

ESSAY

MODERN LITERATURE

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BANKIMCHANDRA

When Bankim's youthful genius first appeared before Bengal bearing the vessel of nectar in the form of a goddess of fortune, the elders of that era did not receive his writings with the reverence and joy they deserved.

In those days Bankim had to endure a great deal of mockery and insult from the world. A certain faction harboured a bitter grudge against him, and it was precisely those petty scribblers who vainly attempted to imitate him who, in their eagerness to conceal their debt to him, abused him more than anyone else.

And now the new generation of readers and writers who have arisen have never had occasion to feel in their hearts the full weight of Bankim's influence; they have been born directly upon the very ground of literature that Bankim himself built, and so they cannot see, disentangled and reckoned separately, how much and in what manner they remain indebted to him.

But by good fortune, when the present writer first came to know Bankim, no prior prejudice regarding literature and such matters had yet taken firm root in our mind, nor had the new currents of thought belonging to the present age become entirely foreign or unfamiliar to us. Just as Bengali literature then stood at its own dawn, so too did we stand at the threshold of our own youth. Bankim brought forth the sunrise of that dawn in Bengali letters, and it was then that our own hearts first opened to its light.

What existed before, and what we gained afterward — standing at the meeting-point of the two ages, we were able to feel this in a single instant. Where had that darkness gone, that dull sameness, that emptiness; where had those tales of victorious spring, those songs of Holi, those stories told merely to lull children to sleep, vanished — and from whence had come such light, such hope, such music, such variety? It was as if Bengali letters, like the first rains of Ashadh, had suddenly become "the thunder-roar heralding the king's advance," and under that torrential downpour of feeling, the eastward-flowing and westward-flowing streams of Bengali literature, all its rivers and rivulets, suddenly filled to overflowing and began rushing forward in the exuberant flood of youth. How many poems, plays, novels, essays, critical writings, monthly journals, and newspapers filled the land of

Bengal with the resounding clamour of an awakened dawn! The Bengali language was suddenly transported from childhood into youth.

We witnessed, in our boyhood, that great festival of feeling's fresh convergence within Bengali literature; we felt that single wave of hope which, sweeping across the entire land, had newly begun to surge — and it is for this very reason that even now, from time to time, a certain wistfulness rises within us. It seems that the boundless hope which stirred in our hearts that day has not, in the end, borne fruit exactly as we had imagined. Life no longer moves with that same momentum. But this wistfulness is largely unfounded. The intense exhilaration of a first meeting can never remain permanent. It is unjust to measure the present against the memory of that first joy, that new hope. The melody of the flute that sounds on the first day of a marriage does not play on forever. That day holds only unmixed joy and hope; thereafter come varied duties, mingled joys and sorrows, small obstacles and hindrances, recurring separations and reunions — thereafter, gravely and solemnly, one must advance along the path of worldly life through many channels, past many sorrows; that same festive music will not sound every day. And yet the memory of that one day's celebration forever scatters joy along the hard road of duty.

We remember the universal blossoming and festive joy of that day when Bankimchandra, with his own hand, brought about the marriage of newly-matured feeling with the Bengali language. That day is no more. Today many kinds of writing, many opinions, many discussions have come forward — today the tide of feeling sometimes ebbs, and sometimes swells to a fuller ripeness than before.

Such is, and indeed must be, the natural course of things. But we must remember by whose grace this became possible. In our vanity, we always forget this.

The first proof that we do forget is this: we do not recognize Rammohan Roy as the true builder of the Bengal we know today. In politics, in education, in society, in language — there is nothing in modern Bengal whose foundation was not laid by Rammohan Roy's own hand. Indeed, even the new enthusiasm the country now shows toward the study of ancient scripture — Rammohan Roy was the pathfinder for that too. At a time when the pride of new learning would naturally have bred contempt for the old scriptures, Rammohan Roy retrieved, from the neglected and

nearly forgotten depths of the Vedas, Puranas, and Tantras beyond the reach of the common people, and kept bright the glory of ancient scripture.

Yet Bengal today is most unwilling to acknowledge, from the depths of its heart, its debt to that very Rammohan Roy.

Rammohan raised Bengali literature up from its state of submersion and set it upon a foundation of granite; Bankimchandra, pouring the flood of his genius upon that foundation, scattered fertile silt across its terraced plains. Today the Bengali language is not merely fit for habitation — it has become fertile and richly harvested. The land of dwelling has truly become a motherland. Now the nourishment our minds require springs up almost at our very doorstep.

He who dissolved the barrenness of our mother tongue and raised her to such glorious eminence — if it is necessary to make anyone understand how great, how enduring a service he rendered the Bengali people, then there could be no greater misfortune than that. Before his time, no one regarded Bengali with any respect. Sanskrit pundits considered it rustic, and English-educated scholars deemed it barbarous. That any achievement worth the name could be won in the Bengali language lay wholly beyond their imagining. For this reason, they wrote simple textbooks in the vernacular only out of condescending charity, and only for the benefit of women and children. Those who wish to know the simplicity and readability of such books may take the trouble to examine the old entrance-examination Bengali text composed by the Reverend Krishnamohan Bandyopadhyay. Even the dishonoured Bengali language of that time conducted its business in an exceedingly poor and tarnished manner. However much beauty, however much grandeur lay hidden within it, that beauty could not shine forth through the veil of its poverty. Where the mother tongue is held in such neglect, no one can save human life there from dryness, barrenness, and wretchedness.

At such a time, Bankimchandra, foremost among the educated of his age, took his entire education, his entire devotion, his entire genius as offering, and laid it at the feet of that constricted Bengali tongue; what an extraordinary work he accomplished in that era, we today, even by his own grace, cannot fully fathom.

In those days, many people far less educated and far less gifted than he would swell with pride merely at writing two lines in English. They lacked even the capacity to

understand that in the ocean of the English language they were building sand-walls like squirrels on the shore.

That Bankimchandra fearlessly renounced that same vanity, that same possibility of fame, and devoted his entire capacity to a subject scorned by the learned men of his day — what greater proof of heroism could there be! To possess full capability, and yet to forsake the encouragement of one's peers and the temptation of their applause, and instead to direct all the hope, endeavour, and power of one's young life along an untried and unhonoured dark path — it is not easy to measure how much faith and how much courage that required.

Nor was that all. He did not merely show condescending favour to the Bengali language despite his education — he showed it outright reverence. Whatever hope, aspiration, love of beauty, generosity of spirit, love of country, whatever store of thought gained through education and mature intellect he possessed — all of it, unhesitatingly, he offered into the hands of the Bengali tongue. By supreme good fortune, upon the face of that neglected, tarnished language there suddenly blossomed an unprecedented radiance of fortune and grace.

Then those who had earlier neglected her began, one by one, drawn by the youthful beauty of the Bengali tongue, to draw nearer to her. Bengali literature grew, day by day, ever fuller in glory.

The heavy burden Bankim took upon himself would have been impossible for anyone else to bear. First, it required a particular kind of capability even to believe and discover that the Bengali language, in the condition it then existed, could be employed for the full range of expression demanded by an educated mind. Second, where literature possesses no ideal, where the reader expects no exceptional excellence, where the writer writes carelessly and the reader reads with charitable indulgence, where writing a little well earns applause and writing badly is considered not worth even criticizing — in such a place, to hold before oneself, always, one's own inwardly cherished lofty ideal, to resist the temptation of cheap fame easily won through slight effort, and instead, with tireless devotion and unremitting endeavour, to advance along the difficult path toward hard-won perfection — this is a work of extraordinary greatness. There is nothing so burdensome as an inert mass, enthusiasm-less and lifeless, extending on every side; how much relentless effort and strength it takes to rise above its ever-present,

powerful gravitational pull, even today's professional writers can somewhat appreciate — how much harder it must have been then, one can only guess with difficulty. When slackness prevails everywhere, and that very slackness goes uncensured, only a truly great soul can bind himself by rule and discipline.

The work Bankim accomplished through the power of genius, holding fast to that inner ideal, is truly astonishing. The disparity between the Bengali literature that preceded Bankimdarshan and that which followed it is beyond measure. Those who have viewed the range of Kanchenjunga's peaks from Darjeeling know how far above the silent mountain-attendants all around, that snow-crowned emperor of the cloud-piercing Himalayas rises, radiant at sunrise and sunset. The Bengali literature that followed Bankimchandra achieved just such a sudden and extraordinary elevation; one need only examine and measure that difference once to easily infer the immense power of Bankim's genius.

Bankim expected that others would show the same reverence toward the Bengali language that he himself had shown it. If anyone, out of old habit, came to trifle carelessly with literature, Bankim would deal him such punishment that he would never again dare show such impertinence.

Times were even harder then. Bankim himself had stirred up a nationwide agitation of feeling. How many minds were set restless under the influence of that agitation, and how many people, without grasping the limits of their own capacity, attempted in a single leap to become writers — their number is beyond counting. The urge to write had awakened, and yet the high ideal of writing had not yet been established. At that time, the all-capable Bankim kept one hand engaged in the work of construction and the other in the work of prevention. On one side he kept the fire burning; on the other, he took upon himself the task of clearing away the smoke and ashes.

It was precisely because Bankim alone undertook the burden of both composition and criticism that Bengali literature was able to achieve so swift and so rapid a maturation.

The fruit of this arduous vow-taking, he too had to bear. I remember that when he occupied the seat of critic in Bangadarshan, the number of his petty enemies was not small. Hundreds upon hundreds of unworthy men envied him and never ceased trying to disprove his supremacy.

However small a thorn may be, it retains the power to wound, and the sensitivity of imaginative writers is somewhat greater than that of the ordinary person. It is not that these small stings did not touch Bankim — but nothing ever turned him away from his duty. He possessed invincible strength, unwavering devotion to duty, and faith in himself. He knew that no disturbance of the present could ever overshadow his greatness, that he could pass effortlessly out from the encirclement of every petty enemy. And so, throughout his life, he advanced with unclouded face and heroic pride; never once was the speed of his chariot diminished.

Within literature too, two classes of practitioners may be observed: the contemplative and the active. The contemplative devotes himself wholly, in solitude, to the cultivation of feeling; his writings, for the worldly man, are like something extra received — a windfall, unlooked-for and unrequired.

But Bankim, in literature, was a man of action. His genius was never satisfied to remain still within itself. Wherever literature lacked something, there he would rush forward with his full strength and joy. Whether poetry, science, history, or theology — wherever, whenever he was needed, there he stood, fully prepared. His purpose was to establish an ideal in every field within the new Bengali literature. Wherever the scattered Bengali language cried out to him in her own voice, there he appeared before her in his gracious, four-armed divine form.

But he did not merely grant fearlessness, offer consolation, and fill lack — he was also a wielder of the sword. Those who today wish to affirm the worth of Bengali literature strive, day and night in private, to keep Bengal ever pleased with exaggerated words of praise; but Bankim's voice was not merely one of praise — it was sharp-edged as well. Had Bengal not been numb and lifeless, it would have felt the sting and gained at least momentary awareness from the sword-stroke dealt, in *Krishnacharitra*, against the fallen present-day Hindu society and the corrupted Hindu religion. No one but a person of Bankim's fiery genius would have dared express his own opinion with such fearless and clear utterance against popular custom and national practice. Indeed, Bankim applied historical judgment to ancient Hindu scripture, separating its essential from its inessential parts, analyzing its authoritative from its unauthoritative portions, with such unhesitating boldness that it is difficult to find a parallel to this day.

Especially since he had to cut his path between two hostile camps. On one side stood those who reject the doctrine of divine incarnation, opposing Shri Krishna out of a divine-averse skepticism. On the other stood those who consider every letter of scripture and every practice of custom to be infallible; even they were not pleased that he should apply the iron hammer of critical judgment, cutting and carving through scripture, to construct an image of divinity fashioned after the ideal of the greatest of men. In such circumstances, another person would have wished to win one side entirely to his own camp. But Bankim, that great warrior of literature, advanced unhesitatingly, aiming sharp arrows to both left and right — his own genius was his sole support. Whatever he believed, he expressed clearly and openly — he never deceived himself or others through clever rhetoric.

There is a vast difference between imagination and mere fancifulness. True imagination is bound into a definite shape by logic, restraint, and truth — fancifulness merely pretends to truth, but swells into grotesque, disproportionate excess. Whatever gleam of light it contains, the proportion of smoke is a hundred times greater. Those of feeble capacity generally take refuge in literature under the cover of this smoke-laden fancifulness — for, though it appears grand to look at, it is in reality exceedingly trivial. One class of readers becomes enchanted and overwhelmed by the skillful weaving of such abundantly excessive artificial fancy, and unfortunately, that class of reader is not rare in Bengal.

Against such boundless, disorderly fancy, an ideal like Bankim's is exceedingly precious to us. In *Krishnacharitra*, amid the passionate surge of grand emotion, his imagination never once broke loose into wild excess. From beginning to end, everywhere, he proceeded step by step with self-restraint, holding fast to the definite path of reason. What he wrote reveals his genius; what he refrained from writing reveals no less his restrained capacity.

Especially since the subject was of such a nature that, had it fallen into the hands of any ordinary Bengali writer, he would have seized the occasion to indulge in abundant cries of "Hari Hari," "Mari Mari," "Alas, alas," floods of tears, and violent gesticulation, never once relinquishing such a convenient opportunity to display the surge of imagination, the passion of feeling, and the excess of the heart; he would not, through well-reasoned argument and the pursuit of rigorous truth, have checked his pen at every step. Abandoning the plain path accessible to all, he

would, through some subtle cleverness, have given supreme importance to some newly self-invented discovery, adorning it with verbal profusion and the enchantment of fancy, and, stretching and weaving his own beliefs and language as far as possible in every direction, would have tried to draw people into the net of his own opinion by excessive display.

In truth, the arduous task of recovering history from our scriptures could scarcely have been undertaken by anyone but Bankim. On one side stood the incapacity of Europeans to grasp the true essence of Hindu scripture; on the other, the reluctance of Hindus themselves to apply impartial judgment to scriptural evidence. On one side lay a genuine lack of familiarity; on the other, the blindness born of excessive over-familiarity, habit, and prejudice. True history had to be rescued from between these two dangers. One had to enter into the heart of scripture with the aid of patriotic devotion, and cast off its baseless portions with the aid of devotion to truth. The bridle by whose signal the pen must be given speed is the very bridle by which it must always be restrained. Bankim possessed this harmony of capabilities. It was for this reason that, shortly before his death, when he sat prepared, having gathered the ancient Vedas and Puranas, Bengali literature had great cause for hope — but death did not permit that hope to be fulfilled, and no one can say when that which, by our misfortune, remains incomplete, will ever be completed.

That Bankim protected himself from every kind of excess and incongruity was inherent to the very nature of his genius. Anyone who has read his writings knows that Bankim possessed a fine wit for humour. Humour is but one ray of that very light of clear reasoning by which all excess and incongruity are exposed. Not everyone can perceive at what point a matter becomes laughable, but those who have a taste for humour possess within them a certain faculty of judgment by which they can, even when the matter is not their own, easily determine the fine line of coherence among speech, conduct, and character.

Bankim was the very first to introduce pure, refined, restrained laughter into Bengali literature. Before him, humour was never permitted to sit in the same row with the other sentiments in Bengali writing. It sat in the lowest seat and amused the assembly with buffoonery in language both fit and unfit to be heard. It seemed to have some special kinship with the erotic sentiment above all, and it was chiefly

by tormenting and mocking that sentiment in every possible manner that most of its jests and derision found expression. However favoured a character this shameless jester might be, he was never accorded respect. Wherever any subject was discussed with gravity, the frivolity of laughter was scrupulously excluded.

Bankim was the first to raise the sentiment of humour to the highest rank in literature. He was the first to show that humour is not confined within the limits of farce alone; that bright, pure laughter can illuminate every subject. He was the first to prove, by example, that in the touch of this light of laughter, no subject loses the dignity of its depth — rather, its beauty and charm increase, and the life and movement of every part of it seem to shine forth with greater clarity. The very Bankim who opened up an inexhaustible spring of tears from the depths of Bengali literature was the one who, from the summit of joy's sunrise, scattered the light of laughter over newly-awakened Bengali literature.

Not merely coherence, but also a natural, subtle faculty of judgment is needed to determine the boundaries of good taste and decency. From time to time, even among many powerful geniuses, this faculty of judgment is found wanting. But in Bankim's genius there was a beautiful blending of strength and delicacy. Just as a truly heroic man harbours a respectful and reverent regard toward womankind, so too did Bankim's powerful intellect hold a heroic, affectionate reverence toward good taste and propriety. His writing bears witness to this. On the day the present writer first saw Bankim, an incident occurred which offers proof of this natural inclination toward refinement in him.

That day, at the invitation of the writer's revered relative, the late Shri Sourindramohan Tagore, a gathering called the College Reunion was held at Marakatakunja. I do not recall exactly how long ago it was, but I was then a boy. That day I found gathered there a great many distinguished men unknown to me. Among that assembly of the learned stood one tall, erect man of advanced years, his face bright and cheerful, wearing a moustache, his hands clasped together upon his frock-coated chest. The moment I saw him, he seemed somehow set apart from all the others, self-contained. Everyone else seemed part of the crowd; only he seemed a solitary individual unto himself. That day I felt no particular urge to learn the identity of anyone else present, but the moment I saw him, both I and a relative companion of mine simultaneously grew curious. Upon inquiry, we learned that he

was none other than the long-sought, world-renowned Bankim Babu, whom we had wished to see for so long. I remember that at first sight, the sharpness and vigour of genius in his countenance, and a certain remote quality of aloofness setting him apart from everyone else, impressed themselves deeply upon my mind. Afterward I met him on many occasions, received much encouragement and counsel from him, and saw his countenance grow exceedingly gentle in the tenderness of affection — but that bright, keen, upraised sword-like intensity I glimpsed in his face at first sight, I have never to this day forgotten.

On the occasion of that celebration, in one room, a learned Sanskrit pandit was reciting and explaining a patriotic Sanskrit verse of his own composition. Bankim stood listening at one end of the room. The pandit suddenly, in one verse, aimed at the fallen sons of India, employed an exceedingly old-fashioned scholarly witticism, and that wit turned somewhat grotesque. Bankim at once grew utterly abashed, and, covering the lower part of his face with his right palm, fled swiftly through a side door into another room.

That sight of Bankim's embarrassed retreat remains stamped upon my memory to this day.

One must consider that when Ishwar Chandra Gupta was the master of literature, Bankim ranked among his disciples. Whatever education the literature of that time might otherwise have been capable of giving, it was scarcely conducive to teaching good taste. How extraordinary a thing it is, then, that though initiated and nurtured amid the disorderly verbal battles and controversies of that age, he preserved undiminished a sensitivity of aversion toward vulgarity, and an unbroken reverence for good taste and decency, everyone will readily understand. Dinabandhu too was Bankim's contemporary and his friend, but though other abilities are revealed in his writing, this Brahmin-like purity of Bankim's genius is not found there. The stamp of Ishwar Gupta's age could not, in the course of things, be wholly washed away from his writing.

Let those of us who make our living by literature never, at any time, forget how eternally indebted we remain to Bankim. There was a day when our Bengali language was bound to a single string, like a one-stringed instrument, fit only to chant simple devotional refrains; Bankim, with his own hand, strung it string by string until today he has transformed it into a full lute. What once played only local,

rustic tunes has now become capable of rendering the grand melodies and rhythms fit to be heard before the assembly of the world. That very Bengali language, nurtured with his own hand and cradled in his affection, weeps today from the depths of her heart for Bankim. But he has found, beyond this tumult of grief, undisturbed and untroubled rest, at the close of a life's arduous labour. After death, a gentle serenity, a deep tranquility beyond all sorrow, shone upon his face — as if death had lifted him, from the harsh worldly plane scorched by life's noonday sun, into the cool, affectionate embrace of a mother. Today our lamentation and grief no longer touch him; that gracious, radiant form, luminous with genius, is no longer present here to receive our offering of devotion. This grief, this devotion, is for our own good alone. May the ideal that Bankim established in the field of literature stand, bright and enduring, within our hearts, through this grief, through this devotion. If we lack the means and the capacity to erect a monument of stone, then let us at least, having once fully grasped his greatness within our minds, make him permanent upon the memorial-pillar of our Bengali hearts. The English, and English law, are not eternal; political, religious, and social opinions may change a thousand times over; whatever events, whatever institutions seem today of supreme importance, and whose clamorous excitement leads us to regard as trivial the unglamorous, unheralded duties of society — tomorrow, perhaps, not even a trace, not even a memory of them, will remain; but he who made our mother tongue capable of expressing every kind of feeling has bestowed upon this unfortunate, impoverished nation a priceless, eternal treasure. He has established the sole enduring means of lasting national progress. It is he who has revealed to us consolation in the midst of true grief, hope amid decline, encouragement amid weariness, and, within the very barrenness of poverty, an inexhaustible mine of eternal beauty. Whatever mortal power is capable of bearing, nurturing, expressing, and everywhere proclaiming whatever is immortal within us, and whatever will make us immortal — that power, the mother tongue, he has made mighty and majestic.

Judgment on particular works may err — what is praised by us may, with the changes wrought by time in education, taste, and circumstance, come to be condemned and disregarded by our descendants; but Bankim increased the power of the Bengali language and the wealth of Bengali literature; like Bhagiratha, he laboured to bring down the celestial Ganga of feeling into Bengali literature, and

by the touch of that sacred stream, dissolved the curse of inertness and brought our ancient ashes back to life. This is no mere passing opinion; it does not depend upon any particular argument or taste — it is a historical truth.

Bearing this truth in mind, let us print it and take our leave of that guide of Bengali writers, that friend of Bengali readers, that beloved, genius-filled son of the fertile, well-watered, fragrant land of Bengal — he who, before the evening of his life had come, at the very outset of engaging with new work in new leisure with new energy, gathered back his own unfading genius and, surrendering it to the hand of a dimmer constellation in the sky of Bengali literature, set prematurely upon the western horizon at the close of the past century.

Baishakh, 1301 (Bengali era)

BIHARILAL

At the very beginning of the current new year, the poet Biharilal Chakraborty has departed for the other world.

Death has entered the garden of Bengal's letters like a plague. Beneath its cruel arrows, many voices have fallen silent within a short span of time.

Among them, Biharilal's voice was not so well known to the general public. His circle of listeners was small, and his sweet melodies continued to sound in solitude and seclusion, never seeking the doorway of the reading and critical public in pursuit of fame.

But those who, by some stroke of fortune, were drawn by the call of this reclusive, feeling-absorbed poet's song and came to him, lacked nothing in their affection for him. They knew him as the finest poet of Bengal.

Long before the publication of Bangadarshan, a monthly journal called Abodhbandhu used to appear for some time. The present writer was then, true to his boyish age, utterly ignorant. When, with the coming of a little more maturity, understanding began to dawn, that paper ceased publication.

Fortunately, some of its issues, some bound, some loose, were preserved in my elder brother's cupboard. Since many valuable books were kept there, mischievous boys were forbidden to touch that cupboard. I may now confess without fear that, tempted by Abodhbandhu's friendship, I violated that prohibition. Let whatever punishment might be due for this secret misdeed remain aside — the joy I derived from it over a long period, I have not forgotten even now.

I still remember how, playing truant from school, in a room facing south, through the long, solitary afternoon, reading the Bengali translation of Paul and Virginie from Abodhbandhu, my heart would break with intense sorrow. At that time, the countryside beyond Calcutta was unfamiliar to me — and the description of the forest scenery along the seashore in Paul and Virginie appeared to me like an inexpressibly sweet dream, and upon that wave-lapped, forest-shaded seashore, the union and the pain of separation of Paul and Virginie seemed to sound within my heart, as though embodied, like an extraordinary music.

The prose essays that appeared in this small periodical had a certain distinctiveness about them. There was no lack of formal, literary Bengali prose in those days, but the language had not yet found its true shape. Those who wrote for monthly journals in those days wrote assuming the pose of a preceptor — for this reason they did not reveal themselves to their readers, and for this reason their writing lacked, as it were, any true individual form. When I read *Abodhbandhu*, it never felt like a continuation of school lessons. This was, I believe, the first monthly journal published in the Bengali language whose writing possessed a distinctive personal flavour. Those who trace the history of the vital growth of modern Bengali literature cannot afford to overlook *Abodhbandhu*. If *Bangadarshan* may be called the rising sun of modern Bengali literature, then the small-scale *Abodhbandhu* may be called the morning star of the dawn before it.

At that dawn, people had not yet awakened, and the garden of literature had not yet burst into its manifold, singing bloom. In that early light, only a single bird of the dawn had begun to sing in sweet, beautiful strains. That melody was its own.

I cannot speak of this with historical certainty — but it was in that first Bengali poetry that I heard, for the first time, the poet's own individual voice.

Just as, when the darkness of night begins to lift, the shapes of the world gradually emerge outline by outline, so too, in the prose and verse of *Abodhbandhu*, line by line, a form seemed to take shape in the first light of genius's dawn. Before the reader's imagination, a vision of feeling was unveiled.

*"My heart forever aches with restless longing,
As if the world were but a desert.
On every side, all is scorched,
Oh, what a burning fire —
Moths falling into a blazing pyre."*

This is, I believe, the first instance in modern Bengali literature of the poet speaking purely of himself. At that time, or somewhat earlier, in Michael's sonnets, the poet's self-expression may occasionally have appeared — but such instances were rare, and within the confined compass of the sonnet form, personal expression comes so tightly compressed and condensed that the full outpouring of feeling's melody does not find such easy expression there.

Biharilal did not write, as the newly English-educated poets of that time did, grand epics crowded with descriptions of battle, nor patriotic verses full of stirring exhortation, and unlike the poets of old, he did not turn toward mythological legend either — he sat alone and, in his own metre, spoke his own heart's thoughts. In that soliloquy of his, no purpose of universal welfare, national benefit, or entertainment of an assembly was to be seen. For this reason, his melody entered the heart intimately and easily drew the reader's trust.

This quality of drawing the reader confidingly close to oneself, I first felt in the prose of Abodhbandhu and in the poetry of Abodhbandhu's poet, Biharilal. Just as I had gained an intimate acquaintance with humanity and with nature in Paul and Virginie, so too did I find in Biharilal's poetry a similarly close companionship. I remember how, in the description and melody of the verses quoted below, a beautiful picture was unveiled before the mind's eye, stirring the heart into restlessness.

"Sometimes I think of some waterfall,
 Cascading over rocks, its spray flying wide —
 The thunderous roar of the mighty fall
 Echoing back upon the wind,
 Spreading out on every side —
 Going there, beneath the trees on its bank,
 In the thick, soft, tender long grass,
 Submerging this body,
 Still as a corpse, silent,
 Listening with rapt ear to the water's murmuring song.
 At that moment, should some doe,
 In wonder, cast her glance
 Upon my state, and, drawing near,
 Gaze and gaze upon me,
 Then let fall tears of pity —
 At that moment I would rise up,
 And embrace their necks,
 As, in the hour of death, a friend arriving,
 One keeps one's eyes open to behold him
 Even as one departs, gazing thus."

What sort of "restless longing" the poet meant by "my heart forever aches," I cannot say with certainty. But reading this description, a boy-reader's heart would ache with restless longing for the outer world. To immerse oneself, beside a waterfall, in cool, moist, soft, deep-green, long grass, and lie there silently listening to the water's murmur, seemed a matter of supreme longing; and though I knew perfectly well that the doe would not come to weep at the poet's sorrow, nor would she willingly let herself be caught in his embrace, still, this picture of a wild doe, caught helpless in a human's embrace amid the thick, silent grass by that solitary shore, was painted in the heart with matchless beauty, as though it were actually possible.

"Sometimes I think of going to a village,
 Hiding away my name and origins entirely.
 Living among the peasants,
 Becoming like a peasant myself,
 Wandering about in the company of peasants.
 In the morning, over the fields,
 Pure air blows, rustling softly,
 All around, delightful to behold,
 I shall labour there with pleasure;
 My body will grow healthy and vigorous.
 Playing upon a bamboo flute,
 Singing a plain, simple rustic song,
 With the guileless peasant,
 With a joyful, blossoming heart,
 I shall pass the night in happiness.
 On that fierce night of the monsoon
 When the lightning rages about wildly —
 The terrible roar of thunder,
 As if the very roof might break and fall,
 The wind trembling everywhere in every direction —
 On such a night, by the edge of the field,
 In a rickety hut of straw,
 Freely, like a king,

*I shall lie sleeping upon the ground,
And rising at dawn, behold the sun."*

There is nothing strange in the fact that a boy from Calcutta would grow restless at this happy picture of village life. From this we may understand that dissatisfaction is inherent in human nature. What planted this fantasy in the mind of a city-dwelling boy, making him imagine that a rickety hut of straw held more happiness than a mansion? It is primal human nature. Not the poet — but the great illusion that beguiled the poet too. Many people lament the excessive prevalence of songs of discontent in poetry. But whom shall we blame? Discontent makes human beings act; longing makes the poet sing. However desirable contentment and satisfaction may be, they hinder both action and poetry equally. Just as the letter "a" stands at the beginning of the alphabet and is joined with every consonant, discontent and dissatisfaction stand at the beginning of creation and remain forever connected with the whole of present human nature. It is for this reason that they have gained such prominence in poetry — not because of any mental shallowness or digestive disorder in poets. When a peasant-poet composes poetry, he does not describe the beauty of the fields or the comfort of the cottage — the astonishing variety of the city draws his heart — then he sings out:

*"What a machine the Sahib Company has built!
Smoke rises straight from the engine, my friend!"*

Those who hear the whistle of the factory grow restless upon hearing the "bamboo flute" of the fields, and those who play the bamboo flute find their hearts stirred upon hearing the factory whistle. For this reason the poet of the city does not speak of happiness, and the poet of the field also tries to express the restlessness of longing in his song.

