ESSAY

LETTERS FROM JAVA

JAVA-JATRIR PATRA

Rabindranath Tagore



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1

To my dear one,

When our journey began, the curtain of monsoon had just been drawn back from the sky; the sun greeted me in welcome. As far as I travelled from Calcutta to Madras, gazing and gazing through the railway carriage window, it seemed to me that a flood-tide of green had swept across the earth; upon Shyamal's flute one note followed another without pause or rest. In field after field, the raw green of new rice shoots; in wood after wood, the dense verdure of abundant, sap-swollen leaves. Ahalya seemed to have wakened from the breast of the earth; Rama, dark as fresh durba-grass after rain, had touched her with his foot.

I had come to sing songs of rasa in praise of this festival of beauty, this new life of nature—this alone I remember as my purpose. Practical people ask what use such a thing serves. They say, that is mere self-indulgence. That is to say, in this world of necessity we belong to the party of excess. I shall not be ashamed of this. For it is through such excess that the self finds its expression.

Practical people forget one thing, again and again: that the fulfilment of necessity lies in the pursuit of abundance; this world of Ashadh proclaimed just that truth to me. I want only the harvest sufficient to fill my stomach. Yet I see that meagre expectation take shape and overflow only when, in the rains, the dark splendour of the soaked earth's treasury far exceeds my need. Even a handful of alms cannot be had if the miserliness of wealth refuses to yield that mere handful. In the business of life, it is life's own profit that is the true aim, and this profit is what constitutes excess. Our ascetics condemn this excess; yet it is this very excess that the poet makes his festival. If, once expenses are paid, a substantial surplus remains, only then does one find the courage to spend freely—this we call profit, we accept as much. That is not for the sake of indulgent excess, but for the joy of courage. Whatever swells the courage of a man's heart, that alone truly fulfils him.

In the present age, it is in Europe that I see the human being whose life's profit, entered in ledger after ledger, has done nothing but increase. This is precisely why she has lit up the world with such splendour. In that light she stands revealed on every side. With a little oil, only one lamp may be kept burning for household needs, but the whole person remains unrevealed in the dark. This lack of revelation is a poverty of being, a diminishment. This is the languor of human

existence. Among living creatures, humans are of the nature of light; beasts merely survive, their existence never flares into brilliance. But man is not meant merely to preserve himself—he must reveal himself. For this revelation, the soul requires radiance. This radiance comes from abundance of being, from the very opulence of existence. In the present age, Europe has scattered her rays on every side; there, man is not merely surviving—he exists far more abundantly than mere survival requires. Self-preservation moves within sufficiency; self-revelation moves beyond it. In Europe, life is more than sufficient.

I do not grieve over this. For whatever land, whatever age brings a people to fulfilment, that fulfilment touches the people of every land and every age. Today, Europe with the abundance of her vitality has touched the whole earth. Everywhere her blow has fallen upon the dormant strength within humanity. It is through this very abundance that her influence has spread.

By what truth has Europe touched every land, every age? Her science is that truth. Her science, which has claimed the entire domain of human knowledge and triumphed in the field of action, is an immense power. Here her wanting knows no end, and her having is of that same measure. Last year, returning from Europe, I fell into conversation with a young German man aboard ship. He was bringing his young wife to India. In the forest regions of central India, where certain tribes live in near obscurity, he wished to dwell among them for two years, learning their customs in minute detail. For this purpose, the two of them did not hesitate to stake everything. Man must know man ever more fully—and this further knowing does not stop even at the borders of barbarian lands. To know all the subjects of knowledge in this systematic, organised, disciplined manner, to gather them as an army in formation, to free the mind utterly of illusion in the quest for knowledge—one can only understand, by going to Europe, how truly colossal a giant man has become through this power. By this power, Europe has been creating the earth anew as man's own earth. Could we see, standing directly before us, the full might of that power which she has deployed to remove every obstacle in humanity's path, we would be overwhelmed by its vastness.

Here Europe's revelation is as great as any that all humanity might take pride in; yet she has as well a side where her light is obscured. It is written in the Upanishads that sages who have attained perfection—"te sarvagam sarvatah prapya dhira yuktatmanah sarvamevabhi vishanti"—gain the all-pervading truth from every side and, with unified soul, enter into the totality of being. Because truth is all-pervading, it grants man the right of entry into all. Science is opening for man the gateway into the heart of universal nature; but today, in that very Europe, such a truth has gone missing as would block the entry of man into man. Inwardly, Europe has become a universal peril for mankind. Here the peril is her own as well.

It was on this very ship that I fell into conversation with a French writer. He told me that since the war, a great sorrow has entered deep into the minds of Europe's young men. This they have understood: that a crack had appeared in their ideal, through which ruin was able to enter. That is to say, somewhere they had strayed from truth, and only now has this been discovered.

Man's world is his heaven, and whatever is his truth-and-splendour is not bounded by time or place. It is not for himself alone that man ceaselessly creates this immortal realm; at its root lies man's boundless courage to aspire. But the moment the small self of man begins to pilfer the very materials meant to build the great, disaster follows. When man's boundless power of desiring begins to flow along a narrow channel, it is then that the banks burst, then that the flood of destruction becomes uncontrollable. That is to say, when man's vast wanting becomes petty and self-centred, therein lies the seed of all unrest. Wherever his striving is for the sake of all, there alone does man's aspiration find fulfilment. The Gita has called this striving yajna, sacrifice; through this sacrifice alone is the protection of the world. The path of this sacrifice is action without attachment to its fruit. Such action must not be weak, must not be petty—but the desire for its fruit must never be for oneself alone.

The pure austerity that science has propagated belongs to all lands, all times, all peoples—it is for this very reason that it has granted man the power of the divine, that man has forged this weapon to remove every kind of sorrow, poverty, and affliction from the human world; this science is the Vishwakarma building man's immortal realm. But this very science, when applied in action makes man's craving for results monstrous, becomes then the vehicle of death. If man is one day to die utterly upon this earth, he shall die for this reason: that he knew truth but did not know how to use truth. He received the power of a god but did not attain divinity. In the present age, that divine power has appeared among men in Europe. But did that power appear only to kill mankind? In the last European war, this very question was revealed in a terrible form. Everywhere outside Europe, Europe has become a horror—the proof of which we see joined together today in Asia and Africa.

Europe did not come among us bearing her science—she came bearing her desire. And so, within the heart of Asia, Europe's revelation stands obstructed. The pride of science, the arrogance of power, the greed of wealth—this practice of humiliating mankind across the whole earth, which Europe has long pursued, has at last, when its fruit ripened within her own house, left her deeply troubled. She was setting fire to the grass; today that same fire has caught her own great tree. She wonders where she shall stop. Is stopping a matter of stopping a machine? I do not say so. What must be stopped is greed. Shall she deliver a sermon on religion? That too shall not be

complete. It requires the union of science with it. The discipline that subdues greed from within is the discipline of religion, but the discipline that removes the cause of greed from without is the discipline of science. Only in the confluence of the two is the discipline fulfilled; the union of scientific reason with religious reason is still awaited today.

You may ask why all this argument came into my head as I set out on this voyage. The reason is this: that once the wisdom of India travelled beyond India's borders. But those beyond acknowledged it. Tibet, Mongolia, the Malay archipelago—India spread there the wisdom of dharma, through the path of the inner, true bond of man with man. It is to see the marks of that history of India's universal entry that we have undertaken this pilgrimage today. Alongside this, one must also observe that the message of India in that age did not spread mere aridity. It awakened man's inner splendour in every direction—in architecture, sculpture, painting, music, literature; its marks lie in desert and forest, on mountain and island and archipelago, in remote places, in achievements difficult to imagine. That mantra of the ascetic which empties man and strips him bare, which cripples man's youth, which stunts the human faculties in every direction—that is not this mantra. This is not the utterance of some decrepit, feeble-hearted old tree; within it is the influence of a youth full of vigorous life.

[Written to Srimati Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis. 1st Shravan, 1334]

2

To my dear one,

As I was about to leave the country, an order came to me that I should send some writings. To whom should I send writing, who would read it? The general public? I do not know that public in particular, and so when I write at its bidding, I must open some rigidly bound, entirely ordinary ledger to write in; that writing's worth is calculated and its account settled.

But man has a special notebook; its loose pages are for writing whatever one pleases, and no one thinks of the price of such writing. The writing itself is its purpose, the ostensible subject merely a pretext. Such writing suits a letter well; it is homely writing—wearing neither turban on its head nor shoes on its feet. It goes to no one on business, its own or another's—it goes where, even if one enters without cause, there is no accounting required, where the coming and going is for the sheer sake of chattering.

The sound the stream's water makes is simply the sound of its flowing, like the buzzing of a bee's wings in flight. What we call chatter is likewise the sound of the mind's own flowing away. A letter is chatter set down in the letters of writing.

This chattering is the play of the mind's life. The body too, purposelessly, sometimes just for the sake of moving, darts off and returns. Not to go shopping, not to hold a meeting, but because it takes joy simply in its own moving. Similarly, the mind finds satisfaction of its life's nature in its own chattering. Hence it seeks leisure, it seeks company—for oratory it needs many, for chatting, one or two.

I live at home amid familiar surroundings, in the crowd of routine daily work, among people known and unknown. There is no time to converse with oneself. There, one's dealings are with various people over various busy matters. That is somewhat like—as if ten people were using the same fixed pond-ghat's water together. But there is a bird-like instinct in us; it waits alone, gazing, for the rain of clouds blown in on the wind. The thoughts that fly up in the sky of the mind are that cloud—struck by the gust of some whim; their coming and going is entirely accidental. Since it cannot be caught in the fixed net of necessity's urgency, it has its special worth; the earth turns her own bound water into water flown free in the sky—to keep her own harvest-field moist, that

water is needed. The need to speak to one's own mind without purpose—in that need, the mind, in its own flowing, consecrates itself.

Emerging today from the accustomed routine of daily life, my mind has found time to think whatever it pleases. So I have thought: I shall not compose an essay recalling some editorial meeting, but write a letter to you. That is to say, this cannot be called serving a feast on a proper platter—it shall be like fruit fallen in the wind beneath a tree, gathered up in the fold of one's garment. Some of it ripe, some raw; some of it coloured, some not. Some may be worth keeping, and if some is thrown away, there will be no complaint.

It was in that spirit that I began writing this letter. But the light of the sky has become clouded. Just as, when the assembly in the drawing room breaks up, the carpet-layer puts out the chandelier and draws over it a soiled-coloured covering, the upholsterer of the heavens has done just that—drawing over the assembly of the sky a covering of faint smoky colour, wrapping up its luminous finery. In this state, my mind of itself stops its light play of the pen. The bank-less stream of chatter, become a river of sentences, at some point begins to flow in a deep channel; then its flowing is not merely to sound the anklets of rhythm in sunlight, but is a striving toward reaching some destination. Absent-minded literature then, arriving in the midst of the crowd, becomes conscious of itself. Then, going far beyond mere speech, the thoughts raise their heads and stand.

It is written in the Upanishads: "sa no bandhurjanita sa vidhata"—he loves, he creates, and he too ordains. Creation is in the ease of joyful whim; in ordaining there is deliberation. What we call true literature belongs to that creator's domain—it is purely for its own sake. If some practical person should ask the creator, "Why was this created?" he would answer, "My pleasure!" That very pleasure, in various colours, various flavours, becomes sufficient unto itself. If you ask the lotus, "Why did you come to be?" it says, "I came to be for the sake of being." Genuine literature too has that one and only answer.

That is to say, creation has one aspect which is the pure chattering of the creative spirit. From that side one might even say: He is writing me a letter. Not in reply to any letter of mine, but because he himself wished to speak; he wishes to speak to someone, after all. Many do not listen with attention; many say, "This is not substantial; this is mere friendly chat, not a deed of property." Substance lies in the womb of the earth, in mines of gold; it is not found in flower gardens, not in the gathering of clouds at dawn and dusk. I take a certain pride in this: that I have practically never once failed to read the letters of that letter-writer. I listen to the universal chatter whenever it comes. This has cost me in worldly affairs, and I have heard reproach even from those who wish to enlist me in their cause; but such is my fate.

[To be continued...]

[Written to Srimati Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis. 1st Shravan, 1334]

Yet the trouble is that Fate too has not spared me. The road from the Creator's playhouse of creation to Fate's workshop—along both ends of that road my comings and goings never cease.

Caught in this dilemma, I have learned one thing. He who is the Creator is also the Ordainer; and it is for this very reason that his creation and his ordinance have merged into one—between his play and his work no absolute division can be found. All his works are works of craftsmanship; wrought amid both leisure and labour. He is not indolent about drawing the veil of beauty over the raw form of action. He has not made work a shame. Within the body there is the mechanical arrangement of an engine, but what covers it is its symmetry and grace—it is that which is manifest.

To man too He has given the right to create; this is his greatest privilege. Wherever man has felt the glory of his own work, there he has tried to make that work beautiful. He wants to build his house beautifully; his cup and plate are beautiful; his clothing bears the effort of adornment. In his life, the portion given to adornment is no less than that given to necessity. Where there is harmony in man's nature, this is how it happens.

This harmony is destroyed wherever some passion, especially greed, becomes overpowering. Greed springs from poverty of spirit, and has no shame; it takes pride in its own indecency. Great profiteers have trampled the beauty of the Ganges' banks underfoot with impunity. They have not acknowledged man's taste at all; they have acknowledged only their swollen purse of profit.

The outward form of the present age is thus filled with shamelessness. It is as if the digestive apparatus, emerging from behind the body's curtain into full view, dangles perpetually before everyone with its complex entrails on display. The demands of its hunger and the boastfulness of its skilful cooking process have become greater than the complete symmetry of the whole body.

When the body wishes to express its own true form, it does so through harmonious grace; when it makes its hunger alone paramount to the exclusion of all else, it feels not the slightest shame in becoming grotesque. The shamelessness of unrestrained appetite is the chief mark of barbarism—whether it wears the gilt-plated label of civilisation or dances stark naked in the backyard of savagery, be it called the devil's dance or jazz dance.

The one cause I see everywhere behind this rupture, in present-day civilisation, between taste and skill, is that greed alone has outstripped all other disciplines and grown monstrous. In the fierce frenzy for the multiplication of things, it will not yield an inch of ground to beauty. If, in this conflict between the love of creation and the greed for goods within the fabric of human dharma, slavishness triumphs, if gluttony's dominion increases, then Yama will not delay in sending his armed messengers; hatred, violence, delusion, intoxication, envy will descend in force, and Lakshmi will be given her leave.

I have said before that meanness is born of poverty; greed has a gross younger sibling named inertia. In greed there is unrestrained energy; that very energy makes it unseemly. Inertia is its opposite—it cannot even stir; it can neither build adornment nor remove filth; its unseemliness is that of utter lack of energy. It is this unseemliness of inertia that has destroyed our country's dignity. And so beauty has taken its leave from our conduct and the practices of our life; in our homes, in our dress and ornament, in articles of daily use, the free expression of taste no longer remains; in its place has come thoughtless ostentation—so far has strength become paralysed, and self-belief regarding one's own taste become so shamelessly absent, that our very ostentation has found its ally in the foreign shops of Chowringhee.

I often think that my writings should become what Bankimbabu called "the vessel of desire." But somehow the burden gathers from who knows where, and before one knows it, the vessel of desire turns into a cargo-ship. Within me lie various grievances; the moment they hear the sound of my pen, they burst forth whether fitting or not; whatever composition has no particular subject to claim as its own, that alone they seize upon as an omnibus. Some sneak in and sit with feet up on the seat; some climb aboard the footboard and keep going; and then, wherever they please, they suddenly leap down.

Today is the first day of Shravan. But this dishevelled, unkempt Shravan has, like some wandering gypsy, folded up its tent of black clouds and gone off, no one knows where. Today it is as though the celestial river of stars stands upon a swing of blue lotus. My mind sways along with it, encircling the whole earth. I feel myself made of light, built of speech, resonant in the universal harp, scattered across water, land, and sky. I hear the ocean beating its drum ceaselessly since

some unknown time, and upon the rhythm of its rise and fall the history-journey of living beings has flowed, from the indistinctness of first appearance into the invisibility of eventual vanishing. A herd of creatures of vast and monstrous form came, as it were, like the nightmare of the creative spirit, troop after troop, and then merged away again. Then, when did the history of man begin, in the faint light of twilight, in the shadows of caves and forests? Small restless creatures, standing erect upon two feet, leapt up and mounted the back of the massive, catastrophic, terrifying beast, just as Vishnu mounted the back of Garuda. Through the striving after the impossible they journeyed on, along the fragmented, difficult paths of decrepit ages. And with this, all around the earth, Varuna's drum began to beat, day and night, wave upon wave. So today I hear, and I feel the wish to recite in rhythm some phrase that belongs to time before all beginning. In a mood such as this day's, the English poet Shelley, gazing at the sunlit, laughing blue waters, once wrote a poem—

The sun is warm, the sky is clear,

The waves are dancing fast and bright.

But this is the lament of his weary life's exhaustion. I find no correspondence between this and what I feel today, within or without. I do hear a world-wide wailing of infants, true enough—that wailing fills the atmosphere, that atmosphere upon which rests the foundation of universal creation, that atmosphere which Vedic India named Krandasi. But this is not the cry of Shraddha's defeated grief. This is the cry of a newborn child, who, proclaiming its own existence at the world's threshold with upraised voice, announces in its very first cry of breath, "Ayamaham bhoh"—Here am I! At the door of boundless future time, it stands as a guest. In the proclamation of existence there is a vast weeping. For, again and again, it must tear through veils, must shatter obstacles. The right to exist is not something received without effort—it is something to be fought for and won at every single moment. That is why its cry is so intense, and among all living beings, the cry of newly awakened human consciousness is the most intense of all. It is as if the wailing sound of newborn light, tearing open the womb of darkness. And with it, in birth after birth, in age after age, the auspicious conch of the gods' realm sounds, uttering the anthem of welcome to the Grandsire of the Universe.

Today this is not my final realisation. In the morning I saw the sky, along the horizon-line of the sea, write its own eternal, luminous message; that message was one of supreme peace, rising above the tumultuous uproar of the many sorrows of many ages of the mortal world, like a white lotus upon a wave of tears. Then, toward the day's end, I saw an obscure individual, in whom humanity had been insulted—if I have time, I shall speak of this later. Then, on the horizons of

human history, in every direction, I saw the black clouds of conflict, the muffled thunder of unrest, and the shadow of a frown of wrath cast over the abode of men.

