PART II
The Most Reverend Teacher,

Pandit Dwarakanath Vidyabhushan,¹

Editor, the Somprakas.²

Sir,

You are one of the pioneers in the field of Bengali literature. I am sending you ‘Binodini’, found without care and unadorned. Tell your world if you find any merit in this; if you do not, say that too. I will not mind in the least. Who ever loves someone else’s daughter, sir? – I have only one request. Even today my heart throbs when I remember the tremendous tormentation to which you subjected us in the Class I of Sanskrit School, around fifteen to sixteen years ago, when we were learning Mugdhabodh³ from you. Sir, do not subject ‘Binodini’ to such a difficult ordeal – she is a mere child.

Your ever obedient student,

Upendranath Das
PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

After a long time the second edition of Surendra-Binodini has been published at the request of the readers; the first printed set of one thousand copies were completely exhausted within a few months. There are reasons behind this delay in publishing the second edition; Upendra Babu, its publisher is now in London and his appointed publisher Babu Tarinicharan Das is dead; then who will be its publisher? Be that as it may, by the kindness of the sympathetic readers, it has been published after making changes at a few places. But at places the readers may notice errors; I shall be grateful if they read it after kindly making the corrections.

Calcutta
33, Sankaritola Lane
8 Aswin, 1287 BS.
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

MALE

Rajchandra Basu : A rich man of Bansabati
Surendra : -do-
Haripriya : Rajchandra Basu’s grandson
Nilkantha : Servant boy of Rajchandra Basu
McCrindle : Magistrate of Hooghly
Krishnadas : Jailer of Hooghly

FEMALE

Binodini : Rajchandra Basu’s grand-daughter
Birajmohini : Surendra’s sister

Guards of the prison, prisoners, etc.
ACT I

Scene 1

[The village Bansabati, near Hooghly. The house of Rajchandra Basu]

[Binodini is seated]

Binod:

Ragini Jhinjhit – Tal Madhyaman

Alas what a dark night has covered the face of Indiæ.

Alas prosperous India is now merged in awful grief

Floating in the sea of grief

Mother India day and night

Recollecting her earlier prosperity

Is weeping incessantly.

Who will now wipe

Mother’s tears?

[Enter Surendra, unnoticed, a little before the song ends and stands beside Binodini]

Binod: [after completing the song] He loves to listen to this song very much.

Suren: [coming forward, lovingly] Were you singing this only because I love to listen to it, Binod?

Binod: [rising and blushing] Please come. When did you arrive?

Suren: A little while ago.

Binod: [smiling] How did you know that it meant you when I said, ‘He loves to listen’?

Suren: [laughing] I say, does someone else –

Binod: [blushing] Go, go, you make fun of everything!
Suren: Of course, I'll go very soon.

Binod: If you are in such a hurry to go as soon as you've come, at whose saying have you come like this? Go, go right now.

Suren: [laughing] Well, then I go. [takes a few steps]

Binod: [holding Surendra's hands] Sit, have mercy on me, sit. [both sit] Have you met grandpa?

Suren: Yes. He's very anxious for our marriage. He says it won't be proper to defer it any longer.

Binod: Where are you going today?

Suren: To the magistrate of Hooghly, Mr. McCrindle.

Binod: Why?

Suren: He owes Rs. 6000 to me. For that money.

Binod: What sort of a person is he?

Suren: Very decent. It might not be an exaggeration to say that I haven't seen one like him amongst the Englishmen. He isn't proud and self-conceited like the other Englishmen usually are. Mr. McCrindle speaks Bengali very well. He doesn't use any other language while speaking to the Bengalis. His pronunciation too is like the Bengalis.

Binod: You are to go today, but I am don't feel well about it. I am afraid of some danger to overtake you.²

Suren: [lovingly] That's because you love me dearly.

Binod: Then why don't I feel like this on other days?
Suren: [smiling] Yes, poets do say that coming events cast their shadow before, but in this nineteenth century where does the strict science allow us to believe this? But it’s different if such coincidences happen sometimes. – Well, Binod, may I leave?

Binod: [holding Surendra’s hands, with tears in her eyes] I am feeling as if some great danger will befall you today. – [wiping her eyes] Well, will you come tomorrow?

Suren: [lovingly] When don’t I come, Binod?

Binod: No, say, will you come?

Suren: Yes. I’ll come. – Well, may I leave?

Binod: [wiping her eyes, reluctantly] Yes.

Suren: [aside] Such a sweet figure of love. – But will it remain so for ever?

Exit

[Binodini sitting worriedly with her head resting on her hand]

[Enter Rajchandra]

Raj: Sitting alone, what are you worrying about, dear? [laughing] Is it because Suren left? I can no longer bear your misery. – Well, why don’t you marry me? What’s wrong with it? What an aged husband you’ll have! ‘Vriddhasya taruni bharrya’! [laughs]

[Enter Nilkantha, hurriedly]

Nil: Sir, that sweet-addict Brahmin from East Bengal has come.


[Exit Nilkantha and re-enter with Nyayratna]

Raj: [after touching Nyayratna’s feet] May I have the honour of welcoming you? Please take your seat.
Nyay: Ah! [sits] I am in pain owing to afflictions induced by old age. [sighs] Who can ever describe the workings of Time! Ah! [yawns] Oh Krishna, you are the only truth.\[8\]

Nil: [aside] Look at the Brahmin's hypocrisy! The truth is, - Oh sweetmeat, you are the only truth.

Raj: Dear Binodini, prostrate before him.

[Binodini does so]

Nyay: May you be devoted to your husband as Sabitri\[9\] was. May you love your husband as Gauri\[10\] did. This girl bears auspicious signs on her person.\[11\] [to Rajchandra] Where is she married, sir?

[Exit Binodini, blushing]

Raj: Well, she is only betrothed. The marriage hasn't yet been solemnized.

Nyay: [gaping] Not married!!

Raj: Her father dearly loved Surendra. On his deathbed [wiping his tears] he made me vow that I would never give his daughter away in marriage to anyone other than Surendra. Surendra kept deferring the marriage. I couldn't get my grand-daughter married somewhere else out of fear of breaking the vow.

Nyay: Why is Surendra Babu unwilling to get married soon? He'll get prepared food. [laughs]

Raj: They belong to the new band and hold new views on every subject. He says, 'Why hurry for marriage? It can be solemnized sometime or the other'.

Nyay: Sir, English education has created some obstinate bulls.\[12\] They are ruining the country, completely ruining. Why hurry for marriage! Well, will he at last marry the
pregnant girl? – Well, sir, is it so that the gentleman often comes to this house and sometimes even to the inner quarters?¹³

**Raj:** They had been playing together since they were six or seven years old. How can I completely stop his coming? But Suren is a very good boy. His character is like pure gold.

**Nyay:** It may be so, but the relationship between a young boy and a young girl like clarified butter and fire. I don’t think allowing them to meet while they are still unmarried is quite judicious. Sir, this is just like placing sweetmeats in front of a starving person.

**Raj:** [smiling] Yes. [whispers into Nilkantha’s ears] Bring a lot of them, do you understand?

[Exit Nilkantha and re-enters after a while with sweets, etc.]

**Raj:** Bring a carpet, water for washing the feet¹⁴ and the rest. Bring, bring them soon.

[Nilkantha does likewise] – [to Nyayratna, with folded hands]¹⁵ If it pleases you, a little –

**Nyay:** [rising soon] Hmm, hmm, there is no use of saying anything in particular. You are the pride of the race of Kayastha!¹⁶ [after having his feet washed, sits and devours the sweets soon]

**Raj:** Hey! [gesticulates at Nilkantha]

**Nil:** [aside] Finished as soon as they were brought!

[Exit and re-enters with sweets]

**Raj:** Hey!

**Nil:** [aside] What does this scoundrelly Brahmin do! Already devoured around 3 sers.¹⁷ Is his tummy a three-storied godown!

[Exit and re-enters with sweets]
Raj: Hey!

Nil: [scared] Oh my, again!

[Exit and re-enters with sweets]

Nil: [aside, to Rajchandra, with folded hands and in a frightened voice] Sir, please calculate my salary and settle it up.

Raj: [surprised] Why?

Nil: Sir, I won’t work in this house any longer. [crying] What if some day you aren’t at home and this Brahmin comes and eats me up in a fit of hunger? [wiping his eyes] Please, sir, I am my mother’s only son. She doesn’t have anyone other than me. – Look at the expanse of his open mouth! – Is it finished again? Oh my! Oh my!

[Runs away in fright]

Nyay: [raising his head] What’s the matter, sir? Why did the boy run away crying?

Raj: Oh, it’s nothing. A little more –

Nyay: I don’t need much. About 1.5 sers\textsuperscript{18} would do for the time being.

Raj: Hey Bhelo?

[Enter another servant\textsuperscript{19} and exit after giving the sweets]

Nyay: [after finishing the food and brushing his hand over his abdomen] Hmm. Had some refreshments. Hmm. I won’t be in trouble if I don’t have food for a little while.

Hmm.

Raj: Well, respected Nyayratna, how many kilograms of sweets can you eat? I mean, how much appeases your appetite, makes your stomach feel full?
Nyay: [with dilated eyes] God! You talk about the stomach being full, sir! Stomach is never full – never. That’s only one of your prejudices. But sometimes, while chewing the jaws might ache, that I don’t want to deny. – Well, sir, I now take your leave.

Raj: [touching his feet] As it pleases you.

[Exeunt]

Scene 2

[Garden-house of McCrindle by the bank of the Ganga at the northern border of Hooghly]

[Enter McCrindle and Krishnadas]

Me: Krishnadas, I hope the past incidents of your life have not faded away or disappeared from your memory. The court of Ranaghat had been thirsting for your blood, - the gallows were already prepared. You were saved only because of my favours. Beware, never be ungrateful. If you show ingratitude, you will be ruining yourself. You won’t be able to get me into any trouble whatsoever. I am reputed all over for being pious and continent. And I guess you are aware of the fact that if I so wish, I can make you quit this world at any moment.

Kri: The servant is your slave. Why such unbelief in your slave, my lord?

Me: I don’t have any distrust in you. Had I any distrust, I wouldn’t have given you such a senior post. I am merely warning you. What about that woman selling flour?

Kri: My lord, that girl is in no way ready to give her consent.

Me: If she doesn’t give her consent, bring her by the way Ramakanta Mukhopadhyay’s wife had been brought. Do you remember?
Kri: Don’t I remember, my lord? When have I ever forgotten any of your words, my lord? Can the servant ever forget?

Me: Excellent. — Well, Krishnadas, my heart leaps whenever I see a beautiful woman.

Kri: That is perfectly normal, my lord. [aside] That’s in their blood.2

Me: I very much love the embrace of beautiful women.

[Enter Surendra]

Here’s Surendra Babu! [courteously] Please come in. I hope you are OK.

Suren: Are you OK?

Me: By your grace. See what an excellent Bengali I’ve learnt to speak. The Government should give me some special reward.

Suren: Mr. McCrindle’s courtesy and knowledge of Bengali are both very famous.

Me: What’s the reason behind your gracious presence today?

Suren: [haltingly] The money that you had borrowed – well, will it be convenient for you to repay the amount now?

Me: [aside] * Debts, debts, debts, - nothing but debts on all sides.3 – [aloud] Do you have the deed of debt with my signature on it?

Suren: Yes.

Me: Have you brought it?

Suren: No.

Me: Could you come once again with the deed of debt in the evening?

Suren: As you please. Then I won’t disturb you any longer.

[Exit after exchanging courtesy]

Me: I am marooned in the sea of debts. I don’t know what to do.

[Exeunt]
Scene 3
[Bansabati. The house of Rajchandra Basu]

**Hari:** I can’t sit idle any longer. What to do? — Father used to call me the devil incarnate because I used to play pranks on everyone. Well, the goddess of mischief hasn’t yet stopped favouring me. I feel extremely happy when I succeed in making people fight amongst themselves. I manipulate the strings from distance and enjoy the fracas. I have fun without taking any trouble. [laughs] Among whom shall I now begin the quarrel? — Enough, enough. [laughs] That will be great fun. Both are deeply in love! L-O-V-E. People will consider me to be indecent. I shall rather become utterly indecent. However so much of love between them is not good. To eat so much sweet will cause heart burn. Wait, I’ll add a dash of bitterness. — How do I set the trap? [chews his thumb and ponders] I should make both sides flare up. — Well, let it be so! [laughs] Hey Nile!

**From backstage:** Yes, sir!

**Hari:** Hey, listen, listen. Come running.

[Enter Nilkantha]

Run and see whether brother-in-law has returned from Hooghly. I’ll give you sweets worth two annas.

**Nil:** Will you really give or cheat me as you did that time?

**Hari:** No, no, this time I’ll really give them to you. Go, go running.

[Nilkantha rushes out]

**Hari:** Let me see how far the arrow goes. [perambulates worriedly]

[Re-enter Nilkantha, panting]

**Nil:** Returned – he’s coming – here. Now give me my sweets.
Hari: [absent-mindedly] Well if two and two make five, what will two and three add up to? [counts on fingers] Why, wow, it will be seven: It's taken for granted. Well—

Nil: I say, sir, give me my sweets.

Hari: The other day I murdered that fellow police informer. Should I be hanged for it or be deported? It's a terrible sin to kill living beings. His parents must be crying so bitterly for him! Isn't deportation better than hanging?

Nil: [whining] I say, sir, everyday you are eating many types of delicacies. Why don’t you give me my sweets?

Hari: [looking at his reflection in the mirror] Haripriya, you are a very good boy, very well-mannered and calm. My daughter is smitten by your handsome features. I beg of you, marry her, or else she’ll commit suicide by poisoning herself. — I am giving you half of my kingdom.

Nil: [crying] I say, sir, give me my sweets. [cries] You cheat me everyday.

Hari: Ta na na, na na na, ta na na. [striking up a pose] Here Shibu goes dancing, Shibu is rattling the tabor. Here Shibu goes to the beats. [Suddenly holds Nilkantha by his feet, overturns him and leaves the stage]

Nil: Ouch, it hurt badly. [gets up]

[Enter Surendra]

Suren: Here Nile, why are you crying?

Nil: See brother-in-law—

Suren: [laughing] Who told you to call me brother-in-law?

Nil: Why, that sir.

Suren: No, call me only Suren Babu.
Nil: See Suren Babu, sir cheats me daily – and more than that he hit me. [cries]

Suren: What did you do?

Nil: I did nothing. He told me, ‘I’ll give you sweets, go and see if brother-in-law has
returned from Hooghly’. When I returned and asked for the sweets, he went away after
throwing me down like this. [falls on the ground. Then rises] It hurt.

Suren: [laughing] This time you fell down at your own will! Well, come, I am giving
you money for the sweets. [taking out a coin from his wallet] Has your mother’s ailment
cured?

Nil: It is much better. But still she can’t go to work. We are going through much straits.

Suren: Well, take this rupee. [gives the coin] Buy sweets worth four paisa and give the
balance to your mother. If she asks, say a gentleman gave this. Don’t mention me.

Nil: Then she’ll say I’ve stolen the money and beat me.

Suren: Alright, tell her if she beats you.

Nil: Shall I say brother-in-law gave this?

[Runs away]

Suren: [smiling] The fellow is so naughty!

[Re-enter Haripriya]

Hari: I say why did grandpa suddenly get so annoyed with you?

Suren: Who says he’s annoyed with me?

Hari: How’s that? Don’t you know? He’s very much annoyed with you.

Suren: [a bit worriedly] Really? Is it true? How did you know?

Hari: The respected Nyayratna brought a match for Binod from somewhere.

Suren: Then?
Hari: After hearing this grandpa said, 'I give my whole-hearted consent to this match. I am tired of waiting for that fellow Suren. Now I hope my grand-daughter gives her consent'.

Suren: What do you say? Then?

Hari: Then he sent me to know Binod's opinion.

Suren: What did Binod say?

Hari: Binod is in your camp. She doesn't want to marry any one besides you.

Suren: [aside] I know that. [aloud] What did she say?

Hari: Can you learn woman's secret easily? After long she said, 'Is that ever possible? Grandpa kept him [meaning you] in hope. He will feel hurt'.

Suren: [aside] How else can she say this? She's a woman, and besides Binod is very shy. [aloud] Did she say only this and nothing else?

Hari: Yes, of course she said. She said, 'Let grandpa wait for another month. It's good if he marries me within this month. If he doesn't, then he can fix a match for me somewhere else'.

Suren: [angrily] You are her brother. Being a woman, how could she say these to you?

Hari: Did she say these word for word? Such is the sense.

Suren: [angrily] I don't believe a word of this. Binod never said this.

Hari: But why are you angry? There's nothing wrong with this.

Suren: Nothing wrong with this? As if I am an object of pity! If she doesn't marry me, I'll feel hurt. Therefore she agrees to marry me out of pity. And that too should be done within the given time. There's no scope beyond it. Nothing with this?
Hari: I said this because you wanted to hear. Had I known you would be angry, I wouldn't have mentioned this.

Suren: I am not angry. I abhor you for being a liar. I know Binod's heart very well. She feels pained if she doesn't see me even a single day.

Hari: [in a pained and serious voice] Had someone else called me a liar on my face, he would have seen the consequence immediately. [sighs] I respect you highly. Say, what else can I tell you? I've become a liar after so many days. Some day some other person might say I am a thief or a dacoit! [sighs] But one day you'll have to repent for this.

Suren: [slightly ashamed] Brother, I said that unwittingly. But what you've told me must either be due to your hearing it or understanding it incorrectly. Binod has never said this. Had she such a feeling in her heart, I would have of course realized it by now.

Hari: Yes, I agree that I may be wrong. Who ever doesn't err? It may happen to you as well. Why don't you, being intelligent and learned, carry out a test? That'll clear all confusions. Instead of telling anything clearly, why don't you try to learn about her feelings by some means?

Suren: My Binod is innocence personified. I don't doubt her love that I should test it. I am not an Othello that like an Iago you can throw me off my balance by your few words. All that you've said have vanished from my memory.

[Exit]

Hari: [smiling] Brother, you say that you don't doubt. But I have ignited the base of doubt. Where can you escape? Doubt arises wherever there is deep love. Places of deep love also happen to be places of much quarrel. But the fire has to be fanned from time to
time, or else it might get extinguished. The love they share, all the doubts will be dispelled once they meet. [laughs.] G r a d u a l l y. Tum dere na, dere na, tum dere na.

[Exeunt]

Scene 4

[A desolate and dilapidated temple, not far from McCrindle’s house, surrounded by trees and creepers. Enter McCrindle on horseback and Krishnadas beside him, on foot]

Me: [alighting from the horse] You take the horse and go. When Surendra comes, send him to this place.

Kri: [in a voice showing fright] Will it be wise for you to stay alone in this thicket, that too when it is gradually growing dark? There are so many sorts of evil men.

Me: Mind your own business. Do what I have told you to do.

Kri: [very politely] As you please, my lord.

[Exit, holding the horse by its rein]

Me: [perambulating worriedly] * I am immersed in debts to my lips, and must end this matter at least, somehow or the other, today.¹ [perambulates]

[Enter Surendra]

Suren: You are strolling here! – I’ve brought the deed of debt with your signature on it.

Me: Where? Let me see.

Suren: Here. [gives the deed of debt to McCrindle]

Me: [tearing the deed of debt to pieces as soon as he gets it] Where, sir, where’s the deed of debt? When ever did I borrow money from you?

Suren: [stupefied] What have you done? You tore it completely?
Me: Go, go, don't disturb me without any reason. My time is valuable.

Suren: Is this the reward for helping you during your hard times? I knew you to be extremely decent. Is your real character unveiled after so long? Or are you merely fathoming the depth of my patience?

Me: It is 'your' good fortune that I touched 'your' money. And here 'you' are begging for its return?

Suren: [angrily] This is just like the fable about the tiger and the crane! Do you think that I won't be able to have my money back?

Me: How will 'you' get it back?

Suren: Don't I have witnesses?

Me: [laughing] 'You' fool, the signatures of two hundred Bengalis like 'you' won't hold good against what I say taking oath by kissing the Bible. Haven't 'you' been able to learn this bit after staying so long under the British rule? 'Your' lack of knowledge has sincerely hurt me.

Suren: I am ready to give up some of the money if you return it to me without my having to sue you.

Me: Don't 'you' have a beautiful sister? Send her to my bed one day. I am prepared to give 'you' some money.

Suren: [mad with rage] What? [kicks at the chest of McCrindle, who falls down]

Me: [getting up soon] Hellish hound, take the name of the god 'you' believe in. [takes out a small pistol from its case and shoots Surendra, who falls down.]

[Exit McCrindle]
ACT II

Scene 1

[Bansabati. Surendra’s house. Birajmohini engaged in household chores]

Biraj: Brother went to Hooghly on Wednesday. Why didn’t he return even today? There he has many acquaintances. He might be staying at somebody’s house. But he should have written a letter; I am so worried. – There won’t be another brother like mine. I disturb him, but he never complains. [with tears in her eyes] I lost my parents in childhood. But just because of him I didn’t face any trouble even for a single day. Brother played the parts of both father and mother for me. He takes care of my studies so eagerly.

– Let me study. [studies with rapt attention]

[Enter Binodini from behind. Covers the eyes of Birajmohini with her hands]

Binod: Say who I am!

Biraj: [laughing] Who else, my brother’s wife!

Binod: [blushes. Moves her hands away] What a joke!

Biraj: [laughing] How’s this a joke? If not today, you’ll be so tomorrow. [making Binodini sit by her and looks at her face for a while] Does brother love you so dearly for nothing? You are such a beauty!

Binod: Go, go, you don’t have to be so sarcastical, sister. I am beautiful! Look at your own complexion and then comment.

Biraj: Well, ask brother who is beautiful!

Binod: He’s your brother, you ask. – What’s that, sister?

Biraj: Dhaka’s Bandhab.¹

Binod: [taking the Bandhab in her hand] Which part were you reading?
Biraj: Kaliprasanna Babu’s ‘The Malady of the Housewife’.

Binod: Kaliprasanna Babu’s ‘The Malady of the Housewife’!

Biraj: [laughing] His article is by that name! It’s true, dear, the malady of the housewife is indeed a serious malady. I hope no man marries a woman who isn’t as sweet-tempered as you are. She’ll make a hell of her husband’s life.

Binod: [embracing Birajmohini with her right hand] You see all virtue in me because you love me, sister. – Well, sister, have you read Swarnalata?\(^2\)

Biraj: Which Swarnalata, dear?

Binod: The one that was first published in the Jnanankur.\(^3\)

Biraj: Oh, haven’t I read that Swarnalata?

Binod: Sister, why wasn’t that book popular?

Biraj: Because it doesn’t depict any violence. The depiction of violence makes a book ‘good’. It soon becomes popular.

Binod: I haven’t seen the Jnanankur since many days. How is it faring, sister?

Biraj: It’s doing pretty well. Rames Babu, the author of Banga Bijeta\(^4\) is now its editor. Brother says, ‘In our country there are few writers as learned and skilful as Rames Babu. In time he might be equal to Bankim Babu’.\(^5\)

Binod: Why wouldn’t it do well with such an editor? – It’s good that I remembered, hasn’t your brother returned even today?

Biraj: [laughing] Wanted to ask this so long, but couldn’t mention it out of bashfulness! – Indeed it’s good that you remembered! As if it isn’t that important a question! But you were waiting so impatiently just to ask this question! You were just making me speak
about Jnanankur, Swarnalata and bla bla bla. I was quietly waiting to see when you’d ask this question. [pressing Binodini’s cheek] When did you learn these tricks?

**Binod:** No, sister, tell me whether he has returned or not.

**Biraj:** [laughing] Had he arrived, would he come here before meeting you? – Oh, my sister’s face is looking so pained! – Do you need to cry?

**Binod:** [a smile breaking into her pained face] There’s indeed a need to cry! – See sister, my brother Hari is sitting outside alone for so long. I came with him. Shall I bring him here?

**Biraj:** [hesitatingly] You want to bring him – well, bring him. 6

**Binod:** ‘You want to bring him – well, bring him’ – why do you speak like that? Hasn’t he ever come into this house? I am going to bring him.

[Exit and re-enter with Haripriya]

**Binod:** What’s this? Both are sitting with bowed heads!

**Biraj:** [aside] Never seen someone as crazy as Binod!

**Hari:** Binod, I’ve left the stick outside. Somebody might take it. Let me have a look at it.

**Binod:** Who’s going to take your stick?

**Hari:** [aside] I want to somehow get away from here. I can do everything, but I can’t stand the gazes of a woman. As if it pricks me. [aloud] Let me go and have a look.

**Binod:** [laughing] I can understand, go.

**Hari:** [aside] You understand nothing. 7 Such a relief! 8

[Exit]

**Binod:** My brother Hari is a queer sort of person. He’s simple-minded, but with it, he’s rather elfish. Sister, why do you feel shy at seeing him?
Biraj: Come, dear, let's go to the terrace. I've brought verbena, a type of plant with beautiful flowers. Let me show it to you.

Binod: You are avoiding the topic. Well, sister, I can understand everything.

[Exit]

Scene 2

[Bansabati. Village path by the bank of a lake near Rajchandra Basu's house. Enter Surendra]

Surendra: Ungrateful, traitor, base! I got saved because that hit me only in the muscle of my left shoulder. The sinful, hellish man was intent on killing me! [kneeling, with clenched fists] Heaven is a witness, if I stay alive, I shall fully avenge this. [rises and strolls] Binod and Biraj must be so worried for me.

[Enter Haripriya]

Here's Hari! Is everything fine?

Hari: [surprised] What's this! Your clothes are bloodstained! And they have patches that are muddy! Did you happen to have a fall or something?

Surendra: [smiling] Yes, indeed something like a fall! How is Binod? Was she much worried for me?

Hari: [aside] He's sad at heart. — Got a good chance. Let me rehearse that once again. It is sure to work now. When people are disturbed, they believe foul things soon. [aloud] Yes, she was indeed. Once she enquired about you on the day before yesterday. — Where were you so long?
Suren: [aside] She enquired about me on the day before yesterday, and no more? [aloud]
I was at some place. Do you know how is Biraj?

Hari: She’s fine. She was so worried for you. She used to send people to our house twice
everyday to see if we got any information about you. So, are you going to your house
first or to ours?

Suren: No, first I’ll go to my house.

Hari: Let me tell Binod about you. How happy she’ll be! [aside] Has got the bait, I hope
it is swallowed. [aloud] Are you sick?

Suren: Yes, I am. You may go now.

[Exit Haripriya]

I am feeling rather perturbed. – Was I born only to be deceived, or is Hari speaking a lie?
– No, no, this can never be. It is a sin to doubt Binod’s innocent and pure love. Binod is
mine a hundred times, a thousand times. She can’t be for anyone else. As long as I am
alive, I won’t let her be.

[Exit]

[Re-enter Haripriya with Binodini]

Hari: [aside] How do I fix this? She should be told something else. [aloud] See, Binod,
Suren Babu is very sick. Don’t make him talk much.

Binod: [softly, with bowed head] I am going only because he’s sick. Do you know
what’s troubling him, brother?

Hari: That I can’t say for sure. If you talk much, he too will have to reply and that will
cause him much pain. You’ll go, talk a little and come back.

Binod: I’ll sit quietly by sister.
Hari: No, no, no, don’t do that. [laughing] The way he loves you, he can’t help talking while you are near. If you wish his recovery, you’ll go and come back.

Binod: Won’t he mind it?

Hari: Never seen someone so crazy! He’s sick. Why would he mind?

[Exeunt]

Scene 3

[Hooghly. McCrindle’s house. Some prisoners engaged in renovating the house]

1st Pri: This fellow Magistrate’s house is never done. Has new orders everyday! Only dismantle and re-build! Doesn’t have to pay any wage; in the name of Government work, he’s making us sweat our guts out. But, brother, can’t bear this regular ill-treatment any longer.

2nd Pri: Speak softly. Some bugger will hear, lodge a complaint and the skin of your back will be removed.

1st Pri: Who’ll complain? All are in the same plight.

3rd Pri: Brother, even if they give the full portion of our food, we may stomach the beating without any protest. But where do we get it? Three-fourth bowl of rice and two spoonfuls of pulses -- how can you stay on this for twenty four hours? Why don’t they give the quantity that has been approved by the Government?

2nd Pri: That’s a fly in the ointment.¹ The bugger Keshta steals much of it.

4th Pri: [angrily] Forget about those. Can you think of a way of preserving the chastity of our wives and sisters from the hands of this fellow Magistrate?

1st Pri: God will protect their chastity. What else can we do? [sighs]
4th Pri: If you people can muster courage, let us follow the example of the Hazaribagh Jail.  

[Enter a Guard]

Guard: Here, here, come this way.  

[Exit Guard with prisoners]

[Enter McCrindle and Krishnadas]

Me: What do you say? Is it true?  

Kri: Yes, my lord. Should I lie to you? Haru, the milkman says that he saw you shooting with his own eyes. And after you left, it was this fellow who sprinkled water over Suren Babu and saved him.  

Me: But I never fired a shot, do you understand?  

Kri: You are so kind-hearted; can you ever do such a thing? But we badly need to shut that fellow Haru’s mouth. The word shouldn’t be allowed to spread.  

Me: You are right. [thinks hard] Long live the powerful British! We shall eternally trample the abominable natives under our feet. Got an excellent idea, Krishnadas.  

Kri: Long live the powerful British! The natives will eternally remain your slaves. What idea did you get, my lord?  

Me: Mr. Stephen’s new regulation is like an iron cudgel at the hands of righteous Magistrates like me. [laughs] Lodge a complaint against that milkman for cheating. He gives you dirty milk diluted with water, in the name of pure milk. Is that clear?  

Kri: Is there any chance of facing any trouble in future?  

Me: Not in the least. None is authorized to interfere in a sentence of up to three months term in prison. My judgment is final. There’s no need to keep records of what the witnesses have said. [laughs] This is a very good regulation, isn’t it?
Kri: How else will the British rule, my lord, if not with such regulations? Very good regulation, my lord. Only to make such good regulations has the Government employed a senior officer paying him handsome salary.

[Enter two guards with a prisoner and a woman]

1st Guard: My lord, this is that notorious thief, Paran. After much effort he has been taken into custody today.

Me: Who is this woman?

2nd Guard: His wife, please. She had the looted things. So we brought her too.

Me: [looking at the woman again and again] Excellent! We can easily get all information regarding her husband from her. [to the 2nd guard] Take her to that room. I'll ask her some questions.

Pri: [anxiously] Ask your questions here itself. What's the need of taking her to a separate room?

1st Guard: Shut up, you fellow thief! [beats the prisoner]

Me: [to the woman] Come, there's nothing to be scared of.

Woman: [crying out in fear] Where is he taking me? I won't go alone.

Me: Come, come, there's nothing to fear.

[Exit after taking the woman by force]

Pri: I am afraid, the Magistrate will outrage the modesty of my wife. I can't stand and see this. [suddenly releasing himself from the hands of the guards, chases McCrindle]

Kri: Hold! Hold!

[Exeunt]
Scene 4

[Bansabati. Surendra’s house. Birajmohini and Surendra are seated]

Biraj: [in a fear-stricken voice] Brother, is it good to seek revenge?

Suren: This isn’t exactly revenge, Biraj. This is merely teaching the wicked a lesson.

Biraj: When the court exists, is it appropriate for us to take this responsibility?