Happiness is forever distant, and this is why, when the poet sang — "My heart forever aches with restless longing" — its echo awoke also in the boy's heart. When the poet said—

*"Sometimes I think of leaving this land,
Going to some such other realm
Where city and village
Are not the abode of man,
But lie fallen in ruins.*

Where proud mansions crumble,
 Now all tumbling down —
 Countless trees and creepers
 Have made the forest dark and dense,
 A miasma of gloom hangs above it.
 Entering within it,
 A frail, timid man dies of fright,
 Where jackals howl,
 Making a terrible din,
 Crickets shrill their ceaseless cry.
 There, dwelling amid them,
 I shall sleep through day and night —
 Whom else shall I fear then,
 Not tigers, not serpents so much
 As I fear the beast that is man."

At this picture, no fear arose, but rather a longing. Why should this picture — of a boy who quails at spending even a single day outside the house, of a terrible, ruined heap of stones encircled by dense forest, echoing with the shrill cries of crickets, borne on winds of gloom — why should this appear to him as particularly desirable, it is difficult to say. Within our nature there dwell, bound in tight and inseparable union, a bond-intolerant, freedom-loving man, and a house-dwelling, confined woman. One is forever restless to enrich his immortal self variously and abundantly by tasting ever new flavours amid ever new lands, events, and circumstances of the world; the other is hidden and enclosed within a thousand accustomed bonds and conventions. One pulls toward the outside, the other draws toward home. One is a bird of the forest, the other a bird of the cage. It is this forest-bird that sings the most. But in its song, amid boundless freedom, there is expressed, in various ways and in varied melodies, a restlessness, an unspoken lament.

The wondrous wanderings of Sinbad the Sailor, and Robinson Crusoe's solitary island exile, once stirred within the mind a certain thirsting emotion; Abodhbandhu's first poem expressed that very feeling briefly, in song. That feeling by which the familiar home seems like exile, and the heart yearns for the unfamiliar world — its first expression I found in Biharilal's melody.

"Sometimes I think of the seashore.
 Where, as if roaring all at once,
 A mass of clouds of destruction,
 Enormous waves upon waves
 Assault the shore with a roar —
 Before me, boundless and infinite,
 Lies spread the vast mass of water;
 All the surging waves,
 White with clusters of foam,
 Rush forward irresistibly in tumult —
 The wind blowing with mighty force,
 As if waging war with the ocean —
 They rush at each other,
 The sky bursts with the sound,
 A tremendous mutual assault —
 In that great field of battle
 I sit, stunned, alone
 (While the wind's constant roar
 Keeps my ears quite cold)
 Watching and listening to it all.
 When the full moon
 Adorns the pure sky,
 Along the moonlit shore
 Will wander, playing,
 Upon the swell of the waves —
 I shall confide to them
 All the grief that is in my heart.
 Have you not heard, O noble friend,
 That he who shares another's sorrow
 Finds his own life eased by a sigh released."

I cannot count how many times I have read these descriptions, and through these verses the call of sea, mountain, and forest resounded within the heart of the boy-reader. In the writings of other contemporary poets too there is description of nature, but that is merely conventional description, merely the poet performing his

duty. It lacks that golden wand whose touch brings the inner soul of unmixed nature alive and awake, binding us in a close embrace of love.

Another chief difference between Biharilal and his contemporary poets lies in his language. Many of our poets show some degree of neglect toward language. Especially in the matching of rhyme in couplets, they preserve the rhyme in the most mechanical fashion. Many consider matching merely the final syllable sufficient, and many treat the rhyming of verb-endings such as "hoyechhe," "korechhe," "bhulechhe," as genuine rhyme. Rhyme has two chief virtues: one, that it satisfies the ear; the other, that it comes unexpectedly. Imperfect rhyme does not satisfy the ear; that imperfection makes the discordance of tone stand out all the more, revealing the poet's incapacity and the poverty of the language. Verb-rhymes can be multiplied at will — such rhyme does not each time produce a fresh surprise in the ear, and for this reason becomes tiresome and monotonous. In Biharilal's verse there is no poverty of rhyme or of language. It flows on, continuously sounding in effortless music, like a flowing spring. In places the language, abandoning formality, has suddenly become unusual and jarring to the ear; the metre has, without apparent reason, broken its own bounds and become wilful — but this is the poet's own deliberate choice, not born of incapacity. Nowhere, in reading through his work, does one feel that the poet was forced by necessity to spoil the rhyme or break the metre.

But the metre of the verses quoted above is not the predominant metre in "Bangasundari." Apart from the first poem, all the other poems in "Bangasundari" are divided, in sequence, into lines of twelve and eleven syllables. For example—

"A *form* *well-shaped,* *a* *tender* *vine,*
Bent *with* *beauty,* *laden* *with* *flowers,*
Curling *locks,* *a* *garland* *dark* *as* *rain-cloud,*
Trailing loose, fallen upon the earth."

This metre is indeed suited to the description of women — it makes anklets ring, as it were, with every beat. But the chief drawback of this metre is that it leaves no place for conjunct consonants. In metres such as payar and tripadi, the writer and the reader enjoy considerable freedom. There is scope to lengthen or shorten the syllable-count somewhat, at will. It is not necessary to count each syllable as exactly one beat and read it in a single breath. An example will make my meaning clear. —

"O Sarada, show yourself.
I cannot live alone,
My spirit is distressed, my heart distressed.
Whatever I have said in pique,
Do not, do not heed it,
Give me no more pain, in this hour of anguish."

This contains hardly any conjunct consonants at all. The following verse contains many conjunct consonants, and yet both verses are equally pleasant to read and sweet to the ear.

"Earth at the feet, sky at the head,
Stars, sun, and moon seem trifling,
As if one could count them on a fingernail's edge;
Before, the sea-clad earth
Lies spread out wide,
As though a sidelong glance had once beheld it."

Both these verses are quoted from the poet's own composition, "Saradamangal." Let us now quote two verses from "Bangasundari" for comparison.

"One day the young sun-god
Beheld, in the waters of the celestial river,
A wondrous maiden, a jewel,
Playing among the blue lotus-leaves."

If one reads the following verse alongside this, the difference will become apparent.

"The apsara and the kinnari stood upon the bank,
Slowly playing a delicate, plaintive melody,
Softly, softly plucking the veena,
Singing tenderly a song of affection."

"Apsara, kinnari" — here the metre breaks because of the conjunct consonants. It is for this very reason that the poet has, so far as possible, avoided conjunct consonants throughout "Bangasundari."

But a Bengali metre that has no place for conjunct consonants is not desirable. For the resonance and variety of sound in metre depend more heavily upon conjunct consonants. In the first place, Bengali metre has no long-short quantity in vowels; and if, on top of that, conjunct consonants are also excluded, the metre becomes an utterly boneless, smoothly-flowing heap of syllables. It quickly becomes wearisome and drowsy, and cannot stir the heart with any striking force. The chief reason that Sanskrit metre surges with such varied music is precisely the long-short quantity of vowels and the abundance of conjunct consonants. Michael Madhusudan was well aware of this hidden defect of metre, and it is for this reason that we feel such fullness of sound and such rippling movement in his blank verse.

When Biharilal's musical composition "Saradamangal" was first published in Aryadarshan, the difference in metre became evident in an instant. The metre of "Saradamangal" is not new — it is the common tripadi — but the poet infused it with such beauty in its music. The metrical grace of "Bangasundari" is easy to imitate, and once one grows accustomed to that sweetness, it becomes difficult to break free of its bondage — but the musical beauty of "Saradamangal" cannot be imitated.

"Saradamangal" is an extraordinary work of poetry. When I first became acquainted with it, I was utterly captivated by its language, its feeling, and its music, and yet I could not grasp any coherent overall meaning in it from start to finish. Just when I would think I had at last grasped the essence of the poem, it would change its shape. Like a sunset-hour garland of clouds gilded with gold, the golden verses of "Saradamangal" offer glimpses of various forms, but hold fast to no single form permanently — and yet, from that distant fountain of beauty, an extraordinary, deep melody flows continuously, keeping the innermost soul restless.

For this reason, proving the excellence of "Saradamangal" to an unappreciative person would be exceedingly difficult. To one who said, "I did not understand it — explain it to me," one would have to concede defeat.

The reader ought to be prepared to accept whatever the poet offers; if the reader attempts to extract from a poem only what he himself wants, he is bound to be disappointed most of the time. The result is that he neither gets what he wants, nor does he receive what the poet is offering. In "Saradamangal," if one listens with attentive ear to what the poet is singing, the heart is consecrated in a kind of divine

nectar of music — but if one tries to squeeze it into the framework of the rules of critical science, much of its essence is needlessly lost.

In truth, "Saradamangal" is not a single unified poem; if one views it as a collection of several fragmentary poems, it becomes easier to grasp its meaning. Secondly, the goddess Sarada as generally conceived in readers' minds is quite different from the poet's own conception of Sarada.

The Sarada whom the poet worships appears to different people in different forms. Sometimes she is mother, sometimes beloved, sometimes daughter. In the form of Beauty she dwells within the world's inner being, and, through mercy, affection, and love, forever stirs the human heart. The English poet Shelley, addressing that universally-pervading goddess of beauty, has said—

*Spirit of Beauty, that dost consecrate
With thine own hues all thou dost shine upon
Of human thought or form.*

Of whom he said—

*Thou messenger of sympathies,
That wax and wane in lovers' eyes.*

That very goddess is Biharilal's Sarada.

In the opening four verses of "Saradamangal," the poet worships and gives embodied form to that goddess Sarada. Then, he describes the manner in which that compassion-embodied goddess appeared in Valmiki's hermitage. When the scene rises before the reader's eyes, it is a dark night in the hermitage.

*"There is no moon, no sun, no star,
No stream of fiery flashes,
Nor the strange radiance of dazzling lightning.
The world is sunk in darkness,
All is silent, still,
Only the storm-wind roars at times."*

At such a moment, the dawn arose.—

"Upon the peak of the snow-mountain
 Suddenly it grows bright,
 A strange radiance falls on that holy hermitage.
 With eyes half-opened, gazing,
 Laughs the young daughter of light—
 Twilight's youthful dawn, a maiden jewel.
 Filling the world with her rays,
 She woke the earth with her laughter,
 Woke, laughing, the maidens of the sky's four quarters.
 She laughed within the heavens,
 Among the flocks of heavenly trees,
 She laughed in the lotus-grove of Lake Manasa."

In the hermitage, on one side, just as the young dawn broke through the darkness of night, so too, on the other side, the poet describes how, piercing through cruel violence, a compassionate poetic light appeared in what form.—

"In the sky, the dawn's glow arises,
 Flowing, rippling, wave upon wave,
 The river Tamasa, murmuring sweetly;
 Beholding the eye-delighting
 Beauty of the sandy shore's grove,
 Valmiki the sage wanders, his mind lost in reverie.
 Upon branch after branch, in loving joy,
 The krauncha and krauncha-female, beak to beak,
 Caress each other so tenderly, sitting together.
 An arrow struck the male—
 It slew the krauncha's life—
 Blood-soaked, its wing lies sprawled upon the earth.
 The krauncha-female, for her beloved companion,
 Circles round and round, mourning—
 The forest fills with her pitiful lament.
 Watching with his eyes,
 His mind numbed with grief,
 The compassionate-hearted sage is nearly overcome.
 Suddenly, upon the horizon,

A radiant maiden awakens,
 Awakening like lightning in a fresh blue cloud.
 With rays upon rays of light,
 A strange dawning of radiance,
 Dimming the sun's own image, illuminating the world.
 Not the moon, not the sun,
 But a radiant peacefulness—"

It seems something has caught fire this day upon the sage's brow —

Seated in a sphere of light,
 The luminous, beautiful maiden—
 The very treasure of the yogi's meditation, the maiden of his brow—
 Descended slowly, softly,
 And stood there, still,
 Gazing with entranced eyes upon Valmiki's face.
 On her the rainbow forms a garland,
 A garland of stars adorns her,
 Stars blaze at the parting of her hair, the forest glitters—
 In her ears, flower-buds of light,
 Swaying, curling locks
 Fly loose and fall, veiling her face...
 A pitiful sound of weeping,
 Rising, rising, ever rising,
 Startled, the bewildered maiden turned to look back—
 She beheld, blood-stained,
 The dead krauncha's broken wing,
 While the krauncha-female, weeping, circles round and round.
 Now upon the krauncha-female,
 Now upon Valmiki again,
 She turns her gaze, back and forth, as if maddened—
 Distressed, overflowing with compassion,
 In a voice full of pathos,
 Softly she plays upon her veena a mournful song.
 Hearing that song of grief,
 The young trees weep,

*The Tamasa river weeps, overflowing on both sides.
Beholding the image of the lotus-eyed girl,
The choked and faltering First Poet
Feels the ocean of compassion surge up within his heart."*

This is one compassionate form of the goddess Sarada. Thereafter, from verse 21 onward, another poem begins. In that poem, the goddess Sarada stands upon a golden lotus in Brahma's Lake Manasa, and her countless reflections are mirrored throughout the entire universe. This is the world-pervading form of Beauty of the goddess Sarada.

*"In Brahma's Lake Manasa
Blooms, overflowing,
In the blue water, a beautiful golden lotus,
Resting her feet upon the lotus-petal
She floats, laughing, laughing,
A sixteen-year-old beauty, a woman like the full-moon night.
With the smile of a million moons
A flood of loveliness surges up,
As if encircling the horizon in a rippling mirror;
Suddenly, wondrously,
The beauty's own reflection
Rises, laughing, laughing, floating, floating, in the eastern sky."*

Having completed his description of this newly-arisen compassionate-maiden form and this universally-pervading, sixteen-year-old beautiful form of the goddess Sarada, the poet sings out—

*"I keep you within my heart,
Ever dwelling in perpetual bliss,
Both cremation-ground and heaven please me equally.—
Mountain-ranges, garden-bowers,
Home, playhouse, dwelling,
Wherever I go, you go before me. ...
As much as my heart desires,
So much do you love me,
With all my heart and soul I love you."*

*Filled entirely with devotion
I am absorbed in your meditation,
I have no desire for Kamala's wealth."*

Having expressed this restlessness to fully attain this treasure of the imagined ideal of his devotion, the poet completed his first canto.

From the next canto onward, we find the restlessness of the lover. Now pique, now separation, now joy, now sorrow, now reproach, now praise. The goddess, arising in the form of the poet's beloved, stirs up music in a hundred streams through varied joys and sorrows. Sometimes the poet finds her, sometimes he loses her — now he sees her form of fearlessness, now her form of destruction. Sometimes she is aggrieved, sometimes sorrowful, sometimes joyful.

The poet speaks to her in her sorrowful mood—

*"Alas, what is this, why, why
Have you become so despondent—
Your moon-face downcast, your eyes downcast,
Your smile fading upon your lips,
Your trembling lips will not open to speak!
Why is that rosy glow
Veiled today in mist,
Why has the image of dawn grown so pale?
Tell me, tell me, O moon-faced one,
Who has given you this pain,
Who is so heartless!
I guessed, by inference,
That though you cast a compassionate glance,
You will not look my way, will not speak a word.
Why will you not speak, alas,
My heart longs to know,
Does some word catch in your throat, or does pain lodge within?
If it is not heartache,
Why then do tears flow?
The heavenly maiden knows not deceit—
A simple, sweet spirit,*

Ever singing,
 Absorbed always in the strain of her own veena.
 Alas, O simple, chaste one,
 Truth incarnate, Saraswati,
 Your eternally devoted worshipper, with folded hands,
 Stands silently
 Beside your lotus-throne—
 Grant permission: what should he do, where should he go?
 A garland of heaven's flowers,
 The burning fire of hell—
 With joyful face he will bear either upon his head.
 Your command is auspicious;
 I shall go even to the depths,
 I want neither this bridal garland nor this heaven."

The poet addresses the aggrieved Saraswati, saying—

"Today, in this melancholy dress,
 Why have you come to show yourself,
 Weeping and making me weep, O goddess, like a stranger!
 The joyous light of the full moon
 Has pleased my eyes,
 Between us the river swells, one on each bank—
 Chakravaka and chakravaki, one on each bank.
 Eye meeting eye,
 Heart playing with heart,
 Love's smile upon the lips, tinged with sorrow.
 Within the heart's veena
 A sweet melody plays,
 The heart's own sweet song dissolves within the heart itself.
 That same I, that same you,
 That same heavenly land,
 Those same wish-fulfilling trees, that same flowering grove,
 That same love, that same affection,
 That same life, that same body—
 Why then, on the banks of the Mandakini, do we stand apart, one on each shore!"

Sometimes, for a moment, doubt arises and speaks—

"Is it all, then, a mistake?
 Is there no root to love—
 Merely a strange sky-flower, a vine of fancy?
 Why does the mind float upon such sentiment,
 Why does the heart love
 That garland of flowers, wishing to wear it fondly upon the breast?
 Hundreds upon hundreds of men and women
 Stand in row upon row—
 Why do their eyes seek that same face!
 Finding it, they gain their lost treasure,
 Not finding it, life itself departs—
 Is there such simple truth, I know not!"

Sometimes, an ideal picture of love's fulfilment rises before the mind's eye—

In the celestial grove of Nandana
 Seated on a throne of white stone
 How Rati and Kama sport, full of life!
 Upon their faces, generous smiles,
 In their eyes, a flood of nectar,
 A strange light illuminates the entire world...
 Lost in some feeling;
 As if in some intoxicated daze,
 Eyes meeting eyes, swaying, falling—
 Arms entwining, entwining,
 Words faltering, choked with emotion,
 In tenderness, in passionate ardour, hearts melting.
 Hands trembling, trembling,
 Bodies swaying unsteadily,
 Hearts pounding, throbbing within the breast—
 A young, rosy glow
 Brings a reddish flush to their faces,
 Lips like lotus-petals tremble, quivering.
 Love, sacred desire,

The realm of bliss, the abode of liberation.
 Why do I see today such an intoxicated air!
 Cupid's bow scattered wide,
 Flung far away,
 Rati's chignon undone, her hair disheveled!
 In bewildered, mad passion,
 The chaste one gazes at her husband's face,
 Melting, dissolving—where has her mind gone!
 Entranced, intoxicated eyes,
 Half-opened like lotus buds,
 Fluttering, faltering, how they seem!
 Yawning languidly,
 Half asleep, half awake,
 As though some dream-like state has overtaken the mind!
 Floating on a sea of happiness,
 What a life-filled smile
 Some wave of feeling plays between their eyes!
 Restless, restless hearts
 Rise into a lively melody,
 Sleeping, half-sleeping, they sing, the two together.
 Keeping time with the melody,
 Birds call out again and again,
 In rhythm, swaying, swaying, the breeze moves along.
 Hidden behind the grove,
 The moon peeps out and watches,
 Ever glad in the lovers' joy, the kind moon.
 Adorned with buds and blossoms,
 Swaying with delight,
 The vines of the grove dance beautifully all around.
 In that joy, joyous herself,
 The Mandakini river swells,
 Making a murmuring sound, flowing with delight."

After such sorrow, separation, and doubt, the poet completes the book by painting a picture of joyful union with the beloved goddess upon the Himalayan peak. Apart

from the opening portion, the description of the Himalaya is not particularly praiseworthy; setting aside that description, I quote the remaining portion—

Generous, more generous still,
 Standing atop the peak
 Is this very queen of my heart, the beauty of the three heavens.
 This is nature's playhouse of beauty,
 You are its graceful dancer,
 Amid an ocean of loveliness, a beauty beyond compare.
 No words upon her lips,
 No blink in her eyes,
 No ear, no mind for my words—
 Her face on the verge of a smile,
 Her garments in disarray,
 Her disheveled tresses scattering in the wind.
 I know not what strange thing
 Has opened up for the world
 Today in those bewildered, intoxicated, blossoming eyes!
 O beloved, O dweller of the night,
 This is not moonlit night—
 Sleeping alone, what dream do you see!
 Ah, what a smile has blossomed!
 How dearly I love
 That smiling face of yours, my beloved—
 Behind the veil of sorrow,
 Turned away, that moon-face,
 I had lost all hope of ever seeing again.
 A poor man gaining Indra's fortune,
 How much joy would he feel—
 My ocean of joy is boundless and vast...
 Come, sister, come, brother,
 Let us go, laughing and playing,
 Rejoicing in joy, in the garden of joy.
 Such joy exists nowhere else in the three worlds.
 O tranquil mountain-land,

You have filled my life,
 Bringing to life this treasure of my existence.
 Such joy exists nowhere else in the three worlds.
 Beloved, life-giving vine,
 How much pain I have felt
 Beholding that sorrowful form of yours.
 How many nightmares
 Have driven my mind wild—
 How much have I wept, crying out in anguish.
 Today all of that,
 Like a wave of illusion,
 Plays about within this ocean of joy.
 Stay, O queen of my heart,
 Illuminating the three worlds,
 Let me fill my eyes, gazing upon you.
 My longing is not satisfied by merely looking,
 I know not what flavour lies there,
 I know not what fragrance is anointed upon that blessed face!
 What pure radiance
 Has turned night into morning,
 Heaven itself smiles in the light of those eyes.
 Upon such a cherished treasure
 Every single rival—
 Has no mercy, no compassion, how cruel!
 Fondly has this maiden strung
 A garland of heart's flowers,
 Who shall cut that flower-garland with a sword of cruelty!
 Why again these tears,
 Flow on, ceaselessly,
 Ah, wash the goddess's lotus feet!
 In the lap of Lake Manasa
 The golden lotus sways,
 Bring the gentle breeze and adorn her neck with it.
 O bird, open your heart,

*Take up the fifth note,
Sing joyously the song of Saradamangal."*

Whether I have rightly grasped the thread by which the poet strung together these poems of "Saradamangal," I do not know — sometimes the thread is lost, sometimes the outpouring turns to excess — but I can say this: nowhere else in modern Bengali literature has the music of love gushed forth from such an abundant fountainhead. Such flawlessly beautiful language, such passionate feeling, such a blending of melody with word, is to be found nowhere else; the present critic once tried, in "Bangasundari" and "Saradamangal," to learn the craft of poetry from this poet — how far that effort succeeded, I cannot say, but this lesson has been permanently impressed upon my heart: that beautiful language is one of the chief elements of poetic beauty; and that carelessness of any kind, whether in metre or in language, is fatal to poetry. On this occasion, let me acknowledge yet another debt to that master of poetry. In my boyhood, I composed a lyrical drama called "Valmiki-Pratibha" and staged it on the occasion of a gathering called "Bidwajjana-samagam." That short play won the favour of Bankimchandra and many other connoisseurs. Its central idea, and indeed, in places, even its language, were taken directly from the opening portion of Biharilal's "Saradamangal."

It has now been twenty years since "Saradamangal" was published serially, and sixteen years since it appeared in book form; in the journal Bharati, only a single critic gave it a warm welcome. Since then, "Saradamangal" has spent these sixteen years in obscurity, still within its first edition. Since then, the poet too never again showed himself before the public. He who remained hidden in the wings of life's stage, beyond the reach of the audience's applause, has now withdrawn behind the curtain of death, without receiving the public's farewell greeting; but I can say this with confidence: when the countless well-known compositions of the general public have long been destroyed and forgotten, "Saradamangal" will grow ever brighter in the memory of the people, and the poet Biharilal, wearing an unfading garland of fame, shall dwell in the same seat with the immortals of Bengali literature.

Ashadh, 1301 (Bengali era)

SANJIBCHANDRA

Palamou

There lingers, in the genius of certain capable writers, a curious flaw of incompleteness owing to some misfortune of their stars; though they may write a great deal, one still feels that all they had to write remains unwritten. We cannot perceive their genius bound within a coherent, well-formed shape; we can sense that within it lay much of the raw material of greatness and grandeur, but it lacked precisely that arrangement by whose power it might present and prove itself, before the world at large, in the finest possible manner.

Sanjibchandra's genius belonged to this aforementioned class. From his writings one senses that he did not lack genius, but he was unable to establish that genius as firmly as he might have. Looking at the work of his hand, one feels that whatever task he demonstrated, his true capacity far exceeded it. Within him there was as much capability as there was, proportionally, too little application of will.

His genius possessed wealth, but it lacked housewifery. Good housewifery can make even a little suffice abundantly; if what little there is can be properly arranged, abundant fruit may be gained from it. But however much one may possess, without suitable housewifery that wealth goes to waste; in such circumstances, many things go scattered and spoiled, while only a little actually proves useful. What many others have accomplished in remedying the deficiencies of literature with far less capacity than his, he, despite his abundant capability, could not achieve; the reason being that Sanjib's genius was rich, but not a good housekeeper.

One example will suffice to make my point clear to the reader. In the book "Jal Pratapchand," Sanjibchandra demonstrates such skill in the arrangement of events, judgment of evidence, and precision of documentation, cutting through complex intricacies to draw out a fascinating, coherent thread of narrative, that no one can doubt his extraordinary capability — but alongside this, one also feels that it is merely a waste of capability. Had he applied this capability to some genuine historical matter, it would have satisfied not merely our momentary curiosity but become a source of lasting joy. When craftsmanship that ought to be carved upon stone is instead engraved upon sand, it gives rise only to regret.

"Palamou" is a charming travel narrative composed by Sanjib. There is ample beauty in it, but reading through it, one repeatedly senses that the writer has not written with due care. There is, woven throughout its composition, a considerable degree of indolence and neglect, and this was not unknown even to the author himself. Where Bankim Babu's writing shows any sign of weakness, he has tried to dazzle and overawe the reader into submission — Sanjib Babu, in similar circumstances, has confessed his fault, but only to silence his readers' mouths; there is no repentance in it, nor, from the tone of his words, does it seem he intends to be more careful in the future. It is as if he has told his readers, "Look here, my friend, accept whatever I choose to give you of my own will, and do not expect too much."

In the manner in which he has written this travel narrative "Palamou," various incidental matters may naturally arise in passing — yet even so, there remains a need for selection and proportionate balance. Whatever matters are meant to come should come of their own accord, without obstructing the flow of the narrative. When a stream flows, it carries along those stones which it can push forward in its current, submerges those it can freely overrun, and effortlessly bypasses the stone that is "neither to be carried nor overrun." In this travel narrative of Sanjib Babu's, many such digressions have crept in that ought to have been bypassed, which have disrupted the flavour of the narrative, and even the author himself has eventually said, "Now let all this rambling talk be set aside." But the deliberate effort needed to carefully exclude such ramblings was simply not in his nature. Whatever matter has found its way in, however unnecessary, has simply remained there. This is why Sanjib's genius could not gain the recognition it deserved from the general public — we have shown above the reason and the example for this — and yet there is also sufficient reason why Sanjib's genius deserves the admiration of the sensitive reader.

In this travel account "Palamou," Sanjibchandra reveals an unaffected, alert love of beauty such as is not commonly found among ordinary Bengali writers. Generally, there exists in our nation a certain symptom of premature aging of the intellect — in our eyes, the whole world seems to have grown decrepit. The illusory veil of beauty seems to have grown threadbare, and the timeless antiquity of the universe seems to have settled only upon us. This is why we show such profound neglect toward beauty in food, clothing, speech, custom, and dwelling, everywhere. But

within Sanjib's heart there was no such reign of decrepitude. He seemed to travel through a newly-created world with a fresh pair of eyes. It is not that Sanjibchandra saw, in "Palamou," anything particularly novel or curious, or described anything in minute detail — but everywhere he displayed a capacity for loving and finding things lovable. The land of Palamou is not presented as a coherent, clearly-defined, vividly illuminated picture, but he has preserved that rare quality whereby, wherever there is sympathy and appreciation of feeling, an inexhaustible treasury of beauty's nectar is revealed everywhere in the world; and that loving quality of tender affection in his heart has touched everything it has come into contact with — whether a dark, shaded forest bower, or a wilderness overgrown with jungle, whether inanimate or animate, small or great — bestowing upon each a delicate beauty and dignity. When, at the very outset of his journey, the writer was crossing the Barakar river by cart, some children of the coolies surrounded his cart, shouting "Sahib, one paisa," "Sahib, one paisa"; the writer describes—

"At this moment a two-year-old child came and, raising its face to the sky, stood there with hand outstretched. It did not know why it held out its hand — seeing everyone else holding out their hands, it too held out its own. I placed a paisa in its hand; the child dropped it and again held out its hand; another boy picked up that paisa, and a furious quarrel broke out with the child's sister."

Upon this small example of an ordinary child's purposeless imitative behaviour, this small instance of childishness, there falls a certain playful, affectionate smile from Sanjib that is truly delightful to the reader; that one picture — of an upturned hand, an upward-looking face, an innocent, greed-less child-beggar — draws out from us a sweet, tender feeling toward the whole race of children.

The scene is charming not because it is novel or extraordinary, but precisely because it is old and ordinary that it stirs our hearts so. We have all, from time to time, witnessed similar incidents among children — these lay forgotten, accumulated within our minds. The moment Sanjib's painted picture is set before us, those half-formed memories come sharply into focus, and, along with them, our affection for children grows dense and is transformed into the pleasure of joy.

