ESSAY

OF MYSELF

ATMAPARICHAY

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OF MYSELF – 1

I have been asked to write an account of my life. I shall not fill this space with unnecessary professions of modesty. But it must be said at the outset: the writing of an autobiography requires a particular gift possessed by particular persons, and I do not possess it. Nor does its absence matter, for I see no advantage to anyone in a detailed narration of my life's events.

For this reason I have, at this point, dropped the "events" from my life's account. I shall attempt only to write, as briefly as possible, how my life has revealed itself to me today through the medium of poetry and verse. Since a certain egotism will inevitably show through this, I beg my readers' particular indulgence in advance.

When I look back over the long course of my writing of poetry, I see clearly that this was something over which I had no authority. While I was writing, I believed that I myself was the one writing; but today I know this was not true. For the purport of my entire body of poetic work was not complete in those fragmentary poems taken singly—what that purport was, I myself did not know beforehand. Not knowing the outcome in this way, I went on composing one poem after another, imagining for each some small, particular meaning; today, with the help of the whole, I have surely understood that a single unbroken significance, transcending those small meanings, had been flowing through each of them. And so, long afterward, I once wrote—

What is this ever-new wonder,
O worker of wonders!
Whatever I wish to say
You give me no leave to say.
Seated within me always
You snatch the words from my mouth,
Taking up my own words you speak your own
Mingled in your own tune.
What I meant to say I forget entirely,
Whatever you make me say, that I say,

In the stream of song I find no shore—
Where do I drift, borne far away?

I find this to be a law of the universe's governance—that whatever is imminent, whatever is present, is never permitted to be belittled by that which sees it. It is never allowed to know that it is but a link in a chain of ascending stages. It is made to believe that it is, in itself, complete. When a flower blooms, it seems as though the flower alone were the tree's sole purpose—such is its beauty, such its fragrance, that it seems the very culmination of the forest-goddess's devotion. But that it is merely an occasion for the fruit to come—this fact remains hidden; it is resplendent solely in the glory of the present, and the future does not overwhelm it. Again, when one looks at the fruit, it seems as though that were the very pinnacle of fulfillment; but that it is quietly ripening the seed within its womb for the sake of a future tree—this truth remains veiled. Thus does Nature, even while preserving the flower's perfection in the flower and the fruit's perfection in the fruit, silently carries forward, beyond them, some further consummation.

I see this same universal law at work in the composing of poetry too—at least, I have realized it within myself. Whatever I was writing at a given moment, I took to be the final purpose; and so a great deal of care and a great deal of joy were drawn into the task of accomplishing merely that much. That I was indeed writing what I wrote, and that I wrote it while holding to some particular sentiment—of this too I have never had doubt. But today I have come to know that all those writings were mere occasions—they themselves did not know the future they were shaping. Behind their author stands another Author, before whose eyes that future significance stands plainly present. A blast of breath through the flute's several holes calls forth, one by one, separate notes, and loudly proclaims its own authority—but who is it that binds those scattered notes into melody? The breath calls forth notes, true, but breath alone does not play the flute. It is the flute that is being played, and to the one who plays it, every raga and every melody stands already present; nothing lies beyond its ken.

I was speaking, seated in a corner,
My own words to my own people,
Announcing at the household door

So many tales of home;
You took that speech and burned it in fire,
Drowned and floated it in tears from the eyes,
And with new artistry a new image
Shaped to your own liking.

The meaning of this verse, I think, is this: what I was setting out to write was a plain thing, nothing more—but into that very plainness, into my own words, some strain would creep such that it grew large, ceasing to be personal and becoming instead the world's own. That very melody—that was never part of my intention. I had, indeed, sketched a picture upon my canvas, but the colour that simultaneously flooded it, and the brush of that colour, were never in my hands.

A new rhythm, like one blind,
Runs off in a rush of joy,
A new sorrow strikes up there
In a new raga's guise.
What I never thought, that I say as if thought,
A pain I do not know wakes as if known,
I know not whose message I have brought
Nor for whom to proclaim.

When I, a small being, grew restless to speak some small word of mine, someone gave me encouragement, saying: "Speak, speak, speak only your own word. It is for that very word that everyone waits open-mouthed." So saying, he would glance toward the listeners and wink; he would smile a little with gentle mirth, and through my very words, would go on saying, somehow, his own.

Each one understands its meaning differently,
One says one thing, another says another,
They ask me again and again in vain—
Seeing you laugh, they think you know.
Who are you, where do you hide,
I go on dying, searching for you.

Has, then, some governing power of poetry-writing merely guided the poet's pen, passing beyond him? That is not all. I have also seen this: that life, as it takes shape—all its joys and sorrows, all the discontinuities of its unions and separations—someone is stringing together into a single unbroken significance. Whether I have always cooperated with him, I do not know; but he has ceaselessly strung and joined together all my hindrances and obstacles, all my broken and shattered pieces. Nor is that all—my self-interest, my instincts, my life, which I sought to confine within a narrow meaning, he has again and again broken through that boundary; he has, through profound sorrow, through separation, joined it to the vast, to the immense. When it once set out to market one day, it did not seek, among the whole of humankind, its own fulfillment—it gathered its coins merely for its own household's happiness, its own household's wealth. But from that earthen path, from those humble joys and sorrows, someone is forcibly dragging it through the impassable defiles of mountain heights and valley depths.

What is this ever-new wonder,
O worker of wonders!
The way toward which the traveller wishes to walk—
Does it let him walk there?
The village path that runs homeward,
Along which the farmers return at day's end,
Toward which the cattle run at the pasture's call, and the young wife brings water—
That path trodden a hundred times over—
One day, in earliest morning,
I set out along that path, carelessly,
Meaning to spend the day in work and play
And return by night.
At every step you led me astray,
Where I shall go today, I cannot tell,
A weary heart, a bewildered traveller,
I have arrived in a strange land.
Sometimes on some noble mountain peak,
Sometimes in sorrow's darkest pit,
I know not the path, upon that path
I go on, like one possessed.

This poet—who, taking up all my good and ill, all favourable and adverse materials, has gone on shaping my life—him I have named, in my poetry, the "Jivandevata," the Lord of my Life. I do not think that he has merely unified all the fragments of this one earthly life of mine and reconciled them with the universe. I know that from beginningless time, through manifold forgotten states, he has brought me to this, my present manifestation—that the vast memory of existence's stream, flowing through that universe, rests upon him and abides within me beyond my knowing. That is why I can feel so ancient a kinship with the saplings and beasts and birds of this world; that is why this vast, mysterious, enormous universe does not seem to me alien and terrible.

Today it seems as though amid all
It is you alone I have loved;
Through the crowd, down through the ages,
Only you and I have come.
Looking toward the four directions
What awakening stirs in my being—
As though your union with me, boundless,
Were present in every place.
For how many ages I dwelt in this sky
I have forgotten much of that;
In the trembling light of star after star
We two have trembled together.
Looking upon the grass-thrilled earth
In autumn's new light,
When I look thus into my own heart
My whole being swells with joy.
It seems as though I know
This unspoken word—
The thought that has awakened
In the mute earth's very core.
Within this life-filled soil
How many ages we two have dwelt,
In how many autumns' golden light

Have we trembled together in the grass.
The dawn that rose upon this world
A hundred thousand years ago—
Did its particle of crimson ray
Not thread itself into my life?
In that dawn, in what place
Did I awaken—who can say?
In what image did I blossom forth
That day, hidden in my breast?
O eternally ancient one, forever
You shape me anew.
Forever you have been beside me,
And forever you shall remain.

In metaphysics I have no authority. Should any dispute arise over dualism and non-dualism, I shall remain silent. I speak only from the side of felt experience: within me there abides a joy in the self-revelation of my innermost divinity—that joy, that love, pervades every limb of my body, my mind and intellect, this universe immediately present before me, and my beginningless past and endless future. What this play is, I do not understand at all; but within me there ceaselessly unfolds this one play of love. The light that delights my eye, the hue of cloud at dawn and dusk that delights me, the greenness of grass and tree that delights me, the beloved face that delights me—all are but the surging waves of that very play of love. And it is in this alone that the shadow-play of all life's joys and sorrows, all its light and darkness, is enacted.

Between what has taken shape within me and Him who has been shaping it, there exists a bond of joy, a tie of eternal love; realizing this through every event of life, a peace comes even amid joy and sorrow. When I can understand that every surge of my joy He has drawn to Himself, that every pang of my sorrow He Himself has taken upon Himself, then I know that nothing has been in vain, that everything is being blessedly gathered toward a world-embracing completeness.

Here let me quote a passage from an old letter of mine—

What is ordinarily called religion—that I have been able to attain clearly and firmly within myself—this I cannot claim. But deep within my mind, I can often feel that some living substance is gradually being created. Not any particular defined doctrine—but a hidden awareness, a new inner sense. I can clearly perceive that I shall gradually be able to establish within myself a harmony of my own—that I shall be able to give my joys and sorrows, my inner and outer life, my beliefs and conduct, all merged together, a wholeness to my life. What the scriptures state, whether true or false, I cannot say; but much of that truth is, for my part, wholly inapplicable—indeed, for my purposes, it might as well not exist at all. That which I can, with my whole life, shape into a complete form—that alone is my ultimate truth. When I experience all life's joys and sorrows in isolated, momentary fashion, I cannot rightly grasp this endless mystery of creation working within us—just as when one spells out each word separately in reading, one cannot grasp the unity of meaning and sentiment running through the whole line; but once the unbroken thread of unity of this creative power within oneself is felt even once, then one realizes one's own connection with this ever-creating, infinite universe around one. One understands: just as the planets, stars, and constellations have, through burning and revolving, come into being over eternity, so too within me, from beginningless time, a creation has been proceeding; my joys and sorrows, desires and pains, have each taken their place within it. What this shall become, I do not know, for we do not know even a single grain of dust. But when I connect my own flowing life, beyond itself, with infinite time and space, I find all life's sorrows too woven into one vast thread of joy—I am, I become, I move—all this I can understand as one immense happening; I am, and along with me all else exists too; not one atom of this boundless universe can remain apart from me; my bond with my own kin is no less intimate a bond than that with this beautiful autumn dawn—and it is for this very reason that this luminous void so pervades my inmost soul with itself. Were it not so, could it have touched my mind even in the slightest? Were it not so, could I have felt it to be beautiful at all?... The eternal, hidden bond between me and the infinite life of the universe—its directly perceptible, manifold language is this play of colour, fragrance, and song. All around, the ceaseless unfolding of this language stirs our minds, visibly and invisibly, without cease; this converse goes on, day and night.

In this letter I have written of that inherent creative power within me, that power which unifies and lends significance to all my life's joys and sorrows, to all its events; which strings my transformations of form, my births and rebirths, upon a single thread; through which I feel a oneness with the whole moving and unmoving universe—it is this that I named "Jivandevata," the Lord of Life, when I wrote—

O innermost one,
Has all your thirst been quenched
Coming into my inmost heart?
In a hundred thousand streams of joy and sorrow
I have filled the cup and given it to you,
Wringing my breast in ruthless torment
Like a crushed grape-cluster.
How many colours, how many fragrances,
How many ragas, how many rhythms,
Stringing and stringing together, I have woven
Your nuptial bed—
Threading and threading the gold of desire,
Each day I have wrought
For your fleeting play
An ever-new form.

The wonder is this—that I have come to be, that I stand revealed. What infinite sweetness must be in me, that I, nourished by all the power of the countless suns and moons and planets and stars of the boundless universe, stand here with eyes open in this light, in this sky—and no one casts me away. Only this question arises in my mind—how do I preserve the right to this astonishing existence of mine? The love, the joy that rests inexhaustibly upon me, without which I should have no power at all to exist—am I giving nothing at all in return to that?

You took me for your own,
I know not in what hope,
Have I proved good, O Lord of my life,
In your solitary chamber?
My night, my morning,

My play, my work—
Do they resound in your lonely dwelling?
In rain, in autumn, in spring, in winter,
Whatever songs my heart has sounded,
Have you heard them, seated alone
Upon your own throne?
Gathering the flower of my mind's imagining in your garment's fold,
Have you woven a garland, worn it about your neck,
Have you, in your own mind, wandered
Through the forest of my youth?
What have you seen, O friend, keeping
Your two eyes fixed on my inmost core?
Have you forgiven all my
Faltering, falling faults?
Days without worship, nights without service,
How many times, again and again, O Lord, have they passed,
How many offering-flowers have fallen and scattered
Blooming in the lonely wilderness.
The tune to which you tuned this vina's strings
Has fallen away, again and again,
O poet, can I ever sing
The raga that you composed?
Going to water your garden
I have fallen asleep, lying in the shade,
And at evening, with eyes brimming,
I have brought only tears.