Suren: The court is as good as non-existent! All have a right to self-defence and it is an important duty. Self-defence is the first lesson of nature. But with the spread of civilization, only for the total welfare of the society, this right and power have been vested on some people. As the representatives of general people, they vow to make right judgments and take on this important duty on their shoulders. But when they become tyrants and selfish, these seats of justice become corrupted with partiality. When judgment varies with the change in the colour of the skin, when the power of preserving or destroying wealth, life and honour of thousands of people rest on sensuous, debauched foreign boys, yet to attain to manhood, then that primeval right returns to our hands. To ignore then is foolish, cowardly and inhuman. It is a sin to remain inactive.

Biraj: Brother, all Magistrates aren’t partial. Besides, no injustice, no torture is permanent. Day inevitably follows night. Isn’t patience better than revenge, brother?

Suren: Patience! Patience!! Don’t utter the word ‘patience’ in front of me, Biraj! I burn with rage even if I hear this word. [grinding his teeth] Can you see the prosperity of India by practicing patience?

Biraj: [aside] No more. Being a woman, how can I carry on the debate with him?

[looking at the backstage] Here comes the antidote of anger! He’ll forget his anger once he sees Binod. [aloud] Brother, brother, Binod is coming.
Suren: What, Binod is coming, - hmm.

Biraj: [aside] ‘What, Binod is coming, - hmm’ – that’s all? What’s wrong with brother today?

Suren: [aside] I’ll stay somewhat serious. Let me see what Binod does. That will show her real feelings. And Hari is coming with her. Let him see how Binod loves me. [turns to his other side and lies down]

[Enter Binodini and Haripriya]

Hari: [aside to Binodini] Did you see, in spite of seeing you come, he turned to his other side and lied down. He’s so sick that in spite of his deep love for you, he doesn’t want you today. Beware, don’t make him talk much.

[Exit]

Biraj: [coming near Binodini and holding her two hands with both her hands] Come, sister, come.

Binod: [softly] Why is he lying like that? Is he sick?


What does this mean?

Biraj: [laughing] Why don’t you ask him for its meaning? After all, he isn’t your elder brother-in-law.

Binod: Sister is always joking. [advancing a few steps, to Surendra] How are you?

Suren: [gravely] So so.

Binod: [wiping her tears, aside] He didn’t look at me for once. I feel like crying.
Suren: [aside] She is remaining quiet! [sighs] Then, did Hari speak the truth? – No, no, it can never be so. My heart rends in thinking of it. Binod is only mine!

Biraj: [aside] Since brother’s encounter with that British, he is so depressed that he didn’t look for once at Binod and speak. Binod must be feeling so sad. Slightest neglect from the person whom one loves whole-heartedly is very painful.

Binod: [wiping her tears, very politely] Then shall I go?

Suren: [very sadly, aside] She wants to go now itself! Then are Hari’s words not absolutely baseless? – Binod surely loves me. How do I discard the dream of such a love? Does this turn out to be merely a mirage? [aloud, haltingly] You want to go, well, go.

Binod: [to Birajmohini, with tears in her eyes] Well, sister, then I am – leaving.

Biraj: [holding Binodini’s hands] Indeed you’ll go! As if I am letting you go!

Suren: [to Birajmohini] I am going for a walk in the field.

[Exit Surendra]

Binod: Sister, don’t tell me anything. [weeps silently, resting her head on Birajmohini’s shoulder]

Biraj: [wiping the tears of Binodini’s eyes] Fie, sister, you are so crazy. Seeing you, I feel like laughing as well as crying. You remember, that day, the Vaishnavi⁴ was singing—

Ragini Bhairabi – Tal Arathea

Whoever comprehends the heart of a girl, or the nature of her love

Seeing her different facets, I feel surprised

If she smiles you enjoy heavenly bliss, but you are doomed if you do not see it

Now sunlight, then cloud – strange is the creation of God

Why do they indulge in love, only to feel pain in the heart?
The girls give up the treasure of their hearts.
Therefore I say there is no use of indulging in love
To hell with love, praise the lord!

Binod: [as she wipes her eyes] Well, sister, we'll see. You too will have your turn. It's easy to joke when it involves others.

Biraj: I'll never marry. There's no need of even mentioning it. Where's the pleasure in it? It's nothing but botheration to death.

Binod: [pressing Birajmohini's cheeks] Oh, really? My sister-in-law will remain forever a virgin!

[Exeunt]

Scene 5
[Bansabati. Rajchandra Basu's house. Enter Haripriya and Rajchandra]

Raj: Dear, what you are saying is indeed good. But I hope we don't end up doing harm rather than good. What if Suren gets angry? If he says, 'I won't'? Dear, he's a modern boy, of the English mentality!

Hari: How many times should I tell you? If you don't threaten him, he might postpone the marriage for two more years. In that case, how will you keep your honour? Your enemies amongst the neighbours are already saying so many things. Once it so happened that they were planning to socially ostracize you.

Raj: Indeed! How terrible! Then the marriage should be solemnized immediately. If this can be done by no other way than by threatening him, I am ready to do so. I hope Binu won't get angry with me for doing this.
Hari: [laughing] She's an eager beaver. An impatient girl of 16-17 years of age will refuse to marry! If she can marry today, she won't wait till tomorrow. And why are you so scared with this plan? If the end is good, the means adopted to achieve that end is also taken to be good.

Raj: Then, call Suren.

Hari: [happily] As you wish.

[Exit]

Raj: [worriedly] I can't approve this whole-heartedly. But I should also keep my honour. The scripture says 'Swakaryamuddharet prajna'¹⁴

[Re-enter Haripriya, swiftly]

Hari: Suren babu is coming. Beware not to laugh.

[Enter Surendra]

Raj: Come, dear, come. Take your seat. Are you fine? Why couldn't I see you these few days? – Dear, I've something urgent to discuss with you.

Surendra: [politely] Please say.

Raj: I say, dear, my grand-daughter is of age. I can't leave her unmarried for long. The neighbours are spreading nasty rumours.

Hari: [aside, to Rajchandra] Good! Carry on!

Raj: Dear, tell me frankly. Tell me if you are ready to marry Binod immediately. And if you aren't, tell me so. I am giving her to you in marriage only because you are a good boy. There are many others who are richer than you are.

Hari: [aside] You are speaking well. Continue! Continue!
Raj: Matches are coming from so many royal families. I didn’t pay heed to them so long only because of you. But in the long run, shall we lose everything and face a trying situation?

Hari: [aside] Suren’s face is looking serious and obstinate. I feel like dancing! As men feel hunger, I feel like breaking into a dance when I am extremely happy. If there weren’t people here, I would have danced!

Suren: [gravely] Was your grand-daughter’s views taken?

Raj: Views regarding what?

Suren: About her marriage to someone else.

Raj: She’s a girl, how does her view matter? Things will happen according to my wishes.

Suren: Still, did you ask her?

Hari: [aside] Tell him, she has given her consent. If you say this, he’ll agree to marry right away. Spit it out! Why are you afraid?

Raj: Yes, she has given her consent. She has given it long back. So many kings — [anxiously] What’s this, dear, you get up? Where are you going? What are you doing?

Suren: I was waiting so long only to listen to this. Sir, I am totally unworthy for your grand-daughter. Fix her match in some royal family. The servant takes leave.

[Exit, after prostrating before Rajchandra]

Raj: Dear, don’t go. Don’t go, dear. Listen to this.

[Follows Surendra and soon re-enters]
Raj: This happened only because of your advice. My fears have come true. Suren got angry and left. Now I am in peril. What shall I do? If Binu hears this, she’ll cry herself to death. What shall I do?

Hari: Why are you so anxious? Calm down. – It is serious only if Suren comes back.

Raj: If you can’t bring back Suren, I shall smash my head against the wall and kill myself.

Hari: Well, I say, if Suren doesn’t come back, does that prevent your grand-daughter’s marriage?

Raj: Should I hang myself to death? I won’t touch water, till Suren comes back.

[Exit, angrily]

Hari: Narad! Narad! What fun! I’ve said different things to different people! As it suits them! As the wind blows, you must set your sail. Still couldn’t do anything with that girl. She’s so steadfast! – Here she comes!

[Enter Binodini]

I told you the other day that Suren Babu doesn’t love you as he did before. You didn’t believe. Today he told it clearly to grandpa.

Binod: Why, why? What happened? What did he say?

Hari: Grandpa called him and explained in clear words, ‘Dear, Binod is of age. Why are you delaying to marry her? I am old, I may die some day. May your marriage be solemnized soon and let I see this and die a happy man’. To that he haughtily said, ‘Sir, I am totally unworthy of your grand-daughter. You fix her marriage somewhere else’. That means you are totally unworthy of him and that he doesn’t want to marry you. Saying
this, he simply walked out! Grandpa called him, but he didn’t pay heed to his entreaties. He just walked past. [aside] Her eyes are full of tears.

**Binod:** [weeping, with bowed head, softly] There’s no doubt that I am unworthy of him. But I won’t believe, till I hear from his own mouth, that he told to have my match fixed somewhere else.

**Hari:** [pretending to be angry] Then am I telling a lie? To hell with your love! All the girls of this Kali era are the same! A nice pain in the neck!

[Exit, hurriedly]

**Binod:** [as she wipes her tears] Brother, don’t get angry on me, brother —

[Exeunt]

**Scene 6**

[Hooghly. Public Garden. Enter Surendra]

**Surendra:** The train will leave after two more hours. Till then let me stroll here. — No, I’ll sit. [sits] I’ll take a house in Calcutta and immediately bring Biraj. We both, brother and sister, will stay there. Biraj is never going to betray me. The love of a sister is selfless and unchanging. I shall spend my days in Calcutta over literature and science. As the saying goes – in a populous place, people are liberal. There will be nothing to cause disturbance to the peace of my mind. [sits, thinking deeply]

[Enter a group of musicians playing western music. Music recital. Exit]

[Enter Krishnadas and McCrindle with a whip]

**Me:** Such a beautiful garden! Such melodious music! Could you enjoy these had you been under local rulers?
Kri: No, my lord. These are all due to the excellent administration of the British. The Hindus never knew – not even a bit – what is meant by a garden, or what makes musical sound.

Me: [looking at Surendra] Who is that man sitting over there? Leave apart saluting me, he didn’t even stand up! It has become very necessary to make a Governmental notice to prohibit the half-civilized Bengalis from entering these public gardens. – I’ve always been saying that these incivilities will never be uprooted till higher education is banished from Bengal. [going near Surendra, touching him with the tip of his shoe, sarcastically] Who are you, sir? [Surendra lifts his face] Who, Surendranath? Why did ‘you’ return from your way to the abode of death? ‘You’ve’ committed an abominable deed. [whips Surendra on his face]

Suren: Fuelling the already blazing flame! I’ve returned so that I can send ‘you’ to that place. [snatches the whip forcefully from McCrindle’s hands, kicks him and throws him on the ground] The reward for that day’s betrayal – this. [whips him once]

Kri: Guard! Guard!

[Exit]

Suren: The reward for kicking me today – this, this. [whips him twice] The reward for whipping me – this, this [whips him thrice] and as an interest, here’s a bit – this, this, this, this. [whips him four times]

[Exit, after throwing the whip at a distance]

Me: [getting up] You shall have to pay heavily for this, boy, and that ere another sun sets.

[Re-enter Krishnadas]
Kri: Which way did the fellow go? Which way did he go? My lord –

Me: [very angrily] My lord, my lord –

[McCrindle runs towards Krishnadas to beat him. Krishnadas runs away with McCrindle close at heels]

From backstage: [crying] This is not my fault, my lord – [cries out in pain] please, my lord, [cries out in pain] don't kill me – my lord – [cries out in pain] –

ACT III

Scene i

[A house in Calcutta. Surendra seated]

Suren: Have I done anything wrong? Who else is wayward and self-willed if not a woman, who after mentally accepting a man as her husband, again wishes another? Merely wayward and self-willed? Deceitful, murderess, witch.\textsuperscript{1} Himadrisikhar\textsuperscript{2} has rightly written. [reads from Himadrisikhar] 'Unsmelt wild flower, filth-free water of the fountain and the loving heart of a woman are the most beautiful objects of the world. But it is a matter of great regret and eternal misfortune of man that the more desirable and charming an object is, the more rare and scarce is it. – No social code or law is created without some need. Why was the zenana created in the Aryan society? Didn't it have any inherent, inner reason behind it? Doesn't it mean, “Women are unable to control the wantonness of their hearts” and doesn't the world history stand witness to the truth of this? Chanakya\textsuperscript{3} was a great psychologist and a multi-faceted scholar. Can his words be totally wrong? But now, due to the effects of western education and examples, our age-old zenana system, still in vogue, is getting loose and upset and its deadly effects can also
be seen in every moment. Our thoughtful readers can notice the number of wayward and self-willed women will increase in proportion to the destruction of the zenana system. If there are truths without any scope of doubt in this wide world, this is one of their foremost'.

Is there any doubt about this? Its deadly fruits can be seen in every moment, every instance. Only the blind can't see. – How strange, heavenly innocence on the face and deadly poison in the heart! – One who believes in women is not even worthy of pity. Mental asylum is his true abode. Be that as it may, I got respite from this deadly serpent in time. I thank God for this from the depth of my heart. I am greatly satisfied because of this. Who says that it causes immense pain if one is deprived from the love that one desired? I am feeling great! I am laughing, playing and wandering as before! Nothing is disturbing me. Instead I am enjoying the pleasures of liberty! Love is a figment of fancy of playwrights and novelists. It doesn’t have the slightest truth in it. [taking the Puru Bikram lying in front of him in his hands] Even the intelligent and discreet author of Puru-Bikram hasn’t shied away from this propaganda of falsehood. Had my heart been enveloped in love, as was Puru’s, and having failed in love, had my heart cried like a hunger-stricken child, then, like this china, I would have crushed it like this china under my feet. [throws a china vessel and crushes it under his feet. Sits]

[Enter landlord]

**Land:** Sir, I’ve found a house for you. – What’s this? Why, your eyes are bloodshot! Give me your hand. It’s not at all unlikely to suffer from fever during this weather change. [examining Surendra’s pulse] Why, you are running high temperature. You wanted to go home today. But now there’s no chance of doing so.
Suren: [in a painful voice] Sir, I am not suffering from fever. And if it is indeed fever, it isn’t serious. I must go home today, my sister is alone.

Land: No, please. I can never let you go home in this condition. Come and lie down.

[Exit, holding Surendra’s hand]

Scene 2

[Bansabati. Rajchandra’s house. Enter Binodini with a letter]

Binod: [with tears in her eyes] Did it come to this? Wayward and self-willed! Cruel Suren, how could you say such things to me? [weeps] Suren, I know none other than you. You are the lord of my heart, the only god of my love. I can sacrifice relatives, friends, wealth, riches – all the world for you. And you speak such cruel words to me? [weeps] Suren, I love you so dearly; a look at your face fills my heart with joy. You call me wayward? [weeps] Couldn’t you pity me while saying this, Suren? [weeps and reads the letter]

‘The relation between the both of us has come to an end for ever. I am not sad! You haven’t learned the discipline of zenana, being under the care of an aged and indulging grandfather. No wonder that you will become wayward and self-willed’.

[weeps]

Ragini Banroya – Tal Thumri

Where are you, O moon of my heart?

See, O lord, how this life slips away

The fire of dejection is burning incessantly in my heart

The heart is getting charred in that fire
Lord, when there is no more hope, why do I meaninglessly drag my life along
Today shall I give up this woeful life.

Suren, I am taking your leave for ever. [weeps] If I survive, O lord of my life, O jewel of
my heart, may I be only your wife. But never again utter such heartrending words.
[weeps] Suren, never again reject this miserable girl. [cries and attempts to hang herself]

**From backstage, Hari:** Binod, open the door. [knocks]

**Binod:** [in a heavy voice] Brother, please go. Come later.

**From backstage, Hari:** What’s this? Are you crying? Open the door! Open the door!
[knocks again and again. – Binod tries to kill herself] What’s this? Why are you silent? I
am feeling scared. Why don’t you open the door?

[Haripriya hits the door hard, breaks it open and enters]

**Hari:** Oh my, what’s this? What a disaster! [tears the noose and makes Binodini sit]

What were you about to do, sister? [aside] I never knew that this would go so far. I
simply meant to have some fun. [aloud] My heart is palpitating. Sister, should you take
such a rash step for just this much? I am shaking with fright. [fanning Binodini] What
were you about to do, Binod? – I am feeling giddy. – Fie, should you ever do like that,
sister? I am feeling sick. [scared] My my, why don’t you speak? [rising] Let me call
grandpa.

[about to leave]

**Binod:** [softly] Brother, I am OK. Don’t tell grandpa.

**Hari:** [wiping his eyes and sitting near Binodini] Listening to your voice has given me
such a relief! Does ever any one act like this, sister? [aside] My my, I never dreamed that
this would go so far!
From backstage, Raj: What a disaster! What a disaster!

Binod and Hari: Why? Why?

[Enter Rajchandra]

Raj: What a disaster! What a disaster! Never seen such a torture! People from police station have taken away Suren’s sister.

Binod: [crying] Oh my, what’s this?

Hari: [anxiously] When did they take her? And why? Weren’t the guards at home?

Raj: They took her away a little while ago. Nile came and gave me this information. Some 20 – 30 guards came and surrounded the house from all sides. What could two or three guards do? What ever could the servants do? Never seen such torture.

Binod: [crying] Brother, go, go and see what happened. Oh my, what to do?

Hari: I am going. You too follow me.

[Exit hurriedly]

Raj: I am coming.

[Exit]

Binod: [crying] Oh my, what to do?

[Exuent]

Scene 3

[Hooghly. The court of the Magistrate. McCrindle occupying the chair of the judge.

Birajmohini, Haripriya, Rajchandra, Krishnadas, Haru the milkman, guards and other people¹ are present]
Kri: [pointing at the milkman, Haru] This milkman is taking the price of pure milk and
giving me diluted milk. After drinking that milk, the children in my house have fallen
sick. I charge this man for cheating.

Mc: Did you yourself go to buy the milk?

Kri: This servant of mine went.

Mc: [to Krishnadas's servant] Did you go?

Ser: 2 [after saluting] Yes, my lord.

Mc: [to the milkman Haru] What have you to say in your defence?

Haru: [joining his hands] Have mercy on me, my lord. I’ve never sold him milk, what to
say of diluted milk. The names of all my customers are in this register. [opening the
register] Kindly have a look at it.

Kri: He sold milk to me only once.

Haru: [crying out] My lord, you are like the parents of the poor. You may kill if you
wish, you may help if you wish. I’ve never sold milk to his servant. If you cross-question
him, the truth will stumble out. Have mercy on me, my lord.

Mc: Krishnadas Babu is a respectable man. I can never believe that he has conspired with
his servant to falsely implicate you. Besides, I don’t see how he will profit from this. —
Cheating is a very serious offence. Go – you’ll be caned ten times and will serve the
sentence of two months of rigorous imprisonment.

Haru: [crying] Have mercy on me, my lord –

Guard: *Come, come, don’t create a commotion.*

[Exit with Haru]
Kri: I have another complaint. Six months ago I had lost two currency notes of one thousand rupees. I could not find them even after searching hard for so long. Coming to know from some secret source, the police searched the house of Surendra Babu of Bansabati. I feel ashamed to say, the lost currency notes were found under the bedsheets of this woman. Here are those two. [gives the notes to McCrindle]

Me: Who is she?

Kri: I hear she is Surendra Babu's sister.

Me: Surendra Babu's sister! It can never happen that she has stolen. How would she steal? And why?

Kri: That I don't know. But how could the currency notes come under her bedsheets?

Me: Yes, that you might say. [to Birajmohini] Do you know who kept those currency notes in your bed?

Biraj: [aside, in sorrow, shame and abhorrence] Earth, divide into two, so that I may enter within you. I can't bear any longer.

Hari: She's dying in shame. How will she answer the question? Is it possible that she has stolen?

Me: Who are you?

Hari: Their neighbour and relative.

Raj: My lord, everyone here knows me. I would like to say something. She belongs to a respectable family. She can never commit such an act—

Me: I too believe the same.

Raj: My lord, there are very few judges as just as you are. This case is not going to be solved today. Leave this girl on bail. I'll pay whatever money is required.
Me: I am really sorry; I cannot accept your proposal. It is beyond my power to release the thief with the loot before the case is settled. This is against the code of law. Both the rich and the poor are equal before the eyes of law. There is no distinction between these two in the scales of justice. She will have to spend tonight in the police station. The next course will be decided tomorrow after the case is over.

[Birajmohini faints]

Hari: [in a loud voice] Never seen such injustice! [tries to bring Birajmohini back to consciousness]

Me: [gravely] Beware, young man, you are violating the code of conduct at the court.


[All, except McCrindle and Krishnadas are driven away by the guards]

Kri: [shaking] My lord, everything is now over. But I am dead with fright. Firstly, they are rich; and over and above, the stubborn resolve that Surendra Babu has!

Me: [smiling] You've nothing to fear. Send her to that place after dusk. Be careful so that no one sees. – I've to satisfy both my lust and revenge. [Krishnadas shakes badly] Are the wicked deprived of the priceless love of beautiful women?

[Exuent]

Scene 4

[Southern Hooghly. An old mansion on the bank of the Ganga. Birajmohini is seated in a room]

Biraj: [after checking all the bay windows and doors, sadly] What shall I do? All the doors and windows are locked from outside. [cries] God, is there no means of my rescue?
Besides suicide, is there no other way of coming out of this hell? Should I die at this age? [weeps] I don’t see any easy means of suicide. What shall I do?

[Enter McCrindle]

Me: [laughing] I’ve listened from hiding to all that you were saying. What else will you do, pretty woman, than come into my embrace? [laughing] Why are you scared of me, pretty woman? I am neither a tiger, nor a bear. -- I won’t devour you. I only want to taste your love.

Biraj: [crying] Forgive me. God will be kind to you.

Me: [laughing] The word ‘forgiveness’ doesn’t occur in the dictionary of love, pretty woman. Besides, how will it harm you, pretty woman? You shall remain as you are now. Then why do you torment me, pretty woman? -- Till now I’ve never seen any native beauty give her love easily. What’s the reason behind this? When will you overcome this prejudice?

Biraj: [aside] May God make this ‘prejudice’ be forever deep-rooted in our country. -- Oh my, I am shaking!

Me: What are you thinking, pretty woman? Why do you worry about the inevitable and meaninglessly torment your heart, pretty woman? -- Pretty woman, I beg of you, don’t torture me any longer.

Biraj: [with extreme anxiousness, aside] What shall I do? I shall consider myself fortunate even if I get little time out of some trick.

Me: Pretty woman, I can’t wait any longer. Till now I’ve been talking politely. Consent in giving me your love. Otherwise, in spite of your unwillingness --
Biraj: [thinking, suddenly] Well, why don’t you marry me? That would spare all troubles.

Me: [laughing] That’s an excellent proposal, pretty woman. I give my whole-hearted consent. Let us have a temporary marriage.

Biraj: What’s that?

Me: [laughing] Don’t you know that, pretty woman? We shall live as man and wife, not lifelong, but for some fixed time, may be a night or two. After that we shall again be free. That is, you can marry someone else, and so can I. [laughing] I completely agree to this—an excellent proposal.

Biraj: [aside] I hope I get some time. Then I’ll run away through that door. If I don’t find any other way, I’ll jump off the terrace. It doesn’t matter whether I survive or die. [aloud] If you leave me after a night or two, well, that’s no marriage!

Me: [laughing] All types of slavery have been uprooted in this nineteenth century with the help of science. Then why should the slavery of permanent marriage remain?

Biraj: [suddenly coming out of the door] See, demon how a Bengali girl protects her chastity!

[Escapes]

Me: *By the dragon—actually jumped down from the verandah!*2

[Exit, hurriedly]

[Re-enter after some time, with Birajmohini, who is bleeding3]

Biraj: Please spare me—I can’t stand, please spare me. [shakes]

Me: [angrily] I don’t want to listen to these. Get ready.
Biraj: Please spare me, spare me. [falls due to weakness from excessive bleeding and faints]

Me: I am not going to give up even at this. [goes towards Birajmohini]


Me: [leaving Birajmohini] *Damn the fellow!* – What’s the matter, Krishnadas? Why are you shouting like a donkey?

From backstage: My lord, come soon. The prisoners have got violent. My lord, come soon, they have become murderous.

[Birajmohini regains consciousness]


From backstage: My lord, come soon. They have become murderous.

Me: I’m coming, I’m coming.

[Exit, taking Birajmohini]

Scene 5

[The prison at Hooghly. Revolt of the prisoners]

Prisoners: Break! Kill! Cut! Break open the door! [attempt to break the door with axe, etc.]

1 Pri: Hey, that’s an iron door. You won’t be able to break it easily. Break the wall!

All: Break the wall! Break the wall!

[Prisoners attempt to break the wall]
1 Pri: This torture of the Englishmen can’t be tolerated any longer. Either I’ll break the shackles of my feet or I’ll die. I can no longer drag along these chains. All those who have been kicked by these nasty Englishmen, come running, wherever you may be! It isn’t possible for just one or two to break the wall of the prison, to break these iron chains of foreigners. Come, brother, come. Come all, wherever you may be, come running.

Whether you are a Hindu or a Muslim, a Bengali or a Bihari, young or old, if you have even a drop of Indian blood in your body, come running. This can’t be accomplished if all don’t try.

All: Break! Break!

[Enter two armed guards and their attack on the prisoners]

Prisoners: Kill the fellows! Tear them into pieces! These fellows eat Indian food and fight for the British! Kill, kill! Cut, cut! [fierce fight and both the guards die]

Few Pri: [kicking the corpses of the guards] Can’t these handsome faces speak? Won’t you fight for the British any more?

1 Pri: Hey, why fight with corpses?¹ Time is running out! Break the wall! Break the wall!

All: Break the wall! Break the wall!

[Enter McCrindle with revolver and sword]

Pri: Kill the fellow! Kill the fellow! [attack McCrindle]

Me: It is a mere waste of time to try and calm these maddened ones down. [fires at the prisoners. Some die and some others run away]
1 Pri: Hey, why do you run away? You won’t have to die twice! Besides, how do you save yourself by running away? All sides are locked. — How many more cartridges does that fellow’s revolver have? It will be over soon. [the speaker and few prisoners die]

Another Pri: Hey, the fellow’s cartridges are over! Now, for once brothers, then we can break this prison and run away! Attack! Attack!

All: Attack! Attack! [attack McCrindle. While moving backwards, he tries to defend himself with the sword, suddenly trips and falls]

1 Pri: [snatching McCrindle’s sword, sitting on his chest, strangling McCrindle, in a frenzy] Move away! [swaying the sword and grinding his teeth] I won’t spare anyone who comes here. My name is Paran. This fellow outraged the modesty of my wife in front of my eyes. It is me who is going to kill this fellow. Beware, no one should come near. [to McCrindle] How now, bugger, don’t you want my wife anymore? [injures McCrindle with the sword. McCrindle dies a painful death] My anger will calm down only after I bathe in your blood. Won’t you outrage the modesty of my wife? [roaring laughter, in a frenzy]

Other Pri: [helping Paran to his feet] That’s enough! Come, let’s run away. — Hey, everyone, for once take the name of the God you believe in and leave this hell. [Allah, Allah, Durga, Durga, etc.] Oh, when will all the English prisons be removed from our country?

[All exit]

[Enter Krishnadas and a few servants after a little while]

Kri: [overcome with fright] Oh dear, am I alive or dead? — O Sambhu, Bagdi, why do you keep quiet?
1 Servant: Sir, let us remove the corpses from this room.

Kri: Will the Government hang me, dear? — Oh, I beg of you, please tell me.

[Exeunt, with the corpses]

Scene 6

[Front of the earlier mentioned old mansion on the bank of Ganga. Enter Haripriya with a pistol and lantern, in the company of a man, amidst thunder, lightning and rain]

Man: [shaking] Sir, I can’t accompany you any longer. If you wish, you may go alone.

[Ghostly sound from unseen place]

Man: Rama, Rama; Durga Durga. [tries to run away]

Hari: [stopping the man] Well, if you wish, don’t come along. But tell me clearly whether you’ve seen any such woman being brought here.

[Ghostly sound from another unseen place]

Man: [shutting his eyes in fear] Oh my! Oh my! I am undone! Now it is from the back. Sir, I beg of you, please let me go.

Hari: First answer my question.

Man: Yes, sir, I’ve seen her being brought here.

[Ghostly sound from yet another unseen place]

Man: Now I am undone, utterly undone. Sir, please leave me, or else I’ll faint out of fear.

[ghostly sound once more and Haripriya lets go the man’s hand] Rama, Rama; Durga, Durga. [tries to run away with half-open eyes and falls. Haripriya tries to help him to his feet. The man cries out, thinking Haripriya to be the ghost] Have mercy on me, dear ghost! Have mercy on me, dear ghost! This fellow forcefully brought me here, I didn’t
want to come. Break the neck of this fellow. Have mercy on me, dear ghost! I don’t know anything.

Hari: I am not a ghost! Get up. Open your eyes, see the road and go.

[Ghostly sound again from unseen place]

Man: Oh, I am undone! I am undone! If you aren’t a ghost, then who are you, someone even scary?  

Hari: Get up! Get up! [shakes the man]

Man: [crying in fear] Don’t kill me, dear ghost! I am going.

[Runs away]

[Tremendous sound from all sides. The leaves of the trees, creepers, etc. are shaking]

Hari: If Birajmohini is in this house, I won’t retreat even after seeing hundreds of thousands of such horrors. I am ready to lose my life, but still I would search thoroughly for once. That would be a fitting expiation of my foolishness.

[Ghostly sound and shower of pieces of bricks]

Hari: Who’s here? Come in front of me. I am not afraid of these.

[Ghostly sound and a monstrous figure rises out of the ground and vanishes immediately]

Hari: Why did you run away? Come, come once again. Let me make a hole in your body with my pistol so that sunlight may enter through it.

[Enter the monstrous figure, with a great speed from another side. Slightly injured by Haripriya’s bullet and falls down]

Hari: [placing his foot on the chest of the figure] Tell me who you are, otherwise I’ll kill you.
Fig: [frightened] I am saying. I am saying. Please remove the cover over my face.

Hari: [removing the cover] Say.

Fig: Sir, I am a Muslim by faith. Once, out of greed, I took recourse to forgery. After coming to know of this Mr. McCrindle threatened, ‘You’ll be deported if you don’t do what I order’. I agreed out of fear. Since then I am doing this in this place.

Hari: Why does he make you do this?

Fig: Sir—, Sir—

Hari: Speak, or else I’ll kill you.

Fig: I am saying, I am saying. Please let go of my neck. Sir, from time to time he brings women to this place. Taking this house to be haunted, people generally don’t come here in their search.

Hari: Oh, how horrible!— Was any woman brought here in this evening? [the figure hesitates] Speak out, or else I’ll kill you.

Fig: Yes, sir, she was brought.

Hari: In which room is she kept?

Fig: The room in the eastern side. But all the doors are locked. How will you go?

Hari: I am trying. You go and bring a ladder or something like that. If you try to contact anyone else, I’ll kill you. I’ll accompany you.

[Exit Haripriya and the figure. Re-enter soon with a ladder]

Hari: Place the ladder here. [the figure does likewise] I don’t believe you. Before going, I’ll bind you up. [does likewise. Climbs the ladder and tries to break the bay window of the first floor room]

From within the room: Oh my, who breaks the window?
**Hari:** [happily] Who else? I am Hari. Come down, please come down. You have nothing more to fear.

