Bhairava will never allow that. You wait here. I must go and find out what the truth of it is. The world is full of voices, and where you close your ears to truth, there strikes the arrow of death.

Dhananjaya goes out. Another Shiv-tarayan enters.

THIRD SHIV. Here is Bishan. What is the news, Bishan?

BISHAN. The king has recalled the Yuvaraja from Shiv-tarai, and will not re-appoint him.

ALL. No, no, that is quite impossible.

BISHAN. What can you do about it?

ALL. We shall take him back.

BISHAN. How?

ALL. By force.

BISHAN. What, will you defy the king?

ALL. What do we care for the king?

Enter King Ranajit and his Minister.

RANAJIT. What are you saying about the king?

ALL. Greetings, your Majesty.

Mukta-dhara

GANESH. We have a petition, Sire.

RANAJIT. What is it?

ALL. We want the Yuvaraja back again.

RANAJIT. Indeed!

FIRST SHIV. Yes, we will take the Yuvaraja back to Shivarai.

RANAJIT. And then comfortably forget to pay your taxes. I suppose?

ALL. But we are starving!

RANAJIT. Where is your leader?

SECOND SHIV. Ganesh here is our leader.

RANAJIT. I don't mean him. Where is your Vairagi?

GANESH. Here he comes.

Dhananjaya enters.

RANAJIT. So it is you who have roused these people to madness?

DHANANJAYA. Yes, Maharaja, and there is madness in my own veins too.

[Sings] Madly I wander from village to village,
What madness is this?
What witchery of music is sounding?
What wind flings it to fill the sky?
The day is done, is done,
What is this madcap's game?
His call wakes eager longing, but he will not
be caught.
I seek him through forest and mountain,
Weeping my life away in a nameless fear.

RANAJIT. Don't bandy words with me. Will you pay the taxes, or not?

DHANANJAYA. No, Maharaja, we will not pay.

RANAJIT. You will not? Have you grown so haughty?

Mukta-dhara

DHANANJAYA. We cannot give you what is not yours.

RANAJIT. Not mine!

DHANANJAYA. [Our excess food is yours; the food of our hunger is not.]

RANAJIT. So it is you who forbid my subjects to pay their dues?

DHANANJAYA. They would pay—out of terror; but I forbid them. Give your life to none, I say, save to Him who gave it.

RANAJIT. Your assurance merely drives their fear underground and covers it up. The moment there is a crack, it will burst out seven times stronger. Then they will be lost. Suffering is written on your forehead, Vairagi.

DHANANJAYA. The suffering written on my forehead I have taken into my heart. One dwells there, who is above all suffering.

RANAJIT [*to the people*]. All of you get back to Shivarai. You will remain here, Vairagi.

ALL. Never, while we live!

DHANANJAYA. O king, you can keep nothing by straining for it. It is only when you can sit loosely to things, that they are yours.

RANAJIT. What do you mean?

DHANANJAYA. (He who gives all, keeps all; greed brings you only stolen goods, and they won't last. There is your mistake. What you seize by violence can never be yours. What you set free is yours for ever. Clutch at it, and it is gone.)

RANAJIT. *Mantri*, place this Vairagi in safe custody.

MINISTER. Maharaja . . .

RANAJIT. My command is not to your liking?

MINISTER. A terrible engine of punishment is made

Mukta-dhara

ready. To pile yet more terrors upon it will mean a total collapse.

ALL. We won't endure this.

DHANANJAYA. Go, I tell you, go back home.

FIRST SHIV. But, Master, haven't you heard? We have lost our Yuvaraja too.

SECOND SHIV. To whom shall we turn for strength?

DHANANJAYA. Is your strength only in mine? If you say that, you will make me a real weakling.

GANESH. Don't betray us now by such talk. You are our only strength.

DHANANJAYA. Then I am defeated. I must stand aside.

ALL. Why, Master?

DHANANJAYA. Would you lose your own souls to possess me? Have I the power to make good such a loss? You put me to shame.

FIRST SHIV. Why do you speak so, Master? We will do whatever you wish.

DHANANJAYA. Then leave me and go away.

SECOND SHIV. What shall we do then? Can you keep away from us? Don't you love us?

DHANANJAYA. Better to love you and leave you, than love you and crush you. Say no more, but go.

ALL. Very well, Master, we are going, but . . .

DHANANJAYA. But what? No buts! Hold your heads high, and go!

ALL. Yes, Master, we are going. [*They move slowly away.*]

DHANANJAYA. Do you call that going? Quick! Off with you!

GANESH. We are off, but we leave all our strength behind.

Mukta-dhara

They go out.

RANAJIT. What are you thinking of, Vairagi? Why are you so silent?

DHANANJAYA. They make me anxious, Maharaja.

RANAJIT. In what way?

DHANANJAYA. I have succeeded in doing what even your Chandapal's big stick failed to do. I thought all this time that I was giving them strength, and today they tell me to my face that I have taken it away.

RANAJIT. How has that come about?

DHANANJAYA. Simply that the more I excited them, the less I helped them to grow. When people have big debts, they can't pay them off merely by rushing about. They think I am greater than the gods—that I can write off the debts they owe them. So they shut their eyes and hang on to me.

RANAJIT. You are their god now.

DHANANJAYA. Yes, and they stop short at me, so they never reach their true god. He could have guided them from within, but I from the outside have blocked his way.

RANAJIT. When they come to pay the king's taxes, you stop them. But when they pay the god's worship at your foot, you feel hurt?

DHANANJAYA. Indeed I do. If only I could run away from it all! They spend all their worship on me; inwardly they are bankrupt. The responsibility for their debt will fall on my shoulders, and the gods will not remit it.

RANAJIT. So what is your duty now?

DHANANJAYA. To keep away from them. If I have dammed up their minds so thoroughly, let Bhairava call me and your Bibhuti to our account together.

RANAJIT. Then why delay any longer? Stand aside.

Mukta-dhara

DHANANJAYA. As soon as I stand aside they will pounce on your Chandapal. And then the punishment which should be mine will fall on *their* heads. So I am afraid to go.

RANAJIT. If you will not stand aside, I must set you aside. Uddhav, take this Vairagi to the camp and keep him prisoner there!

DHANANJAYA. [*Sings*]

Your chains will not put me to confusion,
Nor will my spirit die beneath your blows.
Here in my heart do I hold
a big letter The charter of freedom given by His own hand,
And your captivity will not hold me captive.
Can your sentries discover, say,
The path by which I pass?
I have reached His gates—
Say, can you halt me at yours?
For all your terrors, my soul is unterrified.

Uddhav takes Dhananjaya to the camp.

RANAJIT. *Mantri*, go and see Abhijit in the guard-house. If he seems to be in a penitent frame of mind . . .

MINISTER. Maharaja, if you went personally . . .

RANAJIT. No, no, he is a traitor to his country, and I will not see him until he admits his guilt. I shall go back to the capital now; send me the news there.

Ranajit goes out. The procession of devotees passes across the stage.

The Chant. Cleaver of heart of darkness,
Fire inexorable flaming,
Barren death-pyre's denizen,
Sankara! Sankara!

Mukta-dhara

Thou whose voice is thunder,
Rudra, Trident-wielder,
Breaster of Death's Ocean,
Sankara! Sankara!

Uddhav enters.

UDDHAV. What, has the Maharaja gone? Without seeing the Yuvaraja?

MINISTER. Yes, lest his resolution should fail him. He talked to the Vairagi so long because he was in two minds about it. He could neither enter the camp nor leave it. Well, I must go and see the Yuvaraja.

They go out. Two women come in.

FIRST WOMAN. Mashi, why are they all so angry? Why do they say the Yuvaraja has done wrong? I can't understand it all, I can't bear it!

SECOND WOMAN. You call yourself an Uttarakut woman, and you can't understand it? Why, he has opened the Nandi Pass road!

FIRST WOMAN. I don't see what crime there is in that. I simply don't believe that the Yuvaraja has done any wrong.

SECOND WOMAN. You are only a girl. It is just the people who look so good on the outside that you should beware of most—as you will learn to your cost some day.

FIRST WOMAN. But what makes you suspect the Yuvaraja?

SECOND WOMAN. Everyone is saying that he intended to use the Shiv-tarai folk in order to seize the throne of Uttarakut—they say he would not wait.

FIRST WOMAN. What would he want with the throne, when he has won the whole nation's heart! Are we to

Mukta-dhara

believe the folk who speak ill of him, and not the Yuvaraja himself?

SECOND WOMAN. Silence! You have no right to talk that way, a slip of a girl like you. The whole country is cursing him, and you . . .

FIRST WOMAN. I'll face the whole country, and tell them . . .

SECOND WOMAN. Be quiet, I tell you!

FIRST WOMAN. Why? O, I feel like crying! I must do something, something to show I believe in the Yuvaraja more than in anyone. This long hair of mine, I shall vow it to Bhairava today. And I will pray him to show people that the Yuvaraja is right and the evil tongues wrong.

SECOND WOMAN. Hush, hush, someone may hear you! . . . that girl will get us all into trouble, I can see.

The two women go out. A party of Uttarakut citizens comes in.

FIRST CITIZEN. We won't yield an inch. Let us go to the king.

SECOND CITIZEN. What is the good of that? The Yuvaraja is the apple of his eye. The king will never be able to bring him to justice; he will only vent his anger on us.

FIRST CITIZEN. Let him. I'm going to speak plainly, whatever happens.

THIRD CITIZEN. The Yuvaraja was always so affectionate to us—as though he would give us the very moon from the sky—yet this is what he does behind our backs! Is Shiv-tarai more to him than Uttarakut?

SECOND CITIZEN. The world is in a bad way when things can come to such a pass. What do you say, brother?

THIRD CITIZEN. Nobody can be trusted, it seems.

Mukta-dhara

FIRST CITIZEN. If the king doesn't punish him, we will do it ourselves.

SECOND CITIZEN. How?

FIRST CITIZEN. There is no room for him in this country. He will have to get out of it—by that new road of his.

THIRD CITIZEN. But that man from Chabua said that he is not in Shiv-tarai. He is not to be found in the palace here, either.

FIRST CITIZEN. The king has hidden him, that is certain.

THIRD CITIZEN. Hidden him! We will break the wall down and drag him out.

FIRST CITIZEN. We will set fire to it and smoke him out.

THIRD CITIZEN. Is he trying to give us the slip? I'll be hanged if . . .

Uddhav and the Minister come in.

MINISTER. What is the matter?

FIRST CITIZEN. It is no use trying to play hide-and-seek with us. Bring out the Yuvaraja!

MINISTER. My good man, who am I to bring him out?

SECOND CITIZEN. It's you people who advised him . . . But that won't do, I tell you. We'll drag him out.

MINISTER. Very well, take the law into your own hands. Drag him out of the king's prison.

THIRD CITIZEN. The king's prison!

MINISTER. The king has imprisoned him.

ALL. Long live the king! Hurrah for Uttarakut!

SECOND CITIZEN. Come on, let us get into the prison and . . .

MINISTER. And what? What do you propose to do?

SECOND CITIZEN. We'll take the flowers off that garland Bibhuti was wearing, and twist the string round his neck.

Mukta-dhara

THIRD CITIZEN. Not his neck, his arms. We'll truss up those road-opening arms of his!

MINISTER. You call the Yuvaraja guilty when he breaks barriers; aren't you guilty, when you break the law?

SECOND CITIZEN. That is a completely different matter. And if we do break the law, what then?

MINISTER. Because you don't like the ground beneath your feet, you jump off into space? You won't like that either, let me tell you. Get yourselves another law, before you start to break this one.

SECOND CITIZEN. Well, let the prison be; let us go and stand in front of the palace and cheer.

FIRST CITIZEN. See, look there! The sun has set and the sky is getting dark, but Bibhuti's engine-tower is still on fire with the glow, as if it were drunk with sunlight.

SECOND CITIZEN. That trident too, above the Bhairava temple. The sunlight clings there as though afraid to leave it. How strange it looks!

The citizens go out.

MINISTER. The king ordered me to keep the Yuvaraja in this camp. Now I realize why.

UDDHAV. Why?

MINISTER. To save him from the hands of the people. But I don't like the look of things. The mob gets more excited every moment.

Sanjaya enters.

SANJAYA. I did not dare to let the king see my eagerness. It would only strengthen his determination.

MINISTER. Keep calm, prince, don't complicate the situation still further.

SANJAYA. I too am guilty of treason, I want to be a prisoner.

MINISTER. Better remain free and plan his deliverance.

Mukta-dhara

SANJAYA. With that idea I went among the people. I knew they loved the Yuvaraja better than life, and would not endure his imprisonment. But I found them blazing with anger at the news about the Nandi Pass.

MINISTER. Then surely you see that the Yuvaraja is safest in prison.

SANJAYA. I have followed him all my life, let me follow him to prison also.

MINISTER. What good would that do?

SANJAYA. One man alone is not a whole, but a half. He is only made whole by union with another. My union with the Yuvaraja is like that.

MINISTER. That is so, prince, but where that true union exists, there is no need to be outwardly united. The cloud in the sky and the water in the sea are one; their outward separation only perfects their unity. The Yuvaraja is seen in you today though he himself is absent.

SANJAYA. *Mantri*, these words do not sound like yours. The Yuvaraja himself might have spoken them.

MINISTER. His words are in the very air we breathe; I use them, but I forget whether they are his or mine.

SANJAYA. But you have done well to remind me—it is his work I shall do while we are separated. Now I shall go to the king.

MINISTER. For what purpose?

SANJAYA. I shall ask him to make me governor of Shivarai.

MINISTER. The time is very critical, is this . . .

SANJAYA. That is just why this is the right time.

Sanjaya and the Minister go out. Visvajit enters.

VISVAJIT. Who is there? Uddhav, isn't it?

UDDHAV. Yes, Maharaja.

Mukta-dhara

VISVAJIT. I have been waiting for darkness. You got my letter?

UDDHAV. Yes, I got it.

VISVAJIT. Have you carried out my instructions?

UDDHAV. You will soon see that for yourself. But . . .

VISVAJIT. Have no misgivings. The Maharaja is not ready to give him freedom himself, but it would be a great relief to him if someone else did so without his knowledge.

UDDHAV. But he will never forgive that someone.

VISVAJIT. My men are here; they will arrest you and your guards and take you away. The responsibility is mine.

[*Voice off.*] Fire, fire!

UDDHAV. There it is! They have set fire to the kitchen tent, alongside the guard-room. Now is my chance, I will get both the prisoners out.

He goes out, and after a short interval Abhijit comes in.

ABHIJIT. Uncle! You here!

VISVAJIT. I have come to take you prisoner. You must go to Mohangarh.

ABHIJIT. Nothing can imprison me today—neither anger nor affection. You think it was you who set the tent on fire? No, it would have caught fire in any case, somehow or other. I have no leisure for captivity today.

VISVAJIT. Why, brother, what have you to do?

ABHIJIT. I must pay my debt, the debt of my birth. Mukta-dhara was my nurse. I must set her free.

VISVAJIT. There will be time enough for that, but not today.

ABHIJIT. The time has come now, and no-one can tell whether it will ever come again.

VISVAJIT. We too will help you.

Mukta-dhara

ABHIJIT. No, the same work is not for all. What has fallen to me is mine alone.

VISVAJIT. The people of Shiv-tarai are devoted to you. They are eager to lend you a hand. Won't you call them?

ABHIJIT. If they had heard the call that I did, they would not wait for me. If they follow my call they will lose their way.

VISVAJIT. But it grows dark, brother.

ABHIJIT. Where the call has sounded, the light will be given too.

VISVAJIT. I have no power to hold you back. I must bid you farewell and let you go alone into the darkness ahead. Give me just one word of hope. Promise me that we shall meet again.

ABHIJIT. You and I can never be separated—remember that.

ACT III

Dhananjaya enters singing.

O fire, my brother,
Thy triumph I sing!
Thou breaker of bondage,
Crimson-glowing,
Never was form like thine!
Drunk with what riotous song
Art thou swinging thine arms to the sky?
What courage of joyous dance?
No words can tell.

When the prison-term of life is ended, brother,
And the bolt drawn back from the gate,
Then shalt thou burn to ashes
These cords, my hands, these cords, my feet.

Mukta-dhara

Then shall my body, caught up in thy body,
Be whirled in that reddening dance,
All passionate heat be quenched in thy furnace-heat,
And all ills cease.

Enter Batuk.

BATUK. Master, the day is over, and it is growing dark.

DHANANJAYA. My son, we grow so accustomed to depend on outward light that when it grows dark we see nothing but darkness.

BATUK. I thought that today the dance of Bhairava would have begun. Has Bibhuti bound him also hand and foot in his Machine?

DHANANJAYA. When Bhairava's dance begins, it begins unseen. We see it only as it draws to its close.

BATUK. O Master, give us confidence, for we are much afraid. O Bhairava, awake! The light is quenched, the path is lost, no answer meets our cry. O Bhairava, awake! O Mritunjaya, Conqueror of Death, lay low our terrors by thy terror.

Batuk goes out. Some citizens of Uttarakut come in.

FIRST CITIZEN. It was a lie. He is not in the guard-house. They have hidden him.

SECOND CITIZEN. We shall soon see if they can hide him from us.

DHANANJAYA. No, *baba*, they can't keep him hidden anywhere. The walls will fall and the gates be shattered, the light will burst forth and all be revealed.

FIRST CITIZEN. Hello, who is this? What a start the fellow gave me!

THIRD CITIZEN. O, it is that Vairagi. He will do splendidly. Somebody must smart for this. Catch him!

Mukta-dhara

DHANANJAYA. How can you catch someone who always gives himself up?

FIRST CITIZEN. No use showing off your sainthood here—we don't care a rap for all that.