If it should happen that whatever possibility of serving this Lord of Life existed within my present life were exhausted, if the fuel of my present life should turn wholly to ash and be unable to sustain it any longer—will He then let this fire go out? For how long shall this needless ash be kept from being cast away? But why, then, should this flame of light die? It has already been shown—this is no matter to be treated with neglect. It has already, deep within, been understood—there is no end to the unblinking gaze of joy resting upon it.

Has it already ended, O lord of my life,
Whatever was mine—
All the splendour, all the songs, all the life,
The wakefulness, the depths of slumber?
Has my embrace grown slack,
My kiss lost its intoxication,
In life's bower, has the night of tryst
Already turned to dawn?
Then break up today's gathering,
Bring new beauty, bring new splendour,
Take me up anew once more,
Me, the ever-ancient one.
In a new wedlock you shall bind me
With the cord of a new life.

This very advent, felt within my own life—an advent which, out of the past into the not-yet-come, breathing love's breeze upon the sails of life, has borne me onward to ever-new landing-places on time's great river—this it was that I called the Lord of Life.

In the leisure hours of this life's journey, when now and again, in some blessed moment, I have turned my unblinking gaze fully upon the universe and looked well, another feeling has overwhelmed me. An unbroken bond of my own self with universal Nature, an eternal, ancient oneness, has drawn me utterly. Many a day, sitting in a boat, I have poured out my inmost soul, entire, into the sun-bright water and land and sky; then I no longer kept the earth at a distance as mere earth, then the flowing water coursed as a song of joy within my own inmost being. It was then that I could say—

If I should become soil, if I should become water,
If I should become grass, become flower and fruit,
If, with fellow-beings, I should return to this earth,
There is nothing at all to fear,
Wherever I go, there in boundless bonds
I remain endless, my own self.

It was then, too, that I said—

Take me back, O Earth,
Into your very lap, child of your lap,
Into your vast embrace. O mother of clay,
Let me be spread abroad within your soil,
Let me give myself, scattered in every direction,
Like the joy of spring.

I was not ashamed to say this—

With your soil, mingling me,
You have taken me into the boundless sky
And with tireless steps, circled round
The realm of suns, countless nights and days,
Through ages upon ages; within my soil
Your grasses have all sprung up, your blossoms in cluster upon cluster
Have bloomed, your trees of the forest have rained down
Leaf, flower, fruit, and pollen of fragrance.

I have no pride of separateness—I acknowledge no division between myself and the universe.

I have no pride of the human soul
Above the tender green face of my mother-earth;
I have loved her dust and clay.

I hope readers will understand from this that I have not fragmented my devotion by dividing, into separate compartments, the self, universal Nature, and the Lord of the Universe.

Neither in the self nor in the universe do I find the end of wonder. I have never been able to set aside anything, calling it "inert" or "finite," and push it to one side. It is within this very finitude, within this very immediacy, that the manifestation of

the infinite is, to me, a matter of boundless wonder. That I have opened my eyes and walked through this realm of water and land, of trees and beasts and birds, of stars and planets, amid day and night—this itself is a wonder. This universe is wondrous in its every atom and molecule, in its every grain of dust. That our forefathers beheld fire, wind, sun, planets, cloud, and lightning with a divine vision, that they passed their whole lives amid this inconceivable majesty of the universe carrying living devotion and wonder, that every touch of the universe struck up in the harp of their inner being ever-new hymns of praise—this touches my very heart. Those who wish to dismiss the sun as a mere ball of fire ought at least to know what fire truly is. Those who have settled the earth to be merely "a mass of earth bound by lines of water" seem to think that calling water "water" comprehends the whole of water, and calling earth "earth" makes it nothing more than earth!

Let me draw out three passages from three old letters of mine, on the subject of Nature—

...Such beautiful days and nights pass from my life, day after day—I am unable to receive the whole of it! All this colour, this light and shade, this soundless splendour spread across the sky, this peace and beauty filling the space between heaven and earth—what vast preparation is at work for all this! What a magnificent festival-ground! So astonishing an event happens outside us every day, and within us we scarcely get a good response to it at all! We live so very far apart from the world! From millions of leagues away, journeying for millions of years through infinite darkness, a star's light arrives at last upon this earth, and cannot enter into our inmost being! The mind seems to be a hundred thousand leagues farther still! Coloured mornings and coloured evenings drop, one by one, like single jewels from the broken necklaces of the quarters of the sky, into the sea's waters—not one of them falls into our minds!... Upon this earth where I have come to dwell, the people here are all strange creatures. They do nothing but build rules and walls day and night—lest, perchance, the eyes should see something, they hang up curtains—truly, the creatures of this earth are very strange. That they have not put a little cap upon every flower's stalk, that they have not hung a canopy beneath the moon—that alone is the wonder! These self-willed blind creatures ride through the world's interior in closed palanquins—what can they possibly see as they pass through!

...There was a time when I was one with this earth, when green grass grew upon me, when autumn's light fell upon me, when from every pore of my vastly outspread green body the fragrance of youth rose like vapour, when I lay outstretched, silent, beneath the brilliant sky, filling the watery lands of countless distant countries—then, in my whole vast body, some joy-essence, some life-force, moved—utterly vague, half-conscious, and yet immense and vast—something of that I seem, even now, to half-remember. This mood of mine—it is, as it were, the mood of the primal earth, ever sprouting, budding, thrilling beneath its lord the sun. As though this stream of consciousness of mine flowed slowly through every blade of grass, through every root and vein of every tree upon this earth, and every field of crops rose thrilled with joy, and every leaf of the coconut palm quivered, trembling with the passion of life.

...This little earth is, to me, like a beloved of many days and many births, forever new... I can well remember how, ages ago, young Earth, her head just lifted from the ocean's embrace, bowed in reverence to the young sun of that hour—then I, upon this new soil of the earth, sprang up somewhere as a tree, swelling with a first upsurge of life. Then there was as yet no animal life upon the earth; the vast ocean surged day and night, and, like an unthinking mother, now and again wholly enveloped in wild embrace her newborn little earth. Then, with my whole being, I drank in upon this earth the first sunlight—like a newborn infant I swelled, thrilled with a blind joy of life, beneath the blue sky; I embraced this my earth-mother with all my roots and drank her milk. In a kind of foolish rapture my flowers bloomed and new shoots sprang forth. When the rain-cloud rose, dense and dark, its deep-green shadow touched all my foliage like a familiar palm. And afterward, in age upon age, I have been born again in the soil of this earth. Whenever we two sit face to face alone, our long, long acquaintance comes back to us a little at a time. My earth now sits in yonder riverbank's harvest-field, wrapped in a garment of sun-yellowed gold—I go and fall, lost, at her feet, in her lap. As many a mother, half-absent yet unshaken and patient, pays no great heed to the comings and goings of her children, so my earth, gazing at this noon-hour toward the edge of the sky, thinks of thoughts from far ages past—she takes no particular notice of me, and I go on chattering, incessantly, alone.

Nature, with her forms and essences, her colours and fragrances; man, with his mind and intellect, his affection and love—these have enchanted me; that enchantment I do not disbelieve, that enchantment I do not condemn. It does not bind me—it sets me free; it makes me pervade even beyond my own self. The tow-rope of a boat does not tie the boat down—it draws it, drags it onward, ever forward. All the attractive bonds of the world draw us onward in just this way—some move swiftly and are conscious of their own motion, some move slowly and imagine themselves fixed in one place. But all must move—all, through the world's ceaseless pull, are being extended day by day, in greater or lesser measure, from their own selves toward Brahma. However much we may think that our brother, our beloved, our son binds us to one fixed place—the thing we are truly seeking, a lamp does not merely reveal that one thing alone, it illuminates the whole house—love transcends even its own object and pervades beyond it. It is through the beauty of the world, through the sweetness of the beloved, that God draws us—no one else has the power to draw us thus. It is through earthly love alone that we gain acquaintance with that Bliss of the All; it is within this very form of the world that we come face to face with that formless Beauty—this alone I call the discipline of liberation. I am enchanted within the world; in that very enchantment I taste the flavour of liberty—

Liberation through renunciation is not mine.
In countless bonds, in blissful measure,
I shall taste the flavour of freedom. This earth's
Vessel of clay, filled again and again,
Shall pour forth your nectar unceasingly
In every hue and fragrance. Like a lamp
My whole world, upon its million wicks,
Shall kindle and hold aloft your very flame
Within your temple. To close the senses' door
And sit in yoga's posture—that is not mine.
Whatever joy exists in sight, in scent, in song,
Your joy shall abide in the midst of it.
My enchantment shall rise up, ablaze, as liberation,
My love shall remain, ripened, as devotion.

In my boyhood I wrote "Prakritir Pratishodh" ("Nature's Revenge")—whether I myself understood it well then, I do not know—but in it lay this thought: that by accepting this universe, believing in this world, and reverencing this immediate reality, we can rightly comprehend the infinite. One who has leapt from a ship setting forth with countless souls aboard, journeying into eternity, and tries to swim across the sea alone, will not succeed in that attempt.

O universe, O great river, whither do you journey?
Take me up into your shelter.
Alone, I cannot swim across.
Millions upon millions of pilgrims journey on—
I too wish to go along with them.
The path along which sun and moon hold their light—
Scorning that path, forsaking that light,
Why, by my own small glow-worm's gleam,
Do I go on dying, groping in darkness for the way?
When a bird flies up into the sky
It thinks perhaps it has left the earth behind;
However high, however far, however much it soars aloft,
It cannot, by any means, leave the earth—
At last, wearied in body, it returns to its nest.

In my mature years, when I wrote the play "Malini," even then, from far to near, from the undefined to the defined, from imagination to the immediate, I spoke of realizing religion in this very manner—

I understood: religion gives affection in a mother's form,
In a son's form takes affection again; in a giver's form
Bestows gifts, in a beggar's form receives them;
In a disciple's form pays homage, in a guru's form gives
Blessing; becoming the beloved, from the stony heart
Draws forth love's fountain, and, becoming devoted,
Renounces all. Religion has cast its net of mind
Over the whole universe, drawing the entire creation
In love's snare—that great bondage

Has filled my heart with joyous sorrow.

What I had to say concerning myself has now come to its end; let me close now with one final word—

Whatever you have given to earth's dwellers, Lord,
Even after satisfying every earthly desire, it
Remains never spent. Its ultimate end
Seeks and finds, again and again, only your own shore.
The river runs to its ceaseless task; all its labour,
Its endless current, offered ever at your feet
As a perpetual water-oblation, flows on unceasing;
The flower, with its own fragrance, fills the whole world
Completely, and yet remains incomplete—
In worship of you alone lies its final meaning.
To deprive the world is not to worship you.
The poet, in his own song, says so many things,
Different people take different meanings from it,
But toward you alone runs its final meaning!

The central point concerning my poetry and my life I have tried to make clear, quoting some poems, explaining others through commentary. Whether I have succeeded, I do not know—for the task of making understood does not lie wholly within my own hands; whoever is to understand it will, to a great extent, depend on himself as well. I fear many readers will say: the poetry remains riddling, and the life account equally vague. If the power of the universe has indeed been uttered, in my imagination and in my life, in such a form of speech as is difficult for others to comprehend, then my poetry, my life, shall be of no use to anyone else on earth—that is my own loss, my own failure. There is no benefit, then, in reproaching me for it; the fault, on my part, cannot be remedied—I had no other course open to me.

When the universal spirit expresses itself through a man's heart, through his life, in human language, there is little particular gain in receiving it merely as an echo, a reflected shadow. Through the senses alone, whatever acquaintance we gain of the

world is but a small fraction of the world's full acquaintance—that acquaintance we complete, from age to age, ever anew and ever more deeply, through the hearts of visionaries, of poets, of seer-sages who behold the mantra. To dissect and show which poem of some lyric poet is good, which is middling—that is not the critic's true task. What is worth understanding is in what utterance the universe has expressed itself through the whole of his poetry. Taking the poet merely as occasion, in what form has the Voice, mistress of the lute, the revealing power of the universe, expressed herself—that is the matter worth beholding.

Whatever in the world is beyond utterance, and has struck again and again upon the poet's heart's door—if that ineffable thing has found utterance in the poet's verse; whatever in the world is peerless, and has daily come and gazed toward the poet's face—if that peerless thing has taken form in the poet's verse; whatever stands revealed, embodied, before the eye—if that has, in the poet's verse, spread itself abroad in the form of sentiment; whatever wanders homeless in disembodied feeling—if that has, in the poet's verse, taken on form and attained completeness—then, and only then, has the poetry succeeded, and that successful poetry alone is the poet's true biography. To try to grasp the particular individual who is the subject-matter of that biography, within the common run of events of the poet's outward life, is a mockery.

Do not look at me thus, from outside,
Do not seek me without.
You shall not find me in my sorrow, in my joy,
Search not for my pain within my breast,
You shall not see me in my face,
Where you seek the poet, there he is not.
I, who move about in secret, a shape of dream,
I, who cannot understand or explain even myself,
Who am lost in the very presence of my own song—
That I am the poet—by what shall I be grasped?
The one bound in a human shape, dwelling in a house,
Who cringes upon the ground at every moment's fear,
Whom praise and blame shake with fever—
Is it in his life's ordinary course you seek the poet?

