

PLAY

ACHALAYATAN

Rabindranath Tagore



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ACT I

The House of Achalayatan

SONG

Panchak.

What morning did you call to me—
no one knows it,
My heart weeps unto itself alone—
no one heeds it.
I return with a weary, wandering soul,
I search the faces of them all,
But such a pull as yours holds me—
no one else can pull me so.

Enter Mahapanchak

MAHAPANCHAK. Singing! Singing again!

PANCHAK. Brother, you have seen for yourself—not one of your mantras, rites, ablutions, or scriptural formulas would take root in me.

MAHAPANCHAK. That much is plain to see—but is it truly cause for such rejoicing? Must you split your throat singing over it?

PANCHAK. It is the one thing I can do.

MAHAPANCHAK. Can do! What monstrous pride. Even a bird can sing. That thunder-cleaving mantra which has failed to fix itself in your head these seven days—what came of it today?

PANCHAK. As it was on the seventh day, so it remains, more or less, on the eighth. If anything, a little worse.

MAHAPANCHAK. Worse! What do you mean by worse?

PANCHAK. The longer the thing sits with me, the less it feels right; and the more mistakes I make, the more each mistake sets like stone. So between what you first taught me and what I now recite, quite a gulf has opened. I no longer recognize it myself.

MAHAPANCHAK. That gulf must be closed, you fool.

PANCHAK. It would close easily enough if you would only bend your version to mine. Otherwise I cannot manage it.

MAHAPANCHAK. Cannot manage it! You must.

PANCHAK. Then let us try once more from the beginning—recite the mantra through for me once.

MAHAPANCHAK. Very well. Repeat after me. Om tata tata totoya totoya sphata sphata sphotoya sphotoya ghuna ghuna ghunapoya ghunapoya swara basatwani. Why have you gone silent?

PANCHAK. Om tata tata totoya totoya—very well, brother.

MAHAPANCHAK. Brother again! Finish the mantra, I say.

PANCHAK. One question first—what is the fruit of this mantra?

MAHAPANCHAK. Recited ninety-seven times daily, from sunrise to sunset, it grants a lifespan of ninety years.

PANCHAK. Spare me, brother! Reciting it, one morning session alone feels like ninety years to me—by the afternoon session I feel I have already died.

MAHAPANCHAK. My own brother, and reduced to this! What shame you bring me before this whole community!

PANCHAK. There is no cause for shame, brother.

MAHAPANCHAK. No cause?

PANCHAK. None. Everyone marvels at your learning. But they marvel a great deal more that you are my brother.

MAHAPANCHAK. It is hard even to be angry with this monkey. Look here, Panchak—you are no longer a child. You have reached an age when you ought to reflect on your conduct.

PANCHAK. That is precisely my trouble. Whatever I judge to be right, your judgment runs exactly the opposite way—and yet whatever penalty follows, I alone must bear it.

MAHAPANCHAK. After our father's death, in what poverty, under what universal contempt did we two enter this abode—and today, by strength of will alone, how far above that contempt I have risen! Does not my example stir you even a little to effort?

PANCHAK. Stirring me to effort is scarcely the point. Since you have made yourself into such a perfect example, sitting there in your own person, my effort becomes wholly unnecessary. That is why I remain so untroubled.

MAHAPANCHAK. The conch has sounded. Now is my hour for reciting the Legend of the Seven Maidens. But mark me—waste no more time.

[Exit]

SONG

Panchak.

The fifth note rises and rings,
This shuttered house trembles at the sound,
Yet from beyond, no hand
comes to strike the door.
Whose restlessness stirs the sky?
Whose message does the wind carry?
Along this road, that secret word—
no one brings it here.
What morning did you call to me—
no one knows it.

Enter a group of students

FIRST STUDENT. Ho, Panchak!

PANCHAK. No, friend, do not trouble me now.

SECOND STUDENT. Why? What has come over you?

PANCHAK. Om tata tata totoya totoya—

THIRD STUDENT. Still not rid of tata tata totoya totoya? We finished with that so long ago I can hardly recall when.

FIRST STUDENT. No, friends, let Panchak study a little; otherwise what will become of him! Poor fellow is still dying over tata tata, while we have gone as far as the Dhvajagrakeyuri verses!

SECOND STUDENT. Tell me, Panchak, have you learned the Chandresha mantra yet?

PANCHAK. No.

THIRD STUDENT. The Marichi?

PANCHAK. No.

FIRST STUDENT. The Mahamarichi?

PANCHAK. No.

SECOND STUDENT. The Parnashabari?

PANCHAK. No.

SECOND STUDENT. Well then, tell me this—if the quantity of dust that clings to the claw-tip of the Haret bird were—

PANCHAK. Ah, friend, I have never in any lifetime seen a Haret bird, let alone the dust on its claw-tip!

FIRST STUDENT. None of us has seen a Haret bird either. I have heard it dwells beyond the Curd-Sea, on the great isle of Jambu. But such things must be known nonetheless—one cannot simply ruin one's life through sheer ignorance.

SECOND STUDENT. Panchak, waste no more time in vain. No one expects much of you. But at the very least you must know the Vow of the Jackal's Cry, the Examination of the Crow's Beak, the Purification of the Goat-Dung, the Banishing of the Twenty-two Demons—otherwise with what face will you tell the world you are a student of Achalayatan?

THIRD STUDENT. Come, Vishwambhar, let us go. Let him study a little.

They move to leave

PANCHAK. Ho, Vishwambhar! Tata tata totoya totoya—

VISHWAMBHAR. What is it? Why call me again?

PANCHAK. Sanjib, Jyotirmoy—tata tata totoya totoya—

SANJIB. What has happened? Read on, don't stop!

PANCHAK. I beg you, do not go away entirely. Reciting these sounds, if now and then I catch sight of an intelligent face, it reassures me a little that this world is not merely the ravings of the Creator gone mad.

JYOTIRMOY. No indeed, Mahapanchak grows quite angry. He believes that whatever fails to take in you is our doing.

PANCHAK. That I, without anyone's help, should fail entirely by my own unaided genius—that my brother will not even grant me this small credit—this grieves me sorely. Come, friends, sit apart there a little and talk among yourselves. If you see me grow inattentive, warn me at once. Sphata sphata sphotoya sphotoya—

JYOTIRMOY. Very well, we shall sit here.

SANJIB. Vishwambhar, you said our teacher is coming to the abode this time—where did you hear that?

VISHWAMBHAR. I don't know—someone was saying something. Somehow it has spread on every side that the Guru will come at the start of the rainy season.

PANCHAK. Ho, Vishwambhar, what do you say? Our Guru is coming?

SANJIB. Panchak again! Mind your own business.

PANCHAK. Ghuna ghuna ghunapoya ghunapoya—

JYOTIRMOY. But have you heard it from any of the teachers? What does Mahapanchak say?

VISHWAMBHAR. It's useless asking him. Mahapanchak wastes no time answering anyone's questions. These days he is deep in the Hundred-and-Eight Aryan Verses—who can get near him!

PANCHAK. Come, friends, let us go to the Acharya. If we ask him—

JYOTIRMOY. Again! Back to it!

PANCHAK. Ghuna ghuna ghunapoya ghunapoya—

JYOTIRMOY. I am nineteen years old now—and in all that time our Guru has never once come to this abode. I cannot believe he will suddenly come today.

SANJIB. How feeble your logic has become, Jyotirmoy! By what reasoning does his not coming in nineteen years make his coming in the twentieth year impossible?

VISHWAMBHAR. Then all mathematics itself falls apart. For if twenty does not exist up to nineteen, how can twenty exist after nineteen either?

SANJIB. Not mathematics alone—the whole universe would not hold together. For what has not occurred in this moment, how could it occur in the next?

JYOTIRMOY. There—that is exactly my argument. Who said it occurs? What has not occurred before can never occur afterward. Come now, prove to me that anything at all occurs.

PANCHAK. (climbing onto Jyotirmoy's shoulders) Proof? Here is your proof. Ghuna ghuna ghunapoya ghunapoya—

JYOTIRMOY. Ah, Panchak! What are you doing! I'll throw you off, I tell you—ah, get down!

PANCHAK. Unless you admit that I have climbed upon your shoulders, I shall not get down for anything. Ghuna ghuna ghunapoya ghunapoya—

Enter Mahapanchak

MAHAPANCHAK. Panchak, you are making a great nuisance of yourself.

PANCHAK. Brother, it was they who were making the disturbance. I came only to quiet them further. Tata tata totoya totoya, sphata sphata—

MAHAPANCHAK. Give you the smallest pretext to neglect your own work, and there is no restraining you.

VISHWAMBHAR. Sir, we hear a rumor that our Guru will come here at the start of the rains.

MAHAPANCHAK. Whether he comes or not is no matter for excitement—prepare yourselves in case he does.

PANCHAK. If he comes, he himself will be prepared. Should we, on our side, also try to prepare, some needless confusion is bound to follow.

MAHAPANCHAK. Spoken exactly like a wise man!

PANCHAK. When food approaches the mouth, the mouth simply stills itself and receives it—that much is simple enough. What I fear is that the Guru, arriving, may find that we have prepared ourselves from precisely the wrong direction—and so I do nothing at all.

MAHAPANCHAK. Panchak, arguing again?

PANCHAK. You are angry that I argue, yet just as angry when I manage to prove my point!

MAHAPANCHAK. Off with you.

PANCHAK. I am going—but tell me, will the Guru truly come?

MAHAPANCHAK. He will come when his time comes.

[Exit]

SANJIB. I have never once heard Mahapanchak give a final answer to any question.

JYOTIRMOY. He doesn't give one precisely because there is no final answer to give. It is fools who ask questions; those who know a little give answers; and those who know a great deal know that no answer can be given.

PANCHAK. That is exactly why, when the Instructor questions us from the scriptures, all of you answer, while I remain utterly mute.

JYOTIRMOY. But the things you say without being asked at all—

PANCHAK. Yes, and that is exactly how my reputation has spread—otherwise no one would even know who I am.

VISHWAMBHAR. Look here, Panchak, if the Guru comes, we shall all be put to shame on your account.

SANJIB. Of the forty-eight forms of the ablution ritual, Panchak has managed, at the very outside, to learn five.

PANCHAK. Sanjib, do not wound my heart so. You exaggerate.

SANJIB. Exaggerate!

PANCHAK. Of course I exaggerate—you say five; I have not learned even two properly. In the third form, deciding which joint of the middle finger must be dipped how many times in the water, I forget the very existence of the other fingers. Only the crooked-thumb gesture have I truly mastered. Why are you laughing? You don't believe me, I suppose?

JYOTIRMOY. It is hard to believe.

PANCHAK. The other day, when the Instructor came to examine us, I tried to astonish him by showing off that very crooked thumb, but he narrowed his eyes and raised a warning finger, and I got no further.

VISHWAMBHAR. No, Panchak, this time, with the Guru's coming, you must truly prepare.

PANCHAK. Panchak was born unprepared into this world, and unprepared he will die; he has this one great virtue—he never changes.

SANJIB. I doubt very much that this virtue of yours has managed to captivate the Instructor.

PANCHAK. Yet I do try so hard to make him understand that I have not shifted one inch in my learning—there, take the Pole Star as an example—the advantage of that is, one has only to compare how far the other students here have advanced against my own position, and the truth becomes clear at once.

JYOTIRMOY. At this astonishing logic of yours, the Instructor probably—

PANCHAK. No, nothing at all—his mind was not disturbed in the least. Whatever opinion he already held of me was only confirmed, and made a little firmer.

SANJIB. If we spoke such nonsense to the Instructor as you do, we should be ruined. But in Panchak's case—

PANCHAK. There is a reason for that. My arguments come so naturally, so beautifully, to me that they sound quite sweet in my own mouth. Everyone is delighted and says, just so, exactly like Panchak. But unless you show signs of the profoundest intelligence, you get no affection at all—how unfortunate you all are!

JYOTIRMOY. Come, Panchak friend, enough foolishness. We are off. Do apply your mind and study a little.

[Exeunt the three]

PANCHAK. It will never happen—nothing will ever come of me. Not one mantra of this place has ever taken root in me.

SONG

Far away, somewhere far, far,
My heart wanders round and round,
To that flute's melody
whose sound makes even the wind weep.
The path that carries every land

away, lost in wistful longing—
along that path this beggar soul
would go, to some unknown country.

What is this? Weeping, I hear! It must be Subhadra. In this abode of ours, his tears shall never be allowed to dry. I cannot bear to hear him weep!

[Exit]

Re-enter Panchak, leading the boy Subhadra

PANCHAK. You have nothing to fear, friend, nothing at all. Come to me, tell me what has happened. Tell me.

SUBHADRA. I have committed a sin.

PANCHAK. A sin? What sin?

SUBHADRA. I cannot say it! A terrible sin. What will become of me!

PANCHAK. I shall cut away all your sin—only tell me.

SUBHADRA. I—on the north side of our abode—

PANCHAK. The north side?

SUBHADRA. Yes—I opened the window there—

PANCHAK. Opened the window, and did what?

SUBHADRA. I looked outside!

PANCHAK. Looked outside? Just hearing it makes me long to do the same!

SUBHADRA. Yes, Brother Panchak. But not for long—I looked only once, and shut it again at once. What penance will wash away my sin?

PANCHAK. I have forgotten, friend. There are twenty or twenty-five thousand kinds of penance. Had I never come to this abode, twelve-sixteenths of them would have remained mere words in books; since coming here I have managed to put nearly all of them to use—but I cannot keep them in my head.

Enter a group of boys

FIRST BOY. Ah, Subhadra! So you're here?

SECOND BOY. Do you know, Brother Panchak, what a terrible sin Subhadra has committed?

