

SHORT STORIES

MASTER MASHAI

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MASTER MASHAI 1

Adhar Babu lived upon the interest of the capital left him by his father. Only brokers, negotiating loans, came to his drawing room and smoked the silver-chased hookah, or clerks from the attorney's office came to discuss the terms of some mortgage or the amount of certain stamp fees. He was so careful with his money that even the most dogged efforts of the boys from the local football club failed to make any inroads upon his pocket.

At the time this story opens, a new guest came into his household. After a long period of despair, his wife, Nanibala, bore him a son.

The child resembled his mother—he had large eyes, a well-formed nose, and a fair complexion. Ratikanta, Adharlal's protégé summed up the general opinion—'He is worthy of his noble house.' They named him Venugopal.

Never before had Adharlal's wife expressed any opinion on household expenses differing from her husband's. There had been a hot discussion now and then about the propriety of some necessary item, but before this new arrival, she had merely acknowledged defeat with silent contempt. But now Adharlal could no longer maintain his supremacy. He had to give way, little by little, when it was a question of things to be bought for his son.

MASTER MASHAI 2

As Venugopal grew up, his father gradually became accustomed to spend money on him. He engaged an old teacher, with a considerable reputation for learning and also for his success in dragging boys through their examinations, who otherwise would inevitably have failed. But such a training does not lead to the cultivation of amiability. This man tried his best to win the boy's heart, but the little that was left in him of the milk of human kindness had turned sour from the very beginning, and the child repulsed his advances. The mother, in consequence, objected to him strongly, and complained that the very sight of him made her boy ill. In consequence the teacher left.

Just then Haralal made his appearance in dirty clothes and a torn pair of old canvas shoes. Haralal's mother, who was a widow, had kept him with great difficulty at a district school out of the scanty earnings which she made by cooking in strange houses and by husking rice. He had

managed to pass the Matriculation examination and had determined to go to college. As a result of semi-starvation, his pinched face tapered unnaturally to a point—like Cape Comorin on the map of India—and the only broad portion of it was his forehead which resembled the range of the Himalayas.

The servant asked Haralal what he wanted, and he answered timidly that he wished to see the master.

The servant answered sharply: ‘You can’t see him.’ When Haralal, at a loss what to do next, was hesitating, Venugopal, who had finished his game in the garden, came suddenly to the door. The servant shouted at Haralal to go away. Quite unaccountably Venugopal grew excited and cried: ‘No, he shan’t go away.’ And he dragged the stranger to his father.

Adharlal had just risen from his midday sleep and was sitting quietly on the upper verandah in his cane-chair, swinging his legs. Ratikanta seated in a chair next to him was enjoying his hookah. He asked Haralal how far he had got in his reading. The young man bent his head and answered that he had passed the Matriculation examination. Ratikanta with a stern look expressed surprise that a boy of his age should be so backward. Haralal kept silent. It was Ratikanta’s special pleasure to torture his patron’s dependants, whether actual or potential.

Suddenly it struck Adharlal that he would be able to employ this youth for next to nothing as a tutor for his son. He agreed, there and then, to take him on a salary of five rupees a month with board and lodging free.

MASTER MASHAI 3

This time the post of tutor was occupied longer than ever before. From the very beginning of their acquaintance Haralal and his pupil became great friends. Never before had Haralal been given such an opportunity of loving a young human creature. His mother had been so poor and dependent, that he had never had the privilege of playing with the children at the houses where she was employed. Hitherto he had not suspected the hidden stores of love which lay accumulating in his heart.

Venu also was glad to find a companion in Haralal. He was the only boy in the house. His two younger sisters were looked down upon, as unworthy of being his playmates. So his new tutor became his only companion, patiently bearing the undivided weight of the tyranny of his child friend.

MASTER MASHAI 4

Venu was now eleven. Haralal had passed the Intermediate examination, and won a scholarship. He was working hard for his B.A. degree. After college lectures were over, he would take Venu out into the public park and tell him stories about the heroes from Greek history and from Victor Hugo's romances. The child, in spite of his mother's attempt to keep him by her side, used to get quite impatient to run to Haralal after school hours.

This displeased Nanibala. She thought that it was a deep-laid plot of Haralal's to captivate her boy, so that he might remain indefinitely in his post as tutor. One day she talked to him behind the purdah: 'It is your duty to teach my son for an hour or two only in the morning and evening. But why are you always with him? The child has nearly forgotten his own parents. You must understand that a man of your position is no companion for a boy of this house.'