Ever yours

[Written to Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis. 2nd Shravan, 1334]

3

A wild elephant is destruction incarnate, like a thunder-roaring storm cloud. A mere scrap of a man, one who cannot be compared even to a single leg of the elephant, looked at it and said, out of sheer audacity, "I shall ride upon its back." That any human being, however slight of frame, could conceive of such an impossible thought even once, upon seeing this colossal, unstoppable mass of flesh charging forward trunk raised—this alone is astonishing. And then, the history stretching from the saying "I shall ride" to the actual sitting astride is equally extraordinary. For a long time, the shape of that impossibility did not even come close to possibility—countless failures, countless fatal accidents mocked man's resolve, times beyond counting; counting them, man might well have said, "This cannot be done." But he did not say so. At last one day he mounted the back of that very beast, roamed the roads and lanes of habitation, along the edges of harvest fields. This is a formidable persistence—which is why the crown of human accomplishment sits upon the head of Ganesha's elephant. On the two sides of that image of accomplishment are the forms of two creatures: on one side, the mystery-seeker with keen scent, sharp gaze, restless curiosity—that is the mouse, and that is his mount; on the other, wild strength subdued by the noose, treading over every obstacle without hesitation—that is the elephant, mankind's mount of accomplishment. On the vehicle of accomplishment, man goes on advancing. In his laboratory was the mouse, and in the motor of his aeroplane is the elephant. The mouse quietly finds its way in, but to tame that elephant costs man much sorrow. No matter—man does not admit defeat before sorrow, and so today he has begun his journey along the road to the heavens. Kalidasa, speaking of Raghu's line, said they travelled the "anakarathvartmanam"—the road of their chariots reaching even unto heaven. When the poet said this, mankind still held the strange belief that without traversing the sky, man's fulfilment was incomplete. That belief gradually took shape, and today has spread wings in the outer sky. But the shape it took was through fierce, death-defying austerity. That man's scientific intellect knows how to seek—this alone is not enough; that man's heroic intellect knows how to dare—when this joins with the former, then whatever obstacles the god Indra sets along the path of the adepts' ascetic accomplishment are ground to dust.

Standing on the shore, man saw before him the ocean. So vast an obstacle cannot even be imagined. The eye cannot see its far shore, cannot plumb its depth. Black as the buffalo of Death, its horizon-spanning vastness merely raises wave after wave like a raised, forbidding finger. Eternally rebellious man said, "I will not accept this prohibition." Thunder answered: "If you do not accept, you shall die." Man, raising his tiny thumb in defiance, said, "If I must die, then I shall die!" This is the fitting speech of the born rebel. The born rebels have always, in the end, been victorious. From the very beginning, man declared rebellion in various ways against the governing order of nature. This continues even today. Among men, those whose rebellious power is

greatest, most unconquerable, have claimed dominion over history from age to age—not merely by the extent of their existence, but by the splendour of their existence.

In this discipline of the rebellion of existence, no other living creature has advanced as far as man. Among men, the more powerful, the more unmanageable one's rebellious power, the more he has claimed history from age to age—not merely through the sheer breadth of existence, but through the splendour of existence.

This discipline of rebellion is a discipline of sorrow; sorrow itself is the elephant, sorrow itself is the ocean. Those who mounted its back with the pride of valour, survived; those who, overcome by fear, fell beneath it, perished. And those who, avoiding this altogether, wish to reap its fruit cheaply, wander about with bowed heads under the burden of a false, counterfeit fruit. Near our own homes, one sees much of this sort. They have learned to shout the war-cry of heroism, but they wish to do so as safely as possible. When the blow falls, they complain, saying it hurts too much. They steal their rhetoric of manliness sitting in the examination-hall of courage from foreign books, but when the time comes for the examination not of paper but of the hand, they raise a case against the unfairness of the opposing side, saying, "Their nature is not good; they obstruct."

Man was honoured with the title of Narayana's friend only when he was shown the Terrible Form, when he was made to say:

"drishtadbhutam rupamugram tavedam lokatrayam pravyathitam mahatman"

—Man, when he could worship with all his heart and mind, when he could say:

"anantaviryamitavikramastvam

sarvam samapnoshi tatohasi sarvah"—

You are infinite in valour, immeasurable in prowess; you encompass all, and you are all.

Ever yours

[Written to Srimati Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis. 3rd Shravan, 1334]

4

Tomorrow morning I shall reach Singapore. From then begins my sea-voyage stage. This chatter of mine, going on in my mind, will surely be much interrupted. Not for lack of leisure, but because the mind will be dislodged from the chamber in which it has been dwelling these several days. For what reason? For the attraction of that entity called the general public.

That there should be no attraction at all in one's mind while writing is impossible. But its proximate attraction is a great hindrance to writing. When it stays near, it constantly pushes and demands—demanding its own mind's concern. A vast external commission tugs at the pen from within. I wish to say, "I care nothing for you," but the very fact that I raise my voice to say so proves that I do, in fact, care.

The truth is, in literature's assembly of listeners, the general public sits today upon the throne. To write while entirely dismissing this truth is impossible. One might ask, why dismiss it at all? There was indeed a time when literature did not exist for all humankind in general.

The matter is worth pondering a little. Kalidasa's Meghadutam was, we may now say, written for all mankind—that has become proven today. Had it been written for some particular faction, that faction too would no longer exist, and the Meghadutam would have vanished along with it. But what we now call "the public" was not, in Kalidasa's time, so closely-knit a body of listeners. Had it been, the vast body of humanity gathering over hundreds of years into the great arena of eternity would have found its path considerably blocked by them.

Today's public is a time-bound, cage-confined general body specific to a particular age. Firmly compacted within it lie the politics, social ethics, and religious doctrines of this age, its particular tastes and inclinations, and much else besides. That this general public is a true image of universal humanity cannot be said. That its demands will not match the demands of a hundred years hence, I can say with confidence. Yet this present-day general public, coming close to one's ear, shouts loudly its cheers, its bravos.

Even in comparison to the narrow compass of the present time, the permanence of this applause and approval is negligible. What the sovereign public today rejects with reddened eyes, tomorrow it will use with the same loud voice as though it were its own eternal, considered

opinion. What today it hears with tears streaming down both cheeks, tomorrow, when it comes to mock the same thing, it will entirely disavow its own earlier sentimental history.

When suddenly, around the offices and warehouses of English merchants, the city of Calcutta lifted its head, a public appeared there in this newly-formed shopping district. At least, one section of it took shape after the fashion of owls and cats. The stamp of its demand fell upon Dashuray's Panchali. Frequent alliterations, like popped rice crackling on the roasting-pan, burst forth with popping sounds, blooming and blossoming—

"Bhabo Shrikanta narakantakarire,

Nitanta kritanta-bhayanta habe bhabe."

All around, the assembly was in uproar with cries of alas, alas. Both hands clapped over ears, in high pitched rapid tempo the song rose:

"O Lakshman, what ill omen is this,

Disaster has struck most grievously.

In such trivial work, in such vile attire,

How much I wept in this dreadful forest." Etc.

The general public of the shopping district, delighted, paid in cash. Should we accept, as representative of universal mankind, the reckoning by head-count of that East India Company's marketplace audience—which had neither the power to enjoy leisure nor the education to appreciate it? In fact, it was this very public that obstructed Dashuray's genius from rising to the great assembly of universal humanity.

Yet, in the ballads collected from Mymensingh, the note of world literature rings out easily enough. This is no literature poured into the mould of some city publisher's swift commission. Those ballads were written by the inspiration of mankind's eternal joys and sorrows. Even if composed amid crowds, this crowd was not the particular crowd of a particular age. Therefore this literature is like the harvest that villagers enjoy from their own earthen vessels, and yet it is the harvest of the whole world—it is the ear of rice itself.

In the respect we pay to the one we honour as poet, there lies this tribute: that his solitary word is the word of all of us. It is precisely because the poet is left to speak alone that he can, with ease, speak for everyone. Had he stood in the middle of the marketplace and, tailoring his words to fit the minds of that day's marketplace crowd, sought by the strength of their numerous heads' nodding and counting to consider his composition fulfilled—had he wished us to have the courage to think this—then we would have to accept that in the arithmetic of literature, one is oftentimes greater in number than a thousand.

Now my shipboard letter tilts toward its final lines. Before taking leave, I feel I should ask your pardon. The reason is: I sat down meaning to write a letter, but somehow it never quite became a letter. From this I fear that my age for letter-writing has passed. I no longer have the strength to gather up, from the flow of each passing day, the words that drift by day after day. To offer, while moving, an introduction to all that surrounds me on every side—this is no longer easily within my power. And yet there was a time when I had this power. Then I wrote many letters to many people. Those letters were like moving pictures, cinema of the flowing present. Then the screen of the mind was spread open toward the entire play of light and shadow outside. Letters flowed along the current of those impressions. Now, it may be, the photograph of the outer image has stopped, and the phonograph of the mind's own sound has become alert instead. Now perhaps I see less, and hear more.

Man, after all, does not stand fixed in one place. This is why nothing but a moving picture can be his true likeness. Man continually gives account of himself, moving alongside the flow of moving events. Those who are one's own naturally wish to receive that account. Abroad, amid new and ever-shifting circumstances and events, it is natural that one's kin should wish for a continuous account revealed against this restless backdrop. A letter exists to fulfil precisely that wish.

But every kind of composition depends upon a natural gift. Letter-writing is no exception. Among our party is Suniti. I used to think of him simply as a scholar. That is, I believed he had turned his hand only to the task of breaking whole things into fragments, and joining fragmentary things into wholes. But this time I have seen that whatever the "world" means by the stream of pictures—that which flows continually and is never still for a single moment—he can seize it swiftly and completely in his mind without missing a beat, and can just as swiftly and completely transfer it onto paper and pen. At the root of this power lies his mind's living interest in the affairs of the universe. Nothing is trivial to him personally, and so even the trivial finds, in his pen, a place where it cannot be overlooked. Generally speaking, one might say that among those absorbed in the theory of words, word-pictures lie entirely outside their domain, because the

image belongs altogether to a shallower plane. But that Suniti's mind, deep and profound as a lake, does not drown the floating image—this is remarkably wonderful. Suniti's uninterrupted letters you will get to read in due course—you will see they are altogether imperial letters. In them is the letter's imperialism; the empire of description is all-embracing, nothing too small or too great escapes it. Suniti deserves a title: Emperor of Description, or Universal Sovereign of Description, or Wheel-Turning Monarch of Description.

Ever yours

[Written to Srimati Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis. 3rd Shravan, 1334. Nagpanchami]

5

Before me lies the half-moon shoreline of the sea. Far into the distance the water is shallow; in the colour of the water there is a hint of the earth—as though the ochre-hued end of the earth's garment had trailed into it. There are no waves; all day long the mass of water advances and retreats in the slowest of motions. An apsara approaches, stealthily, from behind, as if to cover the eyes of the earth playfully—upon golden ripple after ripple, the mischievous smile of teasing.

Before me, to the left, stands a grove of coconut trees, unable to stand quite straight upon their long trunks, leaning toward one another. On their eternally swaying fronds the sunlight scatters itself, again and again, the way restless boys splash water at each other on a river-ghat. This is their morning ablution beneath the sky.

This is the house of a wealthy Chinese man. We are his guests. We sit in cane chairs on the spacious verandah. From the direction of the sea, the west wind blows full against the chest. I watch as, in the corners of the sky, clouds broken from their flock have shed their black uniform of Shravan; for some days now they have made truce with the sunlight. Upon my vague musings falls the rain-shower of trembling coconut-leaf sounds, rustling; and the retreating footsteps of the low tide upon the sand mingle in the same soft murmur. There, in the next room, Dhiren plays the esraj to himself—from Bhairon to Ramkeli, from Ramkeli to Bhairavi; slowly, like an idle cloud drifting on the wind of whim, the shape of the raga shifts.

This morning my mind seems like the ebbing sea, drawn toward the shore—toward which shore, it knows not. I sit here with my whole being, my entire inner self, spread wide open, absorbed like this small island—dense with the green shade of young leaves, sunbathed and warmed.

This gathered feeling within me might be called the joy of Being. A manifest wholeness, filled full in form and colour and light and sound, across sky and space, strikes upon my consciousness and says, "I am"; in its wake my own consciousness surges up; like the roar of the sea, a single continuous sound awakens: Om—that is, this "I." A vast "No," its mouth gaping wide open, its void immense—and before that very void stands the coconut tree, shaking its leaves, saying, "Here am I." This daring assertion of the self strikes my mind with deep wonder, and Dhiren's touch upon that Bhairavi note too seems the self-proclamation of universal being, lifting the banner of its own trembling melody amid the infinite void.

This, then, is what "Being" is. Here there is no ending. Alongside this exists "Doing." The sea lies motionless in its depths, but upon it, upon its surface, waves rise, the tide ebbs and flows. In life there is no rest from doing. Toward this doing, how much striving, how much apparatus, how much refuse. All these, piling up, become mere walls, become obstruction. They fragment, piece by piece, the field of wholeness outside, the realisation of fullness within. In the excitement of egoism, action grows arrogant, becomes absolute, pushes itself ahead of everyone; Doing seeks to grow greater than Being. Hence such fatigue, such unrest, such falsehood. The very tune of leisure that continually plays on the flute of the World-Maker—for this reason we cannot hear it; yet it is by that very tune of leisure that the rhythm of universal work is bound.

That tune plays today, in this morning light, upon the tanpura of that coconut tree. There I see that the form of power and the form of liberation are unbroken and one. In this alone lies peace, in this alone lies beauty. This union is precisely what life must seek—the union of the eternally flowing river of Doing with the eternally profound great ocean of Being. It is this self-satisfied union that the Gita has in view when it says, "Do your work, but do not seek its fruit." This very Rahu of desiring is what lies in wait, eager to swallow the nectar poured from the vessel of action. The natural ease within is fulfilled by natural ease of action without. When external self-interest grows stronger than that inner fulfilment, action becomes bondage; entangled in that bondage lie all manner of hatred, envy, jealousy, the deceiving of self and other. When the sorrow of action, the dishonour of action, becomes unbearable, man says, "Away with it—let me abandon work and go." Then the call comes again: there is no escape from action even by abandoning action; it is through Doing alone that Being expresses itself. Not by the external fruit, but by the truth inherent within it, let action be fulfilled—and therein alone lies liberation.

Action taken for the sake of fruit is called servitude, whether the master of that servitude is oneself or another. In servitude, work is done only for wages, not for its own sake. When work draws no juice at all from within itself, when it takes its price purely from outside, it insults man at that very moment. I cannot altogether deny the thing called necessity in the mortal world. To survive, one must eat. I cannot say, "I shall simply do without." It is under the pressure of that very necessity that man becomes a supplicant at another's door, and in this very act the shrewd philosopher begins to wonder how the root of this labour might be destroyed. The rebellious man declares: "vairagyamevabhayam"—that is, I shall eat this little, wear this little, learn to endure sun and rain in such fashion, and evade as much as possible all the various pinches nature has arranged to goad us into servitude, so that the debt of work becomes utterly light. But nature's work carries not merely the goad of pinches—alongside it there is the supply of pleasure as well. On the one hand hunger gives sorrow, on the other the sense of taste gives joy—nature, showing fear and greed both at once, makes us work. From the side of that greed is born, in our mind, the desire for enjoyment. The rebellious man says that this very desire for enjoyment is

nature's cunning, that this alone is delusion—remove it, say instead: "vairagyamevabhayam"—accept not sorrow, seek not joy.

Two or three individuals may indeed make such a bold claim, leaving home and hearth to live in forests eating wild fruit, but if every human being were to adopt this path, then even amid renunciation men would come to blows—the forest would not accommodate them all, there would be crowding and jostling on hills and in caves, wild fruit would be exhausted. Then even the imaginary monkey-army would bring out machine guns.

The dilemma of the ordinary man is this: work must be done. At the very outset of sustaining life, the pressure of necessity already exists. And yet, what can be done to lighten, as much as possible, the burden that necessity imposes upon work? That is to say, what can be done so that in work, one's own agency looms larger than the servitude owed to another? The further agency is banished from work, the more work will crush man beneath the burden of mere wages—it is from this state of servility that man must be rescued.

A memory returns to me. That day, when I was in Silong, Nandalal sent a picture postcard from Kurseong. A jeweller, with children gathered round, sits crafting ornaments, spectacles perched on his nose. In the picture this much is made vivid: that this jeweller's work has, on its outer face, its price, and on its inner face, its love. Through this work the jeweller expresses not merely his want but his very sentiment; by the virtue of his skill he gives shape to the meditation of his own mind. Primarily this work is his very own; only secondarily is it the work of whoever will purchase it for a price. In this way the craving for fruit becomes light; harmony arises between the priced and the priceless, and the servility of work vanishes. Once, society scorned the merchant, because the merchant only sells, does not give as gift. But this jeweller, in fashioning this very ornament, has merged his giving and his selling into one act. He has given from within, not merely supplied from without.

I keep a servant to do the household work. When his humanity becomes entirely severed from his relation to his master, that becomes sixteen annas of pure slavery. In a society that has not, through greed or arrogance, lost its tenderness toward fellow humans, that society keeps the boundary-line between servant and kin as faint as possible. There the servant approaches close to the status of elder brother or uncle. Then his work ceases to be another's work and becomes his very own. Then the craving for fruit in his work is as good as dissolved. He does receive payment, yet still he gives his work as a gift, he does not sell it.

In Kathiawar in Gujarat I have seen the milkman love his cow more than his own life. There, in his trade of milk, he has made the craving for fruit trivial before his love; though he does his work, he finds daily liberation from that very work. This milkman is not a shudra. The milkman who tends his cow with his eye fixed only on the milk, who does not hesitate to sell his cow to the butcher, is the true shudra; his work brings him no glory, his work is his bondage. Any work within which there is no liberation, because it contains only greed, in which there is an absence of love—that work is servile in essence. Caste-shudras occupy many high seats in this world. Some of them are teachers, some judges, some rulers, some priests. There are countless maidservants, wet-nurses, servants, gardeners, potters, farmers who are not shudras like these—today, in the pith of the coconut tree on this sun-bright seashore, the root melody of their life's music is playing.

[Malacca, 28th July, 1927]

6

To my dear one,

We must now go to a place two hundred miles away. Everyone is packing their things and getting ready. Only I have been unable to make myself ready. We must climb into the motor-car right now, bound for the railway station. Near the door the motor-car, impatient, sounds its horn again and again in high pitch—our companions' voices have no such volume, but their anxiety is no less intense. And so I must rise even now. The day is beautiful. The leaves of the coconut trees shimmer, rustle, sway; before us the sea, in ceaseless welcoming murmur, resounds with its babbling voice.

[Malacca, 30th July, 1927. Written to Srimati Nirmalkumari Mahalanobis]

7

To my dear one,

Rani, we have come to the royal palace of Gianyar. Before the midday feast, Suniti had gathered a fine gathering of Brahmin priests of the palace. At the meal, the king asked me to recite a bit of Sanskrit. Two or three verses were recited. As Suniti, introducing one verse, said just the words "Shardulavikridita," the king immediately pronounced the metre's name himself, declaring that he too knew it. To hear from the mouth of this king such a difficult Sanskrit word astonished me. Then the king went on: Shikharini, Sragdhara, Malini, Basantatilaka—and several more names we never find in our own treatises on prosody. He said these metres are current in their own scriptures. And yet these people do not know Mandakranta or Anushtup. Seeing here these fragmented, broken images of Indian learning, one feels as though an earthquake had toppled some ancient great city, sinking it beneath the earth—and upon those very sites later ages built homes and tilled fields; and yet, in many places, the remnants of that old glory still emerge above the surface—these two, mingled and pieced together, make up the settlements here.

From whatever of the ancient India remains, one may guess a good deal about the India of that particular era. Here Hindu religion is chiefly Shaivite. Durga is present, but there is no skull-garlanded, tongue-lolling, naked Kali. No animal sacrifice is offered to any deity here. Some time ago, animal sacrifice was practised on the occasion of yajnas such as the Ashvamedha, but blood offerings are not given to the goddess. From this one may gather that in India at that time, the deities worshipped by hunter and forest tribes had not entered the temples of the higher-caste Hindus, propagating blood-consecrated worship of the deity there.