PANCHAK. Hush, hush. No fear, Subhadra. Why are you crying, friend? If penance is needed, you'll do it. Penance is great fun. Life here is so tediously the same, day after day—if there were no penances, people could hardly survive at all.

FIRST BOY. (whispering) Do you know, Brother Panchak, Subhadra—the north window—

PANCHAK. There, there—do any of you have courage like Subhadra's?

SECOND BOY. The north side of our abode belongs to a certain goddess.

THIRD BOY. If even a breath of air from that direction enters our abode, then—it is—

PANCHAK. Then what?

THIRD BOY. It is terrible.

PANCHAK. How terrible—let me hear it.

THIRD BOY. I don't know—but it's terrible.

SUBHADRA. Brother Panchak, I'll never open it again, never. What will happen to me?

PANCHAK. Listen, Subhadra—what comes of what, I truly do not know, friend. But whatever it is, I am not the least bit afraid of it.

SUBHADRA. You aren't afraid?

ALL THE BOYS. You aren't afraid?

PANCHAK. No. I say—let's just see what happens.

ALL. (drawing near) I say, brother, you must have seen a great many things?

PANCHAK. Seen plenty, indeed. On the Saturday of last month, the day of the worship of the great Peacock Goddess, I placed mud from a rat's burrow in a bronze dish, arranged five jackal-thorn leaves and three black grams upon it, and blew on it with my own breath eighteen times.

ALL. Ah! How terrible! Eighteen times!

SUBHADRA. Brother Panchak, what happened to you?

PANCHAK. The snake that was surely fated to bite me on the third day after that has not managed to find me to this very day.

FIRST BOY. But you have committed a truly terrible sin.

SECOND BOY. The great Peacock Goddess must be furiously angry.

PANCHAK. It was exactly to see how furious her anger might be that I did the deed.

SUBHADRA. But Brother Panchak, what if a snake had bitten you?

PANCHAK. Then there would be no doubt left about the matter, from head to foot.

FIRST BOY. But Brother Panchak, our north window—

PANCHAK. That too I have resolved I must open and look through myself, one day.

SUBHADRA. You will open it too?

PANCHAK. Yes, friend Subhadra—then you'll have a companion in your own band.

FIRST BOY. No, Brother Panchak, I beg you, at your feet, Brother Panchak, you—

PANCHAK. Why, boy, what is there to fear?

SECOND BOY. It is terrible, I tell you.

PANCHAK. If it isn't terrible, where's the fun in it?

THIRD BOY. It is a terrible sin.

FIRST BOY. Mahapanchak himself told us it amounts to matricide—because the north side belongs to a goddess.

PANCHAK. I would commit no matricide, and yet incur the sin of matricide—what a curious spectacle that must be; I am most eager to see it.

FIRST BOY. Won't you be afraid?

PANCHAK. Not at all. Friend Subhadra, tell me, then—what did you see?

SECOND BOY. No, no, don't tell him!

THIRD BOY. No, we mustn't hear it—how terrible!

FIRST BOY. Well, just a little—the tiniest bit, tell us, friend.

SUBHADRA. I saw—there were hills, and cattle grazing—

ALL THE BOYS. (fingers in their ears) Oh no! No, no, we won't hear any more. Don't say another word, Subhadra. Look, here comes the Instructor. Come, come—no more.

PANCHAK. Why? What is it to you now?

FIRST BOY. Well now, you don't even know that? Today is the star Purva-Phalguni—

PANCHAK. What of it?

SECOND BOY. Must we not go and find the shed skin of the striped snake at the southwest corner of Kakini Lake today?

PANCHAK. Why must you?

FIRST BOY. You don't know anything, Brother Panchak! That skin has to be bound with seven black horsetail hairs and burned to make smoke.

SECOND BOY. Because today our ancestral spirits will come to smell that smoke.

PANCHAK. Won't that cause them pain?

FIRST BOY. It will bring merit—tremendous merit!

[Exeunt the boys]

Enter the Instructor

INSTRUCTOR. I generally find Panchak among the children.

PANCHAK. In this abode, my wits match theirs best of all. Once they grow a little older, then—

INSTRUCTOR. But your company is making them unruly. The other day Patubarma came complaining to me that in the first watch of Friday, Upatishya yawned right upon his body.

PANCHAK. He did indeed. I myself was present there.

INSTRUCTOR. I guessed as much, or how else could such a life-shortening irregularity have occurred? I hear you called Patubarma over, to test everyone's courage, and told him to yawn a hundred times over your body?

PANCHAK. You have heard wrongly.

INSTRUCTOR. Heard wrongly?

PANCHAK. Not Patubarma alone—every boy present, I called each of them to yawn at least ten times over my body—I showed no favoritism.

INSTRUCTOR. You called each one?

PANCHAK. Each one. You may ask and confirm it yourself. No one dared come forward. They calculated that if fifteen boys together yawned a hundred and fifty

times, my entire lifespan would be consumed and a surplus would remain besides—and unable to decide what to do with that surplus, they went off to ask Mahapanchak—and that is exactly how I was found out.

INSTRUCTOR. Look here, you have been tolerated a great deal these years simply for being Mahapanchak's brother, but this cannot continue. Have you heard our Guru is coming?

PANCHAK. The Guru is coming? Have you had certain word of it?

INSTRUCTOR. Yes. But there is no cause for you to be so excited about it.

PANCHAK. It is I who need the Guru most—I have learned nothing at all.

Enter Subhadra

SUBHADRA. Sir Instructor.

PANCHAK. Ah, run, run! I'm just hearing a bit of wisdom from the Instructor—don't disturb it now, run off at once.

INSTRUCTOR. What is it, Subhadra? Tell me quickly what you have to say.

SUBHADRA. I have committed a terrible sin.

PANCHAK. What a fine scholar he is! "I have committed a sin!" Run, I say!

INSTRUCTOR. (growing eager) Why are you chasing him off? Subhadra, come, let us hear it.

PANCHAK. There's no saving him now—give him the faintest scent of sin and he darts at it like a fly.

INSTRUCTOR. What were you saying?

SUBHADRA. I have committed a sin.

INSTRUCTOR. Committed a sin? Very well then. Sit down. Let us hear it.

SUBHADRA. I—on the north side of the abode—

INSTRUCTOR. Go on, go on—have you scratched some mark on the north wall?

SUBHADRA. No, I—on the north window—

INSTRUCTOR. I understand—you've knocked it with your elbow. Then all our sacrificial vessels on that side will have to be discarded entirely. Nothing less than having a seven-month-old calf lick that window clean will purify it.

PANCHAK. There you are mistaken. The Compendium of Rites says that with a single touch of a bottle-gourd stalk—

INSTRUCTOR. Your presumption knows no bounds, I see. Has the eighteenth chapter of Kuladatta's Compendium of Rites ever once been opened and read?

PANCHAK. (aside) Go on, Subhadra, off with you.—But as for Kuladatta, I myself—

INSTRUCTOR. You don't accept Kuladatta? Well then, surely you must accept Bharadwaja Mishra's Rules of Application—which state—

SUBHADRA. Sir Instructor, I have committed a terrible sin.

PANCHAK. There it is again! The same story. Be quiet, you.

INSTRUCTOR. Subhadra, the mark you scratched on the upper wall—was it square, or round?

SUBHADRA. I scratched no mark. I opened the window and looked outside.

INSTRUCTOR. (sitting down abruptly) Ah, ruin upon us! What have you done! Do you know that window has not been opened in three hundred and forty-five years?

SUBHADRA. What will happen to me?

PANCHAK. (embracing Subhadra) Glory and triumph be yours, Subhadra! You have broken the seal of three hundred and forty-five years. Seeing this extraordinary courage of yours, the Instructor has been struck utterly speechless!

[Exit, drawing Subhadra along]

INSTRUCTOR. I do not know what ruin will come of this. The presiding deity of the north is a goddess herself. I wonder why the boy's two eyes did not turn to stone that very instant. Let me go and inform the Acharya.

[Exit]

Enter the Acharya and the Upacharya

ACHARYA. After all this time, our Guru is coming.

UPACHARYA. He must be pleased with us.

ACHARYA. Pleased?

Perhaps. Perhaps indeed he is pleased. But how are we to know?

UPACHARYA. Why else would he come?

ACHARYA. At times I fear that perhaps it is because the measure of our transgression has become full that he comes.

UPACHARYA. No, Acharya, do not say such a thing. We have kept every strict rule to the letter—there has been no lapse.

ACHARYA. Strict rules? Yes, all have been observed.

UPACHARYA. This time makes exactly the twenty-seventh completion of the Thunder-Purification Vow in our abode. In what other institution is this even possible?

ACHARYA. No, it could happen nowhere else.

UPACHARYA. And yet why does such doubt arise in your mind?

ACHARYA. Doubt? Yes, I confess doubt has arisen. (remains silent a while) Look here, Sutasoma—for a long time a pain has been stirring in my heart, which I have told to no one. I am the Acharya of this abode; when doubt strikes at my heart, I must bear it alone, in silence. So I have borne it, all this while. But from the day I received the letter that the Guru is coming, I can no longer keep

my heart silent. It keeps crying out against every single thing we do here, day after day—useless, useless, all of it useless.

UPACHARYA. Acharya, what are you saying? Useless—all of it useless?

ACHARYA. Sutasoma, do you recall how long it has been since we came here? How many years would it be?

UPACHARYA. It is very hard to fix the time exactly. Here, the mind does not need age to grow ancient. I feel, myself, as though I had been sitting fixed here since long before I was even born.

ACHARYA. Look, Sutasoma—when I first began my discipline here, I was young, and I had hope that at the end of my striving something would be gained. That is why, the harder the discipline became, the more my zeal increased. Then, going round and round in that wheel of discipline, I quite forgot that there was any such thing as attainment at all. Today, hearing that the Guru is coming, my heart suddenly stopped short—today I asked myself: fool, you have read every scripture, kept every vow—now tell me, wretch, what have you gained? Nothing, nothing at all, Sutasoma. Today I see—this endless, ancient discipline has only circled round itself—only the endless repetition of each identical day has piled itself up into a heap.

UPACHARYA. Do not say it, do not say it, do not say such a thing. Acharya, why has your mind become so wildly distraught today!

ACHARYA. Sutasoma, have you found peace in your heart?

UPACHARYA. I have not known a single moment's unrest.

ACHARYA. No unrest at all?

UPACHARYA. None whatsoever. My days and nights are bound entirely to rule—a bondage a thousand years old. Gradually it has hardened into something as solid as stone, as unyielding as thunderbolt. Not for one instant need I think of anything at all. What greater peace could there be than this?

ACHARYA. No, no—then it is I who erred, Sutasoma, I who erred. What exists is right, exactly right. Somehow, by some means, peace must be found within this.

UPACHARYA. That is exactly why we are forbidden to leave this abode and go anywhere at all. It disturbs the mind—peace departs.

ACHARYA. Right, right—you speak rightly, Sutasoma. Going into the unknown, where would I find its end? Here everything is known, everything familiar—every question here finds its answer from within the scriptures kept here—there is no need to step outside for it, not one step. This indeed is unshaken peace. O Guru, when you come, disturb nothing, strike no blow—all around us is our peace; step gently, mindful of that. Have mercy, have mercy upon us. Our feet have grown stiff; we no longer have strength to walk. Many years, many ages have passed exactly so—ancient, ancient, everything has grown ancient—do not tell us today, suddenly, that we need something new—we have no more time left for that.

UPACHARYA. Acharya, I have never seen you so shaken before.

ACHARYA. I don't know—it seems to me somehow that it is not I alone, but everything all around that has become shaken. It seems to me that every single stone of our walls here is shaken. Can you not feel this, Sutasoma?

UPACHARYA. Not in the least. I see no trace, no shadow of deviation in the unshaken stillness here. We have no reason at all to be shaken. All our learning was completed long ago. All our gain is complete, all our accumulation sufficient.

ACHARYA. Today I begin to recall, faintly, long, long ago, before all else, in that first hour of dawn while darkness still lingered, from whom I began to learn—he was the true Guru—he was no book, no scripture, no formula, he was the Guru. Whatever he set before me, with that I began—all this time I believed, content, that this was surely it, that all was proceeding rightly—but—

UPACHARYA. It is right, all is proceeding rightly, Acharya, have no fear. My lord, that first pure darkness of dawn, we have here not allowed to perish even after a thousand years. Within its sacred, dim shadow we sit, teacher and student, elder and younger, all together, unmoved. Do you mean to say that after all this time, someone shall come and shake that very shadow of ours loose? Ruin! That shadow!

ACHARYA. Ruin indeed!

UPACHARYA. Then what will become of us! Must those who have long stood still, now rise again?

ACHARYA. That is exactly what I see before me. Is it merely my dream! And yet it seems to me that everything else is the dream—this stone wall, this bolted door, all these various grooves worn by ritual, this heaped mass of manuscripts, this ceaseless murmuring drone of mantra-chanting, day and night—all of it a dream.

UPACHARYA. There comes Panchak. What grass springs up even from stone! How was such a boy even possible in our abode! From childhood some fierce unruliness has lived in him that nothing could ever subdue. I fear that boy. He is our ill omen. In this whole abode he obeys you and you alone. Give him a good scolding.

ACHARYA. Very well, go on. I will speak with him a moment, alone.

[Exit Upacharya]

Enter Panchak

ACHARYA. (laying a hand on Panchak) Child, Panchak!

PANCHAK. What have you done! You've touched me?

ACHARYA. Why, is there some obstacle?

PANCHAK. I could not keep the rules of purity.

ACHARYA. Why could you not, child?

PANCHAK. My lord, why—that I cannot say. I have no means of managing it.

ACHARYA. Gentle one, you know how the rule of this place has, for a thousand years, given shelter and certainty to countless thousands of people. Can we simply break it as we please?