DHANANJAYA. That's good. The Lord himself will take you in hand and make you care. You're fortunate. Not like some luckless folk I know of. They have lost their guru by too much reverence, and driven me out of the country by their devotion.

FIRST CITIZEN. Who is their guru?

DHANANJAYA. He whose hand chastises them.

FIRST CITIZEN [*laughing*]. Then why shouldn't we begin to act guru to you?

DHANANJAYA. I'm ready, my son. Let me see if I know my lesson. Just test me.

SECOND CITIZEN. So you are the fellow who has been getting the better of our Yuvaraja.

DHANANJAYA. Your Yuvaraja is cleverer than I. He has been getting the better of me.

SECOND CITIZEN. Hear that? He means something by that. The pair of them are up to something.

FIRST CITIZEN. If they were not, why should he be wandering about here in the dark? There is some plot to get the Yuvaraja away to Shiv-tarai. Let us tie him up and leave him. We can settle with him later on, when we know what has happened to the Yuvaraja. Here, Kundan, just make him fast; you have the rope.

KUNDAN. Here you are; take it and tie him yourself.

SECOND CITIZEN. What, you call yourselves men of Uttarakut? For shame! Here, give it to me. [*Tying Dhananjaya*] Well, guru how's that? What do you say?

DHANANJAYA. The bonds He binds are tight, and not easily loosened.

Mukta-dhara

The procession of devotees again crosses the stage.

The Chant. Cleaver of heart of darkness,
Fire inexorable flaming,
Barren death-pyre's denizen,
Sankara, Sankara!

Thou whose voice is thunder,
Rudra, Trident-wielder,
Breaster of Death's Ocean,
Sankara, Sankara!

KUNDAN. I say, look there. The more the twilight fades, the blacker that engine-tower of ours becomes.

FIRST CITIZEN. All day it competes with the sunlight, and at night it outdoes the dark. Ugh! It is like a ghoul.

KUNDAN. Why should Bibhuti have made it look like that? There is no getting away from it in Uttarakut, no matter where one goes. It fairly shrieks at one, the hideous thing.

A fourth citizen enters.

FOURTH CITIZEN. I have just heard something. The king is keeping the Yuvaraja in his camp here, behind this mango garden.

SECOND CITIZEN. So that's it, is it? That's why the Vairagi was wandering about here all the time. Leave him tied up—let us go and see.

All the citizens go out.

DHANANJAYA [*sings*].

O Master Minstrel, 'neath Thy hand
The strings are taut and true;
The tuned harp waits for Thy command—
Hast Thou no more to do?

Mukta-dhara

If Thou wake not the music pent
Within the sleeping strings,
Mute shame shall mar thine instrument—
Touch it, and lo, it sings.

Thy hand alone the song can free:
The strings are taut and true,
The tuned harp waits Thy minstrelsy—
Hast Thou no more to do?

The citizens come back.

FIRST CITIZEN. Here is a nice state of affairs!

SECOND CITIZEN. The king's uncle!—Carried the Yuvaraja off to Mohangarh, with all his guards! What can that mean, do you think?

KUNDAN. Mean? It means that his heart is in the right place—in Uttarakut. He has kidnapped the Yuvaraja for fear he should not be properly punished here.

FIRST CITIZEN. How absolutely outrageous! What tyranny! Now we can't even punish our Yuvaraja ourselves.

SECOND CITIZEN. The best remedy now is to . . . you understand?

FIRST CITIZEN. Yes, yes, that gold-mine of theirs . . .

KUNDAN. And he must have at least fifty thousand head of cattle, you know.

SECOND CITIZEN. We will count them all out and then . . . really, this is beyond all bearing!

THIRD CITIZEN. And there is that saffron field of theirs too—annually it gives at least . . .

SECOND CITIZEN. Yes, yes, we must have that as compensation. But what are we to do with this Vairagi?

FIRST CITIZEN. O, let him stay here.

They all go out, leaving Dhananjaya.

Mukta-dhara

DHANANJAYA [*sings*].

That which you cast away, O fool,
Will it lie fallen for ever?
He who knows its worth will take it up.
See what a jewel it is!
Can dust lay claim to it?

Should this be lost,
The royal chain at his throat would lack its tale of
gems.
Do you not know that the search has begun?
His scouts are abroad.

By your contumely
You make His jewel dearer in His eyes.
The pain you inflict
Is His pain too, and that Afflicted One,
Will He endure it for ever?

Kundan comes in again.

KUNDAN. Master, I will set you free—don't take offence.
Get away home at once. Who knows, tonight . . .

DHANANJAYA. Who knows, tonight the call may come.
I cannot go home now.

KUNDAN. What call can you have here?

DHANANJAYA. In the festival, when the end is near.

KUNDAN. You belong to Shiv-tarai; what has Uttarakut's
festival . . .

DHANANJAYA. It is Bhairava's festival. Only the even-
ing lamps of Shiv-tarai remain to be offered.

[*Voice off.*] Awake, O Bhairava! Awake!

KUNDAN. I don't like this—I'm off.

*They go out in opposite directions. Two royal messen-
gers of Uttarakut come in.*

Mukta-dhara

FIRST MESSENGER. Now which way shall we go? Those goatherds in Naosanu said they had seen the Yuvaraja going westward along this path alone.

SECOND MESSENGER. The king's instructions are to find him tonight without fail.

FIRST MESSENGER. There was a rumour that he had been taken to Mohangarh, but it is quite clear that the man that madwoman Amba saw was our Yuvaraja, and this is the road he was on.

SECOND MESSENGER. But I can't understand where he could be going alone in this darkness.

FIRST MESSENGER. We shan't be able to go a step further without a light. Let us go and get a lamp from the village watchman.

They go out. A traveller enters.

TRAVELLER [*shouting*]. Budhan! Sambhu! Budhan! Sambhu-u-u! Well, they *have* left me in the lurch! They sent me ahead and said they would catch me up by a short cut. There isn't a soul to be seen. And that black engine grimacing there in the darkness, it frightens me. Someone is coming. Who's there? Why don't you answer? Is it Budhan?

A second traveller enters.

SECOND TRAVELLER. My name is Nimku, I'm a lamp-seller. The capital will be lit up all night, and they will need lamps. Who are you?

FIRST TRAVELLER. Hubba is my name; I'm a singer in a *jatra* company. Did you meet them on the road? Andu Adhikari's company?

NIMKU. How am I to know them? There are crowds of men on the road.

HUBBA. Our Andu is a man in a million—no danger of him being overlooked in a crowd. He is very much

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of a man, you couldn't help seeing him . . . I say, it looks as though you had a lot of lamps in that basket. Can't you spare me one? Travellers need lamps more than folks who stay at home.

NIMKU. What will you pay?

HUBBA. If I could *pay*, do you think I would be coaxing you like this? I would be shouting at you like a lord.

NIMKU. O, so you are a humorist, are you?

He goes out.

HUBBA. Well, he didn't give me a lamp, but he knew I was a humorist, and that is no small thing! Humorists have a knack of making themselves felt, even in the dark. Confound those crickets! The air fairly tingles with their chirpings! If I had played the highwayman with that lamp-seller, instead of wasting my wit, it would have been more to the point.

A sergeant-at-arms enters.

SERGEANT. Up with you!

HUBBA. Good heavens, man, what a start you gave me!

SERGEANT. Now then, get a move on.

HUBBA. That is exactly what I want to do. But I'm stuck—I'm just trying to digest the fact. And all through trying to get a move on without the other chaps.

SERGEANT. The other chaps are all ready, get along and join them.

HUBBA. What are you talking about? We folk from Tin-Mohana, we have a nasty habit of not understanding words, when they are not clear. Who do you mean by the other chaps?

SERGEANT. We Chabua folk, we have a nasty habit of making things clear—we are very handy at it [*giving him a push*]. Understand *that* now?

HUBBA. H'm yes, it is plain enough. I must go whether

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I want to or not. Where am I to go? Gently now, this time. That first answer of yours cleared my mind at one stroke.

SERGEANT. You are to go to Shiv-tarai.

HUBBA. To Shiv-tarai, on a moonless night like this? What play is on there?

SERGEANT. What is 'on' is the re-building of that ruined fort that used to block the Nandi Pass.

HUBBA. Rebuild the fort? Me? My dear fellow, it's too dark for you to see me properly, or you would never say such terrible things. Why, I'm . . .

SERGEANT. I don't care who you are. You have a pair of hands, haven't you?

HUBBA. Yes, but it isn't my doing. Besides, can you call these . . .

SERGEANT. It's no good talking. We'll find out what your hands are like at the proper place. Now then, up with you.

A second sergeant enters with a captive.

SECOND SERGEANT. I've got another man here, Kankar.

KANKAR. Who is he?

THIRD TRAVELLER. I'm nobody, sir. I'm Lakshman, I ring the bell in the Bhairava temple.

KANKAR. Good, you must have strong arms, then. Off with you to Shiv-tarai.

LAKSHMAN. I don't mind going, but who is to ring . . .

KANKAR. Bhairava will have to ring his bell for himself.

LAKSHMAN. Sir, please have pity on me, my wife is sick.

KANKAR. What difference does that make? She will either get well or die, whether you go or stay.

HUBBA. Lakshman, my good fellow, don't make a fuss. There are risks in the work, I know. But there are risks in objecting too—I've just had a taste of that.

Mukta-dhara

KANKAR. Listen, that is Narsingh's voice. How are things going, Narsingh? All well?

Narsingh comes in with a gang of several men.

NARSINGH. I've got this gang together, and I've sent several others ahead.

KANKAR. Then let's start off, we shall get a few more as we go.

ONE MAN. I won't go.

KANKAR. Why not? What is the matter with you?

THE MAN. Nothing, but I won't go.

KANKAR. What is this chap's name, Narsingh?

NARSINGH. His name is Banwari; he is a maker of lotus-seed rosaries.

KANKAR. All right, I'll settle with him. Now speak up, why won't you go?

BANWARI. I don't feel like it. I have no quarrel with Shiv-tarai folk; they are not our enemies.

KANKAR. Well, now that we are *their* enemies, you have a duty that way, haven't you?

BANWARI. I won't have any hand in doing wrong.

KANKAR. Wrong is wrong only when you are at liberty to choose. Uttarakut is a great body, and you are **only** one of its limbs. You have no responsibility whatever for what it does through you.

BANWARI. There is a greater Body than Uttarakut, of which Uttarakut is a limb, and so is Shiv-tarai.

KANKAR. I say, Narsingh, how the fellow argues! No greater nuisance to a country than an arguer.

NARSINGH. Hard work will soon take that out of him; that's why I brought him along.

BANWARI. I shall only be a burden to you, and no use for your work.

Mukta-dhara

KANKAR. You are a burden to Uttarakut, and this will be good riddance.

HUBBA. Banwari, old chap, you like to get at things by reason, and when folk put things across without a reason, you are bound to clash with them. Either copy their system, or give up your own and keep quiet.

BANWARI. What is your system?

HUBBA. I usually sing. It wouldn't go down well here. I think, so I'm not letting out any music. Otherwise I should have started on the flourishes by now.

KANKAR [*to Banwari*]. Now then, what have you decided?

BANWARI. I won't stir another step.

KANKAR. Then we'll have to make you stir. Tie him up!

HUBBA. Just one word, brother Kankar. Don't be angry. Why do you waste your energy in carrying this fellow. Would it not be better to save it for your job?

KANKAR. It's one of our jobs to keep them in hand. these slackers who don't want to serve Uttarakut. Better understand that while there is time.

HUBBA. O yes, I understand all right.

All go out except Narsingh and Kankar.

NARSINGH. Here comes Bibhuti. Long live Bibhuti!
Bibhuti enters.

KANKAR. We have got on well, and got plenty of men together. But why are you here? They are waiting for you to begin the celebrations.

BIBHUTI. The news about the Nandi Pass fort came just today purposely to belittle my reputation. Some rival is plotting against me.

Mukta-dhara

KANKAR. Rival. Bibhuti?

BIBHUTI. I don't want to mention names, but you all know who it is. Is he to be more honoured in Uttarakut, or I?—that is the issue. There is one thing you don't know. A messenger was sent by the other party to make me change my mind. He even threatened—hinted that the Mukta-dhara dam would be breached.

NARSINGH. What impudence!

KANKAR. Why did you put up with it, Bibhuti?

BIBHUTI. It is useless to argue with raving lunacy.

KANKAR. All the same, Bibhuti, is it quite wise to be so confident? You said yourself there are one or two places where the dam is weak, and anyone who knew them could easily . . .

BIBHUTI. Anyone who knows that knows also that to meddle with those cracks means instant death. The flood would sweep him away in a moment.

NARSINGH. Wouldn't it be better to set a guard?

BIBHUTI. Death himself is on guard there. No, there is no fear for the dam. If only I can block up the Nandi Pass again, I shall have no misgivings.

KANKAR. That you won't find difficult.

BIBHUTI. No, my tools are ready. The trouble is that the pass is so narrow that a very few men can defend it with ease.

NARSINGH. Can they really stop us? We will build the fort if we die for it.

BIBHUTI. We shall need a great many men for dying.

KANKAR. No lack of men to die, if we have men to whip them up.

[*Voice off.*] Awake, O Bhairava, awake!

Dhananjaya enters.

Mukta-dhara

KANKAR. See who comes here! A bad omen to set out with.

BIBHUTI. Vairagi, sadhus like you have never yet succeeded in waking Bhairava. It is I who am going to rouse him, I whom you call a blasphemer.

DHANANJAYA. Yes, I admit that. You folk have the task of waking him.

BIBHUTI. But not by your sounding of gongs and lighting of lamps—that is not how *we* set about it.

DHANANJAYA. No, you will bind Him in chains, and He will awake to rend them.

BIBHUTI. Our chains are no light matter, they are coil upon coil, and knot upon knot.

DHANANJAYA. When all seems lost, then His time is at hand.

The procession of devotees passes by.

The Chant. Victory! Lord of Terror, Sankara!

Wrecker of flood-wrath,

Sankara, Sankara!

Victory! doubtings piercéd,

Victory bondage shattered.

Masterer He of the Evil,

Sankara, Sankara!

King Ranajit enters with his Minister.

MINISTER. Maharaja, the camp is absolutely empty, and most of it burnt down. The few guards who were there . . .

RANAJIT. Never mind about them. Where is Abhijit? I *must* know!

KANKAR. Maharaja, we demand that the Yuvaraja be punished.

RANAJIT. When a man deserves punishment, do I wait for your demands to punish him?

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KANKAR. He has not been found yet. The people are getting suspicious.

RANAJIT. Suspicious? Suspicious of whom?

KANKAR. Pardon me, Maharaja, you must know what your subjects think. The longer it takes to find him, the more impatient they become, so much so that when he is discovered, they will not wait for your Majesty to punish him.

BIBHUTI. We did not wait for your Majesty's command to build the Nandi Pass fort. We took the matter into our own hands.

RANAJIT. Why could you not have left it in mine?

BIBHUTI. When an outrage is committed by one of your own family, it is natural for men to suspect that you too may approve of it.

MINISTER. Maharaja, between their vanity and their anger, the people are dangerously excited today. Don't add your irritation to theirs lest it break all bounds.

RANAJIT. Who is that standing over there? Dhananjaya Vairagi?

DHANANJAYA. So the Maharaja remembers even the Vairagi.

RANAJIT. You know, for a certainty, where the Yuvaraja is.

DHANANJAYA. No, Maharaja. What I know for a certainty I can never keep hidden. That is why I am always in trouble.

RANAJIT. What are you doing here then?

DHANANJAYA. I am waiting for the Yuvaraja to reveal himself.

[Voice off.] Suman, *baba* Suman, it is dark now, all is dark!

RANAJIT. Who is that?

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MINISTER. It is that mad woman, Amba.

Amba enters.

AMBA. What now? He has not come back.

RANAJIT. Why do you seek him? His time had come, and Bhairava called him away.

AMBA. Does Bhairava only call men away? Does he never give them back—in the secret hush, in the depth of night? Suman! Suman!

She goes out. A messenger enters.

MESSENGER. There are thousands of men marching up from Shiv-tarai.

BIBHUTI. What's that? We had all our plans laid to take them by surprise and disarm them. There is some traitor among you, who has sent them word. Kankar, only a few of you had inside information. Then how was it . . .

KANKAR. What, Bibhuti, do you suspect even us?

BIBHUTI. Suspicion has no limits.

KANKAR. Then we suspect you too.

BIBHUTI. You have every right to do so, but there will be a reckoning to be made some day.

RANAJIT [*to the messenger*]. Why are they coming, do you know?

MESSENGER. They have heard that the Yuvaraja is a prisoner, and they have sworn to find him. They will set him free and make him king of Shiv-tarai.

BIBHUTI. We are seeking the Yuvaraja, and so are they. We shall see into whose hands he falls.

DHANANJAYA. He has no favourites. He will fall into the hands of both parties.

MESSENGER. Here comes that leader of Shiv-tarai, Ganesh.

Ganesh enters.

GANESH [*to Dhananjaya*]. Master, shall we find him?

Mukta-dhara

DHANANJAYA. Yes, you shall.

GANESH. Promise us!

DHANANJAYA. I tell you, you shall have him.

RANAJIT. Whom are you seeking?

GANESH. The king, here?—O, you must set him free!

RANAJIT. Set whom free?

GANESH. Our Yuvaraja. You don't want him, but we do! Will you keep from us everything we possess, even him?

DHANANJAYA. Fool, don't you know him yet? Who has power to keep him from men?

GANESH. We shall make him our king.

DHANANJAYA. Of course you shall. In his royal robes he will come.

The procession of devotees crosses the stage once more.

The Chant. Cleaver of heart of darkness,
Fire inexorable flaming,
Barren death-pyre's denizen,
Sankara, Sankara!