Beyond this, the various readings of the Ramayana and Mahabharata current in this country differ considerably from those of our own land. It cannot be said with certainty that wherever their reading differs from ours, theirs is corrupt. In the Ramayana here, Rama and Sita are brother and sister; and this brother and sister were wed. I was speaking with a Dutch scholar; he said that, in his opinion, this very tale is the ancient one, and it has since been suppressed by later times.

If one were to accept this view as true, then one might find many great points of correspondence between the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Both narratives, at their root, involve two marriages. Both marriages are irregular according to Aryan custom. Marriage between brother

and sister is heard of in certain places in Buddhist history, but it is entirely against our scriptural tradition. On the other hand, marriage of a single wife shared among five brothers is likewise strange and unscriptural. The second correspondence is that both marriages begin with a test of arms, though that test is quite irrelevant to the question of marriage-worthiness. The third correspondence is that both maidens are not born from a human womb—Sita is the daughter of the Earth, found while ploughing; Draupadi is born of sacrifice. The fourth correspondence is that in both, the chief hero is exiled from his kingdom and goes into the forest with his wife. The fifth correspondence is that in both narratives, there is the dishonouring of the wife at the enemy's hand, and the avenging of that dishonour.

For this reason I have expressed elsewhere the opinion that both marriages are allegorical in nature. The allegory in the Ramayana is quite clear. If the furrow-line made by the plough in agriculture is to be given any form at all, then it may be called the daughter of the earth. If the crop is imagined as Rama, dark as new durba grass after rain, then that crop too is a son of the earth. According to this allegory, both are brother and sister, yet bound together in the marriage-bond.

The essential meaning of the Ramayana lies precisely in the breaking of Shiva's bow. In fact, the whole narrative concerns the breaking of Shiva's bow—for the winning, keeping, and rescuing of Sita. The expedition of the Kshatriyas, bearing agriculture from the eastern part of Aryavarta down to the southern extremity of India, was not an easy one; behind it lay a great conflict, both domestic and external. The history of that historical conflict is embedded within the Ramayana—the conflict between the forest and the agricultural field.

In the Mahabharata too, in the burning of the Khandava forest, we find a hint of this same historical conflict. That too was not merely the burning of forest undergrowth—in that age, the forest was the refuge of a power hostile to man, and it was destroyed. Opposing this were not merely non-Aryans, but even Indra, whom they worshipped as a god. Indra tried, by pouring down rain, to douse the fire of Khandava.

The meaning of the Mahabharata too may be found in the piercing of the target. Within this target-piercing, set in emptiness, lies encoded a certain discipline: that through single-pointed striving, Krishna—Draupadi—can be won; and this sacrifice-born Draupadi is precisely that principle over which, one day, a fierce conflict arose in India. One faction accepted her, another did not. The five Pandavas accepted Draupadi, but the Kauravas did not fail to insult her. In this war, the commander of the Kuru army was the Brahmin Dronacharya, while the charioteer of the Pandava hero Arjuna was Krishna. Just as Rama received his initiation in arms from Vishwamitra,

so did Arjuna receive his initiation in war from Krishna. Vishwamitra himself did not fight, but the inspiration for the fight came from him; Krishna too did not himself fight, but it was he who set in motion the war of Kurukshetra. In the Bhagavad Gita itself, the truth of this war, the righteousness of this war, has been proclaimed—with that righteousness Krishna is one; Krishna, Draupadi's friend, whom Draupadi remembered in the moment of her dishonour and thereby had her modesty preserved, Krishna in whose honour the Pandavas held their royal sacrifice. The forest through which Rama wandered for long years with Sita was the forest of non-Aryans, while the forest to which the Pandavas returned with Draupadi was the forest of Brahmin sages. It was through the Pandavas' companionship that Draupadi's entry into this forest occurred. There Draupadi, from her inexhaustible vessel of food, gave food to unexpected guests. In India there was one conflict between forest and agricultural field, and another conflict between the religion of the Vedas and the religion of Krishna. Lanka was the citadel of non-Aryan power, and there the Aryan achieved victory; Kurukshetra was the field of the Krishna-opposing Kauravas, and there the Krishna-devoted Pandavas emerged triumphant. In every history, outwardly the war is over food, and inwardly the war is over principle. When population increases, then contention arises over land and food, and agriculture must be extended into new fields. When the expansion of consciousness increases, then conflict arises between those who cling to narrow custom and those who wish to receive truth in a broader and deeper way. At one time in India, conflict grew intense between two factions; one faction called the Vedic mantra itself Brahman, while the other faction recognised Brahman as the Supreme Self. Even before the Buddha began his propagation of dharma, the conflict of opinion between Brahmin and Kshatriya had considerably cleared his path.

The original history of India, scattered in various tales within the Ramayana and Mahabharata, will become clearer when we have the opportunity to compare the versions found here. In conversation, I learned from one person here that Dronacharya had, by some cunning device, sent Bhima on some impossible task in order to kill him. That Drona, hostile to Drupada, was not favourably disposed toward the Pandavas—perhaps there is proof of this in the Mahabharata as found here.

One more matter concerning the Ramayana narrative comes to my mind, which I record here. The field of agriculture can be destroyed in two ways—one, by outward violence, and the other, by inner neglect. When Ravana carried off Sita, Rama and Sita were later able to be reunited. But when the separation of Rama and Sita occurred through inner neglect at Ayodhya, then Sita, the daughter of the earth, merged back into the earth itself. The twin children born in the womb of Sita, exiled at Ayodhya, were named Lava and Kusha. The root meaning of Lava is severance; the meaning of Kusha is known well enough. Everyone knows how kusha grass, once it takes root, can ruin the crop-field. What deeper significance might lie in the twin birth of Lava together with Kusha, if my guess is not entirely to be dismissed—this I ask of the scholars.

You will have heard from others' letters that here we have come to witness a grand ceremony of cremation. On the whole this is somewhat like the Chinese custom—they too observe such pomp, decoration, and musical accompaniment at funeral rites. Only the gesture of mantra-chanting and such resembles that of Hindus. This cremation ritual they have taken from the Hindus. But somehow it seems as though it has not been taken to heart. Hindus wish to see the soul as beyond the body, and so, immediately after death, they burn it, seeking complete liberation from all attachment to the body. Here, the dead body is often kept for many years. This wish to keep it is akin to the wish to bury it. Amid their customs, these people seem to have struck a kind of compromise between these two opposite practices—keeping the body and burning the body. Acknowledging the diversity of human psychological nature, Hindu religion has, through its compromise-formula, written all manner of contradictory verdicts beyond counting. Hindu religion has not tried to establish unity by destroying difference; while preserving difference, it has still sought to bring about a unity.

But because such unity is not easy, it lacks within it the strength of firm unity. Though it acknowledges the diverse many as one, walls must repeatedly be raised between them. This unity cannot be called unbroken oneness—it must be called a divided oneness. This unity becomes burdensome, this unity does not become powerful. Many among our co-religionists would be eager to acknowledge the inhabitants of Bali as their own, but at that very moment would keep them at a distance from their own society. Here, in competitive vitality, we must inevitably lose to the Muslim. Among Muslims, unity is instantly and completely forged; among Hindus, it never quite takes. This is precisely why Hindu unity, carrying its vast mass of parts and portions, does nothing but wobble unsteadily. Wherever the Muslim arrives, he does not merely display his strength, or his reasoning, or his character to make the local people join his community—he expands his religion through the living, continuous means of expanding his own progeny. There is no obstacle for him in marriage with people of his own community, or even of another community. Through this unrestricted intermarriage, he can extend his social influence everywhere. Not merely by the path of bloodshed, but by the path of blood-mixing, he has been able to penetrate far and wide. If Hindus could do the same, Hindu religion in Bali would not have taken long to become permanent, pure, and widespread.

[Gianyar, 1st August, 1927]

8

Amid the confusion, the coming and going, the meeting and greeting, the talking, the invitations extended and received, whenever I manage to write two or four lines, the current of thought keeps getting stuck; it does not flow with ease. This cannot even be called a letter. For within it there churns the compulsion of duty—it pushes work forward, but harasses thought. There is a difference between a bird's flight and a kite's flight. I am flying the kite of writing under the pretext of a letter, bound to the string of duty, having to yank and jerk it upward.

I have grown weary. Two or three engagements a day. Lectures by invitation in ever-new places, and so on. If I were to accept the Gita's teaching, if I did not expect the fruit of action, then, like a sailboat with unfurled sails, the vessel of life could leap from shore to shore. Instead I go on rowing against the current, pulling ropes, poling and paddling; at every step my tongue hangs out. That I shall ever, anywhere, be able to travel with ease till the day of my death is a vain hope. The road is very long, the provisions meagre; earning as I go, grumbling as I go, forfeiting dollars in hotel after hotel, wearing out my throat with travel-talk, wearing out my feet with travel. At every turn, on the road and off it, I am suddenly called upon to give a speech, and I too rise and chatter away—the way pulp keeps issuing from the mouth of some pulp-making machine in America. It makes me laugh, and it also grieves me. Fifteen-sixteenths of the world's people seem to love disgracing a poet in this fashion in public; they say, "Give us a message." Think a little about what "message" is supposed to mean. Delivering, into the indifferent ear of that entity called "the general public," some entirely non-specific counsel of sentiment that suits no actual man's actual work at all. It is like offering a lump of rice-ball, in the wholesale manner, to the countless departed ancestors in the other world—

since no one actually eats that rice-ball, it has neither taste nor beauty. Since it is offered merely in name, devoid of palate and hunger, no one cares to make it into a proper meal. "Message"-composition is that same sort of composition.

This afternoon's train I must take to Penang. Before that, if it is manageable, there is bathing to do, eating to do; if unmanageable, still there is a meeting to attend and a speech to give; no sleep, no rest, no peace, no leisure—and after that, a long train journey; then at the station the garlanding, the listening to the address, the giving of thanks in reply; then, in a new lodging amid a new crowd, a new arrangement of daily living; then, on the sixteenth of the month, boarding ship for the voyage to Java; then a new chapter.

Ever yours

[13th August, 1927]

9

To my dear daughter-in-law,

You must surely have received, from the letters of others in our party, an account of the Malay Peninsula. I have not had time to observe properly, to think properly, to write properly. I have only wandered about and lectured. From Penang we boarded ship and first reached Batavia, the capital of Java. Nowadays great cities everywhere in the world belong not so much to their country as to their age. Everyone is modern. Everyone's faces are alike; only the manner of dress differs a little. That is, someone's turban is glossy but his coat has no buttons, his dhoti reaches only to the knee, his torn shawl is unpatched—as in Calcutta; someone else is spotless from head to foot, freshly bathed and combed; bright clothes and ornaments—as in Batavia. I said the faces of the cities were the same—that is not quite right. One does not see the face, one sees the mask. Those masks are all cast in the same mould, in the same factory. Some keep the mask clean and polished, some let it grow dull through neglect. Calcutta and Batavia are both daughters of the same modern age; only their bridegrooms differ, and so their standard of hospitality varies considerably. Madam Batavia has no shortage of ornaments from the parting of her hair to the anklets at her feet. On top of that, soap-washing, scrubbing, and cosmetic lotions continue to enhance her lustre. Calcutta's hand has bangles, but I see no armlets on her arm. And the water she bathes in, and the towel with which she wipes herself dry, are in the same sorry state. We are residents of the Chitpur quarter; coming here to Batavia, it feels as if we have moved from the dark fortnight of the moon to its bright fortnight.

I stayed caged in a hotel for three or four days; there was no lack of hospitality. The full account will probably be written by Suniti at some point. For, just as great as Suniti's power of observation is his power of retention. Whatever is great is his passionate interest, and equally great is his collection. Whatever falls before his eyes all gathers into his mind. Not a particle is wasted. It is not wasted from either direction—neither in the taking in, nor in the giving out. Na nashtam yaddiyate—what is given is not lost. I can be assured that in his hands, the account of our journey will not be the slightest bit wasted, will not be lost.

From Batavia we set out by ship toward the island of Bali. For a few hours the ship put us ashore in the city of Surabaya. This too is a modern city; not the essence of Java, but an appendage of Java. Chant the spell of Aladdin's lamp and transplant this city to New Zealand—it would not seem out of place.

Crossing over, we arrived in Bali; and there I saw the eternally youthful form of the earth herself. Here ancient centuries remain forever new. Here, upon the earth, the lotus-seat of Annapurna is spread, green and unbroken, from horizon to horizon. In the shade of the forest, the settlements enjoy ample leisure. That leisure is daily, endlessly filled with festival and ceremony.

This little island has no railway. The railway is the vehicle of the modern age. The modern age is exceedingly miserly, unwilling to allot even the smallest excess of expense in any direction. The people of this age say: Time is money. And so, to curb the waste of time, the railway engine, panting and puffing, belching smoke, shaking the earth, dashes about frantically from country to country. But here in Bali, the present age stands united with hundreds upon hundreds of past centuries. Here there is no need to abbreviate time. Whatever exists here is eternal; the present is exactly as the past was. Just as the seasons proceed, blossoming flower after flower of varied hue, ripening fruit after fruit of varied flavour, so the people here, generation upon generation, have carried forward the tradition of religious and artistic observance in ever new forms, colours, songs, dances, and rites.

The railway is absent here, but for the modern wanderers who come here, there is the motor-car. In an exceedingly short time they wish to finish their sightseeing and inspection. They are people of a cramped age, arrived in a land of abundant time. Here forest and mountain amid the habitations, we drive on, raising dust, and I keep feeling that here one ought to walk on foot. Where buildings line both sides of the road, letting both eyes race along with the motor does little harm; but where beauty lines both sides of the road, to attend to its invitation one must abandon the impatient motor-car in the garage. Do you not recall how furiously Dushyanta drove his chariot when hunting the deer; this is what is called Progress—the hurry to strike the target. But before the hermitage he had to let his chariot fall and dismount, not out of greed for reaching a target, but in hope of finding fulfilment. The path to accomplishment moves swiftly; the path to beauty moves slowly. In the modern age, the greed for accomplishment is vast, overpowering; and so the pace of modern vehicles keeps increasing. Whatever deserves to be received deeply, the gaze, without truly receiving it, merely brushes past and moves on. Now Hamlet's performance has become impossible; Hamlet's cinema has become victorious.

Where our motor stopped, there was a vast festival underway. The place is called Bangli. It was the cremation ceremony of some royal lineage. There was no sign of mourning in it—rightly so, for the king had died long ago; by now his soul, having ascended to the assembly of the gods, this was in celebration of that. From far away, along village paths, men and women were coming in waves bearing offerings of all kinds; it seemed as though some age described in ancient legend had suddenly come alive before our eyes; as though the painted world of Ajanta's art had come to draw the light of the sun into the world of the living. The women's costumes were like paintings

from Ajanta itself. Here the natural modesty of sparse covering appeared beautiful, in harmony with its surroundings; indeed, even the few American missionary onlookers present here, I hope, were able to feel with simple minds the graceful refinement of this scene.

The sacrificial ground was thronged with people. For this occasion, in several tall bamboo-built pavilions, the Brahmins here, elaborately adorned, hair bound up, sat chanting mantras with various hand-gestures amid heaps of food, cloth, fruit, flowers, and leaves as offerings; some were preparing various sacrificial materials. Somewhere here, a multi-instrument orchestra played; in one place, within a tent, a mythological drama was being performed. Such an immense and ceremonial diversity of festival I have seen nowhere else; and yet nowhere is there anything ugly or disordered; amid such vast pageantry the visible form has not fragmented into disarray of piled objects or the jostling of the crowd. So many people gathered, and yet there is no confusion, no filth, no disorder. It is the inherent beautiful bond of unity within the festival itself that has, of itself, restrained and bound the whole crowd into order. The entire affair is so vast, so varied, and to us so extraordinary, that a detailed description of it is impossible. That Hindu ritual procedure has merged with the sentiment of this country's people to produce this creation—the very abundance of its form is a thing especially worth seeing and pondering. The attempt to express oneself endlessly through unlimited materials—that expression does not merely accumulate objects, but adorns them through many skillful methods.

Bali's natural conditions bear resemblance to Japan's. As in Japan, the island here is small in area, and yet nature's form here is varied, and its creative power abundantly fertile. At every step, mountain, waterfall, river, plain, forest, volcano, lake. And yet, the land is easy to traverse; the extent of river and mountain is small; the population is large, the area of land small, and so, through the excellence of agriculture, every inch of cultivable land has been thoroughly tilled; the extensive system of irrigating fields sufficiently has long been established here. Here there is no poverty, no disease; the climate is pleasant. The mythological Hindu religion, rich in gods and goddesses, rich in legend, rich in ritual, is in harmony with the nature of this land; that very nature has fostered variety and abundance in this land's art, in its social ceremonies.

There is a great difference from Japan as well. Japan is a cold country; Java and Bali a hot one. Japan was able to stand against the peoples of other cold countries and protect herself; Java and Bali could not. The firm, resolute perseverance needed for self-preservation, this land did not have. Hot winds, just as they quickly bring vital expression to fruition, likewise quickly bring about its decay. Moment by moment they slacken strength, and weary life's perseverance. That the city of Batavia is so impeccably tidy and clean is because the people of the cold countries have taken charge of it; in their bodies, formed in cold lands, strength has, for many generations, accumulated in bone, marrow, muscle, and nerve; and so their untiring minds can apply

themselves everywhere, at every moment. We simply say, "Enough now, you too are like this, it will pass." The thing called effort is not merely a matter of the heart, but a matter of strength. To keep the fire of devotion burning requires an abundance of strength. Where the store of strength is meagre, renunciation comes of itself. Renunciation reduces all demands upon oneself. It accepts outer inconvenience, ill health, disorder, everything. It tries to console itself by saying that there is perhaps some greatness in enduring these things. One whose strength is boundless takes joy in meeting every demand; that is precisely why he lives on with vigour, does not easily surrender to ruin. Travelling in Europe, what strikes my eye most of all is this ever-wakeful diligence of man. What is called science, effort—

its chief mark is an unconquerable diligence for the sake of knowledge. Nowhere will mere guesswork suffice, nowhere will whim be entertained; it will not say, "Let us assume," will not say, "The omniscient sage has already spoken thus." In the realm of knowledge, in the realm of ethics, when weariness of self-strength arrives, renunciation appears; in the field of that renunciation's effort-avoidance, the authority of sages, the authority of scripture, the authority of gurus, the pronouncements of great souls spring up like a jungle of weeds—blocking the path of that knowledge-discipline which demands unceasing effort. As the profuse obstruction of renunciation's effort-avoidance grows day by day on every side, it is this very thing that brings about man's defeat. In the land of renunciation, even in art, man moves along the well-trodden circuit of imitation, never advancing, merely going round and round. The merchant of Madras spends thirty-five lakh rupees to build a temple, exactly copying one built a thousand years ago. He has no greater courage than that, no strength of a tired mind; the bird with useless wings takes no joy in spreading itself outside the cage. The bird that surrendered to the cage, has, like this, given itself up for good before the whole world.