PANCHAK. Acharya, unless a rule that is true is allowed to be broken, it is never truly tested.

ACHARYA. I fear not for the rule, but why should I let the man who goes to break it come to ruin himself?

PANCHAK. I will offer no argument. If you command me with your own mouth that I must keep every rule, then I shall keep them. I know nothing of ritual observance—I know only you.

ACHARYA. Command you—I? That is beyond my power now.

PANCHAK. Why will you not command me, my lord?

ACHARYA. Why? Shall I tell you, child? When I look at you, I seem to see liberation itself with my own eyes. Even under such pressure, when I saw that life within you would in no way consent to die, that was when I first understood—the heart of man is truer than any mantra, truer than the most ancient rite a thousand years old. Go, child, go your own way. Ask me nothing more.

PANCHAK. Acharya, you do not know it, but it is you yourself who have drawn me out from beneath the wheel of the rule.

ACHARYA. How so, child?

PANCHAK. That I do not know, but you have given me something that is far more than any rite, far more than any rule.

ACHARYA. I never ask what you do or do not do, but today I shall ask you one thing. Do you go outside Achalayatan and mix with the Shonpangshu people?

PANCHAK. Do you wish to hear my answer to this?

ACHARYA. No, no, let it be, do not tell me. But the Shonpangshus are utterly base. Their company—

PANCHAK. Do you have some particular command regarding them?

ACHARYA. No, no, I have no command at all. If a mistake is to be made, then go and make it—make your mistake, go—heed us no more. Our Guru is coming, Panchak—if only I could sit before him as a child like you—if only he would loosen the bonds of my old age, release me, if only he would grant me freedom and say, from today you have the right to know truth through mistake

after mistake, if only he would lift from my mind the weight of a thousand, two thousand years of the ancient past!

PANCHAK. There comes the Upacharya—there must be some business—I take my leave.

[Exit]

Enter the Instructor and the Upacharya

UPACHARYA. (to the Instructor) The Acharya must certainly be told. He will be greatly distressed—but the responsibility is his alone.

ACHARYA. Instructor, is there any news?

INSTRUCTOR. Very bad news indeed.

ACHARYA. Then it should be told at once.

UPACHARYA. Instructor, out with it. Meanwhile the time for remedy is slipping away. Our astrologer says that within three and a half watches today, in the ascendant hour of Dwyatmakachara, is the only time for the ritual—if that hour passes, the reverse-cycle will begin, and then the penance will fall to only one quarter for a Brahmin, half for a Vaishya, and the rest entirely a Shudra's portion.

INSTRUCTOR. Acharya, Subhadra has opened the north window of our abode and cast his gaze outside.

ACHARYA. The north side belongs to a goddess.

INSTRUCTOR. That is exactly the worry. One cannot say how far the outside air has assailed the mantra-purified, restrained air of our abode.

UPACHARYA. The question now is, what is the penance for this sin?

ACHARYA. I cannot recall it. Instructor, perhaps—

INSTRUCTOR. No, I too cannot bring it to mind. This penance has not been needed in three hundred years—everyone has quite forgotten it. There comes Mahapanchak—if anyone knows, it will be he.

Enter Mahapanchak

INSTRUCTOR. Mahapanchak, you have heard everything, I suppose.

MAHAPANCHAK. That is exactly why I came; we are all impure now, the outside air has entered our abode.

UPACHARYA. None of us can recall the penance for this—you alone can tell us.

MAHAPANCHAK. The Compendium of Rites makes no mention of this at all—only the god Jvalanantakrita, in the Chapter of Superior Annual Rites, writes that the offender must undergo six months of the Great Darkness discipline.

UPACHARYA. The Great Darkness?

MAHAPANCHAK. Yes—he shall not see so much as a single ray of light. For a sin committed through light can only be cleansed through darkness.

UPACHARYA. Then, Mahapanchak, the entire charge rests upon you.

INSTRUCTOR. Come, let me go with you too. Meanwhile let someone bathe Subhadra in the Hindu-purging pool.

All make to leave

ACHARYA. Listen—there is no need.

INSTRUCTOR. No need of what?

ACHARYA. Of the penance.

MAHAPANCHAK. You say there's no need! I shall show you at once, opening the Chapter of Superior Annual Rites—

ACHARYA. It is not required—Subhadra shall undergo no penance at all. I myself bless him and—

MAHAPANCHAK. Is even this possible? Something found in no scripture whatever—do you mean—

ACHARYA. No, it shall not happen—if any wrong has occurred, it is mine alone. You have nothing to fear.

INSTRUCTOR. I have never before seen such weakness in you. Recall how, that time, on the third night of the eighteen-day purification fast, when the boy Kushalshil cried out "water, water" in his thirst and gave up his life, yet even then not one drop of water was given to his lips—you remained silent then. A trifling human life may exist today and vanish tomorrow, but the eternal law of righteousness is for all time.

Enter Panchak, leading Subhadra

PANCHAK. No fear, Subhadra, you have nothing to fear at all.—Grant this child freedom from fear, my lord.

ACHARYA. Child, you have committed no sin at all, child. The sin belongs to those who, without any wrong on your part, have for thousands upon thousands of years distorted their faces to terrify you. Come, Panchak.

[Exit, carrying Subhadra in his arms, with Panchak]

INSTRUCTOR. What has happened here, Upacharya?

MAHAPANCHAK. We remain impure, our sacrifices, vows, and fasts all continue to be defiled—this is not something one can simply endure.

INSTRUCTOR. This must not be endured at all. Does the Acharya mean, in the end, to make us equal with the barbarians?

MAHAPANCHAK. Today, in trying to save Subhadra, he means to destroy the eternal law itself! What manner of derangement of mind has come upon him! In this state he can no longer be counted as our Acharya.

UPACHARYA. How can that be! One who has once become Acharya—can we, by our own will—

MAHAPANCHAK. Upacharya, you too must join with us in this.

UPACHARYA. I am not of an age to join anything new.

INSTRUCTOR. In this hour of crisis, you speak of age!

UPACHARYA. Do whatever must be done to save religion. I must stand at the Acharya's side. We came here together; if the day of departure has come, then together we shall go out from here as well.

MAHAPANCHAK. But consider one thing. In the Acharya's absence, the right to become Acharya falls to you.

UPACHARYA. Mahapanchak, would I stand against the Acharya for such temptation? That you have opened your mouth to say such a thing—is that not a sin lesser than opening the north window here?

[Exit]

MAHAPANCHAK. Come, Instructor, let us delay no more. So long as the sinful, guilty Acharya remains in this abode, all rites are suspended, and we remain in a state of impurity.

ACT II

Hill and Field

PANCHAK'S SONG

This road goes to what place, oh, to what place—
who can say, who can say.
To what mountain's edge, what ocean's shore,
toward what far horizon of longing—
who can say, who can say.
Who comes and goes along this road, to what place
who can say, who can say.
What is its voice like, what its laughter,
in search of whom does it wander—
who can say, who can say.

The Shonpangshu troupe enters from behind, dancing

PANCHAK. Hey there! When did you fellows creep up behind me and start dancing?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. We dance whenever we get the chance—we can't keep our feet still.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Come, friend, let's hoist him on our shoulders and dance once round with him too.

PANCHAK. No, no, don't touch me, don't touch me!

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. Look at that! The ghost of Achalayatan has got hold of him. He won't let a Shonpangshu touch him.

PANCHAK. Do you know—our Guru is coming?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Truly? What sort of man is he? Does he have anything new about him?

PANCHAK. Some new things, and some old ones too.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Well then, send us word when he arrives—we'll come and have a look at him.

PANCHAK. What would you fellows understand of him! Heaven forbid. He isn't the Guru of Shonpangshus. If even one syllable of his teaching reached your ears, seven rows of royal soldiers would have to stand guard outside your borders as punishment. But you have a Guru of your own too—regarding him—

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. Guru! What Guru do we have! We're the band of Dadathakur—the Old Grandfather Fellow. We've never bowed to any guru at all.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. That is exactly why I want to see what such a thing looks like.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. One of us, named Chandak—I don't know what greed has taken hold of him; he got it into his head that if he learned a mantra from some guru of yours, he'd gain some marvelous power—so he's slipped away in secret.

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. But no one calling himself a Shonpangshu will give him a mantra; still, he isn't one to give up easily—he's stuck at it. It's because you people won't hand out mantras that he's so stubborn about wringing one out.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. But Brother Panchak, will your Guru be angry if we touch you?

PANCHAK. I can't say—who knows what offense he might take. All of you do every sort of work there is—that's your great fault. Do you plough the fields?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. We plough, indeed, and plough a great deal. Since we were born on this earth, we mean to teach it a good lesson before we leave it.

SONG

We plough the fields with joy.
Field after field, our hours pass from morning until dusk.
The sun rises, the rain falls, leaves stir in the bamboo grove,
the wind rises heavy with the scent of turned earth.

The song of green life writes its lines, line upon line, clear to see,
some young poet revels in the rhythm of the dance.
Joy leaps from the paddy's ear, all the earth bursts into laughter,
in Aghran's golden sunlight, in the full moon's radiance.

PANCHAK. Well, if you must plough, I suppose it's tolerable, somehow—but
tell me, do you plough that bitter gourd, that karkur vine?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. We do indeed.

PANCHAK. Karkur! For shame! And lentils too, I suppose?

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. Why wouldn't we? It's from right here that the karkur
and lentils go to your market.

PANCHAK. So they do—but do you know, we never let those who grow karkur
and lentils enter our houses?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Why not?

PANCHAK. Why not, indeed! Because it's forbidden.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Why forbidden?

PANCHAK. Just listen to that! Forbidden—and he asks why! It's a wonder your
faces aren't cursed by the very sight of you! Can't you grasp this simple truth,
that growing karkur and lentils is a terribly wicked thing?

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Why? Don't you people eat it yourselves?

PANCHAK. Of course we eat it, we relish it—but we won't so much as let our
shadow fall on those who grow it.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Why?

PANCHAK. Why again! I didn't know you were quite such utter fools. Our
forefather Bishkambhi was born from a karkur vine—don't you even know that
much?

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Born from a karkur vine—why?

PANCHAK. Why, why! You and your everlasting "why" are driving me to distraction!

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. And the lentils?

PANCHAK. Once, in some age or other, a pinch of lentil-flour blew up and landed right on the moustache of some great ancient sage on a fasting day; this cost him one sixty-thousandth part of the merit earned by his fast; so he stood up right there and cursed every lentil field in the whole world. Such was his power! What would you fellows have done, tell me?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Why speak of us? If lentil flour on a fasting day comes as far as our moustache, we'll only push it a little further in.

PANCHAK. Well, let me ask you one thing, and answer truly—do you people work with iron?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. We work iron, indeed, and a great deal.

PANCHAK. Ram! Ram! We, from time immemorial, have worked only with copper and bell-metal. We can melt iron, but not on every day. If Tuesday falls on the sixth lunar day, only then, after bathing, may we touch the bellows—but as for hammering iron—that could never be permitted!

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. We work iron, and so iron works for us too.

SONG

Hard iron lay senseless in a hard sleep,
I woke it from its slumber!
Hidden away in the darkness of a million ages,
oh, I roused it to wake.
It has learned obedience beneath my hand,
whatever I bid, it obeys just so,
today I have broken its long, long silence.
Motionless it lay, now set in motion
it rushes forth to conquer the world,
fearlessly today, with both hands, I hold its reins.

PANCHAK. The other day the Instructor told a room full of students that the Shonpangshu tribe is so vile that they work iron with their own hands. I told him,

the poor fellows have never studied anything at all, I know that well enough—why, they don't even know that this very earth was made from the matted, shorn hair of the demoness Trishira—yet if you try to explain such things they come at you to strike you—but does that mean they have not even this much sense of decency, that they'd work iron with their own hands? Today I see quite clearly—as is one's birth, so is one's understanding.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Why, what crime has iron committed?

PANCHAK. But look here, whatever it is, it's iron—that much you must admit.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. That much, surely.

PANCHAK. Well then, what more is there—can't you grasp even that?

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Still, there must be some reason for it.

PANCHAK. There's certainly a reason, but it exists only in the scriptures. So besides Brother Mahapanchak, very few people indeed have any chance of knowing it. No wonder the students there worship the ground Mahapanchak walks on! Well, friends, you keep astonishing me more and more. You grow lentils, and now you're hammering iron too—haven't you fallen yet under the curse of some five-eyed or seven-headed demon from any direction?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. If we do fall under one, we have iron too, and our curse is no small thing either.

PANCHAK. Tell me, has no one ever taught you any mantras?

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Mantras! What mantras?

PANCHAK. Something like the Thunder-Cleaving mantra—tata tata totoya totoya—

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. What does that mean?

PANCHAK. There he goes again! Meaning! Your presumption knows no bounds. Meaning in everything! Do you know the Keyuri mantra?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. No.

PANCHAK. The Marichi?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. No.

PANCHAK. The Mahashitabati?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. No.

PANCHAK. The Ushnishavijaya?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. No.

PANCHAK. The day the barber, mid-shave, nicks your left cheek and draws blood—what do you do then?

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. That day I land the barber two good slaps on both cheeks.

PANCHAK. No, no, I mean—that day, if you needed to cross the river, could you board the ferry-boat?

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. Easily.

PANCHAK. Oh, you're finishing me off entirely. I can bear no more. I hardly dare ask you another question. If I hear one more such answer, I'll dance for sheer madness right on your chests—I'll have no caste, no honor left at all. Friend, can you people do absolutely everything? Doesn't your Dadathakur forbid you anything at all?