Thou whose voice is thunder,
Rudra, Trident-wielder,
Breaster of Death's Ocean,
Sankara, Sankara!

[*Voice off.*] Mother is calling, mother is calling! Come back, Suman, come back!

BIBHUTI. Hark, what is that? What is that sound?

DHANANJAYA. It is the heart of the darkness, bubbling with laughter.

BIBHUTI. Hush! Be quiet! Which way is the noise, can you hear?

Mukta-dhara

[*Voice off.*] Victory, Bhairava, victory!

BIBHUTI. There is no mistaking it. The sound of running water!

DHANANJAYA. The dance has begun—the drum is beating.

BIBHUTI. Louder! It is getting louder!

KANKAR. As if . . .

NARSINGH. Yes, as if . . .

BIBHUTI. My God, it is—it is Mukta-dhara! The water is rushing out. The dam, the dam, who has broken the dam? No chance for him now!

Bibhuti rushes out, followed by Kankar and Narsingh.

RANAJIT. *Mantri*, what is all this?

DHANANJAYA. The call has come, for the feast of the breaking of bonds.

[*Sings*] Pulse of thy pulses, heart, He comes.

Throb the drum-beats, throb the drums!

MINISTER. Maharaja, it is he . . .

RANAJIT. It must be his doing . . .

MINISTER. No one but he . . .

RANAJIT. Who else has such courage?

DHANANJAYA [*sings*].

Deep in my being, fierce and fleet,

Dance His footsteps, dance His feet.

RANAJIT. I shall punish him, if punished he must be. But these people, maddened with rage . . . O my Abhijit, he is dear to the gods! May the gods shield him!

GANESH. Master, I don't understand. What has happened?

Mukta-dhara

DHANANJAYA [*sings*].

Watches the night, in sleepless dread.
From star to star, His terrors tread.

RANAJIT. Listen, the sound of footsteps! O, Abhijit,
Abhijit!

MINISTER. It is he! He is coming!

DHANANJAYA [*sings*].

Quiver, O heart, in the pain that rends!
Fetters fall. and bondage ends.

Sanjaya enters.

RANAJIT. It is Sanjaya. Where is Abhijit?

SANJAYA. The waters of Mukta-dhara have borne him
away. We have lost him.

RANAJIT. What are you saying, Prince?

SANJAYA. The Yuvaraja has broken the bonds of Mukta-
dhara . . .

RANAJIT. And in her freedom he has found his own! . . .
Sanjaya, did he take you with him?

SANJAYA. No. I knew in my heart that he would go
there, so I waited for him in the darkness by the roadside—
but that was all. He kept me back. he would not let
me go with him to the end.

RANAJIT. Tell me a little more.

SANJAYA. He had somehow found a weak spot—there
he struck. The monster machine struck him back. Then
Mukta-dhara, like a mother, took up his wounded body in
her arms, and carried him away.

GANESH. We came to seek our Yuvaraja. We shall
never find him now.

DHANANJAYA. Nay, you have found him. He is yours for
ever now.

Mukta-dhara

The procession of devotees passes across the stage.

The Chant. Victory! Lord of Terror, Sankara!
 Wrecker of flood-wrath,
 Sankara, Sankara!

Victory! doubtings piercé,
Victory! bondage shattered,
Masterer He of the Evil,
 Sankara, Sankara!

NATIR PUJA

AN APPRECIATION

Natir Puja is one of the simplest and most moving of Rabindranath's plays. It is comparatively free from symbolic complexities and intellectual abstractions which make many of his other plays at once puzzling and fascinating. Though at least one of the characters in the play provides deep psychological interest, the main action of the drama centres in a simple religious emotion which rises to extraordinary heights of richness and nobility as the drama culminates in its tragedy of martyred devotion. Few, having seen this play on the stage, will come away without being deeply impressed by a sense of the majesty of the human spirit which, when properly awakened, invests the seemingly ignoble with the divinity of that which it contemplates.

The drama is based on the following Buddhist legend as related in Rajendralal Mitra's *The Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal*, published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1882).

‘Raja Bimbisara, receiving the knowledge of truth from the Lord, had built a big stupa over the Lord's nails and hairs in his zenana, and his maids cleansed the place every day. When Ajatasatru obtained the throne by parricide, he prohibited the females to sweep the stupa on pain of death. Srimati, a female slave, caring not at all for her life, washed it neatly and lighted it with a row of lamps. The king, in great rage, ordered her to the place of execution.’

King Bimbisara (c. 546-494 B.C.), as every student of Indian history knows, was a contemporary of the Buddha (c. 566-486 B.C.) and founder of the ancient empire of Magadha, with its capital at Rajagriha. The generally

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accepted historical version is that he was killed by his son, Ajatasatru (c. 494-462 B.C.), who seized the throne; though, according to another tradition, Bimbisara is said to have handed over the kingdom to Ajatasatru, the Prince. The following version adopted by the poet for the purposes of the drama draws upon both these traditions.

Bimbisara, having learnt from the Buddha the wisdom of renunciation and seeing his son, Ajatasatru, ambitious of the throne, voluntarily gives up his kingdom to the latter and retires outside the city to spend his days in meditation and prayer. His younger son, Chitra, inspired by the same teaching, embraces the Order and becomes a Bhikshu. The queen-mother, Lokesvari, once a devotee of the Buddha, turns bitterly against a religion that has deprived her of her husband and of her son. The new king, Ajatasatru, under the influence of Devadatta, a cousin and a rival of the Buddha, forbids the practice of Buddhism and persecutes its followers. In the meanwhile, on the Vasanta Purnima day,¹ which is the birthday of the Buddha. Srimati, the Nati (palace-dancer), is chosen by the Order to offer worship at the shrine—a privilege hitherto reserved for the princesses, one of whom, Ratnavali, is highly incensed at the idea of a low creature like the palace-dancer being honoured with this right, on this auspicious day, in preference to one of them. In order to humiliate the Nati, Ratnavali gets an order from the king (who has already forbidden, on pain of death, any worship at the shrine) that the Nati should instead dance before the stupa. Srimati accepts the order and at the appointed hour in the evening appears on the scene dressed for the dance. She begins the dance, which turns out to be one of religious ecstasy, in course of which the dancer discards one by one

¹ The birthday of the Buddha is observed on the Vaisakhi Purnima, which nowadays falls in Summer but which in 600 B.C. fell in Spring (*Vasanta*).

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all her ornaments as well as the gorgeous outer garments, and is left with only the ochre wrap of a Bhikshuni. As she kneels down and recites the final verses of formal worship, her head is struck off by order of the king. The spectacle of this supreme and heroic devotion of the Nati melts even the heart of Ratnavali.

In the meanwhile Bimbisara, who was coming to offer worship at the same shrine, is murdered on the way by the king's men. Ajatasatru, frightened at the enormity of the crime and fearing popular upheaval, turns remorseful and revokes his policy of persecution.

How far the plot as used by the author is historical, how far legendary and how far the creation of the poet's imagination, is not a relevant inquiry. For the interest of the play is not historical, but lies in its deep human appeal and in the subtle analysis of the character of the queen-mother.

The Buddha had challenged the infallibility of the Vedas and the superiority of the Brahmins to the other castes. Worship of the Divine cannot be the monopoly of this caste or that, nor can its expression be for ever imprisoned in one particular Vedic pattern. True worship is the surrender or dedication of the best we have to the call of Truth. The sage dedicates his learning, the man of action his deeds, the poet his songs, the humble Nati her dance. That is how Rabindranath interprets the Buddha's gospel of renunciation. Upali, the Bhikshu, asks for alms in the name of the Lord at the palace gate. Srimati, the Nati, alone is awake. Aware of the social degradation attached to her calling, she dare not give the alms with her own hand and humbly offers to call one of the princesses. But the Bhikshu assures her that her gift will be equally acceptable to the Lord. 'But what have I to offer?' 'The best you have.' The Bhikshu's assurance awakens in her a sense of the essential human dignity which is inherent in every

individual, in the slave as much as in the princess. Social institutions distort this fundamental equality of all human beings by their artificial standards and their snobberies, exalting some and degrading others. But true religion is that which ignoring man-made prejudices restores the fundamental valuation by which all human beings must finally be measured and redeemed. As an English poet has put it:

The soul of music slumbers in the shell
Till waked and kindled by the master's spell;
And feeling hearts—touch them but rightly—pour
A thousand melodies unfelt before.

And so the Nati by her sincerity and her devotion redeems the so-called degradation of her calling and vindicates by her death the innate majesty of her spirit.

Apart from the deep human appeal of this theme, the main interest of the drama lies in the psychological analysis of the character of the Queen-mother, Lokesvari. She is torn between her genuine reverence for the Buddha—having seen and worshipped him in person, how could she feel otherwise?—and her bitter wrath against a religion whose very humanity tramples under foot the claims of the human, whose gospel of *maitri*, of love, service and compassion, works as a deadly disintegrating force, wrecking the basic order of Hindu society, teaching 'the Brahmin to serve and the Kshatriya to beg' instead of to fight.¹ Her husband has renounced his throne, and her son his home. Religion should uphold society and not break it, should provide divine sanction for the power of man, instead of repudiating it. *Ahimsa* may be good for the lower orders whose duty it is to be servile, but it degrades the Kshatriya, the warrior-king, whose duty it is to rule

¹ 'See what I am today—widowed, though my husband lives; barren, having borne a son; homeless, in the midst of a palace.'

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and to wield power. As Lokesvari puts it, the mud has its uses but the mountain must be made of hard rock. Her royal pride, combined with her intuitive sense of the social function of religion, makes her rebel against the extreme individualism of a gospel which ignores the basic rights of flesh and blood. 'Alas for flesh and blood! Alas for its unbearable hunger, its intolerable pain!'¹ On the other hand, her very Hinduism has developed in her a spiritual sensibility which cannot but be moved by her vivid memory of the serene and radiant personality of the Buddha, the Compassionate. Having seen him once, she is for ever haunted by the deep spiritual appeal of his personality which compels her reverence even when she would repudiate it. In her character is symbolized the great historical drama of the challenge of Buddhism to orthodox Hindu society. As Rabindranath used to say, Hinduism could not wholly repudiate Buddhism, nor could it be replaced by it. Though formally dead, Buddhism has never ceased to inspire the best minds of India. Tagore and Gandhi are the two greatest, as they are the latest, witnesses to this fact. Only once in his life, said Rabindranath, did he feel like prostrating himself before an image, and that was when he saw the Buddha at Gaya. The Upanishads and the personality of the Enlightened One were the two deepest and most lasting spiritual influences on his life. Again and again he has invoked the spirit of the Buddha, in poem, song and drama. Here are the opening lines of a song from this same play, *Natir Puja*. The passionate sincerity of its words invests this song with a significance which far exceeds its dramatic appropriateness in the drama.

¹ 'Is the *tapasya*—the struggle—of our blood and flesh any whit less real than their quest for nothingness—their *sunya*?'

Natir Puja

The world today is wild with the delirium of hatred,
the conflicts are cruel and unceasing in anguish,
crooked are its paths, tangled its bonds of greed.
All creatures are crying for a new birth of thine.
Oh thou of boundless life,
save them, raise thine eternal voice of hope,
let Love's lotus with its inexhaustible treasure of honey
open its petals in thy light.

O Serene, O Free,
in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness
wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth.

And here are a few lines from a poem written five years
later in 1932, on the occasion of the opening ceremony of
the Mulagandhakuti Vihara at Sarnath:

Bring to this country once again the blessed name
which made the land of thy birth sacred to all
distant lands.

Let thy great awakening under the *bodhi* tree
be fulfilled.

sweeping away the veil of unreason
and let, at the end of an oblivious night,
freshly blossom out in India thy remembrance!
Bring life to the mind that is inert,
Thou Illimitable Light and Life!

K.R.K.

NATIR PUJA

THE PROLOGUE

Upali, the Bhikshu, enters singing.

UPALI [*calling*]. Who is there? Alms, give me alms, in the name of the Lord Buddha.

Srimati, the palace dancing-girl, enters and greets him reverently.

UPALI [*blessing her*]. May all prosperity be yours! Who are you, my child?

SRIMATI. I am the palace dancing-girl here.

UPALI. Are you the only one awake today in all this city?

SRIMATI. All the princesses are still asleep.

UPALI. I have come for alms, in the name of the Lord Buddha.

SRIMATI. Then with your leave, Prabhu, I'll go and call the princesses.

UPALI. Today I have come to *you* for alms.

SRIMATI. To me? But I am so poor! In your alms-bowl anything that I could give would seem so mean. What can I give, tell me?

UPALI. Your best gift.

SRIMATI. What is my best gift? I do not even know that.

UPALI. No, but the grace of the Lord is upon you. He knows.

SRIMATI. O Sir, then may He Himself take whatever I have.

UPALI. Indeed He will take it, child. He will accept the flowers of your worship. Spring, the king of the seasons, touches the flowering woods—he himself awakens

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them to sacrifice. For you too the appointed day is at hand. I came to tell you so; you are indeed blessed.

SRIMATI. I'll await my hour.

She makes the sign of reverence. They go out.

The princesses enter.

PRINCESSES. Prabhu, Prabhu. do not leave us so. Be pleased to accept our alms . . . O, what a shame! He has gone!

RATNAVALI. What are you all afraid of, Vasavi? There's no dearth of folk to take alms. It's the givers who are rare.

NANDA. No, Ratna. To find one to take the offering, much merit must be earned. Today is lost to us.

They go out.

ACT I

The Palace Garden at Magadha

The Queen-mother Lokesvari enters with the Bhikshuni Utpalaparna.

LOKESVARI. So the Maharaja Bimbisara remembers me?

BHIKSHUNI. Yes, that is my message.

LOKESVARI. Today he worships at his altar beneath the asoka tree. That is why he remembers, I suppose?

BHIKSHUNI. Tonight is Vasanta Purnima—the full moon of spring.

LOKESVARI. And so they worship—*whom* do they worship?

BHIKSHUNI. Why, today is the Lord Buddha's birthday—it's *His* festival.

LOKESVARI. Go tell my husband that my worship is finished and done with. Other people may offer their flowers and lamps; I've emptied my whole world.

BHIKSHUNI. What are you saying, Maharani?

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LOKESVARI. My only son, my prince, my Chitra—they've lured him away and made a monk of him, and now they ask me for an offering! They cut the root of the creeper and then they ask for flowers.

BHIKSHUNI. You have given him away, but you have not lost him. Once you held him in your arms; today you may still hold him—in the whole world.

LOKESVARI. Have you a son of your own, woman?

BHIKSHUNI. No.

LOKESVARI. Have you ever had one?

BHIKSHUNI. No. I was widowed when a child.

LOKESVARI. Then be silent; do not talk of things which you cannot understand.

BHIKSHUNI. Maharani, it was you who first welcomed the true religion into the palace courts. Why then today . . .

LOKESVARI. Ah, so they still remember that! I'm surprised, I thought your Master had forgotten it. Every day I used to call the Bhikshu Dharmaruchi to read the Scriptures to me, before I would touch water. A hundred Bhikshus were fed before I broke my fast. Every year at the end of the rains it was my vow to provide every member of the Sangha with the yellow robe. On the day when that enemy of Dharma Devadatta preached, and everyone else was wavering, I alone stood firm; I invited the Lord Tathagata here. He sat and spoke under this asoka, so that all heard the sacred word. O cruel and ungrateful one! This is how I am rewarded! Nothing has happened to *them*—to the women who hated me so fiercely and put the poison in my food. Their sons still live like princes!

BHIKSHUNI. One can't measure truth by this world's values, Maharani. Light is golden, but can it be weighed with gold?

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LOKESVARI. You remember the day when Prince Ajatasatru cast in his lot with Devadatta. I laughed that day, fool that I was! These men wanted to cross the sea on a broken raft, I thought. He pinned his faith to Devadatta's powers; he hoped to become king by that means, while his father was still alive. I had no misgivings: I boasted that the divine power of a guru mightier even than Devadatta would bring such unholy schemes to nought. What faith I had! I got the Lord Buddha—Sakyasingha. I mean—to come and give my husband his blessing. And yet who had the victory?

BHIKSHUNI. *You* had. Don't turn that inward victory into a mere external thing.

LOKESVARI. My victory, you call it?

BHIKSHUNI. Certainly I do. King Bimbisara freely gave up his throne to the son who craved a kingdom, and he won for himself that day a kingdom that . . .

LOKESVARI. Kingdom! Empty words! Such a kingdom is a mockery for a Kshatriya king. Look at me, see what I am today—widowed, though my husband lives; barren, having borne a son; homeless, in the midst of a palace! *Those* are not empty words! Folk who never accepted your religion make me a laughing-stock today. Go tell this to your Master, your Thunder-Spirit! Where is He now? Let His thunderbolt fall on their heads!

BHIKSHUNI. Maharani, let them laugh their fill; all this is a fleeting dream, there is no reality in it.

LOKESVARI. It's a dream, maybe, but it's a dream that does not please me. I want other dreams called wealth, and motherhood, and honour. Those women yonder, how they flourish on such dreams, how high they hold their heads! Go and talk to *them*! Let *them* bring offerings for the worship!

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BHIKSHUNI. Very well, I will go.

LOKESVARI. Go, but remember, *they* are not fools, like me. *They* will lose nothing, they will keep their treasures. *They* don't believe in the Buddha; Sakyasingha's gracious mercy has not been granted to them—luckily for them! Well? Why are you standing there dumb? Pretending to be patient, are you?

BHIKSHUNI. What am I to say? Even now my inner patience fails me.

LOKESVARI. Your patience is failing you, so you busy yourself with inner forgiveness of the likes of me! The silent insolence of you people is too much! Go! [*The Bhikshuni is about to go, but the Queen recalls her.*] Wait one moment, Bhikshuni. Chitra has taken some new name, do you know what it is?