1311 (Bengali calendar)

OF MYSELF – 2

Whatever rises before its season leaves the mind uneasy about it. The esteem I have received from you is the fruit of an untimely season—and thus I fear lest it fall away, torn loose from its stem.

Like all other servants, those who serve literature—the poets—have two kinds of due: their daily bread, and their wage. They look, day by day, for some small ration of fame sufficient to still their hunger—one cannot live wholly on fasting. But there are poets, too, whose daily bread is otherwise provided—who supply their own sustenance out of their own inward joy, to whom the householder gives not even a handful of parched rice!

This, then, is the daily bread—it is earned by the day, and by the day it is spent. Beyond it lies the wage. But that cannot be claimed before the month is out. That perpetual due is not, by custom, collected while one still lives. The account of this wage is kept in the ledger-books of Chitragupta himself, the scribe of Death—and there the reckoning is seldom in error.

But if some arrangement is made for advance payment while one still lives, then grave doubt arises concerning it. In this world many things may be got by stealth, and kept even so. It is not altogether unheard of that a man has grown rich by deceiving another. But with fame, no such convenience exists. In its dominion, no statute of limitations avails. On the very day the fraud is detected, that day the whole estate is forfeit. Such is the law of the great reckoner, Time. And so a poet can never rest easy, in his own lifetime, concerning whatever honour he has won.

Nor is that all. If the wages be paid in full while one still lives, they do not come wholly into the poet's own hand. At the poet's outer gate a man sits day and night, keeping watch, and he collects his brokerage. However great a poet a poet may be, the whole of him is not poet. Along with him there lodges always a certain ego, which seeks to claim its share in everything. It believes that the credit, the achievement, all of it, is its own, and that the glory of poethood is its rightful due. So believing, it goes on filling its purse. In this manner the very priest pilfers the

offerings meant for worship. But after death this ego-priest leaves no heir, and so the unclaimed inheritance passes safely back to its rightful place.

This ego is the greatest thief in all the world. It does not scruple even to claim as its own the very possessions of God. It is for this very reason that so much discipline exists, to hold this miscreant in check. It is for this reason that Manu has said: know honour as poison, and dishonour as very nectar. Wherever honour proves tempting, there, as far as possible, it is well to shun its company.

As for myself, I have now passed fifty. The call has sounded to withdraw into the forest. Now is the season of renunciation. It will no longer serve to carry upon my head a fresh burden of accumulation. Therefore if, even beyond this fiftieth year, God grants me honour, I shall surely understand it to be intended only as a lesson in renunciation. This honour I cannot accept as my own possession. This burden upon my head I must set down at that very place where my head is destined to bow. Thus much assurance, at least, I can give you: that whatever honour you have bestowed upon me, I shall not use as fuel for my own vanity, nor thereby dishonour it.

In our country, at the present time, there is cause for rejoicing when one passes fifty—for long life has grown rare among us. A country whose people die young is deprived of the treasure that comes from the experience of advanced age. Youth is, after all, the steed, and maturity alone its charioteer. We have seen, now and again, what grievous peril may befall when a country's chariot is driven by an unbridled horse with none to hold the reins. Therefore, in a land of such short lifespans, a man who has passed fifty may rightly be given encouragement.

But a poet is, after all, no scientist, philosopher, historian, or statesman. Poetic genius is the dawn-glow of man's first flowering. When the expanse of life still ahead has not yet found its own boundary, when hope is still deeply mysterious—it is then that the song of poetry awakens in ever-new melodies. Of course, the beauty of this mystery does not belong to the dawn alone; even at life's dusk, at the very close of one's days, the luminous glimpse of the infinite life's ultimate mystery reveals its own still deeper beauty. But the hushed grandeur of that

mystery silences the exuberant overflow of song. That is why I ask: what worth, then, has a poet's age?

Therefore I cannot regard the affection I have received at the very threshold of old age as the tribute properly due to advanced years. Even at this age, you have bestowed upon me the very due that belongs to youth. That is the poet's true reward. It is neither reverence nor devotion—it is the heart's own affection. We show devotion to a man reckoning his greatness, we show reverence reckoning his merit—but affection keeps no ledger at all. When that love sits down to perform its sacrifice, it empties itself utterly, without discrimination.

If it be neither by strength of intellect, nor by force of learning, nor by the glory of virtuous conduct, but simply because, playing the flute a long while, I have chanced upon some one strain that has touched that very affection in your hearts—then I have indeed been blessed; then I have no further cause for hesitation. For just as, in the giving, love keeps no account, so too the one who, by fortune, receives it need feel no scruple over his own worthiness. The power lies with the one who can bestow love—the one who receives love has only good fortune.

How very great is the power of love—today I feel this in a particular way. What I have received is no cheap thing. The wage we pay a servant is trifling; the reward we give a flatterer is base. That gift of contempt I never sought, nor have you given it. I have received the gift of love alone. That love bears within it a mark of true nobility. A thing for which we pay a price, we cannot bear to find flawed—wherever we spy some crack or blemish, we wish to return it and reclaim our payment. When we pay wages, we exact a penalty for every slip and lapse in the work. But love endures much, forgives much; it is by receiving the blow itself that love reveals its own greatness.

I have now pursued the discipline of literature for upward of forty years—there can be no doubt whatever that I have committed many errors, and dealt many a wound besides. That, standing above all my imperfections, all my harshness and contrariness, you have bestowed upon me this honour—it can be nothing other than the honour of affection. In this very gift lies your true glory, and in that glory I too am glorified.

Where the law of natural selection prevails strongly, there is need of natural abundance. Where many are born, there too many perish—and from among them something survives. Among poets, those who are consummate craftsmen, those who are true artists, create according to the law of mental selection; they do not allow natural selection to come near. Whatever they bring forth turns out, every single time, to be wholly successful.

I know that in my own writing there exists that boundless abundance which, in great measure, carries failure along with it. There is not much room in the vessel of immortality; and so, however much I may try to compress my burden, so much the greater will be my chance of reaching the farther shore beyond destruction. It is not true that the more we give into the hands of Great Time, the more it will take. My burden has grown exceedingly heavy—and from this alone it may be seen that a great part of it already bears the mark of death upon it. He who is charioteer upon the chariot of immortality bears a crown of gold, a sceptre of diamond, an armlet of ruby—he does not carry sacks upon his head.

But I have not been able, like a fine goldsmith, to fashion ornaments both compact and precious. Whatever came to my hand, at whatever moment, I have simply bundled up and tied together; the bulk of it exceeds its worth. Just as there is a thing called extravagance, so too is over-accumulation a kind of affliction. This fault I have committed in literature. Where the testing-hall of the customs-house stands, not all of this baggage will pass through the hands of that stern examiner. But I do not wish to grieve, harbouring anxiety over that loss. Just as there exists, on the one hand, the eternal, so too, on the other, there exists the momentary. For the needs of that moment, for the festivities of that moment, even for the unnecessary litter and scattering of that moment, whatever has been supplied cannot, I think, be said to bear no fruit at all merely because it lacks permanence. One fruit, at least, I can see even now: that through sheer abundance, my poetic endeavour has, to some degree, lodged itself within the heart of the present age; and that what I have received today from the hearts of my readers is, in no small measure, a return upon that very gift—of this there can be no doubt.

But just as this gift is fleeting, so too its return is not for all time. Of the flower I have made bloom, a great many petals will fall likewise; of the garland you have given, much too will wither. Whatever a poet receives while he yet lives is, in large part, but the settlement of this transient exchange. I shall not let myself forget that in today's felicitation there is a great deal of this same momentary reckoning at work.

In this business of the moment, willingly or not, much deception passes current. Weight may be piled up with a great deal of failure—more may be said than is truly meant—more attention falls upon the fashion than upon the true worth—the measure of imitation grows greater than that of genuine feeling. I must admit that in my long career in literature, much of this same false weight has accumulated, knowingly or unknowingly.

Only one thing will I say today on my own behalf: that in literature, up to this day, I have given only what I have deemed worthy to give; I have never striven to supply what the public demanded. I have never kept an eye upon shaping my writing to the taste of my readers, but have brought it before the assembly exactly as it pleased my own mind. This alone is sufficient respect to show an assembly. But by such a method, whatever else may come of it, one does not win applause from start to finish—and I have not won it either. That a sweetness has come at last, at the close, to my banquet of fame today, was never something arranged for from the beginning. The metre and the language in which I once began composing poetry found no favour in that day's taste, and whether it deserves favour even in this day's taste, I do not care to claim. My only point is this: whatever was truly mine, that alone I gave to others—I never resorted to any easier, more convenient path than this. Often enough, one can please people simply by deceiving them—but that pleasure, too, after a while, turns round and deceives in its turn—I have never cast a covetous eye toward that cheap and easy pleasure.

Beyond this, I have spoken many an unwelcome word in my writings, and the natural, immediate retribution for unwelcome words I too have had to bear, again and again, upon my own back. Only by one's own strength can a man achieve his own true progress; none, by begging and pleading, can ever win lasting good—even this utterly commonplace truth I have not had occasion to speak without suffering

unbearable abuse in return. Such occasions arose again and again, one after another. But I have never sold cheap in the marketplace what I have known to be true, merely to become popular. I revere my country with all my heart; nowhere have I found anything to compare with the noblest treasure of my land; and for this reason, whatever refuse of the days of our misfortune has, in ever so small a measure, clouded over the wealth of our timeless striving—toward that I have shown not the least particle of tenderness. Here, time and again, a grave conflict of opinion has arisen between myself and my listeners and readers. I know this conflict is exceedingly hard, and its wound most grievous; in such discord we come to imagine friend as foe and kin as stranger. But whatever blow such striking entails, that too I have borne. I have never sought, by cunning, to sidestep what is unwelcome.

It is for this very reason that I take up, today, the esteem I have received from you, and set it as a crown upon my head, calling it a thing so rare. This is not the worth of flattering words—it is the offering of true affection. In this, he who receives honour is himself honoured, and he who bestows the honour has his own honour increased as well. That society alone is worthy of true reverence in which a man may win regard while keeping intact his own true ideals, without diminishing his own true convictions; where, to gain favour, a man is compelled to sell away his own truth, there such favour is not fit to be favoured at all. Where honour and flattery are apportioned according to who belongs to one's own faction and who does not, there such honour is untouchable; there, if men, in hatred, cast dust upon another, that very dust is his true ornament; if, in anger, they hurl abuse, that very abuse is his true felicitation.

Where honour is noble, where it is true, there the mind bows of its own accord in humility. Therefore, before I take my leave of you today, I can tell you this from the depths of my heart: I take up this gift of honour that you have bestowed as I would a blessing from my country—it is a sacred thing, it is not an object for my enjoyment; it shall purify my spirit; it shall never stir my vanity into turbulence.

Falgun, 1318 (Bengali calendar)

OF MYSELF– 3

Every human being possesses a particular thing called "my religion." But he does not know it clearly. He knows: I am a Christian, I am a Muslim, I am a Vaishnava, I am a Shakta, and so forth. But that he is certainly and fixedly an adherent of this or that faith from birth to death—that, perhaps, is not true. The very taking of a name creates such a screen that a man's own inward religion does not fall even before his own eyes.

Which is his true religion? That religion which, hidden within the mind, is creating him. The inherent vital principle shapes the living creature. Of that vital principle the creature itself has no need to keep any account. Man has another life besides this—one greater than the life of the body—and that is his humanity. The creative power within this life is his religion. This is why, in our language, the word "dharma" (religion) is a word of very deep meaning. The waterness of water is water's dharma, the fireness of fire is fire's dharma. Just so, a man's dharma is his innermost truth.

Within each human being there exists a universal form of truth, and along with it, a particular form as well. That particular form is his special religion. It is there that he preserves the world's diversity. This diversity is a precious thing for the sake of creation. For this reason, the power to wholly destroy it does not lie in our hands. However much I may honour the principle of equality, I can never, by any means, obliterate the distinctness of my own countenance from all others. Likewise, however much, by adopting a general sectarian name, I may think that I am of the same religion as everyone else within my sect, my inner witness knows that at the very root of my humanity there reigns a particular distinctiveness that belongs to my religion alone. In that very distinctiveness lies the special joy of my inner witness.

But, as I have already said, what can be seen from outside is my sectarian religion. That common identification alone is my religious identity in society. It is, as it were, merely the turban upon my head. But that which is the very brain within my skull, which is invisible, which is a self expressed only to my inner witness—if someone

from outside suddenly says that the covering of vital mystery over it has been punctured and it has come out, that even by analysing its ingredients they confine it within some particular category—then one cannot help but be startled.