SONG OF THE SHONPANGSHUS

We set our hand to every task, to every task at all.
No fetters bind us, none, none at all.
We look, we search, we understand,
we simply break, we mend, we strive,
we wander through every land in every guise.
Whether we can or cannot,
whether we win or whether we lose,
if we drop the reins for no cause at all, we'd rather die of shame.
By the strength of our own hands
we lift up and we create,

we breathe life and build our homes, and dwell right in their midst.

PANCHAK. Ruin—you're ruining me utterly! I've lost all my dignity. My own two feet are dancing along with your rhythm now. I see they mean to sweep me along too. Some day I'll hammer iron myself, I will—but the lentils—no, no, flee, friends, flee! Don't you see, I've come armed with scriptures, meaning to study.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. What scripture is that, brother? What's in it?

PANCHAK. This is our Compass-Wheel Almanac—it holds a wealth of important matters, I tell you.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Such as what?

PANCHAK. It sets forth in full detail the ten distinct colors, scents, and flavors belonging to the ten directions. The color of the south is like a rohu fish's belly, its scent is the scent of curd, its taste slightly sweet; the color of the east is green, its scent like a musth elephant, its taste tart like the bakul fruit—of the southwest corner—

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. No need to say more, brother. But in the ten directions, we never see any such colors or scents.

PANCHAK. If they could be seen, then seeing would suffice for everyone. Even the greatest fool would see them then. Such things can only be read in books—nowhere in the world can they actually be observed.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Then, brother, you go on reading your books; we're off.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. If we had to sit with our eyes shut like you people, thinking such thoughts, we'd go mad.

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. Come, friends, let's go roaming—we've got wind of some game. Tracks of a rhinoceros have been seen by the riverbank.

[Exeunt]

PANCHAK. These Shonpangshus, they live out in the open, but they spin about day and night in such a whirl that they never even see the outside world at all. Wherever they are, restlessness whips everything into a spin around them. The

moment they pause, the whole sky seems to burst into song. I notice these Shonpangshus—the instant they fall silent, they can hear nothing more; they love to make such noise because they're only listening to their own uproar. But this sky, blue and brimming with light, is speaking within my very blood, and my whole body hums like a swarm of bees.

SONG

A bee has come humming into my house.
Whose message does it come to tell me?
In what light, in what sky
has the madhabi vine awakened in the forest,
bringing word of that flower's awakening.
All day long it comes to tell me that same message.

How shall I stay in the house,
when my heart behaves so strangely,
how shall the days pass, counted one by one.
What spell has it cast upon me;
it has made me forget every task,
the hours slip by, weaving a net in the tune of its song.
Whose message does it come to tell me?

The Shonpangshu troupe re-enters

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Ho, friend Panchak, Dadathakur is coming.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Put away your book now, put it away—
Dadathakur is coming.

Enter Dadathakur

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Dadathakur!

DADATHAKUR. What is it?

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Dadathakur.

DADATHAKUR. What do you want?

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. Nothing at all—just calling you over for a moment.

PANCHAK. Dadathakur!

DADATHAKUR. Why, it's Panchak.

PANCHAK. They were all calling you, and it made me want to call you too. The more I think I shouldn't mix with them, the more entangled I become.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Why worry about mixing with our Dadathakur? He is the hundred-petaled lotus at the heart of every one of our circles.

SONG

This one, alone among us, a thousand people to us—
Dadathakur.

This is our own delightful fellow—
Dadathakur.

In every kind of task,
in every kind of guise,
This is our man of every game—
Dadathakur.

The man who gathers everyone together—
Dadathakur.

In our laughing company,
in our tears too,
This is the man for every moment—
Dadathakur.

In every household,
and out in the open too,
This is our own hidden corner's man—
Dadathakur.

This is the man who dwells within our hearts—
Dadathakur.

PANCHAK. Friend, you carry on with your Dadathakur day and night—for once let go of me, let me sit apart and talk quietly. Don't worry, I won't drag him back to Achalayatan and shut him behind bolted doors.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Take him along, why not. That would be good, actually. Then not even the father of all door-bolts could keep him shut in. Once

he goes there, even the very stones of your Achalayatan will start dancing, and flutes will play among your manuscripts.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Come, friends, let's go finish our chores. Let Brother Panchak sit a while with Dadathakur.

[Exeunt]

PANCHAK. Now that those Shonpangshus have gone, let me take the dust of your feet, Dadathakur. Seeing me do it, they'd have laughed themselves silly, so I do nothing in front of them.

DADATHAKUR. What need is there, friend, for the dust of my feet?

PANCHAK. I feel like doing it. When my heart brims over, my head bows of its own weight beneath it—unless I show reverence, I cannot live.

DADATHAKUR. Friend, I too cannot bear it otherwise. When affection overflows my heart, that very affection becomes my worship.

PANCHAK. My neck has grown sore from bowing again and again within Achalayatan. Yet all that bowing has only diminished myself—I have never once found the Great.

DADATHAKUR. When I come and sit within this greatest of all greatnesses of mine, whatever I do turns of itself into worship. Standing here beneath the open sky, gazing at your face—my heart blesses you even now—this too is my worship.

PANCHAK. Dadathakur, through your two eyes you see only that Greatness—but when I look at you, I feel I catch that very seeing of yours as well. Then nothing—beast, bird, tree, leaf—remains small to me any longer. Why, even romping about with those Shonpangshus no longer troubles me then.

DADATHAKUR. When I play with them, that play too becomes to me a vast play. It feels to me as though I were playing with the waterfall's current, with the ocean's waves.

PANCHAK. To you, everything has become great.

DADATHAKUR. No, friend, not great—it has become true. What is true is always great; what is small is merely false.

PANCHAK. Your bonds have fallen away, Dadathakur, every bond has fallen away. Who else could laugh and play, mingle and mix, work and set work aside so freely! Watching you like this, my heart grows restless. There is something—call it the Ultimate, or the Supreme, or whatever name one gives it—for it my heart seems to ache day and night. Now and then I start awake, thinking, surely now I have understood, surely now I have found it. Dadathakur, I hear our Guru is coming.

DADATHAKUR. The Guru! What trouble that will be. He'll cause a great commotion, I suppose.

PANCHAK. A little commotion would be a relief. Sitting quietly like this, my very breath is growing weary.

DADATHAKUR. Your learning is still raw—doesn't your heart feel afraid?

PANCHAK. My fear is the very least of all—I shan't make a single mistake.

DADATHAKUR. You won't?

PANCHAK. I know absolutely nothing, so there's no room left for mistakes. I shall stand fearlessly silent.

DADATHAKUR. Very well then—when your Guru comes, we'll see about him. But tell me now, how are you keeping?

PANCHAK. I am caught in a terrible tug-of-war, Dadathakur. I keep praying in my heart that the Guru, when he comes, will fix me one way or the other, once and for all—either let me loose fearlessly into this open air, or else press me down hard beneath a stack of books; let me be flattened evenly from head to foot, all in one piece.

DADATHAKUR. Well, no matter how many books your Guru piles upon you, I shall pull you out whole from underneath, unharmed.

PANCHAK. That I know you can do. But look here, Thakur, let me tell you one thing—inside Achalayatan, we keep our doors shut, quite contentedly. All our questions there have been settled entirely. That's why the people there feel so

very secure. There's no room for the slightest doubt in anyone's mind. If by some strange chance the thought should rise in someone's head—well now, on the day of an eclipse, why must we wipe the bedroom wall three times with a white goat's beard while chanting "hoon hoon titha titha bandha bandha amriter hoom phat swaha"—what could be the reason for that—then all you need do is take four betel-nuts and one measure of gold in your hand and go straight to Brother Mahapanchak, and you'll get such an answer that no more words will come to your tongue. Either accept it, or get your ears boxed and walk away—there's no third path in between. So everything there has become wonderfully simple. But Thakur, you drew me out from that place and brought me to this spot here, where I can't even glimpse the shadow of a Mahapanchak—wherever I turn, I get only fixed, ready-made answers. Twelve-sixteenths of every question remains unanswered. You've stirred my heart into such restlessness—and then?

DADATHAKUR. And then?

SONG

Whatever must happen will happen.

Will the one who made me weep simply let me go, just like that?

The one who lures me astray from the path, knows where that path leads;
the one whose hand released me from home is the very one who will draw me
back home again.

PANCHAK. How can you give me such immense courage, Thakur! You'd have me keep no fear, no anxiety at all, and yet since the day I was born our fears have known no end. For fear of death we recite the Amitayurdharini mantra, for fear of enemies the Mahasahasrapramardini, for fear within the household the Grihamatrika, for fear from outside the Abhayankari, for fear of snakes the Mahamayuri, for fear of thunderbolts the Bajragandhari, for fear of ghosts the Chandabhattacharika, for fear of thieves the Haraharhridaya. How many more names shall I recite?

DADATHAKUR. My friend has taught me such a mantra that by it the poison-fang of fear is broken forever.

PANCHAK. Looking at you, that much is plain to see. But where did you find that friend, Thakur?

DADATHAKUR. I believed I would find him, and so, with courage, I opened my heart wide—that's how I found him. I never had to go anywhere at all.

PANCHAK. How is that possible?

DADATHAKUR. The child who has no trust weeps in the dark bed the moment he cannot see his mother, but the child who trusts finds his mother filling his heart the very instant he reaches out his hand. Then even the darkness of fear turns sweet and close. If the mother then asks, "Do you want a light?" the child says, "With you here, light and darkness are the same to me."

PANCHAK. Dadathakur, I have come this far to you, leaving my Achalayatan behind with a great deal of courage, but I cannot summon the courage to go even as far as that friend of yours.

DADATHAKUR. Why, what is it you fear?

PANCHAK. The bird born in a cage fears the open sky more than anything else. It suffers pain from the iron bars, and yet the moment the door is opened, its heart pounds with fear, thinking, "How shall I live, if I'm not shut in?" I have never learned to leave myself fearlessly in your keeping. This has been our lifelong habit.

DADATHAKUR. You people think it a great achievement to fasten many locks and keep the chest sealed shut—but you never trouble to find out what's actually inside the chest.

PANCHAK. My brother says that only by pushing away everything that exists in the world can one attain the true thing at last. That is why, day and night, we do nothing but push things away—how much we have pushed away is our only reckoning—and even that reckoning has no end in sight.

DADATHAKUR. Your brother says that, but my brother says one attains the true thing only when one has everything. That's why I cannot bear to shut my door—I keep everything wide open, day and night. Tell me, Panchak, does no one know that you slip out of your abode like this?

PANCHAK. I know that our Acharya knows. We have never once spoken of it directly—he never asks, and I never say. But when I return from outside, the moment he looks at me, he understands. Then he draws me close and sits me beside him; it's as though some hunger in his eyes is satisfied simply by looking

at me. It's as if he sees the outside sky reflected in my very face. Thakur, the day I can bring you and the Acharya together, all the sorrow of my Achalayatan will be lifted.

DADATHAKUR. That day will be a blessed day for me too.

PANCHAK. But Thakur, you have made me terribly restless. Sometimes I fear my mind may never find peace again.

DADATHAKUR. Am I myself at peace, friend? Because waves have risen within me, waves rise in you too.

PANCHAK. But then why do these Shonpangshus of yours say they find such great peace with you—where is that peace, I ask you? I certainly don't see it.

DADATHAKUR. They need that kind of peace. Otherwise the sheer friction of their labor would set their work itself ablaze, and no one could stand beside them.

PANCHAK. Do they find peace by seeing you?

DADATHAKUR. This madman here has both gone mad and found peace. That's why he can drive some to distraction and bind others fast. The very spell by which the full moon stirs the ocean into restlessness—that same spell lulls the whole earth to sleep.

PANCHAK. Raise the wave then, Thakur, raise it. I want to overflow every bank. I tell you truly, my mind has gone wild, only I cannot find the strength—so, Dadathakur, my heart longs only to come to you—give it strength—give it strength—don't let it stop now.

SONG

Whom do I call out to, oh,
break loose my bonds, oh, set them free!
I stand here with my hands outstretched—
take me, seize me, plunder me away.
Call me with such a call
that shame and fear may vanish quite,
that I may cast off everything, push past everything,
and run, and run, headlong.

I am bound by dreams,
 only the confusion of sleep restrains me,
 it clings so close about my heart,
 with eyelids closed fast shut;
 oh, day after day
 where has my very self dissolved,
 only in a wordless flood of tears
 does my spirit cry aloud.

Tell me, Dadathakur, need you weep no more? The one of whom you speak—
 has he wiped away your tears?

DADATHAKUR. He wipes away the tears, but he does not banish them.

PANCHAK. But brother, when I look at these Shonpangshus of yours, I think to myself, they have never even learned to shed tears. Do you not wish them to weep at all?

DADATHAKUR. Where rain never falls from the sky, water must be brought by digging a canal. They too shall need that nourishment one day, and it will be carried to them from afar. But I have seen they do not want rain—it interrupts their work, and that they cannot bear at all; such is simply their nature.

PANCHAK. Thakur, I stand here gazing, waiting for exactly that rain. All that could wither has withered, not a trace of green remains anywhere—now surely the time has come—I feel as though I hear thunder rumbling from far away. Perhaps now dense blue clouds will fill this scorched sky, will fill it to overflowing.

SONG

DADATHAKUR. It has come, it has come, at last, oh my heart.
 Now let me hear your song.
 Word runs from blade to blade of grass,
 the very earth seems to shudder,
 that silent sky at the horizon lies with ear turned, listening.

PANCHAK. Thakur, such joy fills my heart I cannot even give it voice. I long to clasp this very earth to me. Call out, call out—shatter this whole sky with a single cry of yours.

SONG

Today, sing just as the sky is singing—
sing that way, oh, sing.

Today, gaze just as the sky is gazing—
gaze that way, oh, gaze.