Haralal's voice choked a little as he answered that in future he would be Venu's teacher merely, and would keep away from him at other times.

It was Haralal's usual practice to begin his college study long before dawn. The child would come to him as soon as he had washed. There was a small pool in the garden where they used to feed the fish with puffed rice. Venu was also engaged in building a miniature garden-house, at the corner of the garden, with Lilliputian gates and hedges and gravel paths. When the sun became too hot, they used to go back into the house, where Venu would have his morning lesson from Haralal.

On the day in question Venu had risen earlier than usual, because he wished to hear the end of the story which Haralal had begun the evening before. But he could not find his teacher. When asked about him, the servant at the door said that he had gone out. At lesson time Venu sat unnaturally quiet. He never even asked Haralal why he had gone out, but went on mechanically with his lessons. When the child was with his mother at breakfast, she asked him what had happened to make him so gloomy, and why he could not eat. Venu did not answer. After his meal his mother caressed him and questioned him repeatedly, Venu burst out crying and said, 'Master Mashai.' His mother asked him, 'What about Master Mashai?' But Venu found it difficult to say in what way his teacher had offended.

So his mother asked him: 'Has your Master Mashai been saying anything to you against *me*?'

But Venu could not understand her question and went away.

MASTER MASHAI 5

Soon after this, there was a theft in Adhar Babu's house. The police were called in to investigate. Even Haralal's trunks were searched. Ratikanta said with meaning: 'The man who steals anything does not hide his ill-gotten gains in his own box.'

Adharlal called his son's tutor and said to him: 'It will not be convenient for me to keep you in this house. From today you will have to live elsewhere, and only come in to teach my son at the usual time.'

At this, Ratikanta drawing at his hookah remarked sagely: 'This is a good proposal—good for both parties.'

Haralal said not a word, but he sent a letter saying that he could no longer remain as tutor to Venu.

When Venu came back from school, he found his tutor's room empty. Even that broken steel trunk of his had vanished. The rope was stretched across the corner, but there were no clothes or towels hanging on it. But on the table, which formerly was strewn with books and papers, stood a bowl containing some gold-fish. On the bowl was a label inscribed with the word 'Venu' in Haralal's handwriting. At once the boy ran up to his father and asked him what had happened. His father told that Haralal had resigned his post. Venu went to his room, flung himself down and began to cry so bitterly that Adharlal could in no way comfort him.

Next day, Haralal was sitting on his wooden bedstead in the hostel, debating whether he should attend his college lectures, when suddenly he saw Adhar Babu's servant coming into his room followed by Venu. Venu at once ran up to him, threw his arms round his neck and asked him to come back to the house.

Haralal could not explain why it was absolutely impossible for him to go back, but, whenever he thought later of those clinging arms and that pleading voice, a lump seemed to rise in his throat.

MASTER MASHAI 6

Haralal, after his sad parting from his little friend, found that his mind was unsettled, and that he had but little chance of winning a scholarship, even if he could pass the examination. At the same time, he knew that without the scholarship, he could not continue his studies. So he tried to obtain employment in some office.

Fortunately for him, the English manager of a big mercantile firm took a fancy to him at first sight. After a brief exchange of words, the manager asked him whether he had had any experience, and whether he could bring any testimonials. Haralal could only answer 'No'; nevertheless a post was offered him on a salary of twenty rupees a month, and a sum of fifteen rupees was allowed him in advance to enable him to come properly dressed to the office.

The manager made Haralal work extremely hard. He had to stay on after office hours and sometimes go to his master's house late in the evening. But, in this way, he learnt his work quicker than others and his fellow clerks became jealous of him and tried to injure him, but without effect. As soon as his salary was raised to forty rupees a month, he took a small house in a narrow lane and brought his mother to live with him. Thus happiness came back to his mother after weary years of waiting.

MASTER MASHAI 7

Haralal's mother frequently said that she would like to see Venugopal, of whom she had heard so much. She wished to prepare some dishes with her own hand and to ask him to come just once to dine with her son. Haralal avoided the subject by saying that his house was not big enough to invite him to.

The news reached Haralal that Venu's mother was dead. He could not wait a moment, but went at once to Adharlal's house to see Venu and from that time onwards they began to see each other frequently.