Chandranath Babu says that Sanjib Babu used to see what ordinary people do not see — this, he says, is one of his distinguishing qualities. We say: Sanjib Babu may well have had that distinguishing quality, but literature has no need whatsoever of

such a distinction. The incident we quoted earlier is not a matter of novel observation; there is no new thought or new method of observation in it — and yet it is genuine literature. Let me quote another passage from the book. The author says that one day, standing at the foot of a mountain, he called out loudly to a tame dog, and "behind him, that shout echoed back most strangely. Turning suddenly and looking toward the mountain, I shouted again; the echo again, rising and falling in pitch as before, travelled to the far side of the mountain. I shouted again; the sound, as before, struck against the mountain's flank, rising and falling. This time I understood that sound travels along a particular level; wherever that level rises or falls, the sound rises and falls with it accordingly. ||| It was exactly as if that level were the sound's conductor."

This is science, perhaps mistaken science. It may be novel, but it evokes no aesthetic feeling — it does not resonate at that level within our hearts where our sense of literary appreciation resides. The incident quoted earlier is unremarkable and old, and yet its description vibrates within the literary chamber of our hearts.

Chandranath Babu has offered an example in support of his own view. I wish to quote it in full from the original work.

"Every evening I used to go and sit in the lap of the Latehar mountains; however much work remained in the tent, I would abandon it and go. At four o'clock I would grow restless; I never once thought why; there was nothing new in the mountains; I would meet no one there, there would be no conversation, and yet why I had to go there, I do not know. Now I see this restlessness is not mine alone. At the very hour when the shadows fall across the courtyard, the housewife's mind always grows restless to go fetch water. Even if there is water already, they abandon it and go to fetch more. That woman who cannot go to fetch water is unfortunate — sitting at home, she sees the shadow lengthening in the courtyard, the shadow spreading in the sky, the colours of the world shifting — but being unable to go out and see it, how great is her sorrow. Perhaps I too used to go merely to see the changing colours of the earth."

Chandranath Babu says—

"Even when there is water already, they abandon it and go fetch more — how many of us notice such a thing about our women fetching water?"

In our judgment, this question of the critic is beside the point. Perhaps many have noticed and observed this; perhaps they have not. That housewives abandon existing water to go fetch more — we do not praise the passage quoted above merely for this newly-discovered fact, invisible to the ordinary careless eye. Among all the possible reasons a woman might go to fetch water in the evening, the moment Sanjib attributed the most beautiful of these motives, mingling it with the twilight shadows, the scene of the housewife fetching water became exceedingly charming; and that girl who could not go to fetch water, and sits alone gazing vacantly as the courtyard's shadow lengthens and the sky's shadow deepens, her melancholy face touched by the fading golden light of evening, creates within the courtyard an extraordinarily beautiful image. It is not that Sanjib noticed this girl and we did not — he created her, he made her permanent in the realm of possibility. We do not even wish to inquire whether the existence of such a girl is generally true in Bengal, or whether this truth was discovered by Sanjib. We only feel that the picture is beautiful indeed, and not impossible either.

Sanjib Babu has written in one place—

"In my childhood I used to think that just as ghosts and spirits are themselves formless and manifest through possession of another's body, so too does Beauty manifest by taking on some other form; but the difference is this — that ghosts take only human, especially female, bodies as their abode, whereas trees, leaves, streams, rivers, and all such things serve as vessels for Beauty. Beauty is thus one, though its vessels differ."

Building upon this view of Sanjib Babu's, Chandranath Babu has said—

"Unless one properly understands Sanjib Babu's theory of beauty, one cannot properly understand his writing, nor properly enjoy it."

We cannot agree at all with this statement of the critic. If it were true that one cannot understand the beauty of Sanjib's writing without grasping some particular theory of beauty, then his work would not deserve a place in literature at all. That there is beauty in rivers and streams, beauty in flowers and stars, beauty in humans, animals, and birds — this we knew without ever reading Plato — whether that beauty comes from outside like a spirit and manifests in particular objects, or whether it arises within our minds owing to some particular quality of the object and of our own nature — with all such theorizing, the enjoyment of beauty has not

the slightest connection. Even an illiterate person, when he calls his beloved's face "moon-face," acknowledges, without having read any particular theory, that though the moon and his beloved are, in reality, entirely different objects, yet the kind of joy he feels at the sight of the moon is precisely the same kind of pleasure he derives from his beloved's face.

I have elaborated somewhat on my disagreement with Chandranath Babu; my reason for this is that, by this means, readers will very easily understand how we regard literature. And they will also understand how, in today's fashion of criticism, what is genuinely simple and universally accessible is made needlessly complicated, dressing up the old in some newly-constructed form to present it to the reader. In the criticism of good poetry, nowadays, instead of focusing on arousing beauty in the reader's heart, one sees an attempt to astonish the reader with novel and difficult language; this makes criticism neither truthful, nor simple, nor beautiful — it merely becomes exceedingly astonishing.

Let me quote the author's description of the dance of some Kol maidens.—

"At this time, group by group, village girls began gathering; as soon as they arrived, they began mocking the young men, and immediately a great burst of laughter broke out. I could not understand the mockery at all; I could only tell, from the feeling of it, that the young men had been outdone. It stood to reason — the young men numbered ten or twelve, but the girls numbered nearly forty; forty girls laughing together could put a Highland regiment to shame. When the laughter and mockery ended, preparations for the dance began. All the girls, holding hands, arranged themselves in a crescent-shaped line. It was wonderful to behold. All of equal height, all dark as polished stone; all with bodies unclothed; upon every one of those bare breasts, a mirror-pendant flashing now and again in the moonlight. Again, upon every head, wildflowers, in every ear, wildflowers, and laughter blooming everywhere. All were filled with delight, restless with delight, as if, like horses full of vigour, they were all restraining the force of their bodies.

"Before them stood the young men, and behind the young men, watching in eager anticipation, stood the elders, and along with them, this unworthy self. When the elders gave the signal, drums sounded among the young men, and at once the girls' bodies seemed to shiver. If bodily commotion exists, then a commotion fell upon the girls' bodies, and immediately afterward they began to dance."

This description is beautiful — what more is there to say? And what higher praise could there be? At the words describing the delight-restless young women, before the dance, restraining the force of their bodies like horses full of vigour, the image that arises in our minds arises from the power of our own imagination, not from the operation of any particular scientific theory. To say "a commotion fell upon the girls' bodies" instantly gives rise to a certain feeling in our minds; something difficult to describe directly is thereby stamped upon our hearts in a single flash, through this metaphor. The moment the dance-drums sounded, by long-accustomed habit, a wild wave of excitement rippled through every limb of the Kol women's bodies; instantly, within every limb and joint of theirs, there arose, as it were, a mutual whispering and murmuring, a startled eagerness, a preparation for celebration — had we possessed divine hearing, we might have heard the inner commotion of their bodies thrilling with the excitement of the dance. This ripple that spreads through the limbs of youth-laden women at the very first beat of the dance-drum is so subtle, so purely a matter of our own inference and feeling, that to make it vivid in description one must resort to the metaphor of "commotion" — beyond this, there is no other deep meaning in it. If this metaphor fails to reveal the writer's intended feeling, then it has no other justification, and is mere verbiage.

When flower-adorned Gauri, in the springtime of her beauty, entered Mahadeva's hermitage carrying a garland of lotus-seeds, Kalidasa called her "a moving, flowering vine"; when the beautiful Radhika, surrounded by her companions, entered the field of vision, Govindadas compared her to the enchanting fifth raga; whether they had any particular theory of beauty, I do not know, but the purpose of employing such seemingly incongruous metaphors is this: that we have many times witnessed, in the southern breeze, the swaying of a spring-time vine laden with new leaves; that particular grace of beauty is familiar to us; the moment that metaphor is employed, it becomes adorned with a long-familiar sense of beauty we have accumulated over time, and in a single phrase, Gauri shines forth vividly in our hearts; we know that a raga evokes within us a certain indescribable restlessness of beauty, and so, the moment Radhika is compared to the fifth raga, the indefinable yet eternally familiar sweet feeling that arises in our minds could not have been achieved through any amount of elaborate description; therefore it is evident that, in this realm of beauty, Sanjib Babu has not cut his own new path —

he has followed the ancient royal road trodden by all imaginative writers and poets, and that itself is his glory.

In describing a young woman, Sanjib has written—

"Seeing her arched eyebrows, it occurred to me as though, high up in the blue sky, some great bird were soaring with outstretched wings."

The moment one reads this metaphor, a great joy arises in the mind; the mere resemblance of the metaphor is not the sole cause of this — but that very point of resemblance becomes the occasion for a whole cluster of other beauties to become entangled with it — it is like a kind of magic; it is hard to say for certain whether we are looking at a bird with motionless wings, soaring fixed in the infinitely clear blue evening sky, or whether we are looking at a pair of eyebrows arched upon the beautiful, fair forehead of a young woman. I know not by what spell, suddenly, upon a small forehead, the infinite expanse of a light-washed blue sky descends, and it seems as though, to gaze upon that pair of arched brows on a woman's face, one must extend one's fixed gaze far upward, far outward. This metaphor suddenly creates such an illusion — but it is precisely within the enchantment of that illusion that beauty grows dense and rich.

Let me end the essay by giving, finally, one example of a simple description from the book. The author is describing a sleeping tiger—

"On one side of the courtyard, the tiger lies with eyes closed, like an innocent, gentle creature; near its mouth, one beautiful, claw-bearing paw lies as though held up like a mirror, as it sleeps. It seems that, before falling asleep, it had licked that paw once."

This satisfied, well-fed tiger, having overturned one paw before its face and fallen asleep thus — in this single phrase, the picture of the sleeping tiger becomes as vividly true as nothing else could have made it. Sanjib, like a child, looked upon all things with living curiosity, and, like a seasoned painter, selected its principal features and brought his picture into vivid focus, and, like a true man of feeling, added to everything a portion of his own heart.

Poush, 1301 (Bengali era)

VIDYAPATI'S RADHIKA

Motion and heat are but two different states of a single force; in the poetry of Vidyapati and Chandidas that same power of love shows itself in two such distinct forms. In Vidyapati's verse we find love's grace, love's dance, love's restlessness; in Chandidas's verse, love's intensity, love's burning, love's illumination. For this reason Vidyapati's songs are so replete with rhythm, melody, and manifold hues; for this reason there is in them such a rippling play of the delight of beauty. This is merely the effervescence of youth's first awakening—merely unmixed joy and unbroken strains of music. It is not that sorrow is altogether absent; but between joy and sorrow there lies a gap, an interval. It is either joy or sorrow, either union or separation—so clean is the division into categories. Unlike Chandidas, joy and sorrow, separation and union, have not become entangled and interwoven. This is why in Vidyapati's love there is the freshness of youth, and in Chandidas's love the deeper gravity of riper years.

Such indeed is the way of youth—to see joy and sorrow, good and evil, as utterly apart. It is as though in the world one side held pure good and the other pure evil, one side utter joy and the other utter sorrow—each taking the stance of an adversary, sitting turned away from the other. At that age a complete ideal of every single thing comes to reign in the heart. On seeing virtue, one imagines it virtue entire; on seeing fault, all faults gather together and take on a demon's shape. Once joy shows its face, every trace of sorrow vanishes from the three worlds; and when sorrow arrives, nowhere is the least glimmer of joy to be seen. Hence music is ever pitched, overflowing, in the exultant fifth note. In Vidyapati, therefore, there is only spring.

Radha is opening into bloom, a little at a time. Beauty ripples and overflows. She meets with Shyam, and on every side a trembling of youth surges and sways. There is a little laughter, a little coquetry, a little sidelong glance; a touch of restlessness, a touch of hope and despair stirring—but nothing utterly heart-rending. As Chandidas has it—

*My eyes, like the chakora bird, drink him in without pause,
Not for an instant do they close—*

In Vidyapati there is no such headlong drinking-in—only, one might say, a degree of impetuosity. Only a half-revealing of herself and a half-concealing; only, at a sudden gust of wild wind, a momentary flutter awakened. Vidyapati's Radha is young, newly blossomed. She does not fully know herself, nor the other. From a distance, smiling, self-possessed, playful; up close, trembling, timid, bewildered. Only once, in curiosity, with the tip of a champak-bud finger, does she touch, most cautiously, this unfamiliar love, and at once turns to flee—like a timid girl who, drawn by natural affection for creatures, touches with a start some unknown fawn, once, then flees, then by degrees loses her fear—even so.

Youth, too, has only just begun; at such a season everything is full of mystery. The newly opened heart suddenly feels its own fragrance; it has only just become conscious of itself. Hence, in shame, in fear, in joy, in doubt, it cannot decide whether to conceal itself or reveal itself—

*Sometimes she binds her limbs, sometimes she loosens them,
Sometimes she covers her body, sometimes lays it bare.*

The heart's new longings wish to spread their wings and fly, but do not yet know the way. In curiosity and inexperience they advance a little, timidly, then shrink back again into the recesses of their own reticence, taking refuge in their secluded, tender nest.

At this stage there is more delight in love than pain. It has no unshakable steadfastness of depth—only the wild, playful restlessness of fresh passion. Reading these verses of Vidyapati over and over, the eye falls upon the surface of a wind-tossed sea. Waves are at play; foam rises up in froth; the shadow of clouds falls; sunlight, shattered into a hundred thousand fragments, is scattered on every side. Wave upon wave—touch and flight, murmur, laughter, the clapping of hands—only dance and song, glimmer and stir, light and diversity of colour. How much of beauty, in how many rhythms and postures, scintillates upon this restless billow of fresh love—all this is expressed in Vidyapati's songs. But the depth that lies in the sea's inmost region, the stillness, the world-forgetting absorption of contemplation—that is not to be found among Vidyapati's waves of song.

Now and then perhaps a glimpse is caught—in the waters of the Yamuna, or on the way back from bathing—but never seen fully. It is the glimpse of a moment only, and the reflection of beauty that falls upon the impatient, wavering heart breaks

and breaks again; there is no leisure to still the mind, to gather patience and truly look. All that could be seen was only—

*"Half a glance stolen, half a face in laughter,
Only half the eyes' wave."*

But—

"I could not look upon him fully."

After that, how much coming and going, how much telling and asking, how many wiles, how many moods disclosed, how much fear, how much anxious thought—until at last, one day in sweet spring, a fresh union; yet even that is not an intense, deeply hidden, utter union. Within it, how much misgiving, how much reassurance, how much playfulness, how much feigned coyness, how much pique and appeasement and coaxing! And then counsel with her confidante; calling her friend, sitting secluded in a corner of the house, discussing through many a device and turn of speech the memory of her own delight. Just as a young girl's newly awakened love is enchanting, mingled, full of manifold sport and curiosity—in this it lacks nothing.

Chandidas is deep and anguished; Vidyapati is fresh and sweet.

*"New Vrindavan, new blossoming new saplings,
new, new blossoming flowers.
New spring, new breeze from the Malaya hills,
intoxicating the new swarm of bees.
The young stag wanders free.
By the Kalindi's bank, the grove newly adorned,
new, new, rapt in love.
The fresh mango-buds, honeyed and heavy,
the new cuckoo-flock sings.
The hearts of young women, both together,
run to the forest in fresh passion.
The new prince, fresh, and the new lady,
meet in fresh, fresh splendour.
Day by day such new, new sport—
says Vidyapati, intoxicated in mind."*

To this one more song must be joined, or this remains incomplete.

*"The honeyed season, the ranks of bees;
sweet flowers, honey-maddened.
Sweet, within Vrindavan,
sweet, sweet, the lord of passion.
Sweet, with the young women's company,
sweet, sweet, the sport of passion.
Sweet the instruments, the strains of melody,
sweet, sweet, the clapping of hands.
Sweet the dancer's turning steps,
sweet the dancing girl's play.
Sweet, sweet, the song of passion—
sweet, says Vidyapati."*

Here indeed one might end; but to end here would leave much unresolved. It does not come to rest exactly on the beat. And so Vidyapati has left one final word—call it the last word, or call it a word without end. So much play, so much fresh rapture—its concluding word is this:

*"From birth I have gazed upon this beauty,
yet my eyes are not satisfied.
For a hundred thousand ages I have held it to my heart,
yet my heart finds no peace."*

The fresh love has become, all at once, old as a hundred thousand ages. After this a change of rhythm and mode becomes necessary. The prelude of eternally fresh love has reached its end. Chandidas comes, and begins the song of eternally old love.

Chaitra, 1298

KRISHNACHARITRA

When we first received an English education and began to turn a critical eye upon politics, neither social custom nor religious doctrine escaped that same merciless scrutiny. Even in the minds of mere students of that day, a certain discontent and doubt had arisen regarding our society and our faith.

After judgment comes the turn of action. It is not difficult to decide by opinion what is good and what is bad; but to regulate one's own conduct accordingly, in the field of action, is exceedingly arduous. Regarding the machinery of the state, our own duty is very slight, for the reins of sovereignty lie not at all in our hands; hence political criticism still proceeds in the most vehement and unrestrained manner, without occasion for hesitation. But duty concerning society and religion lies in our own hands; and so, when what is settled in judgment on questions of faith and social order is not carried into practice, no one but ourselves can be blamed for it. A man cannot for long sit in self-accusation, nor is it wholesome for him to remain with an unclouded face laying blame upon himself. And so we began, one by one, to bring forth apologies for our society and our religion, to console our own minds—until at last we came to proclaim, with somewhat raised voices and solemn emphasis, that whatever we possess is the very best and most complete of things.

I do not call such conduct hypocritical or artificial. In truth, the root nature of a people's society and religion lies planted so deep that to interfere with it invites grave difficulties from every quarter, and in the place of old evils new evils rear their heads. In such straits one is driven to take up inaction once more, with a steeled heart; and, in retreating along that path, it is not unnatural that some excess of bravado should appear. Puffing out the chest, one wishes to declare to the world at large: this is not our defeat, but our victory.

It was in just such a season of reversal in our Bengali society that Bankimchandra's *Krishnacharitra* was written. When many, great and small, blending their voices with the voice of the multitude, were crying "Hari bol" in unison, a new note rang out in the throat of genius: Bankimchandra's *Krishnacharitra* is no chorus of "Hari bol." In it there is no assent to the general voice, but rather a discipline addressed to it.

Consider the temper of the age in which *Krishnacharitra* was composed, and the disposition of those who followed in Bankim's train on every side—one perceives in this book a powerful and independent force of genius.

That force is a lasting gain to us; it is the Bengali's supreme necessity. In places it has overstepped the bounds of justice and good manners; and yet, for such as we, weak and timid by nature, it stands as a fearless refuge. When even the educated men of our country, forgetting themselves, were proclaiming in feebleness the victory of scripture, Bankimchandra, with heroic pride, unfurled in *Krishnacharitra* the victorious banner of independent human reason. He examined scripture thoroughly, root and branch, by historical argument, and, bringing even long-hallowed beliefs under the jurisdiction of judgment, reinstated the dishonoured faculty of reason upon its own throne, in its own sovereign glory.

In our view the hero of *Krishnacharitra* is not Krishna, but its true protagonist: independent reason, the vigilant faculty of thought. First, Bankim makes clear that we shall not worship blindly, in servile obedience to scripture or custom; we shall worship, with due care, in accordance with the highest ideal of our own minds. Thereafter he shows that whatever is scripture is not, on that account, to be believed; rather, whatever is worthy of belief is thereby scripture. This one root idea is the inward spiritual power of *Krishnacharitra*, and it is this that lends the whole book its majesty.

The excellence and historicity of Krishna's character are the concern of the present book. In its first part the author discusses the history of the legend.

This is the first instance of proper historical criticism applied to Krishna's character. No one before had laid its foundations; and so Bankim has had to take upon himself both the labour of demolition and of construction. To determine, before deciding what is history, what is *not* history, demands vast labour and discernment. In our judgment, Bankim has, in this book, gone far in completing that work of demolition, but has had little opportunity to lay a good hand to construction.

He relies chiefly upon the Mahabharata, yet proves beyond doubt that within it lies a great mass of interpolated matter—though exactly where the original Mahabharata is to be found, he nowhere establishes. He himself says:

"The current Mahabharata is not the primal Vaisampayana recension. It is known as the Vaisampayana-samhita, but whether we possess the genuine Vaisampayana-samhita is doubtful. I have gone on to prove that nearly three parts of it are interpolated."

Bankim discovers three strata in the Mahabharata: the first, noble and of lofty poetic genius; the second, ignoble and, in its poetic portions, somewhat degraded; the third, the wilful accretion of many hands over a long age.

It is scarcely necessary to observe that judging the excellence or defect of the poetry in order to fix the stratum is a wholly conjectural business. Poetic genius appears differently to persons of differing taste; and it is no rare thing to find an earth-and-sky difference of quality within the work of one and the same poet. Hence difference of *language* ought to be the historian's chief object of scrutiny, not difference of poetic power. To trace, by this linguistic clue, the compositions of distinct poets within the Mahabharata, and to select out the original text, is a matter of prodigious labour.

A second point: a poor poet's work may contain good poetry, but historicity does not depend upon poetic merit. Concerning the war of Kuru and Pandava, many tales, in many versions, were current in ancient India among many peoples. Some excellent poet may have gathered from among these such material as suited his genius, and shaped it into one coherent and beautiful poem; and afterwards many indifferent or poor poets may have grafted onto that poem such scraps of history as they themselves knew. In such a case, the inferior poem might prove, as history, more reliable than the superior one. No one is unaware that to achieve completeness as poetry, the whole of history cannot be received without alteration. Were some later devotees of truth to expand, without discrimination, one of Shakespeare's historical dramas in order to supply its historical deficiencies, one can readily imagine what flaws would result in the poetry, what incongruities with the original text, what conflicts with the character as Shakespeare drew it. In such a case a critic of poetry, judging by poetic quality, might recover Shakespeare's true drama; but a critic of history could not say he would rely solely upon Shakespeare's original text to recover history.

Be that as it may—that the Mahabharata contains the work of many hands is granted; but exactly how these are to be separated, their dates and their relative truthfulness determined, has not yet been discovered.

Only, Babu Bankimchandra has fixed upon one criterion of unhistoricity on which none can differ: whatever is supernatural. First, whatever is supernatural is unworthy of belief; second, that portion of history in which the supernatural appears may, roughly, be said to have been composed long after the events themselves.

He fixes upon another criterion, equally worthy of note: that any portion in which some historical great man is worshipped as a god is certainly a later interpolation.

Hence, where Bankim rejects from Krishna's character whatever is exaggerated and superhuman, no historian's mind is likely to object. But where, on the ground that it is inconsistent with some other part of the Mahabharata, he discards certain matter, there the reader's mind cannot rest wholly assured. For of any great man, and any great event, varied and often conflicting popular tradition tends to grow up in a country; and, discarding and refining such traditions, different poets may, each according to his own ideal, compose quite different poems. One may make of Shri Krishna a supremely righteous man of divine nature; another, a scheming politician of cunning wit. It is likely that both portraits are incomplete, and though mutually opposed, both may contain a measure of truth. In truth it is hard to determine which, as history, deserves the greater trust.

For this reason Bankim discusses at great length, and with elaborate interpretation, every utterance and opinion of Krishna's as found in the Mahabharata, and constructs from it a historical character which, in our view, is not adequately grounded in fact. Bankim himself, here and there, admits that not everything set in Krishna's mouth in the Mahabharata was actually spoken by the real Krishna; it merely proves what conception of Krishna the poet held. But to accept the poet's ideal as, in every particular, the equivalent of the historical ideal requires corroboration beyond the poet's own verse. Let me cite one instance. Bankim says:

"Remembering the sufferings of her sons and daughters-in-law, Kunti wept much before Krishna. What Krishna said to her in reply is beyond price. None but one who has fully fathomed every aspect of human character can grasp the worth of those words; fools, needless to say, cannot. Shri Krishna says, 'The Pandavas, conquering

sleep, drowsiness, wrath, joy, hunger, thirst, cold and heat and defeat, remain steadfast in heroic delight. Renouncing sensual pleasure, they abide content in the delight proper to heroes; men of such vast strength, of such enterprise and prowess, are never satisfied with little. Heroic men are either exceedingly wretched or enjoy the most excellent pleasure; men who covet mere sensual delight remain content only in a middling state—but that middling state is the very seed-bed of sorrow; the gaining of a kingdom, or exile to the forest, is alone the true occasion of joy."

The utterance of Krishna's that Bankim quotes is full of grave and pregnant counsel. But I do not believe it lends any particular support toward fixing the historical character of Krishna. What it displays is the Mahabharata-poet's knowledge of human character and the loftiness of his own heart. This speech occurs in the very latest chapters of the Udyoga Parva; some forty chapters later, an old tale called the *Vidula-Sanjaya-Samvada* has been inserted, in which the fiery Vidula, urging her war-shy son Sanjaya to the duty of a Kshatriya, speaks words that differ not at all from Krishna's utterance above. Vidula says:

"Even now, bear thoughts befitting a man. Do not, contenting yourself with little, needlessly dishonour your boundless soul. As small streams are filled by little water, and the mouse's small palm is filled by a little grain, so cowards too grow easily content with the smallest measure. Better a hundredfold to blaze for a moment than to smoulder for a lifetime.... In this world the wise regard little things as unlovely; whatever little thing becomes dear to a man surely proves, in the end, harmful to him.... Those who, having resolved that results are uncertain, do not shrink back from action—their end may be gained, or it may not; but those who, from the mere apprehension of an uncertain outcome, wholly refrain from action, can never at any time attain success."

From this it is plain that the Mahabharata-poet's ideal of devotion to duty was exceedingly lofty, and that he propagated it, through many examples, in many places. It is not unreasonable to imagine that at one time, in India, for the sake of proclaiming the supremacy of the ethic of action, a poet wove the popularly known tale of the Kuru-Pandava war into a great epic. Krishna, Arjuna, Bhishma, Karna, Drona and the other principal figures of the Mahabharata are, every one, supreme exemplars of the hero of action; even Gandhari and Draupadi are radiant with the majesty of devotion to duty. That is why Gandhari proposed to abandon

Duryodhana, and Draupadi said: *"The sin of slaying one who should not be slain, and the sin of not slaying one who should be slain, are one and the same sin."*

Therefore, if there be no flaw of proof in what Bankim says, it is established only that in the mind of some unnamed poet the ideal of greatness stood exceedingly high, and that his creation of this supreme ideal is the Krishna of the Mahabharata. Krishna may indeed be historical; but there is no proof that the Krishna of the Mahabharata is, in every respect, the counterpart of the historical Krishna. It is evident, too, that within this same epic, different poets have shaped Krishnas of different ideals.

Where one witness speaks against himself, other witnesses must be called to establish the truth. But Bankim has shown that the portion of Krishna's life narrated in the Mahabharata occurs in no other Purana at all; and so the means of comparing the testimony of one witness against another, in order to recover the truth, does not exist here.

Therefore, on Bankim's own proof, we find that the original Mahabharata composed by Vyasa no longer exists. What we now possess was gathered from Vyasa's mouth by Vaisampayana, from Vaisampayana's mouth by the father of Ugrashrava, from him by Ugrashrava, and from Ugrashrava's mouth by some other poet again. Second, into this Mahabharata too, over long ages, the compositions of many hands have been mingled, and there is at present no reliable means of sifting them apart beyond doubt. Third, there exists no way, by comparison with other ancient texts, to prove the historicity of the Mahabharata.

Bankim, taking Krishna's character as his chief occasion, has examined the historicity of the Mahabharata only incidentally; yet it is only by first applying proof and judgment to extract the whole historical substance of the epic that the historicity of Krishna's character could be satisfactorily established. For instance: Bankim has expressed doubt whether Draupadi's marriage to five husbands is authentic fact. It is necessary, then, to see whether such a marriage can be excised, on Bankim's own principles, from every part of what he calls the original Mahabharata—and whether, in those very portions from which he compiles the history of Krishna's character, Draupadi's conduct as wife to five husbands is not inseparably bound up. Had Bankim been able to remove, with proof, from his hypothetical original Mahabharata all such events as he judges unhistorical, then

we might be ready to accept his chosen portion as reliable history. But exactly how much of the Mahabharata is truly the original historical core, Bankim has nowhere clearly fixed; he has merely followed the thread of Krishna's character. In one place he says:

"Nor do I believe that Draupadi sprang from the sacrificial fire, or that she had five husbands. Yet it is not impossible that Drupada had a daughter born of his own body, that she was wed by svayamvara, and that Arjuna hit the mark at that svayamvara—there is no cause to disbelieve this. Whether she then had five husbands or one, the settling of that question is of no concern to us."

It is of considerable concern. Because Bankim regards the Mahabharata as history, and precisely for that reason accepts the Krishna narrated in it as historical. The matter of Draupadi's marriage to five husbands is no small thing; and if so vast an event be false, and if that falsehood has found its way even into Bankim's chosen Mahabharata, then thereby the reliability of that very Mahabharata—and correspondingly the historicity of the Krishna narrated within it—stands diminished. When the witness is one alone, to believe any particular part of his testimony true, the remainder of that testimony must be free from any taint of falsehood.

But to proceed with such elaborate demands, it is doubtful whether the book called *Krishnacharitra* could ever have fallen to any Bengali reader's lot at all. Whether it is possible, within one man's lifetime, by proper method, to recover the whole genuine historical substance of the Mahabharata, is itself doubtful. And so, that Bankim has opened a narrow path through the vast, dense forest of the epic is a matter of the greatest good fortune for us, no small marvel. Our sole complaint is that his work remains unfinished. It is not that we must sit content wherever his genius has brought us. He has shown us the examples of his own dissatisfaction; that dissatisfaction we must pursue further, must, with conscious effort, extend the domain of truth. He has not placed the pearl in our hands, but has taught us, by example, that if we want the pearl we must dive into the sea. Quite possibly we shall bow and say: we have no need of the pearl; we cannot dive into the sea.