**From within the room:** You! Ah, you saved me! [Birajmohini climbs down after Haripriya]

**Biraj:** I am feeling giddy. I can’t speak. – How shall I thank you? By you, I – [stops suddenly]

**Hari:** What’s this? Why did you stop midway?

**Biraj:** [blushing] How can I go alone with you in this dead night?

**Hari:** Everyone knows me to be foolish and crazy. No one will blame you for going alone with me. Besides, you won’t have to go alone for long. We’ll reach the main road after crossing this house on the front. There people are still walking.

[Birajmohini walks a little with Haripriya. She is pain and stands]

**Hari:** Hold my hand. You can’t afford to be shy in the face of danger.

[Exit, holding Birajmohini’s hand]

**ACT IV**

[Bansabati. Surendra’s house. Birajmohini is seated]

**Biraj:** It’s time for him to return, but why doesn’t he? I am rather impatient to know what has been decided. And –

[Enter Haripriya]

Come. What happened?

**Hari:** [laughing] Today is Binod’s marriage! I made grandpa give his consent after much insistence. What’s the use of waiting any longer? What do you say?
Biraj: Being a woman, how can I advise you? But be careful about what you do. He
doesn’t even let me mention Binod.

Hari: I don’t see any other means besides this.

Biraj: [laughing] Does Binod herself know that today is her marriage?

Hari: [laughing] No. Once she asked me, ‘Brother, why is the house being decorated
with lights?’ I told her, ‘Today some people are invited to our house. Therefore the
preparation’. After listening to this, she didn’t say anything. – See, today this has to be
somehow brought to an end. I can’t bear Binod’s pale face and fragile health any longer.
What an evil deed I’ve done!

Biraj: Who else knows about our plan?

Hari: Who else, only you, myself and grandpa. Well, I’ll go now. – I am feeling ashamed
to come in front of all of you after the misdeed that I’ve done. [sighs]

[Exit]

Biraj: Feeling ashamed to come in front of us! [thinks with bowed head]

[Enter Surendra]

Biraj: [seeing Surendra, aside] Let me tell it soon. Otherwise he’ll leave as soon as I’ve
uttered Binod’s name. [aloud] Brother today is Binod’s marriage!

Suren: [remains standing in surprise] Is today her marriage? – Glad to hear. – With
whom?

Biraj: That I can’t say. I just heard.

Suren: Ah, all my tension has now completely gone! I guess this is why there is so much
of commotion in their house today.
Biraj: They are doing these just to show off in front of us. – As if seeing this we are
dying of sorrow! As if my brother can never marry!

Suren: [lovingly] Biraj, you are indeed my loving sister! [smiling] Won’t you attend the
marriage?

Biraj: Brother, I am feeling very angry. I wish to spread the word that you are also
getting married today.

Suren: [laughing] Where’s the bride?

Biraj: [aside] The bride herself will presently arrive. [aloud] Wherever she may be, how
does it bother them? Did they tell us whom Binod is marrying?

Suren: [sighing] Biraj, I am feeling shy to tell you,² - there was a time when I loved
Binod dearly. [weeps]

Biraj: [aside] Ah, what a relief! Mentioned her after so many days! There’s even a drop
of tear in his eyes. That’s a good sign. Water can immediately extinguish the fire. [aloud]
Brother, Binod is unworthy of you. Why do you feel sad for her?

Suren: I am not feeling sad, but – [weeps]

Biraj: Come, brother, have some water.

[Exit, with Surendra]

[Enter Binodini and Haripriya]

Binod: [with tears in her eyes] Brother, is it true that today is his marriage? Wouldn’t
sister have told me if it was so?

Hari: Binod, it is a serious sin to lie. [aside] By the name of God, not in these places.

[aloud] Besides, how will it help me by deceiving you? [sound of music from backstage]

There, listen, they are enjoying themselves even before the marriage. Such an excess of
songs and music! You wait here. Let me have a peep into that room and see what’s going on.

[Exit Haripriya]

[Enter Birajmohini]

**Binod:** [with tears in her eyes] Sister, I have come and will go soon. Don’t get angry on me. Sister, I’ve come to ask you a question. Sister, I say – I say – is – today – your brother’s – [tears choke her voice]

**Biraj:** [irritatingly] Well, why don’t you spit it out?

**Binod:** Sister, why are you talking to me in this manner? Sister, have you too discarded me? [weeps] Sister, have I ever done anything wrong to you? [weeps]

**Biraj:** [aside] I can’t check my tears. [aloud] Now say what you’ve to.

**Binod:** [somehow checking her tears, haltingly] Sister, is your brother getting married?

**Biraj:** Well, should my brother remain a bachelor forever?

[Exit]

**Binod:** [crying] It would have been better had not brother stopped me that day. Now he has totally discarded me. Let it be so, may God keep him happy. I shall feel somewhat at ease even if I see him happy. [weeps]

Ragini (Gara) Bhairabi – Tal Madhyaman

How do I console this heart of mine

My restless heart is disconsolate

The one for whom my body and heart is wasting day by day

Is not mine, O heart – why do you cry in vain

I do not ever hope of having my lord back
There is none as miserable as myself in this world.

[Enter Surendra]

Suren: The music is so sweet. Still I don’t like it today. How could I become so weak mentally? [angrily] Who says I am mentally weak? The person who says so is a liar.

[suddenly, seeing Binodini] What’s this, doesn’t she seem to be Binod? [advancing a bit] Indeed! [with a mixed feeling of anger and surprise] Why is she here? [about to leave] No, why don’t I ask her reason behind coming here? Where’s the harm in it? – What are you doing here?

Binod: [weeping, softly] I came here with my brother Hari.

Suren: To invite for your marriage? – We know that today is your marriage. You don’t have to take the trouble of mentioning it.

Binod: My marriage? Are you saying this just to avoid mentioning your marriage? [in a sorrowful voice] There’s no need to hide it from me. May God keep you happy. I am not here to create an obstacle in your path of happiness. [weeps]

Suren: Doesn’t your eyelid bat before speaking a lie?¹ The person you are going to marry is so fortunate. He’ll get such an intelligent wife!

Binod: [holding Surendra’s hands] Suren, my eyes are clouded with tears. I can’t see you. If you want to discard me, discard completely. But don’t utter such cruel words.

Suren, the omniscient God knows, I know none besides you. [weeps]

Suren: [with extreme anger] Should I disbelieve what I am seeing with my eyes, what I am listening with my ears? You utter a lie taking the holy name of God? You sinful woman, you won’t find a place even in hell.

[Exit, removing his hand from Binodini’s grip]
[Binodini falls down and faints. Enter Haripriya, hurriedly]

Hari: Dear me, she’s almost starving since the last few days. This can be fatal. This is all because of my foolishness. It is me who won’t find a place in hell. [tries to bring Binodini back to consciousness]

From backstage: Brother, listen here. It is not true that today is Binod’s marriage. Please come here, I’ll tell you everything.

Binod: [regaining consciousness] Brother Hari, bring him here for once. Tell him that I am begging him to listen to this one word of mine. This is the last request of my life. [weeps]

Hari: I am bringing him right now. Calm down.

[Exit]

[Enter Birajmohini and Surendra]

Suren: I am feeling ashamed to face Binod. I’ve spoken very cruel words. How shall I go near her? This is all because of that Hari’s fault. – Biraj, please go to that room.

Biraj: I am going. [aside] As if I am going! I’ll watch everything from hiding.

[Exit]

Suren: [going near Binodini, holding her hands, ashamedly] Binod –

Binod: [lying at Surendra’s feet] Beloved, you remembered this unfortunate after so long? After so many days you pity her for being miserable? [cries]

Suren: [wiping her tears, sitting near Binodini] Binod –

Binod: [crying] Suren, I’ve endured much pain. I don’t want to live any longer. I’ll commit suicide in front of you.

Suren: I’ve indeed hurt this innocent girl very badly. Binod, listen –
Binod: You haven’t talked to me for so long. I don’t want to listen to your words. [cries]
Suren: How shall I stop her tears? [suddenly] Oh my, such a big krait! [moves backwards]
Binod: [frightened] Where? Where?
Suren: [laughing, holding Binodini’s hands] Where, Binod, there’s no snake here! I told that only to stop your tears!
Binod: [wiping her eyes] Well, trying to frighten me without any reason? [again about to cry]
Suren: Binod, listen, don’t cry any more. I own my fault. Here, I am pulling my ears.
[pulls his own ears]

[Enter Birajmohini]

Biraj: [laughing] Oh dear, I can’t check my laughter any longer! Should I die of suffocation? [laughing] Brother, what’s happened to your ears? [laughs]
Suren: [aside] My death! From where did this wretch come? [scratching his head, aloud, haltingly] I was feeling the vesicle like thing in my right ear.
Biraj: [laughing] Brother, do you have a vesicle in your left ear as well? [laughs]

[Exit]

Suren: Oh, I guess that girl must have seen everything!

Binod: [wiping her eyes and with a smile on her lips] That serves you right! As you sow, so you reap!

Suren: Binod, smile like this once more. I’ve seen many, many beautiful sights in the world. But nothing matches the beauty of a woman’s face breaking into a smile while her eyes are moist with tears. [holding Binodini’s hands] Binod, has your anger subsided?
Binod: [lovingly] Suren, when have I got angry with you, that it should subside?—Suren,
I’ll tell you something. Don’t get annoyed. Don’t suspect women easily. Whether they
may be literate or illiterate or confined to the zenana, feelings of immorality don’t arise in
their hearts all of a sudden. Their husbands are their only earthly god. The heart of a
woman is occupied by the image of her husband.

Suren: [aside] The anger has subsided. The tears have also stopped. Now scold me,
thrash me, preach at me, I’ll bear everything. Though Binod is a mere child, what she has
said is not that baseless. Many great souls have the fault of suspecting women
meaninglessly. [looking at the backstage, aloud] Biraj is coming. Again she might tease!

[Exit]

[Enter Birajmohini]

[prostrates] Don’t forget this miserable destitute. May she have some food and sweets on
the occasion of your wedding.

Binod: [embracing Birajmohini] What a relief it would be if you die! Why don’t you die
soon? [weeping tears of joy]

Biraj: [wiping Binodini’s eyes] Everything is now sorted out. Why cry again, dear?

Binod: [checking her tears] Now can I understand why you were talking to me like that!
Sister, even you are capable of this!

[Enter Surendra]

Biraj: [seeing Surendra, to Binodini] How does it bother us if it is your marriage? As if
my brother won’t ever get married!

Suren: [laughing] Well, Biraj, on what basis do you joke with me?
Biraj: [aside] On the basis of your craziness! Brother is now all smiles. So long it was hidden behind clouds!

[Enter Haripriya, with bowed head]

Suren: [with slight anger] Hari, I forgive you for the present. But beware in future. Never engage in a prank that hurts at the core of the heart. You are absolutely foolish, otherwise I would have been angry at you.

Hari: [sadly] I did that without realizing the consequences. Please forgive me. – I’m here to take leave of all of you. I am going to Bhagalpur. I’ll stay there for some time. I won’t come to disturb you any more.

Suren: [holding Haripriya’s hands] Should you get so angry, dear, because of my little joke?

Hari: No, I am not going due to anger. I am sad due to many reasons. That’s why I am going. [going near Binodini] Then, sister, I take your leave. I’ve given you much trouble. Please don’t mind.

Binod: [with tears in her eyes] Brother, hadn’t it been for you, I would have died that very day.

Suren: Why, why? What had happened, Binod?

Hari: That’s nothing.

Binod: [with tears in her eyes] When you were angry with me, one day, in a fit of grief I tried to hang myself. Brother came at that time and saved me.

Biraj: [with bowed head, softly] Brother, I didn’t name him so long out of shame. It was he who saved me that night from such a crisis.
Suren: [remaining silent for some time] Is today a day of apologizing for me? – [thinks]
Binod, I want to ask you something. Please come this way.

[goes a few steps and consults with Binodini]

Hari: Let me leave right now. I won’t be able to go once Binodini returns. [to
Birajmohini, shyly, with bowed head] Then, I take your leave. Many times I’ve wronged
you too. Please forgive me.

[about to leave]

Biraj: Please grant my request. Don’t go.

Hari: [aside] It seems from her tone – no, it’s merely a mirage. [aloud] Please don’t make
that request. There’s no need for my stay here. – I don’t dare to ask you, but will you
sometimes think of this miserable man once he has gone?

Biraj: [sighs] Say, what shall I tell you? You indeed won’t grant my request.

Suren: [aside, to Binodini] Are you sure, your grandpa won’t object to this?

Binod: When he learns, he’ll be even happier.

Suren: Biraj won’t object, will she?

Binod: [smiling, pointing with her finger] Can’t you see and understand whether she’ll
object or not?

Suren: [coming near Haripriya] Here, brother Hari, you are indeed very foolish. We can
never let you go abroad. What if you fall into some trouble due to your foolishness? But
neither can we rely on you easily. What if you run away some day? Please don’t mind,
dear, I’ll lock your hands in a chain. [giving Birajmohini in Haripriya’s hands] Dear, may
God daily increase the number of stupids like you.
Binod: [pressing Birajmohini's cheeks, laughing] ‘I'll never marry. There's no need of even mentioning it. Where's the pleasure in it? It's nothing but botheration to death'.

Biraj: [aside] I beg of you sister, don't make me feel more ashamed in front of brother.

From backstage: Where, where are you people?

Suren: [to Binodini] Your grandpa is coming. I am feeling rather ashamed.

[Enter Rajchandra and Nilkantha]

Raj: [happily] Here! The fellows couldn't afford to wait till I came. They themselves have divided the brides amongst themselves!

[The couples prostrate before Rajchandra]

Raj: [helping everyone to their feet] There's no need to prostrate. They are here to have their share and merely prostrating before this old fellow! *Good for nothing!* You've to make a settlement with me! That's enough for the heads of these girls to bow so low!

[to Surendra, pointing at Haripriya] Brother, this was all due to Hari's game! I can't express how happy I am. Brother, I would like to tell you something. Shall I say?

Suren: Yes, please.

Raj: Brother, you boys belonging to the new generation have many virtues like kindness, affection. But brother, don't get angry – you are somewhat adamant. You get angry at the slightest pretext. If you didn't have this one fault, who could ever say anything against you?

Nil: [aside] The young master has cheated me so many times. Now I'll take it with interest. [going near Haripriya] Sir, will you give me the sweets?

Hari: Shh, keep quiet. Take this one rupee. Don't shout. Go.
Nil: [taking the money] This is not a matter of one rupee. Why, won’t you throw me off my feet – like this? [falls and gets up]

Raj: What’s this? Did Nilkantha fall down?

Hari: No, please. He didn’t fall. [aside, to Nilkantha] Here, take one more rupee, and don’t create a hullabaloo here. [gives money]

Nil: [happily] I am going. I’ll give this to mother.

[Exit, dancing]

Raj: Brother, come here. I want to consult with you.

[Surendra and Rajchandra talk. Binodini remains absent-minded]

Biraj: [aside, to Haripriya] Why did ‘you’11 give him money?

Hari: [aside] How sweet is this first ‘you’ from the lips of the beloved! [aloud] I’ll tell you later. – Biraj, will you love me?

Biraj: [smiling, with bowed head] Can’t you understand that even now?

[Enter Nilkantha, hurriedly]

Nil: Sir, sir, I’m undone! That Brahmin is coming again. [hides behind Rajchandra]

Raj: [laughing] I knew from the sound of his walking stick that Nyayratna Babu is coming.

From backstage: Is Basu Babu here?

Raj: Yes, please come in.

From backstage: I’ve my son with me.

Raj: Let him also come. Where’s the harm?

[Enter Nyayratna with his son]
Raj: [after prostrating] May I have the honour of welcoming you! – Prostrate before him, [all of them do so] I have decided to get my grandchildren married soon.

Nyay: That’s indeed a wise decision.

Nyay Son: [quickly] Don’t forget about the sweets! ‘Mishtannamitare janah’ [laughs]

Nil: [aside] The son outdoes the father. Taking no chances with the feast!

Raj: Oh no, is it ever possible?

Nyay: Dear sons, you’ve received English education. What’s there for me to advise you about these? Still I mention what scriptures say:

‘Yatra naryastu pujyante, ramante tatra devatah .
Yatra itastu na pujyante, sarvastatraphalah kriya’.

‘Santushto bharyyaya bharta, bhartra bharyya tathaivacha
Yasminneva kule nityang kalyanang tatra vai dhruvang’.

‘Wherever women are honoured, the gods are pleased. And where they are neglected, all good deeds like sacrifice are in vain. That family where husband and wife are attached towards each other is bound to be prosperous’.

When there is love between the husband and wife, the house becomes the heavenly abode of comfort. And in its absence, it becomes like the crematorium and hell.

[Music from backstage]

Raj: [giving Binodini in Surendra’s hands and Birajmohini in Haripriya’s, putting a cloth round his neck and joining his hands, to Nayayratna and his son] I am indeed honoured by your presence today. The next Saturday is their wedding. Kindly favour this servant by your presence once again that day.

THE END
ANNOTATIONS

DEDICATION

1 After graduating from the Sanskrit College, Dwarakanath (1820 – 1886) was awarded the title ‘Vidyabhushan’. He taught at the Fort William College before joining the Sanskrit College as the librarian. He later taught grammar at this college.

2 The *Somprakas* was published by Dwarakanath Vidyabhushan in 1858, with the help of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar. Later the former took over all the responsibilities and continued doing this till his death in 1886. This journal enjoyed wide circulation and filled up the void created in the world of Bengali journalism after the *Tattwabodhini Patrika* lost its earlier position.

3 *Mugdhabodh* is a Sanskrit grammar book that was written by Bopadeva. He was a scholar who lived during the late seventh century and early eighth century.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

1 All the characters are not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae. These shall be pointed out when they make their appearances.

2 In Bengali there are two different ‘grandsons’. Haripriya is Rajchandra Basu’s daughter’s son.

3 There are similarly two different ‘granddaughters’. Binodini is Rajchandra Basu’s son’s daughter.

ACT I

Scene 1

1 There are different sets of words in Bengali that are used when one is pleading with another person. If translated word by word, it will not make sense in English. The words in the Bengali text mean ‘eat my head’. ‘Have mercy on me’ is what Binodini means.
There are instances in literature where the characters feel apprehensive of some danger to overtake their loved ones. All are familiar with *Julius Caesar*. Caesar would have been saved had he listened to what Calpurnia was saying.

The word that Surendra uses in Bengali means ‘come’. Bengalis do not say ‘I am going’ when they leave a place. Again, the other person too does not say ‘go’. Instead they say ‘I am coming’ or ‘come’. There is a commonly held belief behind this practice. It is believed that sometimes what is said becomes true. If one says, ‘I am going’ and this indeed becomes true, it would mean that one will never again return, that is, one will die. Hence the sentence, ‘I am coming’.

Surendra betrays a trait of his character that is responsible for most of the complications that is to develop in the course of the play. Both Surendra and Binodini deeply love each other. While the latter has full trust in her lover, the former is not quite as sure of the love of Binodini.

Marriage proposals between grandparents and grandchildren were a common joke is Bengal.

Rajchandra says this in Sanskrit. It may be translated as ‘Young wife of an aged husband’. In the nineteenth century Bengalis were familiar with this ancient language. Their conversations were sprinkled with Sanskrit aphorisms.

Bengalis touch the feet of someone who is either respectable or older. Rajchandra touches Nyayratna’s feet because the latter is a Brahmin.

Some people in the nineteenth-century Bengal tried to show off their piety by uttering such sentiments. They did this mechanically only to appear holier in front of other people. These utterances did not spring from sincere and genuine feelings deep-rooted in the heart.

In the Sabitri legend, the virtuous Sabitri loses her husband and after various penances wins him back from Yama, the god of Death. Her unrelenting pursuit of Yama to persuade him to
restore her husband’s life characterized the wife’s uncompromising devotion to her husband. This devotion was extolled as a virtue worth emulating. Sabitri became an archetype of Hindu womanhood.

10 Gauri is the other name of goddess Durga. She is the daughter of Daksha, the king of Himalaya. She observes many austerities to get Lord Shiva as her husband. Being a princess, she does not mind the absence of luxury at Shiva’s place. When her father deliberately insults her husband during a sacrifice, unable to bear the agony, Gauri gives up her life the holy flame.

11 Some marks on one’s person are regarded to be auspicious by the Hindus. It is believed that people with such signs are somewhat different from the others. They are of very good moral character, spiritually advanced and lucky. Nyayratna may not even know the ‘signs’. He might be saying these either to show-off his knowledge or to please Rajchandra.

12 The newly educated Bengali youth of the nineteenth century discarded the rituals and superstitions earlier prevalent in the society. As can be very well expected, Brahmins like Nyayratna did not like their attitude. They were afraid of losing their supremacy.

13 During the nineteenth century unmarried young men were not supposed to frequently visit a house where there were young girls. And when they did visit, they were not supposed to go to the inner quarters, where the women stayed. Free mixing of young people of opposite sexes was not encouraged.

14 Brahmins were much respected in the traditional Bengali families of the nineteenth century. Whenever they visited somebody, the host would bring some water and wash the feet of his Brahmin guest. After this was done, the guest would sit on a carpet spread especially for him and eat the food and refreshments offered by his host.

15 As a mark of respect, Hindus fold their hands either in front of someone who is reverential.
In the Bengali Hindu caste system, Kayastha is the second highest caste in the hierarchy, the Brahmins being on the top.

Ser, a Bengali metric system for weight is used. 1 ser comes to a little less than 1 kg. The quantity mentioned in the source language text comes to around 3 kg.

See Note 17. It approximates 1.5 kg.

This servant is not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

Scene 2

The Bengali language has two different forms. One is called 'chalit bhasha' and the other is 'sadhu bhasha'. The former is used in conversations. The 'sadhu bhasha' on the other hand was used only in the written form. In the nineteenth century, when Bengalis talked to each other, they used 'chalit bhasha'. But when they wrote letters or articles in periodicals, they switched over to the 'sadhu bhasha'. Some British took keen interest in the Bengali language, as the knowledge of this language would help them in administrative affairs. Some again learnt it for its own sake. But they learnt the language from teachers and used books for their lessons. So they came to be familiar with the 'sadhu bhasha'. Thus when they spoke in Bengali, they too used this form.

As can be seen, Krishnadas is very servile. But his servility expresses itself only in his speech and action. He does this only to remain in McCrindle's good book. But he knows the British Magistrate for what he is. He generalizes this tendency and holds the view that British by nature are perverse and hypocritical.

McCrindle says this in English.
Scene 3

1 Saraswati is the Hindu goddess of learning. What Haripriya says, if translated word by word, comes to ‘naughty Saraswati’. But he actually means ‘goddess of mischief’ though there is no such goddess in the Hindu mythology.

2 An idiom is used in the Bengali text. If translated into English, it comes to, ‘I will fish without touching water’. It actually means enjoying something without taking any trouble for it.

3 The Bengali word for ‘deportation’ ‘প্রধানীতা’ consists of two different words, which are two delicacies of the Bengali cuisine. Nilkantha wants the sweets that Haripriya had promised and the latter is talking about deportation. Instead of using the two words together to mean ‘deportation’, Nilkantha plays on the pun and says that Haripriya eats these everyday but is cheating his servant of the sweets he had promised. This pun cannot be translated into English.

4 Lord Shiva is being endearingly called Shibu.

5 Haripriya uses a word that may be translated as ‘boss’. It actually means the male head of the family. Since this will not sound good in English, the word ‘grandpa’ has been used.

6 In the nineteenth century, an elder brother and his younger sister would never discuss their marriage or love affair amongst themselves. Surendra is angry with Binodini because he came to know that she has talked to Haripriya in details about her marriage.

7 This allusion suggests a lot. It shows the extent of English education. Surendra is an educated young man and may be expected to be aware of the story of Othello. But Haripriya is younger than and not as mature as Surendra. Still, he too seems to know it. Again, Othello is mentioned on the stage. The playwright knew that his audience was familiar with Shakespeare. Had he not been so sure about it, he would not have used this allusion.
Scene 4

1 McCrindle says this in English.

2 There are three different forms of the personal pronoun ‘you’ in Bengali. This is something like the pronouns ‘vous’ and ‘tu’ in French. The pronoun ‘apni’ corresponds to ‘vous’ in French and is used while addressing someone who is older or even an unknown but respectable person. There are two different pronouns corresponding to the French ‘tu’. ‘Tumi’ is used within the members of a family and someone who is quite familiar with the speaker. It may also be used for someone who is unfamiliar but not respectable. ‘Tui’ is used with someone who is not at all respectable, like servants, etc. Earlier McCrindle used the honorific ‘apni’ while addressing Surendra and wore the mask of righteousness. Now that he has revealed his true self, he has changed the form of addressing him. He now uses the familiar form ‘tumi’. This is to show his disrespect for Surendra.

3 Aesop’s Fables has a story about a tiger and a crane. Once a piece of bone got stuck in the tiger’s throat. He was in pain and said that he would amply reward besides remaining loyal forever to any animal that helped him out of this. At last a crane agreed only for the reward. It took out the bone after putting its long beak into the tiger’s throat. When the crane wanted the reward, the tiger replied that the crane could safely take its beak out of the tiger’s mouth is an ample reward. It should not ask for more. The tiger further threatened the crane to leave immediately or else it would be killed.

ACT II

Scene 1

1 The Bandhab (1874) was brought out by Kaliprasanna Ghosh. The publication was irregular till 1295 BS and was again resumed from 1308 BS. Kaliprasanna Ghosh was famous for his

2 The novel by Taraknath Gangopadhyay (1843 – 1891) Swarnalata (1873) was the first to be based on realism. The author wrote: ‘Some characters of my novel are from real life. My friend Suresh and Paresh [are] two figures under the name Ramesh and Debesh’ (qtd. P. Chattopadhyay 293). Swarnalata was the first to break away from the tradition of romantic novels. It was serially published for a year from Aswin, 1279 BS to Bhadra, 1280 BS, in Jnanankur that was the edited by Srikrishna Das. This novel was responsible for the increased subscription of the monthly.

3 The Jnanankur (1872) was a monthly that became popular by publishing Taraknath Gangopadhyay’s Swarnalata. They also published the works of the then young Rabindranath Tagore.

4 Rameshchandra Datta (1848 – 1909) was devoted to the cause of culture and literature. His novels include Madhabi-Kankan, Banga Bijeta, (Maharashtra) Jibanprabhat ‘The Dawn of Life’, and (Rajput) Jibansandhya ‘The Dusk of Life’. His English works include Ramayana and Mahabharata in English Verse and Economic History of British India. However, it is not known when he was the editor of the Jnanankur.

5 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838 – 1894) established himself as a novelist with his Durgesanandini. People were amazed by its style and characterization. It was as if Bankimchandra wanted to change the tastes of his readers. He was a popular novelist. His other works include Kapalkundala, Mrinalini, Chandrasekhar, Bishbriksha, Krishnakanter Will, Anandamath, Debi Chaudhurani, Sitaram, Raisingha and many more.
6 In the nineteenth-century Bengal, young girls and boys maintained distance. With Surendra not at home, Birajmohini is feeling rather hesitant to have Haripriya in the house. But Binodini has already brought him and now wants to bring him in. Birajmohini is therefore welcoming Haripriya reluctantly.

7 There are certain idioms in Bengali that are difficult to translate into English. The line that the Bengali text has, if translated word by word, would come to ‘you have understood my head’. This does not make sense in English. What the idiom actually means is ‘you understand nothing’.

8 An idiom is used in the Bengali text. It may be translated as ‘After much perspiration the fever subsided’. But this again is not quite idiomatic in English. ‘Such a relief’ is what is actually meant.

Scene 2

1 Surendranath uses three adjectives to describe McCrindle. Audience loved to hear declamatory speeches with grand rhetoric. This speech has been framed, keeping in view the taste of the audience.

Scene 3

1 It is needless to say that another idiom is used in the Bengali text. If that one is translated word by word into English, it comes to ‘there is sand in that jaggery’. The English idiom used in the translation is exactly what the Bengali one means.

2 The Hazaribagh jail breaking is one of the many incidents of jail breaking during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857.
3 What Krishnadas says in the Bengali text means, ‘The natives shall remain the slaves of your slaves’. But this is not quite idiomatic in English. Therefore, retaining the sense, it has been translated, ‘The natives will eternally remain your slaves’.

4 Sir James Stephen, then Law Member of the Government of India, prepared the regulations of the Criminal Procedure Code of 1872.

Scene 4

1 By the end of the nineteenth century some women were being educated. But education could not make them completely aware of their dignity. As far as self-respect and self-confidence is concerned, their condition was only slightly changed from the less fortunate women of the society. Though the educated men treated them with respect, when it came to debate about something with men, instead of asserting themselves, they tamely acquiesced because they belonged to the ‘weaker sex’.

2 Surendra loves Binodini and is sure that she too reciprocated his love. But what Haripriya has said about Binodini has left him shaken. He cannot bring himself to harbour doubts regarding her innocent love. But again he is not quite so sure about her love for him, as to brush aside even the slightest doubt. Thus Surendra is oscillating between the two poles.

3 In the nineteenth-century Bengal, a married woman would not speak to her elder brother-in-law and neither would he speak to her. They would communicate through a third person.

4 Till the first half of the twentieth century, people of the Vaishava cult went from one house to another while singing devotional songs. Everyone gave alms to these singers. Men were called Vaishnavas and the women were called Vaishnavis.

5 What the Bengali text has, if translated word by word, come to ‘Throw ash on the face of love’. This does not make sense in English. What is means is, ‘To hell with love’.
6 It was natural in the nineteenth-century Bengal to round off some discussion with something addressed to God. It may be that the song is not necessarily entreating its listeners to give up love and turn to God. It may be simply slighting love and the address to God may be just to bring the discussion to a close.

Scene 5

1 Rajchandra says ‘I won’t’ in Hindi. Bengalis resorted to short Hindi phrases in their speeches when they were in a light mood. Haripriya might be in a light mood. But it is not so with Rajchandra. He views the situation to be pretty serious. This Hindi phrase, therefore, does not go with the feelings portrayed.

2 See Act II scene 1 of Sarat-Sarojini. The man there says that it is a matter of great shame that Sarat has not married off his 16–17 years old sister and the 17–18 years old Sarojini. This is how people lost their ‘honour’. Their personal matters were being discussed by people who were not even slightly involved with it. In this particular case, people will begin talking about the delay of Binodini’s marriage and Rajchandra will thereby lose his honour.

3 If a girl had crossed a certain age and was not married, her family was socially ostracized. This practice was prevalent in the nineteenth-century Bengal.

4 See Note 6 on Act I Scene 1. It means: ‘The wise man will accomplish his own work’.

5 In spite of the education girls received, their opinions did not matter, even where their own marriage was concerned. The decision of the men was final. This shows that they did not receive the respect that was due to them and did not share the same platform with the men. But there was a change in the attitude of the newly educated young men. In this particular instance, Rajchandra, who belongs to the older generation, does not bother about Binodini’s views and bluntly says
that things will follow his wishes. But Surendra, an educated young man, does not think like that and insists on learning her views.