BHIKSHUNI. Yes, Kusalasila.

LOKESVARI. He thinks the name unclean by which his mother called him—so lightly he flings it away!

BHIKSHUNI. If you wish, Maharani, I could bring him to see you one day.

LOKESVARI. If I wish? O shame that I, who brought him into the world—that I should have to wish you to bring him to me!

BHIKSHUNI. Then have I your leave to go?

LOKESVARI. Wait a little. You see him sometimes?

BHIKSHUNI. Yes.

LOKESVARI. Very well, perhaps just once . . . if only he . . . no, never mind!

BHIKSHUNI. I will tell him. Perhaps you will see him. *She goes out.*

LOKESVARI. Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps! When the blood of my own veins fed his growing life, there was no perhaps in that! His long long debt to his mother has

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come down to this—a hesitating perhaps! That's what they call *Dharma*. [*She calls*] Mallika!

Mallika enters.

MALLIKA. Maharani?

LOKESVARI. Have you heard anything of Prince Ajatasatru?

MALLIKA. Yes, he has gone to fetch Devadatta. Not a remnant of the worship of the Three Jewels will be left in the kingdom.

LOKESVARI. The coward! A king who dares not rule! Surely I am a living proof how little power the Buddha's teaching has. Yet he dare not even defy that falsehood without the backing of that empty fellow Devadatta.

MALLIKA. Maharani, those who own much have much to fear. He has a kingdom to rule, so fear drives him to seek alliance with every power there is. When he fears he has conceded too much to Buddha's followers, he turns and propitiates Devadatta's with more still. He is trying to secure his fortune both ways.

LOKESVARI. My fortune is secure enough, then! I have nothing to lose, so I need not stoop to seek the aid of falsehood.

MALLIKA. Now you are talking just like Utpalaparna, the Bhikshuni. Blessed is Maharani Lokesvari, she says; by the grace of the Lord Buddha she is freed from all ties which bind men to illusion.

LOKESVARI. These catch-words only anger me. Enjoy if you will your stainless, empty truth—give me all my earth-stained ties again! Then once more I would light my lamps at the altar beneath the asoka tree; once more would a hundred Bhikshus be fed, their sacred texts from end to end recited in my palace. But if that cannot be, let

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Devadatta come! I care not whether he be true or false.
I shall go to the watch-tower to see how near they are.

They go out.

Srimati enters with her Vina : she spreads her carpet in the shade of a creeper and looks off-stage.

SRIMATI. It is time. Come, all of you. [*Sings.*]

At dead of night, what whisper came?

I know not, I.

Was it in waking, was it in dream?

I know not, I.

Malati enters.

MALATI. Are you Srimati?

SRIMATI. Yes, dear, what is it?

MALATI. The door-keeper told me to come to you. I want to learn to sing.

SRIMATI. I've never seen you in the palace before, have I?

MALATI. No, I've just come from my village. My name is Malati.

SRIMATI. Why did you come, child? Didn't the days pass quickly enough there? There you were a flower for worship, and the gods were glad. Here you will deck the garland of pleasure, and the evil spirits will laugh. Your spring-time will have come in vain. You've come to learn to sing, you say? Is that all you hope for?

MALATI. May I tell you the truth? My hope is much larger, but I am shy to speak of it.

SRIMATI. I see, is that it? You hope to be a queen some day—an evil hope! Well, perhaps you may be, if the sins of your former birth are black enough. But when the wild bird sighs for the golden cage, it's an evil spirit that

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sits in her wings. Go back, go while you may, it's not yet too late.

MALATI. What are you telling me, sister? I don't understand.

SRIMATI. This is what I say—alas, that fetters should beguile you, seeming ornaments; alas, that death should bewitch you, seeming beauty.

MALATI. No, you don't understand at all; I'll tell you plainly. I've heard that once the Lord Buddha visited this garden, this asoka tree. King Bimbisara built an altar here, didn't he?

SRIMATI. Yes, that is so.

MALATI. And the princesses make offerings there every evening. If that is not allowed me, may I not sweep the place and keep it clean? That was my hope when I joined the singing girls.

SRIMATI. Welcome, sister, I am glad. The lamps of worship in the hands of the princesses give more smoke than light; they have been waiting for the touch of your innocent hands. But who put the thought into your mind?

MALATI. How can I tell you, sister? There's a voice like fire in every wind today. Only the other day my brother heard it and went. He is eighteen years old. I held him by the hand and asked him where he was going, and he said, 'To seek it.'

SRIMATI. The sea is calling with one voice to the waves of every river, and the moon is at the full. [*Taking Malati's hand*] What's this? A ring on your finger? Has my flower of paradise been sold like common dust?

MALATI. I will tell you everything, you will understand.

SRIMATI. Yes, I know what it is to grieve, and so I understand.

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MALATI. He was rich, we were poor. I used to watch him silently, from a distance. One day he came to our house and said that he loved me. My father said, 'Malati is fortunate.' When all the preparations were finished he came to our door. He was dressed as a Bhikshu, not as a bridegroom. A saffron robe, and a staff in his hand. He said to me, 'If ever we meet, it will not be here, but upon the Path of *Mukti*.' Sister, don't be angry with me. Even now the tears come, for my heart is very weak.

SRIMATI. Let the tears fall, my child. They will lay the dust on your Path of *Mukti*.

MALATI. I bowed to him and said, 'My bonds are not yet loosed. Give me the ring you promised.' This is the ring he gave me. When it falls from my finger before the altar of the Lord, we shall meet again on the Path of *Mukti*.

SRIMATI. How many women in these days have broken the homes they once built up! How many have put on the saffron robe and taken the road! Is it the Way that draws them, or the Wayfarer—who knows? Many and many a time I have lifted my hands and prayed with all my soul to the Great One, that He would not remain unmoved. He has set flowing in every home the flood of women's tears, may He grant them peace! Look, here come the princesses.

Enter Vasavi, Nanda, Ratnavali, Ajita, Mallika and Bhadra.

VASAVI. Who is this child? Just look! See how she has piled up her hair, and stuck a *jaba* flower over her ear. Look, Nanda, how she has woven *akanda* flowers into the plaits. That's a necklace of red *gunja* seeds, isn't it? Where did she come from, Srimati?

SRIMATI. From her village. Her name is Malati.

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RATNAVALI. A fine catch, to be sure! You'll make a disciple of her, I suppose? You couldn't save *our* souls, ~~to be sure~~ **to be sure** a village girl, and palm off your salvation on her.

SRIMATI. The salvation of village girls gives me no anxiety, princess. There neither dust nor ornaments hide Heaven's handiwork, so Heaven knows them for its own.

RATNAVALI. Sooner than go to Heaven through *your* preaching, I'd rather not go there at all!

NANDA. Now, Ajita, why should she always tease poor Srimati so? Srimati never preaches.

VASAVI. O, but there's a world of preaching in her silence. See how she's smiling now—isn't that a sermon in itself?

RATNAVALI. O, a marvellous sermon! I'll tell you what it means—'Let the bitter be overcome by the sweet, and words by smiles'.

VASAVI. Why don't you answer back a bit, Srimati? Your gentleness is past all bearing. It's far better to make people angry than to make them ashamed.

SRIMATI. If I were really good at heart I could afford to make a show of being bad. The full moon can afford to show her shadows. But what if the moonless night were to cover itself in cloud?

AJITA. See how bewildered our village girl looks. She must be thinking that the tongues of palace girls are sharper than they are sweet. What is your name? I've forgotten.

MALATI. Malati.

AJITA. Tell us what you were thinking, do.

MALATI. I was feeling a little hurt, because I love my sister.

AJITA. It's a trick of ours to hurt those we love. That

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is one of the rules of palace rhetoric. Make a note of it!

BHADRA. You were going to say something more, Malati. Do tell us. I'm longing to know what you think of us.

MALATI. I was going to say, *hanga*,¹ how you love to hear yourselves talk! You're missing a chance of music.

All the princesses laugh loudly.

VASAVI. *Hanga, hanga!* We must call the palace grammar-master! Here's a new interjection for him!

RATNAVALI. *Hanga, Vasavi! Hanga*—thou jewel in the royal crown!

VASAVI. *Hanga, Ratnavali! Hanga, hanga*, thou moon of enchanting beauty! What a new wealth of language!

MALATI. Sister, are they angry with me?

NANDA. Don't be afraid, Malati. When the sky-nymphs send hail on the *shiuli* flowers, they are not angry. That is their way of caressing them.

AJITA. See, Srimati has a song, in her mind. She doesn't hear a word we are saying. Sing to us, Srimati; we shall listen.

Srimati sings.

At dead of night, what whisper came?

I know not, I.

Was it in waking, was it in dream?

I know not, I.

I bend to common tasks of home,

I wander down the open ways;

What secret word that bids me come

Haunts all the traffic of the days?

I know not, I.

¹ This is an 'ejaculatory' expression which is characteristic of the racy dialogue of the villages and is therefore mocked by the sophisticated princesses. It is impossible to retain its exact flavour in any translation.

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Fear or triumph or nameless pain?
A word that whispers 'Never again'.
Is it in my heart, or the heavens on high?—
I know not, I.

VASAVI. Malati, your eyes are full of tears. What was it in the song that touched you?

MALATI. Srimati has heard the Call.

VASAVI. What call?

MALATI. The call that set my brother wandering, the call that my . . .

VASAVI. Your what?

SRIMATI. Hush, Malati dear, don't say any more. Dry your eyes, this is no place for weeping.

VASAVI. Why did you stop her, Srimati? Do you think we only know how to laugh?

BHADRA. Don't we know there are places which laughter does not reach?

MALATI. Princesses, there's a voice in every wind today. Haven't you heard?

NANDA. No, child. The petals of the lotus open to the morning light, but not the walls of the palace.

Lokesvari enters. All make obeisance.

LOKESVARI. I can't bear it! There! Don't you hear it?—that chant of praise along the roads: *Salutation to the Buddha, who teaches! Salutation to the Sangha which is supreme!* Alas, it can still stir my heart. [Stopping her ears] It must be stopped, this very day, now, at once.

MALLIKA. Calm yourself, my Lady.

LOKESVARI. How can I calm myself? Which text will you give me, this one? *Salutation to the Supreme Peace, the Supreme Mercy!* No, never, never again. This is

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my text now: *Salutation to the goddess of angry lightning! Salutation to the terrible one, the destroyer!* Through strife, through fire, through bloodshed, the earth will find its peace. For otherwise the son will leave his mother's arms, and the king in his splendour will drop like a withered leaf from his throne. What are you doing here, maidens?

RATNAVALI [*laughing*]. We are waiting for salvation. We're purifying our sinful minds—we're well on the way to become Srimati's disciples.

VASAVI. You shouldn't talk so flippantly.

LOKESVARI. This dancing-girl's disciples? Yes, that's just what *will* happen with this religion. The fallen will come preaching salvation! Srimati has suddenly become a saint now, has she? When Lord Buddha came to our garden and everyone in the place came to see him, I sent for her too, out of pity. The wretched girl refused to come. And now, it seems, when the Bhikshu Upali comes for alms, he avoids our princesses, and receives alms only at her hands. O what fools you are, you girls of royal blood, to be so set on welcoming this religion—this religion that will drag your proud throne in the dust. Beggars will rule henceforth from the thrones of kings! Do you call that the true religion, you suicides? [*To Srimati*] What holy text did Upali give you at your initiation, dancing-girl? Let me hear it. Let me see how far you will dare to go. Your sinful tongue ought to be struck dumb.

SRIMATI [*standing up and folding her hands*].

Salutation to the Buddha who teaches!
Salutation to the Dhamma that saves!
Salutation to the Sangha which is supreme!

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VASAVI. Enough! Words lead only to more words.
Sing to us, Srimati.

Srimati sings.

Have you come to my door, my Lord,
To seek my inmost me?
Call your call today within.
For at your call
The hidden flowers come out on the naked branches.
At your call
The new dawn comes with a pitcher of light
in her hand,
And the deep darkness answers.

A Buddhist chant is heard off-stage: Salutation to the
Three Jewels! Salutation to the Enlightened! Salutation
to the Great Life! Salutation to the Most Merciful!

Enter Utpalaparna. All make obeisance.

ALL. Your blessing, Holy Mother.

BHIKSHUNI. May you enjoy all blessing, may all the gods
preserve you, may good be yours for ever, by the grace of
all the Buddhas.

Srimati!

SRIMATI. What is your command?

BHIKSHUNI. Today is Vasanta Purnima—the full moon
of spring. We celebrate the birth of the Lord Buddha.
It will be Srimati's task to lead the rites of worship at the
altar beneath the asoka.

RATNAVALI. I cannot have heard aright. What Srimati
are you speaking of?

BHIKSHUNI. This Srimati, here.

RATNAVALI. This palace dancing-girl?

BHIKSHUNI. Yes, this dancing-girl.

RATNAVALI. Did you get this from the elders?

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BHIKSHUNI. Yes, it is they who gave the order.

RATNAVALI. Who gave the order? What are their names?

BHIKSHUNI. Upali is one.

RATNAVALI. Upali—a barber.

BHIKSHUNI. Another is Sunanda.

RATNAVALI. He's a cowherd's son.

BHIKSHUNI. Another is Sunit.

RATNAVALI. He's a Pukkush by caste, isn't he?

BHIKSHUNI. Princess, their caste is one and the same. Theirs is an aristocracy of which you know nothing.

RATNAVALI. No, indeed I don't. Perhaps this dancing-girl does—perhaps there's no great difference between their caste and hers. That's why they have such a regard for her, no doubt!

BHIKSHUNI. That's a true word . . . Bimbisara, the king's father, is leaving his hermitage today, and coming in person to join our worship. I will go to welcome him.

She goes out.

AJITA. Where are you going, Srimati?

SRIMATI. To wash the altar under the asoka tree

MALATI. Sister, do take me with you.

NANDA. I will go also.

AJITA. Yes, perhaps I might as well go too.

VASAVI. I too would like to see what kind of preparations you make.

RATNAVALI. How charming! Srimati will serve the altar, and you, her maids-in-waiting, will do the fanning!

VASAVI. While you stand here and breathe out burning curses! Well, that won't set the asoka on fire, and it won't disturb Srimati's peace of mind, either.

They all go out except Ratnavali and Mallika.

RATNAVALI. This cannot last, it cannot last. It's

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completely against all nature. O Mallika, why wasn't I born a man? Shame on these bracelets—if only I wore a sword instead! You too, Mallika, you were silent all the time, you didn't say a word. Are you also pining to be maid-in-waiting to that dancer?

MALLIKA. She would not have me, even if I were. She knows me too well.

RATNAVALI. I can't understand how you can suffer this in silence. Patience is the weapon of the vulgar and helpless, not of the daughters of a royal house.

MALLIKA. I do not care to waste my strength. A day of reckoning is at hand, I know.

RATNAVALI. Are you sure of that?

MALLIKA. Yes, quite sure.

RATNAVALI. If it's a secret, don't tell me. All I wish to know is this—do we princesses stand by with folded hands, while that dancing-girl conducts the evening worship?

MALLIKA. No, never, I give you my word.

RATNAVALI. Amen to that, in the name of our palace gods!

ACT II

The Palace Garden

Enter Lokesvari and Mallika.

MALLIKA. You have seen your son, Maharani, so why do you still . . .

LOKESVARI. Seen my son? Where was my son? It's worse than death! I never looked for this.

MALLIKA. What do you mean?

LOKESVARI. A son comes to his mother—and is no longer her son. There is no sorrow in the world like that. How

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strangely he looked at me! As if his mother had disappeared and left no trace. I am completely wiped out! I could never have dreamed of such disaster.

MALLIKA. They blot out all memory of their birth of flesh and blood, these men, to win that immaculate new birth of theirs.

LOKESVARI. Alas for flesh and blood! Alas for its unbearable hunger, its intolerable pain! Is the *tapasya*—the struggle—of our blood and flesh any whit less real than their quest for nothingness—their *sunya*?

MALLIKA. Say what you will, Devi, I have seen him. What beauty! Like the form of a god, bathed with light.

LOKESVARI. With that beauty he put his mother to shame. It was an insult to the mother's love in my heart, the mother's life in my veins. What a gulf between this new birth and the birth I gave him! It's not only different, it's hostile. This is a man's religion, Mallika, I see that clearly now. In this religion the son has no need of his mother, nor the husband of his wife. Yet we women must stay on in our empty homes, with our blasted lives, to give alms to all these home-forsakers, who are neither sons, nor husbands, nor brothers. It's death to us, Mallika, this man's religion; let us fight it to the death!

MALLIKA. But, Devi, haven't you seen? It's the women who go in crowds to worship the Buddha.

LOKESVARI. They are fools! There is no end to their appetite for devotion. They worship most whatever hurts them most. I refuse to encourage their folly.

MALLIKA. These are only words, Maharani. I know very well how it is. This son of yours has left the shelter of your care by one door, but he has entered the sanctuary of your heart by another. The human child has left your lap and is enthroned as a god in your heart.

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LOKESVARI. Hush, hush, don't talk so. I pleaded with him to spend just one night in his mother's home. He said, 'My mother's home has no roof but the sky.' If you had been a mother, Mallika, you would understand what terrible words those were. A thunderbolt is a thunderbolt, even in the hands of a god. My breast is a shattered ruin—a hollow emptiness behind my ribs. It echoes, echoes in agony to the cry of those Bhikshus on the road:

My refuge is in the Buddha,
My refuge is in the Dhamma,
My refuge is in the Sangha!

MALLIKA. Why, Maharani, even now you bow your head as you chant those words!