Today the wind, leaf by leaf,
sets the forest weeping with its murmur,
just so, within the depths of my heart,
weep, oh, make it weep.

Listen, brother, there goes the gong.

DADATHAKUR. Yes, it's sounding.

PANCHAK. I can stay no longer.

DADATHAKUR. Why?

PANCHAK. Today is our Lamp-Offering worship.

DADATHAKUR. What must be done?

PANCHAK. Today we must bring clay from beneath the fig tree, anoint it with the five sacred products of the cow, and recite the Virochana mantra. Then upon that clay small shrines must be shaped, one after another, and a banner set atop each one. A thousand such shrines must be made before we may take water after sunset.

DADATHAKUR. And what is the fruit of this?

PANCHAK. A dwelling is thereby prepared for our forefathers in the realm of departed spirits.

DADATHAKUR. And for those who still live in this world—?

PANCHAK. A dwelling is not made so easily for them. Let me go now, Thakur, I don't know when we shall meet again. Let me carry the touch of your hand with me as I go—let this go with me always—let this loosen the coils of the serpent's bond that holds me fast. There come the Shonpangshu band—seeing us sitting here, they don't like it, they're growing restless. They want to make a

great commotion around you—well, let them—blessed are they, they have you near them day and night.

DADATHAKUR. Does making a commotion bring one nearer? The very road that leads close by escapes the eyes of those who are nearest.

Enter the Shonpangshu troupe

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Hey there, friend Panchak, where are you off to?

PANCHAK. My time has come, I must go.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. What! How can that be? Today's our forest feast, I won't let you go today.

PANCHAK. No, friend, that cannot be—the gong is sounding.

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. What gong is that for?

PANCHAK. You wouldn't understand. Today is Lamp-Offering worship—no childish games today. I'm off. (Having gone some distance, he suddenly runs back)

SONG

Ho there, ho, ho, ho, ho—
let me go, let me go, let me go!
Like a bird freed from the forest
in the sheer joy of its heart.
Like the dense downpour of monsoon
that knows no binding at all,
like storm-wind, like a bandit
circling round to plunder the sky.
Ho there, ho, ho, ho, ho—
who shall ever hold me fast!
Like the wildfire's dance
encircling every grove.
Like the thunderbolt racing headlong,
roaring in the storm-torn cloud,
tearing with wild laughter through the breast of every obstacle in its path.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Well then, well then, Brother Panchak, come along with us to our forest feast.

PANCHAK. Very well, let's go. (pausing a moment, hesitating) But friend, I'll go only as far as the forest, not as far as the feast itself.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. How can that be! What joy is there in feasting if not all together?

PANCHAK. No, friend, joy of that sort cannot be permitted with you all, in that particular place.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Why not? If we wish it, it can be permitted.

PANCHAK. Do you not know that nothing enters our three-fold boundary simply because someone wishes it? It cannot be forced by beating, cannot be pushed through, cannot be dragged in even by ten elephants yoked together, and you say it can be permitted just by wishing it!

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. Well, never mind then, friend. You go on into the forest—you needn't sit down to eat with us.

PANCHAK. Indeed I shall, indeed I shall! Today I will sit down to eat, I will eat—today I'll sit and eat with everyone together—today, in my joy, I'll set fire to every branch of the Wish-Fulfilling Tree of Ritual—I'll burn it all to ashes! Dadathakur, won't you eat with them too?

DADATHAKUR. I eat with them every day.

PANCHAK. Then why haven't you asked me to eat too?

DADATHAKUR. I don't ask anyone, friend—I simply sit down myself.

PANCHAK. No, brother, that manner won't do with me. Command me outright, and then I shall be saved. I cannot go on arguing endlessly with myself and dying of it.

DADATHAKUR. I won't let you off so easily, Panchak. The day the command rises up within your own self—that day I shall give the command.

A group of Shonpangshus enters

DADATHAKUR. What is it? Why come running in such a hurry?

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. They've killed Chandak!

DADATHAKUR. Who has killed him?

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. The King of Sthavirapattan.

PANCHAK. Our king? Why—why did he go to kill him?

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Chandak was practicing austerities in a ruined temple in the forest, hoping to become stationary and unmoving. Their King Mantharagupta heard of it and had him cut down.

THIRD SHONPANGSHU. Their country's wall used to be thirty-five cubits high; now they've set men to work raising it to eighty cubits, lest all the people of the world suddenly leap over and become stationary too.

FOURTH SHONPANGSHU. They've captured ten Shonpangshus from our land—perhaps they mean to sacrifice them to their goddess of Time-and-Ashes.

DADATHAKUR. Then let us go.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Where?

DADATHAKUR. To Sthavirapattan.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. This very moment?

DADATHAKUR. Yes, this very moment.

ALL. Come on, come on, let's go!

DADATHAKUR. Our King has commanded—when their sin takes the shape of a wall and rises to blot out the light of the sky, that very wall must be brought down into dust.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. We'll bring it down into dust.

ALL. We'll bring it down.

DADATHAKUR. Over the ruins of their broken wall, we shall build a royal highway.

ALL. Yes, we'll build a royal highway there.

DADATHAKUR. Our King's chariot of victory shall pass over it.

ALL. Yes, it shall pass. It shall pass.

PANCHAK. Dadathakur, what is all this!

DADATHAKUR. This is our forest feast.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Come, Panchak, come along.

DADATHAKUR. No, no—not Panchak. Go on, friend, go back to your Achalayatan. We shall meet again when the time comes.

PANCHAK. I don't know, Thakur—though I have no part in any of this, still I feel I want to rush out along with you all.

DADATHAKUR. No, Panchak—your Guru is coming, you must wait for him there.

PANCHAK. Then I'll go back. But Thakur, every time I come out here and meet you, I fear that when I return, Achalayatan may no longer be able to hold me. Either make that place larger, or let me grow no further.

DADATHAKUR. Come then, friends, let us be on our way.

ACT III

Achalayatan

Mahapanchak, the Instructor, Sanjib, Vishwambhar, Jyotirmoy

VISHWAMBHAR. If the Acharya, Adinapunya, will not renounce his office of his own free will, then let him remain as he is—but we shall obey none of his commands.

JYOTIRMOY. He says that his own Guru seated him in that office, and it is his Guru alone who will remove him from that seat—so he waits.

Enter a student

MAHAPANCHAK. Well, Trinanjan, what is it?

TRINANJAN. Today is the twelfth day of the lunar fortnight, the day appointed for the completion of my Lokeshwar vow. But what am I to do—there is no settling who our Acharya even is—all our sacred rites are falling to ruin—what is to be done about this?

MAHAPANCHAK. I have told you already—every task now attempted in this hermitage is coming to nothing.

THE INSTRUCTOR. It is not merely coming to nothing—our transgressions are piling up, one upon another.

SANJIB. This is truly a most disastrous state of affairs.

JYOTIRMOY. But our Guru cannot be long in coming now—how much more harm can occur in the meantime?

SANJIB. Oh, spare us your arguments. Ruin needs no time at all to occur. For death, a single moment is quite sufficient.

Enter a scholar

THE INSTRUCTOR. Well, scholar, what is the matter?

SCHOLAR. You yourselves told me to seat Subhadra in the Great Darkness discipline—but who has the power to seat him there?

MAHAPANCHAK. Why, what obstacle has arisen?

SCHOLAR. The very embodiment of obstruction has arisen—your own brother!

MAHAPANCHAK. Panchak?

SCHOLAR. Yes. I had just finished bathing Subhadra in the Hingumardan pool when Panchak came and snatched him away.

MAHAPANCHAK. No, this cannot go on any longer with this wretched creature. I have endured a great deal. This time, banishment is the only fit course. But scholar, did you simply allow this to happen?

SCHOLAR. Do you think I fear your Panchak! It was the Acharya Adinapunya himself who came and commanded him—that is how he found such boldness.

TRINANJAN. The Acharya, Adinapunya!

SANJIB. Our own Acharya himself!

VISHWAMBHAR. What is becoming of things, gradually! I have lived in this abode all this time, and never once have I heard of such lawlessness. To snatch away one who has just bathed from the very vow he was preparing to keep! And this, the doing of our own Acharya!

JYOTIRMOY. Let us go and ask him about it directly, at least.

VISHWAMBHAR. No, no—the Acharya, we cannot—

MAHAPANCHAK. What can't you do to the Acharya—out with it.

VISHWAMBHAR. That is exactly what I am pondering—what is to be done. Perhaps you yourself might tell us what must be done with him.

MAHAPANCHAK. I say he must be restrained and kept in check.

SANJIB. How so?

MAHAPANCHAK. How else! Just as a maddened elephant must be restrained.

JYOTIRMOY. Do you mean, then, that our revered Acharya should be—

MAHAPANCHAK. Yes, he must be confined. Why do you all stand there in silence! Can you not manage it?

TRINANJAN. Why should we not manage it? If you yourself give the command, then—

JYOTIRMOY. But does scripture permit such a—

MAHAPANCHAK. Scripture provides for it.

TRINANJAN. Then what remains to trouble us?

THE INSTRUCTOR. Mahapanchak, nothing troubles you at all, it seems—but I confess, I am afraid.

Enter the Acharya

ACHARYA. My children, all this time you have accepted me as your Acharya; today the day of my judgment before you has arrived. I confess my transgression is without end, without end at all—and the penance for it, I alone must bear.

TRINANJAN. Then why delay further? Meanwhile our ruin only deepens.

JYOTIRMOY. Look here, Trinanjan—we must fill up this gaping mouth of yours with ashes from the rubbish-heap. Wait a moment, will you.

ACHARYA. Our Guru departed, and we sat down in his place with our books; and no matter how much we fed upon their dried leaves, our hunger was never satisfied, only the pile of books kept growing higher. The less life there is in food, the greater its bulk becomes. Day after day, in crowds, you came to me bearing your own young, open hearts before that heap of withered scripture—what was it you sought? The nectar-word? But my own palate has dried to wood! My tongue holds not the faintest trace of any living taste! Now, at last, bring me that word, O Guru—bring the word of the living heart. Come and wake this life with life itself.

PANCHAK. (running in) Let every dried leaf be swept away in the moist wind of your new monsoon—come, O tender new shoots—rush forth, burst into bloom! Brother Jyotirmoy, do you not hear it? Within the sky's dense blue clouds a cry of freedom has risen—"Dance today, oh, dance!"

SONG

Oh, oh, oh, my heart has gone wild with joy—
who can still it today, oh who!
It stretches out its hands toward the sky—
who can bring it down today, oh who!

Jyotirmoy joins first in the dance-song, then Vishwambhar, then Sanjib

MAHAPANCHAK. Panchak, you shameless monkey, wherever you've come from—stop, I tell you, stop!

SONG

PANCHAK. Oh, my heart has gone wild with joy—
who can still me today, oh who.

MAHAPANCHAK. Instructor, did I not tell you a goddess's curse had begun to take hold? See how she is shaking the very reason of us all—soon you will find not one stone of Achalayatan left standing.

PANCHAK. No, none will be left, none at all—every stone will go mad, and no one will know where they scatter to, and they'll break into song too—

Come, brother, dance, oh brother, dance—
today, freed at last, let us live, oh let us live—
cast off all shame, all fear, oh cast it off.
Who can still you today, oh who!

MAHAPANCHAK. Instructor, what are you standing there gaping at! Don't you see, ruin has begun! You wretched, corrupted fools, you accursed barbarians—is today a day for dancing?

PANCHAK. The moment ruin's drum begins to sound, brother, the dancing begins of itself.

MAHAPANCHAK. Silence, you ill-omened wretch! Students, do not lose yourselves so utterly. Remember, dire peril is upon us.

VISHWAMBHAR. Acharya, at your feet I beg you, place Subhadra in our hands—do not hold him back from his penance.

ACHARYA. No, my child, make no such request of me.

SANJIB. Consider, I beg you, what fortune awaits Subhadra! How few attain the Great Darkness discipline! He shall win divinity itself here on this very earth.

ACHARYA. Do not implicate me in the sin of fashioning gods by brute force. He is human, he is a child—it is precisely for that reason that he is dear to the gods.

TRINANJAN. Look here—you are our Acharya, one whom we revere, but the wrong you commit today compels us to resort to force.

ACHARYA. Do so, then—use force, disobey me, strike me—I am fit only for dishonor. That my punishment should begin at your very hands convinces me that the Guru has indeed manifested himself. But that is precisely why I say I shall let the cause of this punishment grow no further. I cannot deliver Subhadra into your hands.

TRINANJAN. You cannot?

ACHARYA. No.

MAHAPANCHAK. Then there must be no more hesitation. Trinanjan, it is now your duty to seize him by force and confine him within his chamber. Cowards, will none of you find the courage? Must I do this deed myself, then?

JYOTIRMOY. Beware—no one shall lay a hand upon our revered Acharya.

VISHWAMBHAR. No, no, Mahapanchak, we cannot bear to see him dishonored.

SANJIB. Let us all together fall at his feet and persuade him. Will he, out of mercy for one boy alone, bring misfortune upon every one of us?

TRINANJAN. How many children of this very Achalayatan have given up their lives in fasting—and what harm came of that!

Enter Subhadra

SUBHADRA. Let me undertake the Great Darkness vow.

PANCHAK. You have ruined everything! I left him sleeping when I came here—when did he wake and come here on his own?

ACHARYA. Child Subhadra, come into my arms. Whatever sin you fear, that sin is mine—I myself shall perform the penance for it.

TRINANJAN. No, no, come, Subhadra—you are no mere mortal, you are divine.

SANJIB. You are blessed.

VISHWAMBHAR. No one your age has ever had the fortune to undertake the Great Darkness. Truly your mother bore you to good purpose.