Such has been my own case. Recently a critical review appeared in some paper, from which it emerged that I possess a certain theology, and that this theology belongs to a particular category.

Were someone suddenly to tell me that my ghost had been sighted, that would be an occasion for reflection, but this is no less so. For man's play as a ghost does not begin until his mortal play has ended. To say that my ghost has appeared means this: that my present is no longer true for me, that my past alone is the sole truth for me. My religion is at the very root of my life. That life is still going on—but somewhere in between, its religion has apparently come to such a standstill that a ticket may be stuck upon it and it may be held up before the curious eyes of museum-goers—this report is hard to credit.

A few years ago, in another paper, another writer published a review of a collection of my devotional songs. In it, selecting a few songs from my raw and early years as illustrative examples, he arrived at conclusions entirely of his own choosing. To photograph a man in the posture he happened to be in at some point where I never actually stopped, as though that were where I stood still, is to do him an injustice. From a photograph of a running horse with its legs raised in the air, it cannot be proved that its legs were, all along, raised precisely so, and remain raised so. For this reason, a photograph of motion appears comical—only in the artist's brush does its true form get captured.

But perhaps this statement is not wholly true. Perhaps something whose root lies beyond the reach of consciousness has, on one of its facets, become visible from outside. As soon as it becomes visible in this way, a transaction with the outer world begins concerning it. And the moment that transaction begins, the world, for the convenience of its own dealings, does not rest easy until it has marked that thing with some particular category's sign. Otherwise, one cannot fix its price or determine its purpose.

A man's standing rests upon that identity of his which exists in the outer world. If this outward identity fails to match any part of his inward truth, then a self-alienation occurs within his very being. For a man is not merely what exists within himself alone—he exists, in great measure, also within that knowledge which others hold of him. "Know thyself" is not the final word; "make thyself known" is also a very great matter. That effort to make oneself known pervades the whole world. My inherent theology, too, cannot contain and hold itself entirely within itself—surely, knowingly and unknowingly, it has been making itself known outwardly in various ways.

This process of making oneself known has no end, ever. If there be any truth in it at all, it will not end even after death. So what harm, then, if one simply remained silent? Such an objection may arise. Concerning one's own poetic identity, indeed, one must bear everything and remain silent. The reason is that this is a matter of taste. Taste cannot be proven by argument. The proof of taste lies in time. Time's patience is boundless, and taste too must follow its course. One cannot hope to collect, in cash, all that is one's due. But if I do possess some theology, then to let some error remain concerning its identity would be to do an injustice both to myself and to others. For, concerning that which is being transacted with others, whose necessity and value ought to be truly and rightly determined, if some claimant should say something that seems to me inconsistent, then to remain silent would be sheer discourtesy.

Of course, it must be admitted that whatever I reveal concerning theology is like the jotted notes of a traveller's notebook along the way. Those who have spoken, having reached their own destination, speak with perfect clarity. They can hold their own words apart from themselves and view them from outside. I have never viewed my own theory in that way, as something separated from myself. Whatever traces it has left behind, in various writings, as it has taken shape and grown, those alone are the materials of its identity. The difficulty in such a situation is this: in gathering together these materials into a whole, which shall be placed toward the head and which toward the tail depends upon each person's own predisposition.

Let others do as they will; but I too wish to fit these materials together with my own hand, to see what picture emerges from them.

The question has arisen that my religion is enchanted mainly by the sound of the flute, that its inclination is chiefly toward peace, not toward power. It is necessary for me too to examine this claim.

For some, religion is a genteel path of escape, deserting from the battle of the world. To take such a holiday amid inactivity—a holiday in which there is no shame, indeed even a certain glory—that is, some consider it the very purpose of religion to remove, from the world and from life, whatever portion, once removed, relieves one of the burden of duty, and, in religion's name, to find in that removal a place to heave a sigh of relief. Such people are the world-renouncers. And there is another group, the pleasure-seekers. They distil certain particular delightful indulgences of the world into the form of spirituality, drink that, and wish to forget everything else in the world. That is, one group wants a certain peace which excludes the world; the other wants a certain heaven which forgets the world while remaining in it. Both these groups consider the path of escape itself to be the path of religion.

But there is yet another group who consider it religion to know this very world, with all its joys and sorrows, all its doubts and conflicts, as truth, and to attain fulfilment within it. If one holds the world merely within the compass of the world, one cannot reach that ultimate meaning of it which permeates it entirely and, transcending it on every side, presides over it. And so, without abandoning truth in any part, but by realizing in its entirety that ultimate meaning of truth—this alone they know as religion.

There may be two purposes for playing truant from school. One, to do nothing at all; the other, to play as one pleases. It is precisely in order to gain relief from the pain of discipline that exists within school that one scales the wall in such fashion, that one bribes the doorkeeper thus. But there are, again, two different ways of even accepting that pain of discipline. There is one group of boys who obey the rule out of fear of punishment; there is another group who take shelter in mere habitual rule-following—they feel secure if they can, mechanically, according to the exact regulations and at the exact time, do their work as ordered by their superior each day, and feel a certain self-satisfaction thereby, as though something had been

gained. But the boys of both these groups see the rule itself as final, and see nothing beyond it.

But there is also that boy who accepts the pain of school's discipline willingly, even joyfully, because he has truly realized, within his own mind, the school's purpose. Precisely because he knows this purpose to be true does he, at the very moment he receives pain, transcend that pain; at the very moment he obeys the rule, his mind gains freedom from it. This freedom is true freedom. Freedom gained by evading discipline is a cheating of oneself. Because this boy can see before his eyes a joyous image of knowledge's fulfilment, he regards the present incompleteness, the present sorrow, the present bondage, as themselves inherent within that very joy. For this boy, running away is altogether impossible. The joy that accepts sorrow in this way is greater than doing nothing, greater than playing as one pleases. That joy is greater than peace, greater than the sound of the flute.

Now the question is: which religion do I acknowledge? Here one thing must be kept in mind—when I use the phrase "my religion," it does not mean that I have attained perfection in any particular faith. He who calls himself a Christian has not, thereby, been able to become like Christ—in his conduct, opposition to Christian teaching is amply visible daily. I do not wish to speak so great a falsehood as to say that my deeds, my words, never run counter to my religion. But the question is: what is the ideal of my religion?

The answer to this lies scattered in various places throughout my own writings. When I ask myself this question inwardly too, my inner soul says—I am not, after all, partial to leaving anything out, for it is only by taking in everything that I am complete.

Whatever I wish to take, brother,
I shall find you spread outside it.

When, excluding some portion, I then call the truth truth, I am denying it. The very sign of truth is this: that everything comes and meets within it. However much apparent inconsistency there may seem, in that meeting, at its root there is a deep consonance—otherwise it would destroy itself. Therefore, if one takes consonance

to be the very nature of truth, and, by patching and stitching, builds up an artificial, house-bound consonance, that in fact obstructs truth. At one time men, sitting comfortably at home, decided that the earth was like a lotus—at its centre the North Pole mountain like the seed-pod, and in each of the four directions, one continent spread out like a petal. The root idea behind such fancies is this: that truth has a certain symmetry—without that symmetry, truth cannot sustain itself. This is quite correct. But that symmetry does not come by excluding disparity. It comes by accepting and transcending disparity—as Shiva becomes Shiva only after drinking all the poison churned from the ocean. So too, it is only by revering truth thus that one can find the courage to know the earth as it actually is—that is, divided into various unequal parts. I have no covetousness for a clipped truth and a house-bound symmetry. My covetousness is far greater—and therefore I do not fear inconsistency either.

When I was young, I did not have close ties with various populated places; then, in solitude, universal Nature alone was my sole companionship. This companionship is naturally peaceful, for within it there is no conflict, no opposition, no clash of will against will. This state is precisely the true state of childhood. Then, within the inner chamber, only peace and sweetness are needed. The seed needs, within the earth's breast, sheltered from the mighty world outside, to draw its sap in peace. The blows and counter-blows of storm, rain, sunshine, and shadow are not yet for it. Similarly, whatever intimation of religious awareness comes, in this latent state, from within universal Nature—that is the tasting of the Greater. Here, the child sees only Him who is only Peaceful; he grows only within Him who is only True.

To feel the harmony of one's own nature with universal Nature is easy, for, from that direction, no mind ever obstructs our mind anywhere. But in this harmony alone our mind's satisfaction can never reach completeness. For our mind exists too, and it too wants a greater harmony of its own. This harmony is not possible in the domain of universal Nature—it is possible only in the domain of universal Man. There, encompassing our self, we wish to unite with our greater Self. There we want our greater Father, friend, husband, leader in action, guide upon the path. There, when I proceed with only my small self, humanity suffers pain; then death shows terror, loss brings dejection, then the present begins to destroy the future, sorrow and grief become so absolute that, transcending them, I can find comfort

nowhere. Then I only hoard along life's path, I find no meaning in renunciation, my mind grows chafed with petty envies and enmities—then—

Only the shame of mere existence, mere sustaining of life,
A branch of shame,
Night after night, in a shuttered room, the dim flame
Of a small wick, blackened with smoke.

When this urge to seek the greater Self gradually began to bloom within my poetry—that is, when the seed, in sprout-form, first pierced the soil to show itself in the outer sky—I see its beginning in "Vishwanritya" ("The Cosmic Dance") of "Sonar Tari" ("The Golden Boat")—

In vast, deep, sweet, low tones,
Who shall play that music.
The heart shall rise up dancing,
Shall forget itself.
Bondage shall break, great joy,
New rhythm in new song,
The full moon in the sea of the heart
Shall awaken new longing.

But even here, the tune of the music is low. Though this tone is deep, it is a sweet deep tone. Be that as it may, the movement of the poem here rises from Nature's step to man's step. It gains acquaintance with the consciousness of the Vast. Hence, in that very poem, we find—

Who plays there, day and night,
Sitting on the inner seat,
A strange melody on time's instrument—
Some hear it, some do not.
I cannot fathom its meaning,
How many wise and learned men have pondered it,
The great human mind, forever,
Rises up under its command.

Here I see the words of that One conscious Being who, cutting through all obstacles, is driving the history of universal Man along a difficult and rugged path. From this point onward, the era of unbroken peace comes to an end.

But what is that unity which man goes seeking through the midst of conflict and revolution? That is Shivam, the Auspicious. In this welfare there is a great conflict. The sprout here is dividing into two and continuing to grow—joy and sorrow, good and evil. That which was in the soil was one, was peaceful; there was no battle of light and darkness there. Where the battle begins, there, unless one knows Shiva, one shall not know the truth of that place. The pain of knowing this Shiva is exceedingly intense. Here is "the great terror, the uplifted thunderbolt"—but it is precisely within this great pain that the true birth of our religious awareness occurs. Its gestation lies within universal Nature's vast peace. This has been stated concerning myself in two poems of "Naivedya" ("Offerings").

1

Melted by a mother's love, the milk-sweet nectar of the breast
I drank, and laughed, a child, idle in joy—
So too, overwhelmed with delight, a wealth of feeling
I drank in boyhood, and played the flute
In wild, fifth-note melody—upon Nature's breast
Cherished and fondled, my heart, happy like a child,
I lay, and dawn, night, evening as a bride
Brought, in vessel after vessel, honey of every hue,
Steeped in the scent of flower and forest. If today that reverie,
That rapture, should have come to its end,
If Nature's touch-enchantment should have gone far away—
There is no sorrow in that. From the village to the royal city
You have now brought me; give strength to my heart.
Show me the form of Truth, hard and stainless.

2

Amid blow and clash I have come to stand.
Unbroken earrings, necklace, ornaments of every kind
I have flung far away. Place in my hand
Your unfailing arrows, your unfailing quiver.
Grant me initiation into battle, O war-teacher. Let your mighty
Fatherly love resound today in stern command.
Make me honoured in the land of new heroes,
In arduous duty, in unbearable, harsh
Pain. Adorn my limbs
With the ornament of wound-marks. Bless your servant
In successful effort and in fruitless striving alike.
Do not keep me sunk in feeling's soft embrace—
In the field of action make me capable and free.

That good which leads man's soul forward fearlessly along the path of sorrow, along the path of conflict—taking shelter in that very good, the longing to attain the beloved has found clear expression in "Chitra"'s poem "Ebar Phirao More" ("Turn Me Back Now"). That poem begins with a rebuke to the sound of the flute—

On the day I came into the world,
What mother gave me only this playful flute.
Playing and playing it, thus enchanted by my own tune,
For long days, long nights, I went off, utterly far away,
Beyond the world's bounds.

The peace of sweetness is not this poem's goal. Who is it toward whom this poem's tryst is directed?