Coming to this country, one feels, at first, joy at the variety and beauty of every ceremony here. Then gradually a doubt begins to arise in the mind: perhaps this is the beauty of the cage, not the beauty of the nest—perhaps there is no freedom of thought within it. A flawless imitation, mechanical through habit, has continued in unbroken succession for hundreds of years. We who have come here from outside have gained one rare advantage: that we are able to see the distant past as though it were present. That past was great, that past possessed genius, what is called ever-new, creative intelligence; the vast energy of its life-force gave abundant expression to itself in its artistic creation. And yet it was the past—its proper place was to fall behind the present; why, coming forward, did it stand blocking the present? The present, having become merely the vehicle of that past, says, "I have surrendered." It says humbly, "My task is only to keep this past alive, having obliterated myself." It has no courage to believe in itself. This is renunciation regarding one's own strength, the reduction, as far as possible, of any claim upon oneself. To accept the claim brings sorrow, brings danger, and so—vairagyamevabhayam, that is, vinashyamevabhayam—destruction alone is safety.

The ceremony we witnessed that day at Bangli was the ceremony of the departed soul's ascension to heaven. Death occurred long ago; only now, after so long, has the soul found its place in the assembly of the gods, and hence this special celebration. In the district called Sukhavati, in the town called Ubud, the cremation itself will take place on the coming fifth of September. There will be far greater pomp in that ceremony—yet still, it will be like that thirty-five-lakh-rupee temple of the Madras merchant. This is a funeral rite of many, many centuries, and that same funeral rite continues, with no end in sight. Here funeral rites are conducted at such impossible expense that a very long time is needed for their preparation—Death performs his own task briefly and cheaply, but the ritual proceeds in an exceedingly protracted and costly fashion. Here the funeral rite of the distant past has continued for ages, with the present age forced to give up its all to bear its cost.

Coming here, I have repeatedly felt this: however great the past may be, there ought to be, regarding oneself, a certain pride in the present age; there ought to be a belief that within it lies the power to conquer. I have written this sentiment into a small poem, which I set down here to close this long letter.

Nandagopal, chest puffed out, came

And said to me, laughing,

"Can you ever win a fight against me?

Defeat every single time."

I said, "Is that so! Your boast is a lie,

Let us see this fight then."

"Very well, I'll show you," so saying he pulled my hand,

And Grandfather instantly went flat on his back.

He called everyone over, shouting, made the whole house rejoice in triumph.

Again and again he asks me, "Tell me, haven't you lost?"

I said, "How can I say so?

When I've already taken refuge in the dust, what proof remains to give?

Do you know this—

To me, Nandagopal, whenever you win,

That very defeat is mine,

And that shame is mine as well.

When I fall into the dust, may I know this for certain—

That it is your final victory."

Ever yours

[30th August, 1927. Karangasem. Bali]

10

To my dear one,

Mira, where I sit writing is a dak-bungalow, upon a hill. In the morning, cold wind blows. In the sky, clouds gather in flocks, coming and going, at times covering the sun, at times uncovering it. What comes to mind when one says "mountain" is not at all this. No range of rocky peaks is visible anywhere—not far from the verandah, before me, a sloping valley descends; at its bottom a thin stream of water winds and curves along; before me the opposite bank is like a crescent moon, above it a grove of coconut trees standing in rows against the sky.

From above down to below, terrace after terrace of grain-field. Along the slope of the hill a broken, ruined path descends from the village on the far bank to the water. Near the water's edge is a spring. This spring is considered sacred by the people of this country; all day I see women bathing there, drawing water and carrying it away. They say that bathing in this water absolves all sin. There are special occasions when great numbers of people come here for holy bathing. This place is called "Tirta Empul." Tirta means pilgrimage-place, Empul means spring—Spring of Pilgrimage.

There is a legend concerning this spring. Long ago a certain king had a beautiful daughter. That girl fell in love with one of the king's courtiers. It was not that the courtier did not love her in return, but knowing that his rank made him unworthy to marry the princess, out of regard for the king's honour he rejected the princess's love, feeling it his duty to do so. The princess in anger mixed poison into his drink. The young man, drinking only a little, discovered what had happened, but fearing scandal might fall upon the princess's name, fled into the forest here and prepared to die in secret. The gods, taking pity, gave him water from this sacred spring, and saved his life.

How intertwined this land's life has become with Hindu sentiment and custom becomes strikingly clear moment by moment. And yet Hindu religion exists nowhere here in unmixed form; the people here, blending with nature, have taken on a particular form of their own; its outer symbol is Hindu, its inner substance is native to this land. On the first day of our arrival, we had gone to see the cremation ceremony of some king in a certain place. The materials of decoration and arrangement did not match ours at all; the sentiment of the celebration was not quite the sentiment of our own shraddha ceremonies; the outward spectacle of the pageant did not correspond to anything in India; and yet its manner was somehow like our own; upon the

platform, the crested Brahmins of this place were ringing bells, burning incense, making hand-gestures with their fingers in mudras, murmuring mantras in low voices. Any lapse in recitation or ritual renders everything impure and futile. The Brahmins have no sacred thread across the chest. Upon inquiry, it was learned that they know the word "Gayatri" but do not properly know the mantra itself. Some know only bits and pieces. It seems that at one time they possessed the whole of Hindu religion, complete with its deities, customs, festivals, ceremonies, and mythological lore. Later the connection to the root was severed, India went far away—the sea-voyage of the Hindu became forbidden, the Hindu bound himself within his own narrow enclosure, forgetting that beyond his home there had once been a spacious courtyard. But because, in the house of a distant kinsman across the sea, so much of its message, so many of its images, signs, and materials still lay scattered, that kinsman could not entirely forget it. Along road and ghat, at every step, various tokens of that ancient union catch the eye. But since these could not be renewed and repaired, in the hands of time some of these tokens have been eroded, some bent out of shape, some entirely lost.

The unbroken continuity of these tokens can no longer be found. Their meaning has partly grown hazy, partly become fragmented. The result has been this: wherever a gap has appeared, that very gap has been filled by this land's people with their own creation. Taking the broken skeleton of Hindu religion, the people here have built up their own religion, their own society. In this land's art of one era we see pure Hindu influence; later we see that influence grown faint and fragmented. And yet, in whatever field Hinduism enriched, in that very field the native genius of this land has abundantly borne its own fruit. Here I see a background of ancient history, full of holes; through the fragments of that half-erased history, this country's native intellect expresses itself.

In Bali, my first lodging was to be at the royal palace in a place called Karangasem. The king there had been present at the shraddha-festival at Bangli. Along with his officials, the Dutch Governor of Bali had lunch there, and we too were present at that feast. When the feast ended and we rose, it was three o'clock. We had disembarked from the ship at half past six in the morning; from the harbour, two and a half hours of jolting and dust in the motor brought us to the sacrificial ground. Here, after finishing our round of sightseeing without even bathing, in a state of great fatigue and dust-stained appearance, we sat down to eat with genuine reluctance; after that long-drawn-out feast with its eating and conversing and hospitality, we climbed once more, with our host the king, into his motor-car and travelled again a very long road, broken and rough, to his palace. They call the palace here Puri. I do not know the king's language, and the king does not understand mine—nor was there anyone with us to interpret. I sat silently gazing out through the car window.

The great advantage was this: the nature here does not speak in the Balinese language; gazing again and again at that green expanse, I noted how, when out of tune, a singer's voice sometimes launches into song; where the melody calls for particular tenderness, where the mind expects that the singer's throat will spread its wings like a kite soaring in the middling sky and remain still for a while, or perhaps deliver just one or two touches of grace-note, upon that very tender spot of the song when that acrobat of music twists and alters its notes like tumbler pigeons wheeling about, how irritated one becomes. On both sides of the road lay mountain, forest, and sea, and lovely shaded settlements, but the motor-car, racing along at ten or twenty miles an hour, kicking up dust, had not the slightest regard for anything; the mind kept crying out at every moment, "Wait, wait, let me look!" But this machine-demon snatches the mind away as it goes; its one refrain, "No time, no time." At one point, where through a gap in the forest the blue sea came into view, the king himself cried out in our own language, "Samudra!"—seeing me astonished and delighted, he went on reciting, "Samudra, sagar, abdhi, jaladhi." Then: "Sapta-samudra, sapta-parvata, sapta-vana, sapta-akasha." Then, gesturing toward the mountains, he said, "Adri"; then went on, "Sumeru, Himalaya, Vindhya, Malaya, Rishyamuka." At one place a small river flowed at the foot of a mountain, and the king recited, "Ganga, Yamuna, Narmada, Godavari, Kaveri, Saraswati." In our history, India once specially realised her own geographical being; then, through meditation upon her rivers and mountains, she had established her own physical form deep within her mind. Her places of pilgrimage were bound together thus—Kanyakumari in the south, Manasa-sarovar in the north, Dwarka on the western sea-coast, the confluence of the Ganges on the eastern sea—so that through pilgrimage, the complete form of India could be grasped deeply and devotedly in the mind. There could be no better way of coming to know India. In those days one had to travel on foot, and so through pilgrimage not merely was the geography of India learned, but intimate acquaintance with the various local inhabitants came about naturally as well. Because India's self-realisation in that age was a discipline of truth, her method of self-recognition too became naturally so true. Genuine reverence never wishes to accomplish its task by deception. That is to say, it does not wish to console itself that a momentary union performed upon the stage of a political assembly is true union. That day's discipline of union was a discipline of unfeigned devotion.

That self-image which India meditated upon in that age crossed the sea and found such a place in this far corner of the eastern ocean that even after a thousand years, the recitation of that very meditation-mantra rang out in devotional tone from this king's mouth—this filled me with deep wonder. Not because these geographical names remain in their memory, but because of what profound meaning this recitation carried in that ancient age when these names were first uttered here. How great was the eagerness with which India of that day knew her own unity, and by what simple means she devised to make that knowledge permanent and pervasive—this became clear today, coming to this distant island, an island which India herself has forgotten.

With what enthusiasm the king recited the names of the Himalayas, the Vindhyas, the Ganges, the Yamuna—how proud he seemed of it! And yet this geography is not truly theirs; the king does not know any European language, he is not a man educated in modern schools, and so it is likely he has only a vague notion of where and in what form India lies in the world; indeed, outwardly this king has no dealings whatsoever with India today—and yet the melody bound to these names a thousand years ago still resonates in this land's heart today. How genuine that melody must have been, I find myself thinking. Some years ago I composed a hymn to the "Bharat-Vidhata," the Fate of India, in which I strung together the names of India's provinces—Vindhya, Himachal, Yamuna, Ganga are named there too. But today it occurs to me that it would be better to string together, in rhyme, the names of all India's provinces and her seas and mountains into a single geography-song, and impress that alone upon the minds of our people. We use the phrase "love of country" so often nowadays in our talk, but how can there be love of country in one who lacks geographic knowledge of that country?

Then the king recited: sapta-samudra, sapta-parvata, sapta-vana, sapta-akasha—that is, the memory of how India in those days conceived the totality of the universe. Today, under the influence of new knowledge, that memory has been exiled, remaining only, as it were, trapped in the withered pages of the Puranas—but even now it resonates with reverence upon the tongues here. Then the king went on to name the four Vedas, the names of the four guardians of the directions—Yama, Varuna, and the rest—and the eight names of Mahadeva; then, thinking hard, he began reciting the names of the eighteen books of the Mahabharata, though he could not recall them all.

Entering the royal palace, I saw in the courtyard, upon a platform, a variety of materials arranged; four Brahmins of this place—one a priest of the Buddha, one of Shiva, one of Brahma, one of Vishnu; upon their heads, tall, elaborately carved caps, and at the crest of each cap, a little glass ornament. These four sat side by side, each reciting hymns of praise to his own deity. An elderly woman and a young girl stood by, holding trays of offerings in their hands. The whole arrangement was very elaborate and ceremonious. Later we learned that this benedictory mantra-recitation had been proceeding in the palace on the occasion of my very arrival. The king said that through the merit of my coming, the subjects would prosper, the land would grow fertile—it was with this wish that the hymns were recited. The king identified himself as belonging to the lineage of Vishnu.

At half past four in the afternoon, having bathed, I came and sat on the verandah. No one spoke a word. After some two hours had passed thus, the king summoned, from the local market, a Khoja Muslim shopkeeper from the Bombay region. Questions arose: what were my needs, what

arrangements should be made for my food, and so on. I had the king informed that if he would leave me alone to rest, I should be happiest of all.

The next day, several Brahmin scholars of the royal household arrived with palm-leaf manuscripts. One manuscript was the Bhishma Parva of the Mahabharata. Written in the local script; the upper lines in Sanskrit, the lower lines an explanation of meaning in the local language. In one manuscript on paper, a Sanskrit verse was written. The king began reading that verse aloud; through much effort, we managed to recover its meaning from the distortion of pronunciation. The whole thing was instruction in yogic philosophy. Setting aside consciousness, intellect, the three-lettered "Om," the crescent-dot, and all other words and thoughts, pure consciousness alone, in bliss—this was the discipline described. I assured the king that we would send here a scholar learned in Sanskrit, who would be able to recover the corrupted and forgotten readings from their texts here and provide their proper explanation.

Meanwhile my body grew extremely tired. Every moment I realised my strength would not hold out. Fortunately Suniti is with us; his energy is tireless, his enthusiasm unquenchable. He put on a dhoti, wrapped a sash around his waist, and sat down among the "Pedanda"—that is, the Brahmins here. He had with him materials for worship from our own country; he showed them the manner of worship. Through conversation and discussion, he has roused everyone's interest.

When it became clear my body could bear no more, I fled from the royal palace and took refuge in this hermitage at Tirta Empul. Here there is no crowd of people, no burden of hospitality and attendance. All around, beautiful rocky cliffs, a valley green with crops, the ceaseless flow of water at the sacred spring bustling with the bathing of village brides, beneath a clear blue sky the ceaseless swaying of coconut fronds; I sit here on the verandah, sometimes writing, sometimes simply gazing before me. Just then a motor-car suddenly arrived and stopped. The king of Gianyar and a Dutch official of this district got down. I am invited to his house. At least one night must be spent there. In the course of conversation, the subject of the Mahabharata naturally arose. Whatever portions of the Mahabharata are still to be found here, he recited them after much thought. What portions remain, he wishes to know. Here there exist only: Adi Parva, Virata Parva, Udyoga Parva, Bhishma Parva, Ashramavasa Parva, Mushala Parva, Prasthanika Parva, Swargarohana Parva.

Upon the tales of the Mahabharata, the hearts of this land's people have made their dwelling. In their pleasures and delights, in poetry and song, in performance and daily life, all the characters of the Mahabharata live on, variously and vividly. Arjuna is their ideal man. Here I offer one example of how the stories of the Mahabharata have been transformed. Shikhandi of the Sanskrit

Mahabharata has here taken the name Srikanti. Srikanti is Arjuna's wife. She assisted, standing before Arjuna in the war-chariot, in the slaying of Bhishma. This Srikanti is here the model of a devoted wife.

The king of Gianyar requested me that tonight he wishes to discuss with me the lost portions of the Mahabharata and other mythological matters. I told him of Suniti; Suniti will be able to give him proper scriptural information.

One matter concerning India's geographical memory keeps stirring in my mind. Among the list of rivers, the names of the Indus and the Sutlej and other rivers of the Punjab are absent, and the name of the Brahmaputra too is missing. Yet I see the names of the principal rivers of the south. From this one may gather that in that age, the Punjab region, repeatedly ravaged and occupied by Scythians, Huns, Greeks, and Persians, had perhaps become somewhat estranged from India in learning and civilisation; on the other hand, the eastern lands blessed by the Brahmaputra river had not yet, in that time, become properly integrated into Hindu India.

So much, then, for the account of this place. As I find my own condition, I must now curtail my travels here.

31st August, 1927. Karangasem. Bali

11

To my dear one,

Rathi, Bali is a small island, and for that very reason there is about it such a finished completeness of arrangement. Trees and groves, hills and streams, temples and images, cottages and rice-fields, market-place and thoroughfare—all seem woven into a single fabric. Nothing incongruous strikes the eye anywhere. The Dutch Government has forbidden outside manufacturers to come to this island; missionaries too have scarcely any access here. Foreigners find it difficult to purchase land here, and cannot even buy it for cultivation. Arab Muslims, Khoja Muslims of Gujarat, Chinese traders—all carry on their buying and selling here, yet this does not clash with the surrounding harmony. Along the banks of the Ganges, twelve temple-spires have brought shame upon the sacred river by the grievous discord they have created upon the breast of Bengal—but here it is not so. The governance of the village lies wholly in the hands of the villagers themselves. The methods of irrigation and agriculture practised here are of the highest excellence. The quantity of produce these people yield from their harvests far surpasses that of other lands.

They weave cloth of many colours and intricate craft. That is to say, they never leave the body uncovered by wrapping some dirty rag about the waist. Hence, wherever for some reason a crowd gathers, the scene becomes charming through this gathering of many colours. The upper bodies of the women remain uncovered. When questioned on this matter, they say, "Are we then fallen women, that we should cover our breasts?" It is said that in Bali it is only the courtesans who cover their breasts. On the whole, the physical grace and facial beauty of the men and women here are good. I have not yet seen anyone here who is ungainly fat or wasted thin. The lush green nature of this land, the pale-golden, well-formed cattle of this place, and the healthy, robust, contented, cheerful-natured people of this land—all have blended together. Viewed as a picture, such a place is very rare indeed upon this earth.

It grieves me exceedingly that Nandalal did not come here; never again will he find such an opportunity elsewhere. I recall that some years ago, a renowned American artist wrote to me in a letter that he had never seen such a country anywhere else. There are things here worthy of an artist's eye at every turn. Because there is abundance of food, the common villager has naturally

been able to succeed in adorning his household customs, ceremonies, and furnishings with artistic grace. Nowhere did I see any sign of neglect or carelessness. In village after village, everywhere, dance, song, and drama proceed continually; the subjects of these dramas are drawn mostly from the Mahabharata. From this one may understand that the villagers' provision for the stomach's food and the mind's food is both ample. Along the roadside, on every hand, one finds various images and shrines. There is no mark of poverty; not a single beggar came before my eyes up to this point. Seeing these villages of this land, I thought—here indeed is a true Sriniketan. The entire life of the village is complete in every direction.