6 Narad is a mythological Hindu saint and a devotee of Lord Vishnu. He has free access to any part of the heaven and earth. He is famed for his elfish character. He goes to two different parties and makes some comments, either deliberately or unwittingly, that give rise to quarrels. He acts like a catalyst. So whenever two people quarrel or are about to quarrel, Narad is called upon to make the fight even more ‘interesting’.

7 There are four different eras, viz. Satya, Dwapar, Treta and Kali, according to Hindu mythology. The first era comes immediately after the Creation and has everything perfect. People belonging to this are righteous and pious. Corruption gradually creeps in. The last era is Kali, when all values are lost. God then destroys the world through Pralay or a great flood and goes on to create another world order.

Scene 6

1 See Note 2 on Act I Scene 4.

2 See Note 2 on Act I scene 4. Earlier Surendra used ‘apni’ while addressing McCrindle. He did this as a mark of respect. But now he knows the English Magistrate for what he is. Therefore he now uses ‘tumi’ to address him.

3 McCrindle speaks this line in English. He refers to Surendra as a ‘boy’. This reflected the attitude of the colonialists towards the natives. Surendra is an adult. He is a self-dependant young man. But McCrindle refuses to acknowledge that. To him, Surendra is a mere ‘boy’ who cannot look after himself and neither can be entrusted with serious responsibilities. In other words, McCrindle, or for that matter, any Englishman, has to use his power over Surendra, who
represents the native, to ‘civilize’ him. This is the white man’s burden that the British have so willingly taken upon themselves.

**ACT III**

**Scene 1**

1. So many adjectives have been piled up to describe Binodini. But most of them are almost synonymous, if not exactly so. It is as if Surendra is venting his anger through each adjective and the number of adjectives is proportional to the intensity of his anger.

2. Himadrisikhar seems to be one of the lesser known journals brought out by the conservatives.

3. A number of gnomic verses current all over India that were attributed to Chanakya, believed to be a minister of Chandragupta Maurya. Every educated man was expected to know some of them by heart.

4. Puru-Bikram, a play by Jyotirindranath Tagore, is based on history. When Alexander came on is conquest of India, Puru, the king of Punjab, fought valiantly. Though the latter was defeated, impressed by his courage, Alexander established friendship with the king and returned the territory he had won in the battle.

5. Jyotirindranath Tagore (1849 – 1925) was well-known for his criticisms and plays that include Asrumati, Puru-Bikram and Sarojini. He also translated many plays and travelogues from Sanskrit and French. Later he was the editor of the Tattwabodhini Patrika.

6. The nineteenth-century theatre-goers were very much fond of such declamatory speeches and loved to watch the demonstrations of one’s feelings. This part has been introduced only to entertain them. Surendra is an educated and well-mannered young man. One would not expect him to deliberately smash a china vessel at someone else’s house and that too, only to show how
he would punish his heart if it were sad due to betrayal in love! But such reasoning could not be
given the slightest attention when it came to entertain the audience.

7 This is something that again does not seem quite likely. Surendra is now talking in a pained
voice because he is down with fever. But only a little while ago, the way he was talking and
arguing, even breaking the china vessel would not have been possible if he were so sick. These
are again nineteenth-century theatre conventions. Listening to Surendra’s pained voice; the
audience would sympathize with him even more. They would feel sorry for him and his sister for
what will happen in the scene to follow.

Scene 3

1 These people are not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

2 This servant too is not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

3 The Guard speaks this in Hindi.

4 The lost notes may have been found under Birajmohini’s bed sheet. But this does not prove
that these are the same two notes that Krishnadas had lost six months back. And therefore
Birajmohini too cannot be brought to the court on the charge of theft. But somehow neither the
dramatist nor for that matter, the audience bothered about it.

5 There is nothing wrong with the notes coming under Birajmohini’s bed sheet. She could have
kept them herself. This too does not prove that she had stolen the notes. It may be that she kept
the notes to remove them from there at her leisure.

Scene 4

1 As already discussed in a previous chapter, this line was changed by Amritalal Basu, the
manager of the Great National Theatre when the police prevented the staging of The Police of
Pig and Sheep. While playing the part of McCrindle, he took a revenge by changing the line as ‘I am not a pig, I am not a sheep’.

2 McCrindle speaks this in English.

3 The police stated this part to be obscene. This made them stop the performance midway. They argued that the blood showed Birajmohini’s modesty had been outraged and therefore she would now be ostracized by the society. But if anyone jumps from height, that person’s clothes are bound to be bloodstained and he or she will be bleeding. If the height is greater, the fall may result in death. What has been shown is something that follows logic. The police had read too much meaning into it.

4 McCrindle speaks this in English.

Scene 5

1 An idiom has been used in the Bengali text. If translated word by word, it comes to, ‘Why do you strike at the corpse with the sword?’

2 As already mentioned, the nineteenth-century theatre-goers loved to watch the enactment of such a rage, something that comes on the verge of lunacy. Such words with fitting gestures moved them.

3 These servants are not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

Scene 6

1 The man is not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

2 These are the inevitable sound effects that are used during the staging of something very sensational. This is in keeping with the earlier dramatic tradition. Act V scene 5 of Sarat-Sarojini too has thunder and lightning.
3 Rama is a Hindu god, while Durga is a goddess. It is commonly believed that if one takes the name of some god, ghosts cannot come near that person. The man knows that he is near a haunted house. So as soon as he hears the ghostly sound, he does not take any chance and begins chanting the names of gods.

4 The man keeps his eyes shut and believes Haripriya’s voice to be the ghost’s. When the latter tells him he is not a ghost, the man still keeps his eyes shut and actually asks whether Haripriya is the ghost’s father. This has not been retained in the translation because it will not be readily understood.

5 The monstrous figure is not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

6 These sorts of dialogues greatly entertained the audience. The sentence could have been put in a simpler way: ‘I will shoot you’. But the dialogue, as it is in the text, was effective on the stage. Putting it in a simpler way would dampen the impact it was intended to create on the audience. This also shows that Haripriya believes the commotion that is taking place to be the result of some human effort and not something supernatural.

7 This also has not been stated in a straight forward way. Haripriya means to ‘send the monstrous figure to the abode of Yama, the Hindu god of death’.

8 In the nineteenth century, an unmarried girl would not walk alone with a young man and that too in a place where others were not present. Birajmohini is very modest and therefore she is feeling shy to walk alone with Haripriya.

**ACT IV**

1 See Note 1 of Act II scene 4.

2 See Note 6 of Act I scene 3. Surendra is feeling shy. But his grief is so sincere that he cannot help mentioning it.
What the Bengali text has, if translated word by word, would come to, ‘Doesn’t your speech get stuck even slightly in your mouth when you speak a lie?’ But this does not read quite well. So the words have been changed, while retaining the sense.

This is a way of speaking in Bengali. The speaker does not literally mean what she says. In this particular case, Binodini is very happy. Birajmohini is teasing her. The former is at loss for a witty retort. Hence she uses these words.

Bhagalpur is a district in Bihar.

Birajmohini had walked alone with Haripriya when the latter rescued her from the clutches of McCrindle. Nineteenth-century society in Bengal was very conservative. Unmarried young people of the opposite sexes would not come too close. But that was a case of emergency. There was no other way in which Haripriya could have rescued Birajmohini. Still she felt shy and could not tell Surendra the name of the person who rescued her till now.

See Note 5 of Act II scene 5. Surendra has no objections if Birajmohini and Haripriya get married. Binodini has already told him that her grandfather too will be very pleased with this match. Still Surendra respects Birajmohini’s view. He wants to know whether she will give her consent to this marriage.

In the nineteenth century native land meant the town or village where a person was born. Any place beyond his native land was ‘abroad’. Haripriya plans to go to Bhagalpur which is in the adjacent state, Bihar. One may reach this place within hours of leaving Calcutta. Still Surendra calls this ‘abroad’.

See Note 6 of Act I scene 3. Birajmohini’s marriage is being fixed by Surendra in front of her. She is therefore feeling shy. Binodini mentions what the former had earlier said about her
marriage. This makes her feel more shy and she tells Binodini to stop saying such things in front of her elder brother.

10 Rajchandra says this in Hindi. As already mentioned in Note 1 of Act II scene 5, Bengalis use Hindi phrases when they are in a light mood. In this particular instance, Rajchandra is very happy because his grandchildren are getting married.

11 See Note 2 of Act I scene 4. Earlier Birajmohini used ‘apni’ while addressing Haripriya because he was an outsider. But now she will marry him. So she has switched over to ‘tumi’.

12 Nyayratna’s son is referring to a common Sanskrit utterance. It runs: ‘कन्या बहुनात बुध्द माता बिज निता प्रसन्न/ बाबार: कृत्यंशयं सिंहासनिवेद्य अन्ना’ ‘At the time of marriage, the girl wants her husband to be handsome, her mother wants him to be rich and her father wants him to be learned. Her friends wish him to belong to a good family and the rest of the people wish sweets at the time of the marriage’. This Sanskrit verse became like an idiom with the Bengalis.

13 The Bengali idiom is ‘বিপক্ষীর বেলাত অইশকর্দ, তার বেলা মোরীশকর্দ’. This cannot be translated into English. It may be somehow translated as ‘The son outdoes his father and is in turn outdone by his son’.

14 In Hindu mythology, Manu is the progenitor of the human race. The Manava-dharma-sastra ‘Laws of Manu’ were compiled by Brahmanic legalists sometime between 200 BC and AD 200. It contains twelve chapters, the main contents of which speak about the different ways in which a human can get happiness. These slokas are the 56th and 60th verse of the third chapter, which discusses householdership and its objectives. The 56th verse in its English translation is: ‘Where women are honoured, there the gods are pleased; but where they are not honoured, no sacred rite yields rewards’ (Buehler 85), while the 60th verse is: ‘In that family, where the husband is
pleased with the wife and the wife with her husband, happiness will be assuredly lasting’ (Buehler 86).

15 In the past, Bengalis put the loose end of their cloth round their neck to show their humility. They did so while bowing before someone very respectable or when requesting something very politely. Thus Rajchandra with the piece of cloth round his neck and hands joined is the picture of perfect humility. It was customary for the guardian to be very polite when inviting guests for the marriage of his wards.
SARAT-SAROJINI

DEDICATION

My dearest friend

Babu Hemantakumar Ghosh¹

Editor, The Amrita Bazar Patrika²

Brother Hem,

* I am unable to pay back in this life the kindness shown by you and Sisir.³

Doctors have been defeated by my severe ailment. I shall breathe my last soon. Do look after my niece, Sarojini, with affection. I leave her under the guardianship of both of you and Upendra Babu.

Ever obliged

Durgadas Das
FOREWORD

Sarat-Sarojini is but one of the many facets of the contemporary society. That too is uneven due to the fault of the hand that is holding the brush. At places it is lack-lustre and at others it is rather overdone. I do not want to criticize, the painter being dead, but it would have been better had the work not seen the light of day. The first one-third is absolutely uninteresting; while the rest is filled up with obscenities.\(^1\) Neither is there the absence of the sacrilegious political upbraiding. The play has been published at the behest of a friend of the late Durgadas Babu. I request the readers to pardon my impertinence. As far as this publication is concerned, I am absolutely innocent.

I thought of showing the manuscript of the book to Bankim Babu\(^2\) and wondered if he would kindly do some corrections. But the afore-mentioned friend of the late Durgadas Babu forbade me. He argued, ‘Though Bankim Babu is not that worthless a writer of our country,\(^3\) a great demerit exists in all the books that he brought forth. Once a book is taken for reading, there is no respite till the last letter of the last line of the last page is perused. How can we count him as a writer of great merit, when his works block the instinctive hunger and thirst of the readers, makes them self-oblivious? In my opinion Sarat-Sarojini is an excellent piece of drama – one can easily leave it after reading only a page or half of it. It is flat throughout. Another extra-ordinary merit of Durgadas Babu’s style of writing is that a mere reading of two or four sentences has a very good soporific effect. There is no need for any correction to be done by Bankim Babu’. I could protest no longer.

Upendranath Das

P.S. By the strength of the virtues earned by the readers for the good deeds they had
performed in their previous life, the Act VI scene 5 is lost. We could have rest assured had the remaining acts and scenes too taken the same course.

17, Nimukhansama’s Lane
Pataldanga, Calcutta
Paush 1, 1281 B.S
FOREWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

Had the late Durgadas Das been alive today, how happy he would have been! But now he is in heaven and his appointed publisher Upendra Babu in London. Who will write the foreword to the second edition? A few months ago all the copies of the first print of one thousand books were sold out. This time two thousand copies have been taken from the printer.

Before leaving for England Upendra Babu uttered these words, ‘I am going on an exile from my motherland for many days – I don’t know whether I will return alive. If in my absence anyone happens to praise Sarat-Sarojini, say, ‘Its success, that is beyond expectation is due to the compassion of the learned, the sympathy of the oppressed and the histrionic skill of the actors’.

There are slight changes at places, but as the readers can see, the presentation of the course of action is as before.

40, Madan Baral’s Lane

Bowbazar, Calcutta

Baisakh 20, 1283 B.S

Tarinicharan Das
DRAMATIS PERSONAE

FEMALE

Sarojini : A girl brought up at Saratkumar’s house
Sukumari : Saratkumar’s sister
Ramasundari : Saratkumar’s step-mother
Bindubasini : Matilal’s wife
Bhubanmohini : Matilal’s brother’s widow

MALE

Saratkumar Datta : Zamindar
Matilal De : -do-
Bhagaban : Saratkumar’s sarkar
Biswaambhar : Matilal’s advocate
Binay : A youth under Matilal’s guardianship
Nanda : Saratkumar’s friend
Bipin : -do-
Haridas : -do- (Scientist)
Becharam : Saratkumar’s servant (a boy)
Gopinath : Matilal’s fighter with sticks
Kenaram : Gopinath’s friend (a thief)

Maids and servants, sergeant, Englishmen, ghataki (female match-maker), etc.
ACT I

Scene 1

[Saratkumar Babu’s house at Bowbazar, Calcutta. Saratkumar Babu is writing a letter at his table.]

Sarat: [after completing the letter] I wrote this letter in a great hurry. Let me read what I have written.

[Reads]

Calcutta,
Phalgun 2, 1280 B.S.

Saroj,

Extremely glad to learn that all of you are doing well. I am also somewhat fine. Next Saturday is a session of our Society for Spreading the Light of Science. That day Haridas Babu, a famous scholar of Calcutta, will present a lengthy paper on the subject ‘Man has evolved from apes’.¹ There is a scope of much debate. Our honourable chairperson is very much against this view. I am not quite sure of my stance. I will write later about the outcome of the debate. Most probably I will have to present a paper in the session that is to follow.

Is my crazy sister still the same? As fickle-minded as before?

I guess the famine² will not be as severe as we had feared. The government is trying its best to improve the situation. However it goes without saying that the result achieved so far does not match the amount of money spent and the show put on. If the people in our village are starving for want of food, try your best to help them, specially the women and the children. I have told Bhagaban sarkar³ to follow your instructions.

Yours ever well-wishing brother

Saratkumar Datta
P.S. I remain busy attending various duties. I may not remember everything at the right moment. Let me know as soon as you need something. I will buy and send them immediately.

Sarat

[Sealing the letter]

Bearer?

[Enter Bearer]

Sarat: *Mail this letter.*

Bearer: *Yes please.*

[Exit]

Sarat: Saroj is a very intelligent girl. She is eager to learn about the goings-around. Seeing her for some six or seven years, I have indeed developed a brotherly affection for her. I love Saroj just as I love Sukumari. Both are good. But while Sukumari is somewhat fickle-minded, Saroj is calm and quiet.

[Enter Becharam]

Becha: Two babus have come to meet you.

Sarat: Show them in.

[Exit]

[Enter Bipin Babu and Nanda Babu]

Sarat: [standing] Be so kind as to come in.* How do you do?

[All take seats]

Sarat: But what made you bestow this favour today?
**Nanda:** No, we have come without any particular purpose. Will you go to theatre today? I and Bipin Babu are going.

**Sarat:** Please excuse me. I won’t be able to go today. I have an engagement. Which theatre do you mean to attend? Nowadays there are so many theatre-houses.⁶

**Bipin:** We haven’t yet decided which theatre to attend. We shall visit whichever we feel like.

**Nanda:** There seems to be a new craze for theatre in our country. People think they can choose any one of the numerous theatres. They don’t bother about the quality. One doesn’t have scenery; instead there are some tattered rags. Again somewhere the orchestra plays such a sweet cacophony, that if one listens to it, forget about humans, even the dead man will run away. Yet again in another may be an actor has consumed so much alcohol before the show that he can’t utter a single word. His steps falter. Other actors are rebuking him from here and there. They have merely spared beating him up. The audience too can hear, but this gentleman won’t come to his senses.⁷ [to Sarat] Is the picture wrong?

**Sarat:** Sir, I don’t happen to frequent theatre halls. I can’t comment on their faults and say which one is good and which isn’t.

**Bipin:** Why, are you of the opinion that visiting theatres is bad?⁸

**Sarat:** No, I didn’t exactly mean that, but something almost so. Our playwrights and actors busy themselves solely with love. There is love at the beginning, love at the middle and love at the end. Love, love and love!

**Bipin:** Is acting true love bad?

**Sarat:** Not just acting love, rather in my opinion love itself is bad.
Nanda and Bipin: [extremely surprised] You said it! You have surprised us! May we ask, won’t you ever marry?

Sarat: No, never, not till I am alive. OK, let’s forget about it for the time being. May I know what is the benefit of seeing the old and rotten style with which love is staged? The same cuckoo, the same moon, the same love-god, the same five arrows of the love-god, the same spring, the same zephyr – and that, the mention of which makes one feverish – the same placatory remarks and gestures. I feel amused recollecting my friend Nandagopal Babu’s remarks. He says that is it acting that goes on nowadays or – ‘O moon-faced, seeing your moon-like face the flower of my heart blossoms!’ Well sirs, what is the benefit of seeing these?

Nanda: There is a reason behind this indulgence in love in theatre. It is your duty to remember that love is the foremost of all human instincts.

Sarat: It may be so for animals, not for men, at least it should not be so. And even if it were, is this the time to indulge in love? Don’t we have any abhorrence? Don’t we remember that day and night we are being ruled like cattle? Doesn’t the racial prejudice of the British in every sphere make the blood flow through veins like lightning? Doesn’t it make the blood boil? Doesn’t a cry of fie rise within the heart? Still cherishing other wishes, other desires?

Nanda: Then why don’t you take up arms?

Sarat: [sighs] The time is not yet propitious.

Nanda: Will it arrive soon?

Sarat: We are a race of such wretched cowards that I can’t even think of such a thing happening before two hundred or three hundred years. But till the sun doesn’t rise over
the independent India, till the day when the bloodied head of tyranny isn’t dashed to the ground and trampled upon, till that day whoever indulges in love or any other instinct is ungrateful, the most sinful, the basest, the unworthy child of the country.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Nanda: [sarcastically]} They shouldn’t indulge in love, and neither should they take up arms. So what are men now suppose to do? Should they idle the time away?\textsuperscript{13}

\textbf{Sarat: [slightly irritated]} Sir, I didn’t have the idea that one can’t speak without recourse to foul language. Why can’t all get united and remove the darkness of the ignorance of the country,\textsuperscript{14} try to improve the country’s agriculture, trade and industry – and vow to establish amity within the country?\textsuperscript{15} It is very difficult to achieve these properly with the help of a slave of love.

\textbf{Bipin:} That is your big mistake. The sort of affection felt for the country by a man with wife and children - the sincere and heart-rending pain he feels when the king gets tyrannical or levies an unjust tax - won’t be felt - can’t be felt by an unloving, unmarried man.

\textbf{Sarat:} You --

\textbf{Nanda: [seeing the watch, hurriedly to Bipin]} Brother it is 6:00 pm now. Let’s call it a day.\textsuperscript{16} Moreover now we have to go to Nilkamal Babu’s house. We can have a debate over this issue with Sarat Babu some other day.

\textbf{Sarat:} We can raise this issue some day in our meeting, can’t we?

\textbf{Nanda and Bipin:} That’s a good idea. So let’s take your leave today. [stands]

\textbf{Sarat: [stands]} See you.

[Exeunt]
Scene 2

[Eden Gardens, Calcutta. Enter singer]

Ragini Purabi – Tal Ara

The vina of my heart consonates at the sight of the bower

The earth has adorned itself as a cascade of happiness

Mother Nature looks enchanting with the blooming lotus and jasmine

The silvery moon is incessantly smiling, softly and gently

The sons of Britannia accompanied by their wives and children

Are rambling together, enthralled in delight

The loud military band, the fragrant breeze

Proudly proclaims the unlimited power of the British

Alas, my body and heart pains day and night

Who can enjoy pleasures, whose feet are bound by the shackles of slavery?

[Exit]

[Enter Sarat Babu]

Sarat: A pleasant breeze is blowing, let me ramble around. My head is aching after this debate with Nanda and Bipin. [strolls] How beautiful! [sighs] But I am enjoying this only at the mercy of the great men. If these gods so wish, they can enact a law: none besides the white figures is permitted to perambulate here between 5:00 to 7:00 in the evening. —

On all sides the signs of foreign control can be prominently seen. [facing south] Right in front is the severe head of Fort William — the current disgrace of Bengal is present. As if it is telling the worthless sons of Bengal at the top of its voice, ‘Beware, never desire freedom by mistake or even in dreams. What is more, even if you desire, don’t express it.
My architects are the ones who humble the pride of the world, are world-conquerors with thunder and lightning as their weapons. If you want to come to me as a thrashed dog, as a slave, you may come, I won't object to it. But never dare to come to me as an armed rebel. In a moment your heated blood will become cold; a beautiful field will be covered with your dead bodies. [sighs] Fort William, had we not been so thoroughly selfish and voluptuous and had, even if slightly, been worthy of being called human beings, then we would not have had to tolerate your arrogant words so long. You would have been knocked down to the ground long ago; you wouldn't have had even one brick over another. But I guess it won't be an exaggeration to say that one may count on the fingers the number of such people who think, even if once in a week, of the miserable condition of the country. The various organs of the country have become paralyzed due to lack of education and presence of superstition. One does not know how many years, how many centuries are required to cure this dreadful malady. [sighs] So intense and all-devouring is the downfall of India that the permanence of this abhorring slavery has begun to be counted as the only means of our future development. Even the core of the society is afflicted with this severe disease. Under these circumstances the one who advises to rise in arms against the British, or expresses such a desire, is not only a great fool and indiscreet, but the country's enemy.

[Enter Haridas Babu]

Sarat: May I have the honour of welcoming you? Have you come for a stroll?

Hari: Exactly and also to meet you.

Sarat: How did you know I am here?

Hari: I had been to your house, one of your servants told me.
Sarat: How far is your essay complete?

Hari: It is almost complete.

Sarat: Sir, do we indeed owe our pedigree to monkeys?

Hari: Undoubtedly. One can show a thousand proofs in its support, not a single against it. I can explain this to you right now. That man is monkey –

Sarat: [aside] Help! The waves rise up! [aloud] Please excuse me; I have got a severe headache. I will listen to it some other day.

Hari: Oh it’s nothing serious. The blood flow to your brain has slightly increased.

Strolling for a little while will bring it down. That man is –

Sarat: Sir, I shall be much obliged if you can prove that the Englishmen are monkeys.

Hari: What is so difficult? It’s obvious.

   Human beings belong to the monkey-family.

   Englishmen are human beings.

   Therefore, Englishmen belong to the monkey-family.

The first syllogistic pattern of logic establishes this. Now listen –

Sarat: Why do you add this ‘family’? Instead of saying that the Englishmen belong to the monkey-family, it would have been better to prove that they are actually monkeys.

Hari: Why do you have such hatred towards the Englishmen? They are counted amongst the best civilized races; especially they have made considerable progress in the field of science.

Sarat: Of course, the rule over India is a glaring instance of English civilization and the propagation of science in England – a golden fruit. Haven’t you heard what happened the other day? There is a white magistrate at Anantapur. A woman used to come to fetch
water from a pond facing his court. She isn’t very beautiful, but young. Seeing her
everyday, this saint one day suddenly - . [in a voice trembling with anger] Then -. The
poor woman’s husband filed a case against the magistrate at a higher court. The case was
ignored due to lack of evidence. But the matter didn’t end here. Because they had made
false allegations against the honest, sinless, Christian, British magistrate, this woman and
her husband were awarded rigorous imprisonment for three months!

**Hari:** I don’t know whether what you say is true or not. But it is wrong to hold the whole
race or the entire government responsible for the guilt of one person. This goes against
the rules of logic.

**Sarat:** OK then listen to more –

**Hari:** With the increase of the cultivation of science, these will be cured. Now listen,
between man and apes -

**Sarat:** Sir, it is late now, let’s go home.

**Hari:** OK, I shall explain this to you on the way. That man has descended from apes is
one of the greatest truths of the world and its first proof is --

**Sarat:** [with a smile] That like monkeys, men love to eat banana?

**Hari:** Sir, these are serious questions of science, not fit for jokes.

    [Exit angrily]

**Sarat:** [embarrassed] Surely so, I am sorry, I am sorry –

    [Exit following]

**Scene 3**

[Anarpur, Matilal’s house. Matilal lying on a cot and smoking from a hubble-bubble. A
servant is massaging his legs. Binay is standing nearby.]
Mati: This leg, this leg — massage well, you bugger. Don’t you eat food? — Oh dear, the bugger is killing me, the bugger is killing me. [slaps the servant] Vile bugger, you have been in my house for two years and still you haven’t learned to massage legs? Vile bugger! [servant weeps] Yes, yes, massage like this; I’ll increase your pay. [closes his eyes] Ah, this is good, this is good. Massage this part. Ah! [enjoying the comfort and smoking from hubble-bubble. After some time] Hey, did the ghataki go to Pushra?

Servant: It’s long since she has gone.

Binay: What do you order me? Do I have to leave tomorrow itself?

Mati: Yes, you have to leave tomorrow early in the morning. I have been giving you food and clothes for so many days; I can’t maintain you any longer for nothing. I’ve spent a lot of money on you. I was only somewhat acquainted with your father. And he didn’t leave behind any money for you when he died. Crying won’t help, boy; it won’t make money roll on its own and fall at your feet.

Binay: No, I am not crying for that. [weeps] I was brought up under your care; now that I have to leave you, I feel sad.

Mati: Now, off you go. We might not meet tomorrow morning; you know I am a late-riser. Always there’s so much of paper-work. Besides, there are other engagements.

Servant: [aside] What a lot of work — smoking idly from the pipe of hubble-bubble, having the legs massaged in the evening and all the night - . Such a slap it was, the cheek has swelled.

Binay: [with tears in his eyes] I take your leave. Please forgive all my mistakes.

[Prostrates on the ground. Exit]

Mati: [stands] Go and see whether the mutton is ready. Go, go soon, go, you fellow.
Servant: [aside, as he leaves] Should I take leaps? If for once God makes the rich people poor and they have to earn their fare by hard work, then will they understand. Because they make us labour day and night, scold us and beat us, we get broken-hearted, don’t have any attachment for our masters and can’t overcome the urge to waste things and steal.

[Exit]

[Enter Gopinath from the other side]

Mati: [severely] Well Gupe, have you seen carefully? Will you be able to recognize?

Gopi: [nodding] Y e s. I never forget the person I have seen with both the eyes.

Mati: Keep a watch over where he goes, what he does. Have you understood?

Gopi: Yes, yes.

Mati: Keep me informed after every 2 or 4 days. But don’t do anything rash without my order. Remember all that I have said. [gives Gopinath money] Have this now. As you work, so shall you be paid.

Gopi: OK, there’s no worry about that, I have the brahmastra⁵ [pointing to the cudgel in his hands]

Mati: Go now, the servant fellows may come in any moment.

[Exit]

[happily] Be that as it may, I’ve got a nice hold of that fellow’s money. What can the fellow do to me? Well, I’ll go now; I’ve been almost starving⁶ since the last two days. Today I’ll go to Kamini’s garden. I don’t like Bhubanmohini any longer. Can one love the same person forever? This is against the law of the nature, dear! [pacing and worrying] But why doesn’t the fire calm down? Though happiness is within my reach, why can’t I enjoy it? Since at Ward’s Institution,⁷ I was well acquainted with all sorts of
tricks. I've churned the ocean of pleasure; but why doesn't my thirst quench? Besides, why do I sometimes feel so restless? Nothing seems good! – Oh! Damn it! I can’t think any longer. Drink wine, dear, all worries will vanish. Brother Kalidas⁸ has aptly said, ‘Sruyate hi puraloke vishasya vishamaushadham’ Wine and women are the root of worries, and also its remedy. – All is a hoax, dear; it’s nothing once you die. This is the truth and the only one. One or two fellows have got educated and started becoming patriots! Oh my dear patriots! Will your patriotism accompany you after your death? ‘Life is fleeting’.⁹ As long as you live, dear, eat, drink and be merry. – But what after that? – What again? It’s all cock and bull story. I don’t believe in these. – But do I actually enjoy the pleasure or am I simply fidgeting here and there in hope of finding it? – No, what’s the use of simply worrying? The fire in my stomach will get cured once it has ‘fiery water’. Whatever you say, dear, there’s no such remedy.

[Enter two nautch girls]¹⁰

Mati: Oh, what a pleasant surprise!!!¹¹

Girls: You don’t keep us in mind; but does that mean we can forget you?

Ragini Khambaj – Tal Thumri

My bangle has broken on your bed

My bangle has broken, not my hand

I am mad with fear, thinking of my bangles

Mother-in-law and sister-in-law will bring this union to an end.

Mati: *Well done, very good!*¹² – Come; let’s go to the big dancing room. Are these songs that captivating here?

[Exeunt]
Scene 4

[Anarpur, the zenana of Matilal’s house. Enter Binay and Bindubasini]

Binay: Mother, I’ve come to take your leave.

Bindu: [sadly] Dear, will you indeed go? When are you leaving, dear?

Binay: Mother, I’ll go right now.

Bindu: You’ll go right now, dear?

Binay: Yes, mother.

Bindu: [wiping her eyes with the corner of her sari] How can you leave me, dear? I’ve none to address me ‘mother’, dear.

Binay: [with tears in his eyes] Mother, I shall meet you after two years.

Bindu: Dear, only if I live that long. Dear, I guess this is the end of my being addressed ‘mother’. I didn’t have a child of my own. [weeps] I wasn’t aware of my sorrow as I was bringing you up and listening your addressing me as ‘mother’. I regarded you as I would my own son. Oh dear, that extinguished fire has once again rekindled today. Oh dear, none will come to me addressing me ‘mother’. None will address me ‘mother’.

Binay: [in a voice choked with emotion] Mother, don’t get so anxious. I am touching your feet and promising to return. I shall indeed return soon. Now please give me your blessings. I’ll take your leave.

Bindu: Wait a little, dear; I’ll be coming back.

[Exit]

[Enter Bhubanmohini]

Bhuban: [alarmed] Dear, before leaving, do meet me once. For God’s sake, meet me once without fail.
Binay: [reluctantly] In going to you, I feel –

Bhuban: You feel ashamed. [wiping her eyes] People abhor me because I am not chaste. [holding Binay’s hands] Dear, I am earnestly requesting you,² please come to me once. I am saying this for your own good.

Binay: [surprised] For my good?

Bhuban: Yes, dear, for your own good. One person, hot on your trail, is trying to kill you.

Binay: [frightened] How can that be?

Bhuban: It’s a long story, dear. [frightened] I can’t say that here. If he comes to know, he will neither let you - nor me, remain alive.