Who is he? I know not who. I know him not—

I only know this much—for his sake, through night's darkness,
Humanity's caravan has travelled from age to age,
Through storm, tempest, thunderbolt, carefully igniting and holding
The inner lamp. I only know that whoever heard in his ear
His summoning song, has rushed out with fearless soul

Into the whirlpool of crisis, has given up the whole world,
Has taken torment to his breast, has heard death's roar
As though it were music. Fire has burnt him,
Spears have pierced him, axes have cut him to pieces,
All his most cherished things he has sacrificed unhesitatingly
For his sake through all his lifetimes, he has kindled the sacrificial fire—
Cutting out his own heart as a blood-lotus offering,
In devotion he has, redeeming the debt of his birth, worshipped him with a final worship,
Finding, in death, his life fulfilled.

From this point onward, again and again, the story of the clash between the vast consciousness and the human consciousness began to appear in my poetry. This confrontation of the two is not merely one of comfort, merely of sweetness. The summons that arrives from the other shore is not, after all, the flute's gentle tune. And so the reply to that tune runs thus—

O enchantress, O cruel-mouthed one, O blood-thirsty
Harsh mistress,
Have I given you my days entirely, that in the end you would take
My nights too?
Everyone in the world has, near the world's border,
Some end somewhere,
Why does the heart-piercing, all-consuming
Order come from you?
The darkness spread across the universe is everyone's
Own solitary place,
From where, into its midst, does your summons
Strike like lightning?

This summons is a summons only to power; it is the call to the field of action, not to the bower-garden of pleasure-taking—and that is why the final answer here is this—

I shall, I shall, I shall win, O Goddess, I fear nothing,

I shall be victorious.
Your summoning message
I shall fulfil, O Queen, O Glorious One.
The tired hand shall not tremble, the voice shall not break,
The lute-string shall not snap,
For the new dawn I shall remain awake long—
The lamp shall not go out.
In the new dawn of duty, into the hand of a new servant
I shall pass on the gift,
In my last voice I shall go forth proclaiming
Your summons.

My religion is, from within the darkness of my unconscious realm, gradually rising into the light of the conscious realm—these writings are its clear and unclear footprints. Seeing those marks, one may understand that it does not know the path, and does not itself know precisely in which direction it is going. Whether the path belongs to the world or lies beyond the world, that too it has not understood. It cannot name what it can see, and calls it by various names. Suddenly, to its own astonishment, it sees that someone is leading it in yet another direction, even while, keeping its goal in mind, it kept setting its feet forward again and again.

At every step you led me astray,
Where I shall go today, I cannot tell,
A weary heart, a bewildered traveller,
I have arrived in a strange land.
Sometimes on some noble mountain peak,
Sometimes in sorrow's darkest pit,
I know not the path, upon that path
I go on, like one possessed.

There is a certain awareness that, moment by moment, kept startling the poet as he walked along this dim, half-lit path—there is mention of it in a letter of that time; let me draw out a portion or two of that letter—

Who is it that bids me look at everything with such profound gravity, who has set me to listening, with fixed and steady ear, to a music beyond the whole universe, who is making the fine and mighty bonds of my connection with the outer world conscious and alert every single day?...

Whatever religion we receive from external scripture never becomes my religion at all. With it is born, at most, merely a bond of habit. To bring forth religion from within oneself is the life-long striving of man. In supreme pain, one must give it birth, one wishes to give it life with the blood of one's own veins—and thereafter, whether one finds happiness in life or not, one may die fulfilled in joy.

In this way, gradually, an occasion arrived when it became possible to acknowledge religion clearly within life. The further this advanced, the more a certain separation began to appear between the earlier life and the approaching new life. The peaceful, sweet seat of the universal Nature that had been spread across the infinite sky was suddenly shattered by someone appearing in fierce form amid the conflict-tormented world of man. From now on came the sorrow of conflict, the tumult of revolution. How much like a storm's onset that rising of a new awareness appeared is stated in the poem "Barshashesh" ("End of the Year") of this period—

O untameable, O relentless, O new one, cruel-mouthed new one,
Simple and mighty.
As withered petals are destroyed and scattered on all sides
While fruit emerges—
Tearing the old flower-sheath, rending it, into wondrous shape,
So too, all at once, with such force, have you come to full manifestation—
I bow before you.
I bow before you, O terrible one, moist and dark green,
Unwearied, unfading.
O just-born great warrior, what have you brought, bearing it here,
I know nothing at all.
Your banner, torn loose from the cloud-bound sun's
Streak of golden light, flies—
With folded hands I gaze upward, unable to read
What is written upon it.

O prince, with a smiling face, draw your bow,
With a twanging, ringing sound,
Let a most keen, piercing note
Tremble, splitting through my breast's ribs, within.
O youth, lift up your great victory-drum,
Sound the summons.
We shall rise up, we shall rush out,
We shall offer our lives.
We shall not wish to flee, we shall not weep at loss,
We shall not look at direction,
We shall not count days or hours, we shall not enter into debate or judgement,
Wild wayfarers.

When dawn's first stirring occurs at night's edge, its faint hint seems, at first, only to be composing ornament. In corner after corner of the sky, upon cloud after cloud, various colours begin to bloom; the treetops begin to glitter; the dewdrops upon the grass begin to sparkle—the whole affair is primarily ornamental. But from this one can understand that night's turn has ended and day's turn has begun. One understands that the touch of the sun has reached, deep within, the sky itself; one understands that the deep, grave, boundless peace of sleep's night has ended, that all the pain of waking, gathering pitch by pitch, shall soon ring out in restless melody. In just this way, the first awakening of religious awareness was appearing in the ornament of literature; it kept casting various colours, in cloud after cloud of fancy, upon the peaks of mental nature; but from the midst of it, one could recognize that universal Nature's unbroken peace was now bidding farewell, that the term of exile, spent in solitude, in the forest of the years, had ended—that now had come the Bhishma-parva (the great war-chapter) of universal Man's battlefield. If one reads the prose essay called "The Madman," published in Bangadarshan at this time, one will understand what was trying to express itself through the ornament of fancy.—

I know that happiness is a thing of every day, joy is beyond the everyday. Happiness, contracted for fear that dust might somehow touch the body somewhere; joy, rolling in dust, breaks and smashes to fragments the barrier between itself and the All. In this sense dust is toxic to happiness's path, dust is an ornament to joy's path.

Happiness fears lest something be lost. Joy, having distributed everything it has, is content. In this sense poverty is happiness's destitution, but poverty itself is joy's wealth. Happiness, carefully preserves its own splendour within the confines of arrangement. Joy, generously reveals its own beauty within the freedom of destruction. In this sense happiness is bound by outer rule; joy breaks that bond and itself creates its own rule. Happiness sits waiting for its little share of nectar. Joy digests, with ease, even the matter of sorrow. In this sense happiness is partial only toward the good side—but for joy, both good and evil are equal.

There is a madman in this creation, who casually brings and presents whatever is unimaginable〜The deity of Rule is trying to make every path of the world into a perfectly complete circular path, and this madman is winding it up, coiling it into a spiral form. This madman, on his own whim, has evolved a bird from the reptile lineage and a man from the ape lineage. There exists in the world a stubborn effort to preserve, in eternally fixed form, whatever has come into being, whatever exists—this one takes that and sweeps it into ruin, and makes way for what does not yet exist. This one has no flute in his hand, harmonious tune is not his; the war-horn blares, the divinely-ordained sacrifice is destroyed, and from somewhere a novelty comes flying in to settle and take its place.

Suddenly, amid our everyday, monochrome triviality, the Terrible appears with all its blazing pageantry. That Terrible One rises up, within Nature, as an unexpected calamity, within man, as an extraordinary sin, in fearsome shape. Then how many a web of happy union is thrown into disarray, how many a heart's bond is shattered to pieces. O Rudra (the Fierce), the moment even a single spark from your forehead's flickering fire lands, a household lamp bursts into flame, and by that very flame, amidst the town's thousand-voiced wailing, a house-fire breaks out in the depths of night. Alas, O Terrible One, by your dance, by your right and left footsteps, great virtue and great sin are both thrown up into the world. Over the world, day by day, a monotonous veil of ordinariness settles—by the mighty blow of both good and evil, you keep tearing it to shreds, and keep, with the excitement of the unexpected, ceaselessly rippling the current of life, revealing ever-new plays of power and ever-new forms of creation. O Madman, may my fearful heart not turn away from joining in this terrible joy of yours. May your sun-bright third eye, in the midst of destruction's blood-red sky, illuminate, with its unwavering light,

the innermost depths of my inner being. Dance, O maddened one, dance. When, in the whirling force of that dance, the illumined nebula, spanning millions upon millions of leagues in the sky, shall keep revolving, then, in my breast, may fear's regret not cause this terrible song's rhythm to falter. O Conqueror of Death, in all our good and all our ill, may victory be yours alone.

The advent of this our wayward deity is not something momentary; his madness is clinging to creation always—we merely catch, moment by moment, a glimpse of it. Constantly, life is being made new by death, good is being made bright by evil, the trivial is being made inconceivably precious. When we catch that glimpse, then the peerless within form, the manifestation of liberation within bondage, awakens within us.

After that, this sentiment has expressed itself again and again in my writing—the manifestation of the infinite, in life, in the guise of sorrow, calamity, opposition, death—

Tell me, is this the way of union,
O death, O my death,
Is there no pomp of ceremony to it,
Is there no auspicious rite?
Shall your ochre-tinted great matted hair
Not be bound up into a crest?
Shall your victorious raised banner
Have no one to walk before or behind?
By torchlight, upon the river's bank,
Shall no eye open, in coloured garment?
Shall the earth not tremble in terror,
O death, O my death.
When bright-eyed Vilochana went to be wed
O death, O my death,
What preparation there was for him,
What hundreds of implements!
His tiger-skin swayed loosely,
His bull roared again and again,

Encircling his matted locks,
How many hooded serpents hissed in fury.
His horn rang out with a deep boom,
The skull-ornament swung at his neck,
From his conch a blast rose up—
O death, O my death.
If I remain busy at home
O death, O my death,
Break, then, all my work,
Take away all my shame.
If I lie fulfilling all desire in dream,
Reclining in a happy bed,
If, my heart wrapped in lethargy,
I remain with half-waking eyes—
Then blow your conch,
Filling it with an apocalyptic breath,
I shall come running, O Lord,
O death, O my death.

In "Kheya" there is a poem called "Agamon" ("Advent")—in that poem, the great king who came, who is he? He is Unrest itself. Everyone, shutting their door at night, was sleeping in peace; none imagined he would come. Though, now and then, a knock had been felt at the door, though, like distant thunder, the rumble of his chariot wheels had, moment by moment, been heard even in dreams, still no one wished to believe that he was coming, lest their comfort be disturbed. But the door broke—the king came.

O throw open the door wide,
Blow the conch, blow.
In the deep night has come
The king of the dark house.
Thunder rolls in the empty sky,
Lightning flashes,
Dragging along his torn seat
He has decked your courtyard,

With the storm has suddenly come
The king of the sorrowful night.

In "Kheya" there is a poem called "Daan" ("The Gift"). Its subject is this: I had asked for a garland of flowers, but what did I receive?

This is no garland, O this
Is your sword.
It flares up like fire,
Heavy as a thunderbolt—
This is your sword.

Having received such a gift, is there any way left to remain at peace? Peace is bondage, if it cannot be attained through the midst of unrest.

From today, into the world's midst,
I shall abandon fear,
From today, in all my work,
Victory shall be yours—
I shall abandon all fear.
Death you have left, made my companion,
Placed within my house,
I shall welcome him
And keep him full of life.
Your sword shall
Wear away my bonds.
I shall abandon all fear.

Many more songs could be quoted in which this tune of the Vast's unrest has struck. But along with this, one must admit that this is only the middle statement, not the final one. The final statement is: Shantam Shivam advaitam—Peaceful, Auspicious, Non-dual. If terribleness had been Rudra's final identity, our soul could find no shelter in that incompleteness—then where would the world find refuge? That is why man calls upon Him: Rudra yat te dakshinam mukham tena mam pahi nityam—O Rudra, by your gracious face, protect me forever. That gracious face is the

ultimate truth and the supreme truth. That truth alone is above all terribleness. But to reach that truth, one must pass through Rudra's touch. The graciousness that excludes Rudra, the peace that denies unrest—that is a mere dream, not truth.

In the thunder your flute plays,
Is that an easy song?
By that tune I shall awaken,
Give me that ear.
I shall not again forget so easily,
My mind shall rise, intoxicated with that life,
Hidden within death lies
That endless life.
Let that storm be, like the friend of joy,
On the strings of my heart's harp,
Make the seven seas and the ten directions
Dance to that clashing sound.
Tear me away from comfort,
Take me into that depth,
Where, at the heart of unrest, dwells
Peace supreme.