Bankim, citing examples such as Macaulay, Carlyle, Lamartine, and Kuhn, wishes to call the whole Mahabharata poetic history; we, for our part, regard it as historical poetry. But whether we derive the ideal of Krishna's character from history, or from

poetry, or from some mingling of the two, I do not wish to argue further. History, in truth, is no scriptural word; everyone knows that very few men, even witnessing an event on the spot, can grasp it truly and describe it truly. Fewer still can compose, out of fragments, one whole human character and history. Everyone knows how kinsmen misjudge kinsmen, how friends misconstrue friends on many a point, sometimes in wholly opposite ways. To know an extraordinary man truly is harder still; and the accurate reconstruction of his likeness out of events long past is, in large measure, a work of imagination—of that there can be no doubt. By mingling proof with conjecture, so many differing images of the same man may be fashioned that as to which corresponds to the original, men of differing natures will believe differently. There is no doubt that history in general rests, to a great degree, upon the writer's conjecture and the reader's trust. In such a case it is far from impossible that a poet's conjecture should come nearer the truth of history than a historian's own. Mr. Foster published a life of Stratford; tradition has it that it might as well have been written by the poet Browning himself—yet the very play named *Stratford*, which that poet wrote not long after, has since been proved truer than his biography. Even so, the scattered legends once current concerning the war at Kurukshetra were taken up by the poet of the Mahabharata and, by force of imagination, made whole, reflected in one unified vision; and there is no ground to suppose this less true than any historian's history could be.

Fact—what in English is called *fact*—is far narrower than truth. From this heap of fact, truth must be recovered by reason and by imagination. Often history offers up nothing but dry fuel-wood piled high in fact, yet truth blazes into poetry only by the poet's own genius. And so, at this great remove of time, to demand historical proof for the character of Krishna as the Mahabharata's poet drew him seems to us a laborious and self-defeating undertaking. The renowned antiquarian Froude has said: "The genuine and natural greatness of a truly great man lies beyond the reach of prose; it can be told only by the pen of a poet. Whatever the reason, this much is certainly true. Poetry possesses this life-giving power, and prose does not; and for this very reason the poet is the greatest of all historians."

We take Froude's meaning to be this: the recorded deeds of a great man are mere fact; his *greatness* alone is the truth. And to awaken that truth, whole and alive, in a reader's mind, the poet's genius is required far more than the historian's research.

Seen in this light, it may be that not every single fact concerning Krishna's character as narrated by the Mahabharata's poet is accurate; every minute word put into his mouth, every act ascribed to him, may not be verifiable—but the greatness of Krishna that the poet has stamped upon the minds of his readers remains, above all, the most precious truth. Had Krishna's history existed, it would doubtless have recorded a thousand deeds that, though performed by him, possess no lasting worth—deeds, that is, which do not express his essential Krishna-ness; and since, in the end, it is not possible to know all things, many of them might even seem to contradict his true nature. Every man, in the course of many actions, acts against his own truest nature. In the Krishna of the Mahabharata, surely all such needless and accidental facts have been cast aside, and only the essential truths retained—indeed, by making Krishna speak words he never spoke but which only Krishna could speak, and do deeds he never did but which only Krishna could do, the poet has made his Krishna truer than the actual man.

That is: whatever, in bare fact, was naturally un-Krishna-like, he has set apart; and the ideal that the real Krishna, through the qualities of his character, kindled in the poet's mind—an ideal which, for many external reasons, could not everywhere be manifested in unbroken, continuous action—that ideal the poet has brought to full and perfect expression everywhere, recovering from mere history a Krishna truer and more eternal than the actual one.

Therefore, when Bankim wishes to establish the greatness of Krishna's character in the minds of Bengali readers, his proper task is simply to quote it from the poet's own verse. Unhappily, the Mahabharata lies buried beneath the compositions of many hands across many ages; to extract the poet's original ideal is no easy matter. Could all the rubbish be swept away, not Krishna alone but Bhishma, Karna, Arjuna, Draupadi, and the rest would stand before us more radiant and more complete. To recover the original text of the primal poet of the Mahabharata would be one of the supreme gains of mankind.

But what precisely was the ideal Krishna-character of that primal poet, and whether Bankim, seeking to discover it according to his own ideal, has succeeded—before pronouncing on this without doubt, it is necessary to plumb the whole eighteen books of the original Mahabharata. For now I wish only to draw the reader's attention to a single point.

Bankim admits that the poet whom he calls the author of the first stratum of the Mahabharata did not believe in Krishna's divinity—indeed, this very fact serves him as a chief means of determining that first stratum.

But Bankim himself believed in Krishna's divinity. Given so profound a difference, it could not have been easy for him to select, as his own, the ideal Krishna-character of that first-stratum poet. The Krishna whom he sought was born of his own mind's yearning. He was earnestly, restlessly seeking an ideal wholly perfected through the full cultivation of every faculty of thought—the very ideal he had already grasped, in the realm of theology, through his own religious conviction—and he was intensely eager to see it, alive and embodied, in history itself. In such a state of mind it is not easy for any man to recover, unaltered, the ideal of another poet.

One might answer that although Bankim believed Krishna to be God, he has also said, repeatedly, that when God descends in human incarnation He manifests wholly as man, and proclaims Himself divine through no supernatural display. Hence Bankim sought, in the Mahabharata, not the god-Krishna but the man-Krishna.

But the man whom Bankim sought has nowhere any incompleteness; every faculty of his mind attains perfect mutual harmony—that is, he is a theory made flesh. But it is likely that the Krishna of the Mahabharata's author is neither a god nor a set of faculties brought to full cultivation—he is simply Krishna.

The author of the Mahabharata created no man who is merely a moral fable or maxim clothed in human shape—this itself is proof of his supreme poetic genius. He has, time and again, engaged even his greatest heroes in acts so unfitting that lesser poets would never have dared them. Lesser poets possess the power of construction but not of creation; whatever they build, they build to rule from start to finish, permitting nowhere within it exception or self-contradiction. But the imperfection of a truly great thing is itself the herald of its greatness; nature does not think it necessary to make a mountain a flawless, rounded dome—with all its ruggedness, all its careless neglect, it remains sky-touching, majestic in kingly glory, bearing its own imperfections so easily that by that very imperfection the measure of its vast completeness is taken. In a small thing, the smallest flaw is fatal; to command reverence, it must be made faultless.

The society of heroes that the Mahabharata's author created possesses among them a supreme harmony, though no petty consistency. It is quite likely that many a modern writer, famous or obscure, under names like Sarala, Bimala, Damini, Jamini, could fashion chaste heroines flawlessly, consistently virtuous from first to last, who would at every turn outshine Draupadi in moral polish—and yet Draupadi of the Mahabharata, bearing all her imperfections upon her breast without shame, will forever stand enthroned, far above these petty little moral edifices raised by the new Valmikis, in a majesty ancient, unadorned, and eternally supreme. The base conduct that Karna shows toward the Pandavas in the Sabha Parva—our fictional heroes of the drawing-room novel would never stoop to; they, on any occasion, readily practise self-sacrifice—and yet the poet of the Mahabharata, without effort, has enshrined Karna in that immortal realm to whose lowest step these critic-certified paragons, for all their moral first-class tickets and ethical provisions, may never even arrive.

It is for this very reason that I said: if it be true that the poet of the first stratum did not accept Krishna as God, then it seems to us improbable that he fashioned him as a flawless exemplar of moral instruction. Bankim has determined the composer of the Mahabharata's first stratum to be the supreme poet, and, invoking that very supremacy, has in many places stripped Krishna's character of all inconsistency and incompleteness. But we say: the mark of that supremacy is not consistency. To this day no one has satisfactorily discovered consistency in the character of Hamlet, yet no one has doubted that, within the world of poetry, Hamlet stands as one of the most naturally perfect of creations.

Therefore we have complete doubt whether, in stripping away every base element from the Krishna of the Mahabharata, Bankim has truly discovered the ideal Krishna of its primal author.

The matter now stands thus: even should it not be the ideal of the Mahabharata's own author, if Bankim's ideal be itself genuinely great, that too must count a supreme gain to Bengali readers.

That Bankim's ideal is great, and that *Krishnacharitra* is a supreme gain to Bengali literature—of this we have no doubt whatsoever.

But it is for this very reason that, in reading *Krishnacharitra*, one regret persistently arises: that the method by which an ideal ought to be established in literature is not the method Bankim has adopted.

What Froude said—that the greatness of a great man cannot be truly expressed by history, only by poetry—is true, because greatness is a thing meant to be communicated to the reader's mind whole and alive. Argument can prove it, piecemeal, fragment by fragment, but argument cannot convey it wholly, entire, into the heart.

Bankim advances through this book, from its very opening, sword in hand, in constant contention; nowhere has he found leisure to hold up calmly, before our eyes, the complete image of his Krishna.

For this he is not to be blamed. For outside the circle of the devout—indeed, even within it—Krishna's character had been painted in such colours that Bankim had first to make an immense effort merely to dispel the old prejudice. Wherever he had to enshrine his own image of the god, he first had to take up the axe and clear the jungle round about. That the true, credible Krishna is so much more various than our preconceptions suppose—this itself we have learned from Bankim's *Krishnacharitra*.

But the many needless quarrels Bankim has picked in this book strike us as exceedingly distressing. For the ideal he held fixed in his heart while composing it can only preserve its dignity if the whole of his language and sentiment is everywhere animated by that same ideal. If Bankim indulges in petty disputes and illiberal censure, giving vent to impatience, that very impatience destroys the eternal serenity proper to his ideal. There are quarrels enough that suit the give-and-take of a weekly paper's letters column, but are wholly unfit for any book meant to be remembered and to endure.

Upon "Western fools"—that is, European scholars—the author has poured abundant scorn. First, this in itself is unworthy; second, in such a book it is peculiarly unbecoming. Needless ill-usage of anyone before respectable company is not mere ill manners—it is discourtesy to the respected person himself. He whom Bankim considers the greatest of men, at once the abode of forgiveness and of valour, who, though capable, forbore—often even when he had cause—to take up arms: for the author, at the very site of establishing that man's character, before his own ideal,

to indulge in petulance over some difference of opinion, is dishonour to the ideal itself. Not against European scholars alone, but against the European peoples generally, the writer has, in various places, expressed sharp hostility. Let me quote one or two instances.

"Hearing this abuse of Shishupala's, the supreme embodiment of forgiveness, the ideal man, made no answer. Krishna possessed such power that he might have destroyed Shishupala on the instant—later events will show the reader this. Nor is it recorded that Krishna was ever otherwise so grossly reviled. Yet he paid this insult no heed. He did not, after the manner of Europeans, call out, 'Shishupala, forgiveness is the highest virtue, I forgive you.' In silence he forgave his enemy."

In describing the greatness of Shri Krishna's power of forgiveness, this needless and unjust dig at Europeans is not merely superfluous—it destroys the very purpose intended. Whatever state of mind the reader had been brought into, so that the greatness of that forgiveness might sink into the heart, is shattered by it. A book like *Krishnacharitra* ought not to be written for modern Hindus alone; it should, by rights, be composed for all peoples of every age. Readers may easily judge what rebellious feeling such a passage might stir in a European mind—especially when, in the very act of praising forgiveness, to sing its praise as though it were peculiarly foreign to the European national character is a sweeping claim whose source is hard to trace. Our own scriptures are full of contrary examples. When Vishwamitra was forcibly carrying off Vasishtha's cow, and the tormented Nandini came weeping before Vasishtha, he said: "Gentle Nandini, again and again you cry out, and I hear it; but, gentle one, when King Vishwamitra takes you by force, what am I to do? For I am a forgiving Brahmin." And when Nandini pleaded further, he said: "The Kshatriya's strength is might; the Brahmin's strength is forgiveness; and so I am ruled by the virtue of forgiveness."

"Men who covet mere sensual pleasure remain content in a middling state; but that middling state is the seed-bed of sorrow; the gaining of a kingdom, or exile to the forest, is the true occasion of joy."

Quoting this noble utterance of Krishna's, Bankim writes:

"That such words should exist in our Hindu legend and history, and yet we should spend our days reading the novels written by memsahibs, or, gathering five together, chatter like birds—"

Such lapses of temper, recurring again and again, have become singularly unsuited to a book like *Krishnacharitra*. Because the gravity, beauty, and generosity that ought everywhere to inform the book's language and sentiment have not been maintained, the brilliance of the ideal character it seeks to portray has been dimmed.

Upon the slightest pretext, Bankim quarrels with Europeans, with readers, with unfortunate persons of differing belief; the very tenor of this quarrelling is out of place in the book. Besides, in passing, he raises a great many extraneous arguments, distracting the reader's mind to no purpose. First, having established Krishna as the greatest of men, he raises the question whether divine incarnation is possible at all—merely stirring up the reader's mind without properly resolving it either way. To those who object that a formless God could not take form, Bankim replies that it is impossible that the omnipotent should be unable to assume a form. To those who object that, being omnipotent, what need had He of a body, since by mere will He might have slain Ravana or Kumbhakarna, or Kamsa or Shishupala—to them Bankim answers that it was not to kill Ravana or Shishupala that God took a body, but to establish for mankind an ideal. If, in divine form, He suppresses the wicked and cherishes the good, mankind gains no instruction thereby; but if, becoming man, He shows how far human effort itself can reach, that becomes the source of our lasting good. A third objection might now be raised: if God is omnipotent, and if His purpose is to set before men an ideal of human perfection, could He not manifest such an ideal man without Himself becoming man—is there no alternative but that He Himself become human? Is this, then, the very limit of His power? This objection Bankim neither raises nor answers.

Yet this argument bears some slight relation to the purpose of the whole book. Bankim admits, in many places, that man's ideal, however effective, is not God's ideal, since we cannot easily be roused to emulate the omnipotent; the belief and hope that what man has achieved we too may achieve is far more natural and accessible. Therefore, in labouring to prove Krishna divine, Bankim diminishes the value of his own human ideal—for since all things are equally easy to God, there remains no particular cause for wonder in the character of Krishna.

The social arguments that Bankim raises in many places throughout this book have done nothing but agitate its subject, without any other result.

In the chapter titled "Krishna's Polygamy," having established that apart from Rukmini Krishna had no other wife, the author concludes by raising the argument that a man's polygamy is not, in every circumstance, immoral. This is not quite right. He says:

"Ordinarily, a man's taking more than one wife without cause is immoral. But not in every circumstance. If a man's wife be leprous, or so diseased that she can in no way assist him in the duties of household life, I cannot see why his taking another wife should be sinful. If a wife has strayed from virtue and disgraces her family, I do not see why the husband, without recourse to the courts, may not take a second wife. If he needs an heir and his wife is barren, I do not see why he should not take another. Had this evil education from Europe not existed, Bonaparte would not have had to fall into the horrible sin of casting off Josephine; Henry VIII of England would not have had, on a whim, to murder his wives. In Europe today, under the bright light of civilization, much wife-murder and husband-murder occurs for this very reason. Our educated class believes that whatever is English is wonderful, pure, faultless, the salvation of fourteen generations past and to come. I believe that just as we may learn much from the West, the West too may learn much from us; and among such matters, this question of marriage is one."

Since Krishna never took more than one wife, this whole argument on marriage is unnecessary; and besides, what does the argument itself conclude? First it is settled that one whose wife is diseased, unchaste, or barren may marry again. But it is not because, in Europe, a husband cannot easily take a second wife in such circumstances, that so much wife-murder occurs under its "bright civilization"; more often, murder springs from aversion to the wife and attachment to another woman. If such murder is to be prevented, then attachment to another must itself be settled as religious justification for a second marriage—in which case, "ordinarily, a man's taking more than one wife without cause is immoral" comes to mean simply: let there be *some* cause, however slight, when you take a second wife; let it not be wholly causeless. That is, if your wife is diseased or incapable, you may marry again; or if you merely wish to marry another, you may do that too—since it was from thwarted desire of just this kind that Henry VIII murdered his wife. But if there be no cause whatsoever, do not marry. The real question is whether, by the same reasoning that grants the husband such independent powers, corresponding powers ought not, in like circumstances, to be granted the wife as

well—and whether it is the *absence* of such powers in our own society that condemns the wife to fall into "the most horrible hellish sin."

Soon after, in seeking to show that the abduction of Subhadra was no serious wrong, the author, taking a gratuitous swipe at a certain Parsi named "Malabari"—whose celebrated pamphlet will, by now, likely have rotted away among a handful of newspaper wrappers of its own day—raises yet another social controversy, whose resolution proves equally unsatisfying, while the writer, in impatient and querulous language, needlessly picks a quarrel with many people.

Had Bankim not thought of Krishna as God, and had he entertained no theory whatsoever regarding the flawless perfection of Krishna's every faculty, all this argument and controversy would have been quite unnecessary, and he could have proceeded everywhere with restraint. He might then, with impartial and untroubled mind, have recovered more fully the Mahabharata poet's own ideal Krishna and set it before his readers; and lest some faithless, doubting reader should find the least incompleteness anywhere in his Krishna, he need not, in advance, have vented his wrath upon them and thereby banished from his book that restless serenity proper to the loftiest literature.

Just as, when scenery is arranged upon the open stage in full view of the audience, the pleasure of the performance is spoiled and the beauty of the poetry fails to imprint itself wholly on the minds of the listeners—so, in Bankim's *Krishnacharitra*, argument and reasoning intrude at every step, hindering the true character of Krishna from becoming firmly established, whole and entire, in the reader's heart. But Bankim might answer: "The book called *Krishnacharitra* is not the stage itself—it is the backstage. I am its stage-manager; struggling against manifold obstacles, gathering costume and ornament from every quarter, I have arrayed Krishna in the guise of the best of men. Now let some poet come, raise the curtain, begin the performance, and win the hearts of the world. He shall have no need of labour, or thought, or judgment of his own."

Magh–Phalgun, 1301

RAJSINGHA

New Revised Edition

Turning back through *Rajsingha* from its opening, one thought recurs again and again: that no event, no chapter, anywhere pauses or wastes time. Everything moves without rest, and in that forward momentum the reader's mind is helplessly drawn along, hurrying without effort toward the book's resolution.

To sustain this irresistible forward drive, Babu Bankim has cast off, from every chapter, every unnecessary weight. Not merely the unnecessary—he has discarded much that was necessary too, retaining only what was absolutely indispensable.

Had this material fallen into a timid writer's hands, many chapters would have been swollen with elaborate justifications. Fear of being called to account would have forced him to pad matters out at length: the emperor's daughter's love-affair with Mobarak within the very heart of the imperial seraglio; the audacious impudence of the reckless Atarwali Dariya over the matter; Chanchalkumari's private counsel with herself, and her dispatch of an envoy bearing a token to the Begum of Jodhpur; Dariya's acceptance of enlistment as a horse-soldier in male disguise, after displaying her skill in dance before the general—none of this, perhaps, lies beyond the bounds of possibility, but such events demand particular proof of their credibility. Babu Bankim, in one small chapter after another, dispatches these matters with such effortless assurance that no one dares to doubt him. A timid pen would have faltered exactly at such points, would have said far too much, and in saying too much would only have drawn the reader's suspicion further.

Babu Bankim has, for his part, nowhere offered any accounting of himself, and now and then he does not spare even the innocent reader a scolding. When Manikalal suddenly bids the unknown Nirmalkumari mount his horse and sit beside him on the road, and Nirmal, accepting his proposal of marriage on the spot, promptly grants Manikalal's wish, the author—perhaps feeling some slight embarrassment at his own characters' extraordinary conduct—rather than betray it, turns and casts a sidelong glance at his startled readers, saying: "I suppose the courtship did not much please the reader. What am I to do? There is not one word of sweet talk in it—no long-cherished, deep-rooted passion—no 'O my life!' 'O beloved of my life!'—none of that at all—for shame!"

Among the characters portrayed in this book, especially its women, there is a certain haste. They perform deeds of great daring and skill, yet beforehand show scarcely any hesitation or reflection. Like a lovely flash of lightning, in an instant they cleave the veil of cloud and fall upon their mark; no barrier of stone can check that headlong course. When a woman acts, this is how she acts: casting aside all deliberation, with her whole mind and soul, she moves directly to her purpose. But of the emotional force that, growing powerful, draws her with irresistible strength beyond her daily domestic round, the reader deserves some prior acquaintance, some small foretaste. Babu Bankim has not given this in full measure.

For this reason, on first reading *Rajsingha*, one feels that the pull of gravity in this fictional world has somehow diminished a good deal. Where we must walk laboriously, the people of this novel seem able to leap and bound. In the real world we are burdened with thought, doubt, misgiving; in action we must always carry the weight of a hesitant mind—but in the world of *Rajsingha*, most of its people seem to bear no weight at all.

To those who read a great deal of modern English fiction, this lightness would seem remarkable indeed. In the contemporary English novel, at every step, analysis: the smallest action is traced to its remotest chain of causes and thereby swollen to vast proportions—the matter itself may be trifling, but its documentation grows immense; today's novelists wish to leave nothing out, for to them everything is of the utmost consequence. Hence in such novels the weight of the world has grown terribly heavy. I cannot speak for English readers, but for readers such as ourselves, it proves exceedingly wearying.

For this reason one comes almost fearfully to the modern novel. It seems that for a heart already occupied with the labour of living, the burden of thought about the real world is often more than enough; and if literature too shows no mercy, there remains no path of escape whatever. In literature we seek the truth of the world, but not the world's burden.

Yet, to render truth fully perceptible, some measure of weight is required—just enough that truth alone may be properly felt and yield joy to the heart, so that the imagined world feels as solid, as tangible, and as enduringly established as the world we see with our own eyes.

Babu Bankim, in *Rajsingha*, seems to have omitted even a portion of that necessary weight. Whatever is wanting in weight he seems to have supplied through pace. He has not rendered every part of the novel doubt-proof and fully plausible in itself, but has swept over the whole with such swift, effortless motion that no occasion for questioning arose. It is as though, here and there along a railway line, stand a bridge or two that do not look entirely sound—yet the engineer drives his train across at such speed that there is no chance for the bridge to give way beneath it.

The reason for this, too, lies clear before us. When a great army marches to war, it cannot carry its whole household along; much of what is merely comfortable must be abandoned. Anything that hinders mobility is fatal to it. Abundance and weight of equipment suit only the settled householder.

The plot of *Rajsingha* moves like an army on the march—its events form a complicated, vast array, advancing on a grand scale. And the heroes of this army move at the same relentless pace, unable to pause for long anywhere amid their own private joys and sorrows.

Let one example serve. The romance between Rajsingha and Chanchalkumari has not been allowed to ripen as fully as it might have, and some readers—probably a great many readers among the ladies—regret this. Babu Bankim had here, in fact, a rather rare opportunity: he might have used the occasion to fill every quarter with Cupid's five arrows and the surging tide of youthful passion.

But he had no time for it. The entire current of history was then thundering, foaming, through a narrow channel—and over that channel the boat had to be steered with utmost care. This was no season for lingering delay, for coy and drawn-out love-play.

The love found here is stripped of all excess—brief and compact. It is not the languid, moonlit love of the wedding-chamber; on a dark, rain-swept night, death has come suddenly from behind and beckoned; casting off pride and modesty, the startled heroine has flung herself, trembling, into the hero's arms. There is no room here for a long, sweet overture.

In this sudden summons of death everyone has been jolted awake, and each feels the embrace of the vast life-force dwelling within. Where, once, was she—a girl in the depths of the women's quarters of little Rupnagar, who in time became merely

one among the hundred queens of some petty prince, sitting on a thick carpet in a chamber whose walls were painted with impossible birds upon impossible vines, surrounded by the mockery and laughter of rival concubines, idly smoking on her couch? Within that flower-soft, delicate girl what fierce, unconquerable force of life suddenly awoke—she who today, like the proud, swollen crest of a flood that has burst its bonds, has struck against the very throne of Delhi! Where, once, was she—the beautiful Jebunnisa in the jewel-encrusted pleasure-chambers of the Mughal palace, scattering joy upon joy, luxury upon luxury, keeping her own soul lost, unconscious, buried beneath heaps of flowers of ease—who, on that very night of death's summons, was suddenly shaken from her inward slumber by what mighty force, bound in so hard and cruel an embrace of anguish, and delivered—an emperor's own daughter—into the hands of that all-devouring sorrow which lays even the empress of empresses down upon the same bed of grief as a peasant girl in her hut! The bandit Manikalal became a hero; the beauty-smitten Mobarak gave himself to the sea of death; the caged Nirmalkumari flew up into revolution's open sky; and the skilled dancer, swift-footed Dariya, came with a shout of wild laughter and loosened hair to join the dance of death.

In this vast, terrible awakening at midnight, can one still look for the tender, plaintive cooing of love fit only for a noonday bower?

There is no cause to lament that *Rajsingha* did not become a second *Bishabriksha*. The sharp, bitter cycles of joy and sorrow in *Bishabriksha* cut ever deeper into the reader's mind from its very first pages; and by its close, the unfortunate reader's throat is choked entirely shut. The opening chapters of *Rajsingha* leave no such deep, blood-red mark—because *Rajsingha* is a novel of an altogether different kind.

Having sat down to write this essay, I see no reason to speak falsely, nor is it right to set up imaginary readers merely to lay blame upon them. The truth is that, on first reading *Rajsingha*, I myself felt some hesitation. I thought: surely there is too much haste here—as though no one has even a moment to exchange a courteous word in passing. It would have been better had the writer not skimmed so lightly over these matters, but drawn them out with a little more depth. While I was thinking such thoughts, I had not yet truly entered into the heart of *Rajsingha*.

When mountain streams first burst from the peaks, they go rushing about like things possessed; one might think they had come out merely to play, not that they would ever leave a deep mark upon this working world. Follow them a little way, however, and one sees the streams becoming rivers, growing ever deeper and broader, cutting through the mountain, carving their path, and, shouting in triumph, sweeping forward in great strength—and until they have reached their final consummation in the sea, they know no rest.

So too with *Rajsingha*. Each of its sections rushes forward like a mountain torrent. At first there is only the glimmer of light and the murmuring babble of restless ripples; then, in the sixth section, one sees the current deepen, the water darken; then, in the seventh, one sees now the flow of a river, now the swell of the sea, now the cloud-deep roar of an unalterable doom, now the profound sob of a heart drowned in bitter tears, now the vast, anguished sweep of history as fate itself has written it, now the desperate death-cry of some single drowning soul. There the dance grows wild indeed, the weeping sharp indeed, and the sequence of events stretches from the ending of one age of Indian history toward the dawn of the next.

Rajsingha is a historical novel. Who, then, is its hero? The hero of its historical portion is Aurangzeb, Rajsingha, and Providence itself. Whether the novel proper has a hero, I cannot say; its heroine is Jebunnisa.

Rajsingha, Chanchalkumari, Nirmalkumari, Manikalal, and other figures great and small together, on that day of the storm-cloud's chariot-procession, drew the chariot-rope of Indian history along its perilous, rugged path. Many among them may be born of the author's own invention; and yet they belong wholly to the historical portion of this historical novel. Their lives, their private joys and sorrows, possess no independent worth—that is, none appears in this book.

Jebunnisa, too, is connected to history, but that connection is secondary. Were it absent, she would have no place at all in this book. The connection exists; yet the vast tide of history has not swallowed her whole and made her merely a part of itself. She shines forth independently, illumined by the story of her own life.

General history has a certain grandeur of its own. But the majesty of a single, independent human life is no less than that. History's lofty chariot rolls onward—one watches in wonder, gathers to rejoice—yet if, beneath that very wheel, a single human heart is crushed and dies crying out, that heart's mortal cry may rise into

the very sky the chariot's summit aspires to touch, and, soaring up through that same firmament, may outstrip even the chariot's own height.

Babu Bankim has composed this historical novel by binding together both this history and this human element.

Between this vast national history and this intense human history he has kept, to some degree, a thread of connecting sentiment.

When the Mughal empire, swollen with wealth and power, grew utterly self-absorbed—when it came to think justice needless in an emperor, and grew wholly blind to the joys and sorrows of its subjects—then the day of its awakening arrived.

The pleasure-loving Jebunnisa, too, had thought that for an emperor's daughter love was needless, that pleasure alone could be trusted. Blind in that pleasure, when she struck with her jewel-sandalled, lovely left foot the very head of the faith of mercy, then, from some unknown cavern, an angered love awoke and sank its fangs into her heart's core; fire itself began to burn in every vein, in the very stream of blood coursing toward delight; the flowery bed of ease scorched her as a pyre scorches the dead. Then she rushed forth and, in a voice humbled before the love she had once spurned, offered up the entire price of all her wealth and pleasure; she took sorrow to herself of her own free will and enthroned it upon the seat of her heart. After that she found no more happiness—but she regained her own conscious soul. Jebunnisa, out of the sealed, unconscious pleasure-chamber of the imperial palace, after fierce agony, fell prostrate in the dust and was born anew into the wide world of life. From that hour she became a woman dwelling in the boundless world.