But times had changed. Venu, stroking his budding moustache, had grown quite the young man of fashion. His friends were numerous, and they suited well his present position. The old dilapidated study chair and ink-stained desk had vanished, and the room now seemed to be bursting

with pride at its new acquisitions—its looking-glasses, oleographs, and other furniture. Venu had entered college, but showed no haste to cross the boundary of the Intermediate examination.

Haralal remembered his mother's request to invite Venu to dinner. After great hesitation, he did so. Venugopal, with his handsome face, at once won the mother's heart. But as soon as the meal was over, he became impatient to go, and looking at his gold watch he explained that he had pressing engagements elsewhere. Then he jumped into his carriage, which was waiting at the door, and drove away. Haralal with a sigh said to himself that he would never invite him again.

MASTER MASHAI 8

One day, on returning from office, Haralal noticed a man sitting in the dark room on the ground floor of his house. He would perhaps have passed him by, had not the heavy scent of some foreign perfume attracted his attention. Haralal asked who was there, and the answer came:

‘It is I, Master Mashai.’

‘What is the matter, Venu?’ said Haralal. ‘When did you come here?’

‘I came hours ago,’ said Venu. ‘I did not know that you returned so late.’

They went upstairs together and Haralal lighted the lamp and asked Venu how he was getting on. Venu replied that his college classes were becoming a fearful bore, and his father did not realise how dreadfully hard it was for him to go in the same class year after year, with students much younger than himself. Haralal asked him what he wished to do. Venu then told him that he wanted to go to England and become a barrister. He gave an instance of a student, much less advanced in his college course, who was getting ready to go. Haralal asked him if he had received his father's permission. Venu replied that his father would not hear a word of it until he had passed the Intermediate examination, and that was an impossibility in his present frame of mind. Haralal suggested that he himself might go and try to talk over Venu's father.

‘No,’ said Venu, ‘I can never allow that!’

Haralal asked Venu to stay to dinner, and while they were waiting he gently placed his hand on Venu's shoulder and said: ‘Venu, you should not quarrel with your father, or leave home.’

Venu jumped up angrily and said that if he was not welcome, he would go elsewhere. Haralal caught him by the hand and implored him not go away without dining. But Venu snatched his hand away and was on the point of leaving the room when Haralal's mother brought the food in on a tray. Seeing Venu about to leave, she pressed him to remain, and he did so, but with bad grace.

While he was seated at dinner, the sound of a carriage was heard stopping at the door. First a servant entered the room with creaking shoes and then Adhar Babu himself. At the sight of his father, Venu's face became pale. The mother left the room as soon as she saw strangers enter. Adhar Babu began to abuse Haralal in a voice thick with anger: 'Ratikanta gave me full warning, but I could not believe that you were a man of such devilish cunning. So, you think you're going to live upon Venu? This is sheer kidnapping, and I shall prosecute you in the Police Court.'

Venu silently followed his father out of the house.

MASTER MASHAI 9

The firm in which Haralal was employed, began to buy up large quantities of rice and *dal* from the country districts. To purchase this produce, Haralal had to take the cash every Saturday morning by the early train and pay it out. There were special centres where the brokers and middlemen used to come with their receipt and account for settlement. Some discussion had taken place in the office about Haralal being entrusted with this work without any security, but the manager undertook all the responsibility and said that security was not needed. This special work used to go on from the middle of December to the middle of April, and Haralal frequently returned from it very late at night.

One day, after his return from work, his mother told him that Venu had called and that she had persuaded him to dine with them. This had happened more than once. The mother said that it was because Venu missed his own mother, and tears came into her eyes as she spoke about it.

On one such occasion Venu waited for Haralal to return and had a long talk with him.

'Master Mashai!' he said, 'Father has lately become so irritable that I can no longer live with him. And, besides, I know that he is thinking of marrying again. Ratikanta is seeking a suitable match, and they are always conspiring about it. There used to be a time when my father would be anxious if I were absent from home even for a few hours. Now, if I am away for more than a week, he takes no notice, indeed, he is greatly relieved. If his marriage takes place, I feel that I cannot live in the house any longer. You must show me a way out of this. I want to become independent.'

Haralal felt deeply grieved, but he could not see how he could help his former pupil. Venu said that he was determined to go to England and become a barrister. Somehow or other he must get the passage money out of his father: he might borrow it on a note of hand and then his father would

have to pay when the creditors filed a suit. With this borrowed money he might get away, and when he was in England his father was bound to send money to meet his expenses.

‘But,’ Haralal asked, ‘who is there that would advance you the money?’

‘You!’ said Venu.