From "Sharadotsav" ("Autumn Festival") onward to "Phalguni," I have written a certain number of plays; when I look at them with particular attention, I see that the same underlying refrain runs through each. The king has set out to join everyone in the autumn festival. He seeks his companion. On the way he sees boys who have gone out to celebrate, joining in the joy of autumn Nature. But there was one boy—Upananda—who, forsaking all play, was sitting apart, absorbed in repaying his master's debt. The king said his true companion had been found, for it was with that very boy that lay the true joining with autumn Nature's true joy—that boy was repaying, through the discipline of sorrow, his debt of joy—and that very sorrow's form is the sweetest of all. The whole universe is engaged in this austerity of sorrow; the gift that it has received from the infinite within itself, it is repaying through the pain of restless effort. Each blade of grass expresses itself through tireless striving; in the very act of this expression, it is repaying the debt of its own inherent truth. This continuous self-sacrifice in pain is its self-celebration;

this sorrow itself is its glory, this itself is its festival; by this alone has it made autumn Nature beautiful, made it full of joy. Seen from outside, this seems like play, but it is no play—there is not the slightest respite in it. Wherever there is slackness in the repayment of one's own debt of truth, there alone is there obstruction to expression, there alone is ugliness, there alone is joylessness. The soul's expression is joyous. It is for this very reason that it can accept sorrow, can accept death—the man who, out of fear, or idleness, or doubt, avoids this path of sorrow is deprived of that very joy in the world. This is the very inward meaning of the autumn festival—it was never meant to be a matter of sitting idle beneath a tree, listening to the sound of a flute.

In the play "Raja" ("The King"), Sudarshana wished to see her formless king in visible form; deluded by infatuation with outward form, she placed the garland around a false king's neck; and then, through that very error, through that very sin, through the conflagration it ignited, through the terrible war it provoked, through the utter unrest it stirred up within and without—precisely through all this she was brought to true union. The path of creation lies through destruction. That is why the Upanishad says: heated by austerity, He created all this. Whatever our soul creates carries pain at every step. But if we call that mere pain, the final word remains unsaid; within that very pain lies beauty, within it lies joy.

By the awareness through which our soul knows itself, that awareness's arising overcomes conflict, breaks down the walls of our habit and comfort. By the awareness through which we gain liberation, "poets speak of the difficult path, sharp as a razor's edge"—through sorrow's difficult path, it comes blowing its trumpet of victory—it makes the horizon tremble with terror in every direction, we think of it as an enemy, we must fight with it before we can accept it—for "the soul is not to be attained by the weak." In "Achalayatan" this very thought is present.

Mahapanchak: Are you our guru?

Dadathakur: Yes. You will not recognize me, but I am your guru.

Mahapanchak: You, our guru? By what path did you come, violating all our rules? Who shall obey you?

Dadathakur: I know not whether they shall obey me. But I am indeed your guru.

Mahapanchak: You, guru? Then why this disguise of an enemy?

Dadathakur: This is precisely my guru's attire. That you will fight against me—that very battle is my guru's welcome〜〜

Mahapanchak: I will not bow to you.

Dadathakur: I shall not accept your bowing—I shall bow to you.

Mahapanchak: You have not come to receive our worship.

Dadathakur: I have not come to receive your worship, I have come to receive dishonour.

I indeed think that today's war raging in Europe has come to pass because that same Guru has arrived. He must break down many an old wall of money, of prestige, of pride. No one was prepared for his coming. But the preparation for his coming, with all this pomp, had long been underway. Europe's Sudarshana, seeing the false king's golden form, mistook him for her own husband—that is why the fire suddenly blazed up, that is why the seven kings' war broke out—that is why she who was queen must, abandoning her chariot, abandoning her wealth, walk over the dust of the road, on foot, on her pilgrimage of union. This very thought is present in a song of "Gitali"—

In one hand he holds a sword,
In the other a garland.
He has broken your door.
He has not come to receive alms,
He will win, by fighting,
Your very life.
He has broken your door.
By the path of death, there,

He is coming into life,
He is coming in a hero's array.
He will not return with half—
Whatever there is, all at once,
He shall claim entirely.
He has broken your door.

This conflict—death and life, power and love, self-interest and welfare—this opposition of contraries, whose true resolution man's religious awareness alone can see—that resolution is supreme peace, supreme welfare, supreme oneness—of this I have spoken again and again. Some of it could have been drawn from the book "Shantiniketan." But where I have explicitly explained religious doctrine, there I may perhaps not speak my own innermost thought; there it is not impossible that I might be using thoughts merely heard from outside. In literary composition, the writer's own nature reveals itself unconsciously, and that revelation is, therefore, comparatively purer. Hence I take as testimony poetry and drama alone.

To know life as truth, one must seek its acquaintance through death. The man who, out of fear, evades death and clings to life has, because he lacks true reverence for life, never truly attained life. And so, though dwelling within life, he dies daily in death's terror. But he who himself advances and rushes to capture death sees that what he has caught is not death at all, but life. When I cannot summon courage to run to face it, then I see its shadow behind me. Seeing that shadow, I go on dying of fright. When, fearlessly, I run straight toward it, then I see that the very oar which carries us forward along life's path is the same oar that bears us through death's triumphal arch. "Phalguni"'s basic premise is this: the young men have gone out to celebrate the spring festival. But this festival is no mere merrymaking—it is not something that can occur without effort. Only by crossing old age's fatigue, death's terror, can one reach that new life's joy. So the young men said: let us go and bind that old, decrepit one, imprison death itself. In human history, indeed, we see this very play, this very spring-festival, occurring again and again. Old age grips society tightly, custom sits immovable, the tyranny of the old wants to trample and deaden new life—then man leaps into the very jaws of death, and, through revolution, arranges the celebration of new spring. It is precisely this arrangement that is underway in Europe. There, the new age's spring holi-festival has begun. Human

history, wishing to reveal its own eternally-youthful, immortal form, has summoned death. Death itself has been engaged in its own adornment. So the Baul says in "Phalguni"—Age after age man has fought, and today, in the spring breeze, is its very wave〜Those who died immortal, they it is who have sent letters upon spring's tender leaves. In every direction they are proclaiming—"We have not judged the path, we have not kept count of provisions, we have rushed out, we have burst into bloom. Had we sat pondering, what state would spring have been in!"

These letters upon spring's tender leaves—whose letters are these? All those leaves that have fallen have sent their own message through death. Had they been able to cling to the branch, then old age would have been immortal—then the ancient manuscript's pages upon yellowed paper would have turned all the forest yellow, the dry rustling sound of those leaves would have made the sky shudder. But it is the old itself which, through death, reveals eternal youth—this indeed is the spring festival. Hence spring says—those who fear death do not know life; they embrace old age and remain living-dead, cut off from the vital universe.—

Chandrahas: What, is that you〜 our leader. Where is the old man?

Sardar: There is no one anywhere.

Chandrahas: Nowhere?... Then what was that?

Sardar: That was a dream.

Chandrahas: Then it is you who are eternal?

Sardar: Yes.

Chandrahas: And we too are eternal?

Sardar: Yes.

Chandrahas: Those who saw you from behind, there is no telling how many people took you for how many different things〜 Then you suddenly seemed old. Then you emerged out of the cave. Now it seems as though you were a boy. It seems as if I have seen you for the first time. This is a great wonder—you are, again and again, the first, you are, returning again and again, the first.

Man wishes to receive his life as truth, as greater, as new. And so, in human civilization, that life which has blossomed forth does nothing but pierce through death. Man has said—

Dying and dying, finish
Death itself at once,
Then that life shall come
And take its own seat itself.

Man has known—

This is no sweet play,
You and I, our whole life,
Morning and evening.
How many times has the lamp gone out,
The stormy night has roared in,
Into this swing of the world you have set
The push of doubt.
Again and again breaking the dam,
The flood has rushed forth,

Terror in every direction,
A wail has arisen.
O Terrible One, in sorrow and joy,
This one word has rung in the breast—
In your love there is a wound,
There is no neglect.

What my religion is, in such a way that I even today know it fully and clearly—I cannot say such a thing. It is no religion written in a book, in the form of doctrine, in the form of a theory. To sever that religion from the innermost core of life, to unearth it, to fix it in place and set it up for examination and knowledge, is for me impossible—but that idle peace and enjoyment of beauty are not that religion's chief aim or substance—this I know for certain. I acknowledge, Anandaddhyeva khalvimani bhutani jayante and Anandam prayanti abhisamvishanti—from joy, indeed, all these beings arise, and unto joy they proceed and enter—but that joy is not a joy that excludes sorrow, it is a joy that assimilates sorrow into itself. That joy's welfare-form transcends the unwelfare, does not attain itself by rejecting it; its unbroken, non-dual form fulfils all division and opposition, does not attain itself by denying them.

The light that emerges from the source of darkness,
That indeed is your light.
The good that stays awake amid all conflict and opposition,
That indeed is your good.
The home that lies with its breast spread upon the dust of the road,
That indeed is your home.
The tenderness that makes the death-blow immortal,
That indeed is your tenderness.
When everything is exhausted, the invisible gift that remains,
That indeed is your gift.
The life that death pours, filling its own cup,
That indeed is your life.
The dust-covered ground beneath the feet of all the world's people,
That indeed is your ground.
Taking everyone, hidden in the midst of all, you remain—
That indeed is my You.

Satyam jnanam anantam. Shantam shivam advaitam. There is a Jewish legend—that man once dwelt in an immortal realm. That realm was Heaven. There, there is no sorrow, no death. But that Heaven which we have been unable to conquer through sorrow, through the clash of evil, is not the Heaven of knowledge—that I

do not know as Heaven. To find the mother within the mother's womb is not truly to find the mother; to find her through separation is the true finding.

When, leaving the womb, onto the earth
It falls,
Then the child sees its own mother.
When your affection was hidden,
Wrapped around him in the coil of the navel-cord,
Then I did not know you.
Striking a blow,
The day you pull and cast me far away from your covering,
That separation gives consciousness anew—
I see your face.

And so, knowledge came to that unconscious heaven. As soon as that knowledge arrived, self-division occurred within truth. The conflict of true-false, good-evil, life-death, came and exiled man from Heaven into shame, sorrow, and grief. Transcending this conflict, man returns again into that undivided truth from which there is no further deviation. But where can this opposition of contraries be resolved? Within the Infinite. Hence the Upanishad says: Satyam jnanam anantam—Truth, Knowledge, Infinite. At first, man dwells within truth, one with all inert and living beings alike—knowledge comes, and, causing conflict, draws man out from there and makes him separate—at last, in the domain of truth's complete, infinite form, it merges him again with all. In the first stage of religious awareness, Shantam (Peaceful)—man is then subject to his own nature—then he wants only happiness, wants only wealth, then, like a child, he has only the thirst for his own enjoyment, then his goal is Preya (the pleasant). Afterward, with the awakening of humanity, doubt comes to him; then he seeks the resolution of these two oppositions, happiness and sorrow, good and evil—then he does not evade sorrow, does not fear death. In that state, Shivam (Auspicious)—then his goal is Shreya (the good). But it does not end even here—the end is Prema, Ananda—Love, Joy. There, happiness and sorrow, enjoyment and renunciation, life and death, meet at their confluence. There, Advaitam (Non-dual). There, it is not merely crossing the ocean of separation and opposition. There, it is rising from the boat onto the shore. There, that joy is not in the sole cessation of sorrow, but in sorrow's sole fulfilment. This

journey of religious awareness—first life, then death, then immortality. Man has attained the right to that immortality. For, among living beings, man alone has accepted sorrow, death, on the sharp, difficult path of the Good. He has, like Savitri, brought back his own truth from Death's very hand. He has descended from Heaven to the mortal world, and only then has he been able to make the immortal realm his own. Religion alone carries man across the storm of this conflict and, transcending it, brings him into this non-duality, this immortality, this joy, this love. Those who think that to escape the storm by fleeing is liberation—how shall they ever cross over? That is precisely why man prays: Asato ma sadgamaya, tamaso ma jyotirgamaya, mrityor ma amritam gamaya—From the unreal lead me to the real, from darkness lead me to light, from death lead me to immortality. The meaning of "gamaya" (lead) is this: that one must pass through the path—there is no way of avoiding the path.

If there be any theology in my writings, it is this: that the awareness of that complete love-bond between the Supreme Soul and the individual soul is religious awareness—love which, on the one hand, is dual, and on the other, non-dual; on the one hand separation, on the other union; on the one hand bondage, on the other liberation. Within which power and beauty, form and essence, the finite and the infinite, have become one; which, precisely by acknowledging the world, truly transcends the world, and precisely by acknowledging what lies beyond the world, truly accepts the world; which, even amid war, knows peace, even amid evil, recognizes goodness, and even amid diversity, worships the One. The song of advent that my religion sings is this—

You have broken the door, you have come, luminous one,
Victory be yours.
Farewell to darkness, noble arising,
Victory be yours.
O victorious hero, on new life's morning
New hope's sword is in your hand,
Cut through weary illusion with a hard, harsh blow,
Let bondage be destroyed.
Victory be yours.
Come, unbearable one, come, come, merciless one,

Victory be yours.
Come, pure one, come, come, fearless one,
Victory be yours.
O morning sun, you have come in terrible form,
Your trumpet sounds along sorrow's path,
Kindle the crimson fire within the heart,
Let death be destroyed.
Victory be yours.