In the great tumult of history, the torn heart of this newly awakened, ill-fated woman, swelling again and again, weeping and weeping, has spread through the closing portion of *Rajsingha* a strange and thrilling grief, vast and restless. On a night of calamity, on one side the sky-piercing stone palaces of the Mughals crash down in ruin; on the other, the unrestrained weeping of a woman who has renounced all bursts forth again and again. In that immense event, who takes notice of her—save He alone, who through the darkness keeps watch unsleeping and silently orders the whole procession of history—He alone watched even this small, dust-rolling human being with unblinking eye.

In driving history and the human story forward together, both have had to be reined in and bound by a single measure. The abundance of historical incident and the searching analysis of the novel's inner life have each had to be somewhat curtailed—that neither should outrun the other was plainly the author's particular care. It is clear that had the author sat down to expand at length the joys, sorrows, and inward drama of his characters, the movement of history would have come to a halt. He has floated one or two boats upon a powerful current, wishing to show both current and boat together; and so, in the picture, the boats appear smaller than they might, their every fine and delicate detail not fully visible. Had the painter chosen to dwell more upon what lies within the boat, then a great part of the river would have had to be left out of his canvas altogether. Some overly curious reader, perhaps, is unduly eager to peer into the boat's interior, and inwardly, out of pique, blames the author for it. But such idle restlessness ought rather to be set aside in judging what the author, in this particular work, meant to achieve, and how far he has succeeded. To set up beforehand some baseless expectation of one's own, and then to blame the author because it was not fulfilled, is not a reasonable way to judge. I mention this only because I myself, at the very outset of the book, had begun to commit precisely this fault.

Chaitra, 1300

PHULJANI

Phuljani, by Srijukta Sachchandra Majumdar

In the city, amid its manifold and intricate happenings, the ceaseless movement of its people, its carriages and its factories, every man is diminished to littleness; who lived and who died, who ate and who went without, no one in the city troubles to know. There, unless the doings of some great lord or petty official, some war between China and Japan, or some singularly extraordinary event comes to pass, nothing can reach the ears of the multitude at all.

But in the village, every soul, high or low, and every moment of human life, stands out sharp and vivid; even the river, the pond, the fields and lanes, the beasts and birds, the sun and rain, morning and evening—all these draw the eye in their own particular way. There, the smallest ripple of joy or sorrow in the life of the community becomes a matter worth reckoning, and the whole play of light and shadow upon nature's countenance gains a vast importance within the narrow compass of one small horizon.

Between novels, too, there exists just such a distinction of city and village. In some novels, extraordinary characters, intricate events, and the clash of violent passions are portrayed—there the common man's daily joys and sorrows shrink beyond the range of sight; while another kind of novel, withdrawing far from the tumult of frenzied incident, from the far-flung shadow of towering monuments, from the all-devouring flood-tide of crowded humanity, sets up its stage instead amid some secluded, shaded village at the edge of green, grain-laden fields, loud with birdsong—where every word of ordinary human life comes within earshot, and every joy and sorrow draws forth tenderness.

Babu Sachchandra's *Phuljani* belongs to this latter class of novel. Its transparency, its simplicity, the very sparseness of its incident, is its chief beauty. And just as the soft morning sunlight falls upon a village garden—glinting here upon a glossy leaf's surface, there piercing through some chink in the foliage to set a spark twinkling in the dark thicket beyond, here settling upon the courtyard of some crumbling cowshed and striving to adorn its very dinginess, there tracing a line of gold along one single, shadow-girded edge of a long, deep tank—so too, wherever this novel finds the smallest pause or opening, the author enters there with a pure, gentle,

and playfully smiling touch, illuminating the whole scene of village life with brightness.

Babu Sachchandra has led us into a particular village of Bengal where we wish to know everyone's affairs, to converse with every soul, to enter every place without reserve—we ask for nothing weightier than this. We want no towering, sky-piercing matter that dwarfs all else, that tears and diminishes some vast, tranquil, verdant wholeness. Here, Sukhanir's mother and Nistarini, Fanu Sheikh and the Nayeb-mahashay, are all our neighbours—however much distinction of rank may separate them, still the affairs of each household are our concern, the news of each day our subject of discourse. Such a novel is, for our minds, as restful as a well-known place; here is nothing unforeseen, nothing to unsettle the mind, no knotty problem awakening at every step; the pleasure of beauty is enjoyed so effortlessly that it requires no artificial contrivance whatsoever.

But to our great misfortune, the author is not himself content with his own gift; he strives to surpass himself. What is easy in the eyes of those without taste seems trivial to them; and the author, capable writer though he is, has been unable to escape the temptation of impressing that very tasteless crowd. At certain moments he has forcibly checked the natural course of his own genius and cast it, helpless, into extraordinary characters and hair-raising events. To make the reader beautifully and easily acquainted with familiar, simple beauty is a task requiring extraordinary skill; among the ranks of Bengali writers, Babu Sachchandra possesses that extraordinary skill—yet he wishes to display still greater powers, to astonish the reader, and in attempting this he creates within his own genius a needless self-contradiction. In this misguided ambition to outrun his own talent, he set a forest-fire raging in the middle of his first novel, *Shaktikanan*, reducing it to ashes; and in this second book, *Phuljani*, too, one flame at its far edge has spread its own devastating tongue—by good fortune, without managing to consume the whole.

The Sarbabhauma-mahashay's daughter is named Kali; her nature is at once sweet and mischievous, and altogether natural; her firm affection for Phulkumari, the heroine of the book, is likewise entirely natural—for Phul is utterly helpless and timid by disposition, so lifeless indeed that she is scarcely capable of drawing the reader's heart fully to herself; but it is precisely for the sake of such dependent,

powerless beings that a strong, spirited nature will wholly sacrifice itself. Though Phulkumari is nominally the heroine of the book, the author has used her merely as a blank canvas upon which to paint Kali in vivid colour. This ordinary, dusky village girl has not become extraordinary, yet one cannot even say when she came to occupy such a permanent place in our hearts. In the flower-garden of the Boses, by the edge of the palm-fringed pond, we watched with affectionate delight the friendship of these two small girls; and mingled with the boisterous clamour of schoolboys, the curse-laden mutterings of the old crone who guarded against pilfering children, the shade of the dense mango grove swaying at midday beneath a flock of bird-plundering student-thieves, and the rippling of the deep, cool, secluded tank's waters as they swam—all this had created a most charming beauty. We readers were wholly content with just this much, asking for nothing more—when, into the gentle shade of that mango-grove in the village of Harishpur, there fell the faint shadow of something supernatural. Phul dreamed that her impending marriage would not be auspicious, and it seemed she heard that very curse even from the mouth of the old crone, and heard it echoing, too, from the branches of the banyan tree. At once we understood that Phulkumari's marriage, too, would not bring happiness, and that a curse had fallen upon the reader's own delight in savouring the poetry of the tale. Some time later, Phulkumari herself forgot her ill-omened dream, and the reader too, entering once more into the small village community, forgot that a hook had been left dangling for him.

Entering there again, we come upon Nayeb Maheshwar Ghosh. It is he who introduces the note of fierce, terrible passion into this peaceful, beautiful village. By her fiery power, the mistress of the house, Jagaddhatri, has in turn overpowered even her own husband. Watching this, one feels that the tenantry lie prostrate like a helpless elephant; the Nayeb, like a lion, mounts upon their shoulders and sucks their very blood; and the mistress Jagaddhatri, like the goddess Jagaddhatri herself, sits enthroned with her foot planted upon the shoulder of this terrible lion.

The boy's name is Purandar. Though he is indeed the hero of this book, he behaves, like any ordinary boy, by playing truant from school, by climbing the banyan tree to steal crows' fledglings for sport, and by leaping suddenly from a tree-branch into the tank's waters, kicking up spray toward the sky as he swims sidestroke—seeing all this, we had great hope that, by the reader's good fortune, this boy would at least not turn out to be extraordinary. But, as the saying goes, "beguiled by hope's

illusion, what fruit have I gained—alas, this thought alone troubles my mind." But of that, more later.

The character of Nistarini—gentle, sweet, yet firm of nature—has been beautifully drawn. In due course, this Nistarini's daughter Phulkumari was duly married to the Nayeb-mahashay's son Purandar. But the Nayeb-mahashay and his wife Jagaddhatri were not pleased with their in-laws. After the marriage, petty village skirmishes continued between the two allied families. The Nayeb-mahashay took his son Purandar away with him to his own place of work, to keep him at a distance from his in-laws' influence.

Here, having studied the Hafiz under a Moulvi and pursued scriptural learning under a pandit, Purandar became an altogether different man. That a man should change is nothing impossible, and there was ample cause in Purandar's own nature for such a change. But this newly transformed Purandar seems to attempt to overstep, quite excessively, the village scene, the simple community, and the gently rippling flow of events amid which we had been passing our time thus far. Let Purandar be a good boy, well and good; let him be inclined to charity, let him take delight in the chanting of Hari's name, let his learning in the scriptures and his devotion to the Hafiz increase—let there arise in Purandar's heart that same worldly disenchantment which commonly, in our country, dawns upon the minds of so many—to all this we have no objection. But once it becomes something more than this, it grows unbearable. For the sole purpose served by Purandar's character is to bring completeness to the novel *Phuljani*. If, in seeking to display extraordinary greatness, he destroys the novel itself, then we cannot forgive him for it. That clear, sweet stream of simplicity which had been flowing through *Phuljani* from the very beginning of the first chapter—Purandar himself, having suddenly grown to extraordinary heights, has dammed and obstructed. The author writes of Purandar:

"As he grew older, the change taking place in his mind moved in the direction and nature of melancholy. It was his settled conviction that man, for whatever reason, is born into this world to suffer pain and hardship. He never once fixed upon any goal for his own life; but whenever he sat down to think about himself, it seemed to him that his future lay shrouded in the deepest darkness. In this state of mind, even amid joy, he would see with his mind's eye that the lives of all who were connected to him were, more or less, filled with suffering and torment."

The hidden cause of this unnatural gloom in Purandar's temper is soon revealed through an incident. One day he and his friend Braja, out for a stroll, saw beside a myna's nest on the riverbank a fierce battle in progress between a venomous snake and a pair of parrots. Thinking that the helpless nestlings of these birds were about to be swallowed by the serpent, a tear came to Purandar's eye. His companion Braja, being no extraordinary child, without shedding any tears, simply hurled a clod of earth at the snake. This proved rather more effective—the wounded serpent fell into the water. When Braja aimed a second clod at it, Purandar could not bear this and stopped him—

"He was thinking: who is responsible for this terrible enmity between predator and prey that governs the natural world? Why has God's creation, instead of being founded on love, become so filled with malice and hatred instead?"

And so on, and so forth. Hearing such speeches—

"Braja could give no immediate answer, but he could sense where the pain lay in his beloved friend's heart. He understood that Puran's grief was not merely personal."

Such pains as are cured by rubbing on turpentine oil, such sorrows as vanish once their material cause is removed—these are, for practical purposes, the best kind of pain and sorrow to have. Just as the popular proverb holds a poor man's son's fever of horse-madness to be the height of absurdity, so too, for a boy of a Bengali village, such grand pains and such lofty sorrows are likewise the cause of utter ruin.

While returning home with his son, Purandar's father was killed on the way by discontented tenants, and his wife Jagaddhatri became a sati upon his pyre. Purandar, stricken by this blow, went home, where, nursed back to life by his wife's devoted care, he settled his family into a stable existence, after which the widowed Nistarini departed for the holy places of pilgrimage.

Here the book might have ended—but the author was not content to stop; he sat down once more to exhaust what remained beyond exhaustion. Suddenly a band of Muslim men and women together stole away Kali and Phul—Kali leapt into water and drowned—Phul entered the inner apartments of Siraj-ud-Daulah, Purandar went to rescue her, and both perished at the hands of the executioner.

Why all this? What connection has it with the story from beginning to end? Were there, from the very outset, such inescapable causes gathered together that this

strange conclusion of the book became inevitable? Had the author simply said, "There arose suddenly in the village a plague, and everyone died," what difference, as poetry, would there be between that and this? At page 166 the book comes to its end. By page 122, Nistarini has already departed on pilgrimage. Thereafter, in a mere forty-four pages, the author suddenly contrived an entirely new development and startled his readers. There had been no foreshadowing of this whatsoever previously, nor had it any connection with Phulkumari's character at all. Up to page 122 the author had built a beautiful, simple, and complete poem; then, as if by fate's cruel mockery, in the final forty-four pages he fashioned, with the utmost brevity, a sudden thunderbolt and cast it upon its head.

Agrahayan, 1301

JUGANTAR

Jugantar. A Social Novel, composed by Sri Shivanth Shastri

While reading Shivanthbabu's novel *Jugantar*, the mind of this duty-weary critic overflowed, after a long time, with joy and gratitude. Such powers of observation, such creation of character, such delightful humour, such simple warmth of heart, are rare indeed in Bengali literature. The author has made Vishwanath Tarkabhushan as intimately known to us as our own kinsman. It seems we have never before seen so true a character in a Bengali novel. The author has seen him vividly alive in every trifling incident—he has, with the greatest ease, brought his character to life through the laughter and tears, the faults and virtues, of daily existence. There is no doubt in our minds that, in the sparsely populated realm of Bengali literature, Tarkabhushan-mahashay has added one more citizen, and that we ourselves have gained a lasting friend.

Not Tarkabhushan alone—the author has founded, in Bengali literature, an entire village named Nashipur. The rituals, the diversions, the mischief and disturbances, the good folk and the wicked of this village have all become the lasting property of readers. Tarkabhushan's school, the "flock of geese" Chimu Ghosh, the history of Joharlal—though newly created and freshly read, they seem to us like old, long-familiar acquaintances. On the other hand, the domestic life of Tarkabhushan's daughter Bhuvaneshwari in the house of Ramaratan Mukherjee at Ulao has become, for us, an immediate reality and exceedingly poignant. In brief, Tarkabhushan, his village, his family, his students, his friends and foes—all have blazed forth before us with powerful brightness, like the sun at the centre of a village universe.

At just this point, to our supreme misfortune, the novel abruptly finds itself transported into a different world entirely, a "changed age." Where has Tarkabhushan gone, where Nashipur, where the "flock of geese"? From where have Nabinchandra, Hatibagan, and the Nabaratna Sabha suddenly appeared? The author too has donned a new guise. He was a novelist; he has become a historian. He was a man of feeling; he has become a moralist. We have passed from the golden age of aesthetic delight into the changed epoch of argument and disputation. Where the author had once been shaping human beings, he now begins to shape opinions; where once stood a house of joy, a schoolroom has now

taken its place. Why such an untoward transformation should have occurred, I cannot say. The occasion of the widowed sister Bijaya's and her younger son Harachandra's arrival in Calcutta may have been, for them, a happy moment—but for the novel it proved an unlucky one, for upon that mere pretext the latter half of the book has been stitched onto the former, though the two share no necessary connection whatever.

If you bind two people together with a single rope, their strength is not increased even as a unity, nor is it convenient as a pair either. Just so, when two independent stories are forcibly bound together, the free and natural unfolding of each is obstructed, whether one considers them as a single story or as two—in either case they are strangled and destroyed by being tied down. This is exactly what has happened in the present book. Had the author composed the two stories separately, he might well have turned each into an excellent tale.

Of the second story I can say nothing—but that the first occupies the very highest place in literature, of this we have no doubt whatsoever.

The truth is, the author himself dwells within the new age; indeed, he is himself a capable figure among the charioteers driving this new era's chariot. He has not been able, through imagination, to detach himself from the rumbling noise and clamour of the crowd far enough to sit in peace and paint it, as a skilled artist would. His varied opinions and disputations arrive whole and entire, but they never quite grow into flesh-and-blood human beings. His characters Pancha, Brajaraj, Surendra Gupta, Mathuresh, and even Nabin, though good boys enough, are not truly alive—they remain mere symbols, like the letters *ka*, *kha*, *ga* in algebra.

In the canvas of literature, motion is harder to paint than stillness. Whatever is old, whatever is settled, whatever has drawn its sustenance from every quarter of society's heart in manifold ways and now stands green, vigorous, and complete—this is comparatively easier to render truly and vividly alive in the reader's mind. But whatever is newly arising, whatever is still striving, struggling, whirling in the throes of change, whatever has not yet achieved its full and rounded consummation—to reflect this faithfully requires elaborate, subtle analysis, or the intricate dramatic art of showing action and reaction, blow and counter-blow. But to do this, the writer must detach himself from his own material—if he remains too close, if he dwells within the very heart of the circle he depicts, its parts loom

disproportionately large compared to the whole, its opinions compared to the man, its immediate purposes compared to the flow of events themselves; the composition then fails to ring true, its proportions lose harmony, and there remains no telling how the matter is to be rendered whole and convincing to detached outside readers.

But even in this second story, wherever the author has set aside the whirl of the new age to speak of genuinely real people, he has, in two or three simple strokes of description, drawn a picture with the utmost ease, steeping both the picture and the reader's heart in delight. In one place, the author, in passing, introduces us to Sridhar Ghosh only fleetingly and then removes him from the scene—yet even in that brief acquaintance he has left in our minds a certain regret; we believe that, had the author given it his attention, he might have placed this very Sridhar Ghosh at the centre of a book and breathed life into an entire other novel. We quote here his brief description of Sridhar.

"This Ghosh family is a Vaishnava family—disciples of the Gosain. Sridhar-mahashay was a man of an exceedingly pious nature. He worked, for his livelihood, under a European master, but this caused not the slightest impairment to his devotion. When he went to work at the office, the tilaka mark could be seen upon his nose and the impress of Hari's name upon his whole body. || The man was dark-complexioned, healthy and strong of build; his face seemed always choked with sincerity and devotion, so that merely to see that face naturally drew one's heart toward him. Ghoshja-mahashay used to sit in the room beside the office entrance, and kept accounts of all the goods brought in and shipped out by every cart. And so, every morning, upon entering the office, he had often to hear this same question... 'Well now, Ghoshja-mahashay, what news? All well, I trust?' And at once Ghoshja would answer, 'By Govinda's grace, sir, all is well.' At Holi time, Ghoshja would spend a little money; he would invite people respectfully and feed them well. And so, as soon as the month of Magh arrived, the office folk would ask him, 'Well, Ghoshja-mahashay, will you be celebrating Holi this year?' And at once the answer would come, 'I know not, sir—as Govinda wills.' His attitude of dependence upon Govinda was so entirely natural to him that when his second son died of cholera at the age of eight, three or four days later a man at the office asked him, 'Well, Ghosh-mahashay, are your two boys keeping well?' Ghoshja answered, 'Two, sir? There is now only one—only the elder remains.' The questioner, taken aback, said, 'What

happened to the boy?' Ghoshja answered, 'Govinda has taken that one to Himself.' || He had, as a fond wish, chosen the names of his grandsons and granddaughters himself. When his son's eldest daughter was born, he named her Radharani. || The eldest, Radharani, was the treasure of his first affection. When he called her, saying, 'O Radhe! O daughter of the king! O beloved of the cowherds! O favourite of Shyam!' the one-year-old Radharani, her mouth alight with a smile revealing her newly-sprouted teeth, would leap and fall into his lap. Claspng her to his breast, he would say, 'You are in love with the cowherd boys, are you not, O Rai!' And at once tears would flow from his eyes."

Besides this, the infant daughter Timimoni, Nabin's relationship with his brother's wife, and Nabin's fond mother—these too the author has drawn out with great simplicity and pleasing sweetness.

The author has not paid much heed to the demands of a continuous, unfolding plot—nor are we ourselves particularly eager for plot. What we desire is the joyful, believable life-story of one genuine human being; we should not have felt the least fatigue in listening to the complete story, from beginning to end, of the Tarkabhushan family in the village of Nashipur—for Tarkabhushan has drawn our hearts to him, and the author too, through his keen-eyed, laughter-scattering power of imagination, has been able to command our complete trust. But that the author should have taken the pages of two separate books, shuffled them together in disorder, and bound them as one, thereby robbing the readers of their pleasure like a careless bookbinder devouring the very bread of his craft—this regret we can by no means forget.

Chaitra, 1301

ARYAGATHA

Aryagatha. Second Part. Composed by Sri Dwijendralal Ray

Since this book is a collection of songs, a complete critical assessment of it is scarcely possible. For in a song, melody takes precedence over words. Once the melody is stripped away, the words of a song often prove exceedingly poor and meaningless—and indeed, this is as it should be. For when we wish to express feeling through music, it is necessary that words serve merely as occasion; if everything is already said through the words themselves, then the music itself becomes stunted. What we express through words is, in large measure, distinct and fully articulate—but there arise in our minds, often, certain feelings that cannot be conveyed by name or form, by description, feelings that lie beyond words, that are without discernible cause—and it is such feelings, such stirrings and surges of the inmost soul, that can be expressed in their purest form only through music. In Hindustani songs, the words are so slight that they cannot distract our attention at all—we hear phrases like "binadiya," "gagariya," "chunariya" pass by our ears merely in passing; but the music's thousand-branched stream floods over these trifling pebble-words and stirs in our hearts an unparalleled surge of beauty, an indescribable wave of restless yearning. Ordinarily, a pebble is merely a child's plaything; the words of a Hindi song, too, are like children's play—but beneath the current, those very pebbles, through collision and counter-collision, set the flowing water babbling, giving the swift current wondrous variety through manifold obstruction. So too do the words of a Hindi song stir and echo the flowing melody through varied clashes of sound and obstacle, without attempting to surpass it through weight of meaning or poetic beauty. The same holds true of metre. Just as a river cuts its own path as it flows, so too it is best when a song's rhythm shapes itself as it goes. In most cases, Hindi song-lyrics observe no fixed metre at all—and it is precisely for this reason that the rhythmic variety of a fine Hindi song is so unexpected and beautiful; it proceeds, freely adjusting the harmony of short and long as it pleases, achieving a balance of freedom and restraint, advancing with the deep, solemn beat of a drum like a victorious emperor. If forced to move within some pre-fixed metrical mould, its variety and grandeur would be diminished. Poetry may hold absolute sovereignty within its own realm, but to interfere with the freedom of music is to trespass beyond one's rightful domain.

Pure poetry and pure music each attain excellence independently within their own separate domains, yet though the courts of these two goddesses of learning lie apart, they do, now and again, come together. Such a union of music and poetry is sometimes seen. At such times each contracts itself somewhat for the sake of the other—poetry sets aside its manifold ornaments and adopts the utmost transparency and simplicity, while music, restraining the wild play of its rhythm and melody, keeps company with poetry as a friend.

In Hindustan pure music has flourished, but in Bengal a fusion of poetry and music has taken place. The particular independent purpose, the autonomous fulfilment proper to song, has found no place here. It was precisely in order to make poetry resound more deeply within the heart that music was introduced in this land. Great works such as the *Kavikankan Chandi* and the *Annadamangal* were recited to the public, set to melody. The songs of the Vaishnava poets, too, are poetry—it is only that melody became, as it were, their wings, enabling them to fly abroad in every direction. Whatever poetry the poets composed, the melody merely proclaimed it.

In the kirtan of Bengal, the fusion of poetry and music has assumed a wondrous form; in it, poetry is complete and music is powerful both together. It seems as though a golden poem, laden with feeling, floats swiftly along amid a river of full-flowing music. Music here does not merely bear the poem along—its own splendour, generosity, and dignity find powerful expression as well.

In the book under review, songs of both kinds appear. Among them are certain songs that are not pleasing when merely read, whose metre and arrangement of feeling depend upon melody and rhythm—these lie beyond the province of literary criticism. There are other songs, however, that are largely complete even as poetry—which, merely upon reading, stir feeling and instil beauty in the heart. Though the sweetness of such songs might well gain greater clarity, depth, and freshness when joined to melody, still, just as one may largely infer, from a fine engraving, the beauty its ideal oil-painting would possess, so too, from such poems alone, we can in our own minds supply the song's complete sweetness. As an example, I wish to draw the reader's attention to the kirtan beginning, "Come once and see, come and see, how much I suffer day and night." It is full of anguish, steeped in longing and entreaty. As one reads, its yearning melody seems to resound continually in our imagination. Perhaps the actual tune to which this song

is set could never match the ideal our imagination conceives. And that is only natural. For this poem is somewhat elaborate and varied; whereas our music generally expresses itself through a single, sustained, simple emotion, without shifting from mood to mood in varied forms and ever-new turns. For this reason we cannot easily expect a raga suited to the poem before us. Yet, even without any melody, we shall call this a song—for it leaves within our minds a longing for song, just as, seeing in a picture the outline of a stream, we ourselves supply, from within, the sense of its motion. We can demonstrate the distinction between song and poetry through comparison, using examples from this very book.

*Who is he?—Is there anyone in this world so exalted above me
that I should hold but trifling desire for him?
Who is he?—Though subordinate, yet remains my lord;
though lord, I am become his slave;
Who is he?—Farther than the far-off kinsman, dearer than the dearest,
yet his own, from himself;
Who is he?—Though frailer than a vine, he binds me fast,
so that I cannot free myself so long as I live;
Who is he?—Whose strength is weakness, whose tears pierce the very heart,
whose wrath is uttered in the accent of love;
Who is he?—Whose satisfaction is worth to me an entire life,
the fulfilment and accomplishment of every striving;
Who is he?—Who, though hard as stone, becomes, timid as a child with tenderness,
one who falls at another's feet and bows;
Who is he?—From whom I crave forgiveness though I have done no wrong; there is
no shame
in touching his feet a hundred times;
Who is he?—Whose bondage is sweet, whose prison is full of play;
whose very chains ring like anklets;
Who is he?—Seeking to find whose heart, I lose myself
within the enigma of his own heart.*

This is poetry, but not song. Even if sung to melody, we could not call it a song. It possesses feeling, and even skill in the expression of feeling—but it lacks that spontaneously overflowing, freshly welling surge of emotion which, striking the reader's heart like a plucked string, sets vibrating within it the tremor of music.

She sat once in a garden of flowers.
 And a pure, red, brilliant radiance
 was floating there in joy.
 Her hair lay loosely spread (like a shadow);
 upon her brow was a heavenly light, a peace
 of matchless majesty.
 There was no accent of sorrow there (no tears, alas);
 there was bound only the memory of happiness,
 laughter, delight, hope;
 there lay sleeping virtue, love,
 and heartfelt affection.
 Her body, simple and shapely (radiant, alas, full of life);
 it seemed as though someone had fashioned it
 from all that is soft and lovely;
 and then had created there a dream, a song,
 a shy affection, a tenderness.
 It seemed as though dawn itself had gained life (O luminous one);
 as though a living flower, a golden radiance,
 harmonious, perfectly attuned;
 as though a living fragrance, a sweet southern breeze,
 a song filled with the cuckoo's call.
 She only turned her gaze toward me (just once, alas);
 it was as though veena, drum, and flute
 sounded at once within my restless soul;
 what she gave, what she took, in binding my heart—
 by what magic, who can say.

The essence contained in this poem we may call the essence of song. That is, the manner in which the author wishes to steep our minds in a memory of happiness and an image of beauty is achieved through music, and when a poem, by particular virtue of its spell, produces just such an effect, then it seems an inarticulate strain of music continues to hum within the mind. Those who have read the Vaishnava padavali need not be told the difference between the poetry of songs and other poetry.

Even in ordinary conversation, when we wish to express the emotion of beauty or of feeling, the inflection of melody naturally mingles with our words. And so, when in poetry pure delight in beauty or an outpouring of feeling is expressed, the words themselves begin to express a longing for their eternal companion, music—

*Come, come, friend, come, sit upon the edge of my garment,
let me look upon you with eyes full to overflowing!*

Has the profound love and utter self-surrender expressed in this line been achieved through words alone? Or have we, from within our own minds, supplied some imagined, plaintive melody, and thereby made it complete? Among the words contained in those two lines, what could be more ordinary, more simple, more well-worn than these? Yet it is precisely this utter simplicity that begs melody from the listener's imagination. For this reason, even without a tune, this is song. And for this same reason—

*When, after a year, I return joyfully home,
who is it that waits for me, hoping, tell me;
When kinsmen and friends, all with shining eyes, gather round,
whose dear eyes shall be the brightest of them all!*

This, though set to the raga Kanara, is not truly song; and—

*I gaze with unsated eyes upon your face,
my eyes will not turn away;
I lose myself, forget everything,
and remain lost in wonder!*

—this, without indication of any particular raga, is song.

Lastly, let us quote a song of tender, playful affection from *Aryagatha*. In it, readers will find a blending of affection with humour.

*What is this—her childish play, or does she truly mean it—
whatever she sees, she cries, "O Mother, give it to me, give it, give!"
Is it always only, "I'll take it, I'll take it"?
Once she gets a thing, she throws it away,
going to cry, she laughs instead, going to laugh, she weeps!
Leaving behind so many toys,*

she says—could you not give me this?
Something impossible—the stars, the clouds, the lightning, or the moon!
Hearing that someone is to be married,
she runs at once and clings to my skirt—
"O mother, I too shall marry"—she's a champion crier, this one!
Hearing that someone is to be hanged,
she clutches at my sari-end and comes running—
"O mother, I too shall be hanged"—guiltless though she is!

Agrahayan, 1301

ASHARH

The author has not disclosed his name; and so we too are unable to mention it here. But it is certain that among Bengali readers his name will not long remain hidden.

Asharh consists of a number of humorous poems, many of them cast in narrative form. By calling these poems "Asharh" (the rainy month, associated with foolery and jest), the author has already prepared his readers in advance—for we Bengali readers are people of an exceedingly grave disposition. Just as a humourless bridegroom, taken aback by unexpected wit in the bridal chamber, grows sullen, so too we, when we open a printed book and find ourselves confronted from the outset with unrelieved buffoonery, cannot bear such impertinence.