‘I,’ exclaimed Haralal in amazement.

‘Yes,’ said Venu, ‘I’ve seen the servant bringing heaps of money here in bags.’

‘The servant and the money belong to someone else.’

Haralal explained why the money came to his house at night, like birds to their nest, to be scattered next morning.

‘But can’t the manager advance the sum?’ Venu asked.

‘He may do so,’ said Haralal, ‘if your father stands security.’

At this point the discussion ended.

MASTER MASHAI 10

One Friday night a carriage and pair stopped before Haralal’s lodging house. When Venu was announced, Haralal was sitting on the floor of his bedroom, counting some money. Venu entered dressed in an unaccustomed manner. He had discarded his Bengali dress and was wearing a Parsee coat and trousers and on his head was a cap. Rings glittered on most of the fingers of both hands, and a thick gold chain was hanging round his neck; there was a gold watch in his pocket, and diamond studs could be seen peeping from his shirt sleeves. Haralal at once asked him what was the matter and why he was wearing such clothes.

Venu replied: ‘My father is to be married tomorrow. He tried hard to keep it from me, but I found it out. I asked him to allow me to go to our garden-house at Barrackpore for a few days, and he was only too glad to get rid of me so easily. I am going there, and I wish to God I never had to come back.’

Venu, seeing that Haralal looked pointedly at the rings on his fingers, explained that they had belonged to his mother. Haralal then asked him if he had already had dinner. He answered, ‘Yes, haven’t you?’

‘No,’ said Haralal, ‘I cannot leave this room until I have safely locked up all the money in this iron chest.’

‘Go and have dinner,’ said Venu, ‘while I keep guard here; your mother will be waiting for you.’

For a moment Haralal hesitated, and then he went out and dined. In a short time he came back with his mother and the three of them sat talking among the bags of money. When it was nearly midnight, Venu looked at his watch and jumped up, saying that he would miss his train. He then asked Haralal to keep his rings and his watch and chain until he asked for them again. Haralal put them all together in a leather bag which he placed in the iron safe, whereupon Venu left the house.

The canvas bags containing the currency notes had already been placed in the safe: only the loose coins remained to be counted over and put away with the rest.

MASTER MASHAI 11

Haralal lay down near the door of the room, placed the key under his pillow, and went to sleep. He dreamt that from behind the curtain Venu’s mother was loudly reproaching him. Her words were indistinct, but rays of different colours from the jewels which she wore kept piercing the curtain like violently vibrating needles. Haralal struggled to call Venu, but his cry seemed to stick in his throat. At last, the curtain fell noisily down. Haralal started up from his sleep and found that all was dark around him. A sudden gust of wind had flung the window open and blow out the light. Haralal was covered with perspiration. He re-lighted the lamp and saw, by the clock, that it was four in the morning. There was no time to go to sleep again; for he had to get ready to start.

He had just washed his face and hands, when his mother called from her own room, ‘Baba, why are you up so early?’

It was a habit of Haralal to see his mother’s face the first thing in the morning in order to bring a blessing on the day. His mother said to him: ‘I was dreaming that you were going out to bring home a bride.’ Haralal then went back to his bedroom and began to take out the bags containing the silver and the currency notes.

Suddenly his heart seemed to stop beating. Three of the bags appeared to be empty. He knocked them against the iron safe, but this only proved his fear to be true. Nevertheless he opened them and shook them with all his might. But he could find nothing in them but two letters from Venu, one of which was addressed to his father and the other to himself.

Haralal tore open his own letter and tried to read it. But the words seemed to run into one another. He trimmed the lamp, but felt that he could not understand what he read. Yet the purport of the letter was clear. Venu had taken three thousand rupees in currency notes, and had started for

England. The steamer was to sail before daybreak that very morning. The letter ended with the words: 'I am explaining everything in a letter to my father. He will pay off the debt; and then, again, my mother's ornaments, which I have left in your care, will more than cover the amount I have taken.'

Haralal locked up his room and hiring a carriage hurried to the jetty. But he did not know even the name of the steamer which Venu had taken. He ran the whole length of the wharves from Prinsep's Ghat to Metiaburuj. He found two steamers had sailed for England early that morning. It was impossible for him to find out which of them carried Venu, or how to reach him.

When Haralal returned home the sun was strong and the whole of Calcutta was awake. Everything before his eyes seemed blurred. He felt as if he were pushing against a fearful obstacle, unembodied but pitiless. His mother came on to the verandah and asked him anxiously where he had been. With a strained laugh he said to her, 'To bring home a bride for myself!' And then he fainted away.