Binay: Who is he?

Bhuban: Talk softly, dear. I am afraid some enemy will hear and cause harm. Come to me, dear; you’ll know everything. He told me about it under the effect of wine.

Binay: [reluctantly] Alright.

Bhuban: God bless you.³

[Exit]

Binay: How does she come in public? Matilal Babu is her own brother-in-law; and with him - ⁴ – Should I go? No, once I have promised, I can’t help going. – I am rather scared. But I don’t have any enemy. Who would like to harm me? How would that help him?

What is the use of having enmity with the poor?

[Re-enter Bindubasini]

Bindu: Dear, take this money. You will need it while travelling. [sighs, aside] Dear, I am giving you your own money.
Binay: See, mother, I have money. What shall I do with more money, mother?

Bindu: It might help you some time or the other. Dear, I am giving this, please take the money. Don’t return it, dear.

Binay: Mother, why are you speaking like that? Have I ever ignored your words?

Mother, since I have grown up, I have called you ‘mother’. Can I ever ignore your words? See, I am taking the money.

Bindu: My wretched fondness for you has increased, dear. Who will ever speak to me like this, dear? [weeps]

Binay: [with tears in eyes] Mother, please exercise more patience. It’s late now, please give me your blessings and your leave.

Bindu: How else can I bless you, dear? I hope that if I revere God and Brahmins, if I have single-mindedly served my husband, you shall never come to harm, and even if some danger comes, it won’t affect you; it will be bound to get right.

Binay: Mother, I am afraid some disaster will befall me as soon as I leave this house; but your blessings won’t be in vain. Mother, now I take your leave. Ah, the word ‘mother’ is so sweet! Within one’s country and abroad, in difficulties and danger, in a palace and in jail, half the misery is reduced by uttering the name ‘mother’. [wipes his eyes] Mother, I take your leave.

Bindu: [weeping] Come, dear, I will accompany you till the door. How can I live without you, dear, oh, how can I live? [weeps bitterly]

[Exeunt]
ACT II

Scene 1

[Rishra, office room in Sarat’s house. Enter Bhagaban with a register and a bundle of notes.]

**Bhag:** [revealing his face] There is no joie de vivre. Keeping accounts all through the day. [sits] There is no scope of relaxing for a moment. The master continuously stays at Calcutta. He busies himself with exercise books, newspapers and meetings. He won’t turn his attention towards the property even for once. He keeps on writing, ‘There is famine at a certain place, send Rs. 100’, ‘A certain person is in trouble, send Rs. 50’, ‘Pay the school fees of a certain person’, ‘Buy books for a certain person’, ‘A certain person’s house has been destroyed in storm, build it’. He writes ten letters a day to tell to ensure that the people of our village don’t starve for want of food. Had anyone else been in my place, he would have built a house out of the money that is being distributed. I don’t indulge in such an unrighteous act only because I am an employee working here for so long. I simply manage an extra monthly income of Rs. 25 to Rs. 30 from here and there. How else can I manage my domestic affairs? I have to feed my wife and son. I atone for this sin by distributing water and gram among the poor in the months of Baisakh and Jyaishtha.¹ Besides, there is the daily worship of the presiding deity of the house and that too a very sacred deity. Sometimes, even for this Rs. 2 is spent in a month. God save me!

[Enter a Man]²

**Man:** Sir, please settle that account of mine.

**Bhag:** Yes, please be seated, I’ll do it today itself. Bhola?³
From backstage: Yes, sir.

Bhag: Basu Babu has come; fill the bowl of the hookah with tobacco. Make it moderately strong. - Sir, I don’t like it mild. It suits the sophisticated. Take one puff and no taste remains. If you want tobacco, have it moderately strong.

[Enter Bhola, gives tobacco and leaves]

[Both smoke]

Bhag: How much does the money amount to, sir?

Man: Hundred and thirty four rupees and seven annas.

Bhag: Let me see. [verifying the figure with the account-book] Yes, it is correct. But sir, you’ll get only Rs. 130. The remainder is my fees. If you agree to this, I can pay you right now. Or else it is a matter of two months.

Man: No sir, I need it urgently. I want it today itself. Give me only Rs. 130.

Bhag: [giving Rs. 130] Put your signature.

Man: [signs and counts the notes] Now sir, won’t babu marry? He is around 25 – 26 years old. He is handsome and without any want of money. And what of his sister’s marriage? She too has come of age. I hear she is around 16 – 17 years old. How does he let such an old sister remain unmarried? Doesn’t he feel ashamed? Who will marry her after some time? Can’t you people say something?

Bhag: There is no worry regarding her marriage. She belongs to a rich family and moreover she is very beautiful.

Man: OK, I agree, but does that mean he will marry her off when she becomes aged? Can’t you people say something? What a shame! A 16 – 17 years old unmarried sister at home!
**Bhag:** We have said a lot, sir. But if he will hear nothing about his marriage, what can we do? Not of his own, nor of his sister and neither of the other girl who stays here. She too is quite grown-up. She must be around 17 – 18 years old.

**Man:** Well sir, don’t the girls wish to get married?

**Bhag:** Will they ever tell the babu, ‘Get us married?’ The babu too doesn’t mention their marriage and they too don’t talk about it. You know sir, marriage is a matter of fate; being rich or poor doesn’t decide it. As the saying goes:

> If it is not fated, you won’t succeed, however hard you may try.8

**Man:** [gesticulates] I say sir, is there some other reason behind this?9

**Bhag:** No, it isn’t so. It is nothing like that. I have been working in this house for the last twelve years. All these years neither have I seen nor heard anything. Both the girls are very good. But they are rather unconventional.

**Man:** How’s that?

**Bhag:** Like talking to anyone and everyone. They don’t cover their heads with veils. These are the effects of educating girls.10 Moreover there is no matronly woman in the house. They do whatever they wish. But seen from another perspective, the two girls are very good. When my younger son was seriously ill, they used to visit him twice a day. Besides they used to give him medicine, remove the seeds of pomegranate for him, take him in their lap and caress him to sleep. They have done a lot. They are very good in these respects. Besides they take pity upon the poor and the destitute. They other day when they were about to take their lunch, some 30 - 32 people came from Burdwan. They were emaciated and starving for 3 or 4 days. These two girls gave up their food. Since
their two cooks will find it difficult to cook for so many, the girls lend a helping hand.
Later when everyone had their full, did these girls have their food.\textsuperscript{11}

**Man:** Then they are indeed very good. Nowadays one doesn’t come across such girls in rich families or for that matter in any household. Sir, is it true that they are highly educated?

**Bhag:** Yes. They are well versed in both Bengali and English. They are so qualified that they can write books. They occasionally contribute articles in the women’s journal Bamabodhini\textsuperscript{12} and Abalabandhab\textsuperscript{13} that comes by post.

**Man:** Now what about their ways?

**Bhag:** Sir, their ways are rather queer. They don’t put on many ornaments. If they ever feel like, they wear one or two pieces of jewellery. They never wear anklets. Sometimes they wear no ornament on their hands. They never paint the borders of their feet red.

**Man:** Oh, I see, they are like Christians.

**Bhag:** No, they are not so. Neither do they go to the church nor do they sit at home and loudly sing,\textsuperscript{14} ‘O lord Jesus Christ, deliver our souls; lead us from light to darkness’.

**Man:** [laughs] From light to darkness, sir!

**Bhag:** No, no, sorry, it was a slip of tongue. From darkness to light. But it’s almost the same. The difference is only slight.

**Man:** I say, sir, if they are neither this, nor that, then what are they?

**Bhag:** That I can’t say, sir. When I myself don’t know, how can I tell you?

**Man:** Girls belonging to a gentleman’s house not wearing jewellery, neither painting the borders of their feet – this doesn’t sound good.
Bhag: Sir, I’ll tell you something more; you’ll be amazed. But don’t tell this to anyone else.

Man: By the Mahabharata, can I ever do so? Yes sir, tell me. When God has given me ears, let me listen.

Bhag: [softly] Sir, how do I say, they wear tailored clothes, they wear socks — [even more softly] and sometimes they wear shoes like the bibis.

Man: [with eyes dilated in surprise] What?? What did you say, sir? They wear tailored clothes! — They wear socks!! — They wear shoes!!!

Bhag: Yes, sir. Let’s forget about these, sir, there is no use being involved. These are the matters of the rich.

Man: Sir, I am surprised. I have never heard of such things! — They wear tailored clothes! — They wear socks!! — They wear shoes!!! — Now sir, what sort of a man is the babu himself?

Bhag: Well, of a sort. It is difficult to make out what he is. Anyhow he is of a charitable disposition. His only fault is that he is quick-tempered. Once he gets angry, he goes out of his senses. But when his anger subsides, he calms down. He becomes a changed man. He has some eccentricities and naivety. But don’t tell these to anyone.

Man: Rama, can I ever do so? [gets up] I say will you attend the khemta dance to be held in the house of Bannerji Babu of the other locality?

Bhag: Sir, do I have time to go? Well, let me see if I can go for an hour or so. — Our babu takes offence at the khemta dance.
**Man:** [surprised] Offended by khemta dance! Such a pursuit of pleasure! Such beautiful gestures! And such sweet songs! How one is emotionally softened! [sings] 'Young lover—'

**Bhag:** [hurriedly covering the man’s lips with his hand] Sir, what are you doing? What are you doing? There are girls in the house, what if they hear?¹⁹

**Man:** [angrily] Sir, there is nothing improper in wearing shoes and listening to one khemta song is a sacrilege!²⁰ Well this is the topsy-turvy of rules of the Kali era!²¹

**Bhag:** Why else do they call it the Kali era?

**Man:** Well sir, let me take leave. It is late now.

**Bhag:** Yes, sir. I’ll also leave. Would you like to smoke the hookah once more?

**Man:** Sir, I am stupefied! I have no wish of smoking the hookah any more. [as he leaves]

- They wear tailored clothes! — They wear socks!! — They wear shoes!!! — Take the name of God. All the conventions have got confused with time, nothing remains any longer.

[Exeunt]

**Scene 2**

[Rishra. The zenana of Sarat Babu’s house. Sarojini and Sukumari are seated]

**Suku:** Sister, have you read the new book ‘The Society and Customs of the Parsis of Bombay’?

**Saroj:** No, how is the book?

**Suku:** The book is good. — There is a really good way for the maintenance of the poor among the Parsis. Oh sister, talking of the poor I remember — everyone loves you; they say you are as if the Mother Annapurna¹ herself.
Saroj: [smiles] What a jump from one topic to another! If I am Annapurna, what are you?

Suku: [hugging Sarojini] What am I, only Sukumari, your little sister.

Saroj: How is your daughter?

Suku: My daughter!

Saroj: Why, that little girl of Basundhara, who calls you ‘mother’ and won’t have her medicine from anyone else?

Suku: She is somewhat better today. She didn’t have fever since yesterday.

Saroj: Sukh, many days have past since your brother wrote a letter. I am rather worried.

Suku: Is he only my brother; does he mean nothing to you?

Saroj: [sighs] Is he related to me, sister? He loves me a bit out of pity and nothing else.

Suku: A bit? He loves you more than he loves me.

Saroj: [with tears in eyes] Dear, you are his own sister; and who am I? An orphan girl. He has kindly given me shelter in the house. That he looks upon me with affection is enough.

Suku: Nothing can satisfy you, dear. Well, let brother come, I will tell him everything.

Saroj: No, no Sukh, have mercy on me,² don’t tell him this. If he hears, he will be sad.

[Enter a maid with a letter]

Maid: Sisters, the sarkar has sent this letter. He said, ‘Give this letter from Calcutta to sisters’.

[Enter a maid with a letter]

Suku: You were so worried about the letter; now here it is.

[Both read the letter silently]
Suku: [laughs] A debate in the meeting over the issue of owing our pedigree to monkeys!
Oh, where shall I go! Oh, where shall I go!

Saroj: [smiles] Keep quiet for a while, sister. Let us read the letter completely; then laugh as much as you wish.

[Both read the letter]

Suku: [huffs] Brother has called me crazy. OK when he comes home I won’t talk to him.
Am I crazy?

Saroj: [laughs and presses Sukumari’s cheeks] He said that because he loves you.

Suku: He loves you too, then why didn’t he call you crazy? Well??

[Again both read the letter]

Saroj: [after finishing the letter, aside] ‘Yours ever well-wishing brother, Saratkumar Datta’ – ‘Yours ever well-wishing brother’! [sighs]

Suku: What are you thinking, sister?

Saroj: What to think, sister? What shall I write in reply to this letter?

Suku: You are trying to evade the answer. Sister, why don’t you talk to me frankly?
Well, sister, am I not you own?

[Re-enter Maid]

Maid: Oh sisters – [laughs]

Saroj: What’s the matter, maid? Why are you laughing so much?


Suku: Look at the way she’s laughing! Why don’t you tell what’s the matter?

Maid: [laughs] – There’s a match for the younger sister – [laughs]

Suku: Damn it! She’s continuously laughing.
Saroj: [laughs] With whom?

Maid: With Matilal De of Anarpur. He has a wife. [laughs]

Saroj: Who has brought this proposal?

Maid: [laughs] – I have almost split my sides, sister. A ghataki has come. I am bringing her.

[Exit]

[Re-enter with the ghataki]

Saroj: With whom is the proposal of marriage, dear?

Ghataki: With Matilal De, the zamindar of Anarpur. He’s a very rich man and will give ample gifts.

Saroj: But doesn’t he have a wife?

Ghataki: What if he has? [pointing towards Sukumari] He will be only hers. Will he ever love a middle-aged wife, when he gets such a beautiful, young wife?

[Sarojini and Sukumari blush]

Maid: [laughs] – How old is your babu? And how does he look like; just like Kartik, isn’t he? [laughs]

Ghataki: Who is this damned woman? Why does she laugh so much? Matilal Babu may be rather old and dark-complexioned. What does that matter? He has such a lot of money like Indra that if he wishes people willingly offer girls at his feet.

Saroj: [gets up and hugs Sukumari with her right hand] Dear, tell him that a hundred properties of such a hundred Matilals wouldn’t equal the worth of a finger of my Sukumari’s feet.

Ghataki: How are you related to her, dear?

Saroj: [proudly] She’s my younger sister.
Ghataki: You are so proud to be her sister. I wonder what her brother would have done.

Maid: Had he been here, he would have caught you by the neck and thrown out of the house.

Ghataki: [gets up and says angrily] I am a ghataki who goes to the houses of kings and you dare to insult me! Well, I am leaving; but this house will never come to good. Matilal Babu is such a man that if within ten or twelve days he doesn’t teach you a good lesson, I am not the daughter of a Brahmin.

[Exit angrily]

Maid: How do you dare to curse them in front of me? Wait, woman, I’ll pour buttermilk over your head and send you to the other side of the Ganga. Wait, woman, let me thrash you with a broom. You woman - !

[Exit]

Saroj: [smiling] Will you marry Matilal babu?

Suku: Why don’t you marry him?

Saroj: OK, if you don’t like him, let’s go and find another. Why do you worry?

Suku: Hadn’t I loved you so much, sister, today I would have quarrelled with you. — But, sister, the ghataki’s threats have frightened me.

Saroj: Pooh! Ghatakis speak like that.

[Exeunt]

Scene 3

[A street at the outskirts of Calcutta. A guard and a man seated under a tree]

Guard: *Brother, it is a question of fate. Whomever Krishna favours has, and whom he doesn’t favour doesn’t have. It is all predestined.
[Enter Binay]

Binay: Good, I'll ask this guard. Guard, is this the way to Calcutta?

Guard: *[looking at him] Why, sir?

Binay: I am coming from Anarpur. I am going to Calcutta in search of a job.

Guard: *[thinks] I see. Do you have some money?

Binay: Why?

Guard: *[gesticulating at the man] Now people are prohibited from going to Calcutta. Only those who pay Rs. 2 are permitted to go. This is by the order of the Hon'ble Company,¹ what can I do?

Binay: What will the government do with this money?

Guard: *Well, brother, this is something really funny. The Company will put up a show of monkey-dance⁴ with this money.

Binay: [surprised] The government will organize a monkey-dance!

Guard: *Yes, sir, why should I lie?

Binay: Well, what sort of monkey-dance will that be?

Guard: *Listen. They have driven in big bamboos at the ground in Chowringhee.⁵

Binay: What are they going to do with those?

Guard: *The monkeys will dance on them.

Binay: Monkey-dance on bamboo poles! Where did they bring the monkeys from? And who will make them dance? – Monkey-dance on bamboo poles!

Guard: *[laughs] – This is very funny, sir; this is very funny. Those two justices of the Municipality, or whatever they say, will have to dance on the bamboo poles. Each of
them will be sporting a tail. When the justices will dance on the poles, the ropes will be pulled from the ground, to make them move to and fro.

**Binay:** The justices of Calcutta will have to mount on the bamboo poles and dance like monkeys! Well, who will make them dance?

**Guard:** * Lieutenant Governor will beat the dumbaru⁶ and shout out the instructions. The Chairman will hold the rope in one hand and whip in the other.

**Binay:** [startled] Will he whip the justices?

**Guard:** *No, not at all, sir, he won't flog them; he will scare them by making sound with the whip. This is as it is done in monkey-dance. Once the babus listen to the sound, they will dance better.

**Binay:** Well, where did you learn about this?

**Guard:** *The proprietor of the weekly that is published on Thursday told me so.

**Man:** [aside] Well, is it true?

**Guard:** *[aside] Yes, it is true. Only what I told about the money is a lie. I'll give you Re. 1 from that Rs. 2.

**Binay:** Will all the justices have to dance like monkeys?

**Guard:** *Yes, except two or three babus, all have to dance.

**Binay:** Why won't those two or three have to dance?

**Guard:** *The chairman is angry with them. Those officers are misers. While the chairman wants to spend Rs. 10,000, these babus want it within Rs. 2000. When the chairman wants to levy tax, they say that there is no need to raise the tax. What a miserly act is this? One should always agree with what the Sahibs say.
Man: This gentleman has just arrived from a village. He knows nothing about Calcutta. Why don’t you show him the sort of dance that will be staged?

Guard: *Yes, I’ll show. [gets up and lets some portion of his belt to dangle] Hold this as if it were my tail. [Binay hesitates] Why are you hesitant, hold it. [Binay does so] There is no bamboo here. So I’ll dance on the road. But it would have been better had there been one. [to the man] Could you bring a whip and a dambaru?

Man: Yes, there is a stable here. Let me see if I can find there.

[Exit]

[Re-enter with a whip and a dambaru]

Man: I’ve got them; man, I’ve got them.

Guard: *Sir, please hold my tail properly. Now I have become a justice. But justices will get angry if the tail is injured. [to the man] Brother, do keep an eye and tell me as soon as you see some sergeant coming.

Man: Don’t worry about that. You dance.  

Guard: *[dances and sings] This is a very entertaining dance – the justices are dancing – a very funny dance – sirs, please give tips – very funny dance.

Man: [frightened] Oh my! Run, the sergeant is coming.

[All run away]

Scene 4

[A street in Calcutta. Enter Gopinath]

Gopi: Which way did the boy go? Have I lost him? [looks behind the stage and exclaims happily] There!
**From backstage:** How long do I search? Let me try at that house. – Anyone here?

**Gopi:** Who are you? Why are you shouting?

**From backstage:** Thank God! I see there is a gentleman.

[Enter Binay]

**Binay:** Sir, I am coming from far.¹ Could you kindly tell me where I may find some lodging?

**Gopi:** You are a great fool. In this Calcutta, where you can have blood out of stone, you couldn’t find lodging!

**Binay:** [politely] This is my first visit. I know nothing about this place.

**Gopi:** Come with me, I can give you a place in my house. Our house is here. Don’t worry. You may stay at our house as long as you wish.

**Binay:** Sir, I am indeed obliged.

**Gopi:** OK, now come. [aside] I am taking you to make you obliged. [comes forward] Uncle,² where are you? Uncle?

[Enter Kenaram]

**Kena:** Here you are, uncle.³ Welcome, dear! Come let’s embrace. [they hug] I say, who is this man with you?

**Gopi:** [whispers into Kenaram’s ears]

**Kena:** Indeed! [jumps with joy]

**Binay:** [surprised] What was that?

**Gopi:** For his arthritis in the waist, the kabiraj⁴ said, ‘Jump occasionally; that will cure your arthritis’. So he jumps now and then.

[Binay smiles, remains standing, worried]
Kena: What are you thinking?

Binay: [haltingly] No, I was thinking, how both of you happen to be each other’s uncle!

Gopi: [laughs] We are not related to each other. We say like that for fun.¹

Binay: You call each other uncle for fun!

Gopi: That’s a common practice in Calcutta. There’s nothing wrong with it. What else is it, if it isn’t an endearing way of addressing someone? This goes here. Is this your village? Here you can’t show your affection unless you address people like this, you can’t even joke. Leave apart calling each other uncle; sometimes people call their own father by some other name.

Kena: Why don’t I tell him that too? Nowadays wives call their husbands by their names.⁶ Suppose my name is Pela, then my wife will call, [distorting his voice] ‘Pelu, o my Pelu, do come here once’. I should go immediately. Any delay will cause a crisis. She will get angry and sit with tears in her eyes. A lot of effort is needed to placate her huff.

Binay: [laughs] Do all women in Calcutta call their husbands by their names?

Kena: Do all women have husbands that they can call them endearingly by their names? One-fourth of the women don’t have husbands. [gesticulates] They have kicked the bucket. And the husbands of the half of the remaining women are as good as absent – they visit the prostitutes. They seek pleasure day and night at Amaravati.⁷ And their wives –

Binay: Do all of the remaining one-fourth call their husbands by their names?

Kena: No. Only the wives of the educated people do so.

Gopi: Come, let’s sing that song of ours.

Kena: Which fellow can ever sing with white eyes and a dry throat, dear?
Gopi: Fie on you, you want it once in every thirty minutes? Where do we have that much silver? Come, dear, let’s now go home. You too come.

[Exeunt]

ACT III

Scene 1

[Calcutta. A book shop overlooking a street. The shopkeeper is seated. Enter Sarat Babu]

Sarat: Why does the care, perseverance, courage and patriotism of our educated youth vanish the moment they leave the university? Love alone devours everything. This love has caused all the harm in our country. Let me see how far I succeed in my fight against this powerful enemy. For the time being I have decided to present a paper titled ‘Love is the cause of much harm and should therefore be altogether discarded by the learned’ at our meeting. I have to read all the books available on this topic. Let me see if this shop has any such book. [to the shopkeeper] Does your shop have any book on love?

Shopkeeper: Do you mean something like Nidhi’s tappa? I am sorry, sir, we keep only school books. You won’t find much of other sorts of books. Don’t you see these shops are near the school? Here you can find Bastubicar, Bhugolbibaran, Patiganit.

Charitabali, Charupath, Pakritik Bijnan, Ramer Abhishek.

Sarat: [smiles] No, sir. I don’t need those books. Don’t you have any book on love? Why don’t you check once more? I need them badly.

Shopkeeper: [thinks] Sir, see if this one helps you. It is titled ‘Pranay Pariksha’, ‘A Test of Love’.
Sarat: ‘Pranay Pariksha’! Yes, I want it. [seeing the book, dejected] Why, this is a play!
This book doesn’t have what I am looking for. What is the use of reading this? [about to return the book]

Shopkeeper: This book isn’t costly. Why don’t you read and judge its worth?

Sarat: What’s the price?

Shopkeeper: Rs. 2 only, sir.

Sarat: The printed price is Re. 1 and you ask for Rs. 2!

Shopkeeper: All the copies are sold out. Only my shop had two copies. Yesterday a person bought one for Re 1 and 12 annas. This is the last copy. Why should I sell it for less than Rs. 2? There isn’t any dearth of customers. If I wait for two more days, this book will sell for Rs. 3. It is a very good book.

Sarat: OK, let me try some other shop. [about to leave]

Shopkeeper: Wait, sir. You are leaving without even bargaining! Why don’t you bargain? Will you give Re. 1 and 12 annas? Will you give Re. 1 and 8 annas? OK, sir, give me the printed price of Re. 1. I wonder what made me so unlucky today!¹⁰ I’ve to sell the book at the cost price of Re. 1 itself! I can’t make a profit of even a single paisa! Give me the price, sir.

Sarat: OK, I am giving. [sits and has a look at the book]

Shopkeeper: Sir, may I ask you a question? Are you married?

Sarat: [surprised] Why?

Shopkeeper: I am running this business for the last ten years and have noticed that those who aren’t married are in search of these books. That is why I asked you.

Sarat: [with a gentle smile] Can you say why is it so?
Shopkeeper: The answer is very simple. As long as you don’t have it, it seems very good and sweet. But this attitude doesn’t remain once you get it. Instead you don’t think it improper to abuse in the filthiest language.\textsuperscript{11}

Sarat: [laughs] You are right. I too hold similar views regarding love. [pays the price and reads with close attention]

[Blood smeared Binay rushes in]

Binay: [falls at Sarat’s feet] Sirs, please save me!

Sarat: [rises, and hurriedly] Why, why, what’s the matter? Who are you?

From backstage: Thief! Thief! - *Stop him!

Binay: [rises] Sir, I am not a thief, I am not a thief. Two persons of the house where I had lodged were involved in a robbery. Guards came and bound them up. I was leaving, but they got hold of me, and severely beat me up with their cudgel. I somehow managed to run away. They are again coming to get hold of me. Sir, I can’t run any longer; save me, save me! [falls once again at Sarat’s feet]

Sarat: [helping Binay to his feet and suspiciously] Why were you staying with the thieves? How long did you stay?

Binay: I stayed for a few days. I didn’t know they were thieves.

From backstage: The fellow is here! Thief! Thief!

Binay: [in a voice overcome with fear] Sir, please save me! [wipes his eyes] I have no friends or relatives. God will be kind to you. If I am proved guilty at the court, I don’t mind being punished. But save me from being thrashed before legal proceedings. See, I am bleeding all over.
Sarat: You seem to be a gentleman. But whether or not you are a gentleman, none has the power to punish you before the legal proceeding is complete.

[Enter two guards, a sergeant and a mob]¹²

All: Lay hands on the fellow!

[The sergeant tries to hold Binay and beat him. Sarat shields him with his own body. The shopkeeper shuts down his shop and watches from cover.¹³ Others run helter skelter.]

Sarat: *Don’t beat him. You have no right to beat him. If you want, you may take him to the police station.

Sergeant: *Shut up, you swine, son of a bitch! [hits Sarat on his face with his stick and again tries to get hold of Binay]

Sarat: Dare you to hit me! [goes blind with rage, snatches the sergeant’s stick and beats him severely. The guards advance to help the sergeant, are beaten up by Sarat and fall on the ground.]

Sergeant: [to guards] Ungrateful, swine! [again tries to attack Sarat]

Sarat: [kicks the sergeant] Don’t you know, you basest, you beast, that people are no longer scared of the white skin? [to Binay] Come with me, don’t feel afraid. [holds Binay’s hand and leaves.]

[Exeunt]

Scene 2

[Colootola, Calcutta. Matilal’s house. Enter Matilal and Bindubasini]

Mati: ‘You’¹ must know something or the other regarding this matter. Had ‘you’ not passed on some information, how would the fellow come to know? None besides us
know about this in the three worlds. Had ‘you’ not divulged this, how could the fellow manage to learn about these? And why else should he write such a letter?

**Bindu:** Mother Jagadamba knows!

**Mati:** [making a face] Mother Jagadamba knows! – Do ‘you’ want to make me understand that I am a fool? Past are those days when gods came in dreams and said that this much amount of money has been buried under that tree. That age is over. Due to the presence of the wolves in the form of the English, even gods have abandoned the country. ‘You’ must have divulged that to Binay. ‘Speak’ the truth, or else I shall kill ‘you’.

**Bindu:** [weeps] How do you doubt me? Can I ever do such a thing? You are my lord and master, how can I tell your secrets to others? And that too such dangerous secrets, which if the judge or magistrate comes to know, will land you in prison? God, even if I think of this, a chill runs down my spine. Being your wife, can I ever do such a thing? Is it ever possible?

**Mati:** Woman, then how have these words come into public?

**Bindu:** [wiping her eyes] How do I know? Shall I tell you something, if you don’t get angry?

**Mati:** ‘Tell’.

**Bindu:** This deed hadn’t been quite proper right from the beginning. Can a wicked deed be hidden forever? One day or the other it will come to surface on its own. None has to say it.

**Mati:** [angrily] You wicked, abominable woman, how dare ‘you’? ‘You’ dare to insult me on my face? [kicks Bindubasini and she falls on the ground]
Bindu: [gets up and weeps] I was wrong, I am sorry. Being a foolish woman, I couldn’t speak discreetly. [wipes her eyes and comes closer to Matilal] Did you hurt your feet?

Mati: I haven’t hurt my feet. Now push off!

[Exit Bindubasini]

Mati: [walks about worriedly] What shall I do? Rs. 8000 isn’t a matter of joke. Well, the fellow can’t prove it. So why do I worry? — But then you know even a little poison is after all poison. Who knows what form it might take some day? No, all obstacles should be removed from the way. Otherwise I won’t be able to enjoy the property in peace.

[Enter Gopinath]

Mati: [surprised] How now, Gupe! How did you manage to fool the police?

Gopi: Since I didn’t have the loot with me, they had to let me go. But I had to bribe the police and such others.

Mati: I shall reimburse that. Now tell me, what about the fellow?

Gopi: Sir, that fellow has deceived us. A fellow named Sarat Datta has saved him. That fellow is very courageous. He beat up and chased the sergeant who had come to arrest Binay.

Mati: Sarat Datta? Which Sarat Datta?

Gopi: His house is at Rishra. But he is staying here at Bowbazar.

Mati: [angrily] The Sarat Datta of Rishra? Insulted my ghataki the other day and has now saved Binay? [with eyes reddened with anger] Well, if I abduct his beautiful sister, who wears shoes and socks and make her my maid-servant and raze his house to the ground, only then am I Matilal De. Hear now! Keep an eye on that fellow, Bine. And if you can do something regarding Sarat Datta’s sister, I shall make you rich.
Gopi: [happily] I’ll do as you order. If you so wish, I can bring her tomorrow itself. [aside] How can we prosper without the patronage of a few zamindars like him?

Mati: Don’t be so rash. This being the rule of the British, we have to act carefully. Moreover the fellow is rich. You may go now. Come in the evening. I’ll tell you all that you have to do.

[Exit Gopinath]

Mati: [strolls] I wonder how that fellow came to know of it! However I have to remove the obstacle irrespective of the amount of money needed and the means to be adopted.

[Exeunt]

Scene 3

[Goldighi, Calcutta. Enter Sarat and Binay]

Sarat: Brother, what’s the use of listening to the tale of woe? My mother died when Sukumari was six months old and I just completed nine. [weeps] At the advice of other people, my father got eager to re-marry within a few days. He married into the family of the Basus of Behala. My step-mother was very good. She loved me dearly. She brought up Sukumari with motherly care and affection. She looked upon us as our own mother would have done. But you can never be quite sure about a person’s attitudes. Three years ago my father died and this sinful woman gave up her morality. She was around 24-25 years old at that time. [weeps]

Binay: How did you come to know?

Sarat: Matilal De of Anarpur has a woman named Bhubanmohini –

Binay: Who did you say?
Sarat: Bhubanmohini. Why do you happen to know her?

Binay: I’ll tell you later. Please continue.