There is, too, in this book, a certain kind of humour that verges on the personal—the last poem is entitled "Karna-vimardan" ("The Mauling of Ears"), but this element of "mauling" is present, to some degree, in every poem here. Wherever, in the course of a narrative, some aspect of social hypocrisy comes within the poet's reach, he has applied there a touch of smiling satire.

Such mock-serious verse of this kind is entirely new to Bengali literature, and the poet of *Asharh*, through singular genius, has invented for himself its language, its manner, and its every subject.

Regarding language and metre, the author writes in his preface—

"The language of these poems is exceedingly unrestrained, and, as regards metre, extremely loose. It would be proper to call it rhymed prose. But I believe the language ought to suit the subject. In describing Harinath's journey to his father-in-law's house, why should the language of Meghnad-badh's battle-drums be employed?"

What the poet says regarding language is quite correct. But regarding metre he offers no justification whatsoever, and even had he offered one, we could not have accepted it. There is no reason to make verse function as though it were rhymed prose. This does not increase the freedom of verse—rather, it diminishes it. For while reading a poem, one naturally strives to preserve the discipline of its metre;

but if there occur repeated stumbles along the way, this becomes an obstruction and a source of irritation.

In Byron's *Don Juan* the poet has introduced humour as freely and abundantly as he pleased. But it is precisely within the well-disciplined rule of a flawless metre that such effortless, casual wit astonishes the reader at every turn.

Even in comic verse of a comparatively lower order—works such as the *Ingoldsby Legends*—the unfaltering elegance of metre is likewise particularly noticeable.

In truth, laxity of metre diminishes the intensity of comic effect. For the two principal elements of humour are unimpeded swiftness and unexpectedness. If, in the course of reading, the metre falters and one must try two or three different ways of placing the pause, then that very effort blunts the keen edge of the laughter.

Of course, any new metre is difficult to read at first, and those who lack a natural ear for rhythm can never read it properly without instruction from others. But the chief obstacle in the metre under discussion is not its novelty. It is that no single rule is maintained throughout it; and so, in reading, one must, as necessity dictates, sometimes draw out a syllable, sometimes compress it, adjusting more or less as one goes. In this way, one may perhaps manage to read it silently to oneself, but to read it aloud to another proves awkward at every step.

And yet there is no material in Bengali literature more deserving of being read aloud than this. Nowadays Bengali poetry has developed something of an inclination toward recitation. For recitation, comic verse is exceedingly well suited. Yet it is a matter for considerable regret that many of the poems in *Asharh*, owing to the unruliness of their metre, are not readily suited to recitation.

And yet there is no doubt of the author's astonishing command over metre and rhyme. Just as sparks fly up wherever the hammer strikes glowing iron on the wheel, so at every turn of his metre, rhymes are showered forth. Those rhymes burst with the sudden, startling brilliance of a gun's percussion cap. There are also many examples showing that difficulty of metre cannot suppress this poet at all. He himself has bound his later compositions within regular metre, thereby granting them permanence and due dignity. His poems "Bangali Mahima" (The Glory of the Bengali), "Ingrej-stotra" (Hymn to the Englishman), "Deputy Kahini" (The Deputy's

Tale), and "Karna-vimardan" have all proven exceedingly well suited to being quoted, read, and put to use everywhere. The refined humour and the sharp satire contained in these pieces glitter throughout within their honed, disciplined metre.

The first unruly effort of genius rushes at once toward some new path; then, with maturity, it submits itself once more to old constraints, and makes its own inward novelty shine forth in doubly brilliant form against that outward antiquity. In every poem the author of *Asharh* has written, the distinctiveness of his genius shows itself; but in those poems which he has cast into the old moulds of metre, the brilliance of novelty and the permanence of tradition are combined together as one. We believe the poet himself has grasped this within his own heart, and that the nebula of his comic genius will, in time, condense through the discipline of metre into a fixed constellation of laughter's light in Bengali literature.

Pure, unmixed laughter alone is as light and shallow as a heap of foam. It is merely a fleeting, bright splash of colour upon the surface of things. Through mere comic delight alone, no one attains true immortality. In silver leaf there is indeed whiteness and brilliance, but owing to its lightness and shallowness its value too is slight, and its permanence negligible. Only when that same brilliance is joined to the solid weight of a mass of silver does its value increase. So too, comic delight attains lasting esteem only when joined to the weight of thought and feeling. In this book's poems such as "Bangali Mahima" and "Karna-vimardan-kahini," the laughter expressed is no mere light amusement—within it lies the poet's own heart, and from its midst burn forth fire and radiance. It is dignified by due contempt for cowardice and by righteous condemnation.

Besides this, poems by the author of *Asharh* have appeared from time to time in periodicals in which laughter and the trace of tears, wit and imagination, the foam of the surface and the depth beneath, are all expressed together. That is the true measure of his poetic gift. He has come not merely to make the Bengali laugh, but has given us assurance that he shall move us and stir us as well.

Agrahayan, 1305

MANDRA

Mandra, the newly published volume of poetry by Srijukta Dwijendralal Ray. We welcome this book into the arena of literature with a cordial greeting—we cannot keep it waiting a moment at the door.

Reviewing a book is generally regarded as an editor's duty. Many undertake this duty with the greatest of eagerness. But we confess there is a considerable lack of such eagerness on our part.

We have not come, on the strength of the volume *Mandra*, to fulfil some sudden obligation. This is, rather, our attempt to express the joy we have felt in reading the book.

The volume *Mandra* has given a rare variety to Bengali poetic literature. It gleams with novelty, and the power displayed in this work is effortlessly wielded, an unbroken, bold self-confidence reigning throughout.

That boldness remains unshaken everywhere—in the choice of words, in the handling of metre, in the arrangement of ideas alike. That boldness has repeatedly startled us—it has kept our minds vibrating right to the very end.

Of the nine rasas that exist in poetry, many poets keep these jealous rivals separated, each within its own chamber—but Dwijendralalbabu has fearlessly gathered them all together under a single roof to hold their festival. In his poetry, laughter, pathos, sweetness, and wonder—there is no telling when one will fall upon another.

In this way, almost every poem in *Mandra* seems to dance with ever-changing rhythms of movement, none remaining still; in the unpredictable whirl of feeling its metre rings out and its ornaments scatter light.

But to compare these poems to a dancing girl would not quite describe them rightly. For there is virility in these poems. Their laughter, their sorrow, their satire, their wonder—all belong to men; within them lies a natural vigour alongside an effortless beauty. There is no concern here for coyness or adornment.

Rather, if a comparison must be drawn, one might invoke the image of a full-moon night in Shravan. Light and darkness, motion and stillness, sweetness and vastness, meet together effortlessly across the whole sky. And now and again a shower of

rain, too, moistens the air and falls with a rustling sound. The clouds, too, show varied moods—now half-veiling the moon, now covering it wholly, now suddenly setting it entirely free—now growing dense and dark, flashing with lightning, and trembling with thunderous roar.

Dwijendralalbabu has discovered a new power within the Bengali language. This is precisely the work of a writer endowed with genius. They alone can show how much capacity lies hidden within a particular language—they alone can prove the existence of something whose presence no one had ever before suspected. Dwijendralalbabu has revealed one particular power of Bengali poetic language: its power of motion. The poet has shown how swiftly, how effortlessly, it can move from the shallow to the profound, from feeling to feeling—that its movement is not merely a slow, languid drift borne on emotion, but something far more.

Regarding metre too, the poet seems to have displayed his mastery almost defiantly. In his poems "Ashirbad" (Blessing) and "Udbodhan" (Awakening), metre has been utterly shattered and blown to pieces in the very act of composing rhythm. It is as though he has walked along the edge of some perilous precipice—I cannot say that no mishap has occurred anywhere. But such reckless daring would never have suited a poet lacking real power.

Now the time has come to offer some samples. But we do not hope to show the beauty of the garden by plucking its flowers. Let readers read the poetry themselves—let them not, by merely tasting our commentary, spoil the full pleasure of the feast.

Kartik, 1309

A HAPPY MARRIAGE

Ruskin has said somewhere that all great art is essentially praise. And immediately it must be added that no great thing is easily bound by a definition—therefore it becomes necessary to explain plainly what manner of praise this business of art really is.

Whatever man loves in the whole of creation, through art he offers it praise. When man fashions a beautiful form and shapes from it some humble vessel, what is it that he does? It is this: the lovely mystery of line and curve which we have beheld, entranced, in the folds of a flower's petal, in the ripeness of a fruit, in the bending grace of a leaf, in the loveliness of every living form—that same mastery of design which belongs to the universe, man praises anew in the shaping of his vessel. He says, in effect: *This manifold beauty, which I have beheld with my eyes open upon the world, has given me delight.*

Here there is a matter worth pondering. To say that whatsoever is great or beautiful in the nature of the universe or of man is alone worthy of our praise, and is therefore alone the proper subject of art, is not to say everything that needs saying.

There exists a natural attraction of life towards life, of mind towards mind, of heart towards heart, which cannot properly be called an attraction of beauty or of nobility. It may rather be called the attraction of oneness. Because I am human, I feel in my mind a certain eagerness towards everything that touches humanity. Because I am a Bengali, even the most trifling matters of Bengali life find an answering chord within me. The broken bathing-ghat of some village pond pleases me—not because it is beautiful, but because I love the village. And why do I love the village? Because I feel within me a natural bond towards its people. Yet the folk of the village are not of the company of Ramachandra and Yudhishtira, of Sita and Savitri—they are utterly ordinary people, and among them one may search in vain for anything specially worthy of praise.

Should some poet succeed in giving true expression, in a poem, to his tender feeling for that very ghat, then that poem would not please only the people of this one village—sensitive readers in every land would find delight in its savour. For the sentiment out of which such a poem is woven belongs equally to the hearts of men everywhere.

It is true that much art is indeed an expression of our reverence or affection for what is noble and beautiful. But that our minds should take natural delight even in what is not beautiful, what is merely ordinary—this too is a proper concern of art. Were it otherwise, art would do us positive harm.

For if we allowed our taste to be perpetually drawn only towards what the world has specially selected as beautiful, as great, a certain dissipation of feeling would be born in us. Whatever belongs to every day, whatever surrounds us, whatever lies close to hand, would come to seem to us flavourless; and thus, within a narrow compass, we should force an excess of feeling and everywhere breed only staleness. Tennyson, in one of his poems, has described just such a decay befalling the dilettante devoted only to Art; all are familiar with it.

These few words have been offered as a preface, by way of introducing to the reader the book whose examination we now undertake.

By Ruskin's definition, of what is the book *Shubhabibaha* ("A Happy Marriage") the praise? What image of beauty, what ideal of greatness, does it disclose? To this the answer must be: such matters cannot be reckoned up so neatly. If a man, returning home from his office, is asked by the household, "What have you earned today?"—the sum of his profit can at once be counted out and shown. But if, returning from a round of visits among friends and kin, one is asked, "What have you gained today?"—one cannot shake out a purse and display the gain, coin by coin, upon the table.

In literature too, what has been gained from certain particular books can be shown quite clearly. But there are other books whose gain cannot be brought into such reckoning—which offer no new instruction, no lofty teaching, no creation of matchless wonder. Their gain is only acquaintance renewed with the familiar, conversation with a companion, friendship simply with a friend.

And yet the greater part of life's joy is fashioned of things exactly this simple, this ordinary. The sudden, the strange, the wondrous come by chance upon our path in life; and he who sits waiting for them, or goes searching after them, is generally left disappointed.

Shubhabibaha is a novel, written by a woman; its scene is the inner apartments of a Kayastha household in Calcutta. Thus much may be said: the way in which a woman has written of women here, no male author could have written.

It is not true that mere familiarity with a subject makes writing about it easy. Habitual acquaintance dulls the edge of our perception; the mind, when nothing strikes it freshly, in a new way, comes to know a thing without truly knowing it at all. That the mind should retain fresh curiosity even towards what is thoroughly familiar is a rare capacity indeed.

In *Shubhabibaha* the authoress has revealed that capacity in abundant measure. Never in any Bengali novel have we seen so vivid, so truthful a picture. Nowhere could we bring ourselves to feel that the inner household and its women, as depicted in this book, were the authoress's own invention. They stand forth as radiant truth, and the authoress herself seems but the occasion of their coming.

There is only the barest thread of plot in this book, and the customary trappings of hero and heroine are entirely absent. And yet, once the first thirty pages or so are read, the mind's curiosity remains equally alert to the very last line. Throughout the whole book there is not the least trace of contrivance or of ornament of language—only life, and truth. Whatever is there is immediately felt as real, and effortlessly believed.

No attempt whatever has been made to portray the women of this book as extraordinary—and yet their characters have taken hold of our minds, so that we are not the least indifferent to their joys and sorrows. She who is the mistress of the house, called "Didi" in this book, is a plump, simple, elderly woman, proud of the newly-won wealth earned by her son; and yet the natural fund of tenderness stored in her heart has never become corrupted. Outwardly she is the mistress of a wealthy household, but within she is a plain-hearted, simple woman. Her widowed daughter Rani is the very image of virtue—and yet nowhere in her portrayal is there any deliberate attempt to lay the colours on thick. She takes her place among us with the utmost naturalness. In the most ordinary of circumstances she has quietly made her uncommonness felt. The authoress, nowhere, has turned to look at us for applause, having set this figure before us. And that "Pishima"—orphaned, childless, dwelling in the vast emptiness of an unneeded wealth within a house void of human presence, with only the image of Shyamasundar to occupy

her—in whose character shining purity mingles with tender compassion, and thwarted maternal love with disciplined self-restraint, blended into a beauty that seems to have blossomed of its own accord, unforced. When, upon suddenly gaining her orphaned nephew, this ascetic woman, overflowing with the nectar of tenderness, forgets for a moment even her daily rites of worship to the god, the reader's heart is dissolved, as it were, in the sincerity of unfeigned tears.

Romantic novels exist in Bengali literature, but there is an extreme dearth of realistic portraiture. For this reason too we count this book a special gain to our literature. In European literature we sometimes find that the meanness and baseness of human character have been taken as the very definition of realism. In this Bengali book under our consideration there is not even the faintest trace of squalor, and yet nowhere throughout its length is there anything that is not ordinary, not natural, not real.

Ashadh, 1313

THE HISTORY OF MUSLIM RULE

In the period shortly before the entry of Islam into India, in the early centuries of the Christian era, there appears in Indian history a strange and awe-inspiring void. After the long day's decline, an unconscious slumber, dark and dreamless, seems to have settled over the whole land—of that stretch of time no waking witness, no reliable trace, can be found. The conflict with the Greeks and the Scythians had already come to an end before this. That clash of arms in which Chandragupta, Vikramaditya, and Shalivahana had risen to the summit of all India—how did it come, all at once, to so utter and enduring a stillness? In the intervening period no great man, no vast awakening, made its appearance. When the Muslims, forcibly tearing aside the curtain, opened a new act in the drama of Indian history, they found the country's high places all occupied by a comparatively modern community called the Rajputs, who were tearing the land apart with their petty quarrels born of wounded pride. When that people was formed, when it grew powerful, when it spread from west to east, displacing whom and occupying whose place—all this lies buried in that same historical night of India; its continuity is hidden from us. One is tempted to think that India, at that time, suddenly received from some quarter a cruel blow, a fierce pain, and fell senseless without a sound. From that hour she never regained her former state; never again did the lute of her heart sound in music, never again did the bow-string hum in her courts, never again did Brahmaidya shine forth from the lips of sages in the fire-lit hermitage.

Meanwhile, not long before this, in the lands neighbouring India, a great many fragmented and scattered peoples, drawn together by the tremendous force of attraction exerted by the great soul Muhammad, had risen up united into one vast body bearing the name of Muslim. It was as though separate masses of snow, lying upon the peaks of remote and inaccessible mountains, unawakened even to themselves and unknown to the world without, had lain there in silence—until suddenly a fierce sun rose, and, as we watched, streams pouring down from many summits gathered together into one great flood, and then went forth in a hundred maddened torrents to assail the world on every side.

At that time ancient India lay exhausted; the Vedic religion had been overcome by Buddhism; and Buddhism itself, having undergone manifold and distorted transformations, had split into a hundred narrow and crooked channels within the

Puranas and sub-Puranas, flowing sluggishly, currentless, and had come to entwine India in its coils like some thousand-headed cold-blooded serpent. In religion, in society, in scripture, there was at that time no novelty, no movement, no growth; it seemed as though every test had already been made, and there remained nothing new to hope for. At that moment there was in India no ardour capable of receiving the newly-created, world-conquering, radiant strength of the young Muslim nation.

To what deathless power a nation may rise through fresh enthusiasm and a religion bent upon unity, the Sikhs would later demonstrate by their example.

But history shows us that the unenthusiastic multitude of Hindus was in no way loath to die. The Muslims fought battles; the Hindus, in their thousands, committed self-slaughter. In the wars of the Muslims there was, on one side, religious zeal, and on the other, the lust for kingdom or for wealth; but the Hindus kindled the funeral pyre and destroyed wife and child, and died, young and old together—reckoning it right to die, and holding it against their teaching, against the very order of the world, to live. One may call this heroism, but one cannot call it warfare. In it there was neither purpose nor statecraft.

Whether through the teaching of scripture, or through some other historical cause, or perhaps through some enervation bred of climate, the life-grip of the Hindus upon this earth had grown, in some measure, slack. There was, for the world's goods, no such fierce and desperate craving. Without that fierceness of appetite, the sinews too are not supplied with adequate strength. As a tree bites the soil with a thousand roots and draws sap from every side, so those who do not, with like eagerness, grasp the world tightly, are not, in turn, held fast by the world. Their roots grow loose, and they fall, uprooted, before the storm.

We Hindus, in particular, desire nothing very much; we do not tear open the walls of another's estate to stretch our roots into distant soil—and therefore, to contend with those who do desire is not our proper business.

Of how those who desire, desire, this book under review offers abundant illustration. Never elsewhere has the world witnessed such fearful strife and bloodshed, such an accumulation of monstrous sin. And yet, from the very midst of this dreadful whirlpool of bloodshed, now and again a jewel of mercy and piety is flung up, as it were, glittering.

Even among the Christian nations of Europe, how deadly this universal hunger of appetite can be is known best to the vanished and near-vanished dark and red-skinned races of the sea-coasts. Just as the ogre of the fairy tale, nostrils raised, roars the moment he catches the scent of flesh—"Fee, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman"—so do these peoples, the instant they catch scent of some fresh scrap of land, cry out in chorus, "Fee, fi, fo, fum, I smell the scent of soil." In the inhospitable snow-wastes of North America, on receiving news of gold, men and women, drunk with greed, have rushed headlong like moths blinded by lamplight; no obstacle of road, no fear of death, no darkness whatsoever, could restrain them—the tale of it all has been read by everyone in the newspapers. This inconceivable labour may indeed advance a country's progress, but its aim is not the country's progress, nor the acquisition of knowledge, nor any other worthy end—its spur is unconquerable greed. As Duryodhana and his fellow Kauravas once rushed to the cattle-raid in the north at greed's instigation, so too have these men, to milk the golden essence of the earth, rushed towards the death-strewn Arctic pole.

It is no distant matter: in the year 1871, aboard an English vessel engaged in the slave and convict trade, an incident occurred whose account has been published in a new periodical called []. In the sugar-plantations of Fiji, three pounds sterling was paid per head of native labour procured by Europeans. Driven by this greed, a certain gang of slave-hunters, with what inhuman cruelty they went about capturing men on the islands of the southern seas, and how they once slaughtered sixty or seventy prisoners like devils and fed them to the sharks of the sea—to read the dreadful account of it is to be persuaded of the truth of the Christian doctrine of eternal hell.

Those nations who are conquerors of the world, whose discontent and ambition know no bound, harbour beneath the surface of their civilisation a chained savagery, an unbridled greed, a hidden den of beasts; and now and again, catching but a glimpse of it, one's flesh creeps.

At such moments a doubt arises in our minds: that renunciation which has restrained Indian nature from stretching a hand towards another's wealth, which lets it die quietly even amid the starvation of famine—granted that it does not serve the ends of self-interest—yet when we see, in the history of the Muslims, how in

the face of the excitement of unbridled passion, in the pursuit of power, of self-interest, of the throne, natural affection, mercy, and religion all alike become as nothing; how among brothers, between father and son, husband and wife, master and servant, there arise rebellion, betrayal, deceit, bloodshed, and unspeakable, unnatural cruelty; when we see, in Christian history, how in America and Australia helpless native peoples have been hunted down like beasts of the field for the sake of land, how greed-blinded slave-traders did not reckon men to be men; when we see how, to break the earth apart and stuff it into their own pockets, men are ready to defy every obstacle—Clive, Hastings, being to them great men, and the winning of success the final law of statecraft—then we ask ourselves: on which side, after all, does true worth lie? Though I know that the same strength which stirs the beast in time awakens also the god in man; though I know that where attachment is strong, there renunciation of attachment is most sublime; though I know that the indifference of the doctrine of renunciation, even as it subdues nature, brings also a certain barrenness to humanity; and I know too that just as in the lower reaches of the religion of passion there is only bewildering darkness, so at its highest peak burns the purest light of religion—I know that where the clash of impulse and restraint in human nature is fiercest, there too is churned up, for the enjoyment of the gods, the purest ambrosia of the spirit—yet, seeing the endless tumult of greed and violence, of dissipation and indulgence, one hesitates for a moment, and a doubt arises in the mind: is such a high, tumultuous, uneven excellence of good and evil, of virtue and vice, to be preferred—or is the lifeless, vast, level stillness of sinlessness, though joyless, the better thing?

Our hearts, in the end, incline towards the latter—because we do not feel within ourselves the strength suited to so vast a struggle; we lack the energy to drive together, in one team, Dharma and Artha, Kama and Moksha. We are eager, rather, to restrain every kind of unruly striving and attain complete peace. But when scripture cannot protect India like a fortress-wall; when conflict with alien peoples becomes inevitable; when we are compelled to defend our own interest against greed and our own life against violence—then it is fitting that the beast which lies within man, though we feed it flesh morning and evening for no other purpose, be at least stationed like a sentinel outside the gate. Even if nothing else comes of it, it commands the respect of the strong.

But alas, in India, in the war between gods and demons, the demons have vanished utterly—and it seems doubtful whether the gods themselves are still very much alive. At the very least, free from every kind of fear and conflict, they seem to have fallen fast asleep.

Shravan, 1305

SIRAJUDDAULA

By Shri Akshay Kumar Maitreya

All who have had to commit history to memory at school must admit that, of the entire chronicle of India, the account of the period of English rule is the most tedious of all. One reason is that in this account the drama of human nature is nowhere given full play. A Governor arrives; a war is fought; there is victory or defeat; five years pass; the Governor departs.

Of course, the matter was not, in truth, so utterly devoid of human feeling as a mere piece of machinery. In the great chess-game of India, where white and black were pursuing their manifold and curious strategies upon many squares, the hands of error, of passion, of greed and delusion were by no means absent. But writers, mindful of loyalty to the Crown and of the requirements of school textbooks, have been obliged to tread timidly within a narrow compass. For this reason, at least in histories composed in Bengali, the chapter on English rule remains extremely dry and stunted.

There is another matter besides. In the days of the Mughals and the Pathans, each emperor ruled the kingdom as an independent sovereign, entirely at his own pleasure; and so, in the movement of their free will, the history of India was, at every turn, agitated into waves of varied colour and feeling. But English rule in India is the rule of the English Crown in England. In it the play of the human heart is a matter of the utmost insignificance. There is no man, there is no king—only a system, moving forward along an exceedingly long road, laying down its posts; every five years or so, merely the bearer of that post changes.

How subtle, how intricate, how far-reaching is that system; how the threads of this vast web, hanging down from Gibraltar, Egypt, Aden, and other lands far and near, have come to enmesh India from head to foot—an account of all this is not without its own peculiar fascination for us; and nowhere else have we seen that account set forth so concisely and so charmingly as in Mr Lyall's book, *The Rise of the British Dominion in India*.

But this account is an historical mechanism displaying the ingenuity of human intellect—it is not that eternally fascinating thing, the historical heart-essence, dear to the reader forever. In how the western clockwork sets the puppets of the East

dancing there is something of comedy, something of pathos, and a great deal of wonder; but of that dramatic richness which is born of the direct clash of heart with heart, there is here but little.

In the days of the East India Company, that romance of history—romance in the full sense the word bears in English—was present in ample measure. At that time, even within the far-sighted policy of English territorial expansion, private greed and personal passion, in their play, kept history restless and heated.

Shriyukta Babu Akshay Kumar Maitreya, in his book *Sirajuddaula*, lifts the curtain upon that point in the historical drama where, before the palace-gates of the crumbling Mughal Empire, the community of English merchants stands in the most abject posture. At that time all manner of destructive power, in various guises, roamed the field of India; among them, the mildest, the most restrained, the poorest in dress, was that of the English. The Maratha cavalry rode abroad kindling fires of devastation to every horizon; the Sikhs, on India's western border, were gathering their unconquerable strength into one mass; the Mughal Emperor's provincial governors, in that twilight of an age, again and again raised the bloody banner of rebellion; while only a handful of English traders, carrying sacks of merchandise upon their heads, sought shelter, in the utmost humility, in the shade of the porch beside the palace steps of the Emperor.

At the time when Siraj-ud-Daula, the young heir of the Nawab's house, was still a child in the lap of his grandfather Alivardi, the future majesty of English rule too lay helpless, a child in its own right, cast down upon the ground in the merchant's factory at Calcutta, living out its own defenceless infancy. Between the two of them, Fate, binding an invisible knot, kept concealed her own terrible jest.

In the intoxication of pleasure this catastrophic drama had its beginning. Along the banks of the Bhagirathi, in the pleasure-groves of Hirajhil, the singing voice of courtesans and the ring of dancing-girls' anklets rose in a swelling murmur. The greedy hand of lust extended even into the locked chambers of respectable householders.

Meanwhile, offstage, now and again is heard the thunder of Maratha cavalry hooves, the clash of weapons breaking out. To fend off their raids, the aged Alivardi

rushed hither and thither on every side. Under cover of this turmoil, the English merchants threw up a fort at Kasimbazar, and began to gather, here and there, troops sufficient for their own defence.

The insolence of the merchants, too, began to swell. They began to attempt the plunder of the boats and vessels of merchants, native and foreign alike. The Company's servants, together with their kinsmen and friends, took to conducting trade upon their own private account, exempt from duty.

At just this juncture Siraj-ud-Daula assumed the office of heir apparent, and, to curb the licence of the English, began to enforce a stern discipline.

Between the proud Nawab, jealous of his royal dignity, and the wealth-hungry foreign merchant, conflict broke out. In this conflict there is nothing whatever for the merchant's side to be proud of. Siraj-ud-Daula, though truly he was not a man of exalted character, yet against the meanness, the falsehood, and the deceit of this quarrel, his courage and candour, his valour and his forbearance, shine forth with a royal grandeur. Thus does Malleson, speaking of him, say: "Among the chief actors in that catastrophic drama, Siraj-ud-Daula alone was the man who made no attempt at treachery."

The conflict at its outset was slender and simple as the tender shoot of a tree bearing but two leaves; but gradually, with the gathering of many men and many designs, it spread and grew tangled like some vast forest tree.

As a skilful charioteer can yoke many horses at once and yet drive the chariot true, so has Akshay Babu, with rare artistry, swept this intricate tale of conflict—crowded with many actors—irresistibly forward from its beginning to its close.

His language is as brilliant and vivid as his arrangement of incident is coherent, and his weighing of evidence equally masterly. Where the events are manifold and pull in many directions, where the proofs are scattered and argument must constantly be introduced at every turn, there to preserve the unity of the subject throughout and yet carry it forward at a swift pace is the task of a truly capable writer. The scrutiny of evidence, in particular, tends to break the thread of narrative; yet, despite these unavoidable obstacles, the author has made his history as engaging as a tale, and has not rested until he has stirred the reader's pity for that perpetually maligned and calumniated figure of history, the unfortunate Siraj-ud-Daula.

In one respect only has he transgressed the discipline proper to history. Though the author has made no attempt to conceal any fault of Siraj's character, he has yet, with a certain effort, taken his side. Instead of letting the evidence of history alone speak calmly for itself, he has, at every step, expressed alongside it his own opinion, with a certain excess of feeling and passion. Struggling against firmly entrenched, hostile tradition, and wounded at every turn by prevailing blind injustice, he has naturally given vent to this agitation of feeling. But by this the tranquillity proper to truth has been somewhat disturbed, and an unfounded apprehension of partiality has, here and there, stirred a slight uneasiness in the reader's mind.

Reading Shrijukta Akshay Kumar Maitreya's *Sirajuddaula*, a certain Anglo-Indian newspaper has expressed its wrath.

It is only natural that one should feel angry on hearing a reproach concerning one's own people from the mouth of another—even if the reproach is just.

But how great is the difference between us and the editor of that newspaper! We are compelled to study the reproaches written by foreigners, to commit them to memory, to answer for them in examinations. But there seems little likelihood that Akshay Babu's *Sirajuddaula* will ever be prescribed, by any editor, as a textbook for his own children. Especially since Akshay Babu has composed this book in Bengali, the possibility of its causing distress to English readers is rendered still more remote.