After some time, Haralal recovered consciousness, and opening his eyes asked his mother to leave him. Entering his room he shut the door, while his mother sat at the door of the verandah in the fierce glare of the sun. She kept calling to him fitfully, almost mechanically, 'Baba, Baba!'

As usual, the servant came from the manager's office and knocked at the door, saying that they would miss the train if they did not start at once. Haralal called from inside: 'Cannot start this morning.'

'Then, when are we to go, sir?'

'I will tell you later on.'

The servant went downstairs with a gesture of impatience.

Suddenly Haralal thought of the ornaments which Venu had left behind. He had completely forgotten about them, but with the thought came instant relief. He took his leather bag containing them, and also Venu's letter to his father, and left the house.

Before he reached Adharlal's house he could hear the band, playing for the wedding, yet on entering could feel that there had been some disturbance. Haralal was told that there had been a theft the night before and that some of the servants were suspected. Adhar Babu was sitting in the upper verandah, flushed with anger and Ratikanta was sitting near him smoking his hookah. Haralal said to Adhar Babu, 'I have something to tell you in private.' Adharlal's anger flared up, and he shouted: 'I have no time now!' He was afraid that Haralal had come to borrow money or to ask his help. Ratikanta suggested that if Haralal felt uncomfortable in making any request in his presence he would leave. Adharlal told him angrily to sit where he was. Then Haralal handed over

the bag which Venu had left behind. Adharlal asked what was inside, so Haralal opened it and gave him the contents.

Then Adhar Babu said with a sneer: 'It's a praying business that you two have started—you and your former pupil! You were certain that the stolen property would be traced, and so you bring it to me to claim a reward!'

Haralal presented the letter which Venu had written to his father, but this only made Adharlal the more furious.

'What's all this?' he shouted, 'I'll call the police! My son has not yet come of age, and *you* have smuggled him out of the country! I'll bet my soul you've lent him a few hundred rupees, and then taken a note of hand for three thousand! But I am not going to be bound by *this!*'

'I have not advanced him a single pice,' protested Haralal.

'Then how did he find it?' asked Adharlal. 'Do you mean to tell me he broke open your safe and stole it.'

Haralal stood silent, while Ratikanta sarcastically remarked: 'I don't believe this fellow ever set hands on so much as three thousand rupees in his life.'

When Haralal left the house, it seemed to him that he had passed beyond all possibility of fear or anxiety. His mind seemed to refuse to work. As soon as he entered the lane he saw a carriage waiting before his house. For a moment he felt certain that it was Venu's. It was impossible to believe that his calamity could be so hopelessly final.

Haralal went quickly up to the carriage, but found an English assistant from the firm sitting inside it. The man got down when he saw Haralal, seized him by the wrist and asked him: 'Why didn't you leave by the train this morning? The servant had told the manager his suspicions and he had sent this man to find out.'

Haralal answered: 'Because I found that notes to the value of three thousand rupees were missing.'

The man asked how that could have happened, but Haralal was silent.

Seeing his embarrassment, the assistant said to Haralal: 'Let us go upstairs together and see where you keep your money.' So they went up to the room, counted the money and made a thorough search of the house.

When Haralal's mother saw this she could contain herself no longer. She therefore came up to the stranger and asked her son what had happened. The man answered in broken Hindustani that some money had been stolen.

'Stolen!' the mother cried, 'Why! How could it be stolen? Who would do such a dastardly thing?' But Haralal forbade her to speak.

The man collected the remainder of the money and told Haralal to come with him to the manager. The mother barred the way and said:

‘Sir, where are you taking my son? I have done everything in my power, I have even starved myself so that he might be brought up to do honest work. My son would never touch money that was not his own.’

The Englishman, not knowing Bengali, could only reply, ‘*Achcha! Achcha!*’ Haralal entreated his mother not to be anxious; he would explain it all to the manager and soon be back again. His mother, distressed by the fact that her son had eaten nothing all morning, begged him to remain a moment to break his fast, but Haralal disregarding her appeal, stepped into the carriage and drove away, and the mother in the anguish of her heart sank to the ground.

When Haralal came into the manager’s presence, he was asked: ‘Tell me the truth, what did happen?’ But Haralal could only reply, ‘I haven’t taken any money.’

‘I fully believe it,’ said the manager, ‘but surely you know who has taken it.’