Ashwin-Kartik, 1324 (Bengali calendar)

OF MYSELF– 4

To arrive at one's true identity is no simple matter. Amid the manifold experiences of a lifetime, the single thread of unity running beneath them refuses to be easily grasped. Had Providence not lengthened my days, had I not been granted leave to reach the age of seventy, I should never have won the leisure to form a clear understanding of myself. I have looked upon myself in fragments, engaged myself in a hundred different labors, and moment by moment my own experience of myself has lain scattered before me. Now, treading this long circling path of life, come at last to its parting hour, when I behold that circle in its wholeness, I have understood one thing: I possess but a single identity, and it is nothing more than this—I am merely a poet. My mind has, on the occasion of various works, shown itself moment by moment in various guises. In none of these lies the fullness of my identity. I am no philosopher, no master of arms, no guru, no leader—once I declared, "I do not wish to become the helmsman of new Bengal's new age," and in that I spoke the truth. Those who are messengers of the stainless, spotless Light—who cleanse the sins of the world, who set mankind upon the path of pure and untroubled welfare—them I hold in reverence; but my seat has never been placed beside theirs. Yet when that same white radiance becomes manifold, when He scatters Himself abroad in rays of many colors and tints the universe with hue, I am the messenger of that diversity. We dance and make others dance, we laugh and make others laugh, we sing, we paint—we who are made restless by the causeless joy of that manifest revelation of the universe—we are His messengers too. To take the play of the Manifold into the heart, and to give it play again without—this is my task. I lay no claim to guiding mankind toward some final goal; my work is to walk alongside the wayfarers as they walk. The shade that falls on either side of the road, the wealth of green, the flowers and leaves, the song of birds—it is only to furnish the savor of that flavor that we exist. That Manifold One who plays abroad in every direction, in melody and song, in dance and picture, in color upon color, in form upon form, in the clash and concord of joy and sorrow, in the strife of good and evil—of His playhouse of infinite variety I have taken up the outward task; the burden of arraying the manifold images upon His stage has fallen to me. This alone is my one identity.

Other epithets, too, men have bestowed upon me—some have called me a philosopher, some have seated me in the schoolmaster's chair. But from childhood onward, sheer love of play has led me to slip past the schoolmaster—the schoolmaster's office was never mine. When as a boy I first went out upon the road with a flute pierced with many notes, something wished to bloom forth clear from within the unclear dimness of that dawn—I remember still the recollection of that day. That was the first blessed dawning of light upon darkness; that day the flood-tide voice of morning broke for the first time upon my mind, sending its ripple across the lake of my heart. Whether I understood it well or ill, whether I could speak of it or could not, at the shock of that Word, the Word itself awakened within me. In the manifold play of the universe the mind of the Infinite grows restless with a hundred melodies, and in that same wave the child's mind, too, grew restless—and to this day it has not found rest. Seventy years now stand complete, and still my friends chide me for this same restlessness, still they find in me a want of gravity. But there is no end to the commissions of the Cosmic Craftsman. He who is restless, who in the unquiet breath of spring is forever restless in forest after forest—Him I cannot betray by disciplining myself into a borrowed solemnity. These seventy years I have tested many paths, and today I harbor no more doubt: I am the playmate of the Manifold in His sport. What I have done, what I shall leave behind for others to find, I do not know. I shall lay no claim upon permanence. He who plays holds no attachment to His play—the playhouse that He Himself has built, He Himself again dismantles. The alpana pattern drawn yesterday evening in this mango grove, restless as it was, a single night's storm has washed and wiped away, and it must be traced anew today. If I have furnished some small toy to His playhouse, I harbor no hope that Eternity will gather it up and preserve it. Broken toys go to the rubbish-heap. If, for so long as I live, I have offered some measure of the wine of joy in this earthen jar, that is enough. The morrow may see the wine spent and the jar shattered, but that shall not make of yesterday's feast a thing of nothing. On this day that completes my seventieth year, I say to all, invoking the name of the Lord of Rasa: to weigh oneself as greater or lesser than another is a vain reckoning that spoils the very savor of the game; let those who wrangle over the measuring-rod be forgiven their play. I have no wish to scramble in the dust for that lump of clay men call fame, scattered and trampled underfoot in the marketplace of the world. May the wit to haggle loudly over the wages of my labor never be granted me.

Even in the labors of this ashram, only so much as pertains to expression is truly mine; the machinery of it others tend and drive. I wished to give form to mankind's longing for self-expression, and for that purpose I sought out a hermitage to serve as its stage. Not amid the brick and mortar of the city, but here, in this courtyard of sunrise and sunset beneath the blue sky, I wished to become playmate to these tender boys and girls. To give expression to that gracious and beautiful form which awakens here in this ashram, in the confluence of living spirits—this is my task. Some works outside this I have also set in motion, but there I hold no final place; wherever form dwells, there I dwell. Where the inarticulate sorrow of the village seeks restlessly for expression, there am I found. The classes I have held here for children are but a secondary matter. My endeavor has been to lay open that first flowering-forth of children's tender lives upon the playing-field of Nature, that flush of dawn at the very threshold of their pursuit of knowledge, that sprout of freshly-risen aspiration—had I not done so, I should have had to perish entangled in the wreckage of law and syllabus. All such outward labor is secondary; for that, I have my friends. But to blend the rhythm of the Lord of Play's own sport with the singing and dancing of these children, now granting them holiday, now the edge of a blade, and in this to labor at rousing their hearts to joy—in this alone lies my delight, my fulfillment. Graver than this I cannot become. To those who, sounding conch and bell, would seat me upon some lofty dais, I say: I was born to take the lowest place; the master of these games has granted me leave from the seat reserved for the venerable and the eminent. Into this dust, this earth, this grass, I have poured out my heart—among the forest-trees and healing herbs. Those who dwell near to the lap of earth, who are raised by earth's own hand, who begin their walking upon the earth and in the end take their rest upon the earth—of all such I am the friend; I am a poet.

Santiniketan, 25 Vaishakh, 1338

OF MYSELF– 5

The materials that compose the body of a banyan tree are not different from the basic materials of other trees. In the general province of things, every plant gathers its own nourishment for itself. To these materials, and to this nourishment, we may give different names; we may distinguish them by classifying them into various categories. But amid the countless forms of vegetation, that impulse which fashions a particular tree into precisely a banyan tree—tarhi darśanaṃ gūḍham anupraviṣṭaṃ, "who has seen that hidden thing which has entered in secret"—that invisible force, that deeply-hidden thing, I know not by what name to call it. One might say it is that tree's own inherent tendency of unfolding. This is no mere passive nature that simply signals an individual, generic identity—it is a nature that unceasingly expresses that identity, ever anew. Throughout the whole being of the tree, it is pervasive, yet nowhere can that mystery be seized or touched. Ghrāṇejiraksya dṛdṛśe na rūpam—one may perceive that One's momentum, one may perceive its labor, but its form itself cannot be seen. Amid countless paths, with unerring skill, along one single path alone, it preserves and carries forward its own wondrous individuality in utter secrecy; it never sleeps; it never falters.

Of this life-filled mystery within ourselves, we do not readily think—yet I myself have felt it again and again. Especially now, having come to the very margin of my allotted years, my perception of it grows only clearer.

That which is life's ultimate significance, its innermost meaning, that which outwardly is taking shape in a continuous unfolding of consequence—this I am coming to understand as prāṇasya prāṇaṃ, the life within life, the innermost breath of breath. Within me it has not found its passage easily—at every step it has met resistance. This engine of life is fashioned from whatever raw materials were at hand; a master craftsman might not always have been able to draw from them a flawless music. But I have come to know, on the whole, the essential nature of what that Will within me intends. Through the pull of various forces from various directions, I have sometimes mistakenly understood; my mind has been scattered onto other paths; sometimes, perhaps, the seeming superiority of some other path has led me astray. This much I have learned: that according to inspiration, the worth and dignity of every person's path is distinct unto itself. In my play Naṭīr Pūjā

(The Dancing Girl's Worship), I sought to express precisely this truth. What the dancing girl wished to offer to the Buddha as her tribute was her dance. What the other devotees had given him was what was, for them, their own inmost truth; but the dancing girl gave the truth manifest in her entire life. Through death she proved the ultimate worth of that truth. What had wakened this dance to fullness, within her spirit and heart, was the innermost life of her own life.

I harbor no doubt that within me, likewise, some single-minded purpose, achieving its creation, has been steadily guiding me—a hidden consciousness working through obstacles, working even through my own self-contradiction. If it were my fortune, then by His inspiration, in the vessel of tribute, I might be able to manifest, wholly and completely, the very oneness and distinctiveness of the offering of my life to existence. That is to say—if a harmony congenial to its own inherent disposition could be achieved between its innate impulse and my outer condition, my outer arrangement; if there were no gap between the player and that which is played. Looking back today, I find that in the harmony of my life's course, I can, from the outside, trace that expression; and along with this, I can perceive, within, that unseen Person at the center of life who, through a single continuous current of resolve, has woven the threads of existence upon the string of truth.

I must now consider what part was played, in the shaping of my life, by our family. When I was born, the customs that then prevailed in our society were more governed by habit than by any true meaning; their vitality was spent; they had become merely an enclosing wall of the past. Yet no such wall stood around our own house. The hall of worship, established by our forefathers, stood empty within our home; I had not the slightest experience of its manner of use. Whatever contrived conventions, born of sectarian narrowness, have long fettered the human intellect—which for many centuries, in various places, in various strange forms, have set one people against another in the most obstinate estrangement, have converted mutual hatred and the humiliation of contempt into an ingrained, unreasoning prejudice; whose influence, since the ending of the medieval age, has withdrawn somewhat from the more advanced nations, or become at least comparatively less thorny, but which, still pervasive throughout our own land, has taken the fearful shape of catastrophic conflict, whether in the governance of the state or in the conduct of society—of the passage of all this, neither within our

house nor without it, was there any trace. My purpose in saying this is: that the very nature of life fashioned in me from birth was never subjected to the scriptural weight of any decaying age; the shaper of that form never had to keep constant, wary watch against the uplifted, admonishing finger of ancient authority in his own new work of creation.

In this fashioning of the universe, there is wonder; on every side there is the ineffable. With this could never mingle any mythological belief lodged in my mind, nor any particular ritual of seasonal observance. What could join, unmixed, with my own mind, was this world itself. From childhood I have felt, with intense intimacy, joy in the vision of the universe. Nothing can be a simpler act of worship than that sense of joy; the initiation into that worship came not from without—I have composed its mantra myself, as I went along.

The winter dawns of my childhood still shine bright in my memory even today. When the night's darkness had faded to grey, I would fling off my quilt and rise in haste. At the eastern edge of the walled garden within our house, a row of coconut fronds would then be glittering, dewy, in the first flush of dawn. Fearing, as it were, that I might for even a single day be deprived of this golden display, I would rush out wearing only a thin shirt, my two arms clasped against my chest, heedless of the cold. To the north, against the side of the husking-shed, stood an old country-variety mango tree; in another corner stood a plum tree, by the side of a crumbling old well—where girls fond of forbidden fruit would gather at noon beneath its shade. In the middle lay a stone-flagged courtyard, marked with moss, bearing the fissured traces of a bygone age. And there was, besides, a good deal of open space, carelessly neglected, of which I recall no other tree worth naming. This, then, was my garden; this was, for me, entirely sufficient. Here it was, as it were, from some cracked, chipped, handleless vessel that I drank the water of my thirst. Some tender being within me secretly poured out that water for me. What material thing I received was far, far less than the savor I gained from it. Today I understand why I came into this world: I am no saint, no ascetic—I am a suitor for the nectar-flavor of this created universe; I have come again and again merely to say: "it feels good to me." Returning home from school one evening, scarcely had I stepped down from the carriage than, looking eastward, I saw, above the third-story roof, a mass of dense, deep-blue clouds gathering close against the sky. In that instant, a wonder

denser than that very mass of cloud gathered itself, piled thick, within my own mind. On one side, the far, cloud-laden sky; on the other, the mind of a boy new-come into the world, delighted in wonder. There was need for this strange meeting to occur, else no rhythm could be found. In the world, there sounds the call of those who must labor; but there is also an invitation for those who must simply behold. Within myself, I have felt the urge to satisfy, unceasingly, this eagerness to look and to see. This seeing is no passive idleness. In the very rhythm of this seeing, and of showing what is seen, lies creation itself.

In the Rig Veda there is a wondrous verse—

abhrātṛvyo anātmā tvam apirindra janiṣā sanādasi
yudhedāpitvam icchase.

"O Indra, you have no enemy, you have no rival, you have no friend; yet, at the moment of manifestation, through union, you desire friendship."