Sarat: He has Bhubanmohini as his kept woman. This sinful woman began frequenting her house. People started discussing this. One day I asked, ‘Why do you visit that prostitute everyday?’ She didn’t reply and simply stared at my face. Unable to check my anger, I said, ‘All say that you are a fallen and an unchaste woman’. After hearing this, she cried for a while and then, without telling anyone, she went to her parents’ house. Since they had already heard about her bad reputation, they too didn’t let her stay there. On her way back, she died when her boat capsized. I felt very sad when I heard this. In spite of all her faults, she loved us dearly. [weeps]

Binay: It would have been better had you sought for some more proof of her immorality. I greatly doubt her being really fallen. The Bhubanmohini you’ve just named isn’t in reality as bad as you’ve heard of. It was she who made me aware of Matilal’s betrayal. By her gestures and attitudes she doesn’t at all seem to be a prostitute. At least I shall never believe that she has committed this sin at her own sweet will.

Sarat: How do you say so? Can you deny that she is Matilal’s kept?

Binay: No. But I believe there is some hidden story behind this, something that people haven’t yet come to know. OK, let’s leave this for the time being. Did your father write the whole of the property in your step-mother’s name?

Sarat: I heard such a rumour. But I don’t believe it.

Binay: I am afraid Matilal is trying to file a suit against you over this issue.

Sarat: How’s that? On what ground can Matilal file a suit? Where did you hear that?

Binay: Bhubanmohini gave me some hint regarding this matter.
[Sound from backstage and enter Becharam]

Becharam: Sir, a white drunkard is beating people. He got into a house and is causing such disturbance that –

Sarat: The pillar of success of the immaculate character of the English! The fluttering flag of victory of the sound English administration!

[Exit all]

[Enter Nanda and Bipin]

Nanda: Let us see how long Sarat Babu can continue the debate. What craziness!

Bipin: It is both craziness and naivety.

[Enter Haridas]

Nanda: Where are you going?

Hari: To the meeting. And the both of you?

Bipin: Come, let's go together. We are also going there.

Nanda: Are you for or against the issue?

Hari: I won't take any side. I am on the side of truth.

Bipin: Still, what is your view regarding this?

Hari: I've no such view. The first and foremost duty of man is the cultivation of science. I don't mind what they do after that. For me love and lack of love are the same. It is improper to allow such debates in the Society for Spreading the Light of Science. This is nothing but waste of time.

[Re-enter Sarat]

Bipin: Please be so kind as to join us. We were talking about you. All of us are going to the meeting. What about your case regarding the beating of the sergeant?
Sarat: What else can you expect? That which usually happens when an Englishman is the plaintiff and a Bengali the accused. I have been fined Rs. 200. But I wasn’t the first to beat. I’ve appealed for a review. Let’s see what they do!

Nanda: Have you written four articles titled ‘Modes of the British Administration’ that were recently published in ‘Nagarik’?

Sarat: Why?

Nanda: I heard that the government is going to sue you in the High Court.

Sarat: What is the guilt of the subordinate?

Nanda: False allegations and sedition.

Sarat: [smiles] OK, let’s see.

Bipin: No, you should indeed be more careful.

Hari: And your effort is going in vain. The only means of national progress is through the cultivation of science.

Sarat: [laughs] That is our bone of contention.

Bipin: Until we marry, we don’t reach the state of mental equilibrium. Though your purpose is great and you are intelligent, but [laughs] because you don’t have a ‘better half’ you fail to comprehend everything correctly.

Sarat: If you succeed to defeat me in today’s debate, then you shall be entrusted with the responsibility of finding a ‘better half’ for me.

Bipin: I agree.

Nanda: I agree.

Sarat: Will you place an order abroad?
Bipin: There would have been no worry, had merely placing an order brought boxes full of good women, just like chandeliers, watches, paper and cotton mills.

Nanda: Haridas Babu, can’t your science help in this matter? Can’t we get hold of some female monkeys and transform them into adorable women? It is otherwise difficult to find them.

Hari: You don’t believe that we have actually descended from apes and therefore crack such jokes. If you listen to me attentively, I can prove this right now.

Sarat: Come, let’s go to the meeting.

[All exit]

[Enter Matilal and Gopinath]

Mati: I’ve secretly enquired; the fellow stays mainly at Calcutta and only occasionally visits home. This will greatly help us. Are your people ready?

Gopi: With much difficulty I’ve managed to gather six men. They don’t want to engage in this and say abduction needs a lot of courage.

Mati: Why are they scared? I’ll shower money. What can’t money buy?

Gopi: Yes, that’s true. Actually they want more money.

Mati: How much?

Gopi: Rs. 50 per head. Ten people would be enough.

Mati: The rate is rather high. OK, I agree. But the job should be accomplished soon.

Gopi: That will be done. Within a week I’ll produce the girl before you, will that do?

You may then –

Mati: [happily] Ah, if you can do that! Come, let me give you money.

[Exeunt]
Scene 4

[Pataldanga, Calcutta. The session of the Society for Spreading the Light of Science]

Sarat: [reading a paper] I don't want to say anything more on this topic. In fact, there is nothing more to say. Besides I have no right to waste your valuable time as well as that of the session. What has already been mentioned is enough to prove that love is the fountain head of all evil and mischief in this ill-fated world. There is nothing, not even a single thing that causes such endless and severe calamities that are difficult to prevent.

[applause] Not just immoral love that people abhor and regard as sin, but love itself is the root cause of many evil. Therefore it should be totally discarded by the knowledgeable, by the intelligent and wise members of the Society for Spreading the Light of Science. It is very difficult to count the number of fearful battles in the world fought only for love; count the number of countries and continents flooded with blood; count the number of times love has kindled our habitual anger and envy. One cannot ascertain, even in imagination, the number of poisonous fruits borne by the tree of love. The dull and the ignorant think pure love is the house of uninhibited pleasure and the clean steps of religion. But pure love or that which people without any acquaintance with science call pure love is actually servitude and voluptuousness. [applause] Love destroys humane qualities in man. It shrivels those faculties of mind that should have been directed towards the well-being of the world. It routs patriotism completely. What more shall I say, it transforms the godly man into beast. May I ask you, can love, that is capable of producing such results, ever be regarded as the house of peace or the steps of religion?

[‘Never’, ‘never’] If we are humans, if the light of science has even slightly touched our hearts, come let us take a vow that as long as we retain senses, we shall never indulge in
love, and we shall never accept the slavery of this abominable instinct – not even if we have to die. Love itself is detestable; love itself is dirty filth. It has no distinction of pure and impure – it is altogether impure. [thunderous applause]

First Speaker: Respected Chairman and members, the speech that Sarat Babu has delivered today is excellent and charming. Therefore I propose to give him our warm thanks.¹ [applause]

Second Speaker: I second the proposal with all my heart. But I cannot help saying that the proposal would have been better had it been done in simple Bengali style rather than in the English fashion. What is ‘warm thanks’? [laugh and applause]

Bipin: It is our habitual practice to spot the chinks in somebody’s armour. I agree that the language of the first speaker is not without fault. But is the second speaker sure that he does not commit any mistake? As the saying in English goes, ‘People who live in glass houses should not throw stones at others’. It isn’t a matter of slight regret that we sometimes become oblivious of this truth.

There is no doubt that Sarat Babu deserves our thanks. But I would like to ask him one question, only one. If love is that detestable and base and if we subdue our passions with the help of scientific enlightenment, then how will God’s creation continue to exist? Is this the last fruit, the final boundary, the highest excellence of the development of science and civilization that will make the breed of Manu² extinct and make the human form disappear from the world? And is this desirable? [applause] Besides my little brain cannot comprehend how we may permanently banish the God-given instincts from the heart with the help of science. [tremendous applause]
Sarat: In reply to the last speaker's question it is enough to say that one never knows the limits of the power of science. Maybe someday, with the help of science, we shall be able to produce sons without getting married. I've heard that Comte, the famous French scholar too holds this opinion. But till science reaches that developed stage, we will have to bear with the very painful bondage of marriage, just as we have to swallow bitter pills during illness. But even if we marry, why should we let love have a place in our hearts? We shall marry, not for love, not for pleasure, but for the sake of duty. But if my eyes oppose this, I shall gouge my eyes; if my heart opposes this, I shall cut it into two with a sword, or throw it into fire. If we cannot do even this, what is the benefit of our advanced education? If we cannot curb even a base instinct of our heart, then fie on our lives, fie on science, fie even on our Society for Spreading the Light of Science. [thunderous applause]

Nanda: [aside] Well brother, we'll see how long your conceit stays.

[Chairman gets up and looks around through bespectacled eyes. Applause]

Chairman: It has been unanimously accepted that Sarat Babu's speech is excellent. So I thank him on behalf of all the members and audience. [applause] But I warn Sarat Babu that in future he should desist naming an atheist like Comte in the meetings. It is a sin to take the name of an atheist, as well as hear it. [applause]

I'll tell you something, do listen attentively. It is very subtle and has risen out of the cogitation of many days. Such serious scholars like us, the members of the Society for Spreading the Light of Science should always walk with their heads held high; like this. This is so because our minds are always busy with high thoughts; petty matters are
unable to enter it. And it is hypocrisy if your mind is not reflected on your face.

Secondly, all of us are of serious disposition. So we should always walk steadily and firmly, and ensure that our hands do not swing. Both the hands should be fixed by the sides; like this. Thirdly, we do not have any strong attachment with the mortal world. Therefore the lesser you touch the ground with your feet the better. You should balance yourself on your toes; like this. Now it is late in the evening. I wish to expound on this subject in the next session. Let us end today’s meeting. Those of you, who agree with my views, must try to walk around like this from today itself.

[The meeting comes to an end after thanking the Chairman. The four members walk serially in the afore-mentioned style. While walking with the head held high, the Chairman hits stumbles⁴, followed by the four members]

Chairman: [gets up] I was engrossed in a very high thought. I fell as I stumbled on an insignificant object of this insignificant world. This is nothing surprising. All great souls that have endeavoured to spread the light of science or religion in this world shrouded with darkness have had to suffer some or the other sort of pain or botheration. This is the reward for those who choose this path. [gets up and again walks with his head held high]

[Exit all except Sarat]

[Enter Becharam]

Sarat: What’s the matter? Why are you here?

Becha: A person brought this letter from Rishra. He said that the sarkar has sent this and told him to deliver the same to you as soon as he comes. There is some serious trouble in the house.

[Exit, after giving the letter]
Sarat: [after reading the letter] Nothing is written clearly in the letter. There seems to be no trouble, they are simply trying to bring me home on some pretext or the other. But I can’t go now; I’ve lots of commitments here. [thinks] Well, that’s a good idea; I shall send Binay. He too needs to go to Rishra. Bhubanmohini has called him. [reads the letter once again] I haven’t met Saroj and Sukumari for long; I may as well go home once.

[Exeunt]

ACT IV

Scene 1

[Rishra. Sarat Babu’s house. Sarojini and Sukumari are seated]

Saroj: [reads the letter]

Calcutta

23 Phalgun, 1280 B.S

Saroj,

Most probably I shall be returning home soon. I am sending this letter through Binay Babu. You can learn about his past from his own lips. Neither you nor Sukumari should feel hesitant to speak to him. He is indeed modest, just as suggested by the meaning of his name. Extremely well-behaved and polite. There isn’t even the touch of vice in his nature. Regard him exactly as my younger brother. Don’t do otherwise.

Well-wishing

Sarat

[laughs] Your brother finds brothers and sisters wherever he goes. Maid?

From backstage: I am coming, sister.
Saroj: Maid, bring the gentleman who brought this letter.

Maid: Who is he, sister?

Saroj: [smiles] Sarat Babu regards him as his brother.

[Exit Maid and re-enter with Binay]


Binay: [softly] No.

Suku: [aside, to Sarojini – reads a part of the letter] 'Regard him exactly as my younger brother. Don’t do otherwise'. ‘Neither you nor Sukumari should feel hesitant to speak to him’. Brother has ordered that he should be regarded and spoken to as a younger brother. Now and then brother creates laws from Calcutta. Why, if I want to talk, I’ll talk; if I don’t want to talk, I won’t. Brother thinks his order is sufficient, whether we agree with it or not.

Saroj: [laughs, aside] Your brother is right. You are indeed crazy.

Suku: [aside] You don’t have to explain it. I am crazy. If I’m crazy, let it be so.

[Enter Maid with refreshments. Sarojini and the Maid spread the carpet, etc. Exit Maid]

Saroj: Please come, have some water. [Binay sits]

Suku: [aside] Hmm. Drink water, don’t eat the food.

Saroj: Please take the food. Why are ‘you’ feeling shy? We are but ‘your’ sisters.
Suku: [aside] Talk about yourself. What's the use of involving me? 'We are like “your” sisters'. You become his sister after seeing him for a moment. You may be, but why should I?

Saroj: [laughs] Why don't you keep quiet, sister? Please take the food. Why have ‘you’ begun feeling shy?

Binay: [shyly] The way you address me makes me feel ashamed.

Saroj: [smiles and sits near Binay] OK, brother, eat. [to Sukumari] Why don’t you too say?

Suku: [softly] Please ‘eat’.²

Saroj: No, say that properly.

Suku: [inarticulately] Eat.³

Binay: [aside] I haven't ever seen something like this. One is a goddess and the other is a bird flying in the sky. I had the idea that educated women are proud and ill-mannered.

[Eats]

Saroj: [to Sukumari] He must be tired after the journey. We must not disturb him today. We can listen to his story tomorrow. Come, let's show him his room.

Binay: I would like to go to the ghat near the tamarind tree. Which way is that ghat? Is it far?

Saroj: It's near. I'll send someone to guide you. Maid?

[Re-enter Maid]

Saroj: Maid, he wants to go to the ghat near the tamarind tree. Tell someone to show him the place.

Maid: Please come.

[Exit Maid and Binay]
Suku: Couldn't you ask him what business he had at the ghat near the tamarind tree?

Saroj: He has just arrived here. It isn't seemly to ask him something that he doesn't wish to divulge.

[Knock at the door]

Saroj: Who's there?

From backstage: Mother, I am the sarkar, Bhagaban.

Saroj: Please come in.

[Enter Bhagaban]

Bhag: Mother, in spite of my requesting babu to come home, he hasn't. Now you write to him once, please. I am very scared of all the things that I am hearing about Matilal. He has some twenty or thirty fighters with sticks and four or five Englishmen as paid servants.

Suku: [scared] Sister, to tell the truth, I am also very frightened.

Saroj: Is this a lawless country? What do we care if he has fighters with sticks and white servants? We live in a country ruled by the British.

Bhag: Mother, those are mere empty words. The sort of torture to which people are subjected by the zamindars in villages makes the blood run cold.

Saroj: [smiles] Your master is also a zamindar.

Bhag: Mother, there are good and bad people. But how many zamindars so you find to be as good as our master or Dakshineswar Maliya of Siyarso? There will be too many if there is one good zamindar out of twenty. Be that as it may, mother, please write a letter requesting the master to come home soon.

Saroj: OK. [aside] How can I wish against his coming home!

[Exeunt]
Scene 2

[Rishra. The bank of a river. Enter Binay]

Binay: I have been instructed by Bhubanmohini to wait here till 9:00 pm. She will come to meet me and tell me about something urgent. What can that urgent message be? Anarpur is about 3 kros from here. How will she come this far? Matilal will come to know. [strolls] It is not even 8:00 pm. [looks around] The world is quiet, as if it were dead or asleep. The waves of the river, the bank, and the buildings overlooking it—all are appearing silvery in the moonlight. The breeze is playing like a young child with the leaves of the trees with a murmur. Now and then the boats are sailing across the river. People within the boats are singing and the oarsman is rowing to the beats. It is as if, knowing my emotions, the Goddess Ganga is feeling greatly amused. As if she is saying, ‘During all these years I’ve seen the craziness of so many people. This boy is standing on my banks and thinking, if—’ No, this is like the desire of the moth for the star! [sighs]

[Enter a boat and song within]

Ragini Surat-Malhar – Tal Ara

Where will the worthless find that which is beyond the reach of gods

Beautiful, well-versed, innocence personified

How can I forget one who is the emblem of graces?

Binay: As if from the heart of my hearts—

[Enter Bhubanmohini]

Binay: Welcome. How did you manage to come?

Bhuban: He has got a new companion and is busy with her. He won’t search for me.

Binay: But what if he looks for you or comes to know of your visit?
**Bhuban:** What if he comes to know? How many fronts will he manage? [very angrily] I shall drink his heart’s blood and grind him down into smithereens.

**Binay:** [frightened] Why, why are you so angry with him?

**Bhuban:** Why am I so angry? You are immature and don’t know anything. Women can love; they can sacrifice everything for the sake of love; but if they get angry, they can scare off even Yama.² Why am I so angry? You don’t understand because you are immature. There is no greater pleasure in the world than giving a turn of the screw to one’s enemy.³ And none can feel the intensity of this pleasure as women do.

**Binay:** [aside] God, I have never before seen such a terrible rage. I am frightened to stand here and talk to her. — Did Matilal Babu bring upon you some severe harm?

**Bhuban:** Severe harm. Do you know what is meant by severe harm? Listen. Matilal felt attracted towards me even before my husband’s death. In spite of trying a lot, he couldn’t manage to do anything. Women usually don’t go astray while their husbands are alive — moreover he loved me dearly. [weeps] Realizing that he won’t be able to gain anything while he is alive, he removed the stumbling block. My husband loved to ramble till late in the garden on full moon nights. One night he went for a stroll, but it was very late and still he didn’t return. I got anxious. I sent servants to the garden but they could find him nowhere. The next morning around 11:00 am, his body was found by a brook about 1.5 kros⁵ from our house. [weeps] He was hit on the head with a stick. This was done by Gupe, Matilal’s fighter with sticks. The police investigated, but nothing came out. The police harass the poor, but they don’t disturb the rich. When these disturbances cooled down, he misappropriated my husband’s property. A few days later, as I was lying down after the fast of ekadasi,⁶ Matilal suddenly came to my room. He bribed my maids and
got them under his control; they didn’t answer my repeated calls. In spite of my crying and pleading, he didn’t give me respite. Being a woman and that too weak after the fast, my — [trembling with anger] I tried to hang myself, but he kept me bound up. I thought of starving myself to death, but when it was time for food, he would force spoonful of milk into my mouth. He would laugh away at whatever I said. He used to say, ‘I love you’. This went on for some fifteen days. Then I thought it was in vain that I was attempting suicide. My chastity has already been destroyed. Women’s chastity is like glass; once broken it can’t be joined. Then I vowed [grinds her teeth] that I shall realize the worth of my life as a woman by bathing in Matilal’s blood. I started behaving with him in another way. Within two to four days, I made him believe that I loved him wholeheartedly. I was set free. Since that day I am in search of the way of ruining him. Now he ignores me because I am old. He’s got a new companion.

**Binay:** [aside] Her anger is justified. She’ll try to kill him. However evil he might be, I shouldn’t let him be murdered. He has brought me up. I’ll warn him in a letter written under a pseudonym. But she shouldn’t come to harm — she had her trust in me when she narrated the story.

**Bhuban:** It is late now. I’ll go. Oh, I forgot to tell you that for which I have come. Matilal is furious since he received that letter of yours. He is secretly devising a stratagem. Be careful and tell Sarat Babu also to be watchful. Don’t be afraid, he won’t be able to harm you because of the support that I am giving. But as the saying goes, it’s better to be safe than sorry. I’ll go now.

[Exit]
Binay: A comet! Comes all of a sudden and goes! How can Matilal harm me; instead I am worried for him. Let me go, otherwise they’ll be worried. Gosh! It’s late now.

[Exeunt]

Scene 3

[Calcutta. Matilal Babu’s house. Enter Matilal and Gopinath]

Mati: On Saturday at 11:00 pm. I can’t be there, as you can understand, lest anyone should recognize me. Go in two groups. One group will attack at the main entrance. And the other group will go to the backside of the fellow’s house, place a ladder and leap over the boundary wall. There’s no need to do so much. But as you know, it’s better to be careful. And see that the four white fellows, whom I have appointed, go with you. Even if they don’t do anything, their mere presence is of immense benefit. The black Bengalis are much afraid of the white face.

Gopi: [aside] As if the master himself is as fair complexioned as the sahib! – Will they agree?

Mati: You fool! The British are such a race that you can buy the whole lot if you give money. It is only for money that they have sailed across the ocean and come to our country.

Gopi: Well, it’s enough if they agree.

Mati: Take spears, swords and sticks.

Gopi: What shall I give to the white fellows?

Mati: It would hardly matter even if you don’t give them anything. Each of them is an incarnation of the demon.
**Gopi**: But what if it becomes necessary?

**Mati**: If necessary, give them swords. But don’t give, unless it is urgent. They may attack you. They are such a mean race! You may go now. Meet me once tomorrow.

**Gopi**: OK.

[Exit Gopinath]

**Mati**: Let me fix the other matter too. Oh Dama?

**From backstage**: Yes.

**Mati**: Has the advocate arrived?

**From backstage**: Yes, he has come.

**Mati**: Send him here.

[Enter Biswambhar, the advocate]

**Mati**: How far is the case?

**Biswa**: On what grounds do you want to claim Sarat Datta’s property?

**Mati**: When Iswar Datta’s first wife, Sarat Datta’s mother, died, a match was fixed for the former with Ramasundari. But Iswar Datta was middle-aged and with two children. Ramasundari’s family was rich and didn’t approve of the match. But Iswar Datta felt greatly attracted towards Ramasundari and was eager to marry her. Her family consented only when he gave all his property to Ramasundari as a gift.

**Biswa**: How did he write it?

**Mati**: A deed of gift. ‘I do hereby declare that I gift all my property to Ramasundari and that neither I nor any of my successors will have any claim to it. She can gift or sell this property to anyone she likes’. It was like this.

**Biswa**: What after that?
Mati: Iswar Datta died about twelve or thirteen years after his marriage to Ramasundari. She didn’t have any children of her own. She was still young. Her beauty was in its full bloom.¹ With me —, well, you can understand what happened. People began talking about it. Ramasundari left her house in shame. She once went to her parents’ house and on her way back, got drowned in the Ganga.

Biswa: I understand. But the question that remains is on what grounds you claim her property.

Mati: You are practising law for so many years, and can’t you understand this much? We were close; do you understand what is being ‘close’? So she gifted her property to me.

Biswa: Merely saying this in the court won’t help.

Mati: Why, I can say in the court that she made this gift because I gave her shelter when she was homeless. Moreover it’s her own property and she can give it to whomever she pleases. I’ll be the witness.

Biswa: [aside] Mother Ganga² alone knows what evidence you’ll provide. [aloud] What do I mind? I’ll get money and keep the case running. — Why didn’t you go to court earlier?

Mati: I was busy attending various other business. Besides there was no need to hurry.

Biswa: Sir, much money is needed for the case. And a lot of time too.

Mati: *OK, I don’t mind.³ I’ll give any amount of money needed. Let it take as much time as is needed.

Biswa: I doubt as to whether even that will prove your point. But I’ll try my level best. You are my client since long. I can regard you as my client and also as my patron. Where is Sarat Babu now?
Mati: He’s a busybody staying mostly at Calcutta. Well, now I go, I’ve got loads of work. You file the case.

Biswa: As you please. See that there’s no dearth of aid.

[Exit Matilal]

Biswa: I don’t believe that Ramasundari has given him the property as a gift. He’ll bring some false witnesses. I hope he doesn’t take recourse to forgery. I can’t say whether he’ll be able to stand the cross-examining at the court. I’ll secretly inform Sarat Babu. I am sure there’ll be a shower on this side. Let me see if I can draw something from that side too. Crows and vultures have a great fun whenever there’s a war. [laughs]

[Exeunt]

Scene 4

[Rishra. Sarat babu’s house  Binay seated]

Binay: It’s been only a month that I am here, and I already begin to regard this as my own house. Everyone loves me. I’ve doubts as to whether one’s own sister can love as Sarojini loves me. Women are by nature soft-hearted. Those who haven’t seen Sarojini will be unable to understand what a beautiful shape a woman takes if she doesn’t get married in her childhood and is well educated. One can’t believe unless one sees with one’s own eyes. It will take long for the people to change their deep-seated prejudices. What’s my attitude towards Sarojini? Love, devotion and gratitude. But the magnet? That’s elsewhere! My heart is getting excited. [thinks with bowed head]

[Enter Sukumari]

Suku: [aside] He’s thinking. Let me make him discomfited. Nowadays he thinks like that day and night. [goes out and enters silently, goes behind Binay without his being aware and fires a cracker near his ears]
Binay: [startled and gets up hurriedly] What’s that? [embarrassed seeing Sukumari]
You?'

Suku: Did something scare you? God, the way you got up, I thought you must have seen
some ghost.

Binay: Doesn’t one get scared if a cracker is fired suddenly near the ear?

Suku: [in a voice feigning fright] Yes, look there’s a ghost under that tree. You won’t
believe, it is taller than a three-storied building and with hands as long as bamboos. And
once it sees someone, it tries to get hold of him like this, [shows] Never cross that place
alone after dusk or late at night. I am afraid; it may get hold of you someday.

Binay: [aside] Such a discomfiture!

Suku: Well, what were you thinking?

Binay: When?

Suku: When I came in.

Binay: What was I thinking? Something or the other.


Binay: Don’t you ever think?

Suku: Why, I don’t remember of ever thinking in my life.

Binay: Well, suppose your brother falls sick, won’t you be worried?

Suku: [worried] Why, has he fallen sick?

Binay: No. [sighs] I wish I were rich.

Suku: [very worried] Something is troubling you. I request you, please say what it is.
Have the servants disobeyed you? What’s the matter? Please tell it frankly.
Binay: [with tears in eyes] I’ve no such troubles because of Sarat Babu’s kindness and the compassion of the both of you. Here I am very happy.

Suku: Then tell me what bothers you. I am much worried.

Binay: What’s the use of your hearing it? Besides what do I think?

Suku: No, I want to hear. If brother comes to know that you have troubles here, he’ll be very angry with us.

Binay: Will you indeed listen to it?

Suku: Yes, spit it out. Besides I don’t like your formal way of addressing me.

Binay: OK, first listen to the story that I’ll narrate. A man named Dinanath lived in a village near Calcutta. He made some property out of business. He had only one little son named Narendra. Before his death, he left his son and his property in the care of a trusted friend. He said, ‘Brother, I leave my son under your care. Bring him up. When he grows up, give him my last blessings and the money that I leave behind’. [weeps] But that friend behaved like a base traitor. He misappropriated the property and drove Narendra out of the house when he grew up. The orphan boy went to many places and faced much adversity till he caught the attention of a kind-hearted person named Rames Babu. The latter kindly brought the boy to his house and started to love him as his own brother. But here was the cause of another misery for Narendra. Rames Babu had an unmarried sister named Swarnalata. Seeing her innocent heart and loving attitude, Narendra felt attracted towards her. He had never before fallen in love. This was his first love. His heart softened with love. But he couldn’t express his feelings. He was a poor destitute, while Swarnalata was the sister of a rich man. He couldn’t gather courage to speak of his love. At last death came to his rescue. [sighs]
Suku: Why didn’t he try mentioning it once? Why didn’t he tell this to Rames Babu?
How did he know that he who was kind and benevolent wouldn’t let his sister marry
unless the groom was rich? Do all count on money? Don’t they respect virtue?

Binay: Narendra didn’t have any special virtue. And suppose he had and even if Rames
Babu also gave his consent, what if Swamalata didn’t give hers?

Suku: [softly, with her head bowed] She might have given her consent, if her brother
agreed.

Binay: Do you really know? Are you sure?

Suku: How am I to know? I guess.

Binay: [sighs. Aside] Lost the hope at the moment of getting it!

Suku: What are you thinking again? And you didn’t tell me about your worries. You
merely told a story.

Binay: [looking at Sukumari’s face for a while, suddenly taking hold of her hand]

Sukumari –

[Enter a servant who is frightened. Binay lets go of Sukumari’s hand]

Binay: Why is your face so pale? What’s the matter?

Servant: Sir, I am trembling from fright. [trembles]

Binay: [anxiously] Why, what has happened?

Servant: Sir, when I was sitting on the steps of the main pond and smoking, a fat fellow,
as dark as night, rowdy, as abominable as the messenger of Yama¹ and with a thick stick
in hand came and asked me, ‘Does a man named Binay Babu stay here?’ I said yes. Then
that fellow again asked, ‘Did he come few days back? Is he boyish and slim?’ I said yes.
Then I asked, ‘Why are you looking for him?’ He didn’t reply, looked at me sternly and
went away. While going he said to himself, 'Hmm, the fellow’s end has arrived'. Sir, hearing this I got scared and came running to tell you.

**Suku:** [scared] What’s this? Do you have any enemy?

**Binay:** [aside] This must be some aide of that Matial, a devil in human form. I don’t know what evil plans he has. I am rather scared. – Come and show me which way that man went. You have nothing to fear, come. [to Sukumari] You go upstairs, I’ll come back soon.

**Suku:** Be careful, don’t fall into troubles.

**Binay:** No, don’t worry. You go upstairs.

**Suku:** Come soon.

[Exeunt]

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**Scene 5**

[Rishra. Zenana of Sarat Babu’s house. Sarojini is seated. Enter Becharam]

**Saroj:** You were supposed to come in the evening. Why did it take so long?

**Becha:** Sister, what to say! Sister, a man like babu wasn’t born before.

**Saroj:** [smiles] Why do you say so?

**Becha:** To come home, we left at 3:00 pm for Howrah. As the master was about to buy the ticket, he saw an old woman sitting and crying bitterly. He went to her and asked, ‘Why are you crying, dear?’ The woman said that she worked at somebody’s house in Calcutta. She was going to her village because she heard that her younger son was sick. She gave money to someone to buy the ticket for her. But the fellow ran away with it. She lost her money; the train also went away. She’s crying because she’ll be late in
reaching her village. The master then bought her a ticket and giving her all the loose change that he had said, ‘Buy medicine for your son with this money’. The woman was so happy that grasping the master’s feet she started crying and said, ‘Dear, you helped me a lot. Dear, may you have golden pen and ink-pot. Dear, may you live long’. What could master do? Saying, ‘Have you gone crazy; have you gone crazy’ he somehow managed to free his feet and ran away from that place. As he went, I could see a drop of tear in his eyes. – Why sister, there’s tears in your eyes too!

Saroj: [quickly wipes her eyes and smiles] Tears in my eyes! What happened after that?

Becha: What else could happen? I had a tough time in finding out the master. Seeing me he said, ‘Now we can’t go home. Let’s return to our lodging’. But the master’s wallet was absolutely empty. He didn’t have a single paisa with him. Luckily I had some coins in the fold of my loincloth. That saved us. We used it and returned to the lodging. After that we came here.

Saroj: Your brother is a wonder. We were so worried. But after coming here, where did he go?

Becha: He’s talking to Banamali Babu of Uttarpara. – Sister, when I was leaving for Calcutta, you told me that on my return you would tell me your story. Tell it now.

Saroj: [sighs] OK, I am saying. Our house was in the other locality. My father died when I was nine years old. Overcome with grief, my mother fell sick. My father had some debts and therefore the moneylenders began to trouble us. We were going through much difficulty. One day Sarat Babu came to meet my mother. He assured her and said, ‘Don’t be afraid. He who has put you in these straits will remove all your difficulties’. Before leaving, he called me outside and said, ‘Saroj, here are some papers. Give these to your
mother'. I came and gave her the papers. Seeing those, mother sat upright and said, ‘What’s this? Who gave these to you, Saroj?’ I said that Sarat Babu had given these.