THE INSTRUCTOR. Ah, Subhadra, you are indeed a true child of our Achalayatan.

MAHAPANCHAK. Acharya, do you still mean to deprive this boy, by force, of this supreme merit?

ACHARYA. Alas, alas, it is precisely at seeing this that my heart is breaking. If you had torn him weeping from my hands by force and carried him off, even that would have grieved me less than this. But I see now that the cruel arm of a thousand years has seized even so small a child's mind in its stony grip, has pressed its five-fingered mark upon it entirely. When did it find the time? Does it labor even within the womb?

PANCHAK. Subhadra, come, brother, let us go and perform the penance together—I too shall go with you.

ACHARYA. Child, I too shall go.

SUBHADRA. No, no—I must remain alone—if others are present, it becomes a sin!

MAHAPANCHAK. Blessed child, today you have taught your venerable old Acharya a lesson. Come with me instead.

ACHARYA. No—so long as I remain your Acharya, no vow may begin or end except by my command. I forbid it. Subhadra, do not disobey your Acharya's word—come, Panchak, take him up in your arms and bring him along.

[Exeunt Panchak and the Acharya and the Instructor, carrying Subhadra]

MAHAPANCHAK. Shame upon you! No power on earth could save cowards such as you from ruin. You will destroy yourselves, and drag everyone else down with you. Your Instructor has become just the same—he too is nowhere to be seen now.

Enter a foot-soldier

SOLDIER. The King approaches!

MAHAPANCHAK. What can this mean! Why, it is our King, Mantharagupta himself.

Enter the King

KING. Greetings to all of you, godlike men.

ALL. Victory to the King!

MAHAPANCHAK. All is well, I trust?

KING. The gravest of news. Messengers from the border regions have brought word that Dadathakur's band has come and begun tearing down the wall at the edge of our kingdom.

MAHAPANCHAK. Who is this Dadathakur's band?

KING. Why, those Shonpangshus.

MAHAPANCHAK. If the Shonpangshus break through our wall, they will lay everything utterly to waste.

KING. That is exactly why I have come rushing here. My question to you is this—why has our wall been broken?

MAHAPANCHAK. Surely the Great Terrible One, of the Flowing Topknot Discipline, has been guarding our wall.

KING. Then has he bowed his own topknot before these lawless Shonpangshus! Surely your recitation of mantras has grown impure, some lapse has crept into your rites—otherwise this is beyond all belief.

MAHAPANCHAK. You have guessed rightly indeed, Your Majesty.

SANJIB. A goddess's curse can never fail to take effect.

KING. A goddess's curse! Heaven help us! Why has she cursed us?

MAHAPANCHAK. The window facing north, where her seat is established here, was opened one day.

KING. (sitting down heavily) Then there is no hope left at all.

MAHAPANCHAK. The Acharya, Adinapunya, will not permit penance to be performed for this sin.

TRINANJAN. He has forcibly kept us all thwarted.

KING. Then it was in vain that I called my army together. Come, come, banish Adinapunya at once, this very moment.

MAHAPANCHAK. At the coming new moon—

KING. No, no, there is no time now to consult almanacs for auspicious dates. Danger is imminent. In times of crisis I may exercise my royal prerogative—scripture makes provision for this.

MAHAPANCHAK. Yes, it does. But who shall become Acharya?

KING. You—you shall. I now establish you in the office of Acharya, this very instant. Let the guardian deities of the four directions bear witness, let these celibate students bear witness.

MAHAPANCHAK. Where would you have Adinapunya banished?

KING. Not outside the abode—who knows, he might join forces with the enemy. My counsel is this: at the edge of the abode there is a settlement of the Dabhaks—confine him there for these few days.

JYOTIRMOY. The Acharya, Adinapunya, among the Dabhaks! They are the lowest, the most fallen of castes.

MAHAPANCHAK. He who defiantly transgresses proper conduct will only have his eyes opened by dwelling among the lawless. Do not imagine that I shall spare Panchak merely because he is my brother—his fate lies there as well.

KING. Look here, Mahapanchak, everything now depends upon you—I must have victory in this battle. Should I be defeated, that defeat will be an everlasting stain upon your Achalayatan itself.

MAHAPANCHAK. Have no fear whatsoever.

ACT IV

The Dabhak Settlement

PANCHAK. Banishment, oh my banishment! I am saved, I am saved. But why can I still not draw my heart out from within its old shell!

SONG

Who has driven these bees from their home, oh who.
Tell me, brothers, oh tell me true.
In the secret heart of the flower
a silent flute plays its tune—
by that piping of theirs, how has my heart been so stolen away, oh.
The honey that lies hidden there
reveals itself to no one's touch—
by that honey of theirs, how has my heart been filled so full, oh.

The Dabhak band enters

FIRST DABHAK. Dadathakur!

PANCHAK. What's this now? Whom do you call Dadathakur? Has the name "Dadathakur" been written on my very body without my knowing it?

FIRST DABHAK. What shall we give you to eat, Thakur?

PANCHAK. Whatever you have, that is what we shall eat.

SECOND DABHAK. Our food? How can that be? It has all been touched by us—defiled.

PANCHAK. Don't trouble yourself over that, brother. The fire of hunger in the belly knows no one's touch as defilement—it purifies everything. Tell me, what do you people do first thing in the morning? Do you perform the purification rite over your water-vessel with the six-syllabled mantra?

THIRD DABHAK. Thakur, we are lowly Dabhak folk—we know nothing of such things at all. Generations upon generations we have lived here, and never once has the dust of your feet fallen on this ground. Today, recite your mantras and deliver our forefathers from perdition, Thakur.

PANCHAK. Heaven help us! What are you saying! Must mantras be recited here too! Then what was the use of my banishment at all? Well then, tell me, what do you do of a morning?

FIRST DABHAK. We know no scripture—we sing the names of God.

PANCHAK. What sort of thing is that? Let me hear one.

SECOND DABHAK. Thakur, you will laugh to hear it.

PANCHAK. Why, brother, I myself have spent all this time making others laugh—now you'll make me laugh too! Even to hear that would gladden my heart. You haven't yet learned what manner of worthless fellow I am, that you still fear my laughter. Have no worry—sing it out fearlessly.

FIRST DABHAK. Very well, brother, come then—strike up the song.

SONG

O shore of the shoreless, O refuge of the refugeless,
O protector of the orphan, O lord of the fallen!
O light of the eye, O honey of the tongue,
O necklace of jewels, O friend of the soul!
O beauty beyond form, O speech that enchants the heart,
O joy of the utmost, O sorrow of the deepest heart!
O wealth of the beggar, O the mute one's own speech—
O cradle of birth, O the lap of death itself!

PANCHAK. Give it to me, brother, wipe away all my mantras and incantations, strip me of all my scholarly striving, and teach me that song of yours instead.

FIRST DABHAK. Our song?

PANCHAK. Yes, indeed, that very song of the lowly, that weeping of the powerless. It is precisely this ignorant wisdom of yours, this beggar's sole possession, that I have sought all along without finding—that is why nothing ever came of my studies, why all my ritual labor came to nothing! Ah, brother, let me hear one more—a thirst of so many days is not quenched so quickly.

SONG OF THE DABHAK BAND

We know only Him, only Him, our friend and companion.
We tug and pull at Him, day and night alike.
With Him we graze the cattle,
we play the flute,
for His sake we spread our seat in the banyan's shade.
Making Him the boatman at the helm,
we sail our vessel,
in the tempest's hour, we revel in the play of waves.
When the day's work is done,
in the evening
we light the lamp in the house, watching for His path.

Enter the Acharya

ACHARYA. My banishment has been well rewarded indeed.

FIRST DABHAK. Father Thakur, our whole settlement has found deliverance today. All this time, the dust of your feet had never once fallen here.

ACHARYA. That was my misfortune, my own misfortune alone.

SECOND DABHAK. Father, who shall we get to draw the water for your bath? Here, there is no one—

ACHARYA. Why, you children yourselves shall bring it.

FIRST DABHAK. We ourselves shall bring it! How can that be!

ACHARYA. Yes, my children—with the water you draw, my consecration shall take place today.

SECOND DABHAK. Come then, brothers, let us go. Let us fetch water from our river Patala.

[Exeunt]

ACHARYA. Look here, Panchak—when I first came here yesterday, I felt myself weighed down with the deepest shame.

PANCHAK. As for me, I spent the whole of last night lying outside the house.

ACHARYA. While I sat here, utterly abashed, considering myself steeped in sin from head to foot—just then, at evening, they returned from their labors and all together struck up a song—

"O ferryman of the far shore, can the landing yet be seen?
Shall all our burdens now be set down, shall all our debts be redeemed?"

Listening to it, I felt as though some stony mass within me had dissolved away. Day after day I have gone about bearing what burden, I wonder—yet with what simple, unguarded faith they climb aboard that same ferryman's boat!

PANCHAK. I have observed one virtue in this Dabhak people—they know how to call His name outright, plainly, without disguise. And I, forever muttering tata tata totoya totoya, have brought my tongue to such a state that the simplest word will not come forth from it at all. Acharya, simply from not being able to call properly, something within my breast has grown so parched—I long, just once, to cry out with all my heart, freely. But my throat will not open, my lord—reciting scripture after scripture has sealed it shut. Things have come to such a pass that even weeping, should it come today, gets caught fast within me.

ACHARYA. That is precisely why, my child, I keep wondering when our Guru will come. Let him sweep away all this clutter and make our hearts simple once more—let him take us by the hand and unite us all together.

PANCHAK. I feel as though I catch the scent of wet earth—somewhere, it seems, the rains have come down.

ACHARYA. There—Panchak, can you hear something?

PANCHAK. What do you mean, sir?

ACHARYA. It seems to me as though Subhadra is weeping.

PANCHAK. Could such a sound carry from here? This must surely be some other noise.

ACHARYA. Perhaps so, Panchak—yet I have carried his weeping within my own breast; why has his crying struck me so? He who cannot bear to weep, and yet will not be consoled at all—he is weeping still.

PANCHAK. By now they will have seated him in the Great Darkness—and everyone standing far off will be crying out in praise, "Subhadra, the child-god!" I tell you truly, if I were king, I would seize every one of them by the ear and turn them into gods myself—I would not let them off so easily.

ACHARYA. They are making their own god weep, Panchak. At that very god's weeping the whole sky of this kingdom has grown restless with grief. And yet their wall of stone has not yet been shattered into a hundred pieces.

PANCHAK. My lord, all of us together wept for him so, and yet we could not drive it away. In whatever chamber we seated him, we extinguished every light in that chamber—we can see him no more—and yet still he sits there.

SONG

Through every life, through every birth,
 O my compassionate one—
 I weep, and I make you weep too,
 O my compassionate one!
 You dwell within my heart,
 there such deep sorrow resounds,
 oh, does this become you at all,
 O my compassionate one!
 In this chamber with bolted doors
 the darkness never once departs,
 yet still you remain within it,
 O my compassionate one!
 No seat has ever been spread there for you,
 no garland ever strung for you;
 my head bows low in shame,
 O my compassionate one.

Enter the Upacharya

ACHARYA. Why, Sutasoma! What good fortune is mine. But why have you come here?

UPACHARYA. Where else could I go, tell me. The moment you departed, how harsh, how utterly desiccated Achalayatan became—I cannot even say. Come now, let me embrace you once.

ACHARYA. Do not touch me—since yesterday I have performed no purification rites at all, neither for vessel nor for spirit.

UPACHARYA. Let it be so, let it be so. If your embrace too has become impure, then grant me the sacred initiation of that very impurity.

They embrace

PANCHAK. Upacharya, whatever wrongs I have committed against you in Achalayatan—forgive them all today, here in this Dabhak settlement.

UPACHARYA. Come, my child, come.

ACHARYA. Sutasoma, the Guru is coming soon—how could you leave your post there and come away?

UPACHARYA. That is exactly why I came away. The Guru is coming, and you are not there! And Mahapanchak will come forward to welcome the Guru—must I stand by and watch that too? Even if the great sage Jaladhargarjitaghosha-Susvaranakshatrashankhusumita himself, that very worm of scripture, were to come and tell me that such a man is fit to summon the Guru, still I could not accept it.

PANCHAK. Ah, look how the clouds have gathered even as we spoke! Listen, Acharya, thunder upon thunder! It seems the sky itself has been scorched from every direction at once!

ACHARYA. There—the rain descends—rain the earth has awaited through how many long days—rain the forest has dreamed of through how many long nights.

PANCHAK. Now at last the earth's thirst is quenched—this dark soil here—this very soil beneath everyone's feet.

The Dabhak band enters with musical instruments, carrying baskets of ketaki and kadamba flowers

ACHARYA. My children, what is all this splendor! What is happening today!

FIRST DABHAK. Father Thakur, today the splendor is all for your sake. We have never had this chance before—today we have it.

SECOND DABHAK. We know nothing of scripture at all—your gods never come to our homes.

THIRD DABHAK. But today some god, for whatever reason, has come as a guest into the homes of us lowly folk.

FIRST DABHAK. So with whatever we have, we shall serve you.

SECOND DABHAK. Since we have no mantras, we can only sing.

Playing the madal drum, a dance-song

Torrential rain pours down in storm,
all day long, alone in the house.
The moist wind blows in gusts,
the wild river rises, awakened,
dark clouds gather round the sky,
darkness falls upon the tamal grove.
O friend, at the day's end
in what strange guise have you come.
With the edge of my garment I shall dry your wet clothes,
wipe your feet, your tangled hair.
Though the night of darkness grows ever more dense,
I shall light the lamp of love,
I shall spread out my very soul
and lay your feet upon it.

ACHARYA. Panchak, we too must call out just so—the one who has struck at the door with thunder, call him into our home—delay no longer.