But it is precisely in this Bengali composition that the reviewer finds still greater cause for outrage. He fears that, owing to their ignorance of languages, those Bengali readers for whom the original documents and the evidence of history are inaccessible may, upon reading the book *Sirajuddaula*, come to feel disrespect towards the conduct of the English.

But this is history; to attack and demolish it by reasoning and by proof is no easy matter. Even by some unimaginable stretch of legal interpretation, it might not be impossible to suppress both the history and the historian together. But the question to be asked is: which, upon comparison, is the graver matter—that English writers, in novels, essays, and travel narratives, express in various forms towards Oriental peoples so much scorn and contempt, which for the most part rests not

on reason or fact but on national prejudice—whose deep root, as the Spectator has somewhere called it, is []—or this: a history in Bengali, which even twelve-sixteenths of educated Bengalis will neglect to read simply because it is written in Bengali?

Whatever notion the English form of us has its direct effect upon us—for we lie helplessly in English hands. It is natural that contempt should be bred towards a weak and subject dependent, and that contempt cannot but hinder fair judgment; besides, from childhood, English children read books which fill them with horror and dread concerning India. When the countless fanciful falsehoods and exaggerations, concerning India's religion, society, and popular character, contained in the pages of English books, are set beside the whole body—good and bad, readable and unreadable—of Bengali literature, the latter, in its comparative thinness, is put to shame.

The English are our powerful masters. The direct attraction of that power and mastery is very great indeed—so great that even should injustice and oppression occur, they keep the weak overwhelmed with fear, awe, and a kind of blind attachment. Thus, no Indian, having read of how the English merchant behaved towards the princely houses of Rajasthan a hundred and fifty years ago, could fail to feel some disrespect towards the English. Whatever we may say with our lips, however we may argue on this occasion or that out of resentment at some particular hurt, to cut ourselves free from the attraction of the mighty power of England is by no means easy for us.

Therefore, so long as we remain weak and the English strong, it is best simply to say that our tongues' abuse does them no harm—while their tongues' abuse is deadly to us. So long as this continues, our newspapers merely irritate the ears of Englishmen and their memsahibs, while their newspapers fire bullets straight into the very core of our being.

But that some injustice is committed in English literature does not justify our taking an unjust revenge for it—this is not sound reasoning; especially since, for the weak, imitation of the strong is a fearful thing.

To speak ill of the English was not the purpose of the book *Sirajuddaula*. Still, what need was there to raise such a topic at all? Whether the reviewer has rightly understood, and rightly received, that necessity, is doubtful.

There is a natural law of action and reaction. Reading in English books, on Oriental character and Oriental statecraft, an endless stream of harsh remarks—great and small, plain and veiled, fair and unfair—few Englishmen can imagine what a resentment, born of humiliation, this may breed in the minds of the educated among us.

And yet, in our early schooling, we accepted the writings of Englishmen as gospel truth. However much they wounded us, we did not believe that any protest was possible, that any examination of the evidence lay within our power. Silently, with bowed head, cursing ourselves, we had to bear every insult as complete and unquestionable truth.

In such a state of things, whatever gifted and capable writer of our country has severed that mental bondage, who has been able to show us the way to freedom from blind subservience, deserves the gratitude of the people of our land.

Besides this, to voice our doubt, and to bring forward counter-evidence, regarding the notion that in the clash of East and West our lot has been only disgrace, is altogether necessary for our bowed heads and wounded hearts.

That Akshay Babu should compare the massacre of the Black Hole with the killing at Cawnpore and the terrible slaughter at Amritsar during the Sepoy Mutiny may, in the context of an historical narrative, be somewhat beside the point, and the English critic's angry rebuke on that account may be not unreasonable; yet we cannot call it pointless. We cannot, for this reason: that reading such accounts—true, false, and exaggerated alike—of the merciless barbarity of Oriental character, generation after generation of Englishmen have shuddered, and have kept poised, from the pulpit of a lofty morality, a rebuke against us, of which the Black Hole is one chief instance. Unless some counter-blow answers that blow, there is no escape from the hand of self-abasement. We cannot resist the temptation to say, seizing this occasion, that blind ferocity towards an enemy is the beastliness of degenerate human nature in general, and belongs to no special degree to Oriental character. The pulpit of the reviewer does not belong to one nation alone. Given the chance, we too might climb upon it and point an accusing finger at the darkness on the judge's own robe. Christian scripture itself says that he who judges another must himself come under judgment. We admit this is not the discipline of history—but it is the law of human nature.

Of course, it is also the law of nature that, just as the strong judges the weak at ease, with an untroubled mind, so, should the weak attempt to judge the strong in the same manner, the eyebrows and fists of the strong may be raised in anger. Akshay Babu has perhaps fallen under that harsh primal law; but for the era of freedom which he has inaugurated in Bengali historiography, he will remain forever blessed in the annals of our literature.

The reviewer has taken care to remind us that, under Muslim rule, Akshay Babu could not have written such a book. Perhaps he could not. Under Muslim rule the conquered Hindus held the highest offices of state—chief minister, commander-in-chief, revenue secretary, and the like—but no one, in any Nawab's reign, could probably have written, according to the evidence without and the conviction within, the history of that same Nawab's house stretching back a century and a half. If, under English rule, Akshay Babu has gained that liberty, it is to the credit of English governance—but then why does the reviewer's eye flush red at his exercise of that very liberty? And if Akshay Babu does not truly possess that right, if he has indeed transgressed the bounds of the law, then why does the reviewer take pride in the generosity of having granted that right?

In truth, the line marking this liberty has grown so fine, so faint, that even those who apply the letter of the law with the greatest skill differ among themselves as to where the boundary lies. In such a state of affairs, it is perhaps best that, for some time yet, no more be said upon this matter.

Jyaishtha, 1305

HISTORICAL PICTURES

We have received the printed prospectus of a historical journal named *Aitihasik Chitra* (Historical Pictures), to be published under the editorship of Shrijukta Akshay Kumar Maitreya.

In this prospectus it is written: "Many materials for our history lie recorded in the writings of foreign travellers; being written in many languages, they remain to us unfamiliar and unexplored. The accounts written by contemporary Muslim or European historians have, as yet, received no adequate Bengali translation. Among the papers of the old royal houses much historical material lies hidden, yet no arrangement exists for its investigation.

"The translation of travel-accounts and histories of India written in various languages, authenticated new historical facts gained through research, the critical examination of modern histories, and the publication of the antiquities of Bengali royal and zamindar houses—these are the chief aims of this proposed journal."

In ancient Greece and Rome, and in almost every modern civilised nation, a partiality towards history has been manifest as it never was in India—of this, I think, there can be no two opinions. In the age of Mandhata perhaps everything else existed in our country—there are those who would have us believe there was even the telegraph, the railway, the balloon, the Maxim gun, Darwin's theory of expression, and Ganot's natural philosophy—but history did not exist. Had it existed, we should not now hear so many such claims.

But in more recent India, in the period when the Rajputs' bond of common feeling was still strong, history sprang up among them of its own accord, as a proper crop upon proper soil.

From the time when, in modern India, the Marathas, through Shivaji's genius, bound themselves together like a thunderbolt into a single people, and that thunderbolt, with lightning speed, shattered the decaying Mughal empire from one end to the other, from that time the natural cause of history-writing came into being among them. Their histories, called *bakhars*, form the chief branch of old Maharashtrian literature.

The scriptures of the Sikhs and the history of the formation of their community are combined as one. In their doctrine, the great unity of monotheism became, quite naturally, the cause of national unity. As they were one in faith, so were they one in action, one in strength. Their scripture is at once Purana and history.

The real matter is this: as the instinct of the living creature is, in the present, to preserve life, and, in the future, to perpetuate itself through its lineage, so, when a large number of scattered people are given one life, made into one body, by some particular idea, sentiment, or continuous thread of memory, that body can then stand firm against the assault of an external enemy, and becomes eager to project its own individuality, its communal unity, into the future. History is one of the chief means to that end. It is for this reason that, just as coral colonies build their reefs across generations, the writing of history is a matter of instinctive religion for a particularly united community.

Scripture and Purana, though not the complete history of a people, are the history of a community of faith. The religious body weaves the greatness, the beauty, the antiquity of its own faith, together with edifying legend, into Purana and scripture, thereby extending the current of religious doctrine, unbroken, from age to age, and, by that ancient thread of unity, makes its community vast and firmly bound across the span of time.

For this reason, preserving the factual accuracy of events is not the aim of the Purana. It is merely the record of religious belief and doctrine. Even its imaginative, baseless utterances express only the ideal of the moral teaching being conveyed. The true account of contemporary events does not fall within its purpose.

But when a people feels its unity not merely as a religious community but as a political nation—when not merely the preservation of religion, but the collective self-preservation of the people, becomes natural to it—then it begins to record not merely particular doctrines or beliefs, but its own deeds, achievements, joys and sorrows, and contemporary events.

When the Aryans first came to India, when detached indifference was not their ideal, when they had to remain closely bound together in struggle against natural obstacles and against the primitive non-Aryan peoples, when the memory of heroic men served to inspire them to valour—then, without doubt, in their unwritten literature there arose a flowering of historical legend. Those very ancient fragments

of history were, ages later, combined, with much alteration, into the Mahabharata and the Ramayana.

But when, at every step, there was no longer forest, and in the forest no longer any demon; when the yakshas and rakshasas, exiled to inaccessible mountains, gradually assumed, in popular legend, a supernatural form; when Dhurjati, lord of the Kiratas who overcame Arjuna, had risen to the rank of a god; when the conflict between hostile nature and man had receded into the distance; when, in a long age of peace, under the sun-scorched skies of India, the Brahmins, having become foremost among all, cast the vast net of their doctrine of detachment from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin—from that time history ceased to be. The religion of the Brahmins came to be woven into hundreds upon hundreds of new Puranas, but as to where the body of the people, gradually grown slack, scattered and was lost, of that there remains no word at all. They fell away even from the past, and lost their connection likewise with the future.

The truth is that the religion of unity is like the religion of life itself. Like inert matter, it does not remain bound within one portion alone. If it gains entry on one side, it gradually extends its dominion to another side as well. If it can spread through space, then it wishes also to spread through time. If it can fill the gap between the near and the far, then it seeks also to remove its own separateness from the past and the future.

This striving after wholeness is so powerful that often it fills, by mere imagination, the gaps left by history, and thereby renders history itself futile. It was for this very reason that the Rajputs, spinning out a long web of fancy, established their own connection with the lineage of the Sun and Moon.

We too have, for a long time, been spinning, like a fine thread, the discipline of caste and lineage-purity. In the brief literature concerning caste, clan, gotra, and family alliance, this has gone on increasing, generation after generation, from the mouths of genealogists. This we cannot allow ourselves to forget. For the unity that exists in our society is chiefly a unity of caste. That thread we wish to draw down from time immemorial, and to bind fast to an endless future.

But had we possessed among us a genuine national unity, had we, bound to one another, been able to feel, in one vast heart, the glory of victory, the shame of defeat, the striving after progress, then that body of people would naturally, like

the spider's web, have spun the threads of its own history far and wide, in every direction, and bound itself thereby. Had that been so, the genealogists of our land would not merely have chanted dirges of clan and lineage; the reciters of Puranas would not merely have expounded old legend; the tellers of historical tales would have kept alive, generation after generation, the memory of joy and sorrow, of glory shared with ages past.

At present it is a matter of particular joy to us that, in recent Bengali literature, an enthusiasm for history has awakened, in which a universal, wholesome sign is manifest. We cannot consider this to be some sudden, short-lived, peculiar contagion of composition. Today, throughout the whole of India, that vital force of education and of movement, working in many forms, has, in this hunger for history, one of its natural fruits.

This proves that the agitation of the Congress and similar bodies is not, in our country, a mere external phenomenon. At times a fear arises that these vast preparations, made year after year to present the same monotonous petitions at the doors of government, are in vain—for they have failed to win the confidence of the government, and their lasting influence has not penetrated into the depths of the country's inner life.

But how a mass of hidden strength is invisibly at work within us, of that we know least of all. Only when the sprout breaks through the soil do we understand that the wind had, at some time, brought a seed and lodged it in the fertile ground of the mind.

This hunger for history is one such sprout. We come to understand that the Congress has not, year after year, merely showered a handful of failed petitions upon the royal palace—it has been bringing the various provinces of India into ever closer union, and sowing, within our hearts, the seed of feeling.

For some time now we have begun, as it were, to feel the great heartbeat that runs through the whole country. Personal and parochial separateness has dissolved, and our joys and sorrows, our honour and dishonour, our thoughts, our endeavours, are gradually taking on an ever wider compass. As the stone-turned Ahalya, at the touch of Ramachandra, rose up from the earth and took form, so, at the touch of the single, unifying rule of England, our India, out of a mingled mass of scattered and untouched elements, is gradually rising up, assuming a single form. That very

surge of unity now stirring in the nation's heart, that overflow of life, that release from the bonds of narrow attachment, that joy born of a generous sense of duty—it is this that has awakened our striving.

Now we wish to feel Bombay, Madras, and the Punjab as near to us as we wish to make the India of the past directly present to us. Grown conscious of ourselves, we are now eager to comprehend ourselves, in space and in time, both as one and as vast. Now we wish to go forth on our own quest, through the midst of the Mughal empire, past the reign of the Afghans, through the tangled forest of the Sena, Pala, and Gupta dynasties, tracing an unbroken path from the age of the Puranas to the Buddhist age, and from the Buddhist age back to the Vedic age. In that great voyage of discovery *Aitihasik Chitra* is one vessel among others. May God bless the fearless sailors who have gathered for this venture; may the people of the country be their support; and may the selfless joy of a great and beloved duty never, even for a moment, desert them amid every obstacle and discouragement.

Let none suppose that, in the search for glory, one must enter upon the difficult paths of ancient chronicle. In that direction there may be no glory at all—through much defeat, much dishonour, much decline and decay, the long history of India has wound its crooked way. In many places we shall have to walk stooping through that same narrow passage. Yet what is it that draws us towards this muddy, tangled, winding road? It is not national vanity, but a newly awakened love of country. We wish to know our country in its true nature, directly, completely—we wish to look steadily even amid all its sorrows and misfortunes—we do not wish to deceive ourselves.

And yet I hold the firm conviction that, should we, following the path of history, come to see India in her wholeness, we shall have no cause for shame. We shall then attain an eternal ideal—the ideal of India herself—which has kept its lofty head unstained above every defeat and dishonour.

The Greeks and the Romans were a heroic people, a conquering people; for long ages, fearlessly renouncing tenderness of heart, they conquered lands and defended their own. The preservation of political liberty was their national aim and their glory. But that firm ideal, that long success, that great achievement, could not save them from the hand of ruin and defeat.

The path India took for herself was never, in any age, the path of national defence or national conquest. Therefore the defeat India suffered at the hands of external enemies' might is not the defeat of her own ideal. Doubtless, in the successive shocks of foreign disturbance, of Scythian, Greek, Arab, Mughal, and native barbarian conflict, that ascetic discipline which India had undertaken was shattered; the unity of that ideal, gradually made manifest, growing from scattered diversity into concentrated firmness, capable of shaping the Hindu people into a particular form and structure, into grace and harmony—that unity was again and again torn apart and scattered; yet perhaps, could we trace that one underlying thread even through its many ruptures, we might come to understand that the history of India is not to be measured by the standard of present-day Europe.

Where the ideal of Europe is leading Europe, we do not fully know; that it is not enduring, that within it many seeds of destruction are visibly sprouting, is plain to see. India, subduing her passions, gave up her life at the hand of the enemy—Europe, nourishing its passions, is preparing for self-destruction. Because we had no attachment to our own land or to others', we surrendered our country to the foreigner—cherishing with the utmost care its attachment to its own land and to others', to what shore of blood has Europe today come to stand! Bristling on every side with sword and cannon, what a monstrous form is this! With what suspicion, with what terror, does every power of Europe cast its cruel glance upon its neighbour! Ministers of state, scheming and plotting, are ceaselessly weaving webs of death for one another; fleets, laden with the arrows of death, sail forth upon every sea of the world like the messengers of Yama himself. In Africa, in Asia, the ravenous, greedy hands of Europe advance step by step, seizing with one paw a portion of soil while raising the other, threateningly, against some other covetous intruder in front. The violence and greed of European civilisation have today set all four continents and the two great oceans of the world in turmoil. On top of this, the conflict between capital and labour, between luxury and famine, between the settled order of society and socialism and nihilism, rages everywhere throughout Europe. The predominance of passion, the intoxication of power, the excitement of self-interest—these can never, in any age, lead to peace and fulfilment; a fierce collision, a terrible and bloody outcome, is bound to follow. There is, therefore, perhaps no need to measure India, belittling her by comparison, against the

political ideal of Europe, taking that ideal as the final standard. There is a saying: one should praise even a worn-out garment while it yet serves.

However it may be, we can no longer find comfort in seeing India through the eyes of others. For when our love for India had not yet awakened, we used to see India's history from without; we used to read the history of the Pathan kingdom within the history of the Mughal empire. Now, within that same Mughal empire and Pathan kingdom, we wish to trace the history of India herself. This can never be achieved through indifference or through aversion. That entire comprehension cannot come from judgment and research alone; imagination and sympathy are needed too.

When, to unite scattered events and to breathe life into dead facts, imagination and sympathy are utterly essential, in that matter we cannot afford to depend upon others. In the work of gathering material there is no objection to accepting the help of others; but in the work of creation, one's own strength must be brought to bear. When the history of India is written by Indians, there is a risk of partiality; but partiality distorts history far less than does the absence of sympathy, joined with hostility. Besides, the tendency to apply the standard of one land to another creeps unbidden even into the pen of the foreign writer; nor does that serve any good purpose either.

Whether it succeeds or not, the day of joy has come when we shall rescue our own history from the hands of others, when we shall look upon our India with our own free vision. We shall draw our readers forth from the tutelage of Mr Lethbridge's manual, and set them down within the open field of history itself; here, though in their own effort they may gather, along with truth, some error too, that is, for us, far better than the rote-learned wisdom drawn from an examination text written by another—for the endeavour of that free inquiry will, on some future day, correct that very error itself. But however useful borrowed spectacles may be for perpetually wandering along the same well-worn road, however necessary for the oil-extraction of the examination treadmill, they are useless for the winning of new truth and the shedding of old error.

Aitihasik Chitra has set out upon a righteous war for the liberation of Indian history from its bonds. May religion be its ally, protect it, and bring its purpose to fulfilment. Or else—as the saying goes—even in defeat in righteous war, the three worlds are won.

THE PERSONAL AND THE IMPERSONAL

Sakar o Nirakar-tattva, by Shri Yatindramohan Singha, B.A.

Now and again in our country one hears the debate as to whether God is to be conceived with form or without form. But in the book presently under review the argument does not run to any such crude extreme. The thesis the book undertakes to establish is this: whether God ought to be worshipped in a personal, embodied form, or in an impersonal, formless manner.

Some, in answer to this question, hold that for one who cannot fix his mind upon the formless, worship of the embodied form is the better course.

But the author of this book will have no such half-way compromise; he declares that formless worship is not possible at all. Either become one with Brahman itself, or worship an image. He has begun his work of destruction facing in the direction precisely opposite to that of Kalapahar. Not merely does he wish to defend image-worship—he desires, by argument, to demolish the worship of the formless altogether.

What can be, and what cannot be, is more readily proved by history than by argument. To convince, by mere reasoning, the king of some tropical land, accustomed to heat, that water when frozen by cold can become ice, is no easy matter; but should he once travel to the Himalayan region, there remains no further dispute on the point. The author has not troubled to take that road. He has declared, by argument alone, that formless worship simply cannot exist.

Muslims do not worship images. And yet it is not to be believed that among the community of Muslims there are, or ever have been, no devotees at all. How the fulfilment of their devotional impulse is achieved, Yatindramohan Babu may perhaps not understand—but that it is not achieved through image-worship is certain.

None would venture to deny that Nanak was among the very foremost of the world's devotees. Nor is there any doubt that he was not a preacher of the doctrine "I am Brahman." Yet no adequate reason can be found for supposing that he, having specifically renounced the current practice of image-worship, propagated

instead the worship of the formless. Surely he found fulfilment in formless worship, and image-worship would have obstructed that fulfilment for him.

Among the Brahmos too there undoubtedly exist those who, moved by the intensity of devotional passion, have, having forsaken image-worship altogether, spent their entire lives in worship of the formless. Such a one may, by the author's reckoning, be mistaken, but that he is a true devotee he has proved not by argument but by conduct, and by the acceptance of much suffering and sacrifice.

There was indeed a time when image-worship did not exist in India, but it is fruitless to invoke historical proof concerning so remote a past. From the examples that can be adduced from the modern age, this much at least is proved: that certain devotees, growing weary of image-worship, have abandoned it, and that many devotees, in many lands of the world, have found the fulfilment of their devotional feeling in the worship of the formless.

The author says: granted, they do not worship images—but that they worship the formless can simply not be so. For, "knowledge of God, resting upon terms denoting species and quality, is necessarily knowledge of a form."

What manner of argument is this—as if I were to say: if I claim that K walks a crooked path and Kh a straight one, you might reply that Kh does not walk a straight path either—because the straight line is a fiction; nowhere on earth does a straight line exist.

The statement is true enough, but it remains, for all that, a mere argument. Our language can never entirely outstrip our mind; and our mind is bounded. Our language, therefore, is relative. What we would see through the sharpest lens, if we try to examine it too closely, grows blunt; what we call perfectly round, if magnified a thousandfold, is found imperfect. I do not venture to say that, examined under a microscope, formless worship would reveal no hint of form whatsoever.

If that be so, then what fault is there in what we call the worship of form? When the formless lies wholly beyond the mind's grasp, it is better to worship Him in some accessible form.

Form may be accessible to our minds—but it does not follow that the formless can be made accessible *through* form—quite the reverse is true.

Suppose I wish to form some conception of the sea. The sea lies but two miles off. As I set out to view it, a learned man comes and tells me: the sea is so vast that even beholding it with your own eyes, you cannot truly conceive it—for our vision is bounded; however far we go into the sea, however hard we strive, there is no way but to see the sea as something smaller than it is. Therefore, dig a little pond in your courtyard, and imagine that to be the sea.

But if, even by the utmost reach of the power of sight, beholding the actual sea leaves the conception of the sea incomplete, then it may be said with even greater force that from a mere pond, any conception of the sea is impossible.

The infinite sky is, for us, walled about—but that is no reason to shut the door of the room and thereby try to satisfy our longing to behold the sky. That I cannot see beyond a certain point does not mean I am content not to see what lies within it.

This very striving is, in essence, worship. When, having gone to my utmost limit, I still do not reach *His* limit; when my mind sets forth alone upon a journey into the universal void; when it is lost amid the infinite, intricate forest of light formed by countless planets, moons, and stars; and when, like a bird well-nigh vanished in the vast expanse of the dawn-flooded blue sky, it bursts into an exultant song—*I am the boundless, I have not found Thy end*—then, in that very failure, the mind finds its fulfilment. It is in not reaching that end that its joy consists: "*There is joy in the infinite; in the finite there is no joy.*"

The Ptolemaic system of the universe is well within our power of conception. That the stars revolve, in narrow, fixed order, through a heaven bounded and hard, holding the earth at its centre—this lies precisely within the grasp of the human mind; but modern astronomy has broken free of that bondage, and, in passing beyond such limited conception into infinite mystery, has gained thereby in glory. It is this very tidings—that the universe is no mere courtyard of the earth, that the earth itself is but a mote of dust in the cosmos—that sets our imagination free to expand without bound.

When we do not confine the god we worship within the mere courtyard of man's household, when we know Him to lie beyond our conception, when we hear from the mouths of the sages—

*Yato vāco nivartante aprāpya manasā saha,
Ānandaṁ brahmaṇo vidvān na bibhetti kutashchana—*

that is, "he who knows that Bliss, that Brahman, from which speech together with mind turns back, unable to reach it, fears nothing from anywhere"—then, and only then, does our bound heart begin to receive the assurance of freedom. That He, from whom speech and mind turn back unattained, is not thereby a mere void to us—He is Bliss itself.

We worship Him whom we know to be greater than ourselves.

Our highest worship is drawn towards Him who is so vast that nowhere does He come to an end.

It might be said, in the heat of argument, that we would *know* Him as great, but *see* Him as small. Is it, then, an easy task to constantly diminish oneself by one's own hand? Above all, when the senses are given free rein, they grow greater than the mind itself. When more authority than is strictly necessary is voluntarily surrendered into the hands of that very sense, a certain torpor of mind becomes inevitable.

And why, indeed, should we see Him as small at all?

If He is not thought of as *something*—as some *thing*—then the mind loses its footing altogether.

But there is no short cut by which to escape a great goal through some clever evasion. *Durgam pathastat kavayo vadanti*—"That path is hard, the wise declare." Had there been a way to avoid that difficult path, there would have been no cause for concern. Because effort is required, because striving is demanded, one who takes the path of effortlessness loses sight of his goal altogether. He who wishes to become wealthy toils the whole day, and only after balancing his accounts at one in the morning does he go to sleep; sitting idle with folded hands brings him no success in his ambition. And he who seeks God—shall he attain Him merely by play, because the path is arduous?

The truth is, God is not desired by all; by nature, many have no inclination whatsoever towards the transcendent. Fixing their gaze upon wealth, splendour, pleasure, good fortune, the burden of sin, and the accumulation of merit, George

Eliot has given the name [] to the practice of divine worship and religious observance conducted with such an end in view. That is to say, it is a form of *worldliness disguised as the other-worldly*. It is not spirituality at all. For those whose aim lies in that direction, form and formlessness are mere pretexts. And so, taking up whatever comes readiest to hand, whatever proves convenient, whatever the crowd recommends, the religiously astute continue entering their gains into the ledger of merit. Among both the party of the formless and the party of the embodied form, such people are to be found in abundance.

But for those to whom spirituality is the natural law of their being, whom the world cannot satisfy or distract, whose minds, wherever set, turn of themselves towards the infinite by an inexplicable magnetic attraction—for whom, apart from the Lord of the Universe, all our comings and goings, all our thoughts and endeavours and activities, are wholly meaningless, and the entire pageant of the world an unbroken horror; who, having tasted, within the depths of their own being, the direct bliss of the Supreme Soul, have understood that "from that very bliss all beings are born, by that bliss, once born, they live, and unto that bliss, departing, they return"—for such as these, discipline is no hardship, and, forgetting both themselves and their God, they seek no shortcut for the fulfilment of their desire—for their joy lies in eternal striving, their nature's satisfaction in ceaseless endeavour.

In just such a way, when some natural-born devotee is engaged in image-worship, he may, through his own singular genius, perceive the embodied form as the formless itself; no boundary present before his eyes can cut him off from the boundless; whatever his eye beholds, his mind, in a flash of lightning, outstrips and passes beyond; the outward occasion remains for him a mere habit, requiring no removal; the whole universe is, to him, mere symbol—image is not even in question. Just as one who knows letters does not see a letter as a mere letter—just as, when he sees upon paper the marks "b" and "r", he does not see merely a small curved shape, but in an instant, in his mind's eye, beholds a great branching tree—so does he, though beholding the object set before him, fail to see it as such; in a moment, within his heart, he apprehends that formless bliss, "from which speech together with mind turns back, unattained." But this magic is achievable only through extraordinary genius. Such genius belonged to Chaitanya; it belonged to Ramprasad Sen.

Again, by a difference of nature, certain other natural-born devotees, breaking free of habitual practice, come to regard worship of God through the customary image as an insult to the Self and an insult to the Supreme Self, and instead worship Him within their own soul and within the universe. Muhammad and Nanak are examples of this.

But among us the genius for devotion belongs to very few indeed. The visible world stands like a forest, enveloping us on every side; now and again, through some opening in its branches and leaves, a ray of spiritual light touches a portion of our darkness like the pointing finger of a divine messenger. Now, if we, setting aside now and again our worm-like search beneath the shadow-trees of the world, wish to enjoy the bliss of liberation within the infinite sky, what then are we to do?

I must say "if we wish"—for, as already stated, not all of us desire this; taking God merely as a pretext, we desire something else entirely. But if we do desire it, what then?

Then, carefully avoiding whatever constitutes obstruction, whatever constitutes darkness, we must, following that path by which light reveals itself, spread our wings and rise towards the sky.

That path is not merely the path of the senses, the path of dust, the path of the earth—it is the trackless path of air, the path of light, the path of the sky. For us, that alone is the one path.

Those who dwell in the open fields receive the light of the sky even while seated upon the ground; but those who are hemmed in by a tangled thicket of desires must rise up and fly clean away from the earth itself.

If, instead of doing this, we fashion our god after our own passions and our own likeness, then where, within that, is liberty to be found? If we bathe him, feed him, put him to bed with a fan waving over him, and even, indeed, keep dancing-girls appointed for his pleasure—what, then, is the result? It is merely our own passions that we have made into a god and worship. We keep our greed, our violence, our pettiness, immortalised in the form of a deity. It is for this very reason that the bandit knows Kali as the ally of his own banditry, that the perjurer in the courtroom offers a beast in sacrifice for the sake of winning his case, and that even those

actions of injustice, iniquity, and misdeed which are held disgraceful among men find a place, unquestioned, within the character ascribed to the divine.