In this country the chief element of celebration is dance. Just as the coconut groves here sway in the sea-breeze, so too are the men and women of this whole land stirred by the breeze of dance. Every nation has its own particular path of self-expression. On the day Bengal's heart was stirred, it easily found in kirtan-singing a channel for its welling emotion; even now that has not entirely vanished. Here, when the life-force of these people wishes to speak, it breaks into dance. Women dance, men dance. I have watched their folk-drama performances; from beginning to end, in coming and going, in battle and conflict, in the expression of love, even in buffoonery—everything is dance. Those who properly understand the language of that dance can, I imagine, follow the thread of the story correctly. That day we watched a dance at a certain palace here. A little later we learned that the subject of this dance-drama was the tale of Shalva and Satyavati. From this one understands that it is not merely the surge of feeling but the narration of events too that these people shape into the form of dance. The outward form of every human event is movement, coming and going. If one wishes to render some extraordinary event visible, it is fitting to give completeness of form to its movement through the graceful harmony of rhythm. That legend which in poetry is meant only to be heard, these people have made a thing to be seen with the eye alone. The vehicle of poetry is speech; the rhythmic portion of that speech is governed by the universal law of music; but its portion of meaning is artificial—a mere sign created by mutual agreement in society. Poetry is the union of these two. When we hear the word "tree," those alone see a tree among whom there exists an agreed understanding on this point. Likewise, in the dance of these people, if there were only rhythm, narrative description would not proceed—there is also a sign-language; it is by the union of these two that their dance exists. In this dance, restraining speech, they speak with the whole body—in gesture and in devotional song. The form of battle I see in their dance is not possible in any actual battlefield. But if in some heaven there be such a law that one must fight in rhythm, such a fight that if the rhythm breaks it counts as defeat, then it would be a battle exactly of this kind. Those in whose minds this discord with reality breeds disrespect or amusement ought, by the same token, to laugh when reading Shakespeare's plays—for there too, one falls fighting in metre, one dies dying in metre. In cinema there exists movement joined with form; to turn that opportunity into true art, the narrative must be made to stand up as dance. It goes without saying that objects we in our country call "nautch" and the like are not the model for this dance. In Japan I have seen the performance of historical drama in the Kabuki style; there is speech in it, true, but its gestures

and movements are wholly of the manner of dance—its power is wondrous indeed. When in drama we employ rhythmic, metrical speech, if the accompanying movements and gestures are left in their ordinary, natural manner, it becomes incongruous—of this there is no doubt. It is evident even in the name that in our country there was once a time when dramatic performance was, in its entirety, chiefly dance. Those who come to watch a play are called, in the Western hemisphere, the audience—that is, listeners. But India has called drama drishya-kavya—that is, poetry given, through its medium, for the pleasure of the eye; and it is for this very purpose of giving that visual delight that acting exists.

This, then, is performance through dance. But pure dance also exists here. The night before last, that was to be seen at the palace of Gianyar. Two beautifully adorned little girls—upon their crowned heads clusters of flowers that sway at the slightest movement—began to dance together to the accompaniment of the gamelan orchestra. This instrumental music does not correspond exactly to ours. Our country's water-chime music strikes me as mere child's play of music by comparison. But that very thing seems, in the music of these people, to attain a grave, spacious, skilfully wrought, multi-instrumented, variegated form. Their ragas and raginis correspond to nothing of ours; the part that does correspond is the sound of their mridanga, accompanied also by cymbals. Bells small and large form the principal element of their music. It is not like the new style of concert-drumming that has arisen in our theatre-halls; nor yet is it like the harmony of many instruments in European music. A fundamental tonal composition, something like the sound of bells, comes to the ear; and with it various instruments produce various sounds that seem woven together into a single tapestry of craft. Though the whole is altogether distinct from anything of ours, still it is very sweet to hear. Even Europeans find no objection to enjoying this music.

The two little girls danced to the gamelan music; their beauty was exceedingly enchanting. In every limb, in the whole body, what grace, what variety, what delicate refinement, what effortless play there was in the rhythmic undulation! In other dances one sees the dancer moving her body deliberately; watching these two, it seemed rather that the two bodies were themselves fountains of dance, spontaneously welling up. After the age of twelve these girls are no longer permitted to dance; after twelve, such easy, delicate undulation of the body is no longer possible.

That same evening, at the palace, we witnessed another spectacle—the performance of masked dancers. From the masks we had brought from Japan, it is quite evident that mask-making is a specialised art of skill. It requires considerable talent. Just as every one of our faces has an individual character, so too does it have a class character. A particular mould and manner of

expression indicate one class or another of our faces. The skilled craftsman who makes masks binds that class-nature into the mask. He gathers together, in one particular mould, the emotional variety of that particular class of face. When the actor puts on that mask, we can see at once—not one particular person merely, but a whole class of people of a particular disposition. Ordinarily, the actor shapes his gestures according to the emotion. But in the mask, the expression of the face has been fixed and bound beforehand. Therefore the actor's task becomes that of shaping his bodily gestures to harmonise with the mask. The fundamental melodic line is fixed; the variations must be rendered such that each note explains that fixed theme, with nothing incongruous. This is what I saw in this performance.

As for the vocal music accompanying the performance here, what I have heard cannot rightly be called music at all. To our ears it sounds exceedingly discordant and harsh. Here we are, after all, close to the village; yet I have never heard anyone here, alone or in a group, singing songs bound together in melody. In our own villages, when the moon rises, it is not conceivable that no song should arise somewhere. Here, in the evening sky, the waxing crescent moon appears above the heads of the coconut trees, the cocks crow in the village, the dogs bark—but nowhere is there any song of man.

One thing I have repeatedly noted and observed here is the self-restraint of the crowd. That day, when the performance was going on at the palace of Gianyar, there was an unrestrained gathering of people on every side. I called Sunity and said, why is it that one does not hear the crying of infants in the mothers' laps? By what wondrous discipline does even the female voice remain so utterly silent? I recall how, in the theatres of Calcutta, the chattering of women and the crying of children overwhelm comedy and tragedy alike like a flood, raising what discordant waves of incivility. That day here too I saw an infant or two in a woman's lap, but they did not cry—why, I wonder.

One thing was seen here that I have not seen anywhere else. The women here wear no ornaments. Occasionally I have seen a single bangle on someone's wrist, and even that was not gold.

Piercing the ear, they wear a small roll of dried palm-leaf. It occurs to me that perhaps such ear-ornaments are to be seen even in the Ajanta paintings. The remarkable thing is that in all their other work these people show no scarcity, but rather an abundance, of ornamentation. Wherever one looks, in stone, in wood, in cloth, in various metals, they have scattered varied ornament throughout the whole land—only upon the bodies of their women is there no ornament at all.

In our country it is generally seen that the principal seat of ornamented objects is in the old cities where Muslim or Hindu influence was concentrated—places such as Delhi, Agra, Dhaka, Kashi, Madura, and the like. Here it did not seem to be so. Here artistic work is scattered, more or less everywhere and among all classes of people. This means that the people here are not working to the order of the wealthy, but out of their own delight adorn their own surroundings. Somewhat as in Japan. The reason is that within the narrow confines of a small island, ideas and knowledge do not take long to spread. Besides, there is national unity among these people. In that homogeneous cast of mind one sees an equality of capability. It is a natural characteristic of any island that its people, being surrounded by the sea, can for a long time concentrate their particular skill without disturbance, and preserve it. In our own vastly extended India, whatever arises abundantly at one time is, at another time, scattered and lost. Hence in our country we have Ajanta, but it clings only to the age of Ajanta; we have Konark, but only in the age of Konark; they could not carry themselves forward to the present age. Not only that—metaphysical knowledge is the chief treasure of the Indian mind, but far away, in the age of the Upanishads or of Shankaracharya, it became fixed in fragments here and there. In our own age we only recite that same store, but its living stream of creation has become severed. Though completely independent of India, and though so many centuries have passed, the reason that so many things of India still exist here in this fashion is that this is an island; here nothing can easily go astray. Wealth may be lost; one thing may become overlaid by another, but the substance still remains. It is for this reason that we hope to find here, in pure form, many things of ancient India. Perhaps

the dance and the dance-based performance here belong to that same category. The kings here are called "Arya." I believe the meaning is this: the royal dynasty, knowing themselves to be of Aryan lineage, did not regard themselves as kin to the native inhabitants. Therefore, if one investigates the arts and ceremonies that continue to this day within the households of the kings here, one may find many things now lost and forgotten in our own country.

Once, upon this small island, there were many kings; some of them, in the fear of imminent defeat during the Dutch invasion, died in mass suicides, thousands upon thousands, group by group. Even now, the few who hold royal titles are like old, precious chandeliers in which the lamps no longer burn. They have their palaces and their finery, and wherever they reside, that place is called the "city." But the difference between this "city" and the village is like the difference between siblings—they dwell in the same house; there is no wall between them. In modern India, in matters of arts and crafts and much else, there is a great disparity between city and village. The lamp that the city lights does not send its light out to fall upon the village. It is as though the wealth of the country has been divided into portions, and with the share that has fallen to the village, it is impossible to maintain custom and ceremony. For this reason, the

country as a whole cannot together preserve and nurture any art, any learning. Thus, when the city-dweller thinks of the country, he knows only the city as the country; the villager does not even know how to think of the country at all. Here in Bali, however far and wide we wander in our motor-cars—through rivers, hills, forests, cornfields and hamlets—city and village seem to be joined together in close intimacy; it seems as though the whole wealth of these people is scattered among all of them alike.

I have already spoken of the gamelan music. Meanwhile, I have had occasion to think about this matter. That these people do not sing songs easily and naturally among themselves is because of their lack of vocal music. What they play with their ting-ting-tung-tang is, in truth, without song—it has rhythm. In various instruments they simply give voice to the beats of the rhythm. Some instruments that give this beat are much like drums—little tone, mostly noise; some instruments are made of metal,

producing sustained tone. It is not possible for these metal instruments to hold a sustained note, nor is it necessary that they should, for sustained notes are for singing—in the discrete-note instruments, they only give the beat of the rhythm. In truth, these people sing not with the throat but with the whole body; their dance is theirs to sing, as it were, with every limb; their dance is like the twist and turn of a sustained note given at every step—not exuberant and leaping like the dance of foreign lands. That is, their dance is not like the pattering downpour of monsoon rain, but like the rippling flow of a stream. What rhythm displays is unity achieved by joining together the segments of time; what song displays is unity achieved by completing the indivisible wholeness of feeling. Therefore I say: for these people, their music is rhythm, and their dance is song. In our country and in Europe there exists song-based performance; in this country there exists dance-based performance.

Meanwhile I have made the acquaintance of several Dutch officials here. One particular characteristic of theirs struck my eye. It is not that these people lack sufficient dominion over the subject race—that is not so—but I have not observed in their personal conduct the arrogance of power. They can mix easily with the people here. Intermarriage between the two races occurs regularly, and the children of such marriages are not disowned by their paternal lineage. There are here many high-ranking Dutch officials who are of mixed blood; they are not objects of contempt. When I asked how it was possible to treat the people here with such easy, natural regard, recognising them as fellow human beings, one Dutchman told me: "Those who have vast armies, vast fleets of warships, vast wealth, vast empire—deep within, they always carry in their minds the thought that they are something immensely great; therefore, to enter through a small door, they must contract themselves excessively. We have never had the leisure to know

ourselves as being so tremendously great. That is why we can enter anywhere with ease; that is why mixing with everyone comes naturally to us." So be it.

[7th September, 1927]

12

To my dear one,

Amiya, today is our last day on the island of Bali. We have taken shelter in a bungalow atop a hill called Mundu. Throughout my wanderings through Bali, all the country I have seen has been cultivated, inhabited land; the villages are enclosed and shaded within dense dark-green groves of coconut, betel-nut, mango, tamarind, and drumstick trees. Coming here, I saw for the first time, spread along the flank of the hill, an ancient forest. It is somewhat like the Shillong hills. Below, in gentle terraces, lie the rice-fields; through a gap in the hills one catches a glimpse, far off, of the sea. Here, the distant views are mostly veiled in mist. There is a slight film of indistinctness in the sky, like the ancient history of this place. It is now the night of the waxing moon, but even on such a night the moon here does not reveal itself so completely as it does to the sky-gazers of our own country; its moonlight is like a language I do not know very well.

For these past several days this country has been utterly absorbed in a single great funerary rite. There has been a throng of people, invited and uninvited alike. So many photographers, so many cinema-men, so many bands of transient wanderers. The travellers' rest-houses are filled to overflowing. The dust of motor-cars and their fumes have dimmed the very sky. Tomorrow the ferry-steamer will turn back toward Java, and so today the crowds of returning travellers are hastening restlessly along every road and byway. You may well ask why there is such a commotion.

The people of Bali who are Hindu, who call their own religion Agama, regard the rite of shraddha as a very great festival indeed. For, according to proper rites, when the dead are given their final rites, the soul, becoming mist, comes to the earth and takes a new birth; then, receiving purification after purification, it is at last, in the fullness of time, released into the supreme liberation of Shiva's realm.

This time we have come for the shraddha of those whom the family has determined to have attained divinity, and hence there is so much greater ceremony. It has been many years since there was so much ceremony, and everyone doubts whether it will ever happen again. For the age has taken up its shears and gone round the world seeking to trim away the excess of ritual; its sole enthusiasm is directed toward reducing the abundance of paraphernalia.

The people here say the expense of this grand ceremony will be, in the local currency, nearly forty thousand rupees—in our currency, fifty thousand. This sum seems, to everyone, exceedingly large. In our country, fifty thousand rupees for the shraddha of a great man is nothing much at all. But the difference is this: our shraddha's expense is incurred not so much for pomp as for the earning of merit. Its chief object is charity, for the welfare of the departed soul. Here too the shraddha does not lack honorific gifts and offerings to the resident Brahmin pandits, but the most costly portion of it all is the pageantry and adornment—all of which is burned entirely to ashes on the pyre. That these people have no true inward approval of destroying the body in this manner can be understood from one incident of that day's ceremony. A black bull-effigy, with the corpse inside its belly, was being carried along the road; and as it passed, there was jostling and pushing among the different groups of the funeral procession. It seemed as though there were an attempt to turn it back, an unwillingness. The bearers were chased, made to circle round and round. Here indeed one sees that discord between the heart's own inclination and Agama—the religion that has come from outside. It is Agama that has won; the body has become ash.

This ceremony took place in the household of the king of a place called Ubud. When he learned, upon being introduced to Sunity, that she was a Brahmin learned in the scriptures, he informed her that it was very unlikely that such a shraddha would ever again be performed in this country with such complete and comprehensive ceremony; therefore, if Sunity would recite the Vedic mantras of the shraddha according to proper rite, he would be gratified. Sunity, in the assembly of Brahmins, lit the sacred fire and, reciting "Madhu vata ritayate" and verses from the Katha Upanishad and the like, completed the auspicious rite. Many hundreds of years ago, one day, this shraddha ceremony had begun on this island with the chanting of Vedic mantras; now, many hundred years later, in this shraddha, that same mantra was perhaps sounded for the last time. In between, how much forgetting, how much corruption there had been! The king had asked Sunity what should be given her in honour of her priestly service. Sunity replied that to accept payment for such work was contrary to the custom of her Brahmin lineage. At the conclusion of the ceremony the king presented her with a costly Balinese-made garment and a seat of honour.

There is a custom here that if any member of a household dies while his elders are still living, then, unless those elders themselves die, there is no possibility of the deceased's proper obsequies. For this reason the corpse must be kept until the elders die. Thus it happens that the cremation rites of many bodies here take place all at once. The dead must wait a long time in this fashion.

There is another reason for this long delay before the final rites—the elaborate paraphernalia and vast expense required for the rites. Preparation for it takes a long time. I have heard,

therefore, that here a special year comes only once in several years, and only then does this great funerary rite occur.

To carry the bier, a great tall vehicle, something like a chariot, is constructed, and a large number of bearers together carry it to the cremation ground. This vehicle is called a wadah. Just as our own country's peacock-palanquin is adorned with the figure of a peacock, so this wadah of theirs bears, upon its body, an enormous garuda-face; on either side spread two vast wings, beautifully wrought. One cannot but marvel at the artistic skill. It is very difficult to take in, all at once within the mind, the whole manifold apparatus of this shraddha; what most draws the eye and the mind is the unceasing flow of the crowd. From far and near, from every direction, women bear upon their heads all manner of offerings, walking in long processions along the road. Far and wide, in village after village, wherever the offering-laden bearers are preparing to set forth, there in the shade of the village trees the gamelan plays and a separate little festival of its own proceeds. The common folk, group by group, bring their own offerings and deposit them at the site of the sacrifice.

The offerings are not brought in any careless fashion—all are elaborately and beautifully arranged. That day we saw the king of a city called Ieng-Ieng send his offering upon the heads of many bearers. At the very end came the elderly ladies of his palace. What splendour, what adornment, what modest grace of aristocracy! Thus, along many a road, wound this unbroken, rippling procession of festivity, variegated in a thousand colours. The eye's delight, gazing and gazing, never comes to an end.

What strikes me most of all is how blessed is this coming together, this joyful union of so many people, drawn by the pull of such a far-reaching festival. This union is not merely the gathering of a crowd because a fair has been set up. This union has a wondrous and beautiful form of its own. In village after village, in household after household, many people, over many days, sitting together, have with their own hands brought this image of festivity to full perfection. This is a joint creation of many people, in the sense that as various people sit together, matching their rhythms on various instruments, matching their tones, they go on building up together a single, unbroken image of sound. There is no discourtesy anywhere, no ugliness. Amid such a dense crowd of so many varied people, not even the faintest hint of quarrel was to be seen anywhere. The presence of women in the crowd is very great indeed, yet it has given rise to not the slightest trouble. Wherever the joyful union of many people blossoms in beauty free from all taint—it is precisely there, I think, that we behold the goddess of true civilisation enthroned; wherever the red-turbaned police are not needed to prevent discord; wherever the union of men, in the joy of their hearts, is not merely peaceful and secure but is, of its own accord, filled from within with beauty and abundance—there indeed lies the highest excellence of civilisation. I earnestly wish

that this very thing might come to pass, in just such perfect completeness, in my own country. But how simple a thing it seems—this spectacle we witnessed by the roadside of this small island! Yet how much labour across how many ages, how many inner knots loosened, before even this much could become natural and effortless. To gather together is not difficult; to become one is difficult indeed. To bring that unity to beauty, through the creative power of all, through sacrifice—how great a labour of strength that is! Our joint work must be given, by all together, the form of a festival. Beauty in joy must be expressed through various forms upon various occasions. In that expression, if everyone continues to contribute their own will, their own strength, then gradually the jagged edges within us wear smooth, just as the pebbles at the bottom of a stream become rounded through the continuous flow of its waters. Many of our ascetics believe that knowledge and works, in themselves, through disciplined effort, suffice. But in the creation wrought by the Divine Architect, He has shown that it is not merely inherent knowledge and the faculty of action, but in rasa—delight—that creation finds its supreme fulfilment. In the desert, whatever power exists is entirely a power of opposition, a power of destruction. When rasa arrives there, only then does life arrive; then all powers, drawn by that delight, cause flowers to bloom and fruit to ripen; it takes on the form of festivity in beauty and in blessing.

It is now eight o'clock. Two or three motor-cars have gathered before the veranda. Suren and Sunity together are loading the cars with bags and satchels and bundles of various sizes. They are setting off ahead of the rest, headed toward the ferry-crossing. The sun has fallen upon the dark-green forest of the nearby hills; the distant hills are veiled in a pale-blue mist. The sea-belt of the southern coast is dim, like a mirror clouded by breath. Close by, amid the bamboo-groves clustered around the hill-girt village, the branches of the areca-palms sway in the winter breeze. Women are bringing water in earthen pots from the spring. In the long valley beyond the paddy-fields, on the flank of the near hill, glimpses of habitation appear among the gaps of dense trees. The coconut trees, lifting their fronds like cupped hands toward the cloudless sky, drink in the sunlight.