Hearing this, my mother kept quiet for a while and then said, ‘Dear, Sarat Babu is no human being, he’s an angel. Go soon and find him out’. I ran to this house, but couldn’t meet him. I heard that he had left for Calcutta. When I returned home, my mother said, ‘Dear, Sarat Babu has repaid all our debts with his own money and has given us Rs. 100 in cash. We don’t have any more worries’. But my mother’s disease didn’t get cured.

[weeps] She called for Sarat Babu just before her death. When he came, she told him, ‘Dear Sarat, I am going. I leave behind Saroj; do take care of her. My daughter doesn’t have anyone else. Dear, I bless you, may you live happily forever’. [weeps] After sometime my mother died. She left this sinful world. Since then I am here. [sighs]

Becha: [wiping his eyes] Sister, you and the younger sister are above 15-16 years old. Why doesn’t the master get you married? People in the village discuss and reproach it.

[Sarojini blushes and bows her head]

Becha: Why don’t you answer, sister? Why are you feeling shy? I am nothing but a young boy. Why doesn’t he get you married?

[Enter Sarat]


[Sarojini stands up respectfully and Becharam runs away]

Saroj: Please come in. How are ‘you’? I We were talking about what made ‘you’ late and this and that.
Sarat: [lovingly] I hope you are fine. Gosh! You have grown so tall. I didn’t come home for six months and you have so grown up! At a casual look you don’t seem to be that Saroj!

Saroj: [laughs] Yes, I am fine. Please take ‘your’ seat.

Sarat: [surprised] What’s this, Saroj? Earlier you used to come running to me when I returned home. And now it seems you are standing at a distance and using the formal form of address while talking to me! Are you angry with me?

Saroj: [laughs] Angry with ‘you’!

Sarat: Again ‘you’! What’s the matter?


Sarat: Again? Again that formal form of address? I beg of you, Saroj, please tell me what the matter is.

Saroj: Please don’t speak like that. [with tears in eyes] I am living by ‘your’ grace. After mother’s death had ‘you’ not kindly given me shelter, I would have died by now for want of food. Does it befit ‘you’ to speak to me in such a language?

Sarat: I am leaving. I’ll go to Calcutta right now. [about to leave]

Saroj: What are ‘you’ doing? Why should ‘you’ go back to Calcutta? What will others say?

Sarat: How do I know what other people will say? I’ll go right now. I told you many times not to talk to me about your past. Regard me exactly as Sukumari does. Still you have to talk about that fifty years old story! Of course I’ll go. If any one questions me, I’ll say that I am leaving because Saroj quarrelled with me. [about to leave]
Saroj: [holding Sarat Babu’s hand] I am sorry, please forgive me. I shall never again talk about that. Don’t leave.

Sarat: [in a pained voice] Saroj, don’t you love me? Don’t you know that I feel hurt if you talk like that? And why are you using the formal form of address for me? You never before used it for me.

Saroj: Earlier I used the informal form because I didn’t know. Is there anything wrong in my using the formal form of address?

Sarat: Using the formal form of address makes one feel like an outsider. The informal form of address shows intimacy.

Saroj: Why, when children grow up, they use the formal form while addressing their parents. Does that make them outsiders?

Sarat: All that ‘you’ have said is indeed correct, just that it doesn’t go with my nature. Why do ‘you’ remain standing? Please take ‘your’ seat.

Saroj: [laughs] Now, what was that? ‘You’ change ‘your’ attitude all of a sudden!

Sarat: If you can use the formal form of address for me, why can’t I? – Saroj, there’s something worrying you. Tell me frankly what it is. I can’t think of anything. [thinks]

Saroj: [looks at Sarat’s face with yearning eyes, aside] Sarat, that you can’t understand why I am using the formal form of address for you is my woe.²

[Enter Sukumari]

Suku: [happily] Brother is here! When did you come, brother?

Sarat: [lovingly] I’ve just arrived. How are you?

Saroj: [laughs] Hadn’t you said, ‘When brother comes home, I won’t talk to him’?

From backstage: Raid by dacoits! Run! Run!
All: [anxiously] What’s this? What’s this?

[Enter Becharam and two servants]

Servants: Sir, dacoits have raided! Dacoits have raided!

Sarat, Saroj and Suku: What do you say?

1st Servant: Sir, don’t you know that there are many such raids by dacoits due to the famine in the country?

Sarat: I know nothing! I’ve just arrived. Raids by dacoits at a place so near the capital!

[to Sukumari] Where’s Binay?

Suku: I don’t know.

Sarat: Where did he go during such a crisis?

Suku: Brother, what’ll happen? [cries]

Sarat: You have nothing to fear. You won’t come to harm while I am alive.

[Noise from backstage. Sukumari and Sarojini hold each other’s hands]

Sarat: [takes a revolver from the almirah and loads it. To the servants] You have nothing to fear. Close all the doors of the room and stand against them, so that they can’t enter this room, firing their pistols. You have nothing to fear. Follow my instructions.

[The servants do likewise and tremble with fear]

From backstage: Place the ladder here! Hurry! – Climb, sir.

Servants: What’s that? Another group? They are climbing the ladder! Now we are done for. [screams]

Suku: Sister, I’m parched and feeling uneasy. Hold me.

Saroj: [wiping her eyes] God!
Sarat: Where's the other small pistol? – Here's it. [to one servant, after loading it] Here, can you fire this pistol? Look here, lift it like this and then pull this downwards...

2nd Servant: [cries and answers haltingly] Y-e-s.

Sarat: [angrily] I can well understand what you'll do from the time you take in answering. [anxiously] What shall I do? [placing the small pistol on the table] Let it remain here. Things will follow its course. [to Sarojini and Sukumari] You have nothing to fear. I can kill twenty dacoits with the bullets of these two pistols. Keep your composure. Everything will go wrong if you grow impatient.

[A lot of noise from backstage. Breaking a bay window Gopinath and some men with swords, etc. in hand, try to enter the house. Sarat fires. Gopinath severely injured, falls on the ground and dies. Other men run away]

Sarat: [takes Gopinath’s sword] This may be of help.

[advances and fires at the men]

From backstage: Run! Run! The fellows have ten or twelve revolvers. Run!

From backstage: *Damn cowards!

[Enter two Englishmen. Sarat’s pistol falls off his hand at the sudden stroke of their swords]

Sarat: [in a thunderous voice] Let the world see whether the slander that Bengalis are cowards is true or not. [attacks the both with his sword]

[One Englishman is killed. Sarat falls under the weight of the former’s body. He tries to get up. Sukumari cries, overcome with fear and grief]

2nd British: [stands on Sarat’s chest and pointing his sword at his neck] *I have you now, bloody nigger.³
Sarat: I may die. But the heaven remains witness to the fact that Bengalis are not cowards. Sarojini! Sukumari!

From backstage: The fellow is overpowered. Come! Come!

Saroj: I can’t bear any longer. I am a woman, but God, the deliverer of the helpless, will help me! There is no other respite from the hands of the demons in the form of the British. [takes the pistol lying on the table and shoots the second Englishman dead]

[The men re-enter. Sarat gets up and takes his sword]

Men: God! The fellow is on his feet once again!

[Hurriedly run away]

[Sarat is about to follow them]

Saroj and Suku: [taking hold of Sarat’s hand] They ran away. There’s no need of your chasing them.

Sarat: Saroj, you’ve saved my life. However we can talk about that later. Let me first go and see if everything is OK.

[Exit Sarat]

Saroj and Suku: Don’t go, don’t go! You might get into troubles.

[Exit, following Sarat]

[Sound of swords from backstage]

3rd Servant: [gets up and holding his head with both hands] See whether my head is severed by the stroke of the sword. [trembles]
Saroj: [looking at Sarat for a while, softly] I should not stay here any longer. If I continue to stay near you day and night, I might disclose my deepest feelings. In that case I won’t find any place to hide my face in shame and disgust. The more I stay near you, the more I see you, the more I feel like loving you. Sarat, at times I feel like ceasing my mental agony by unburdening my heart. But I can’t muster courage. I feel rather scared. Moreover how will it help me? Firstly, you’ve vowed never to marry. Besides I don’t have any special virtue that I may be able to attract your heart. I love you steadfastly. But there is more than heaven and earth difference between us. Your heart is the abode of kindness, affection and generosity. There’s none in the world who will not be charmed by your virtues. Mother had said, ‘Dear, Sarat Babu is an angel, he is never a human being’. Then I couldn’t comprehend those words, but now I can. And I, – well, who am I? Only an ordinary woman with a weak heart. There is nothing special that can make me worth your love. It’s not brotherly affection, - something else – something more. [sighs] What if I mention this and you get angry, – if you loathe me? No, I’ll rather keep my heart’s anguish to myself. [weeps] I am in a state of perpetual grief – I am condemned to agony since my birth. Who can be more miserable than one who has lost one’s parents? [wipes her tears] You won’t face any trouble if I leave now. Sukumari is here, she can nurse you. [rises – cries out] Beloved, O lord of my heart, I am going, never to return. I beg of the Lord to grant me only this – may I see you once before my death, may I die after seeing you happy. [moves away slightly]
Ragini Gara Bhairabi – Ta. Madhyaman

O god of my life – I am a beggar of your love

The drudgery of this life is worthless without my lover’s love

Alas, in the temple of my heart, my godly lover

Would I worship with a garland of love – this was all that I wanted

Shame and fear of being insulted stood against this wish

My heart rends – I can bear this no longer

Lord, today Sarojini will put on the dress of a nun

And roam about in different countries, gardens and mountain tops

Or in the water of the river

O lord, will I give up this worthless body of mine.

[checking her tears, looking towards the backstage] Becharam?

From backstage: Yes, sister.

Saroj: Do come here once.

[Enter Becharam]

Becha: How may I help you?

Saroj: The master is sleeping. Sit by his side.

Becha: As you please. [sits]

[Exit Sarojini after looking for a while at Sarat with tears in her eyes]

Becha: She’s indeed praiseworthy! This one month, since that day of the raid of the dacoits, when the master broke his leg in his effort to capture them, she has given up food and sleep. She’s busy throughout the day with his nursing. She doesn’t let anyone else do it; only the younger sister could do some nursing. And did she let her do it willingly?

Only at the insistence of the younger sister. She gets so worried if the master is in pain.
I've seen from hiding, she's crying because the master is sick. And she doesn't
continuously order us to do this or that. She does everything on her own. – The English
officers of the police station made such an issue of the raid of the dacoits!

**Sarat:** [waking up and looking around] Why, where are your sisters? Where have they
gone?

**Becha:** Sir, the elder sister has just left. I am calling her.

[Exit Becharam]

**Sarat:** Saroj is taking such pains for me, but her face doesn’t look fatigued. Always
cheerful. Cheerful even without food and sleep. When I was in much pain, I felt such a
relief once she came and sat by me. Woman’s heart is made of compassion and
tenderness. Others’ happiness is their happiness; others’ pain is their pain. They don’t
think about themselves. Perhaps I wouldn’t have survived had not Saroj taken so much
care this time. Not to mention the night of the raid cf the dacoits! – I am rather perturbed
these days. It hurts if I can’t see Saroj even for a moment. Why is it so? I am afraid¹ –
that I love Saroj. But that is brotherly love. Is there anything wrong in it? It’s not against
my convictions.² – Well, I’ve noticed these four or five days, whenever I look at her face,
Saroj blushes – and turns away. [pensive]

[Enter Becharara]

**Becha:** Why, I can’t see her anywhere!

**Sarat:** Go and search for her properly. She must be in some room or the other. Where
else can she go?

[Exit Becharam]
[Enter Sukumari, carrying a letter and crying]

**Suku:** Brother, what's this? Where did sister go? Have you offended her by saying something?

**Sarat:** [anxiously] Why, what's the matter? Where is she?

**Suku:** Listen. [reads the letter in a pained voice]

'Dear Sister,

I just can't say how much I am bound to you in gratitude. I am an orphan girl, bereft of my parents. But I did not know misery because of your affection and generosity. I shall never be able to forget you wherever I may be and as long as I am alive. Sister, don't take it otherwise, I am taking your leave for ever. Don't feel sad for me and don't make futile attempts of searching me. We shall never again meet in this world. I pray to God wholeheartedly, may all of you live happily forever. Sukumari, dear sister, it breaks my heart in leaving you. But I can't help it. Sukumari, at the end of the day, sometimes remember this unfortunate girl.

Woeful Saroj'

[weeping] She hasn't mentioned you once in the letter. Brother, did you happen to scold my sister? – Brother, I am so disturbed, I can't speak discreetly – please don't get angry.

[weeps]

**Sarat:** [wiping his eyes] Sukumari, have I ever spoken harshly to you? Sukumari, am I a beast?

[Enter Binay]

**Binay:** [anxiously] What's this? There's so much confusion in the house! Where did sister go?
Sarat: [in a pained voice] Brother, just see. [giving Sarojini’s letter]

Binay: [after reading the letter] What a disaster! What does this mean?

[Enter Becharam]

Becha: This letter has arrived by post.

[Exit Becharam, after giving the letter to Binay]

Binay: [reading the letter hurriedly] Now one more disaster! Nanda Babu has written that the magistrate of Anantapur has charged you of calumny.

Sarat: When and where will the hearing be held?

Binay: At Hooghly. It is after fourteen days.

[Re-enter Becharam]

Becha: Sir, here’s one more letter. The advocate has sent this.

Sarat: Let me see, let me see. [after reading the letter] One more charge! This is Matilal’s. The Saturday after this one.

Suku: All disasters have arrived here in unison. [weeps]

Binay: Such is the rule of the world. [sighs]

Sarat: Yes, it is indeed generally so. Sukumari, it is meaningless, completely futile to lament in the face of danger. Everybody’s life is a broad field of danger.

Suku: But brother, I can’t bear this. I am worried for sister. [weeps bitterly]

Sarat: [to Becharam] You go and bring the sarkar babu.

[Exit Becharam]

Sarat: [to Sukumari] Sukumari, bring Saroj’s picture that is in your room.

[Exit Sukumari]
Sarat: [rising soon, to Binay] Binay, you remain here. Take care of Sukumari. You and the sarkar discuss amongst yourselves and do whatever you can about the lawsuit. I am anxious for Saroj, I am leaving in her search. [about to leave]

Binay: How can the case proceed in your absence? You have to be present at least on the day of hearing.

Sarat: I shall return before that. Look after Sukumari; see so that she doesn’t cry. I sent her off on the pretext of bringing the picture, because she won’t let me go.

[Exit Sarat]

Binay: I say –

[Re-enter Sukumari]

Suku: Brother? Brother, where have you gone? Brother?

[Exit, weeping]

Scene 2

[Rishra. Garden with the pond adjoining Sarat Babu’s outhouse. Enter Matilal and four fighters with sticks in the guise of old women]

Mati: [aside] After staying in this world for so many days, whether or not I have learnt anything else, this much at least I have thoroughly learnt that one should not lose one’s enthusiasm after a failure. Besides, there’s nothing in the world that can’t be accomplished with money and effort. If one makes up one’s mind to be successful, one is bound to be so. And there’s nothing like it if one happens to be Fortune’s favourite. It is indeed a matter of great regret that the fellow Gupe kicked the bucket as soon as the job began. The fellow was much experienced in these assignments. – However it must be
admitted that it was rather good that he died. The fellow knew many of my secrets. That time I had a good escape – from being ruined in wealth, life and prestige. All of it passed over Gupe and a few fellows. I was under the impression that the fellow Sarat was a book worm of these days. Who ever knew that he could fire the pistol? The fellow had to be at home at that very time! Nothing but a piece of bad luck! But I too have brought rifle today. This time the plan has to be executed carefully.

A burnt child dreads the fire. The lawsuit that I have forged will soon make the fellow a pauper and then he will be under my control. You can’t tame a snake till you extract its poison-fangs. Money itself is man’s poison-fang. You can toy with the poor as you wish. – [to the fighters] Do it carefully. Just as I have instructed. It would be dangerous should you get caught. Do you remember what you have to say?

Fighters: We have had dress rehearsal. You don’t have to teach us anymore. – ‘Glory to God! May I have some alms, mother?’

[Noise at the backstage]

Mati: Quiet! What noise was that?

1st Fighter: I’ll go and see.

[Leaves the stage and returns soon]

1st Fighter: Sir, it’s something very interesting. The elder girl has eloped with a fellow barber and Sarat Datta himself is out to get hold of them and bring them back.

Mati: Is it true? This is the most formidable good fortune!

1st Fighter: Tell me what reward you will give. I’ve brought such good news.

Mati: Of course. The barber fellow will have a great time! What’s that noise?

1st Fighter: Chaos is reigning in the fellow’s house. The noise comes from there.
Mati: Look, aren't three people coming this way? Here, arrange the dress, soon! [to one fighter] You fellow, lower your headdress. [to another fighter] You bugger, you're sporting a tail! I've to work with such fools!

[Enter Sukumari, Bhagabon and Binay]

Suku: [to Bhagaban] Did you hear anything about brother? Which way did he take?

Bhag: No, mother.

Suku: Sister's?

Bhag: No, mother, — I didn’t get any news about her too.

Suku: [to Binay] Why didn’t you call me when brother was leaving?

Binay: I was stupefied at that moment. I’ve never seen such a succession of disasters.

Bhag: Mother, why do you worry? Mother Jagadamba will protect.  

Suku: First sister left, then brother left. Besides, there are two serious lawsuits. I wonder what more lies in store for us in the future.

Bhag: You should not invite disasters in this way, mother — it brings misfortune. What fear? What is there to cause fear? All the villagers are on our side. They are feeling sad for the master.

Binay: [to Sukumari] It’s night now, go to bed.

Fighters: [coming forward] Glory to God! May we have some alms, mother?

Bhag: [surprised] Why do you ask for alms at this late hour, dear? Come tomorrow morning.

Fighters: [in a voice choked with tears] We haven’t had any food since the last three days. Give us something to eat, dear. Goddess Lakshmi will bless you with wealth and sons, dear.
Suku: OK, come with me, dear, I’ll give you. [comes forward]

Mati: [aside] I beg for the nectar of your body, pretty woman.

Bhag: Why do you come so close, woman? Can’t you see the way?

Fighters: Glory to God!

[Sukumari, Binay and Bhagaban are suddenly attacked, gagged and firmly bound]

Mati: That’s all. None should make a sound. Each of you should take different routes. They should not be able to make out which way you took. I’ll dispatch the spoils in a boat to Bhagalpur.¹⁰

[Exeunt]

Scene 3

[A valley near Rajmahal.¹ Enter Sarat Babu on horseback]

Sarat: What a lovely scene! Never before have I seen hills. What a difference between pictures and reality! Hills as dark as midnight in front, verdant fields on all sides, tall trees here and there, a small river at a distance — just like a silver screen. There is no sign of human habitation. — Spontaneously it brings such an ineffable joy. Even if for a while, it soothes the heart of the most wretched. [sighs] But my heart won’t calm down — it is burning with remorse. Just before her death, Saroj’s mother entrusted me with her guardianship. Suppose — though it is impossible — suppose she should come to me now and ask, ‘Traitor, where is my Saroj?’ What can I answer? — I’ve searched so many places; I searched so hard but couldn’t find Saroj. I learnt that she has an uncle working at Rajmahal. I thought she might have come here. But I’ve failed in my attempt. She doesn’t have any acquaintance here. [looking behind] Where did the groom go? — Jakhu?
[Enter Jakhu]

Jakhu: *Your slave, my lord!

Sarat: *Where were you?

Jakhu: *I was just returning, sir. What’s your order, sir?

Sarat: *Take the horse to the stable. It’s quiet cold now. I’ll return later by foot.

Jakhu: *As you please, sir.

[Exit with horse]

Sarat: Let me sit on this grass. [sits] At times I worry for Sukumari. But, why? Binay is there!

From backstage: Give a paisa to the blind; sir, give a paisa to the blind.

Sarat: What’s this?

[Enter a blind Muslim]

Blind: Give a paisa to the blind, sir. Allah will be kind to you.

[Absent-mindedly, Sarat about to give money. In the meanwhile, the blind opens his eyes and hits Sarat on his head with a club. Sarat falls, unconscious. Enter four Muslims.]

1st Muslim: Hurry up! This is a big prey. Has much money.

[Removes grass from a spot to reveal a secret entrance and the Muslims, except the first-mentioned one, enter through it with Sarat. The former closes the entrance and covers it with grass.]

1st Muslim: Give a paisa to the blind; sir, give a paisa to the blind. Allah! Allah! None gives a paisa to the blind, Allah!

[Exeunt]
Scene 4

[Underground chamber, below the valley of Rajmahal. Sarat is unconscious. Aamir Khan and four Muslims are seated]

Sarat: [regaining consciousness] Where have you brought me? Where am I?

Aamir: You don't have to worry; you are in an excellent place.

Sarat: Why have I been brought here?

Aamir: I'll say. First, answer my question. Are you happy under the British rule?

Sarat: This question comes as a surprise! What does it mean? [aside] A Muslim speaking sensibly!

Aamir: Well, first give the answer. You'll know the reason later.

Sarat: How can I answer when I don't know the motive behind the question? All kingdoms have their share of happiness and misery.

Aamir: That's true. But there's a difference in their proportions. Are you happy now as you were in the days of rulers like Akbar?

Sarat: There were indeed some Muslim emperors who are ever memorable. But most of them were highly voluptuous, autocrats and tyrants. I won't wish for another rule by the Muslims.

Aamir: [sarcastically] All the Englishmen are continent – harmless lambs!

Sarat: I don't mean that. But there was no limit to the Muslims' autocracy. The autocracy of the English is somewhat – though only slightly – bound by civilization.

Aamir: Don't you know that from time to time the Englishmen have recourse to severe tyranny? Or are you reluctant to admit it?

Sarat: None of the two.
Aamir: Won't you be happy if your country attains freedom?

Sarat: Is it at all worth asking?

Aamir: Will you actively support those who are trying to bring freedom to your country?

Sarat: [aside] I feel rather curious. I want to know everything in details. – That I can’t say now. Is someone trying to do so?

Aamir: Yes. This is going on since many days. This is the meeting place of the conspirators. You can see how many revolvers and other weapons we have amassed.

Sarat: [smiling] Will you be successful in driving away the lions in the form of the English with only these?

Aamir: A tree doesn’t bend with the weight of its fruits in one day.

Sarat: Why have you brought me here?

Aamir: Listen. The infidels\(^3\) have plundered us of our belongings. We are taking our stolen money with interest from their rich, loyal subjects. As soon as enough money is gathered, play with gunpowder will begin. You have to give four thousand rupees.

Sarat: What if I don’t?

Aamir: You will be converted to Islam.

Sarat: If I don’t get converted?

Aamir: Your wife will be widowed.

Sarat: [smiling] Please listen to what I say. Your efforts are in vain. You’ll never be successful. The cowards of our country are not yet eager for freedom. It is indeed a matter of doubt whether we’ll be able to preserve the freedom for long if we happen to attain it. And none will agree to accept your slavery in the name of freedom. You discard this conspiracy. I promise, I shall not reveal this secret plan of yours to the rulers.
Aamir: [laughing] That’s something to be decided later. Do you agree to give the money?

Sarat: But I don’t have money with me.

Aamir: It would suffice if you give in writing that you would give us four thousand rupees.

Sarat: What if I reveal everything about you?

Aamir: [laughing] Where’s the harm? Can you provide any proof?

Sarat: This room of yours.

Aamir: [smiling] Do you know where it is?

Sarat: No, that I don’t know. You’ve brought me here in an unconscious state. But I can give it a try.


Sarat: Why?

Aamir: They came in an unconscious state; they left in an unconscious state.

Sarat: I can understand coming in an unconscious state – it happened in my case. But how did they leave in an unconscious state?

Aamir: Alcohol and opium.

Sarat: [aside] Such annoyance! I wish I can deceive them and get hold of a revolver. — How did you learn such fluent Bengali?

Aamir: By your grace, the slave has mastered many languages.⁴

Sarat: [suddenly rising and placing the nozzle of the revolver on gunpowder] You can see, the revolver is ready. Now promise by the Quran to set me free. Otherwise permit me to set the gunpowder on fire; let all of us bodily go to heaven. All in the house.
[A Muslim enters from behind and hits Sarat hard on his right shoulder. The revolver falls off Sarat’s hand and his hands are bound by a rope]

Aamir: Sir, it would have been very good had you joined our group. I’ve seen few Bengalis as clever and brave as you are. Please forgive us, we are doing our duty. You will remain imprisoned as long as your strength isn’t diminished. Without food. [signals his companions and they remove two or three wooden planks and throw Sarat into the pit thus exposed]

Sarat: [from inside] It is very dark here. Don’t give me food, if you so wish. But give me a lamp. Sir, cockroaches, scorpions and lizards are walking over me. Give me a lamp.

Aamir: Do you agree to give the money?

Sarat: [loudly] No, ten thousand times no. I am no coward. If somehow I escape from this hell, you’ll get a proper punishment. Remember that!

Aamir: [laughing] OK!

[Exeunt]

Scene 5

[Salkia. A house with an extensive garden. Four boozers are seated]

[Boozers’ song]

Ragini Pilu – Tal Posta

Is there any other treasure as wine in this world

Many virtues are needed to know the worth of wine

Worship of something earns merely gold and silver

Praying to the goddess of wine one can immediately enjoy the bliss of heaven
If you want immediate deliverance, deeply revere wine
This is the tenet of the New Doctrine – who can refute this
All the haters of wine who speak much against it
Secretly indulge in wine and go to hell for this sin.

1st Boozer: It's enough, dear. Give me a glass, dear, let me whet my throat.
2nd Boozer: You bugger, you've drowned two bottles today. Won't you get knocked
down if you have more?

1st Boozer: Why don't you mind your own business, dear? Two or three bottles won't get
me drowned, dear. It's long since I've learnt swimming. Don't be afraid, dear, your sister
won't get widowed.

3rd Boozer: And how does it matter even if she is? Nowadays widows are getting
married, dear.

[All drink alcohol. Enter Sarojini, not far from the boozers]

Saroj: I can't walk any longer today. My legs are aching. – How far can uncle's² house
be from this place? – I wonder whether they'll be able to recognize me. He isn't directly
related, and moreover we haven't been in touch since my childhood. [looks at the sky]
It's beginning to cloud over! [lightning and peal of thunder] Ah, ears can't stand this roar.
[worriedly] Where shall I go? – There's light over there, let me see if I can find some
place to stand there. [advances, frightened] Help! These are drunkards!

[Exit, hurriedly]

4th Boozer: Ah, here's a girl!

2nd Boozer: Oh, that's true! Young and beautiful!³

1st Boozer: She's running away even before our coming! Hold! Hold!
All: Thief is running away! Hold! Hold!

[Exit all. Re-enter with Sarojini as a captive]

1st Boozer: Why are you scared, pretty woman? Why were you running away?

2nd Boozer: [taking a glass of alcohol] Shall I give some alcohol to your lotus like lips, pretty woman?

3rd Boozer: [snatching the glass away] Can’t you wait, you bugger? Don’t you see that she’s a girl from a respectable family? Why such intemperance?

Saroj: [aside] God! This is my punishment for leaving without telling them.

1st Boozer: All of you, leave this place. She’s feeling scared.

3rd Boozer: Really? What a joke! He’s an eager beaver!

1st Boozer: No, not so. [whispers]

3rd Boozer: Yes, that’s true! Don’t deceive, dear. You’ve studied in Nitibodh, dear, that deception is a serious sin.

[Exit all, except the 1st Boozer and Sarojini]

Boozer: Why are you scared, beloved? I am not yet married. I’ll marry you. I promise, I’ll marry you – and love you dearly. Why are you scared? Where are you coming from, pretty woman?

Saroj: I am coming from a very distant place. I am very hungry. Could you bring me some food?

Boozer: Can’t I do this much, pretty woman? What would you like to have, beloved?

Saroj: Anything. [after thinking for a while] I am rather fond of papaya. Could you bring me one?
Boozer: Why one, I can bring twenty. The gardener fellow has picked all the papayas today. What else can I give you, beloved?

Saroj: Then kindly give me some food and two papayas. And I don't eat fruits skinned by others — I don't feel like eating those. Could you kindly bring me a knife fixed on a piece of wood?6

Boozer: This is a pleasure-house. Here you won't find large knives fixed on wood, pretty woman. But there are knives. When we five friends enjoy ourselves, we can't wait till uncorking the bottle with a corkscrew. We crack the bottle with the handle of the knife — like this. [gesticulates] Shall I bring that knife?

Saroj: Why, bring it. Where's the problem?

Boozer: Would you like some alcohol, beloved?

Saroj: First bring the food, and then I'll say.

[Exit Boozer and re-enter with knife, food, papaya, etc.]

Boozer: Here you are, pretty woman. I've brought all that you've asked for.

Saroj: Now kindly leave this place. I feel shy eating in front of men.

Boozer: Now you are being cruel, young woman. Will you eat everything without giving some leftover to this slave,7 pretty woman?

Saroj: No, I feel shy. Please leave this place. I'll finish eating soon.

Boozer: OK, pretty woman, as you wish. You must do whatever a woman wishes, even if you've to lay down your life.8 OK, beloved, I am leaving. Have the food.

[Exit Boozer and the sound of bolting the door by Sarojini]

Boozer from backstage: What's that, pretty woman? Why do you bolt the door?
Saroj: Oh, that’s nothing. I am bolting the door to prevent someone coming in before I finish my food and thus having me leave it unfinished. Please leave the place; I’ll finish it off soon.

Boozer from backstage: Don’t be afraid, pretty woman. None will disturb you while you are eating. I love you dearly, young woman. Kindly keep some leftover for this slave.9

Saroj: [taking the knife] There isn’t even time to repent. Sarat, I feel sorry because I couldn’t see you before my death. Mother, here goes your miserable daughter. I know it’s a sin to commit suicide. But a woman’s chastity is more important than her life – much more important. The less important one has to be sacrificed for the cause of the greater one. God, forgive this foolish girl’s sin. [crying] Sarat, I loved you dearly. I can’t say how much I loved you. If I could see you once – even for a moment! – What’s the use of grieving? [sighs, wiping her eyes] See, you barbarous, basest, cruel boozers10 – see how the papaya is eaten – see the fluttering flag of your achievement. [slits her throat and falls down. Lightning and thunder].11

ACT VI

Scene 1

[The hills near Rajmahal. Enter Haridas Babu with some porters.1]

Hari: In the past this area was under the ocean. Therefore in one layer or the other of this soil, I might find skeletons of sea animals. I am here only for this search. [to the porters] Dig the ground. If you find any piece of bone, bring it to me.
1st Porter: Here is one piece of bone.

Hari: [takes] This is the bone of a finger. It doesn't seem to be that of a human. Well, I'll take it to Calcutta and examine it thoroughly. Keep digging.

2nd Porter: Something seems to be under this part. Sir, should I dig?

Hari: Yes, dig! See what's lying in there.

2nd Porter: Sir, here's a huge stone.

Hari: Two or three of you join hands to remove it.

[Porters do as instructed]

From inside: What's this? From where is the light coming?

Porters: [frightened] What is that speaking?

From inside: I see, this is sun light! Now this ordeal seems to be over! I was almost dead.