Forgetting life and death alike
I shall welcome you as my own,
I shall conquer all shame and fear
and stand today at your side.
Every binding chain shall burn away,
I shall gather joy and sorrow both together,
on this stormy night, with you,
I shall step out fearless and free.

ALL. Torrential rain pours down in storm—
you have come home, the door flung wide.

A brightness flashes in my eyes,
every heart awakens with delight,
I long to gaze upon your face
yet my eyes, trembling, scarcely dare to open.

PANCHAK. There, the thunder again.

ACHARYA. The rain has redoubled its force.

UPACHARYA. It seems the whole night will pass just so.

ACT V

Achalayatan

Mahapanchak, Trinanjan, Sanjib, Vishwambhar, Jyotirmoy

MAHAPANCHAK. Why have you all grown so agitated! There is no cause for fear.

TRINANJAN. You keep saying there is no fear, yet word has come that enemy forces have breached the very wall of Achalayatan.

MAHAPANCHAK. This is beyond belief. Sooner would stone float upon water! That barbarians should breach the wall of Achalayatan! Whoever said this has gone mad.

SANJIB. Someone claimed to have seen it with his own eyes.

MAHAPANCHAK. He must have dreamed it.

JYOTIRMOY. But is not today the very day our Guru is expected?

MAHAPANCHAK. All the arrangements for his reception have been settled—only we have failed, even now, to procure a child born of a ninth pregnancy whose parents, brothers, and sisters are all yet living, to stand at the door and hold the great protective offering; I cannot decide what is to be done.

SANJIB. When the Guru arrives, who among us shall even recognize him? Only the Acharya, Adinapunya, knew him. None of us has ever set eyes upon him.

MAHAPANCHAK. The old man who sounds the conch in our abode has seen him. And the one who supplies the flowers for our worship knows him too.

VISHWAMBHAR. There—the Instructor comes running in great haste.

MAHAPANCHAK. He must have received news of the Guru's coming. But what is to be done about the protective recitation! We could not find a child of the proper auspicious signs at all.

Enter the Instructor

MAHAPANCHAK. How far off is he?

INSTRUCTOR. How far off! He has already arrived!

MAHAPANCHAK. Why then has the conch not yet sounded at the gate?

INSTRUCTOR. I see no particular need for it—for I can see no trace of the gate at all—it has been shattered to fragments.

MAHAPANCHAK. What are you saying! The gate is broken?

INSTRUCTOR. Not the gate alone—the very walls have been laid so flat and level that there is no longer any need to trouble ourselves about them at all.

MAHAPANCHAK. But our astrologer calculated it clearly and showed us plainly that—

INSTRUCTOR. Far more clearly visible now are the blood-red caps of the enemy soldiers.

STUDENTS. What ruin is this!

SANJIB. What good are your mantras now, Mahapanchak!

TRINANJAN. I said all along that such matters could never be entrusted to precocious youths still fresh from their books.

VISHWAMBHAR. But what is to be done now?

TRINANJAN. Let us bring back our Acharya at once. Had he remained, this calamity could never have occurred. Whatever else, that man was seasoned and wise.

SANJIB. But mark me, Mahapanchak, if any harm comes to our abode, we shall tear you to pieces.

INSTRUCTOR. You need not trouble yourselves with that labor—a fit person is already on his way.

MAHAPANCHAK. You are needlessly alarmed. The outer wall may fall, but the inner iron door remains closed fast. When that breaks, the sun and moon

themselves will be extinguished. I give you my assurance—stand firm and witness the astonishing power of Achalayatan's guardian deity.

INSTRUCTOR. I would rather find which way leads out of here.

TRINANJAN. That is exactly our wish too. But we do not even know the way out of this place. Never in our wildest dreams did we imagine we should ever need to leave.

SANJIB. Listen—there, listen—everything has come crashing down!

STUDENTS. What will become of us! The door has surely broken!

TRINANJAN. Seize Mahapanchak! Bind him! Let us go and offer him as sacrifice to some goddess!

MAHAPANCHAK. That is well spoken indeed. Let us go, offer me as sacrifice to the goddess. Her wrath shall be appeased. Where else could she find so unblemished a victim!

The boys enter

INSTRUCTOR. Why, what is this dancing all about?

FIRST BOY. What marvelous thing has happened today!

INSTRUCTOR. What sort of marvel, tell me.

SECOND BOY. Today light comes streaming in from every direction—everything seems to have opened wide.

THIRD BOY. We have never before seen such light.

FIRST BOY. Bird-calls, from who knows where, can be heard even from here.

SECOND BOY. We have never heard such birdsong before. It is nothing at all like our caged mynah's chatter.

FIRST BOY. Today I feel a great longing to run about freely. Would that be wrong, Brother Mahapanchak?

MAHAPANCHAK. I cannot rightly say what today may hold. It seems no rule can be upheld today.

FIRST BOY. Then is our six-postured meditation suspended today?

MAHAPANCHAK. Yes, suspended.

ALL. What joy, oh what joy!

SECOND BOY. Is the ablution-before-meals not required today either?

MAHAPANCHAK. No.

ALL. What joy! Ah, what light everywhere today!

JYOTIRMOY. My own heart has begun to dance too, Vishwambhar. Whether it is fear or joy, I cannot tell at all.

VISHWAMBHAR. Something extraordinary is happening today, Jyotirmoy.

SANJIB. But I cannot fathom what it might be. Tell me, boys, why have you suddenly become so joyful?

FIRST BOY. Do you not see? It is as though the whole sky has come rushing into the house.

SECOND BOY. It feels like a holiday—our very own holiday.

THIRD BOY. Since morning we have done nothing but sing that song of Brother Panchak's.

JYOTIRMOY. Which song?

FIRST BOY. That one—

SONG

Light, my light, oh
light that fills the world.
Light that washes my very eyes,
light that steals away my heart.

Light dances, dances—oh brother
 close beside my very soul,
 light resounds, resounds—oh brother
 within the lute-strings of my heart;
 the sky awakens, the wind runs swift,
 all the earth breaks into laughter.
 Light, my light, oh
 light that fills the world.
 Upon the stream of light have hoisted sail
 a thousand butterflies.
 Upon the wave of light rise dancing
 the jasmine and the malati flower.
 Gold upon cloud, gold upon cloud—oh brother
 gems too numerous to count,
 laughter upon every leaf—oh brother
 joy heaped upon joy,
 the banks of the river of song lie drowned
 beneath a shower of falling nectar.
 Light, my light, oh
 light that fills the world.

[Exeunt the boys]

JYOTIRMOY. Look, Brother Mahapanchak, it seems to me there is nothing at all to fear—otherwise why would the children's hearts have grown so joyful, without any cause?

MAHAPANCHAK. That there is nothing to fear is exactly what I have said all along.

Enter the conch-blower and the gardener

BOTH. The Guru is coming!

ALL. The Guru!

MAHAPANCHAK. There, you hear? I knew all along your anxiety was groundless.

ALL. No fear now, no fear at all.

TRINANJAN. How could we possibly fear anything, with Mahapanchak among us?

ALL. Victory to Acharya Mahapanchak!

Enter Dadathakur, dressed as a warrior

CONCH-BLOWER AND GARDENER. (bowing) Victory, victory to the Guru!

All stand stunned

MAHAPANCHAK. Instructor, is this the Guru?

INSTRUCTOR. So it seems, from what I hear.

MAHAPANCHAK. Are you our Guru?

DADATHAKUR. Yes. You will not recognize me, but I am indeed your Guru.

MAHAPANCHAK. You, our Guru? By what path have you come here, breaking every one of our rules? Who will accept you?

DADATHAKUR. I know none will accept me, yet I am your Guru still.

MAHAPANCHAK. You, the Guru? Then why come dressed as an enemy?

DADATHAKUR. This is precisely my Guru's own attire. That you should take up arms against me—that very battle is my Guru's welcome.

MAHAPANCHAK. Why have you broken down our wall to enter?

DADATHAKUR. You left nowhere for your own Guru to enter by.

MAHAPANCHAK. Do you imagine that because you come armed, I shall bow in defeat before you?

DADATHAKUR. Not now, perhaps. But defeat shall come to you day by day, step by step.

MAHAPANCHAK. Seeing me unarmed, you suppose I cannot strike you?

DADATHAKUR. You may strike me, but you cannot wound me—for I am your Guru.

MAHAPANCHAK. Instructor, will you bow down to this man?

INSTRUCTOR. Should he graciously accept our obeisance, I would surely offer it—but otherwise—

MAHAPANCHAK. No, I shall not bow to you.

DADATHAKUR. I shall not accept your obeisance—I shall make you bow before me instead.

MAHAPANCHAK. Have you not come to receive our worship?

DADATHAKUR. I have not come to receive your worship—I have come to receive your scorn.

MAHAPANCHAK. Who are these armed men following behind you?

DADATHAKUR. These are my followers—these are Shonpangshus.

ALL. Shonpangshus!

MAHAPANCHAK. These are your followers?

DADATHAKUR. Yes.

MAHAPANCHAK. This mantra-less, ritual-less band of barbarians!

DADATHAKUR. Come now, let them hear your mantras too. And you shall see, in time, what manner of works they perform.

SONG OF THE SHONPANGSHUS

He who is the doer of every deed—we
are but companions in his labor.
He whose colors paint every hue—we
are but dyed in his own delight.
To his vast, boundless rhythm
we move along in joy,

as he sounds the drum, so
do we shape our dance.
In this play of birth and death
we join in his own gathering,
this life of joy and sorrow, ours,
is but a piece within his play.
Oh, whenever he calls
his deep-toned drum shall sound,
we shall leap free, thorns beneath our feet,
crossing over mountain and sea.
We go forth rejoicing always,
as he beats the drum, so
do we shape our dancing step.

MAHAPANCHAK. I am the Acharya of this abode—I command you to take this barbarian horde and depart at once.

DADATHAKUR. Whomever I appoint as Acharya, he is Acharya; whatever I command, that is the command.

MAHAPANCHAK. Instructor, we cannot simply stand here like this. Come, let us drive them out from here and bolt every door of our abode twice as fast as before.

INSTRUCTOR. It seems far more likely that they shall be the ones to drive us out!

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. You speak of the doors of Achalayatan—we have already made them level with the very sky itself.

INSTRUCTOR. Well done indeed, friend. We were suffering no end of trouble—all that worry over locks and keys!

MAHAPANCHAK. You may shatter the stone walls, you may fling open the iron gates, but I have sealed shut every door of my own senses and taken my seat here—though I die of starvation, I shall not let your wind, your light, touch me even in the slightest.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. What sort of madman is this! If we crack open his skull a little with the point of this sword, perhaps a bit of fresh air might reach that brain of his.

MAHAPANCHAK. What fear can you show me? You can kill me—your power extends no further than that.

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Thakur, let us take this fellow captive—the people of our land will find great sport in him.

DADATHAKUR. Who among you could take him captive? What bonds do you possess strong enough for that?

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. Then shall we give him no punishment at all?

DADATHAKUR. Punish him! You cannot even touch him. Where he sits today, your swords cannot reach.

The boys enter

ALL. Are you our Guru?

DADATHAKUR. Yes, I am your Guru.

ALL. We bow to you.

DADATHAKUR. My children, may you attain the great life.

FIRST BOY. Thakur, what will you have us do?

DADATHAKUR. I shall play with you.

ALL. Play with us!

DADATHAKUR. What joy would there be in being your Guru otherwise?

ALL. Where will you play?

DADATHAKUR. I have a vast field for playing.

FIRST BOY. Vast? As vast as this room?

DADATHAKUR. Far larger than this.

SECOND BOY. Larger than this? Like that courtyard out there?

DADATHAKUR. Larger even than that.

SECOND BOY. Larger than that! Oh, how terrifying!

FIRST BOY. Would it not be sinful to go and play there?

DADATHAKUR. What sin could there be in it?

SECOND BOY. Is it not a sin to go into the open?

DADATHAKUR. No, my child—in the open, all sin flees away entirely.

ALL. When will you take us there?

DADATHAKUR. Once the work here is finished.

JYOTIRMOY. (bowing) My lord, I too shall go.

VISHWAMBHAR. Sanjib, further hesitation only wastes time. My lord, let us too be called along with these children.

SANJIB. Brother Mahapanchak, will you not come too?

MAHAPANCHAK. No, not I.

ACT VI

The Dabhak Settlement

SONG

PANCHAK. I want to take everything, I rush to seize it all.
I myself shall meet my own true self out in the open.
The wind has caught my sail,
my voyage upon the sea has begun,
no mooring holds my vessel fast at any shore.
In joy and sorrow both, deep within my heart,
the road's own flute forever plays,
in every task, that same tune I hear.
Today madness has taken wing—
can a bird still remain upon its bough?
From every direction I hear an answering call.

Enter the Acharya

PANCHAK. From afar I hear all manner of sounds, Acharya! It seems some great celebration is taking place in Achalayatan.

ACHARYA. The time has surely come. He was expected here yesterday itself. My heart grows restless. Let me send Sutasoma there at once.

PANCHAK. He has gone off today searching for sacred grass to perform the eleventh-day offering—wherever such grass might be found.

The Dabhak band enters

PANCHAK. What is it, friends? Why are you all in such a hurry?

FIRST DABHAK. We hear that some people have come to wage battle at Achalayatan.

ACHARYA. Battle? But is not today the day our Guru was to arrive?

SECOND DABHAK. No, no, we have heard news of a battle. Everything has been smashed and thrown into utter confusion.

THIRD DABHAK. Father Thakur, if you command us, we shall go and beat them back at once.

ACHARYA. There are plenty of people there already, my children—you need have no fear.

FIRST DABHAK. People there are, but how could they possibly fight?