LOKESVARI. That's the worst of it, Mallika. This religion of the weak makes folk weak, that is its purpose. It bows the heads that were once held high. It teaches the Brahmin to serve and the Kshatriya to beg. I myself have nourished its poison in my blood, of my own free will, for many days. That is why I fear it now more than you all . . . Who is that coming?

MALLIKA. Princess Vasavi; she is on her way to the place of worship.

Vasavi enters.

LOKESVARI. Are you going to the worship?

VASAVI. Yes.

LOKESVARI. But you girls are no longer children.

VASAVI. Why, do we seem to you to behave like children?

LOKESVARI. You infants! Is it true that you go about proclaiming that non-violence is the highest of creeds?

VASAVI. Those who proclaim it are much older and wiser than we; we simply repeat their words.

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LOKESVARI. How am I to make the silly girl understand that non-violence is the religion of the vulgar? Force is what befits the strong arm of a Kshatriya—it is a jewelled armlet, brilliant and cruel.

VASAVI. But is strength never gentle?

LOKESVARI. Gentle to pervade and submerge, yes; to bind and establish, no. With pitiless rock the Creator fashioned His mountains, not with mud. Your teacher wants everything to be made of mud from top to bottom. You, a king's daughter, are you not ashamed to believe such nonsense? Answer me, girl.

VASAVI. I am thinking it over.

LOKESVARI. What is there to think over? It has happened before your very eyes. A king's son abandons kingdom and all, at a moment's notice, to cultivate pity for the whole world—so he says! You heard it, didn't you?

VASAVI. Yes, I heard.

LOKESVARI. Then who is left to take up the harder duty of cruelty? If there is none, what fate will befall this earth, this earth which is meant for heroes? An evil fate, I say—endless misery at the hands of these spiritless, lifeless men, with their bowed heads and their fasting bodies. You are Kshatriya girls, Vasavi; do you find my words so strange?

VASAVI. No, they are familiar enough. But all in a single day they have been smothered out of sight—just as the leafless boughs are hidden, when the spring blossom covers the *kinsuka* tree.

LOKESVARI. Men grow infatuated sometimes and forget their manhood. But if women allow them to forget it, women must bear the brunt, and for them it spells disaster. Great creepers need great trees for their support. If all

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the trees were to shrink into shrubs, what would become of the creepers? Well? Why don't you answer?

VASAVI. We need great trees, of course.

LOKESVARI. But your Teacher has come to destroy the trees. And that not axe in hand, with the strength of a Parasurama. These soft teachings of his are like maggots. He sets them to eat out the very marrow of manhood. He will wipe the Kshatriya from the face of the earth without a battle. And when his work is done, you the king's daughters will shave your heads and tramp the roads with your begging bowls! May you die first—that's my blessing! [*She pauses*] You do not relish what I say?

VASAVI. Let me think.

LOKESVARI. There is no need to think, you have the proofs. My husband Bimbisara was a Kshatriya king. He held his kingdom as a religious duty, not for pleasure. But this desert wind of a religion has only to breathe its texts in his ear, and down he falls from his royal state like a shrivelled leaf—instead of facing death on the battlefield, sword in hand, as befits a king. What of yourself, Vasavi? Have you given up hope of being a queen one day?

VASAVI. No, why should I?

LOKESVARI. Then I ask you, could you respect and marry a king who is shaken on his throne by every breath of this chant of compassion, who holds his sceptre with a half-hearted grasp, on whose brow the emblem of victory is dim?

VASAVI. No.

LOKESVARI. Listen, Vasavi, I'll tell you my own position. 'King Bimbisara has sent a message that he is coming today and wishes me to be ready to receive him. You think, I suppose, that I shall put on my best in his honour? What? Welcome a man who is neither king nor monk, who neither enjoys the world nor renounces it? Never! Vasavi, I

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entreat you, have nothing to do with this shameful, unmanly, self-abasing creed.

Vasavi turns slowly away.

MALLIKA. Where are you going, Princess?

VASAVI. Home.

MALLIKA. But the dancing-girl is almost ready.

VASAVI. Never mind.

She goes out.

MALLIKA. Listen, Maharani.

LOKESVARI. Yes, I am listening. What a clamour!

MALLIKA. They must have reached the city.

LOKESVARI. But hark, the chanting is still going on—

Salutation . . .

MALLIKA. But the tone is changed. They are chanting it louder because it has been challenged. There! Do you hear?—there's another shout along with it—*Salutation to the Wielder of the Pinaka*. We have nothing to fear now.

LOKESVARI. The end has come, the end! When this altar crumbles to the dust, no one will ever know how much of my life has gone with it—how much heart's devotion! May it be swiftly broken, Mallika. It is built into my heart, and I can endure no more.

Ratnavali enters.

LOKESVARI. Are you too going to worship, Ratna?

RATNAVALI. Perhaps I don't always give worship where it is deserved, but I never give it where it isn't.

LOKESVARI. Then where are you going?

RATNAVALI. I am coming to you, Maharani. I have a petition.

LOKESVARI. What is it?

RATNAVALI. If that dancing-girl is allowed to make the offerings here, this palace will be desecrated. I can live here no longer.

Natir Puja

LOKESVARI. The desecration shall be stopped, I promise you.

RATNAVALI. It may be stopped today—and then happen to-morrow.

LOKESVARI. No fear of that, daughter. we will destroy this worship, root and branch.

RATNAVALI. Even that will be a poor compensation for all the insults we have borne.

LOKESVARI. Make your petition to the king. He may order her to be banished, or even put to death.

RATNAVALI. That would only heighten her glory.

LOKESVARI. Then what do you want?

RATNAVALI. Bid her dance, dancing-girl as she is, before the very altar where she was to have worshipped as priestess! . . . You are silent, Mallika. What do you say to that?

MALLIKA. It is an interesting suggestion!

LOKESVARI. No, I have misgivings about allowing that, Ratna.

RATNAVALI. I can see that you still pity that dancing-girl, Maharani.

LOKESVARI. Pity *her*! I could have her thrown to the dogs, I could watch her torn limb from limb! I, pity her! But the altar—the altar which my own hands have served! Let it be destroyed, I can endure that. But for the feet of a dancing-girl to tread the royal shrine—that I cannot bear!

RATNAVALI. Forgive me if I seem impertinent—but if you allow such painful memories to have their way, the broken shrine may yet be rebuilt upon them.

LOKESVARI. That fear is not altogether absent from my mind either.

RATNAVALI. You have been deluded into honouring a

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false creed, and you cannot free yourself from the delusion merely by thrusting it from your mind. Insult it, dishonour it, then you will win your freedom.

LOKESVARI. Listen, Mallika, listen to the noise from the north side of the garden. They have broken it, broken it, all! *Salutation* . . . no, no, let it go, let it be broken!

RATNAVALI. Come along, Maharani, let us go and see.

LOKESVARI. Yes, yes, I'll come—but not just yet.

RATNAVALI. I must go and see.

She goes out.

LOKESVARI. O Mallika, what suffering it costs to break these ties!

MALLIKA. I can see it from your eyes—they are filling with tears.

LOKESVARI. Just listen to that—*Victory to Kali the Terrible!* The other cry has become faint—I cannot bear it!

MALLIKA. If you merely drive out the religion of Buddha, it will return again. Another religion must take its place, else there can be no peace. Your only hope of consolation is to accept a new creed—from Devadatta.

LOKESVARI. Silence! How dare you? Don't mention that name in my presence! Devadatta!—that cruel snake, that worm of hell! Yes, I took the vow of non-violence, but even then, if hate could burn, I'd have scorched him to the marrow. What! Call *him* to the throne of my heart? Give *him* the shrine of my Master—my pure and radiant Master? [*Kneeling and chanting*] Forgive me, O Lord, forgive me all my sins, of thought and word and deed. [*Rising*] Do not be afraid, Mallika. The devotee within me shall remain hidden within. Outwardly I am the pitiless one, the royal queen of the land, and no one shall bring me low. I shall go and sit in my lonely room.

Natir Puja

Call me again when the vessel that so long carried my worship is finally sunk—sunk in the stormy sea of dust.

Both go out.

Enter Srimati with some women of the palace, bringing the worship offerings, incense, lamps, garlands of flowers, etc. They consecrate each object with appropriate mantras and conch-blasts according to the Buddhist ritual.

ALL [*consecrating the flowers*]. With the colour and fragrance of flowers I worship at the lotus feet of the Lord of Sages. [*Conch-blasts and obeisance.*]

[*Consecrating the incense vessels.*] With the fragrant odour of incense I worship the Excellent and Venerable One. [*Conch-blasts and obeisance.*]

SRIMATI [*consecrating the lamps*]. With lighted camphor lamp, the dispeller of darkness, I worship the perfectly Enlightened One, the Light of the Three Worlds, the Destroyer of the Dark. [*Conch-blasts and obeisance.*]

[*Consecrating the food-offerings.*] Accept, O Lord, the food which we offer; in thy compassion accept our best.

[*Kneeling.*] I bow to Him the Buddha—to Him who seated under the blessed Bodhi, and putting to flight the hosts of Mara, received enlightenment; to the Lord of infinite knowledge, supreme in the universe.

[*To her companions.*] We have finished the rites for the entrance to the garden. Now let us go to the altar.

MALATI. But, Srimati sister, look there; the path is fenced up.

SRIMATI. Come along, we can climb over the fence.

NANDA. It looks as though the king forbids it.

SRIMATI. Maybe, but the Lord commands it.

NANDA. What a terrible roar! What is it, a revolt?

SRIMATI. Let us sing. [*She sings.*]

Natir Puja

Now shall the bonds be loosened, now is the time at hand,

Now with a cry exulting shall I put out from land.

With Him is the victor's garland, the stormy, devouring flame—

Bhairava, Lord of Terror, I bow, I bow to His name.

Over the seas of Time the pilgrim of light goes by,
Voyaging into the Timeless, hearing its surges' cry
Strike to the heart like the flash and thrust of the lightning's knife.

Summoning forth to the festal of a shoreless sea of life.

Enter a number of women guards.

GUARD. Turn back from here, all of you.

SRIMATI. But we have come to worship our Lord.

GUARD. The service is forbidden.

SRIMATI. Today is the festival of the Lord's birth.

GUARD. The service is forbidden.

SRIMATI. Is that possible?

GUARD. The service is forbidden—that's all I know.

Give up your offerings! [*Snatches them.*]

SRIMATI. Why should this have happened? Have I done any wrong? [*She kneels and chants.*]

I bow my head to the precious dust of thy feet. O Buddha, do thou forgive the wrongs I have done in thy sight.

GUARD. Silence, stop that chanting!

SRIMATI. Stopped at the very gate! Alas, I am unworthy. It is not for me to enter, after all.

MALATI. Why are you crying, sister Srimati? Our worship doesn't depend on rites or offerings. The Lord has been born in our hearts too.

SRIMATI. You are right, Malati, and more than that,

Natir Puja

in His birth we are all reborn. It is our own birthday we keep today.

NANDA. But there's a storm of evil brewing fast. Why, Srimati, on this day of all days?

SRIMATI. Because this day shall turn all evil into good. What is broken shall be bound up; the fallen shall rise again.

AJITA. Srimati, I feel sure that it was a mistake to put you in charge of the worship. That is why everything has gone wrong. We ought to have known from the first how it would be.

SRIMATI. I am not afraid. The temple door does not open to the worshipper all at once. But little by little its bolts are withdrawn. I have no doubts—it is to me that the Master's call has come. The barriers will go down—this very day.

BHADRA. Even the king's barriers? Are they to give way to you?

SRIMATI. The king's sceptre does not reach the shrine. *Ratnavali enters.*

RATNAVALI. I heard what you said—every word of it! You dare do what the king himself forbids?

SRIMATI. The king cannot forbid worship.

RATNAVALI. The king cannot? O really? Go then and worship, let me see what happens. It will be a feast for the eyes.

SRIMATI. None will see it, except the Lord who knows the heart. He has taken away all outward things, lest they hide the truth. And now—*[She chants.] In my words and thoughts, I worship the Tathagata, sleeping and sitting, rising and walking, in all things.*

RATNAVALI. Your day has come now; this pride of yours will be brought to nothing.

Natir Puja

SRIMATI. Amen; may it come to nothing, and leave no trace behind.

RATNAVALI. Now it is my turn; I must go and make ready. *[She goes out.]*

BHADRA. I don't like this at all. Clever Vasavi foresaw this, and ran away in good time.

AJITA. I feel afraid.

The Bhikshuni Utpalaparna enters.

NANDA. Where are you going, Holy Mother?

BHIKSHUNI. Evil has come upon the city. They have struck at our religion and the Bhikshus are afraid. I am going to chant the Text of Protection through the streets.

SRIMATI. Won't you take me with you, Mother?

BHIKSHUNI. How can I take you? You know the order—you must conduct worship.

SRIMATI. Does the order still hold good?

BHIKSHUNI. The order holds good until it has been carried out.

MALATI. But the king bars the way, Mother.

BHIKSHUNI. There is nothing to fear, be patient. Those very barriers will make a way for you.

[She goes out.]

BHADRA. Listen, Ajita! On the road! O what is it? People wailing or roaring in anger?

NANDA. It sounds as though they have got into the garden—they are smashing everything to fragments. Quick, Srimati, the Queen's apartments! We can find refuge there.

[She goes out.]

BHADRA. Come along, Ajita, this is some dreadful nightmare. *[All the princesses go out.]*

MALATI. Sister, that sounds like a death-cry, doesn't it? Do you see that flame in the sky?—the town is on fire, I think. O why, on His Birthday, this dance of death?

Natir Puja

SRIMATI. Because birth must march in victory through the royal gates of death.

MALATI. I am so ashamed of feeling frightened, sister. I can't bear to be afraid while I am going to worship.

SRIMATI. What are you afraid of, my dear?

MALATI. Not of the danger. It's because I can't understand anything, and it all seems dark.

SRIMATI. You mustn't see yourself from the outside. See yourself in Him who is born today eternally, and your fears will be blotted out.

MALATI. Sing me a song, sister; that will drive away my fears.

Srimati sings.

Leave me no longer in the darkness.

Give me now to see.

My real self in Thee

Give me to see.

Let my eyes be washed in the stream of tears.

Give me to see . . .

A woman guard enters.

GUARD. Aren't you going to listen, Srimati?

MALATI. Why are you all so cruel? Please don't tell us to go away. Why shouldn't you let two girls like us sit on the ground by the garden? What harm will that do you?

GUARD. But what good will it do you, either?

MALATI. Lord Buddha came to this garden once; all its dust, to the very edge, is hallowed by His feet. If you won't let us go in, at least let us sit on this holy ground and keep His birthday in our hearts—we won't even chant a text or offer a flower.

GUARD. Why shouldn't you chant a text? Please do! Do you think I'm too sinful to be allowed to listen? The

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other guards are a long way off. Srimati, do let me hear you sing the Master's praise; it's an auspicious day and you sing so sweetly. I too am His servant, you must know. When He came to the asoka tree, I saw Him with these sinful eyes, and He has been in my heart ever since.

SRIMATI.

Salutation to Buddha the Sun of Enlightenment!

Salutation to Gotama the Moon of Peace!

Salutation to the Ocean of Greatness!

Salutation to the Delight of the Sakya's House!

You chant with me, won't you?

GUARD. My lips are too unclean to utter the holy texts.

SRIMATI. There is love in your heart. Your love will cleanse your lips. Come, join in.

[They repeat the chant together.]

GUARD. The burden on my heart is lightened—this day has been a fruitful one. Now let me say what I came to tell you. Get away from here; I will show you the way.

SRIMATI. But why?

GUARD. King Ajatasatru has been initiated by Devadatta. He has destroyed the Lord's altar by the asoka.

MALATI. No, no, sister! O no, not that! I've never seen it after all, and now it is all broken! I was born with an evil star!

SRIMATI. Why, Malati, what are you saying? His altar can never be broken. It's only what King Bimbisara built that has gone. The Lord's throne needs no stones to give it strength. It is strong in His own splendour.

GUARD. The king has issued a proclamation—anyone who brings a lamp for evening worship, or chants the hymn, will be put to death. There is nothing you can do here now, Srimati.

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SRIMATI. I must wait in readiness.

GUARD. How long?

SRIMATI. Until the call to worship comes—as long as I live.

GUARD. O Srimati, I beg of you to forgive me now, beforehand—

SRIMATI. Forgive you for what?

GUARD. Perhaps, if the king commands it, I shall have to strike you, *you*—

SRIMATI. Then you must strike.

GUARD. The blow may fall on the palace dancing-girl, but as I bow my head before the Lord's handmaiden now, so shall I bow before her then. Forgive me, Srimati.

SRIMATI. May the Lord give me grace to forgive all blows.

Buddha forgive! Buddha forgive!

Another guard enters.

SECOND GUARD. Rodini!

FIRST GUARD. What is it, Patali?

PATALI. They have killed Mother Utpalaparna.

RODINI. O, how dreadful!

SRIMATI. Who have killed her?

PATALI. Devadatta's disciples.

RODINI. So bloodshed has begun. Well, in that case we are armed too. I will not endure such crimes in silence. To strike at the Lord's *Sangha*! Srimati, forgiveness is no good now. Get yourself a weapon.

SRIMATI. Don't tempt me, Rodini. I may be a dancing-girl, but even my dancer's hand itches for that sword of yours.

PATALI. Then take this one.

[She gives Srimati her sword.]

Natir Puja

SRIMATI [*trembling and letting the sword fall from her hands*]. No, no! I have my weapons already from my Master's hand; my warfare has begun. May violence be brought low, and the Lord have the victory!

PATALI. Come, Rodini, we must go and carry the Mother's body to the burning-ground.

[*They both go out.*]

Ratnavali enters with a few guards.

RATNAVALI. Here she is; tell her the king's orders.

GUARD. This is the king's order, dancing-girl. You must go and dance in the asoka garden.