At the moment of taking leave from this place, I find myself thinking: the island is beautiful, its people too are good, and yet my heart does not wish to build its nest here. Across the sea, the call of India comes and reaches my heart. It is not merely because I gained my acquaintance with the world through India from my very childhood that it is so; in the sky, in the air, in the light, in the rivers, in the plains of India, I have seen a certain largeness of nature; my mind, like an iron filing, has for ever been drawn to it, as if by a magnet. There I encounter much sorrow, the shape of misery is visible on every side in the habitations of men; and yet, surpassing all this, in the sky of that land I hear a voice of ages beyond memory, in which there is the savour of one vast liberation. I have nowhere else seen, on the lower plane of India, so many bonds of pettiness, so much clamour of triviality, so much mockery of degradation; and equally, on the higher plane,

nowhere else such a throne-seat of the Infinite, such an unbarred invitation of the Boundless. Even now, the primeval invocatory sound of the hermitages of a distant age seems to breathe eternally, ever afresh, in that sky. And so, to my mind, this tranquil dawn of today points, even here, its finger of light toward that very direction.

So be it.

[8th September, 1927]

Postscript: Whatever image awakened in my eye, whatever mood floated across my mind, as I passed swiftly, glancing here and there, I have set down—but this must not, therefore, be taken as a true and full account of Bali. This picture may perhaps be called merely a fringe of the outer covering. But upon the outer covering the impress of the inner feeling is forever falling, is it not? Therefore this covering cannot be dismissed as no true acquaintance of the people. That covering which, like an artificial disguise, overlays the truth from above—that alone deceives; but that covering which, in the restless life of every moment, in its rising and falling, its bending and slipping, its swaying and trembling, of itself takes on a certain form—that, on the whole, may be trusted. In the houses and temples here, in dress and ornament, in festival and ceremony, the very first thing that strikes one forcibly is the natural creative energy present in the mind of the whole race. A Western artist has lived here for three years; he says that the art of these people has never come to a standstill—it advances, of its own momentum, along its own path—yet the artist himself remains utterly unaware of this fact concerning himself. He says that until quite recently there was Chinese influence here, but, as one watches, it is being naturally worn away, and the Balinese spirit has begun to express itself in its own tongue. There is such effortless mastery in their work that, of the one or two modern sculptures he has seen, he firmly believes that were they sent to a European art exhibition, the people there would be startled. This, then, is the natural power of these people to bring forth form. And beyond that, it is this very power that gives shape

to their society. In festival and ceremony, through various customs, these people are engaged in beautifully expressing this very will to create form. Where this creative impulse is constantly active, there upon the whole nation's face is manifest a certain radiance and joy. And yet, one cannot say that every part of their way of life is admirable. Among it there is much that wounds joy—much brutality, much cruelty, in blind superstition. If a woman dies barren, the belief here is that, a rope tied round her neck as though she were bound for the realm of the dead, she is left hanging for ever on a barren tree. If a woman gives birth to twins, one son and one daughter, then immediately after the birth she herself must carry her own bedding to the cremation

ground; the family carries the twin children behind her. There, with branches and leaves, some sort of hut is roughly made, in which she must pass three lunar months. For two months the doors of the village temple remain closed, and all manner of expiatory worship is performed to appease misfortune. Food is sent to the woman in confinement only now and then; during those days, all manner of intercourse with her is forbidden. Within the depths of this beautiful island's eternal spring and unceasing festival, blind ignorance has created superstitions with a thousand terrors, just as it does in household after household even in India. Where there is no critique of, no faith in, that liberated knowledge which frees mankind from such fear and cruelty, who is there to save man from self-degradation and self-torment? Yet it is not right to make these things the chief object of one's gaze. To the astronomer, the sun's spots are not hidden; yet for the common man, its light alone suffices. To call the sun spotted is not to speak falsehood, yet to call the sun luminous is also to speak the truth. Those scientists who lengthen the list of facts, the moment they turn their pen's edge upon the ferocity of fang and claw in the animal kingdom, it seems to imagination that the life of beasts is merely a vehicle of fear. But greater than all such excesses is that life-force which, in its own spontaneous, active impulse, is joyous within itself; even the skill and effort of self-protection from the predator's claws is itself a part of that very joyous vital process. In a monthly journal called Inter-Ocean, one writer's description gave an account of the sorrows of Bali's women; in that same journal another writer

has viewed with joy the artistically skilled, festival-loving, beauty-cherishing nature of this same people. In the light of his way of seeing, one understands that the stain of shame, though not untrue, is also not the whole truth. We have wandered much upon this island; in villages, on roads, in markets, in cornfields, at temple-gates, in the grounds of festival, beneath the spring, I have seen many of Bali's women; everywhere I found them healthy, well-nourished, well-mannered, cheerful of countenance—among them I saw no trace whatsoever of suffering, insult, or cruelty. If one digs deep and asks for news, one will doubtless find much material for reproach; but to believe that stringing together, on a single thread, scraps of such gathered dirt will make the truth clear—that is not to be trusted. So be it.

[Surabaya, Java. 9th September, 1927. Written to Sri Amiyachandra Chakravarti]

13

To my dear one,

Bou-ma, we have crossed over from Bali and come down at the town of Surabaya, in the island of Java. This place is the chief haunt of foreign merchants. Sugar, the greatest product of Java, is being shipped from this small island to lands near and far. There was once an age when the burden of distributing sugar to the world lay upon India's shoulders. Today it is by buying sugar in this market of Java that the sweetmeats of Bhim Chandra Nag in Bowbazar are made. Whatever gifts Mother Earth may naturally bestow, if one relies solely upon them in this modern age, one is bound to be cheated; what matters now is how much man can extract by his own contrivance—that is the real question. Cows give only so much milk of their own accord as does not suffice for any grand sacrificial enterprise; before it can even fill the bellies of a household's children and reach the shops of Bowbazar, it is snatched away and runs dry. Those who are master milkmen know by what tricks and breeding-methods a cow's yield of milk can be increased. This green little island is, in the hands of the Dutch, like the milch-cow of Mother Earth's own wish-fulfilling bounty. They know by what method this cow may never, even for a moment, run dry, but remain perpetually full of milk; the art of extracting the whole of it is also entirely within their grasp. Our own rulers, too, have set up their dairy-farms in India; with tea and jute this long while their markets have flourished—but meanwhile, our own ploughed fields have grown lifeless, and the tongues of our farmers now hang out from exhaustion. After all this time, they have at last, quite suddenly, cast their eyes upon our crop-failing misfortune. A commission has been convened; its report too will duly appear. Whether the beggar's broken cart-wheel of a hope will be moved by the pull of a report, I know not; but the day-labourers needed for building roads will certainly have no difficulty in finding wages. In short, the Dutch have shown themselves here to be extremely skilful in the field of agriculture; thereby the people here have secured their livelihood, and the rulers' trade too flourishes well. Within this, the underlying truth is this—

that to use the products of one's country in order to awaken love for one's country is a good thing; but to increase the power of producing one's country's goods in order to awaken love for one's country—that is the sound and solid thing. Here is where learning is needed; even if that learning comes from abroad, its acceptance will not diminish our race but will, on the contrary, preserve our very existence.

For three days in Surabaya we were guests in the house of a gentleman who is a prominent figure of the royal house of Surakarta, but who has of his own will renounced his hereditary right and come to this city to engage in trade. He deals in the export of sugar, from which he derives immense profit. A truly excellent man, an embodiment of the dignity and courtesy befitting an ancient noble lineage. His son has received a modern education—modest, gentle, of pleasing countenance—and it was to him that the charge of our hospitality was entrusted. I had feared greatly lest, under the pressure of unremitting hospitality, all rest and leisure should be utterly destroyed. But we were spared that ordeal. They had set aside one whole wing of their mansion entirely for our own use. We lived in seclusion; fifteen-sixteenths of this flawless hospitality remained, as it were, behind the scenes. Only at mealtimes did we see each other at all. It felt as though I myself were the master of the house, and they but occasional guests. Among all the arrangements of that reception, the greatest thing of all was freedom and leisure.

There is here an art-society, mainly European in character—something like a club for the local merchants. As with the music societies of Calcutta, so it is here. Just as, in Calcutta gatherings, the claim of music is no greater than that, here, the claim of art-appreciation is no greater. I had been requested to say something on the subject of Art here; I explained as best I could. One day, at the house of our host, many prominent local persons had gathered. That evening it fell to me to answer their questions. Sunity too lectured to their assembly one day; everyone was very pleased.

The Indians here also, one evening, invited me to tea, along with the local officials and many others, as a mark of hospitality. That day I received some honorarium as well. In this manner our days passed here, entirely within the walls of this household. In the courtyard there are many trees and creeper-arbours—mango trees, sapodilla, custard-apple. The variety of mango they call madhu is, by their reckoning, especially sweet. This year, since there was not sufficient rainfall, the mangoes are falling, unripe, from the trees. Here, at meal-times, I have eaten mangoes such that, were I at home, I would think the money spent on buying them wasted and the labour of cutting and eating them merely tiresome fatigue—but here I feel no reluctance whatever in indulging in them.

Beneath the shade of this creeper-arbour in the courtyard, our hostess generally spends her day. Around her, children make noise and play, together with their old nurses. The women, sitting here and there upon cloth spread out, are engaged in the beautiful stamp-work batik craft prevalent in this land. The many currents of household work revolve around this shaded, secluded courtyard.

The day before yesterday, after a long journey by rail and after two hours of an afternoon oppressed by the sun's heat, we reached Surakarta at three o'clock. Here lies the greatest royal house of Java. The Dutch have taken away the royal power of this dynasty, but they could not take away its dignity. We are staying at the house of a family belonging to this very lineage; their title is Mangkunegara, and this branch of theirs has taken shelter in Surabaya.

We ourselves occupy one secluded wing of the palace. Here there is ample space, sufficient means of comfort, and no burden of excessive hospitality. The palace is vast and much subdivided. Where we are staying is one grand courtyard, paved in white marble, rows of wooden pillars supporting a sloping wooden roof above. The heraldic colours of this royal house are green and yellow; hence the pillars and roof of this courtyard are painted in green and gold. At one end of the courtyard is arranged the gamelan orchestra. Its variety is no less than its quantity. Instruments of seven

tones and of five tones, of metal, of many kinds and sizes, played with mallets. The shape of the drum is exactly like that of our own country's; the beat and style of playing are also of much the same manner. Besides these there are flutes, and stringed instruments played with a bow.

The king himself came to the station to receive us. At dinner that evening, we had good conversation with him. Young in age, with a bright, intelligent countenance. He has received a modern education in the Dutch language; he speaks and understands a little English. Before we sat down to dine, music struck up at the corner of the veranda, and along with it we heard the local song. In that song there is no division, as in ours, into asthayi and antara. The same melodic phrase is repeated over and over; whatever variety exists is in the instrumental playing. As I noted in an earlier letter, their instrumental music is intended to keep the rhythm. In our own country, the tabla and similar rhythm-instruments are pitched to the sa of the very octave in which the song is sung; here, all the notes of the melody exist within the rhythm-instrument itself. Suppose someone were to sing, over and over, the single line "Do not go now, it is still night" from Bhairavi—and if the rhythm were then given on various instruments in the tune of Bhairavi itself, and if that beat, joined thus, were made to explain the raga Bhairavi—that is precisely how it is here. If one tests it, one will find it pleasant to hear; the dance of tone in this metal-instrument music makes the gathering come wonderfully alive.

After eating we returned again to sit upon the veranda. Two young girls came, to the beat of the dance-rhythm, and sat side by side upon the floor. A very beautiful picture. Their dress and adornment were exquisitely elegant. Golden-carved crowns upon their heads; upon their necks a half-moon-shaped golden necklace; in their ears golden coiled serpent-earrings; on their upper

arms a kind of golden armlet, which they call kilat-bahu. Their shoulders and both arms bare; from breast to waist a tight-fitted bodice interwoven with gold and green; from the waistband two lengths of cloth hung down in front, swaying like a pleated fold. From waist to feet, wrapped like a sari, a garment richly patterned in the batik craft; the very sight of it recalls at once

the images of Ajanta. I have never before seen such harmonious simplicity, so devoid of excess.

The clumsy, ill-fitting garments worn by our own dancing-girls, the baijis, over their tight bodices and pyjamas, have always struck me as exceedingly ugly. Their abundant jewellery, their voluminous skirts and veils, together with their exceedingly heavy bodies, give at first sight the impression of some huge burden, dressed up. And then, from time to time, betel-chewing while dancing, chatting with attendants, various expressive movements of eyebrow and eye that seem almost contemptuous—not so much a fault of morality as of manner. The dance I have seen in Japan and in Java is as flawless in its modesty as it is in its beauty. We saw how the tender bodies of these two young girls seemed wholly possessed by the disembodied spirit of dance itself. As poetry has taken possession of speech, so the unspeakable has taken possession of gesture.

I have heard that many European spectators do not much care for this excessive delicacy and refinement of the dance. Being accustomed to strong stimulation, they find this dance monotonous. For my part, I found not the least deficiency of variety in it; if it does not strike the eye because it is not too obtrusive, then the fault lies with the eye's own habituation. I could only feel, throughout, that this is a perfect creation of artistic beauty, in which the human being, as mere material, has utterly disappeared into it. When the dance was over and these girls came and sat among the musicians, they became altogether ordinary human beings. Then one could see that they had painted their bodies, decorated their foreheads with patterns, restrained the natural spontaneity of the body, and, in order to express a certain concentrated grace, had dressed themselves in very tight-fitting garments—for an ordinary person all this would be incongruous, would offend the eye. But this transformation of an ordinary human being into the realm of dance becomes itself something extraordinary.

The next morning we were invited into other parts of the palace and into the inner apartments. There we saw an exceedingly vast assembly-hall, its span marked out by rows of pillars; seeing the beauty of its immense yet perfectly proportioned architecture, I felt great delight. A proper description of all this you will doubtless get from Surendra's letters and drawings. Going into a comparatively small pavilion within the inner apartments, I saw our host and hostess seated there. The queen looked exactly like a beautiful Bengali woman—

large eyes, a gentle smile, restrained dignity of grace—all very satisfying indeed. Outside the pavilion were trees and plants, and various birds of various kinds in cages. Inside the pavilion were arranged various apparatus for music, for shadow-play, for masked performance, for puppet-dance. On a table were laid out several batik-worked cloths. From among them she asked me to choose three for myself. She also presented, to each member of my party, one such precious cloth. Such artistic work on cloth takes two or three months to complete. The palace attendants themselves are skilled in this craft.

Among the members of this royal house, it was the eldest branch who had, the previous night, invited us to their residence. There, all manner of royal ceremonial formality prevailed. For instance, just as we saw two crane-birds circling round each other in various stately gestures in a dance, so here the Resident and this king likewise extended their circling royal manoeuvres around each other. Kings and royal persons must, admittedly, preserve a certain measure of dignity from the outward viewpoint; this covers, to some extent, the ordinariness of such men, but to overdo it merely draws mocking attention, with a pointed finger, to their very ordinariness.

Last night's dance was performed by nine women together. It had as much skill as beauty, but watching it, one felt that the spontaneous enthusiasm of life that had marked the previous night's dance was absent; it was as though they were tired, dancing merely from the force of habit. Yesterday's dance had ample technical merit but could not touch the heart in the same way. One of the king's sons, sitting beside me, conversed with me; I liked him very much. Young in age, educated two years in Holland, appointed to a senior post in the military department of the Dutch government. There was a natural charm about his face and manner.

Last night, another dance took place here as well. Of the two young girls who had danced the night before, one today danced in a male mask as one of the male comic characters.

The astonishing thing was that, while fully preserving the beauty of the dance, she nonetheless, through the tone of her voice, played the buffoon to perfection in her gesture and expression. There was not the slightest incongruity between her performance and the male mask. Not the slightest flaw appeared in the beauty of her costume either. That, without in any way corrupting the elegance of the dance, its comic satire could be brought in so skilfully, struck me as truly remarkable. These people wish, above all, to express the whole content of the heart through dance itself; hence even in satire they are bound to preserve rhythm. They cannot make satire ungainly; even their demons dance. So be it.

[Surakarta. Java. 14th September, 1927. Written to Sri Pratima Devi]

14

To my dear one,

Bou-ma, in my last letter I wrote to you about the dance here, thinking that I had said all there was to say on the subject. And yet that very same night an invitation came to another dance-gathering. It was that same vastly spacious hall—broad marble flooring lit brilliantly by electric light. Before dinner, a dance-drama began—a men's dance, its subject being the combat between Indrajit and Hanuman. The king's brother took the role of Indrajit; he is a master of the art of dance. The remarkable thing is that he began learning to dance only in his mature years. It is when one is young—when the body is still supple, when the bones have not yet stiffened—that one ought to learn this dance; every joint of the body needs to move with the utmost ease, every muscle needs to gain strength effortlessly—such is the habituation required. But since the king's brother has a natural gift for dance, he needed less effort than most.

Hanuman is a wild creature; Indrajit is a highly cultured demon-king; the distinction between the two natures must be made clear in the very manner of their dancing, or else the effect is lost. The very first thing that strikes the eye is their costume. Ordinarily, in our own folk-drama, Hanuman's monkey-nature is played up to great excess, to provoke the audience's amusement. Here, by giving only a hint of Hanuman's animal nature, his humanity is thereby rendered more luminous still. It would have been no difficult matter to express Hanuman's monkey-nature through his dance by means of leaping and bounding, and by that means the whole assembly would readily have burst into raucous laughter—but the difficult task is to grant Hanuman greatness. From watching Bengal's own performances and the like, one can see that

it is his unswerving devotion and self-sacrifice that matter less to the Bengali mind than the length of his tail, the grimace of his burnt-mouth face, his very monkeyhood—these possess a greater hold over the Bengali heart. In our western regions, it is the reverse. Indeed, parents would hesitate even to name a son Hanumanprasad. We could never imagine, in Bengal, a "Hanumanchandra" or "Hanumanendra." Even the people of this country have chiefly seen the grand side of the Hanuman of the Ramayana. In the dance, I saw the form of Hanuman—a tail running from the small of the back up to the head—yet there was such dignity of bearing that there was no room at all for laughter. Everything else was wholly human. From crown to foot, the costume of Indrajit was a beautiful sight to behold. Then the two danced their duel; and simultaneously, on drums and cymbals, on gongs and bells and various instruments, and now and then in the thunderous roar of many human voices, the music grew exceedingly grave, powerful

and turbulent. And yet that music was not in the least harsh to the ear; the skilful concord of many instruments blended beautifully with its own turbulence.

The dance itself was truly wondrous. It possessed as much manliness as beauty. In this combat-drama of duel, the essential nature of the dance did not for a moment become disordered or ragged. The heroism of the Rajput warrior on our own stage, however debased and childish it may appear—this was nothing of the sort. Every gesture had a certain dignity about it. The blows of the mace, the wrestling-combat, the strike of the club—all unfolded, faultless, within the dance. Throughout it all was an unparalleled beauty, together with a stirring surge of confident manliness. Earlier here I had seen the women's dance and been enraptured by it, but by comparison with this men's dance, it now seemed slight. This has a far stronger flavour. Just as, once one has become intoxicated by the taste of Dhrupad, the mere sweetness of Thumri seems light—so it is here.

This morning at ten o'clock, our host arranged for another dance here. Two women took on male roles—the combat of Arjuna and Subala. The story may perhaps be found somewhere in the Mahabharata, though I could not recall it myself. The matter runs thus: in some garden Arjuna possessed a weapon,

which Subala had stolen; he was wandering about seeking Arjuna in order to kill him. Arjuna was disguised as a gardener. After a brief exchange of words, the two engaged in combat. Subala carried the plough-weapon of Balarama; fighting on, Arjuna managed to snatch it away before finally slaying Subala.