However mighty in power one may be, to be manifest in truth one requires friends, one desires to be found pleasing. It is for the sake of being found pleasing that the whole universe holds such countless preparations. Is it not for this that song awakens out of mere sound, that the wondrous beauty of form awakens out of mere line? How strange this is—yet we forget it.

This I shall say: my call to creation has come precisely here, in this unnecessary sphere of worldly existence. I have come to establish, with Indra, a bond—the bond of friendship. Life has need enough of many things—of food, of clothing, of shelter—but it has no need of joy, of the taste of nectar. It is there, precisely there, that Indra's companion finds his place.

asti santaṃ na jahāti
asti santaṃ na paśyati.
devasya paśya kāvyaṃ
na mamāra na jīryati.

"He who exists nearby cannot be renounced; he who is close by cannot be seen. But behold that god's poem—that poem never dies, never grows old."

Upon animals, the Creator's action is immediate and unmediated. From that very immediacy, animals are removed too far to behold Him. Had His relation to man been solely a matter of law and rule, then man, hemmed in like those animals by an inevitable chain of occurrences, would never have found Him. But in the poetry of the divine, He who transcends the net of law manifests from within that very net of law itself. In that poem alone lies His pure, unmixed revelation.

Of this revelation, the sage-poet has spoken—

avir vai nāma devatra tenāste parīvṛtā.
tasyā rūpeṇeme vṛkṣā haritā haritasrajaḥ.

"That divinity's name is Avi; by him is everything encompassed—these trees have been made green by his very form, and wear his garland of green."

The sage-poet had the power to see, through the poet's own vision, the poet's own revelation. For this manifestation of dawning wonder, dressed in a garland of green, no cause can be shown that has meaning in terms of necessity. It cannot be said why—He was simply pleased to give it. This joy is a gain beyond all mere getting. Above this, the toiling animal, driven only by need for livelihood, can lay no claim. The sage-poet has said: the Creator of the universe, with one half of Himself, has fashioned the whole created world. After this, the sage has asked: tadasyārdhaṃ kataraḥ sa ketuḥ—where does His remaining half go, and to where? The answer to this question I know. Creation exists as the manifest; this creation has, further, a past domain that is not manifest. Transcending this mass of material things, had that vast unbounded space not existed, where should we have found the ineffable? It is there, precisely there, in that touch of the uncreated upon the created, just as light comes down from sky to earth, that we find poetry in the company of the utterly near. In poetry there is the going-beyond of form and sound, showing that which lies there—that half of the Creator which is not bound within matter. In this vast unreality occurs the union, in feeling, of Indra with the

friend of Indra. The individual's lute-string sends its own message out into the unexpressed.

My days have passed in many kinds of labor; my mind has been drawn, from all directions, in many pursuits. I have come to know the law of the world, and have had to submit to it too; I have never, like a fool, distorted it in unruly fancy. But through the very midst of all these dealings, my mind has gone forth, joined to the universe, precisely where creation has passed beyond itself, into that which lies beyond creation; through this very union my life has found its fulfillment.

I once said—

"I do not wish to die in this beautiful world."

The poet of the Rig Veda has said—

asunīte punarasmāsu cakṣuḥ
punaḥ prāṇamiha no dhehi bhogam.
jyok paśyema sūryamuccarantam
anumate mṛḍayā naḥ svasti.

"O leader of life-breath, give me back my eyes, give me back my breath, give me enjoyment; let me forever behold the rising sun; grant me well-being."

Here is the language of a friend; the revelation of a friend has felt good to me. Is there any hymn of praise greater than this? Devasya paśya kāvyam—"behold the poem of the divine." My heart tells me: behold that poetry—of this seeing, no end can be conceived.

Here the question may arise: has my labor, then, never joined itself with Him?

It has; and proof of it exists. But that is no work bound and fettered by iron and machinery. As labor, this too is poetry. When once, at Santiniketan, I took upon myself the vow of imparting education, the field of that creation was the poetic domain of Providence itself; I invoked here the fellowship of water, earth, and sky.

I sought to establish the pursuit of knowledge upon the altar of joy. Through songs of welcome to the seasons, I sought to awaken, within the students' minds, the courtyard of universal Nature's festival.

Here, from the very beginning, the doctrine of creation's own inherent power of unfolding reigned. Within the living conception of wholeness cherished in my mind, I wished to hold intellect in a place of honor. Therefore, I have sought to give science, within my sphere of work, as full a place of respect as I was able.

It is written in the Veda—

yasmādṛte na sidhyati yajño vipaścitaścana sa dhīnāṃ yogaminvati.

That is: without whom the sacrificial rite of even the greatest sages does not succeed, He unites Himself only through the union of intellect—not through the union of mantras, not through the union of magical rites. Therefore, I have striven forever to yoke these two powers—intellect and joy—to the work of creation here.

Just as, here, I have invoked the union of joy with Nature, so also have I earnestly desired that here the union of man with man be raised into a union of the innermost heart. Wherever, in the field of labor, the flow of that inward union grows thin and weak, there law itself becomes the sole sovereign; there, in place of the spirit of creation, the spirit of mere construction establishes its dominance. Increasingly, there, the machinery of the machinist gains the right to disdain the poet's poem. The meter and language in which the poet's literary work finds expression are entirely his own, within his own control. But wherever creation involves many people, there the purity of the creative work cannot always be preserved. In just such a state of affairs within human society, spiritual discipline, losing its liberty within sectarian regulation, turns to stone. Therefore I can only hope that in the future the complexity of a lifeless, factional network of rules will not utterly obliterate the root-principle of this ashram.

I know not whether another such occasion will ever come, and so today, standing upon the threshold of my eightieth year, I have wished to make known, in its entirety, the truth of my own life. But perfect harmony between resolve and deed

is never wholly possible. Hence I must view myself both from the impulse working within, and from the direction I have taken outwardly. I have again and again described the ideal form of this ashram as a forest hermitage of ancient tapasya. That hermitage I did not derive from analyzing history. I received it from the poet's own poetry. So it was natural that I should wish to establish that ideal in the very shape of poetry. I wished to say: "Paśya devasya kāvyam"—behold, in human form, the poem of the divine. From childhood, reciting the Upanishads, my mind grew accustomed to accepting, through inward vision, a universal completeness. That completeness is not of matter, but of spirit; and therefore, to know it clearly, the apparatus of material things must be made light. Those who saw me, in the earliest days, within this ashram, know without doubt what the true nature of this ashram was, then, in my mind. At that time there was a scarcity of material means; this was its very distinction. A simple manner of living had, here, spread on every side the pure transparency of truth. In play and sport, in song and drama, my bond with the children was unrestricted, in a self-expression full of ever-fresh awakening. I invoked, inwardly, in meditation, that peace which is Shiva, without a second—and then it was easy to see Him, for labor was simple, the day's routine uncomplicated, the number of students small; and the few teachers who then were my companions, most of them believed, with faith: "etasmin nu khalu akṣare ākāśa otaśca protaśca"—"in this imperishable syllable the sky is woven, warp and weft." They could say, with the same faith: "tam evaikaṃ jānatha ātmānam"—"know that One alone, the all-pervading Self"—ātmanyeva, in one's own self alone, not in traditional rite and observance, but in love for mankind, in righteous action, not in worldly calculation, but by the inspiration of the spirit. In the pull of this spiritual reverence, the meaning of the day's tasks then held the brightness of patient renunciation.

That day, I was then still a boy. I know not by which eastern path the light of the primordial sun came and suddenly illumined, before me, all human relationship in the radiance of the spirit. Though that light dissolved without delay into the murkiness of everyday life, still I had hoped that, before taking my leave of this earth, I might one day behold the whole of humankind manifest, actually and directly, glowing in that same single light of the spirit. But the path of that stream of radiance, upon the eastern horizon of the heart, became overcast with many mists. Be that as it may—still, in the field of life's labor, I have been able to see

something remaining, some provision gathered with joy. In this ashram, the sacrificial ground that I once fashioned—in its selfless observances, I was able to preserve the hospitality due to that man to whom it is said, "the guest is verily god." Within the guest dwells the divinity. Whether pride in the success of my labor has taken possession of my mind, I cannot say for certain; but surpassing that weakness, the fulfilment of self-sacrifice has surged forth. Here I found the rare opportunity to unite intellect with benevolent wisdom in disinterested endeavor.

By the invitation of every people, every community, I have not, here, let go to waste the blessed leisure of keeping benevolent wisdom awake. Again and again I have longed—

ya ekovarṇo bahudhā śaktiyogāt
varṇānanekān nihitārtho dadhāti
vicaiti cānte viśvamādau sa devaḥ
sa no buddhyā śubhayā saṃyunaktu.

Om

Bolpur

With respectful greetings, I beg to state—

I do not possess even a single photograph of myself. Nor is it easy for me to procure one from elsewhere. Messrs. Elliot & Fry, who once photographed me, may still have copies in their possession.

There is nothing especially noteworthy in the events of my life, and my biography is not worthy of being set down in writing.

The date of my birth is the 6th of May, 1861. In my childhood I passed my days chiefly in truancy from school. Writing was, quite simply, a compulsion with me, and I have been writing ever since my earliest years. When I was sixteen years of

age, the journal Bhāratī began publication. It was principally in this journal that my prose writing became established.

At the age of seventeen I went to England in the company of my second elder brother—this occasion afforded me the opportunity of learning English. For some time I studied English literature at London University, in the class of Professor Henry Morley.

After remaining rather more than a year in England, I returned home. Aboard ship I began a poem entitled Bhagna Hridaya (The Broken Heart)—this was completed after my return home. Within a short while, Sandhya Sangeet, Prabhat Sangeet, and Prakritir Pratishodh were published.

At the age of twenty-three I was married to Srimati Mrinalini Devi.

Chhabi o Gaan, Kori o Komal, Manasi, Raja o Rani, Sonar Tari, and other volumes of poetry appeared one after another. I do not recall the dates of their publication.

The poems of Sonar Tari were mostly written for the journal Sadhana. My nephew, Sudhindranath, was editor of this journal for three years; in the fourth year, its entire responsibility devolved upon me. Most of the writing in Sadhana had to be done by me, and I had also a considerable hand in the compositions of other contributors.

At about this same time, the responsibility of managing our estates fell to me, and I was obliged constantly to travel through the countryside, by river and by land. It was partly the enthusiasm of that experience that drew me toward the writing of short stories.

Before Sadhana ceased publication, the journal Hitabadi had come into being. Among those who were its founders and directors, Krishnakamal Babu, Surendra Babu, and Nabin Chandra Bardal were foremost. Krishnakamal Babu was also its editor; for that journal, every week, I would write short stories, reviews, and literary essays. It was there that my writing of short stories had its true beginning. I continued to write for six weeks.

Sadhana ran for four years. Some while after it ceased publication, I was for one year editor of Bhāratī; on this occasion also I had to write a number of stories and other essays.

At the particular request of my late friend Srish Chandra Majumdar, I revived the journal Bangadarshan and took upon myself its editorship. On this occasion I turned to the writing of a full-length novel. In my early youth I had written Bou Thakuranir Haat for Bhāratī—this was my first novel.

At this same period, I established, at the Santiniketan ashram in Bolpur, a school known as the Brahmacharyashram. Brahmabandhab Upadhyay was then my helper—at that time I never saw in him even the faintest trace of political enthusiasm; he was then absorbed, on the one hand in Vedanta, on the other in Roman Catholic Christianity. As I myself had no experience of running a school, Upadhyay's assistance proved of particular benefit to me. After the school had run for a year or two, my wife died in the year 1307 (Bengali calendar).

I ran Bangadarshan for five years, and then relinquished its editorship. I am now occupied with the school.

Upadhyay introduced me to the late Mohit Chandra Sen. He held my school in special reverence—for some time he even directed its management. During this period he compiled, with immense labor, my collected poetical works. In that volume, he arranged all my poems, dividing them into separate sections according to subject matter, and thus published them.

I have written above, in brief, the history of my life and my writings. I do not trouble myself with exact dates. My mother died when I was still quite young—I think I must then have been eleven or twelve years old. A year or two before her death, my father took me with him to Amritsar, and thence on a journey to the mountains of Dalhousie—that was my first acquaintance with the outer world. That journey, without doubt, exerted a considerable influence upon my writing. During those three months of living together with my father, I studied English and Sanskrit under his instruction, and spent much of the time in oral discussion of astronomy and in

learning the names of the stars. Having thus broken free of school's bondage and tasted, in the open embrace of Nature, three months of liberty, upon my return my connection with formal schooling became sundered. In this, my last stage of life, having founded a school, I am, as it were, paying off that old debt—now I have no path of escape left open to me; and my gaze is fixed upon this: that the students, too, may never seek a path of escape.

28th Bhadra, 1317

Yours faithfully,

Sri Rabindranath Tagore

Santiniketan, 1st Baishakh, 1347