Haralal remained silent, with his eyes on the ground.

‘Somebody,’ said the manager, ‘must have taken it with your connivance.’

‘Nobody,’ replied Haralal, ‘could take it away with my knowledge unless he first took my life.’

‘Look here, Haralal,’ said the manager, ‘I trusted you completely. I took no security. I employed you in a post of great responsibility. Every one in the office was against me for doing so. The three thousand rupees is a small concern, but the shame of all this to me is a great matter. I will do one thing. I will give you the whole day to bring back this money. If you do so, I shall say nothing about it and I shall keep you on in your post.’

It was eleven o’clock, when Haralal with bent head walked out of the office, and left his fellow-clerks to exult meanly over his disgrace.

‘What can I *do*? What can I *do*?’ Haralal repeated to himself, the sun’s heat pouring down as he walked along like one dazed. At last his mind ceased to think at all about what could be done, but he continued to walk mechanically.

This city of Calcutta, which offered its shelter to thousands upon thousands of men, had become like a steel-trap. He could see no way out. The whole body of people was conspiring to surround and hold him captive—this most insignificant of men, whom no one knew. Nobody had any special grudge against him, yet everybody was his enemy. The crowd passed by, brushing against him: clerks from different offices ate their lunch on the roadside out of plates made of leaves: a tired wayfarer on the Maidan was lying under the shade of a tree, with one hand beneath his head and one leg crossed over the other: up-country women, crowded into hackney carriages, were on their way to the temple: a chuprassi came up with a letter and asked him the address on the envelope—

so the afternoon went by, till one by one the offices began to close. Carriages started off in all directions, carrying people back to their homes. The clerks, packed tightly on the seats of the trams, looked at the theatre advertisements as they returned home. It came into his mind that he was no longer a unit in this throng.—no work would engage him all day long, and there would come no pleasant evening release from toil. He had no need to hurry to catch the homeward tram. All the busy occupations of the city—the buildings—the horses and carriages—the incessant traffic—seemed sometimes to swell into dreadful reality, and at other times, to subside into the shadowy unreal.

Haralal had eaten no food, taken no rest, nor sheltered from the sun all that day.

The lamps in one street after another were lighted till it seemed to him that a pervading darkness, like some demon, was keeping its eyes wide open to watch every movement of its victim. Haralal had not the energy even to enquire how late it was. The veins on his forehead throbbed, and he felt as if his head must burst. Through paroxysms of pain, which alternated with the apathy of dejection, one thought came again and again from among the innumerable multitudes in that vast city, the image of only one person rose before his mental vision, and one name alone found its way through his dry throat—‘Mother?’

He said to himself, ‘In the depth of night when no one is awake to arrest me—me, the least of all men—I will silently creep to my mother’s arms and fall asleep, and may I never wake again!’

Haralal’s one trouble was lest some police officer should molest him in the presence of his mother and thus prevent him from going home. When at last it became an agony for him to walk further, he hailed a carriage. The driver asked him where he wanted to go. He said: ‘Nowhere. I want to drive across the Maidan to breathe some fresh air.’ The man at first did not believe him and was about to drive on, when Haralal put a rupee into his hand as earnest of payment. Thereupon the driver crossed, and then recrossed the Maidan from one side to the other, by different roads.

Haralal laid his throbbing head on the side of the open window of the carriage and closed his eyes. Slowly all the pain abated. A deep and intense peace filled his heart and supreme deliverance seemed to embrace him on every side. It was *not* true—this day’s despair which threatened to drag him into utter helplessness. It was *not* true, it was false. He knew now that it was only a vain fear that his mind had conjured up from nothing. Deliverance was in the infinite sky and there was no end to peace. No King or Emperor in the world had the power to keep captive his nonentity, this Haralal. In the sky, surrounding his emancipated heart on every side, he felt the presence of his mother, that one poor woman. She seemed to grow and grow till she filled the infinity of darkness. All the roads and buildings and shops of Calcutta gradually became enveloped by her. In her presence all his pain vanished; thought, consciousness itself, closed. It seemed as though a bubble

filled with the hot vapour of pain had burst, and now there was neither darkness nor light, but only one tensefulness.

The Cathedral clock struck one. The driver called out impatiently: 'Babu, my horse can't go on any longer. Where do you want to go?'

There came no answer.

The driver came down and shook Haralal and asked him again where he wanted to go.

There came no answer.

And this was a question that never received its answer from Haralal.