That the dancers were women mattered not at all; no particular effort was even made to conceal that abundant fact. For the reason that whether the dancers are male or female is a secondary matter—the primary matter for observation is the dance itself. The body was of a woman, but the fight was of a man—and it is precisely this discord that makes this strange combination all the more striking. Beneath the sheath of femininity lay the exuberance of heroic sentiment. Think of it—not tigers, not lions, but among the hibiscus and datura flowers, a fearsome slaughter, clash of horn against horn, petals scattered and torn asunder; and all the while, as though the very forest were shaking, the gamelan sounded like a violent tempest of Vaishakh, the mridanga like the rumbling of thunderclouds, in the branches of trees the clatter of woodpeckers, and in the sighing whistle of wind, its own flute.

Last of all came the king's brother. This time he danced alone. He was Ghatotkacha. Perhaps our humour-loving Bengalis have always laughed heartily at the expense of Ghatotkacha. Here, the people's minds hold Ghatotkacha in high regard. It is for this very reason that the story of the Mahabharata has, in the hands of these people, grown considerably beyond its original bounds. They have arranged, in their version, that Ghatotkacha was wedded to a woman named Bhargava. That same lady is, moreover, the daughter of Arjuna. In matters of marriage, the custom here approaches that of Europe—there is no prohibition against unions among cross-cousins on either the mother's or father's side. From the womb of Bhargava, Ghatotkacha has one son, whose name is Shashikiran. Be that as it may, the subject of today's dance was Ghatotkacha's yearning, in separation, as he remembers his beloved. Sometimes, in a mood of feverish longing, he even falls to the ground; in imagination, seeing her form in the sky, he grows restless. At last, unable to bear it any longer, he flies off to seek his beloved. There is a thing here worth considering. Unlike the European artist's convention of angels, they have not fixed a false pair of wings upon Ghatotkacha's back. With the help only of his shawl, through the very posture of the dance, he has expressed the sense of flight. This reminds one

of the poet's stage-direction in the drama Shakuntala—rathavegam natayati—"he enacts the swiftness of the chariot through dance." It becomes clear that the swiftness of the chariot was meant to be expressed through dance itself, not through an actual chariot.

How deeply, how profoundly, the stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have taken hold of the hearts and lives of the people of this country became perfectly clear in these few days. One reads in geography books that when some new species of plant or animal is introduced from abroad into a favourable region, it is not long before, before one's very eyes, it spreads to cover the whole country; indeed, even in the land from which it was originally brought, it may not have such an unbounded influence. In just such a manner, the stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata have come and settled into the very field of these people's minds, overspreading it entirely. Such a powerful awakening of the heart cannot but express itself without creating some form of art. That expression's abundant delight found visible form in the sculptural imagination of Borobudur. Today, the men and women of this land, through their very bodies, express in the form of dance the life-stories of the characters of that great epic; with every rhythmic beat their very blood is stirred by the momentum of those narratives and their emotions.

Besides this, there are performances of many kinds, most of them upon these very subjects. Outwardly, these people have been completely cut off from India for many centuries; yet all this time they have preserved this Ramayana and Mahabharata intimately, within the very heart of India itself, so to speak. The Dutch call these islands "the Dutch Indies"; in truth, they might well be called "the Vyasa Indies."

I mentioned earlier that they have named Ghatotkacha's son Shashikiran. The tradition of coining names from the Sanskrit language continues among them even to this day. Sometimes the naming turns out oddly strange. The title of the royal physician here is Kridanirmal. What we call niramaya or nirog (free from disease), they have given this same meaning to the word nirmal. Meanwhile, the word krida, in our dictionary, means "play," but here krida is used to mean "endeavour." That whose endeavour is to remove disease is thus

Kridanirmal. The watering given to a field of crops they call sindhu-amrita—"the nectar of the ocean." Here, the word sindhu itself is used to mean simply "water"; that watering which saves the field from death is sindhu-amrita, the "nectar of water." One of our host's sons is named Saroṣa, another Santoṣa. Needless to say, saroṣa here does not signify a person of irritable temper—one must understand it rather as "vigorous." The name of the king's daughter is Kusumavardhini. Names such as Anantakusuma, Jatikusuma, Kusumayudha, Kusumavrata, are also heard. There is here a use of pure and grandly sonorous Sanskrit words in personal names such as one does not find in our own country—names such as Atmasuvigya, Shastratma, Virapustaka, Viryashastra, Sahasrapravira, Viryasuvrata, Padmasushastra, Kritadhiraja, Sahasrasugandha, Purnapranata, Yashovidagdha, Chakradhiraja, Mritasanjaya, Aryasutirtha, Kritasmara, Chakradhivrata, Suryapranata, Kritavibhava.

The king in whose house we stayed that day was named Susuhunan Pakubuwono. It was at the house of one of his sons that we were invited yesterday, whose name is Abhimanyu. All these people possess natural courtesy; their gentleness is charming. There, a shadow-play performance of the Virata Parva of the Mahabharata was in progress. Shadow-play is not to be seen anywhere outside this country, and so it deserves some explanation. A screen of white cloth is stretched taut; before it burns a great oil-lamp with a bright, glowing wick; on either side are arranged, upon thin leather cut into shapes, various figures of the characters of the Mahabharata—their arms and legs strung so that they can be moved by the pull of cords. These figures are each bound to a long stick. One person, chanting in melodious tone, narrates the story, and, in accordance with that narrative, moves and sways the figures upon the screen in various postures. In harmony with the mood, the gamelan plays accompaniment. It is as though a lesson on the Mahabharata is being impressed upon the mind in a classroom, with the performance of pictures joined to the recitation of the text. Suppose that history were taught in schools this way—the schoolmaster

narrating the story while another person, a showman of puppets, went on demonstrating the principal events through puppet-performance, and

simultaneously, according to the mood, various instruments playing appropriate tunes and rhythms—what more beautiful method of teaching history could there be?

Human life, in the sway of passion and misfortune, of joy and sorrow, plays itself out, taking on various forms in sound and touch; if all of it were to be expressed through sound alone, it would become a kind of strange music; likewise, if, setting aside everything else, one had to express it solely through movement, that would become dance. Whether it be rhythmic melody or dance, it possesses a momentum, and that momentum stirs up in our consciousness a surge of feeling, keeping it powerfully awake. To make us feel any event intensely, our consciousness must be made thus quickened. The people of this country have continually, with the aid of melody and dance, kept swaying within their own consciousness the stories of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. These narratives, in a stream of delight, flow continually over the very life of these people. There is here an effort to assimilate, in every possible way, through such varied vital means, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata into their very being. What might be the finest way of taking up and retaining a subject of learning wholly as one's own—this the people of this whole country seem to have discovered together; and this discovery came naturally, out of their deep longing and joy to grasp the Ramayana and Mahabharata profoundly.

The shadow-play we saw yesterday was likewise, chiefly, dance—that is, storytelling through the language of rhythmic movement. From this one thing may be understood—that in this country dance is not for the sake of savouring its enchantment; dance is their very language. Their myths and their history speak in the very language of dance. The music of their gamelan, too, is the dance of tone. Sometimes quick, sometimes slow, sometimes powerful, sometimes soft—this music too exists not for the sake of music itself, but to give a certain narrative the accompaniment of dance-rhythm.

When I first sat down in that lamplit assembly, I could make out nothing at all of what was happening. I began to feel irritated. A little later I was taken

behind the screen. There, in that darkened chamber, the women sat watching. From this side, the figures were invisible; even the person animating the figures could not be seen—only, on the lit screen beyond, the shadow-shapes of the puppets could be seen dancing about. It was as though, upon the breast of the supine Shiva, the dance of Mahamaya proceeded. When the

Creator of the light of consciousness keeps Himself hidden behind the veil of His own creative screen, only then can we behold His creation. He alone knows Him to be true who knows that the Creator maintains an unbroken bond with His creation. Seen apart from that bond, these restless shadow-shapes seem to be sheer illusion, nothing more. Some seeker wishes to tear apart the screen and see what lies beyond—that is, to try to see the Creator by setting aside creation—but nothing could be a greater illusion than that. Watching the play of shadows, this very thought kept occurring to my mind.

When I was leaving, our host presented me with a very precious gift—a large batik-worked cloth. He said that only the sons of the royal house are permitted to wear this particular type of cloth. Hence, I could not have purchased this kind of cloth anywhere.

Our stay here has come to its end today. Tomorrow we go to Jogjakarta. There, too, in the royal palace, the customs and traditions concerning dance and song are of pure ancient lineage, yet there is a difference from what is found here. Jogjakarta is close to Borobudur—about an hour's journey by motor-car. Some five or six more days will be needed to see and take in all these things, and after that, freedom at last. So be it.

[17th September, 1927. Written to Sri Pratima Devi]

15

To my dear one,

Amiya, our sight-seeing here is now nearly at an end. Watching, step by step, the life of these people—so intimately entwined with that of India—I have felt wonder throughout. I have already written how the Ramayana and the Mahabharata remain living, in a manner most vital, within the hearts of these people. Precisely because they are living, this material is no complete repetition of any written literature. Through the long course of these people's own thought and imagination, they have undergone many transformations. The chief reason for this is that they have used the Mahabharata daily, for the practical needs of their own way of life. They have not stored the moral principles of worldly conduct within the pages of any scripture—rather, these principles seem to them embodied in the various characters of these two great epics. These characters are the very measuring-rod by which people of every station, good and bad alike, are judged. It is for this very reason that, as the movement of life has grown and changed, the material of their lives has changed considerably too. Just as, over the ages, the songs of Vidyapati and Chandidas have been transformed, from mouth to mouth of Bengali singers, so too has this. The shadow-play we went to see yesterday—its story-outline was typed and given into our hands. I am sending it along; do read it. Compare it with the original Mahabharata and render it into Bengali. The particular feature of this story is that Draupadi does not appear in it at all. The eunuch Brihannala of the original Mahabharata, in this version, takes on the female form and the name "Ken-Bardi." Kichaka, seeing her, is smitten and falls at the hands of Bhima. This Kichaka, in the Mahabharata as adapted in Java, is the enemy of the lord of Matsya; the Pandavas, having slain him, won the gratitude of the king of Virata.

I am writing this seated in the veranda of the house belonging to the king who bears the title Mangkunegara; all around, upon its walls, are the images of the Ramayana, exquisitely embroidered upon silk cloth. And yet, in religion, these people are Muslim. Yet they know the accounts of the Hindu gods and goddesses in minute detail. They have taken into their own land even the geography of ancient India—its hills and rivers. In truth, there is no wrong in this, for the men and women of the Ramayana and Mahabharata move and dwell, in living form, within this very land of theirs; in our own country they lack such universal recognition—there, they do not thus dwell within every household, in ritual and festival and joyous occasion, as they do here.

Tonight, before a royal audience, I shall recite before the Javanese listeners a few pieces from my Katha o Kahini ("Tales and Legends"). A certain Javanese gentleman will translate and explain

them in his own language. Yesterday Sunity gave a lecture on Indian painting, illustrated with lantern-slides. Today the king has again requested her to speak on the same subject. These people have a special eagerness to know everything concerning India. So be it.

[17th September, 1927. Written to Sri Amiyachandra Chakravarti]

16

To my dear one,

Rathi, taking leave of the Mangkunegara household at Surakarta, I have found shelter in the palace of the king bearing the title Pakualam at Jogjakarta. In the city of Surakarta, the construction of a new bridge and road has just been completed; the charge of formally opening this road for the use of travellers fell to me. A ribbon of paper had been stretched across the road at the head of the bridge; I cut it with scissors, thereby clearing the way. I liked this task; it seemed to me that my very calling was to remove obstacles from the path. This road has been named after me.

On the way here, we stopped to see an old, ruined temple at a place called Prambanan. This place is something like Bhubaneswar, strewn with the ruined remains of temples. The Dutch Government has, by joining together the broken stones, restored the temples to their former shape, piece by piece. This work is very difficult and proceeds slowly; one or two learned European scholars are engaged in this task. I gained particular pleasure from conversing with them. To bring this work to full completion, these gentlemen have made extensive use of our Puranas as sources of illumination. Many things do not correspond, and yet these discrepancies do not arise from any distortion of memory among the Javanese people—rather, their history is embedded in the customs of the people of India of that very period. Shiva-temples predominate here. Various dance-postures of Shiva are found in the images here, but no detailed account of these is to be found in our own scriptures. Here is a matter worth pondering. In this country, Shiva has been called Guru, Mahaguru—the great teacher. It is my belief that Shiva held the office of guru even before the Buddha; he taught mankind the path of liberation. Here, Shiva is Natraja, King of the Dance; he is Mahakala—that is, the ceaseless flow that runs through the world, the coming and going of birth and death, is itself the rhythm of his dance; he

is Bhairava, for the very essence of his dance-play is death. In our country there was once a time when Shiva was seen as divided into two aspects. On the one hand, He is the Infinite, He is complete and whole, and hence He is inactive, He is serene; on the other hand, within Him runs the current of time, with its succession of transformations, nothing remaining fixed for ever—here, that terrible dance of Mahadeva has taken form as Kali. But in Java, there is no trace of Kali whatsoever. Nor is there any sign of the pastoral life of Krishna in Vrindavan. The episode of the slaying of Putana and the like exists, but we find no sight of the gopis anywhere. From this one may glean a fragment of the history of India of that period. Here there are many variant tales of

the Ramayana and the Mahabharata that are, at least, not current in the Sanskrit epics or in Bengal. The scholars here hold that the Javanese, either by travelling to India or by hearing, from Indians who came to Java, the various stories that circulated orally, had these very stories remain here. That is, at that time there existed, within India itself, in various places, a great variety of tales. To this day, no Indian scholar has ever made a comparative study of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. To do so, one would need to compare, with the original, the various regional-language poems that exist in the different provinces of India upon this subject. I have been waiting for some German scholar to undertake this task some day; and after his writings appear, we shall obtain, by supporting some points and disputing others, our own doctoral degrees from the university.

I found the man named Pakualam here very likeable indeed. Calm, dignified, learned, thoughtful. He is eager to preserve the ancient art of Java. The chief personage of Jogjakarta is the Sultan here. There was an invitation to see a dance at his house that night. There I heard, from a Dutch scholar, that the name of this very place was once Ayodhya—by gradual corruption, it has, in time, come to be pronounced as Jogja.

The dance we saw here was danced by nine women. Only the women of the royal household dance. Two of the nine were the Sultan's own daughters. Of all the dances I have seen since coming here, this one seemed the most beautiful. It is impossible to describe this by mere words. Such a flawlessly complete

creation of form is rarely to be found. This dance has one aspect that constitutes its outward beauty, and another—that particular gestures carry particular meanings. Those who know these meanings can join that meaning to its beauty and receive complete delight. There is here a school for the teaching of dance; an invitation has been received to visit it. Going there, I hope to understand still more of the theory of their dance.

Tonight I am sending a synopsis of the performance from the Ramayana that is to be presented. Reading it, one may understand the character of their version of the Ramayana story.

Bou-ma's letter, sent on the first of August, has reached my hands today, a month and a half later. Which of my letters have reached you, and which have not, how am I to know? So be it.

[19th September, 1927]

17

To my dear one,

Rani, our engagements here are drawing to an end, and the body too grows weary. The king in whose house we are staying will show us, tonight, a shadow-play performance; after that we shall go to Borobudur. There, after spending two days, we shall proceed on our way and, coming to Batavia, board our ship.

Last night I went to a certain place to see a performance of the slaying of Jatayu. Watching it, one may gain some understanding of the mind of the people of this land. What we call "performance" or "drama" is, in its greater part, speech; the remainder consists of the representation of events bound up with various emotions of the heart. Here it is otherwise. Here the principal elements are image and the rhythm of movement. But that "image" here means not representation, but a beautiful, enchanting form. Even where the greatest divergence from what we habitually see in ordinary life is involved, these people are not troubled by it. Human beings, in this world, generally stand and move about. In this performance, everyone must sit throughout, moving and going about while seated. Nor is even this ordinary movement—each and every gesture must be in the manner of dance. In their imagination, these people have created a kind of dream-world in which everyone moves about only in the sitting posture. If this land of "legless" people were a land of farce, I should have understood it well enough. But it is nothing of the sort—it is the land of the epic. These people do not wish to give reality its due. Nature does not, in retaliation, mock them or turn them into figures of ridicule—this too does not happen. Even the distortions of nature these people will render beautiful to look at—this is their pledge. Form itself is their aim; imitation of nature is not their aim—this is a claim these people seem to make with a certain proud audacity. Consider—why not—the first scene: the royal assembly of Dasharatha and his ministers. All the performers entered the arena squatting on their haunches. Nothing, one would think, could be stranger than this. Consider how difficult it must be to save such a scene from becoming ridiculous.

And yet in this we saw nothing at all incongruous; whether they are Dasharatha or the queen-mother becomes an entirely secondary matter. In the next scene, Kaikeyi and her companions entered, in the same manner, swaying and rocking in their sitting posture, dancing their way in. Boys of eight or nine had been dressed as Kausalya and the other queens. Meanwhile, the one playing Rama, Kausalya's son, must have been at least twenty-five years old; no question of how great an incongruity this is occurs to anyone's mind, because what they are watching is the dance of images. So long as no fault occurs within the dance itself, there is no cause for complaint. When people of other countries ask what this or that means, they answer, "We don't quite know

that, but our rasa is being satisfied." That is: we may not grasp the meaning, but we receive the delight. A Dutch scholar told me that the people of Bali perform various rites of worship out of sheer habit, understanding nothing of their meaning, and yet they too invoke the same claim of "rasa-satisfaction." That is, an idea of beauty, of perfection, exists within their minds, and when, in the course of a ritual, that idea finds a response, the joy they receive from it might, indeed, be called spiritual.

Last night, the number of people who gathered outside this performance-ground was beyond counting. They watched in silence—only the pleasure of watching. In their minds lay the story of the Ramayana, and, joining the flow of that story with the flow of the images, imagination became luminous. The astonishing thing in all this is that in the very images they watched, there was no effort at all to bring out the story dramatically. Kaikeyi has grown angry over Rama's coronation, yet nowhere in this image does one see the least trace of the manner and tone of voice through which anger becomes visible to our eyes and ears. When an eight- or nine-year-old boy dressed as Kaikeyi in female garb, it would be impossible for the character of Kaikeyi to be present in him even in the slightest degree. Yet these people feel no lack in this. Had the whole thing been throughout somewhat childish and crudely rustic, there would have been nothing astonishing at all in it—but where there is no limit to skill and beauty, where not the slightest gesture is without meaning, where through great effort and great skill this delicate art

has been brought to such utter maturity—there, one cannot afford to dismiss it. What must be said is this: that the sense of form and movement is exceedingly powerful in the minds of these people; the language of that form and movement speaks to their minds as much as our language speaks to ours, and often more. One can see this too in the gamelan music. First, the instruments are very numerous, adorned with much craftsmanship, and their arrangement is orderly, and among the players themselves there is a decorous restraint. This delight of the eye is essential to these people. Preserving the pleasure of sight, what they discuss as music is really a dance of tone. The play of rhythm is, to them, more significant than the flow of melody. But this play of rhythm is not the unbearable din of our country's Bhojpuri wedding-bands. Just as their dance is a beautiful, orderly dance of the limbs, so the rhythm within their music is not the clamour of khol, cymbal, and mridanga—rather, that rhythm is adorned with sweetly resonant melody. Their music might be called "tone-dance"; their performance might be called "form-drama." Nataraja, having come from India, once received worship in a temple here; the boon that he bestowed upon this people is precisely this dance of his—and for us, alas, is there nothing left but his burial-ash? So be it.