Is the deity of our land bound so utterly to the mere image that, breaking through that symbol, we might attain within it a liberty of thought? We might, indeed, imagine his four arms as symbolising activity on every side—but from the Puranas and sub-Puranas, from the folk-drama and the recitation of legend, how are we to free our minds of the manifold and mutually contradictory tales of his birth, death, marriage, passion and hatred, joy and sorrow, poverty and weakness? Of every conceivable device by which the human mind may be beguiled and bound hand and foot, not one has been left untried. And if the author regards all these strong, gross, fourfold chains, cast about us from every side with such careful contrivance, as steps towards the attainment of infinite Brahman, then it would not be unreasonable to suppose that even a fly, caught fast in a spider's web, has thereby found a means of soaring into the sky.

The various erroneous conceptions concerning the character of the gods, which have branched out in our country and spread their roots in every direction, are a corruption of the imagination; the author, I think, regards this as a consequence of the decline of Hindu society, and presumably counsels its correction. What is the means of correction? He has said in one place—

"At the root of all the scriptures lies one Veda, one Shruti—and through that one Shruti there exists a prescribed method for resolving the contradictions among all the scriptures."

The method exists—but has anyone ever attempted it? Has any scholar, down to this day, succeeded in establishing a single, coherent ideal of Hindu religion by reconciling the doctrine of the Puranas with that of the Vedas? Is this, indeed, achievable by everyone?

The religion of the Puranas is the historical religion of the Hindus. Over time, the Hindu faith has undergone many transformations. Whatever society, whatever customs, whatever beliefs, whatever mental disposition the Vedic Aryans brought with them when they entered India—all this has, by the law of nature's own working, been transformed through conflict and intermixture with the non-Aryans into manifold and varied states. Each such new expression has taken shape, embodied, in ever new Puranas. The Veda is the scripture of one condition; the

Purana is not the scripture of that same condition. Therefore, if the Veda alone is accepted as authoritative, the Purana must be set aside; and if the Purana is accepted as paramount, the Veda must be discarded. Indeed, the author himself has said—and it may be observed as fact—that accepting one Purana often sets it in contradiction with another. At present, Hindu society pays lip-service to the Veda while, in actual practice, relying upon the Purana. That any manner of inconsistency exists between the two is a question never even raised.

This historical evolution of Hindu religion continues down to the present day. For the Purana is bound not to Sanskrit alone, but is composed also in the vernacular tongues. The ballad of Manasa, the tale of Satyapir, and the like, are examples of this. The vow-tales (*brata-kathas*) recited by women are likewise instances. Though the *Annadamangal* recounts the Puranic sport of Shiva and Durga, and though its author, Bharatchandra, was a scholar learned in the shastras, yet into it have found ready entry the modern, imaginative corruptions current among the common people. The same holds true of the *Kabikankan Chandi*. The petty quarrels of Hara and Parvati, Shiva's attraction towards women of the Koch tribe, the making of a doll from the scrapings of Durga's own body and the birth of Ganesha from it—all such tales are local, modern inventions; the Shruti is not their source, the imagination of the common folk is their source, and the chief cause behind them is the very attempt to fashion the divine after one's own measure. To extract from such material any lofty spiritual symbolism is beyond the power of the common man, and difficult even for the exceptional.

In brief, our final contention is this: that those great devotees who have never abandoned the age-old worship of the personal, embodied form have, through extraordinary genius, in the fervour of their inspired feeling, raised even the visible beyond the reach of sight; obstruction is, to them, no obstruction at all; like the rays discovered by Röntgen, their minds can effortlessly pass through even a wall a hundred layers thick. But that obstruction is indeed obstruction to the ordinary person, there can be no doubt. The natural inertia of their minds seeks to cling to matter, and cannot transcend it. This does not carry them forward—it distracts and confuses them. Through it, one may attain the joy of devotion, but not the joy of liberation.

The majority of people, in every community, observe customary practices out of conformity with society. Many among the Brahmos utter certain fixed formulas at set times and let them pass unheeded, just as many image-worshippers complete their outward worship and their verbal recitation of prayers as a matter of routine duty discharged. But the worship of those who are not mere social Brahmos, but spiritual Brahmos in the truest sense, is by no means the confused and misguided thing the author supposes it to be.

Ashvin, 1305

JOUBERT

The discerning Matthew Arnold introduced the French thinker Joubert to English readers.

Whatever came to his mind, Joubert would write down—but he would not publish it. His writing is not composed as essay; it is, rather, the setting down, each independently, of single thoughts. As in verse there is the sonnet, as there is the epigram—so, in prose, were these writings of his.

These written pages lay heaped in a drawer of Joubert's desk; they were printed only fourteen years after his death—and even then, not for the general public, but only for a chosen handful of the discerning few.

Joubert has written of his own writing—

"I merely sow; I do not build or construct."

That is to say, he does not stitch his thoughts together to construct something whole; he sows, instead, the living seed of a thought, each one separately.

Some intellects keep their minds like an orchard of fruit trees, enveloping the mind through particular, deliberate thought and cultivation; the daily rain of seeds from every quarter finds no unbidden, unrestrained place within their minds.

Joubert's mind was not of that kind; his mind was not an orchard of fruit trees, but a field for the raising of crops.

That crop was of many kinds. Religion, action, art, literature—there was no limit to what it might be.

Today we wish to gather a handful, concerning literature and the art of composition, and present it as a gift to our readers.

Joubert says of himself—

"To learn what I wished to know required the maturity of old age; but to give proper expression to what I have learned, I feel the need of the vigour of youth."

That is: for knowledge, experience gained through effort is needed; but for expression, freshness is required. The more evidence of thought a piece of writing

contains, the greater its dignity; but the less the signs of effort visible within the composition, the greater will be its power of expression.

Of the very method of composition he himself adopted, he says—

"What you wish to obtain through the sound of words, I wish to obtain through their meaning; what you seek through the abundance of words, I seek through their careful selection; what you seek through the connection of words, I strive to attain through their separation. And yet I too desire coherence—but a natural, appropriate coherence; not the coherence constructed by mere skill in joining and binding."

Indeed, the difference between the writer of true genius and the merely skilful writer of correct prose is this: in the writing of the one, coherence is so natural and so profound that it is difficult even to analyse it; in the writing of the other, coherence is built and arranged like brick laid upon brick. The first enchants unawares; the second draws applause for its careful construction.

Of intellectual controversy, Joubert says—

"The necessity of debate and argument is far outweighed by its troublesomeness. Every form of contradiction deafens the mind. Where all others are deaf, I am mute."

Joubert says—

"Some minds cannot yield a harvest from their own soil, but the crop springs up from the layer of manure spread upon its surface."

We are reminded of ourselves. What is produced by us today—does it truly come from within our own minds, or does it spring rather from that layer of manure which the English university, unloading cartload upon cartload, has spread over the surface of our nature? To raise argument on this point might well breed dissension—so it is better to remain mute.

Concerning criticism, I here translate some of Joubert's opinions.

"To make delightful what previously gave no delight is itself a kind of new creation."

This creative power belongs to the critic.

"The beauty of criticism lies in acquainting us with the writer's mind. To keep watch over whether pure rules have been observed in the writing is indeed the critic's professional business—but it is, of all his tasks, the least necessary."

"Merciless criticism afflicts good taste, and mingles poison into the flavour of every good thing."

"Where there is neither courtesy nor peace, there true literature cannot be found at all. Criticism ought to contain generosity of spirit—without it, criticism cannot properly be reckoned as belonging to the domain of literature at all."

"Mercantile critics can no more accurately assess the value of an uncut diamond, or of gold freshly drawn from the mine, than a tradesman can. Their business lies with the coin as it currently circulates in the mint. Their criticism has scales and balances, but no touchstone, no crucible in which to smelt and test the gold."

"The critical faculty of literature is born over a very long span of time, and its complete development takes place with extreme slowness."

"The excessive zeal of critics regarding taste, their heated indignation and agitation, are laughable. On matters of poetry they write in a manner suited only to questions of morality and statecraft. Literature belongs to the realm of imagination, and ought to be conducted according to the customs of that realm; the excitement of anger, the heat of bile, are out of place there."

Joubert's counsels regarding the art of composition are set down below.

"It is the very effort to write with excessive emphasis that ruins the writing of young authors—just as singing pitched too high ruins the voice. The art of composition teaches the disciplined use of vigour, capacity, and intelligence, and that alone is the one path to excellence."

"It is by moderation in literature that the great writer is known. Without discipline and self-restraint, maturity is impossible, and without maturity, greatness cannot come about."

"To write well requires natural ease, together with practised effort."

The meaning of the preceding statement is this: a good writer's power of writing is natural, but the regulation of that power, at every step, through judgment, is a

matter achieved through practice. It is only when this natural power is joined with this cultivated power that truly good writing emerges. A good writer can write with ease—but he accepts, at every step, the discipline required for that writing.

"The writer should possess the capacity for abundance, yet must guard against becoming culpable through its use. For paper is patient—the reader is not; one ought to fear the reader's flagging attention far more than the reader's hunger for more."

"Genius sets great undertakings in motion; but it is patient labour that brings them to completion."

"Three things are needed to compose a good book—capacity, learning, and skill. That is: nature, effort, and practice."

"While writing, one must imagine oneself in the presence of a select company of well-educated persons, yet writing without directly addressing them."

That is to say: writing must not be fit only for a chosen few to read; it must be suited to the general reader, and yet remain pleasing to a discerning circle.

"A thought can be said to be complete only when it comes ready to hand—that is, when it can be separated as one wishes, and placed wherever one wishes."

In the minds of most people, most thoughts remain in an entangled, mingled state; unless given shape and separated out, they cannot be put to particular use. Joubert himself always gave form and independence to his thoughts, keeping each one, as it were, ready for use. To establish, in this manner, a clear acquaintance with each thought in his mind was his very task.

"In the act of writing, we do not know precisely what we wish to say until we have said it. It is, in truth, the word itself that lends completeness and existence to the thought."

"Good literature does not excite—it enchants."

"What is astonishing astonishes only once; what is charming, its charm goes on increasing."

There are many further sayings of Joubert's on the *style* of writing. But what shall we call *style* in Bengali?

If a current, everyday word can be found, so much the better; ornate technical terms are not always usable. The Bengali word *chhānd* might be offered as a rough equivalent for style. But its defect is this: the word *chhānd* alone is not, by usage, current in Bengali. Without saying "*chhānd* of speaking," "*chhānd* of writing," and the like, the word does not stand complete.

In Sanskrit, in certain specific contexts, the word *rīti* signifies style. As, for instance, *Māgadhī rīti*, *Vaidarbhī rīti*. The particular style current in Magadha is the *Māgadhī rīti*; that current in Vidarbha, the *Vaidarbhī rīti*. In this manner, an individual writer's own writing too may possess a style peculiar to himself—in European rhetoric this notion of "style" receives extensive discussion.

Yet, when one sits down to translate, it will be found that to use *rīti* or *chhānd* everywhere as an equivalent for "style" runs contrary to the natural usage of the language. Let me give one example: Joubert says—"do not be deceived by the cleverness of style" (*[phrase in original]*). Here, "*rīti*" or "*chhānd*" does not fit exactly in this form. But by turning the phrase a little, the sense can be made to work—one might say, "if there is cleverness in the *chhānd* of the writing, do not be taken in by it"—or, "do not be deceived by the cunning of the manner of writing." But wherever the use of the word "style" itself proves more convenient, we shall not attempt to force in a substitute.

"Du Sault says: style arises from habit of mind. But blessed indeed are they whose style is formed from the habit of their inmost nature."

In translation we have ventured to use the word *prakriti* ("nature"). The original English word for which this stands is "soul." Here the word "*ātmā*" cannot be used, for its philosophical meaning is of a different order. Here the meaning of "soul" is this: that it is not partial, like the mind. The mind is subordinate to it. Mind, heart, and character are its constituent parts—by this word "soul" is expressed a total psychic wholeness. If the phrase "inmost nature" fails to convey this unity of the whole mental constitution, readers must supply the proper meaning for themselves. Joubert's point is this: the mind is merely the instrument of thought; through its exercise, skill alone may be gained; but the style formed through the whole, entire human being is style in the truest sense. In such a manner of writing, one finds not merely the influence of thought, but the complete influence of the whole man.

"From habit of mind comes skill; from habit of nature comes excellence and completeness."

Every good writer has some style peculiar to himself—but in the case of a truly great writer, that style is difficult to pin down precisely. There remains within it a certain vast indefiniteness. On this point Joubert writes—

"Those whose thought does not overflow beyond their language, whose vision does not exceed their thought—theirs is the style that becomes most precisely definite."

In great writers, thought tends to be vaster than their language, and their mental vision passes beyond their thought. They transgress the bounds of logical, argumentative reasoning, and readily accept many things beyond it. For this reason their style is not neat, trimmed, and tailored; within it there remains a certain indefinability, an inexpressibility.

"The mark of well-composed writing is this: that it says, exactly, somewhat more than is strictly necessary, and yet says precisely that which needs to be said; in good writing, abundance and precision, the small and the great, are mingled together at once. In a word, its words are few, its meaning boundless."

"The impulse towards excessive precision is not good, whether in literature or in conduct; if one wishes to preserve one's dignity, this rule ought to be kept in mind."

"Certain styles of writing possess a kind of clear, open frankness, born of the writer's own temperament. That may please us, but it cannot be said that it is, in every case, indispensable."

"This is a quality found in Voltaire's writing, but it is not to be found in the writing of the ancients. The style of incomparable Greek literature possessed truth, grace, and harmony, but it lacked this quality of open frankness. This quality does not sit well with certain principal elements of beauty. It may accord with vigour, but not with dignity. There is, within this quality, a certain boldness and audacity, but there is also, equally, a certain erratic, petulant quality."

"Those who are satisfied with understanding only half are content with expressing only half; it is in just this way that hasty composition is born."

"Young writers give the mind much wandering, but very little nourishment."

"As glass either aids the sight or blurs it, so too with the matter of words."

"There exists a certain bookish style in which one catches only the smell of paper, not the breath of the living world; the philosophy of things is rare in it—only bookishness is present."

A book is merely a vessel for the expression and preservation of thought. But often the vessel itself becomes everything. Then, reading such a book, one feels: I am merely reading a book, this is merely writing. In reading a good book, one is not conscious of reading a book at all; one comes face to face directly with the thought and the truth itself; the intervening medium does not even catch the eye.

"Many a writer keeps clanging his own style loudly, wishing to let people know that he has gold in his possession."

"A rare, unexpected style is good, if it can be achieved—but I myself prefer a style that can be exactly anticipated."

There is depth in this remark. Unimaginable, excessive beauty must indeed be called good, yet it remains but the mind's own image of itself, and it brings with it a certain weariness. But where the mind finds exactly what it expects, there alone does it experience peace and health; it is not repeatedly wounded and disturbed by the shock of surprise or of pleasure. There is a Bengali saying, "Contentment (*swasti*) is better than happiness (*sukh*)," which carries this same meaning. The peace, the depth, the permanence and constancy present in contentment are absent in mere happiness. For this reason it may be said: happiness is good indeed, but contentment is more to be desired still.

Baishakh, 1308

APPENDIX

Those who attempted to convene a public meeting to express mourning on the occasion of Bankim's death encountered, it is said, a serious obstacle—one more astonishing than any other, and one which could not have been foreseen.

Many respected persons, who count themselves honoured by their friendship with Bankim, refused to take part in the public expression of grief, considering it an artificial display, and did not hesitate even to rebuke the organisers of the meeting. On such an occasion of bereavement, to openly express the emotion of one's own heart is, I imagine, regarded by them as a desecration of sacred grief.

Especially since no such custom has ever prevailed in our country, to indulge publicly in an unnecessary, foreign display of mourning may well seem, to some, unseemly and inappropriate.

When such views are found among many respected persons of our land, discussion of the matter has become necessary.

That upon the death of some great man devoted to the public good, there should be discussion of his virtues in a public assembly, and an open acknowledgment of gratitude towards him accompanying the expression of grief—whatever else may be said of this, good or bad, it must be admitted that it is a practice tainted with the great vice named "Europeanism." But alongside this it must also be considered that, whether through contact with Europeans or through various other causes, our external circumstances and the disposition of our minds have, willingly or unwillingly, undergone certain changes; these cannot be simply denied and dismissed out of mere irritation. If, for new necessities, new methods appear, at first, unfamiliar or unwelcome to some eyes owing to lack of habituation, still a discerning person does not condemn them without proper consideration.

It is universally acknowledged that artificiality is exceedingly repugnant to a person of feeling. But artificiality has many distinct kinds. One kind of artificiality upholds society as its very foundation; another kind of artificiality, like a parasite, gradually consumes and wastes society away.

To fulfil the duties we owe to society, some measure of artificiality must necessarily be adopted. For if each person were to observe social duties according to rules of

his own devising, based merely on his personal taste and the measure of his own feeling, there would then be no limit to disorder. In such matters, a fixed rule agreed upon by all must be adopted. Just as the Creator did not leave this earth in a state of pure, unadulterated thought, but expressed that thought through an abundant measure of dust—so too, whatever is not merely private, whatever must be made serviceable and appropriate for the community at large, must be given firm and definite form through a measure of what is, in a sense, inert artificiality. However much sensitive poets may praise the unadulterated beauty of the forest, I see no reason to deny that the artificial, brick-built metropolis is, for the purposes of human society, in many respects far more suitable. Every part of a tree is alive and self-generated, and its beauty delights the heart—and yet man, without envying his ancestral, tree-dwelling forebears, has, by taking shelter in mansions built with his own hands, truly manifested his humanity.

Where feelings are predominantly one's own private concern, where outer society has no right of entry, where there exists liberty within the human heart—there, artificiality is a fault. But human society is so intricate that how much belongs to me alone, and how much to the outer society, is often a matter difficult to determine, and often one is compelled, even at the cost of one's own private right, to yield the way to society's—to society's, as it were, municipal jurisdiction.

Let me cite an example. It might readily seem that grief for a father belongs to the child alone. Society, one might think, has no right whatsoever to legislate on the matter. Not all children are alike, not all children's grief is alike, and according to the differing natures of minds, different means of expressing grief are equally natural—and yet society steps forward and declares: "Your grief may remain your own"—or, indeed, if there is no such grief, no answer on that point is even required—"but the manner in which I have prescribed the expression of mourning, that all must observe—the virtuous and the wicked, the deeply grieved and the lightly grieved alike. It is not a question of whether or not you feel grief at the loss of your father; society declares: you are obliged to express mourning before me, and that too, in the manner I prescribe."

Why must it be so? Because reverence towards one's father is absolutely necessary for the well-being of society. If, even on so grave an occasion as death, the self-willed conduct of some particular individual reveals a lack of filial devotion, or if

such devotion, though present, remains hidden from the public—then that example strikes at the very root of society. In such a case, society, for the sake of its own self-preservation, is compelled to bind even personal grief and the expression of devotion within its own rules. And in the rule that must be framed for the general public, the measure of individual difference of nature can never, under any circumstances, be preserved. For this reason, the general rule may often prove harsh and painful for one whose grief is genuinely intense; yet, out of regard for one's duty towards society, even in moments of the gravest sorrow, every minute detail of the prescribed ritual must be carefully observed.

All will agree that the bond between the devotee and God is the most profound bond of all. It is not bound by time or place. That neither father, mother, wife, son, nor husband belongs to us forever is a refrain of renunciation heard echoing along every road of India—and so, while with those to whom our connection is merely social, confined to this present life, society may bind us with every kind of rule, yet with Him with whom our connection is intimate through all eternity, it would seem natural that there should exist between us a separate, free relationship. But even here our society has not granted us freedom. In what image, in what manner, by what method God is to be worshipped—society has not been content merely to offer instruction on this; it has bound it fast through strict discipline. Which flowers must be offered, and which must not, must likewise be observed according to its command. Even should one not understand the mantra by which the worship is to be performed, there is no harm—but one must not, following the dictates of one's own heart, alter that mantra at will. Thus, that portion of our life which is most utterly inward, which is dedicated wholly and exclusively to that Indwelling Being who transcends both society and the world, society has, on the pretext of the common good, subjected even there to its own narrow governance.

Whether society's unchecked power is, in general, good or evil is a question irrelevant to raise here. What I wish to show is this: whether mistakenly or with sound judgment, wherever society has deemed it necessary, it has compelled individuals belonging to that society to express the feelings of their private hearts according to its own prescribed rule. By this, much of society's work is simplified, and much of its beauty is enhanced.

Our society is one centred upon the household. Unwavering devotion to, and dependence upon, one's parents and the elder authorities of the household form the principal bond of this society—for this reason, the expression of mourning at the loss of an elder is not a matter of individual choice, but falls under the governance of social rule. This society has never, deeming it unnecessary, interfered in any way with a son's grief.

Recently, however, this household-centred society has undergone a certain transformation. A new flood-tide has entered into it. Its name is "public."

The very concept is new; its name, too, is new. Translation into Bengali is impossible. And so the word "public," and its antonym "private," have come into current use in the Bengali language—though they have not yet risen to the dignity of being admitted into the assembly of literature; by this, they themselves suffer no loss, but literature suffers considerable inconvenience. When there is no need to actually utter the word, refined literature must somehow manage, with great difficulty, through gesture, tone, hint, and suggestion, without pronouncing it at all. But now that this foreign word has become intelligible to the general public, I see no further need for such laborious circumlocution.

Now that, in our society, not merely the household, but the very existence of the "public" has gradually come to shine forth ever more brightly, the emergence, one by one, here and there, of various "public duties" has become inevitable.

Just as, in our country, the funeral rites for a father are performed in a public assembly, and the expression of a son's mourning for his father is regarded as a public duty, so too, upon the death of some great man devoted to the good of the public, the expression of public mourning ought to be reckoned among the social duties. In our household-centred society, almost every father is, in his own way, a hero. He must shoulder manifold burdens of duty, and, sacrificing his personal happiness at every step for the sake of the entire family, he must proceed steadfastly along his difficult path. It is the ordinance of society that those for whose benefit he patiently and with fortitude fulfils, throughout his whole life, the arduous duties of the household, should show reverence and devotion, in the presence of all, towards this elder who has remained indifferent to his own happiness in their service. Likewise—should not those who have devoted their lives not merely to their own household, but to the good of the public, receive, after

death, an open acknowledgment of devotion from the public? And is it not necessary, in openly acknowledging such devotion, to bring one's private grief under a certain restraint? And can such public mourning ever be expected to match the manner in which one particular intimate friend gives free vent to the overflow of grief within the confines of a closed room? And does it follow that, because such grief is not possible for the public, the mourning of the public has no value at all, and is to be condemned?

I do not deny that the "public" of our country does not feel due grief at the passing of our nation's great souls. This youthful "public" of ours is, in many ways, childlike in nature. It does not properly recognise its own benefactors; it does not fully appreciate the value of the benefits it receives; it forgets its friends all too quickly, and thinks: I have only to receive—I have no obligation in return.

I would say that it is precisely such a "public" that stands in need of education, and that the calling of public meetings, together with discussion at such meetings, is the chief means to that education. If those who are thoughtful, sensitive, imaginative persons keep the sorrow of bereavement for our great benefactors locked within their own hearts alone, and do not grant it the generous breadth of public mourning; if, despising the public as petty and fickle, they neglect, at the great moments of the nation's history, the opportunity for public instruction; indeed, if, when the people of the country come, in good times and in bad, to their doors, they turn away and try, with cold indifference, to disappoint and discourage them; and if that scorned community, doing whatever it can, unaided, according to its own limited wisdom and capacity, is then mocked and dismissed as worthless by these same persons—then they themselves deprive our present society of a most important lesson suited to the needs of the present age.

In our country, especially, there exists no literary society, and within society at large there is no cultivation of literature. In Europe, in the manner in which social life is cultivated, distinguished persons attend various assemblies on various occasions. They are not known directly only to their own families and a handful of friends. They are constantly present before the public eye. They live close to, before the very sight of, the men and women of their own land. For this reason, when they pass away, the shadow of their death falls, like the darkness of twilight, over the

whole country. The void left by their absence becomes, within society, exceedingly conspicuous.

Our society is not so densely woven. No one compels us, drawn along by an unbroken chain of social duties, to move beyond the confines of our own family. And since, in our external society, there is no place accorded to women, sociability there remains extremely incomplete. In such circumstances, the great men of our land cannot become sufficiently and truly known, or bound in manifold relations, outside their own homes. They remain, always, hidden from view.

To accept only the fruits of a person's work, setting the person himself aside, is exceedingly difficult for the public at large. If, along with a gift, an affectionate hand is seen extended as well, the value of that gift is greatly enhanced, and its memory becomes stamped upon the heart. To man, man himself is the object of greater fondness, greater longing, than any mere object. Whatever comes to us mingled with the human heart and human life, that we can accept easily and with joy. When a living human voice sings sweetly, in the beauty of that song we feel the living connection of a human heart possessed of will and feeling, and thereby enjoy a more intense delight—but should we hear that very same music produced, note for note, by a machine, much of that delight would be diminished. In such a case, we invest the machine-player, or the composer, with the emotional overflow of the song itself. However it may be accomplished, when action is seen directly joined with its agent, the action itself becomes vivid and conscious, and blends readily with our own awareness.

For this reason, whenever any action strikes us as pleasing, our eagerness to become acquainted with its author is aroused. Otherwise, it is as though our hearts do not receive the full portion of their nourishment. Half its hunger remains unsatisfied.

In our country, because society, caste, family, and the inner and outer spheres of life are all fragmented and divided among themselves, we are unable to perceive human beings as near to us; the gifts and benefits they confer reach us, as it were, thrown to us from a distance—our affection and gratitude cannot always keep themselves alert and focused, taking hold of any single living embodiment.

Those who knew personally, as friends, the great men of our land—they alone can satisfy this longing of ours, can remove this deficiency. They alone can grant

completeness to our joy. They can bring the benefactor together with the benefit and set them both before us, and, by this means, can vivify our gratitude, and sharpen the receptive and retentive powers of our hearts. Not mere dry criticism, not mere effusions of language uttered in a public assembly, constitutes the fulfilment of this duty—only through friendship is it possible to make the general public truly acquainted with a great soul. We lament that, for want of money and enthusiasm, no stone statues are erected to the great men of our country; but a matter for far greater lament is this: that those very persons who are capable of establishing them, more vividly than any stone statue, within our hearts, do not regard that duty as sufficiently weighty.

This duty of friendship must, after death, be discharged without fail.

To discuss a departed friend in a public assembly is an exceedingly difficult task. And if anyone hesitates to perform that duty, he cannot be blamed for it. But in writing, that objection need not hold. In whatever form it may take, we expect, at the hand of a beloved friend, the true likeness of our public friend.

The curtain of life often keeps a man concealed from us. When death tears away this curtain, the man stands revealed to us in his entirety. When, day after day, moment by moment, we behold him through the ordinary course of life, we see him now as small, now as great; now as dull, now as bright. But the sky of death is dustless and clear; moment by moment it does not change. Placed within the frame of that death, man can be seen with a certain measure of truth.

Those who make astronomical observations tell us that the layer of atmosphere surrounding us on every side presents a serious obstacle to such observation. Especially are the lower strata of air the most turbid. For this reason mountain peaks are the most favourable places for astronomical observation.

In the observation of human "stars," the atmospheric layer surrounding us presents many obstacles. This air is forever filled with countless varied particles of dust, swirling and stirred within the turbulent world. This causes the light-rays of great men to appear displaced from their true position, and their true measure distorted. In this turbid air of the present, a ray of light may often appear unduly enlarged, but that enlargement remains vague and indistinct—had we been able to see the ray in its true proportion, its magnitude might perhaps have been somewhat reduced, but its clarity and brilliance would have been vastly increased.

Death, like a mountain-peak, carries us up out of this dense atmospheric layer into a clear sky, where all the rays of a great man's greatness fall upon our sight, pure and unbroken.

In this peak-region of death we wish, with the help of his friends, to become acquainted with our stars. To make a person already known to oneself known to others as well is no such simple task. To select the essential from the incidental in the events of a life is a matter of great difficulty. It is hard to determine which aspect of one who is intimately known to us will prove most useful in making him known to others. Many an incident, many a remark, may seem trivial in the moment, though it is by no means trivial for the purpose of acquaintance. But Bankimchandra has many capable friends, whose powers of criticism, of selection, of composition, are by no means insignificant. It is their duty to undertake the task of setting up his likeness in the realm of literature. It is not that our public shows ingratitude by nature—it is rather that, not understanding him well, not knowing him fully, its gratitude fails to be awakened. The deeds of the departed must be well displayed, and he himself must be brought forth and set among us. Not merely as a writer, but in his humanity—in his tenderness, his affection, his joys and sorrows—must he be bound together with his writing, and with the great multitude of us. He must not merely be worshipped as a deity, but must be made our own—one of our kind, our kinsman.

We ourselves exile our great men into the realm of the gods. By this our human world becomes impoverished and stripped of its glory. But if they could be clearly and specifically known to us as men of flesh and blood, if, amid a thousand virtues and faults alike, we could still recognise them as great, then alone could we truly, with sincerest heart, receive that portion of greatness inherent within their very humanity, and love them, and not forget them.

This work can be accomplished by friends alone. And while friends now rebuke as ungrateful a public indifferent to the erection of stone statues, the public too might justly bring against them a charge of ingratitude. For they did not receive mere benefit from Bankim—they received friendship; they did not receive mere composition—they received the composer himself. Where money is available, the erection of a stone statue is a simple matter; but to establish Bankim, as friend, as human being, within the world of human hearts, is achievable only through their

own love and effort. To keep their friend confined merely within the memory of themselves alone would not amount to the true repayment of the debt owed to friendship.

Jyaishtha, 1301