SRIMATI. Dance! Today!

MALATI. What a thing to say! Isn't the king afraid to give an order like that?

RATNAVALI. The king afraid! So it has come to that now, has it? The sovereign must tremble before his dancing-girl. The village boor!

SRIMATI. When is the dance to be?

RATNAVALI. This evening at the time of worship.

SRIMATI. Before the Lord's own seat and altar?

RATNAVALI. Yes.

SRIMATI. So be it, then.

All go out. Bhikshus enter in procession, singing.

The world today is wild with the delirium of hatred,
the conflicts are cruel and unceasing in anguish,
crooked are its paths, tangled its bonds of greed.

All creatures are crying for a new birth of thine.
O Thou of boundless life,
save them, raise thine eternal voice of hope,
let Love's lotus with its inexhaustible treasure of honey
open its petals in thy light.

Natir Puja

O Serene, O Free,
in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness
wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth.
Thou giver of immortal gifts
give us the power of renunciation
and claim from us our pride.
In the splendour of a new sunrise of wisdom
let the blind gain their sight
and let life come to the souls that are dead.
O Serene, O Free,
in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness
wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth.

Man's heart is anguished with the fever of unrest.
with the poison of self-seeking.
with a thirst that knows no end.
Countries far and wide flaunt on their foreheads
the blood-red mark of hatred.
Touch them with thy right hand.
make them one in spirit,
bring harmony into their life,
bring rhythm of beauty.

O Serene, O Free,
in thine immeasurable mercy and goodness
wipe away all dark stains from the heart of this earth.

ACT III

The Palace Garden

Enter Malati and Srimati.

MALATI. Sister, there is no peace for me.

SRIMATI. What has happened?

MALATI. When they took you away to dress you for your
lance, I went over to the wall there and peeped out into

Natir Puja

the road. They were carrying away Mother Utpalaparna's body, and . . .

SRIMATI. Come, tell me; why do you stop?

MALATI. I'm very weak—you won't be angry?

SRIMATI. Of course not!

MALATI. I saw him walking along by the body, chanting the funeral verses.

SRIMATI. Whom do you mean?

MALATI. From a distance it looked like—*him*.

SRIMATI. Yes, it's quite possible.

MALATI. I vowed I would never set eyes on him, even from a distance, until I found the Path of *Mukti*.

SRIMATI. You must keep your vow. You can't cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water. Don't let yourself indulge in vain wishes.

MALATI. Don't think I'm beside myself with longing to see him. It's not that. I'm afraid they will kill him; that's why I want to be with him. O sister, please don't despise me if I cannot keep my vow.

SRIMATI. Do you think I don't understand your sorrow?

MALATI. I couldn't save him, but at least I could die with him. I can't bear up any longer, sister, everything is over. There will be no freedom for me in this life.

SRIMATI. You are going to one who can give you freedom, because he himself is free. This talk of yours has helped me to see one thing clearly.

MALATI. Why, what is that, sister?

SRIMATI. That the old wound in my own heart is still unhealed; it has begun to ache again. I have got rid of my outward ties, but the more I do so the deeper they hide themselves within.

MALATI. It grieves me very much to leave you, sister, for there is no one else in the palace so lonely as you. But go

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I must. When you have time, please chant for me the text of forgiveness.

SRIMATI. *O Buddha, do thou forgive me the wrong I have done in thy sight.*

MALATI [*bowing her head*]. *O Buddha, do thou forgive.* Please sing me a song before I go. But today I can't keep my mind on those songs of freedom. Sing me a song of the road.

Srimati sings.

You have called me to take the road.

I have lagged behind, and how shall I travel it now?

For night has fallen deep

And the gleam of the path is lost.

Give me an answering call, in the gloom and dark.

MALATI. Listen, sister, there is that roar again. They have no mercy, any of them. The Buddha has walked this earth, with such infinite pity, and yet these flames of hell are not put out! I cannot stay here any longer. Farewell, sister. Call me once more when you find your freedom, give me one last chance.

SRIMATI. Come, I will go with you to the gate.

They go out. Enter Ratnavali and Mallika.

RATNAVALI. Devadatta's followers have killed the Bhikshuni. Why make such a to-do about that? She was only a farmer's daughter.

MALLIKA. But she is a Bhikshuni now.

RATNAVALI. What difference does that make? Sacred texts don't alter the blood, do they?

MALLIKA. Nowadays a change of creed is far more important than a change of blood.

RATNAVALI. O, stop talking like that! The king in trouble because of a lot of resentful commoners? I can't

Natir Puja

tolerate that! This beggar's creed of yours saps the glory of kingship.

MALLIKA. There is another reason for their resentment. King Bimbisara set out to offer worship here, but he still hasn't arrived. The people are getting suspicious.

RATNAVALI. Yes, a lot of whispering is going on—I've heard it too. I agree that it is a bad business. But it's the fruit of his own deeds, when all is said and done.

MALLIKA. How, the fruit of his deeds?

RATNAVALI. King Bimbisara murdered the Vedic religion of his forefathers. Wasn't that an even worse deed than parricide? The Brahmins have been saying ever since that a day of reckoning would come. The hungry sacrificial flames he quenched must devour him in his turn.

MALLIKA. Hush, gently! You know how plunged in gloom the king is, for fear of the curse.

RATNAVALI. Whose curse should he fear?

MALLIKA. Buddha's. At heart the king fears him very greatly.

RATNAVALI. But the Buddha never curses anyone. The one who knows how to curse is Devadatta.

MALLIKA. That is why he gets such honour. Men cheat the merciful god with empty words, to the vindictive god they give costly offerings.

RATNAVALI. A god who cannot strike terror must go hungry, like an old lion whose teeth and claws are gone.

MALLIKA. However that may be, I tell you this—there will certainly be worship at the asoka tree this evening.

RATNAVALI. Well, we shall see; but I tell you this too—there will be dancing at the shrine first.

Mallika goes out. Vasavi enters.

VASAVI. I've come prepared.

RATNAVALI. For what?

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VASAVI. To have my revenge. That dancing-girl has put me to shame too often.

RATNAVALI. How has she done that? By her preachings?

VASAVI. No, by making me respect her.

RATNAVALI. Is that why you have that knife in your hand?

VASAVI. No, not for that. But it looks as though there may be a riot, and if it comes to the worst I won't die without a blow.

RATNAVALI. Then how do you propose to have your revenge on the dancing-girl?

VASAVI. By means of this necklace.

RATNAVALI. Your diamond chain?

VASAVI. Yes, a costly insult—fit for a kingly house. I shall fling it at her while she is dancing—this gift of my grace!

RATNAVALI. And what if she flings it back at you, in disgrace? What if she does not take it?

VASAVI. Then I have this. [*Indicates the knife.*]

RATNAVALI. Call Queen Lokesvari quickly, she will be delighted with this.

VASAVI. I went to look for her on my way here, but they say she has shut herself in her room. Whether she is afraid of revolution, or sulking over her husband, there is no telling.

RATNAVALI. But the Maharani *must* be present at today's performance—The Dancer's Discomfiture!

VASAVI. The Dancer's Discomfiture!—a good title that. *Mallika enters hurriedly.*

MALLIKA. Things have gone just as I thought. King Ajatasatru has sent out messengers to summon every disciple of the Buddha in the kingdom. Some planet or other must always be propitiated—if not Saturn, then the Sun.

Natir Puja

RATNAVALI. Excellent! Then he can hand over the whole lot to Devadatta's disciples. They will make short work of them.

MALLIKA. No, that's not it. They are to chant the text of purification night and day on his behalf. The king has completely collapsed.

VASAVI. Why, what has happened?

MALLIKA. Do you mean to say you haven't heard what the people are saying? Everyone thinks that King Bimbisara has been murdered on the road.

VASAVI. How terrible! It can't be true.

MALLIKA. One thing is certain, though; the king's mind is in torment—on fire with some terrible remorse.

VASAVI. Alas, alas, what dreadful news!

RATNAVALI. Has the Maharani Lokesvari been told?

MALLIKA. No one dares to tell her; anyone who brought such evil news would be torn to pieces.

VASAVI. This is a terrible disaster. No one in the palace will escape the consequences of such a crime. Can Dharma be so lightly broken with impunity?

RATNAVALI. There you go again, Vasavi!—inclined to become the dancing-girl's disciple after all. People hide behind this folly called religion only when they are cowed by fear.

VASAVI. Never! I tell you I fear nothing. I'm going to tell Bhadra the news.

RATNAVALI. That's just an excuse for running away. You *are* afraid. This cowardice of yours makes me heartily ashamed. This is what comes of keeping such low company.

VASAVI. That's not fair; I'm not afraid.

RATNAVALI. Very well then; in that case come and see the dance under the asoka tree.

Natir Puja

VASAVI. Why not? Do you think you have to force me to go?

RATNAVALI. We will wait no longer, Mallika. Call Srimati at once, whether she is dressed or not. If the other princesses don't want to come, we must have all the waiting-maids there, or the fun will be spoiled.

VASAVI. Here is Srimati coming now. Just look at her, she is like one walking in a dream—like a shining noonday mirage. She is rapt out of herself completely.

Srimati enters slowly, singing.

O Thou Life supernal,
O Thou Death supreme,
Refuge I take in Thee.
Light my dark lamp at Thy fire
Print Thy glory on my brow,
Take away my shame.

RATNAVALI. This way, girl. Can't she hear what we say? Here you, this way!

Srimati continues.

Thy feet the touchstone are
To change my dross to gold,
Refuge I take in Thee.
The tarnished cleanse, the dark illumine;
May all evil turn to good.
Rend all veils for ever.

RATNAVALI. Why are you standing still, Vasavi? Come on!

VASAVI. No, I will not.

RATNAVALI. Why not?

Natir Puja

VASAVI. To tell you the truth, I cannot.

RATNAVALI. Are you afraid?

VASAVI. Yes, I am afraid.

RATNAVALI. Aren't you ashamed?

VASAVI. Not in the least. Srimati, that text of forgiveness, please.

SRIMATI. *I bow to the precious dust of thy feet. O Buddha, do thou forgive the wrongs I have done in thy sight.*

VASAVI. *O Buddha, do thou forgive! O Buddha, do thou forgive!*

Srimati sings.

Defeat admitted, humbled the proud soul.

The platter is broken in pieces

That held the dim lamp lit by the wasted hands.

Kindle then

The light of thine own star,

Let the glowing shimmer of twilight have an end.

Come, O friend of the farther shore.

The wind of the road is blowing, the lamps of the
home are quenched.

Today have I brought my song

To an empty road,

A darkened landing-stage,

A stage where all is lost.

All go out. Bhikshus enter in procession singing.

Thou, all-destroyer of darkness and sin's stain,

Let victory, victory be to thee!

Who sprinklest the whole wide earth with

ambrosial rain.

· *Natir Puja*

Supremest bliss, most gracious love thou art,
Holiness pure, and utter peace of heart.
Thou dawning splendour of the enlightening Sun,
Let the black night end, and the evil dream be broken,
And fear be gone.

Supremest bliss, most gracious love thou art,
Holiness pure, and utter peace of heart.

ACT IV

Under the asoka tree. The broken stupa.

Ratnavali enters with some maids-in-waiting, and some women guards.

FIRST MAID. Princess, it is getting late; we have our work in the palace.

RATNAVALI. Wait a little longer. Queen Lokesvari herself wants to be present. The dance cannot begin until she comes.

SECOND MAID. We have come at your command, but this sacrilege—it makes us frightened and uneasy.

THIRD MAID. To see a dancing-girl dance here—here where we have worshipped the Lord? Fie on such sin—how could it ever be washed away?

FOURTH MAID. We never dreamed that such a hateful thing could happen here. No, no, we cannot stay, we cannot.

RATNAVALI. Miserable creatures! Don't you know that the worship of Buddha has been forbidden?

FOURTH MAID. To defy the king is beyond our power. We don't worship the Lord; but all the same we can't insult Him.

FIRST MAID. The palace dancing-girl dances only for the

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royal family. Why should we have any hand in all this? Come along, all of you, let us go back to where we belong.

RATNAVALI [*to a guard*]. Don't let them go. [*To another*] Call that dancing-girl here quickly.

FIRST MAID. Princess, this sin will not touch the dancing-girl. It is on your own head alone.

RATNAVALI. Do you think I care for the new-fangled sins of your upstart religion?

SECOND MAID. To insult what men hold sacred has always been a sin.

RATNAVALI. This pious dancing-girl seems to have infected you all. You can't scare me with your talk of sin—I'm not a child.

FIRST GUARD [*to First Maid*]. Vasumati, we all revered Srimati. But it seems we were mistaken. She herself has agreed to dance.

RATNAVALI. Agreed! Of course she has! Would she not fear to disobey the king?

FIRST GUARD. It is for such as we to fear the king, but . . .

RATNAVALI. Do you think a dancing-girl ranks above you?

FIRST MAID. We never thought of her as a dancing-girl. We saw in her the light of heaven.

RATNAVALI. A dancing-girl has to dance, even in heaven itself.

FIRST GUARD. How I used to dread lest an order should come from the king, and I should have to lay hands on Srimati! I'm ready enough to do it now, without waiting for orders.

FIRST MAID. Never mind about *her*, the wicked wretch. What about ourselves? Where shall *we* be if we pollute our eyes with this sinful sight?

RATNAVALI. Hasn't that dancing-girl finished dressing

Natir Puja

yet? Fancy! How much this dancer-saint of yours enjoys dressing up!

FIRST MAID. Here she comes. Whew, how she sparkles!

SECOND MAID. That sinful body of hers is aflame with a hundred lights.

Srimati enters, dressed for her dance.

FIRST MAID. You are a wicked woman, Srimati. Shameless girl, will you dare dance before the Lord's own seat? I wonder your legs have not been blasted into dry sticks already.

SRIMATI. I have no choice. The command is laid upon me.

SECOND MAID. I'll tell you this much—you'll be dancing a million years on the burning coals of hell.

THIRD MAID. Look at her! The wretched creature has covered herself with bracelets and bangles from head to foot. They'll be chains of fire to eat through flesh and bone; they'll be streams of torment in every vein. Do you realize that?

Mallika enters hurriedly and speaks aside to Ratnavali.

MALLIKA. The king has countermanded his order. The Buddha worship is no longer forbidden. They are proclaiming it in the street now with beat of drum. They may be here at any moment. And that's not all—King Ajatasatru himself is preparing to come and offer worship here.

RATNAVALI. Then run, Mallika, and get Queen Lokeshvari here at once.

MALLIKA. Here she comes now.

Lokeshvari enters.

RATNAVALI. This is your seat, Maharani.

LOKESVARI. Wait a moment. I must have a word in private with Srimati. [*Calling her aside*] Srimati!

Natir Puja

SRIMATI. What is it, Maharani?

LOKESVARI. Take this, I brought it for you.

SRIMATI. What is it?

LOKESVARI. The nectar of heaven.

SRIMATI. I don't understand.

LOKESVARI. It is poison; drink it and save yourself.

SRIMATI. Do you think that there is no other way of salvation?

LOKESVARI. There is none. Ratnavali has already been to the king and got his orders for you to dance. There is not the slightest hope that the order will be revoked.

RATNAVALI. Maharani, the time is short. Let the dance begin.

LOKESVARI. Take it and drink, quick! Die here, and you go to heaven. Dance here, and you go to lowest hell.

SRIMATI. Before everything, I will keep the commandment.

LOKESVARI. What, you will dance?

SRIMATI. Yes, I shall dance.

LOKESVARI. And you are not afraid?

SRIMATI. No, not in the least.

LOKESVARI. Then no one can save you.

SRIMATI. None but the Saviour; He will deliver.

RATNAVALI. Maharani, there's not a minute to be lost. Don't you hear the tumult outside? The rebels may be in the garden at any moment. Dancing-girl, begin your dance.

Srimati sings as she dances.

Forgive, O Lord, forgive me,

Accept my reverence.

O Peerless One, I think of Thee,

And my full heart overflows

Natir Puja

In the pulsing life of dance.
To Thee I raise
In wordless praise
My eager body's rhythmed cry—
This new birth's eloquence.
In music and in gesture shines
My worship, Lord, of Thee.

RATNAVALI. What kind of a dance is this? Nothing but a pretence! And what's the meaning of this song?

LOKESVARI. No, no, don't stop her.

SRIMATI.

Lo, all my being's ecstasy,
That trembles into pain!
On the ocean of peace there dance the waves,
And beauty awakes again.
All I have suffered and striven,
Let it not shamed be.
In music and in gesture shines
My worship, Lord, of Thee.

RATNAVALI. What is all this? She is throwing her jewels, one by one, upon the stupa ruins. There go her bracelets, her necklace! The jewels belong to the Palace, Maharani—what an insult! Srimati, those ornaments are mine—my own; go and pick them up at once and bring them here, and then touch them with your forehead.

LOKESVARI. Peace! Peace! She is not to blame; the rhythm of her song demands it. It has set my own body trembling with ecstasy too. [*She unclasps her necklace and throws it before the stupa.*] Don't stop, Srimati; go on, go on!

Natir Puja

SRIMATI.

I bring no woodland flower,
No fruit for worship meet,
No jar of holy water
To offer at Thy feet.
But into my slender body poured
The streams of my heart are free.
In music and in gesture shines
My worship, Lord, of Thee.

RATNAVALI. This is a mere mockery of dancing! See her throw off her dancing robes, one by one! Look, Maharani, the yellow Bhikshuni's cloth underneath! This is worship, surely. Don't you see her, guards? Don't you remember what punishment the king has ordered?

GUARD. But Srimati has chanted no holy text.

SRIMATI [*kneeling*]. *My refuge is in the Buddha . . .*

GUARD [*placing her hand over Srimati's mouth*]. Stop, stop, foolhardy girl! Stop before it is too late.