SECOND DABHAK. We hear they've bound both their hands tight from end to end with all manner of written charms and amulets. They dare not undo them, lest the power vested in their hands be lost the moment they try to act.

PANCHAK. Acharya, this news of theirs may well be true. All last night it seemed to me as though the whole universe were crashing down on every side. In my drowsy state I thought perhaps I was only dreaming.

ACHARYA. Then has the Guru not come after all?

PANCHAK. Perhaps, by some mistake, brother has fallen into battle with none other than my own Guru! There's no telling. Perhaps, seeing him suddenly in the night, they mistook him for the messenger of Death himself.

FIRST DABHAK. We heard someone say the Guru had indeed come.

ACHARYA. The Guru has come! How can that be!

PANCHAK. Then tell me, who has come to do battle?

FIRST DABHAK. People are saying it is Dadathakur's own band.

PANCHAK. Dadathakur's band! Tell me, tell me, are you certain of this?

SECOND DABHAK. Yes, everyone is saying it is Dadathakur's band.

PANCHAK. Oh, what joy, what joy this is!

ACHARYA. Why, Panchak, why have you suddenly grown so wild with excitement?

PANCHAK. My lord, I have long harbored a secret wish—that somehow, some way, I might bring about a meeting between our Dadathakur and the Guru, and then we should see who truly triumphs and who falls!

ACHARYA. Panchak, I cannot clearly grasp your meaning. Whom do you call Dadathakur?

PANCHAK. Acharya, that is my own secret, one I have carried in my heart this long while. I shall not tell you now, my lord—if he has truly come, I shall bring the two of them face to face myself.

FIRST DABHAK. Father Thakur, give us leave, let us go and join the fight—let us show them there are real men here too.

PANCHAK. Come, brothers, I shall go along with you.

SECOND DABHAK. Will you fight too, Thakur?

PANCHAK. Yes, I shall fight.

ACHARYA. What are you saying, Panchak! Who has called you to battle!

PANCHAK. My own heart calls me. Some strange enchantment has bound my soul, my lord. It is as though I have been dreaming all this while—and however hard I try, I cannot wake myself. I will not simply sit idle any longer! Unless I plunge straight into the very thick of the fight, this spell can never be broken.

SONG

No more, no more shall this be.
I shall know fear no longer.
My bonds are broken, my striving has borne fruit,
my chains have crumbled away.

That very sky calls out to me there,
who now can hold me back?
I have thrown open every door today,
I shall go forth into all that is.
They sit idle, weaving in vain
only webs of illusion,
what do they mumble in some corner of the house,

calling after me in vain?

My weapon now is forged,
my armor now is worn,
now my steed shall race with the speed of wind
and conquer the whole world.

Enter the gardener

GARDENER. Acharya, our Guru is coming.

ACHARYA. What are you saying! The Guru? He is coming here? Had he but summoned me, I would have gone to him at once.

FIRST DABHAK. If your Guru comes here, where shall we seat him!

SECOND DABHAK. Father Thakur, purify a little space here for his seat—we shall stand apart, out of the way.

Another group of Dabhaks enters

FIRST DABHAK. Father Thakur, this is not your Guru—why would he come to this settlement! This is our own Gosain!

SECOND DABHAK. Our Gosain?

FIRST DABHAK. Yes, yes, our very own Gosain. I have never before seen him dressed so! It quite dazzles the eyes.

THIRD DABHAK. What have we in the house, brothers—bring it all out!

SECOND DABHAK. There are wild plums.

FOURTH DABHAK. I have dates at home.

FIRST DABHAK. Go quickly, brother, milk the black cow and bring the milk.

Enter Dadathakur

ACHARYA. (bowing) Victory, victory to the Guru!

PANCHAK. What is this! Why, it is Dadathakur! Where is the Guru?

THE DABHAK BAND. Gosaitakur! We bow to you. Why did you not send word ahead? Your offering is not yet prepared!

DADATHAKUR. Why, friends, has no cooking-fire been lit in your homes today? Have you all taken up mantras and started fasting?

FIRST DABHAK. We have only black gram and rice cooking today. There was nothing else in the house.

DADATHAKUR. That will do well enough for me.

PANCHAK. Dadathakur, I took such pride in believing that in this whole kingdom, I alone truly knew you. It seems there is no one left who does not know you now.

FIRST DABHAK. Why, this is our own Gosain—he came and ate rice-cakes at our home on the last full moon; and now, after so long, we see him again. Come, brothers, let us gather everything we have and bring it here.

[Exeunt]

DADATHAKUR. Acharya, what have you done with yourself?

ACHARYA. I lack even the power to understand what I have done. This much alone I grasp—that I have destroyed everything.

DADATHAKUR. You have only ever tried to bind the very one who would set you free.

ACHARYA. But I could never bind him at all, Thakur. Believing I was binding him, all the coils I wound only entangled myself. The very hand that might have loosened that bond, I bound fast along with the rest.

DADATHAKUR. He who has already given himself up everywhere—the moment you try to seize him in one place alone, you lose him entirely.

ACHARYA. It was only because the knowledge of his presence never truly reached my heart that I imagined I must fashion him laboriously through my

own cunning. That is why, sitting day and night, I have spun this whole web of futile striving.

DADATHAKUR. Instead of preparing chains for him within that very prison where you yourself could scarcely fit, prepare instead to set your seat within his own open temple.

ACHARYA. Command me, my lord. I erred knowingly, yet could not break free of that error. I knew I had lost the path, and the further I went, the further still from that path I strayed—I understood this too, yet fear would not let me stop. I believed that circling this same wheel a thousand times over was itself the way to find the path at last.

DADATHAKUR. That wheel is merely the wheel of habit, which leads nowhere at all, but only whirls one round within oneself—it is precisely to draw you out of it, and set you upon the straight road alongside every other traveler of this world, that I have come today.

ACHARYA. You have blessed me indeed. But why did you not come sooner, my lord? You have been coming and going in this very Dabhak settlement, right beside our own abode, and how many years have passed without your ever showing yourself to us!

DADATHAKUR. The road to reach these people is simple enough. It is you who never made it easy to be found.

PANCHAK. It is well that I have tested your strength for myself. You will make our road easy, but your own road is not easy at all. Now, I wonder, what shall I call you? Dadathakur, or Guru?

DADATHAKUR. To one who does not wish to know that I am guiding him, I am Dadathakur; to one who wishes to walk by my command, I am Guru.

PANCHAK. Then, my lord, you are both to me at once. That I guide myself, and that you guide me—both of these I wish to know as one. I am no Shonpangshu; I have no fear of submitting to you. Your command spoken aloud, I can joyfully make into my own heart's desire. Now then, let me set out with you, bearing your own burden upon my head, Thakur.

DADATHAKUR. I have already made ready a place for you.

PANCHAK. Where, Thakur?

DADATHAKUR. There, in Achalayatan.

PANCHAK. Achalayatan again! Has my term of imprisonment not yet run its course?

DADATHAKUR. The prison that once stood there, I have already destroyed—now, from those very stones, you must build a temple in that same place.

PANCHAK. Thakur, I beg you with folded hands, do not set me to the task of sitting still again. Your warrior's guise has utterly captivated my heart—I have never seen you so magnificent before.

DADATHAKUR. Have no fear, Panchak. Achalayatan shall never again know that old stillness. I have broken through its gate and let the storm-wind of battle rush within. The days of sitting fixed, gazing only at the tip of one's own nose, are now ended forever.

PANCHAK. But the people of Achalayatan will never accept me as their own, my lord.

DADATHAKUR. I tell you, you are dearer to the people of Achalayatan than any among them.

PANCHAK. But Dadathakur, I am utterly alone—they will all cast me aside.

DADATHAKUR. It is precisely because they do not wish to accept you that you are most needed there. Precisely because they push you away, you shall never be able to push them away in turn.

PANCHAK. What must I do?

DADATHAKUR. You must call together, one by one, all who are scattered abroad.

PANCHAK. Will there be room enough for everyone?

DADATHAKUR. If there is not, then this very wall will simply have to be broken down again another day—build with that understanding. Do not burden me with further questions.

PANCHAK. The Shonpangshus—

DADATHAKUR. Yes, they too must be called and made to sit down—let them learn a little how to sit still.

PANCHAK. Make them sit still! Heaven forbid! Better to let them break things and roam wild—they stay far calmer that way. They think restlessness itself is freedom.

DADATHAKUR. Give a small child a ripe wood-apple, and he is overjoyed, thinking it a fine toy to roll about with. They know that kind of freedom only from the outside, as a fine amusing thing—but they do not know that one must sit still to draw out its true essence. Place them for a time under the charge of your Brother Mahapanchak, and once somewhat calmed, they will find the time to let their own inward stillness take root.

PANCHAK. Then must my Brother Mahapanchak remain there too—

DADATHAKUR. Yes, exactly there. There is much work for him yet. All this time, shutting himself up in darkness, he believed the wheel was turning splendidly, never seeing that it was merely spinning fixed in one place. Now his eyes have opened to the light; he is no longer that same man. How to transcend one's own self—that lesson falls to his charge now. The mystery of tearing through the veil of hunger and thirst, greed and fear, life and death, to reveal one's true self—that lies now within his hands.

ACHARYA. And what have you decreed for this eternal transgressor, my lord?

DADATHAKUR. You need labor no more, Acharya. Come with me now.

ACHARYA. You have saved me, my lord, you have rescued me. My entire heart had withered into stone—draw me out from this very prison of stone that I myself built. I ask for no treasure—only grant me a little of life's true sweetness.

DADATHAKUR. Have no fear, Acharya, none at all—the rain of joy has already come pouring down—its patter dances within my very heart. Step outside and you shall see everything afloat on every side. Some sit trembling with fear indoors. In this dense, thundering monsoon there is joy in the black clouds, joy in the sharp lightning, joy in the roar of thunder. If the turban should blow from one's head today, let it go; if one's shawl grows soaked through, let it be

soaked—who dares call this a misfortune today! If the very foundations of the house crumble away today, let them crumble—for today the meeting shall take place right in the middle of the great open road.

Enter Subhadra

SUBHADRA. Guru!

DADATHAKUR. What is it, my child?

SUBHADRA. The sin I committed—its penance was never completed!

DADATHAKUR. Nothing remains of it now.

SUBHADRA. Nothing remains?

DADATHAKUR. No. I have shattered it all to fragments and scattered it in the dust.

SUBHADRA. But the goddess—

DADATHAKUR. The goddess! The moment that northern wall was broken, we became so reconciled with that very goddess that she will never again shake her matted locks to frighten anyone. Look upon her now, and you will see she is nothing but the light of the very sky—her whole tangled crown has become entwined with the fresh clouds of the monsoon season.

SUBHADRA. What shall I do now?

PANCHAK. Now you have me, brother, and I have you. Together, the two of us shall go about flinging open every door and window, north and south, east and west alike.

UPACHARYA. (entering) The sacred grass could not be found—nowhere could I find it.

ACHARYA. Sutasoma, were you out searching for grass all this while?

UPACHARYA. Yes, the Indra-grass—nowhere at all could it be found. Alas, alas! What am I to do now! That people should dwell in such a place as this!

ACHARYA. Never mind your grass. Look this way for a moment.

UPACHARYA. What is this! Why, it is our own Guru! Here! In this Dabhak settlement! What is to be done now! Where shall we—

The Dabhaks enter, bearing offerings

FIRST DABHAK. Gosain, we have brought all this for you. Ketan's aunt made rice-cakes the day before yesterday; some still remain—

UPACHARYA. No, no, stop, you'll ruin everything! What are you doing! He is our Guru!

SECOND DABHAK. Your Guru, indeed? Why, this is our own Gosain.

DADATHAKUR. Give it here, friend—have you brought anything else?

SECOND DABHAK. Yes, I've brought some plums.

THIRD DABHAK. I've brought some curd.

DADATHAKUR. Set it all here. Come, friend Panchak, come, Acharya Adinapunya—new Acharya and old Acharya both, come—let us share among ourselves these offerings of their devotion, and so make this day worthy of its name.

The boys enter

ALL. Guru!

DADATHAKUR. Come, my children, come.

FIRST BOY. When shall we set out?

DADATHAKUR. No more delay now—we must set out this very moment.

SECOND BOY. What shall we do now?

DADATHAKUR. Why, here is your feast, already prepared.

FIRST BOY. Look, brother, plums—how delightful!

SECOND BOY. Oh, brother, dates—how delightful!

THIRD BOY. Guru, is there no sin in this?

DADATHAKUR. None at all—only merit.

FIRST BOY. Shall we sit here together with everyone and eat?

DADATHAKUR. Yes, right here.

The Shonpangshu band enters

FIRST SHONPANGSHU. Dadathakur.

SECOND SHONPANGSHU. We can do no more. Not a single wall remains standing. What shall we do now? Sitting idle so long has made our legs quite numb.

DADATHAKUR. Have no fear. I shall not leave you sitting idle for nothing. I shall give you work to do.

ALL. What work will you give us?

DADATHAKUR. You must join with our Brother Panchak and begin building anew upon the broken foundations.

ALL. Very well, very well, we agree.

DADATHAKUR. Upon that very foundation, in last night's battle, the blood of the Sthavirakas mingled with the blood of the Shonpangshus.

ALL. Yes, it did indeed mingle.

DADATHAKUR. That mingling alone is not enough to bring this to its end. This time, not red, but pure white. Raise up the white walls of this new temple, piercing through to the very light of the sky. Disperse now, both bands, and set yourselves to your labor.

ALL. So we shall. Brother Panchak, you too must rise now—you cannot go on sitting there so coolly aloof. Make haste. No more delay.

PANCHAK. I am ready. Then, Guru, let me bow to you. Acharya, give me your blessing.

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