[Java, Jogjakarta. 20th September, 1927]

18

To my dear one,

Bou-ma, we have come to a most delightful place. Atop a hill—said to be five thousand feet high. The air is quite cold. But even the highest peak of the Himalayas does not provide as much cold as this place offers, near as it is to the equator. We are guests of a gentleman named Dieman-Court. His wife is Austrian, from Vienna. Their beautiful house, surrounded by a garden, stands upon the hill. From here, straight ahead, one can see the town of Bandung, nestled in the lap of blue-tinted mountains. In the hollow of the hills in which this town lies, not long ago, there was a lake. At some point the embankment gave way, and all its water drained out. After all this wandering, coming now to this beautiful, tranquil place, to this secluded house, one feels great relief indeed.

Ever since we set foot in Java, the person who has served us tirelessly, without a moment's rest, is one Samuel Koperberg. The literal meaning of his name is "copper mountain." Sunity, taking that very meaning, has translated his name into Sanskrit as Tamrachura. This very name of his has become current in our company; he is delighted by it. I feel like calling the man Swarnachura ("golden peak") instead, for the sake of renaming him. To provide for even the slightest comfort or convenience or need of ours, he has expended extraordinary thought and effort. His affection is entirely unfeigned. In bodily stature the man is small, but in the measure of his heart he is exceedingly vast. All this time we have observed him, on various occasions, day and night—never once have I seen in him any arrogance, or pettiness, or vanity. Always I have seen that he places himself last of all. His body is frail and weak, yet he has never once demanded any special consideration on account of that weak body. Whatever is left over, after everyone else's needs are met—that alone is his portion.

He has endured harsh words from many, but never once have I heard him complain, or utter a word against anyone, on that account. He cannot speak English well, nor even understand it easily. But what his speech lacks in eloquence, his deeds make up for fourfold. In the early days of our motor journeys he used to sit with us, but as soon as he perceived that our conversing with him proved difficult, he would, without hesitation, remove himself and make room for our English-speaking companions. But now it has come to such a point that not only is it inconvenient when he is not with us, but I do not even enjoy myself as much without him. In his solicitude for our comfort, our dignity, our ease of mind, he has so entirely poured himself out that, the moment he withdraws even a little, we feel a much greater emptiness. There is one sign of his gentle heart that I particularly love to notice—everywhere I see that he is the friend of children; they regard him as one of their own age. There is another proof of his heart—he has made the

people of Java entirely his own. It is his singular devotion to preserve the dance, song, art, history, and the like of the Javanese people. For this very purpose, discussion of all such matters, a society called the "Java Society" has been founded, and to its direction he has devoted his whole time and effort. From my description you will understand that we have come to love this simple, self-sacrificing man.

The poem I wrote in honour of Borobudur is copied out on another page and sent to you. So be it.

[Dago, Bandung. Java. 26th September, 1927]

19

To my dear one,

Mira, I have now finished with everything here worth seeing. From Jogja, I went to Borobudur; there I spent one night and have now returned.

First, I saw a small temple at a place called Mendut. It had fallen into ruin, and the government here has restored it. The reconstruction was quite pleasing to see. Inside were three colossal figures of the Buddha, representing three different attitudes. I stood there, transfixed, gazing at them. A certain sorrow arose within my heart. Once, many people together had built this temple, made these images. What clamour there must have been then, what preparation—and with it all, the life-force of man. On the day this vast stone image was being raised upon the hill, amid these very trees and plants, beneath this same sun-bright sky, mankind's immense effort must have quivered here, alive with purpose. In those days there was no news-transmission across the world; the powerful will that this small island had thrown itself into, in fashioning its own monument, sent its report across the sea to no one else. When Victoria Memorial was being built by the edge of the Calcutta Maidan, its clamour had spread along every shore of every sea in the world.

Surely a long time was needed to build this temple; within the lifespan of any single man, there could have been no limit to its creation. The intense reverence that inspired the building of this temple was true throughout the whole span of that age. How much wonder, how much dispute, how many tales, true and false, must have been woven into the daily, joy-and-sorrow-mingled life of this island in those days, regarding the construction of this temple. One day, the temple's construction was complete; and thereafter, day after day,

the lamps of worship burned here, group after group brought offerings of worship, particular days of the year became festival days, pilgrims, women and men, gathered in its courtyard.

And then, in time, dust settled over the language and sentiment of that age; whatever was then intensely true has now lost its meaning. Just as when a stream dries up only the bare stones remain, so it is with these temples today. The stream of life that once flowed unceasingly around them has receded far away, and, as it did so, the stone here fell silent; the mere marks of that vital current of that day remain, but its motion is gone, its voice is gone. We came, a whole party

in motor-cars, to see it, but where is the light to see by? For man's monument to reveal itself, it requires man's gaze—and how long ago that gaze was lost.

I have seen pictures of Borobudur many times before. Its structure has never appealed to my eye. I had hoped that seeing it in person might yield its true savour. But my mind was not satisfied. By dividing it into tiers, layer upon layer, they have made the pinnacle at its very top so small, in proportion to the whole structure, that however great its overall size may be, it lacks grandeur. It felt as though a stone lid had been placed over the top of the hill. It seemed merely a kind of container, a great basket meant to carry countless images of the Buddha and the pictorial narratives of the Jataka tales. From this basket, if one picks things out one by one and examines them, many fine things are to be found. I liked very much the Jataka-figures carved into the stone—countless representations of ordinary daily life, and yet among them nothing base, unbeautiful, or indecent. In other temples I had seen images only of gods and goddesses, and the carved narratives of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. In this temple one sees everyone—from the king down to the beggar. Under the influence of Buddhism, reverence for the common people has come to powerful expression; here there is ample room not only for humankind but for other creatures as well. There is a great truth in the Jataka legends—it says that, age after age, the Buddha, moving through the humblest of all beings, gradually

revealed himself. In the world of living creatures there has always existed the perennial struggle between good and evil; following the current of that very struggle, the highest ideal of Dharma finds its expression in the Buddha. In even the humblest of creatures, in ever so small a form, this power of good has striven to manifest itself through the ages of struggle; its supreme flowering is self-sacrifice in the power of boundless love. Among creature and creature, world and world, that boundless love slowly, bit by bit, from every direction, loosens its own knot—and it is in that very direction that liberation moves. A creature is not free, because its inclination is always toward itself; through the course of Dharma's manifestation among all living beings, a blow falls precisely upon that self-directed inclination. Wherever, and to whatever degree, that blow is seen to fall, to that same degree, there, the Buddha is manifest. I recall that in my childhood I once saw, near the washerman's donkey tethered by a rope, a cow gently licking its body; seeing this, I felt great wonder. That the Buddha himself, in some birth, might have been that very cow—this the Jataka storyteller would not hesitate to say. For this very affection of the cow finds its ultimate end in liberation. In the Jataka tales, the supreme extraordinary is affirmed through countless ordinary things. It is precisely by this that the ordinary became so great. It is for this reason that

on the very walls of this immense temple-structure, the accounts of trivial lives are depicted with such simple and pure reverence. Through the light of Dharma's own striving toward manifestation, the history of every living creature has become glorified by the influence of Buddhism.

Two Dutch scholars accompanied us, offering thorough explanations of everything. I found it most pleasing to see, in their character, the union of erudition with simple warmth of heart. What one reveres most of all is their sheer devotion. They have given their whole lives to draw speech out of the mouths of these mute stones. There is not the least trace of miserliness in their scholarship—only boundless generosity. It is these very men who ought to be regarded as the true teachers, for having brought India's history to full and complete knowledge. It is from a purely disinterested devotion to truth that this diligence of theirs springs. India's learning, India's history, are not matters close to home for them, and yet this is precisely

the very object of their life's endeavour. I met a few other scholars as well; in them too I found a natural humility that drew my heart toward them. So be it.

[Bandung, Java. 26th September, 1927]

20

To my dear one,

Rani, when, having completed our tour of Java, we arrived at Batavia, it felt as though we had come to stand at the ferry-crossing—as though, once we crossed, we would arrive at our own homeland on the other shore. My mind had just spread its wings in that very expectation, when a telegram arrived from Ariyam, in Bangkok, saying that I was summoned there, that a reception awaited me. Once again, the helm had to be turned. Just as, at the end of a whole day's exhausting journey, when the horse turns onto another road at the stable-gate at some new rider's command, some feeling must arise within its very being—so it was with me exactly. I must confess that I am weary. I have known people (I shall not name them) who, had fortune favoured them, might have taken up the vocation of touring and performed impossible feats their whole life long, and yet who, instead, spend their days fixed like Dhruva the pole-star at some post-office in some corner of Patuldanga, absorbed in household duties. And as for me—I might be perfectly content to tuck my body away in some corner and let my mind soar through the heavens, and yet the waters of all seven ports insist on being drunk by me. And so, onward I go, along Shyam's path, not the path home.

The government steamer bound for Singapore from here was excessively crowded, so Suren and I have secured passage on a small ship instead. We set out yesterday, Friday morning. Sunity and Dhiren remained behind for one day, since last night there was to be a lecture by Sunity on Indian civilisation. Sunity has gained considerable standing among the scholarly circles of Java. The reason is that there is no pretence in her learning; whatever she says, she knows thoroughly.

Our ship will circle round two islands, so what would be a two-day journey will take three days. In this region, the bag of the world's creator has, it seems, burst open, scattering many small islands into the sea. These belong to the Dutch. The island where the ship has now dropped anchor is called Billiton. There are not many people; there are tin mines, and the managers and labourers of those mines. Sitting here, I am struck with wonder, thinking how thoroughly these people have milked the entire world. Once, group after group of them set forth in sailing ships into unknown seas. They wandered round and round the whole earth, seeing it, weighing it, measuring it. That long history of coming to know the world is fraught with so much dreadful peril. I try to imagine: on the day these people first arrived and dropped anchor at some far-flung island shore, so distant from their own homeland, what apprehension, and yet what expectation, must have filled that day. The trees and plants, the animals, the men—everything that day was new. And today! Everything is entirely known, entirely possessed.

We have had to concede defeat before these people. Why this is so, I ponder. The chief reason is that we are a settled people, while they are a people of motion. We are bound within the bonds of mutual social obligation; they are propelled by the momentum of individual freedom. It is for this very reason that they were able to roam so easily. Because they roamed, they came to know, and thereby to possess. It is for this same reason that their hunger to know and to acquire is so powerful. Sitting fixed in one place, that very hunger of ours has grown weak. Even in our own neighbourhood, we do not properly know who lives there, what is happening—nor do we even wish to know. For we are excessively enclosed by our households. Those who lack the strength to know have little strength to survive in this world. The very power by which these Dutch have taken complete possession of the island of Java is the same power by which so many of their scholars devote such single-minded austerity to reclaiming the antiquities of Java. And yet this antiquity is, to them, as utterly disconnected from themselves as any newly discovered island might be. We remain indifferent even to knowledge close at hand, while these people's eagerness for knowledge of distant matters knows no bounds. Not by force of arms alone, but by the sheer intensity of this very curiosity, these people are conquering the world both within and without. We are entirely a domestic people. That means we—

—each one of us is but a fragment of our own household, bound by the thousand knots of duty. Domestic obligation is entangled with ceremonial obligation. The meaningless burden of ritual observance is so excessively heavy that all other genuine work becomes nearly paralysed beneath its weight. From the birth-rite to the funeral-rite, all these obligations that press upon our shoulders throughout this world and the next cannot be dislodged, and they do nothing but continually drain our strength. The children of such households are bound to be beaten by outsiders' hands. This truth, deep within, we ourselves understand. It is for this very reason that our leaders have inclined so strongly toward asceticism. And yet, these very leaders proclaim the eternal religion, Sanatana Dharma, to be the fixed and absolute truth. But our Sanatana Dharma is founded upon the household life. Sastrikam dharmam acharet—"one should practise dharma together with one's wife." In our country, dharma without a wife has no meaning at all.

Those who do not invoke the authority of Sanatana Dharma say, what harm is there. But if the ancient foundation of a social order built over so many ages can be broken with any ease, how long will it take to build a new foundation in its place? Regarding what is right and what is wrong to do, every society has fixed certain principles into the very fabric of custom. Few can, by argument and reasoning, remain steadfast on their own—it is by the strength of custom that people proceed along the path of the world. To build a new custom in place of an old one is no simple matter at all. All the customs of our society exist to keep our multiply-knotted household life firmly established. Learning science from Europeans is easy, but making the customs of their society one's own is not easy at all.

Aboard our ship was the head of a tin-mining company; he said he had been stationed here for sixteen years. There is nothing here besides tin. Yet even here he had made his nest. Chinese merchants have set up shops in Batavia. Their custom is to return home every two years. I asked—what is the objection to bringing wife and children and settling here? He replied, why should I bring my wife along; a wife is bound to the whole extended family, and to remove her from that context is to cause a rupture there. I suppose in the age of the Ramayana this argument did not exist. The tin-company manager spent his childhood at a boarding school, on reaching adulthood returned in search of work, and, upon marriage,

placed himself, immediately, entirely upon his own strength. There is no demand made upon his father's purse, nor does he feel any concern for mother, aunt, or uncle. It is for this very reason that even in this sparsely-peopled exile the tin mines continue to run. That these people were able to build homes across the entire world—the reason is that they are people unbound by home. And that they train telescopes toward the planet Mars and spend night after night in such pursuit—the reason for that too is that their curiosity is unbound by home. How could settled householders ever compete with such people? Beneath their tremendous momentum, the very pegs of our households come loose and fall; nothing can hold them back. So long as we remain silent, however much unnecessary baggage piles up, mounting to the height of a mountain, we do not feel much distress—indeed, we may even find comfort in leaning back against it. But the moment we try to lift it upon our shoulders and carry it forward, our very spine bends. Those who are a mobile race must, regarding their burden, exercise the most delicate discernment at every moment; what to keep, what to discard—this question presses upon them every instant, and it is precisely thereby that their wisdom in clearing away rubbish grows sharp. But the settled householder sits enthroned upon his canopied seat; and so, from his almanac, not one item of the three hundred and sixty-five days' worth of folly has, to this very day, been discarded. All this rubbish, which fills them to the brim, within and without, at every joint—suddenly, from atop the platform of Congress, a command comes down to them: you must walk in step, at an equal pace, with the lightly-burdened masses, for within a mere handful of days Swaraj must be won. They have no words in which to answer, but from the aching agony of their broken ribs comes this silent, mute plea: "We would indeed try to keep pace, if only our masters would relieve us of our burden." Then the masters start up in alarm and cry, "Heaven forfend! That is a sacred, eternal burden!" So be it.

[Billiton, aboard the ship Maetsuycker. 1st October, 1927]

21

To my dear one,

Amiya, October has begun; I suppose this is now your Puja holidays; I imagine you have not thought it necessary to leave the ashram in order to enjoy this holiday. Doubtless you have entrusted the provision of your holiday delight to the autumn scenery of Santiniketan, adorned with clusters of blossoming shiuli flowers. Wandering about the world, at least this much wisdom has come to my head—that there is little real gain in roaming about; it is like trying to draw water through a sieve, for most of it drains away along the very path itself. The travel of the modern age is like the gleaning of leftover grain—one must go about, picking up scattered bits here and there as one moves along. The memory of one's own ripe harvest, gathered and bound in sheaves, back in one's home fields, keeps rising in the mind all the while.

On this journey I have received scarcely any letters or news from home, so that it feels as though I have taken on a new incarnation altogether. The specific gravity of each day of this present birth is at least equal to seven days of my former life. New places, new people, new events flow past in an unbroken, closely-packed current, rushing headlong. It is by this very measure of speed that my mind judges your time as well. Just as a passenger on a train imagines that, outside his carriage, the rivers, mountains, and forests have suddenly, startled by the urgency of time, gone racing off in breathless flight—so it seems to me too, borne upon the shoulders of this swiftly rushing time, that even where you are, time's momentum must be of this very same measure—that there, too, the "todays" must be overtaking the "yesterdays" and tumbling headlong onto the very heels of "the day after tomorrow," that there, too, perhaps, the gap between the age of the bud and the age of the fruit has vanished entirely. When, from afar, I thought about Borobudur, Bali, and the rest, I had to spread that thought out over some vast expanse of time in my imagination, else there would be no room to contain so much material. In just these

few days, all that material has been hastily gathered up; what had lain scattered across the field of imagination has now been compressed into the narrow space of actual experience. The scale of time that, from a distance, loomed vast in its very vagueness, has, up close, become dense and concentrated into this very stretch of time. Calculating it, I find that within the span of these few days of my life, a considerable quantity of time has been compressed together. If one who spends his days absorbed in ritual observance were to subtract the greater portion of his years thus spent, only then would he arrive at the true measure of his actual lifespan; that is, if one tries to

reckon the value of one's years merely by the measure of elapsed time, one is bound to be cheated—much haggling over price still fails to bring one to any fair reckoning. Yet this does not mean that leaping about, at breakneck speed, through country after country, incident after incident, thereby causes one's years to expand proportionately in richness. Take our Shastri-mahashay, for instance. He sits fixed in one corner. And yet, remaining still within that very corner, how expansively he has gone on possessing time; if one measures him by the ordinary yardstick of years, his age exceeds ninety. It was only the other day that he came to the ashram, having just resigned the editorship of the Mitra-goshthi. And no sooner had he arrived than his mind went racing off into the vast wilderness of the Pali scriptures—now in Tibet, now in China. There is no catching up with him at all.

Therefore I say: this time of our travels, in terms of extent, is not, in terms of what it has yielded, of equal worth. The rhythm of our travel is fourteen beats to the bar. This is not the rhythm to which our life is accustomed, and hence, trying to keep the inner self in step with this outer swiftness of pace, one becomes bewildered. Just as food that is swallowed without chewing cannot really be felt as food, so too work done in headlong haste cannot be truly grasped as duty. I have been sweeping my mind lightly, in passing glances, over the surface of the world; I have barely a second's leisure to touch my lips to the froth in the cup of experience, let alone time to reach the drink itself. If the honeybee, driven by a gusting wind, is forced only to fly on and on, and, the very instant its foot merely brushes a flower, is swept away and dashed aside, then its whole flitting about becomes as futile as, I think, my own mind

is likewise scattered helplessly by these gusts of frustration—the very connection between its motion and its arrival has been lost. From this I clearly understand that in no former birth was I ever an American. One who does not know what it truly means to "gain" something imagines mere "touching" to be the same as "gaining." My mind is not a mind of the snapshot; it is a mind that craves the finished picture.

Just now Sunity has come and is hurrying me—we must set off, there is no time left. As Coleridge once said—water is everywhere in the ocean, and yet there is not one drop that I may drink. I am in an ocean of time, and yet I have not one single moment of it to spare. So be it.

[2nd October, 1927. Written to Sri Amiyachandra Chakravarti]