RATNAVALI. Carry out the king's orders!

SRIMATI. *My refuge is in the Buddha, My refuge is in the Dhamma . . .*

MAIDS. O Srimati, stop, don't bring us all into disaster.

GUARD. Don't walk into the jaws of death, crazy woman!

SECOND GUARD. I implore and entreat you, for pity's sake, be silent.

MAIDS. I can't bear the sight of it, I can't bear it. Let us get away from here! [*They all flee.*]

RATNAVALI. Carry out the king's orders!

SRIMATI. *My refuge is in the Buddha! My refuge is in the Dhamma! My refuge is in the Sangha!*

LOKESVARI [*kneeling*]. *My refuge is in the Buddha! My refuge is in the Dhamma! My refuge is in the Sangha!*

Natir Puja

The guard strikes Srimati, who falls dead across the holy seat.

GUARDS. Forgive us, forgive us.

As they speak they come one by one and take the dust of Srimati's feet.

LOKESVARI [*taking Srimati's head in her lap*]. Dancing-girl, this Bhikshuni's robe shall be your parting gift to me. [*She bows her head and touches it with reverence.*] Let it be mine.

Ratnavali has sunk down on the ground.

MALLIKA. What are you thinking of?

RATNAVALI. Now at last I am afraid.

An attendant enters.

ATTENDANT. King Ajatasatru has come to worship the Lord. He waits at the gate and asks the ladies' leave to enter.

MALLIKA. I will go and bid him enter in your name.
[*She goes out.*]

LOKESVARI. All of you chant after me, *My refuge is in the Buddha!*

ALL, EXCEPT RATNAVALI. *My refuge is in the Buddha!*

LOKESVARI [*followed by the rest*].

My refuge is in the Dhamma!

My refuge is in the Sangha!

The Buddha is my supreme refuge, I have no other!

By this truth may blessing and well-being be mine!

Mallika enters.

MALLIKA. The king has not entered, he has turned back.

LOKESVARI. Why?

MALLIKA. When he heard what has happened, he trembled in fear.

LOKESVARI. Fear? Of whom?

MALLIKA. Of that dead dancing-girl.

Nalir Puja

LOKSVARI. Come, let us bring a palanquin; we must all carry this body.

RAINAVALI [*taking the dust of Srimati's feet and kneeling in reverence*].

My refuge is in the Buddha!

My refuge is in the Dhamma!

My refuge is in the Sangha!

CHANDALIKA

INTRODUCTION

THIS SHORT DRAMA is based on the following Buddhist legend. Ananda, the famous disciple of the Buddha, was one day returning from a visit when he felt thirsty and approaching a well on the way asked for water from a chandalika, a girl belonging to the lowest untouchable caste. The girl gave him water and fell in love with the beautiful monk. Unable to restrain herself, she made her mother, who knew the art of magic, work her spell on him. The spell proved stronger than Ananda's will and the spell-bound monk presented himself at their house at night; but, as he saw the girl spread the couch for him, he was overcome with shame and remorse and prayed inwardly to his master to save him. The Buddha heard the prayer and broke the magic spell and Ananda went away, as pure as he came.

This crude plot of the popular tale, showing how the psychic power of the Buddha saves his devotee from the lust of a chandal girl, has been transformed by the poet into a psychological drama of intense spiritual conflict. It is not the story of a wicked girl roused to lust by the physical beauty of the monk, but of a very sensitive girl, condemned by her birth to a despised caste, who is suddenly awakened to a consciousness of her full rights as a woman by the humanity of a follower of the Buddha, who accepts water from her hand and teaches her to judge herself, not by the artificial values that society attaches to the accidents of birth, but by her capacity for love and service.¹

¹ 'If the black clouds of Sravana are dubbed Chandal, what of it? It doesn't change their nature, or destroy the virtue of their water.'

Chandalika

This is a great revelation for her, which she calls a new birth; for she is washed clean of her self-degradation and rises up a full human being with her right to love and to give. And since her own self is the most she can give, and since none is more worthy of the gift of her surrender than the Bhikshu who has redeemed, or, as she puts it, created her, she yearns to offer herself to him. But Ananda, detached from all earthly cares and immersed in his inner self, knows nothing of all this and passes by without recognizing her.

She is ^{one of the most beautiful women} ~~humiliated~~, wounded in her newly awakened sensibility, and determines to drag the monk from his pride of renunciation to the abjectness of desire for her. She has lost all religious scruple or fear, for she owed nothing to religion save her humiliation.

'A religion that insults is a false religion. Everyone united to make me conform to a creed that blinds and gags. But since that day something forbids me to conform any longer. I'm afraid of nothing now.'

She forces her mother to exercise her art of magic on Ananda. She refers to it as the primeval spell, the spell of the earth, which is far more potent than the immature *sadhana* of the monks. The 'spell of the earth' proves its force and Ananda is dragged to their door, his face distorted with agony and shame. Seeing her redeemer, so noble and resplendent before, thus cruelly transformed and degraded, she is horrified at the selfish and destructive nature of her desire. The hero to whom she yearned to dedicate herself was not this creature, blinded by lust and darkened with shame, but Ananda of the radiant form, who had given her the gift of a new birth and had revealed her own true humanity. In ^{compulsion (and not love)} ~~remorse~~ she curses herself and falls at his feet, begging for forgiveness. The mother revokes the spell and willingly pays the price of such revocation, which is death. The chandalika is thus

Chandalika

saved redeemed for the second time, purged of the pride and egoism that had made her forget that love does not claim possession, but gives freedom.

Chandalika is a tragedy of self-consciousness overreaching its limit. Self-consciousness, up to a point, is necessary to self-development; for, without an awareness of the dignity of one's own role or function, one cannot give one's best to the world. Without rights there can be no obligations, and service and virtue when forced become marks of slavery. But self-consciousness, like good wine, easily intoxicates, and it is difficult to control the dose and have just enough of it. Vanity and pride get the upper hand and he who clings to his rights very often trespasses on those of others. This is what happened to the heroine. Prakriti, in her eagerness to give, forgot that Ananda need not take; her devotion grew so passionate that she could not make her surrender without first possessing. Yet it was inevitable that it should be so; for a new consciousness after ages of suppression is overpowering and one learns restraint only after suffering. Hence the tragedy. The good mother, who so unwillingly worked the spell to please her importunate daughter, and who so willingly revoked it to save Ananda, dies in the process. The daughter, though chastened and made wise by suffering, has paid a heavy price; for wisdom is not happiness and renunciation is not fulfilment.

K.R.K.

CHANDALIKA

ACT I

MOTHER. Prakriti! Prakriti! Where *has* she gone? What ails the girl, I wonder? She's never to be found in the house.

PRAKRITI. Here, mother, here I am.

MOTHER. Where?

PRAKRITI. Here, by the well.

MOTHER. Whatever will you do next? Past noon, and a blistering sun, and the earth too hot for the feet! The morning's water was drawn long ago, and the other girls in the village have all taken their pots home. Why, the very crows on the *amlaki* branches are gasping for heat. Yet you sit and roast in the Vaisakh sun for no reason at all! There's a story in the *Purana* about how Uma left home and did penance in the burning sun—is that what you are about?

PRAKRITI. Yes, mother, that's it—I'm doing penance.

MOTHER. Good heavens! And for whom?

PRAKRITI. For someone whose call has come to me.

MOTHER. What call is that?

PRAKRITI. 'Give me water.' He set the words echoing in my heart.

MOTHER. Heaven defend us! He said to you 'Give me water'? Who was it? Someone of our own caste?

PRAKRITI. That's what he said—that he belonged to our kind.

MOTHER. You didn't hide your caste? Did you tell him that you are a Chandalini?

PRAKRITI. I told him, yes. He said it wasn't true. If the black clouds of Sravana are dubbed Chandal, he said,

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what of it? It doesn't change their nature, or destroy the virtue of their water. Don't humiliate yourself, he said: self-humiliation is a sin, worse than self-murder.

MOTHER. What words are these from you? Have you remembered some tale of a former birth?

PRAKRITI. No, this is a tale of my new birth.

MOTHER. You make me laugh. New birth, indeed! Since when, pray?

PRAKRITI. It was the other day. The palace gong had just struck noon and it was blazing hot. I was washing that calf at the well—the one whose mother died. Then a Buddhist monk came and stood before me, in his yellow robes, and said, 'Give me water.' My heart leaped with wonder. I started up trembling and bowed before his feet, without touching them. His form was radiant as with the light of dawn. I said, 'I am a Chandalini, and the well-water is unclean.' He said, 'As I am a human being, so also are you, and all water is clean and holy that cools our heat and satisfies our thirst.' For the first time in my life I heard such words, for the first time I poured water into his cupped hands—the hands of a man the very dust of whose feet I would never have dared to touch.

MOTHER. O, you stupid girl, how could you be so reckless? There will be a price to pay for this madness! Don't you know what caste you were born in?

PRAKRITI. Only once did he cup his hands, to take the water from mine. Such a little water, yet that water grew to a fathomless, boundless sea. In it flowed all the seven seas in one, and my caste was drowned, and my birth washed clean.

MOTHER. Why, even the way you speak is changed. He has laid your tongue under a spell. Do you understand yourself what you are saying?

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PRAKRITI. Was there no other water, Mother, in all Sravasti city? Why did he come to this well of all wells? I may truly call it my new birth! He came to give *me* the honour of quenching Man's thirst. That was the mighty act of merit which he sought. Nowhere else could he have found the water which could fulfil his holy vow—no, not in any sacred stream. He said that Janaki bathed in such water as this, at the beginning of her forest exile, and that Guhak, the Chandal, drew it for her. My heart has been dancing ever since, and night and day I hear those solemn tones—'Give me water, give me water.'

MOTHER. I don't know what to make of it, child; I don't like it. I don't understand the magic of their spells. Today I don't recognize your speech; tomorrow, perhaps, I shall not even recognize your face. Their spells can make a changeling of the very soul itself.

PRAKRITI. All these days you have never really known me, Mother. He who has recognized me will reveal me. And so I wait and watch. The midday gong booms from the palace, the girls take up their water-pots and go home. The kite soars alone into the far sky, and I bring my pitcher and sit here at the well by the wayside.

MOTHER. For whom do you wait?

PRAKRITI. For the wayfarer.

MOTHER. What wayfarer will come to you, you crazy girl?

PRAKRITI. That one wayfarer, Mother, the one and only. In him are all who fare along the ways of all the world. Day after day goes by, yet he does not come. Though he spoke no word, his word was given—why does he not keep his word? For my heart is become like a waterless waste, where the heat-haze quivers all day long, and the hot wind

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curtains of destiny are drawn aside, they all stand revealed in their queenliness. You had a good chance, you know, when the king's son was deer-hunting and came to this very well of yours. You remember, don't you?

PRAKRITI. Yes, I remember.

MOTHER. Why didn't you go to the king's house? He had forgotten everything in your beauty.

PRAKRITI. Yes, he *had* forgotten everything—forgotten that I was a human being. He had gone out hunting beasts; he saw nothing but the beast whom he wanted to bind in chains of gold.

MOTHER. At least he noticed your beauty, if only as game to be hunted. As for the Bhikshu, does *he* see the woman in you?

PRAKRITI. You *won't* understand, Mother, you won't! I feel that in all these days he is the first who ever really recognized me. That is a marvellous thing. I want him, Mother, I want him beyond all measure. I want to take this life of mine and lay it like a basket of flowers at his feet. It will not defile them. Let everyone marvel at my daring! I shall glory in my claim. 'I am your hand-maid,' I shall declare—for otherwise I must lie bound for ever at the whole world's feet, a slave!

MOTHER. Why do you get so excited, child? You were born a slave. It's the writ of Destiny, who can undo it?

PRAKRITI. Fie, fie, Mother, I tell you again, don't delude yourself with this self-humiliation—it is false, and a sin. Plenty of slaves are born of royal blood, but *I* am no slave; plenty of Chandals are born of Brahmin families, but *I* am no Chandal.

MOTHER. I don't know how to answer you, child. Very good. I'll go to him myself, and cling to his feet. 'You accept food from every home,' I'll say. 'Come to our

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house too, and accept from our hands at least a bowl of water.'

PRAKRITI. No, no, I'll not call him in that way, from outside. I'll send my call into his soul, for him to hear. I am longing to give myself; it is like a pain at my heart. Who is going to accept the gift? Who will join with me in give-and-take? Will he not mingle his longings with mine, as the Ganges mingles with the black waters of the Jumna? For music springs up of itself, and he who came unbidden has left behind him a word of hope. What is the use of one pitcher of water when the earth is cracked with drought? Will not the clouds come of themselves to fill the whole sky, the rain seek the soil by its own weight?

MOTHER. What is the use of such talk? If the clouds come, they come; if they don't, they don't; if the crops wither, it's no concern of theirs! What more can we do than sit and watch the sky?

PRAKRITI. That won't do for me; I won't simply sit and watch. You know how to work spells; let those spells be the clasp of my arms, let them drag him here.

MOTHER. What are you saying, wretched girl? Is there no limit to your recklessness? It would be playing with fire! Are these Bhikshus like ordinary folk? How am I to work spells on them? I shudder even to think of it.

PRAKRITI. You would have worked them boldly enough on the king's son.

MOTHER. I'm not afraid of the king; he might have had me impaled, perhaps. But these men—they do nothing.

PRAKRITI. I fear nothing any longer, except to sink back again, to forget myself again, to enter again the house of darkness. *That* would be worse than death! Bring him here you must! I speak so boldly, of such great matters—

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isn't that in itself a wonder? Who worked the wonder but he? Shall there not be further wonders? Shall he not come to my side, and sit with me on the corner of my cloth?

MOTHER. Suppose I can bring him, are you ready to pay the price? Nothing will be left to you.

PRAKRITI. No, nothing will be left. The burden and heritage of birth after birth—nothing will remain. Only let me bring it all to an end, then I shall live indeed. That's why I need him. Nothing will be left me. I have waited for age after age, and now in this birth my life shall be fulfilled. My mind is saying it over and over again—fulfilled! It was for this that I heard those wonderful words, 'Give me water.' Today I know that even I can give. Everyone else had hidden the truth from me. I sit and watch for his coming today to give, to give, to give everything I have.

MOTHER. Have you no respect for religion?

PRAKRITI. How can I say? I respect him who respects me. A religion that insults is a false religion. Everyone united to make me conform to a creed that blinds and gags. But since that day something forbids me to conform any longer. I'm afraid of nothing now. Chant your spells, bring the Bhikshu to the side of the Chandalini. I myself shall do him honour—no one else can honour him so well.

MOTHER. Aren't you afraid of bringing a curse upon yourself?

PRAKRITI. There has been a curse upon me all my life. Poison kills poison, they say—so one curse another. Not another word, Mother, not another word. Begin your spells, I cannot bear any more delay.

MOTHER. Very well, then. What is his name?

PRAKRITI. His name is Ananda.

Chandalika

MOTHER. Ananda? The disciple of the Lord Buddha?

PRAKRITI. Yes, it is he.

MOTHER. O my heart's treasure, you are the apple of my eye—but it's a great wrong I'm putting my hand to at your bidding!

PRAKRITI. What wrong? I will bring to my side the one who brings all near. What crime is there in that?

MOTHER. They draw men by the strength of their virtue. We drag them with spells, as beasts are dragged in a noose. We only churn up the mud.

PRAKRITI. So much the better. Without the churning, how can the well be cleansed?

MOTHER [*apostrophising Ananda*].

O thou exalted one, thy power to forgive is greater far than my power to offend. I am about to do thee dishonour, yet I bow before thee: accept my obeisance, Lord.

PRAKRITI. What are you afraid of, Mother? Yours are the lips I use, but it's I who chant the spells. If my longing can draw him here, and if that is a crime, then I will commit the crime. I care nothing for a code which holds only punishment, and no comfort.

MOTHER. You are immensely daring, Prakriti.

PRAKRITI. You call *me* daring? Think of the might of *his* daring! How simply he spoke the words which no one had ever dared to say to me before! 'Give me water.' Such little words, yet as mighty as flame—they filled all my days with light, they rolled away the black stone whose weight so long had stopped the fountains of my heart, and the joy bubbled forth. Your fear is an illusion, for you did not see him. All morning he had begged alms in Sravasti city; when his task was done he came, across the common, past the burning-ground, along the river bank, with the hot sun on his head—and all for what? To

say that one word. 'Give me water,' even to a girl like me. O, it is too wonderful! Whence did such grace, such love, come down—upon a wretch unworthy beyond all others? What can I fear now? 'Give me water'—yes, the water which has filled all my days to overflowing, which I must needs give or die! 'Give me water.' In a moment I knew that I had water, inexhaustible water; to whom should I tell my joy? And so I call him night and day. If he does not hear, fear not; chant your spell, he will be able to bear it.

MOTHER. Look, Prakriti, some men in yellow robes are going by the road across the common.

PRAKRITI. So they are; all the monks of the *sangha*, I see. Don't you hear them chanting?

[*The chant is heard in the distance.*]

To the most pure Buddha, mighty ocean of mercy,
Seer of knowledge absolute, pure, supreme,
Of the world's sin and suffering the Destroyer—
Solemnly to the Buddha I bow in homage.

PRAKRITI. O Mother, see, he is going, there ahead of them all. He never turned his head or looked towards this well. He could so easily have said 'Give me water' once more before he went. I thought he would never be able to cast me aside—me, his own handiwork, his new creation. [*She flings herself down and beats her head on the ground.*] This dust, this dust is your place! O wretched woman, who raised you to bloom for a moment in the light? Fallen in the end into this same dust, you must mingle for all time with this same dust, trampled underfoot by all who travel the road.

MOTHER. Child, dear child, forget it, forget it all. They have broken your momentary dream, and they are going

away—let them go, let them go. When a thing is not meant to last, the quicker it goes the better.

PRAKRITI. Day after day this cry of desire, moment by moment this burden of shame; this prisoned bird in my breast, that beats its wings unto death—do you call it a dream? A dream, is it, that sinks its sharp teeth into the fibres of my heart, and will not loosen its grip? And they, who have no ties, no joy or sorrow, no earthly burden, who float along like the clouds in autumn—are only they awake, are only they real?

MOTHER. O Prakriti, I cannot bear to see you suffer so. Come, get up, I *will* chant the spells, I *will* bring him. All along the dusty road I will bring him. 'I want nothing,' he says in his pride. I'll break that pride and make him come, running and crying 'I want, I want.'

PRAKRITI. Mother, yours is an ancient spell, as old as life itself. Their mantras are raw things of yesterday. These men can never be a match for you—the knot of their mantras will be loosened under the stress of your spells. He is bound to be defeated.

MOTHER. Where are they going?

PRAKRITI. Going? They are going nowhere! During the rains they remain four months in penance and fasting, and then they are off again, how should I know where? That's what they call being awake!

MOTHER. Then why are you talking of spells, you crazy thing? He is going so far—how am I to bring him back?

PRAKRITI. No matter where he goes, you must bring him back. Distance is nothing for your spells. He showed no pity to me, I shall show none to him. Chant your spells, your cruellest spells; wind them about his mind till every coil bites deep. Wherever he goes, he shall never escape me!

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MOTHER. You need not fear, it is not beyond our powers. I will give you this magic mirror; you shall take it in your hand and dance. His shadow will fall on the glass, and in it you will see what happens to him and how near he has come.

PRAKRITI. See there the clouds, the storm clouds, gathered in the west. The spell will work, Mother, it will work. His dry meditations will scatter like withered leaves; his lamp will go out, his path will be lost in darkness. As a bird at dead of night falls fluttering into the dark courtyard, its nest broken in the storm, even so shall he be whirled helpless to our doors. The thunder throbs in my heart, my mind is filled with the lightning flash, the waves foam high in an ocean whose shore I cannot see.

MOTHER. Think well even now, lest sudden terror spring upon you with the work half done. Can you endure to the end? When the spell has reached its height, it would cost me my life to undo it. Remember that this fire will not die down till all that will burn is burnt to ashes.

PRAKRITI. For whom are you afraid? Is he a common man? Nothing will hurt him. Let him come, let him tread the path of fire to the very end. Before me I see in vision the night of doom, the storm of union, the bliss of the breaking of worlds.

ACT II

[Fifteen days have passed.]

PRAKRITI. O, my heart will break. I will not look in the mirror, I cannot bear it. Such agony, so furious a storm. Must the king of the forest crash to the dust at last, his cloud-kissing glory broken?

MOTHER. Even now, child, if you say so, I will try to

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undo the spell. Let the cords of my life be torn apart and my life-blood spent, if only that great soul can be saved.

PRAKRITI. That is best, Mother. Let the spells stop, I'll have no more . . . no, no, don't! Go on—the end of the path is so near! Make him come to the very end, make him come right to my bosom! After that I will blot out all his suffering, emptying my whole world at his feet. At dead of night the wayfarer will come, and I will kindle the lamps for him in the flames of my burning heart. Deep within are springs of nectar, where he shall bathe and anoint his weary, hot and wounded limbs. Once again he shall say 'Give me water'—water from the ocean of my heart. Yes, that day will come—go on, go on with the spell.

[Song] In my own sorrow
Will I quit thy sorrow;
Thy hurt will I bathe
In the deep waters of my pain's immensity.
My world will I give to the flames,
And my blackened shame shall be cleansed.
My mortal pain will I offer as gift at thy feet.

MOTHER. I never knew it would take so long. My spells have no more power, child; there is no breath left in my body.

PRAKRITI. Don't be afraid, Mother; hold out a little longer, only a little. It will not be long now.

MOTHER. The month of Ashad is here, and their four months' fast is at hand.

PRAKRITI. They are gone to Vaisali, to the monastery there.

MOTHER. How pitiless you are! That is so far away.

PRAKRITI. Not very far; seven days' journey. Fifteen

days have already passed. His seat of meditation has been shaken at last. He is coming, he is coming! All that once lay so far away, so many million miles away, beyond the very sun and moon, immeasurably beyond the reach of my arms—it is coming, nearer and nearer! He is coming, and my heart is rocked as by an earthquake.

MOTHER. I have worked the spell through all its stages—such force might have brought down Indra of the thunderbolt himself. And yet *he* does not come. It is a fight to the death indeed. What did you see in the mirror?

PRAKRITI. At first I saw a mist covering the whole sky, deathly pale like the weary gods after their struggle with the demons. Through rifts in the mist there glimmered fire. After that the mist gathered itself up into red and angry clusters, like swollen, festering sores. That day passed. The next day I looked, and all the background was a deep black cloud, with lightning playing across it. Before it he was standing, all his limbs fenced with flame. My blood ran cold, and I rushed to tell you to stop your spells at once—but I found you in deep trance, sitting like a log, breathing harshly, and unconscious. It seemed as though a fierce fire burned in you, and your fire was a flaming serpent that hissed and struck in deadly duel at the fire that wrapped him round. I came back and took up the mirror; the light was gone—only torment, unfathomable torment, was in his face.

MOTHER. Yet that did not kill you? The fire of his suffering burnt into my soul, till I thought I could bear no more.

PRAKRITI. It seemed that the tortured form I saw was not his only, but mine too; it belonged to us both. In

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those awful fires the gold and the copper had been melted and fused.

MOTHER. And you felt no fear?

PRAKRITI. Something far greater than fear. I beheld the God of Creation, more terrible far than the God of Destruction, lashing the flames to work His purposes, while they writhed and roared in anger. What lay at his feet in the casket of the seven elements—Life or Death? My mind swelled with a joy hard to name—joy in the tremendous detachment of new creation, free of care or fear, of pity or sorrow. Creation breaking, burning and melting among the sparks of the elemental fires. I could not keep still. My whole soul and body danced and danced together, as the pointed flames dance in the fire.

MOTHER. And how did your Bhikshu appear?

PRAKRITI. His eyes were fixed motionless upon the distance, like stars in the evening twilight. I longed to escape from myself far into boundless space.

MOTHER. When you danced before the mirror, he saw you?

PRAKRITI. Fie upon it, how I am shamed! Again and again his eyes grew red, as though he were about to curse. Again and again he trampled down the glowing fires of anger, and at last his anger turned upon himself, quivering, like a spear, and pierced his own breast.

MOTHER. And you bore all this?

PRAKRITI. I was amazed. I, this I, this daughter of yours, this nobody from nowhere—his suffering and mine are one today! What holy fire of creation could have wrought such a union? Who could dream of so great a thing?

MOTHER. When shall this turmoil be stilled?

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PRAKRITI. When my suffering is stilled. How can he attain his *Mukti* until I attain mine?

MOTHER. When did you last look into your mirror?

PRAKRITI. Yesterday evening. He had passed through the lion-gate of Vaisali some days before, at dead of night—seemingly in secret, unknown to the monks. After that I had sometimes seen him ferried across rivers or on difficult mountain passes. I had seen the evening fall, and him alone on the wide commons, or on the dark forest paths at dead of night. As the days went by, he fell more deeply under the spell and became heedless of everything, all the conflict with his own soul at an end. His face was mazed, his body slack, his eyes fixed in an unseeing stare, as though for him there were neither true nor false, good nor evil—only a blind and thoughtless compulsion, with no meaning in it.

MOTHER. Can you guess how far he has come today?

PRAKRITI. I saw him yesterday at Patal village on the river Upali. The river was turbulent with new rains; there was an old peepul tree by the ghat, fireflies shining in its branches, and under it a lichened altar. As he reached it he gave a sudden start and stood still. It was a place he had known for a long time; I have heard that one day the Lord Buddha preached there to King Suprabhas. He sat down and covered his eyes with his hands—I felt that his dream-spell might break at any moment. I flung away the mirror, for I was afraid of what I might see. The whole day has passed since then, and torn between hope and fear I have sat on, not daring to know. Now it is dark again; on the road goes the watchman calling the hour, it must be an hour past midnight. O Mother, the time is short, so short; don't let this night be wasted; put the whole of your strength into the spell.

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MOTHER. Child, I can do no more: the spell is weakening, I am failing body and soul.

PRAKRITI. It mustn't weaken now—don't give up now! Maybe he has turned his face away, maybe the chain we have bound on him is stretched to the uttermost, and will not hold. What if he escapes now, away from this birth of mine, and I can never reach him again? Then it will be my turn to dream, to return to the illusion of a Chandal birth. I will never endure that mockery again. I beseech you, Mother, put out your whole strength once only; set in motion your spell of the primeval earth, and shake the complacent heaven of the virtuous.

MOTHER. Have you made ready as I told you?

PRAKRITI. Yes. Yesterday was the second night of the waxing moon. I bathed in the river Gambhira, plunging below the water. Here in the courtyard I drew a circle, with rice and pomegranate blossoms, vermilion and the seven jewels. I planted the flags of yellow cloth, I placed sandal-paste and garlands on a brass tray, I lit the lamps. After my bath I put on a cloth, green like the tender rice shoots, and a scarf like the champak flower. I sat with my face to the East. All night long I have contemplated his image. On my left arm I have tied the bracelet of thread—sixteen strands of golden yellow bound in sixteen knots.

MOTHER. Then dance round the circle in your dance of invocation, while I work my spells before the altar.

[Prakriti dances and sings.]

Now, Prakriti, take your mirror and look. See, a dark shadow has fallen over the altar. My heart is bursting and I can do no more. Look into the mirror—how long will it be now?

PRAKRITI. No, I will not look again, I will listen—listen

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in my inmost being. If he reveals himself I shall see him before me. Bear up a little longer, Mother, he will surely, surely reveal himself. Hark! Hark to the sudden storm, the storm of his coming! The earth quivers beneath his tread, and my heart throbs.

MOTHER. It brings a curse for you, unhappy girl. As for me, it means surely death—the fibres of my being are shattered.

PRAKRITI. No curse, it brings no curse, it brings the gift of my new birth. The thunderbolt hammers open the Lion-gates of Death; the door breaks, the walls crumble, the falsehood of this birth of mine is shattered. Tremors of fear shake my mind, but rhythms of joy enrapture my soul. My All-destroyer, my All-in-all, you have come! I will enthrone you on the summit of all my dishonour, and build your royal seat of my shame, my fear and my joy.

MOTHER. My time is near. I can do no more. Look in the mirror at once.

PRAKRITI. Mother, I'm afraid. His journey is almost at an end, and what then? What then for him? Only myself, my wretched self? Nothing else? Only this to repay the long and cruel pain? Nothing but me? Only this at the end of the weary, difficult road?—only me?

MOTHER. Have pity, cruel girl, I can bear no more. Look in the mirror, quick!

PRAKRITI [*looks in the mirror and flings it away*]. O Mother, Mother, stop! Undo the spell now—at once—undo it! What have you done? What have you done? O wicked, wicked deed!—better have died. What a sight to see! Where is the light and radiance, the shining purity, the heavenly glow? How worn, how faded, has he come to my door! Bearing his self's defeat as a heavy burden, he comes with drooping head . . . Away with all this, away

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with it! [*She kicks the paraphernalia of magic to pieces.*]
Prakriti, Prakriti, if in truth you are no Chandalini, offer
no insult to the heroic. Victory, victory to him!

[*Enter Ananda.*]

O Lord, you have come to give me ^{ananda} deliverance, therefore
have you known this torment. Forgive me, forgive me.
Let your feet spurn afar the endless reproach of my birth.
I have dragged you down to earth, how else could you raise
me to your heaven? O pure one, the dust has soiled your
feet, but they have not been soiled in vain. The veil of
my illusion shall fall upon them, and wipe away the dust.
Victory, victory to thee, O Lord!

MOTHER. Victory to thee, O Lord. My sins and my life
lie together at thy feet. and my days end here, in the
haven of thy forgiveness. [*She dies.*]

ANANDA [*chanting*].

*Buddho susuddho karuna mahannavo
Yoccanta suddhabbara-gnana locano
Lokassa papupakilesa ghatako
Vandami Buddham ahamadarena tam.*

To the most pure Buddha, mighty ocean of mercy.
Seer of knowledge absolute, pure, supreme,
Of the world's sin and suffering the Destroyer—
Solemnly to the Buddha I bow in homage.

NOTES

MUKTA-DHARA

Mukta-dhara literally means 'free current'. The original Bengali drama was first published in 1922. An English translation entitled *The Waterfall*, with a note by the author, was published in the *Modern Review* in May 1922.

The chant, p. 9, ll. 23-9. The translation attempts to reflect something of the strong rhythm and concentrated vigour of the original.

baba, p. 11, l. 2. Literally, father. A homely salutation, much used by villagers, which may be addressed to anyone from a baby to an old man.

The schoolmaster and his boys, p. 21, ll. 13-14. In the original there is much more play made with the cheering of the boys, prompted by the schoolmasters in the middle of a word. The comic effect is difficult to reproduce in English.

Baul, p. 31, l. 23. A singer of mystical *bhakti* songs in the villages of Bengal.

ACT II

In the original this play, unlike the others, is not divided into acts. There is no lapse of time in the action. The divisions here suggested indicate the intervals which would be found desirable in stage production.

Dhananjaya, p. 33, l. 9. The following footnote is inserted by the author in the original published in 1922: 'The character of Dhananjaya and a large number of his speeches have been taken from my play *Prayaschitta*, written over fifteen years ago.'

an early crossing, p. 35, l. 3. Ganesh is using the 'ferry-boat' metaphor of salvation which finds extended expression in Dhananjaya's opening song in this act.

If he can keep me bound, what is there to be anxious about? p. 38, ll. 8-9. This speech is followed by a song which has been omitted in translation.

Notes

O king, you can keep nothing, p. 44, l. 20. In this and the following speech of Dhananjaya several short snatches of song are embedded, the sense of which is given in the prose.

ACT III

Dhananjaya enters singing, p. 54, l. 18. A paraphrase of this song, 'O Fire, my brother!' has been included by the author in 'Fruit-gathering', No. XL. A more literal translation has been preferred here, in order to bring out more clearly the theme of liberation which is attuned to that of the whole play.

O Master Minstrel, p. 57, ll. 27-30, p. 58, ll. 1-8. The translation fails to bring out the idea implied in the imagery, for the Indian mind, that the *vina* (harp) has endured pain and stress in the process of tuning, and that its suffering will be in vain unless it finds fulfilment in song. The taut strings are the counterpart of the tight-drawn cords in which the singer is bound.

NATIR PUJA

PROLOGUE

Bhikshu, Bhikshuni, p. 81, l. 1. Buddhist mendicant monk and nun.
Prabhu, p. 81, l. 15. Lord, a reverential form of address.

The Maharaja . . . remembers me, p. 82, l. 18. The Sanskrit word 'remember', when used of a highly placed person, has the significance of 'asks to see', 'sends for'.

Vasanta Purnima, p. 82, l. 22. At present the birthday of the Buddha falls on Vaisakhi Purnima, i.e. in summer. In the sixth century B.C., however, it fell in spring, on Vasanta Purnima.

alas, that fetters should beguile you, p. 88, ll. 5-6. This speech represents a short snatch of song.

ACT II

Parasurama, p. 102, l. 6. Parasurama is a mythical hero or incarnation of Vishnu who is supposed to have massacred the Kshatriyas with his axe some twenty-one times.

Notes

The Weilder of the Pinaka, p. 103, l. 17. The Pinaka is the bow of Siva.

The world today is wild with the delirium of hatred, p. 113, l. 24. The translation of this song is by the author. See *Poems*, by Rabindranath Tagore.

CHANDALIKA

Chandalika was first published in 1933. An English translation by K. R. Kripalani appeared in the *Visva-Bharati Quarterly* (New Series) in 1938.

ACT I

Uma, p. 137, l. 14. In the Puranic legend Uma imposed on herself a terrible penance in order to win the love of Siva.

For someone whose call has come to me, p. 137, l. 19. This speech is followed by a song in the original, which has been omitted. In this play, songs which are not dramatically necessary have not been translated. These omissions occur after the following speeches:

'Was there no other water, Mother, in all Sravasti city?' p. 139, ll. 1-2.

'You won't understand, Mother, you won't!' p. 141, l. 15.

'How can I say? I respect him who respects me.' p. 143, ll. 19-20.

'What are you afraid of, Mother?' p. 144, l. 17.

'No matter where he goes, you must bring him back.' p. 146, ll. 28-9.

'For whom are you afraid?' p. 147, l. 20.

'Something far greater than fear', p. 150, l. 4.

'I mustn't weaken now—don't give up now!' p. 152, l. 3.

'Mother, I'm afraid.' p. 153, l. 19.

Blessed am I, says the flower, p. 140, ll. 21-8. This song was translated by the author himself.

he who came unbidden has left behind him a word of hope, p. 142, ll. 9-10. Up to this point the speech is a paraphrase of a song. The rest of the speech is prose.

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

BIOGRAPHY

KRISHNA KRIPALANI

RABINDRANATH TAGORE was poet, playwright, story-teller, musician, and painter. His many achievements were but partial expressions of a restless vitality and an inexhaustible zest in living, and it is these that Krishna Kripalani has succeeded in portraying in a detailed and absorbing study of the poet's life and work. His book gives a picture of the complete man.

Krishna Kripalani is married to Tagore's granddaughter. He lived and worked with the poet at Santiniketan from 1933 until Tagore's death in 1941. At present he is Secretary of the National Academy of Letters, New Delhi.

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