[Sarat tries to come out of the dungeon]

Porters: [frightened] Here's a ghost coming out of the ground. Look how huge its head is. Run! Run! [Porters run away]

Hari: [with mixed feelings of fear and curiosity] Did the rotation of the earth create a new type of organism under the soil? If it is indeed so, I shall be remembered forever for making this discovery. -- But it would be wise to maintain distance. It might be a ferocious beast. Should I forsake my precious life for the sake of science? [steps back]

Sarat: [coming out] Ah, after so many days -- Why, I see a man! Sir --

Hari: [frightened and going a few more steps back] My death! It talks like humans. Beware, don't come close!
Sarat: [happily] Why, here's Haridas Babu! Can't you recognize me?

Hari: He talks quite well! Is that a human? No, one or two evidences should not convince me. It goes against the rules of logic. His limbs seem to be longer than those of humans. Whether or not he is sporting a tail will prove it. Turn around; I want to see whether 'you' have a tail.

Sarat: Have you gone crazy? I am Saratkumar Datta. Can't you recognize me?

Hari: Mercy on me! Why does he come forward? [takes a few steps back] Beware, I tell you. He talks like Bengalis. If he happens to be a human, he must know the Bengali alphabet. Well, recite the Bengali alphabet.

Sarat: Such a pain in the neck! ‘ka kha ga gha uo cha chha ja jha io’

Hari: Okay, that will do. Slyly I had a look at his teeth. The teeth are exactly like those of humans. [coming a few steps forward] ‘You' won't bite me, will 'you'?

Sarat: I shall munch your head.

Hari: Bless my heart! To hell with science!

[Runs away]

Sarat: O Haridas Babu! Listen! Listen! I won't bite you. [Re-enter Haridas]

Sarat: Have you gone mad?

Hari: I will believe 'you' only if 'you' can say something of the past.

Sarat: You had presented a paper titled 'Man has evolved from apes' at a session of the Society for Spreading the Light of Science. [aside] It is indeed beyond doubt that at least you have so evolved.
Hari: Okay, it’s enough. You are indeed Sarat Babu. [dejectedly] But you have caused me much harm. I had made a great discovery regarding your existence. Be that as it may. Why were you in here?

Sarat: I had been taken captive by some evil Muslims. I’ll tell you about that later. What about the state of my house?

Hari: Very miserable. Matilal in possession of your property, the death of your sister and Binay Babu and an arrest warrant in your name for absenting yourself on the date of hearing for the charge of calumny against the magistrate of Anantapur.

Sarat: So well entertained! Such glad tidings! What about the case regarding insurgency?

Hari: You’ve been implicated only for the calumny against the magistrate.

Sarat: Was it at Hooghly?

Hari: Yes.

Sarat: Could Sarojini be traced?

Hari: I don’t know – I don’t think so.

Sarat: What did you say about my sister?

Hari: Dead. It’s a rumour. Matilal has taken her a hostage and kept her somewhere.

Sarat: What do you say?

[Exeunt]

Scene 2

[Anarpur. A room in Matilal Babu’s house. Binay is bound in chain. Matilal is standing near him]

Mati: Only two things can save you.¹
Binay: What?

Mati: First, ‘you’ve’ to write that ‘you’ have gifted me ‘your’ entire property.

Binay: Well, I agree. If I can live, I can maintain myself. What’s the other thing to be done?

Mati: And, ‘you’ve’ to write a letter to ‘your’ mother, that is, to my wife, backdated to the last month, saying that ‘you’ harbour doubts regarding Sarat Babu’s sister.²

Binay: [angrily] Having doubts regarding Sukumari, the personification of innocence and purity? Didn’t ‘your’³ tongue fall off while uttering this?⁴ – How will this help ‘you’?

Mati: [angrily] This is my gain. In the British legal system, there’s much difference between kidnapping an innocent girl and one who is secretly in love.⁵

Binay: [aside] Had I not been bound in chains, I would have smashed his head. – I shall never write this even in the face of death.

Mati: [angrily] ‘You’ have two write both of these. [grinding his teeth] If ‘you’ don’t, I’ll kill you right now.⁶

Binay: [furiously] You base! You infernal, don’t think that just because ‘you’ve’ enchained me, my integrity is in ‘your’ control – or will ever be. And ‘you’ know quite well that Sarat Babu will avenge this torture.

Mati: [smiling] Do you know where ‘your’ Sarat Babu is?

Binay: Where?

Mati: In the prison. He had escaped to Rajmahal or some place; the government has arrested him from there.

Binay: Isn’t there any attempt to have him released?
Mati: Does he have any money that people will fight for him? I've completely ruined him.

Binay: Where's Sukumari?

Mati: How does that bother 'you'? First look after 'yourself' and then think about others. Time is simply being wasted. Now tell me whether 'you'll' do what I want.

Binay: Never. Bengalis may be a race of cowards; but they are not ungrateful. They can face all adversities for the sake of their benefactor. Shall I slander against the sister of that Sarat Babu who saved my life in the face of danger? And that too no ordinary slander, the slander of being unchaste? Is everyone Matilal De?

Mati: 'You' wicked! [placing his right foot on Binay’s chest] Tell me whether 'you'll' write. I can kill 'you' right now. Tell me whether 'you'll' put your signature.

[Bhubanmohini in disguise rushes in, hits Matilal who falls on the ground, while she leaves]

Mati: [frightened] Oh, my! Oh, my! What was that? [rising, aside] I shouldn’t express my fear. – Put ‘your’ signature right now, otherwise I say it won’t help ‘you’. Even now I tell ‘you’.

[Knock at the door]

Mati: What’s that? Who’s there?

[Again knock at the door]

Mati: Well, who’s there? Why doesn’t he reply?

From backstage: I am the gate-keeper.

Mati: What do you want?

From backstage: A letter, sir.
Matt: Keep it in the drawing room.

From backstage: The bearer has said that it should be read and your reply be given immediately. Otherwise you'll come to harm.

Mati: Such a botheration!

[Exit]

Binay: I don’t have any hope. Sarat Babu’s property is with Matilal, he himself is in the prison, sister and Sukumari are missing. [sighs] I am more worried for them.

[Re-enter Matilal with letter]

Mati: Who may have written this letter? I can’t make out anything. Let me open it.
[shakes after reading only two lines of the letter] Good gracious! Had got drowned in the Ganga! Now I’m undone! I’m lost! What shall I do?

[Shakes and exit]

Binay: What new drama is this? Things seem to turn for the better. But I can’t understand how things are happening!

[Re-enter Bhubanmohini]

Bhuban: He forgot to lock the door. I’ll remove your chains. [tries removing the chain. Striking her head with her hand] My, my! What a chain! It’s locked. Well, don’t get scared. I’ll rescue you by any means. [about to leave]

Binay: Listen to me, listen to me. Have you been able to find out the whereabouts of Sukumari?

Bhuban: Yes. Not a single strand of her hair will come to harm. There’s nothing to fear.

[Exit]
[Re-enter Matilal]

**Mati:** I can’t leave ‘you’ in this room. Move, move into the inner room.

**Binay:** My hands and legs are tied up. How can I go?

**Mati:** Don’t ‘you’ know how ‘you’ can move while bound up? See.

[Exit, kicking Binay and making him roll]

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**Scene 3**

[Rishra. A small house. Enter a woman and a boy]

**Boy:** Mother, I am feeling shy to go in this dress.

**Woman:** [smiling] After making an endeavour you can’t shy away. After coming this far, you can’t afford feeling shy. It is only for you that I’ve come this far. You –

**Boy:** [ashamedly] Don’t make me feel more ashamed, mother. How further are we to go?

**Woman:** I guess we can find a lodging here itself. Is there anyone in this house?

[Enter Bhubanmohini]

**Bhuban:** [happily] Here you are!

**Woman:** [gesticulating at Bhubanmohini] We want to stay here for a few days. Where can we find a room on rent? [again gesticulates]

**Bhuban:** Yes, why won’t you get it? But the rent should be paid in advance. That’s because I don’t know you, dear.

**Boy:** [aside, to woman] Mother, see that the rent is not high. I don’t have much money.

**Woman:** First show me the room; we can negotiate the rent later.

**Bhuban:** Well, come with me. I’ll show you the rocm.
Woman: [aside, to Bhubanmohini] She doesn’t know you. Had she known, she wouldn’t have come. Has Bhagaban arrived?

Bhuban: [aside] He has arrived.

[Everyone leave the stage. After some time, the woman re-enters with Bhagaban]

Bhag: You have to say who that boy is.

Woman: You’ll know that later. Don’t try to find it out at this moment. There’s a reason.

Bhag: It seems I’ve seen the boy somewhere. How is he related to you?

Woman: He’s not related to me. The boy is very good. Once I happened to help him and since then he addresses me ‘mother’. Let us leave this for the moment. What about things here? Are the papers ready?

Bhag: Yes.

Woman: Sarat?

Bhag: In the prison.

Woman: I say has any appeal been placed at Calcutta?

Bhag: The day I got your letter. Besides, the press is fighting for him. It will be settled within a day or two. The lawyers are hopeful. They are saying that at most he’ll be fined Rs. 1000 and set free. He brought about his own misfortune. At that time he could have simply admitted his fault. Instead he said, ‘Even if I’ve to give up my life in my attempts to rescue my distressed countrymen from the torture of the whites, I’ll do so’.

Woman: See so that Sarat doesn’t come to know even slightly that I am also involved in this. Spread the rumour that some of his friends have raised a fund and are paying for the legal proceedings.

Bhag: As you please, ma’am.
Woman: Has Matilal been called?

Bhag: He’ll be coming at any moment. Such a letter has been written that he can’t help coming.

Woman: He’s taking time. Send someone once again.

[Exit Bhagaban]

Woman: It’s a difficult game. [thinks seriously]

[Enter Matilal]

Mati: [haltingly] Why – have you – have you– asked me [shakes]

Woman: [angrily] You black sheep, ungrateful, base, ‘you’5 dare to ask me why I called ‘you’?

Mati: [haltingly] I thought – I thought – you – Ganga [shakes]

Rama: ‘You’ thought I was drowned in the Ganga?

[Re-enter Bhagaban]

Rama: [to Bhagaban] Bring the papers.

Bhag: Here they are.

Rama: [to Matilal] Put ‘your’ signature.

Mati: What am I to sign? What’s written in it?

Bhag: It is written, ‘Mrs. Ramasundari Thakrani had never gifted her property to me, not even a paisa. The deed of gift with her signature on it that I had produced at the court was forged. I have made false allegations against Sarat Babu and harmed him’.

Mati: Sarat had hounded you out of the house. Why are you taking trouble for him?

Rama: Sarat didn’t drive me out. I left willingly. [to Bhagaban] Read the other paper.
Bhag: [reads] 'The charge of being unchaste, made against Mrs. Ramasundari Thakrani is unfounded and baseless. Since childhood, she and Bhubanmohini were friends and they loved each other. Bhubanmohini was seriously ill in 1278 B.S. At that time, for the sake of their earlier friendship and good relation, Ramasundari went to her for four days. This is the source of the charge. It does not have any other reason. Even the shadow of sin has never fallen upon her chaste body'.

Rama: Put 'your' signature.

Mati: [aside] Let me try my luck. This is my last chance. – What if I don’t put my signature? I can of course get hold of witnesses.

Rama: False witnesses?

Mati: Well, there’s no point in quarrelling over a word. If you call my witness a false one, I don’t mind. My point will be proved. It’s enough if the rat be captured, what matters if the cat be wooden?

Rama: How will ‘you’ stop Bhubanmohini speaking out?

Mati: She loves me. Besides, she’s a woman of ill repute; who’ll ever believe her? I am enjoying her for the last four years.

Rama: [somehow suppressing her anger] And ‘your’ wife’s?

Mati: She’s a very devoted wife. She won’t speak out against her husband.

Rama: Will she ruin me?

Mati: Where’s the harm in it? Hindu wives can do anything for their husbands. She’s not a modern girl of these days.6 Neither is she a wife married by the Act III,7 nor is she the ‘Banakusum’ of Abalabandhab Babu.8

Rama: Bhagaban, are the guards at the door?
Bhag: There are two.

Rama: Leave this sinful in the custody of one and tell the other to inform at the police station.


Rama: You base louse, I have forgiven ‘you’ for long. The earth can no longer bear ‘your’ weight. [rising] Don’t ‘you’ remember that while my husband was alive, ‘you’ had forged his signature and only your wife’s tears had made me save you? I have those papers even today. Once again –

Mati: [holding Ramasundari’s feet] Mother, you are my mother. Save me this time. I couldn’t understand. I’ll do all that you ask me to do.

Rama: Well, then put ‘your’ signature.

[Matilal signs]

Mati: Now what if Sarat makes a charge against me?

Rama: I’ll see to it that he doesn’t do so. I don’t want to see ‘your’ face any longer. Leave this place.

Mati: [aside] Well, I’ll avenge this.

[Rama: Keep these two papers safely. As soon as Sarat is released, give the first paper to him. And give the other one to me.]

Bhag: No, let remain with me.

[Exit Bhagaban]

[Re-enter Bhubanmohini]

Bhuban: [worriedly] What did you do, sister? Why did you let him go?
Rama: Why? Why?

Bhuban: He has taken Sukumari and Binay captive.

Rama: Oh my, I didn’t know! You never mentioned this to me.

Bhuban: When did I get the time to tell you?

Rama: Now what’s the way out?


You inform the police. He’ll murder today. I know him quite well.

Rama: Come, let’s go. I am feeling trepidation.

[Exeunt]

Scene 4

[The zenana of Matilal Babu’s house. Binay bound in chain]

Binay: Since the last few days he’s making it apparent that he’ll kill me. I wish he kills me at once. I can’t bear this any longer.

[Enter Matilal with a kris]

Mati: I must avenge this insult. I’ve locked all the doors. I’ll do what I’ve got to do and escape somewhere. What can’t money do? I’ll shower money with both hands. How else is Nanasaheb living even today? [to Binay] Can ‘you’ sing?

Binay: [surprised] Why?

Mati: Sing. ‘You’ll’ go to the heaven while you sing. Today is ‘your’ last day on earth.

Binay: Kill me; kill me at once instead of thus tormenting me. It would do good to remember that the fruits of the good deeds have to be tasted, whether here, or somewhere else.
Matilal: Then here it is. [about to strike] No, wait; see that and die. When I am set to do it; I’ll do it in style. Let this kris remain here.

[Exit and re-enter with Sukumari]

Suku: Binay, you are here! [crying] Binay, save me! Binay, save me! [to Matilal] Please forgive me, please leave me!

Matilal: [laughing] Can I leave you, pretty woman? I wanted to marry you; I pleaded with you so long, but you didn’t consent. I’ll drink your nectar. [tries to kiss Sukumari]

Suku: Isn’t anyone here to save me? [hits Matilal, who falls on the ground]

Matilal: [rising] You swine! [attacks Sukumari]

Binay: [raising his voice] You base! Anyone here, come soon. A woman’s modesty is being outraged. [tries to break the chains]

[Enter Bhubanmohini, locking fierce]

Bhuban: [seeing the kris] Oh, blessed is my birth today! [hits Matilal with the kris] Have you forgotten that the red door on the east can be opened from outside? [hits Matilal again and again. Sukumari and Binay faint. Matilal falls unconscious due to excessive bleeding]

Bhuban: [laughs frantically with the kris in her hand and her body shakes] What a pleasure! Now all of you see another act of pleasure! [strikes the kris at her chest, falls and dies]

[Matilal regains consciousness and cries out in pain. Enter Bindubasini, worriedly]

Bindu: Oh my! [weep] I am shattered! Is this why you wanted me to go to that house? [cries]

Matilal: I am in acute pain. I can’t speak. I am dying; am dying.
Bindu: [weeping] Don’t speak like that; it rends my heart. You will live; of course, you will live. I’ll perform religious services for your recovery.² I’ll have you examined by a competent doctor. Of course, you shall live.

Mati: Have you gone mad? Can’t you understand from what you are seeing? I don’t have that hope. I am reaping the fruits of my deeds. I wanted to cheat, and I am cheated; I am cheated of my life. I won’t live; I won’t live.

Bindu: Dear, I beg of you, don’t utter such words. [seeing Binay, cries out loudly] My my, what a situation I am in. [holding Binay’s hands] Oh dear Binay, save him; dear, save him. – Oh my, why doesn’t he move? What is this again? [weeps]

[Binay and Sukumari regain consciousness]

Mati: The lock – of this chain – is in my – purse; open – it.

[Bindubasini does so and weeps]

Mati: [in a painful voice] I die – I die. [to Binay] Forgive me, dear. [to Sukumari]

Forgive me, mother.³ My life is – wretched – see so that your curse doesn’t make my next life wretched as well. – Forgive me, forgive me.

Binay: [sadly] You⁴ are my guardian, a sort of father. You shouldn’t ask me to forgive you. Beg forgiveness from the one who can forgive – the merciful God.

Bindu: Dear Binay, you too are speaking like that! Does it mean that there is indeed no hope, dear?

Binay: Mother, everything is in God’s power.

Mati: Dear, you’ll get back your Rs. 8,000. I give Sukumari Rs. 4,000. The rest is in your mother’s name.
Bindu: [crying] Dear, I don’t want your money. Take me in your company. I can’t live without you.

Mati: Dear, do whatever is necessary for the peace of my soul. [pain increases. To Bindubasini] Dear, I can’t bear this – I’ve used foul language against you – without realizing – I’ve wronged you.

Bindu: Dear, do so for another thousand times. But don’t leave me behind. Take me in your company.

Mati: Binay – forgive – Bindubasi–

[Suffers and dies. While crying aloud, blood comes out of Bindubasini’s mouth. She falls on Matilal’s body and dies.]

Binay: [sadly, after examining Bindubasini’s body] Unable to bear the grief of her husband’s death, the chaste wife’s heart rends and she too dies. Incidents like this aren’t frequent on the earth. Mother, chastity is woman’s ornament. You set the ideal of that chastity in the world. In spite of the husband being cruel and without a single virtue, one who can so serve and revere him is indeed chaste.

[Enter servants and maids]

All: What’s this? What’s this? [lament]

Binay: Lend me a hand in removing these from the room.

[Exeunt, bearing the three dead bodies]

Scene 6

[Rishra. Sarat Babu’s house. Enter Bhagaban]

Bhag: [happily] To hell with your swearing! I bite my tongue! Let me first spit it out and allow things follow their course. Hearing this Habi’s mother¹ cried in joy. All women are
the same; they cry in joy, they cry in sorrow. [wipes his tears] This time, during the master’s wedding, I’ll get a necklace with seven strings\(^2\) for Habi’s mother.

[Enter Becharam]

**Becha:** Sir –

**Bhag:** Such a botheration! While I am planning of making a necklace with seven strings for Habi’s mother, this fellow comes in and starts calling me. Off you go!

**Becha:** [feigning fright] My my! Is the sarkar possessed?\(^3\) Rama, Rama! Durga, Durga!\(^4\)

**Bhag:** Never seen such a flippant servant! Who are you, that you are laughing while showing your teeth? Just see, you fellow, you ill-fated devil!

[Becharam runs away with Bhagaban following him]

**Bhag:** This damned part of the dhoti tucked behind at the waist has opened. Wait, you fellow, wait!

[Exit, holding the cloth in his hands]

[Enter Sarat, Sukumari and Binay]

**Sarat:** [sighs] Binay, could you gather nothing about Sarojini’s whereabouts? Nothing at all?

**Binay:** I have sent people all over India. I wired this report of missing to all places. Districts, villages, cities, police outposts, police stations, railway stations, banks used for bathing, market places – there’s not a place where some sort of search hasn’t been made. Not just that, it has been advertised in all newspapers, whether more popular or less – the *Banga Darsan*,\(^5\) *Amrita Bazar Patrika*,\(^6\) *National Paper*,\(^7\) *Sadharani*,\(^8\) *Bharat Sanskarak*,\(^9\) *Saptahik Samachar*,\(^10\) *Sahachar*,\(^11\) *Bengalee*,\(^12\) *Education Gazette*,\(^13\) *Somprakas*,\(^14\) *Hindu Patriot*\(^15\) – how many more do I name – that whoever can bring any information about her will be awarded the sum of Rs. 2,000. But nothing worked. [sighs]
Suku: [crying, while addressing Sarojini] Due to what fault of ours did you leave us, sister? Is it because I used to quarrel with you, sister? Sister, that quarrel was out of love and affection, couldn’t you understand that? And what is brother’s fault? Since you left, he’s sick and is facing such adversities. Couldn’t you pity him? I am crazy, and said what not. But he never spoke ill to you.

Sarat: [to Binay] “S-j S-t Babu is seriously ill. Wherever you are, kindly come for once” – I wanted this to be advertised. Was it done?

Binay: Yes, it was done a few days back. But why, nothing happened!

Sarat: Binay, I guess Sarojini is no more. We are trying in vain. – Binay, earlier I couldn’t understand how much I loved Sarojini. I myself couldn’t comprehend my feelings. And I guess Saroj too loved me like that. Nowadays she didn’t sit beside me; she used the formal form of address while talking to; if I looked at her face, she used to bow down her head and many a time she used to come as if to say something, but could never speak it out.

Binay: But if it were so, why should she leave?

Sarat: How do I know? May be out of bashfulness. – I was such a blind; I couldn’t understand in spite of seeing these. But brother, I am almost sure Saroj is no more alive. Had she been alive, whether or not she loved me, hearing of my sickness, she would of course have come.

[Enter servant with a newspaper]

Servant: A courier gave this newspaper.

[Exit servant]

Binay: [looking at one part of the newspaper] What’s this? [reads]

Sarat: What? What?
Binay: Nothing much, a boy died after falling into a well.

Sarat: No, brother, your face makes me doubt. It should be something else and not this.

Give it to me; let me have a look at it.

Binay: No, what’s there to look at?

Sarat: Ah, why don’t you give? [snatches the newspaper from Binay’s hands, reads and faints]

Binay and Suku: What’s this? What’s this?

[They try to bring him back to consciousness]

Suku: [eyes filled with tears] Brother, brother? Why doesn’t he answer? [cries]

Binay: Don’t worry. He’s alive.

[Sarat opens his eyes and gradually regains consciousness]

Sarat: Brother, I knew Saroj is no more. Otherwise she would have surely returned by now. [reads the newspaper] 'At 8:00 am on Friday, the dead body of a woman named Sarojini was fished out of a well. The murderers have not yet been arrested. The Magistrate has given his permission for cremation'.

Suku: Sister, where did you go, leaving us? My heart rends, sister. [weeps bitterly]

Sarat: Binay, take Sukumari to some other place and console her. I can’t bear this any longer.

[Exit Binay and Sukumari]

Sarat: [sighs] I am feeling so depressed. The world seems empty. — I’ll go on a tour. But that doesn’t mean my heart will get pacified. There’s no point in cherishing such a hope.

But if I stay here, all through the day I’ll be remembering Saroj and gradually it will become unbearable. Wandering in foreign lands wil make me forget the grief many a
time. So calm, so polite, so intelligent Saroj, I loved you; I loved you more than I loved myself. Had you stayed a few more days! What's the use of thinking? Nothing interests me. Let me go on a tour. I'll leave today itself; right now. I should leave without telling them. [dresses] But I've promised Sukumari that --

[Enter servant]

**Servant:** Sir, there's a man here. He wants to talk to you.

**Sarat:** Ah, go, take him to Binay.

[Exit servant and re-enter after sometime]

**Servant:** No, sir. He says it's very urgent and he won't tell it to anyone other than you.

**Sarat:** What a pest! Go, bring him.

[Exit servant]

[Enter a man]

**Sarat:** Tell me soon what you want.

**Man:** Sir, I've come from far on foot. I am tired. I can't speak so soon.

**Sarat:** Well, speak as briefly as you can.

**Man:** Here again you want me to hurry.

**Sarat:** Okay, say; say what you want.

**Man:** [taking out a newspaper] Did you give out an advertisement in this newspaper?

**Sarat:** Yes.

**Man:** About a woman?

**Sarat:** Yes, why don't you speak out? Tell me soon what you've got to say.

**Man:** Again you want me to hurry!

**Sarat:** [sighs and wipes his eyes] We have come to know everything about her.
Man: What have you come to know?

Sarat: [giving the newspaper earlier brought by the servant] You may see it for yourself. [weeps]

Man: [reading it and slightly smiling] Sir, that news is not true. It may be the editor’s fancy. Sometimes during the acute scarcity of news, editors happen to mint one or two news items.  

Sarat: [anxiously] Then, sir, is it false? How do you know?

Man: It may not be false. This report may not be of the Sarojini you’ve lost.

Sarat: Have you seen our Sarojini? Well, sir, is she alive? Where is she?

Man: [rising] No, sir, I go. I can’t speak so hurriedly. In one breath you’ve put fifty questions. Which one do I answer?

Sarat: [holding the man’s hands] Sir, I’ll give you all that you want. Have you seen her? Answer this one question of mine.

Man: Well, give the money first. You don’t have to give the amount I want, give me only the two thousand rupees that you had mentioned in the advertisement.

Sarat: I don’t have that much money here. Do you want it right now?

Man: Yes, sir, right now. As the saying goes, ‘Ingratitude is the law of the world’.  

Sarat: Well, sir, as you please. – I don’t have that amount here. – But I’ll manage it somehow in cash and kind. [opens the box quickly] Take my golden watch and chain. These two cost Rs. 800. Take this Rs. 500 note, and this Rs. 200 note. Take these notes that amount to Rs. 130. This comes to Rs. 1630. Take this Rs. 200 – Rs. 1830. – What else can I give; there’s nothing here. [thinks] Well, wait. [brings a small box from the almirah] Got four medals at the college. [sighs] It hurts in parting with them. – No, when
I've lost Saroj, what's the use of keeping four medals? Sir, take these. The price of these medals will be Rs. 200. You have a little more than Rs. 2,000. Now tell me what you know about Saroj. — Well, how do I ascertain the truth of what you say?

Man: Of course, I'll prove that it is true. If I can't, you can have your money back. Not that I am running away with your money.

Sarat: Well, tell me; tell me.

Man: After leaving this place, she went through many others. One day around 8:00 pm or 9:00 pm, while it was raining heavily, she came near a babu's garden house. There she saw few people drinking alcohol. She ran away as soon as she saw. But those drunkards too saw her. Before she could go far, they got hold of her.

Sarat: Then? Then?

Man: After bringing her, they spoke to her about nasty things.

Sarat: [rising] It's enough; it's enough. I don't want to listen any more. Tell me the location of that garden house of the drunkards. Tell me soon. I am shaking with anger.

Man: First listen till the end. The drunkards couldn't harm her.

Sarat: [delightedly] Was she delivered from their clutches?

Man: Hmm - by slitting her throat.

Sarat: [sits] How? What did you say?

Man: Slyly she had a knife brought to her and with it she slit her throat.

Sarat: She committed suicide? [sighs and wipes his eyes] Didn't you say a little while ago that she hadn't died?

Man: Why, I never said that she hadn't died.

Sarat: I thought so from what you said.
Man: You may ‘think’ anything. If you shut your eyes and ‘think’ that Sarojini is standing near you, does that mean she should be actually so? – Well, sir, how is Sarojini related to you? Spending so much money and searching so hard only for a woman?

Sarat: [angrily] How does that bother you, sir? Say only what you’ve come to say.

Man: She had slit her throat.

Sarat: [sighs] Saroj died! Well, what’s the point of listening any further? [covers his face with his hands]

Man: Now this is your another misconception. Who ever told you that she died?

Sarat: [rising and holding the man’s hands] I beg of you, brother, tell me precisely whether or not she is alive.

Man: No, sir, I can’t say anything precisely. Speaking precisely is simply not in my habit. If you want to listen to things as they happened, you may. Otherwise, here’s your money; off I go.

Sarat: Well, speak. Speak as it suits you. I won’t utter a single word.

Man: After she had slit her throat, the drunkards dumped her near a canal. The next day, very early in the morning, a woman was passing by that canal. She noticed her and after a careful look, understood that she was still alive. So thinking, she lifted her; washed her face and hands with water and after much effort brought her back to consciousness. Then she took her to their house. After a few days of nursing, she brought her back to health. Her throat was only slightly slit – the cut was not that deep. She had fainted out of excessive bleeding and fright.

Sarat: [rising and in a voice choked with happiness] Brother, I don’t know what to give you.
Man: First listen till the end. I shall consider myself lucky if you don’t drive me out while thrashing. That woman has a very handsome son named Ranjan. He is about 22 to 23 years of age. That Ranjan madly wanted to marry your Sarojini. He told his mother, ‘If you don’t get me married to this girl, I’ll hang myself to death’. She had to give her consent due to the entreaties of Ranjan and the request of his mother. What else could she do? Moreover it was Ranjan’s mother who had saved her life.

Sarat: Did she give her consent to the marriage?

Man: What else? Am I telling you a lie? Do you take me for the press?

Sarat: [sighs] When was the wedding?

Man: It hasn’t yet been solemnized.

Sarat: [rising] Not yet? Brother, I’ll give you Rs. 12,000; I’ll give you all that I have, if you can take me to her, or if you can tell me where she is.

Man: [moving his head] That’s beyond my power.


Man: Here, read this. [gives a letter]

Sarat: The letter is addressed to me, and I can see her handwriting! [opens it soon and reads]

‘You can learn everything about me from the bearer of this letter. Please don’t feel sad. There’s no use lamenting about what has already happened. I will be married within a week. Today we are leaving for another village by boat. The bearer does not know that place. Please forgive me. What more to write!

Ever ill-fated Saroj’
[weeps] I wish I had not read this letter. Saroj, you are so cruel! [sighs and weeps with bowed head]

**Man:** [rising] Then, sir, I take your leave. Don’t get angry on me. The news is indeed painful, but what can I do! Had I known that the letter would have hurt you so badly, I wouldn’t have given it to you. Well, do – I – take – the – money? If you so say, I won’t take it. Your grief is bringing tears to my eyes. But I am coming from far and I incurred expenses on my way. If you kindly give me some –

**Sarat:** [wiping his tears] It’s not your fault. Please take the money; take all of it. I have to give the amount I had promised in the advertisement.

**Man:** Then, at least keep those golden coloured round things – medal or what-d’you-call-them – those you were feeling sad to part with. The remaining amount is sufficient reward for me.

**Sarat:** [wiping his eyes] I was indeed feeling sad in giving them away, but now I am not feeling so. [sighs] Sarojini is alive; this is sufficient good news. Rs. 2,000 is no extravagant award for that. But if you could tell me where she is, I would have given you four times as much.

**Man:** Sir, we are poor; your words are tempting me. If I can bring you news of your liking, will you indeed give me Rs. 8,000? Rs. 8,000 is no meager sum. Think seriously.

**Sarat:** Sir, why Rs. 8,000, I would give you Rs. 10,000. But now that is impossible.

[sighs]

**Man:** My, my! Such a price for a girl! I am surprised! You are rich people; you can indulge in any fancy. Well, sir, if I bring you a girl more good-looking and better natured than Sarojini, will you give me Rs. 8,000 or Rs. 10,000? I’ve never engaged myself in
match-making; but I’ll try it once for your sake. And how does it harm you? You’ll get a new one instead of the old. As the saying goes, ‘Who cares for the old when they get the new?’

Sarat: [very angrily] You greedy, base man! Do you think all are like ‘you’? All the women of ‘your’ world together won’t equal one Sarojini. [somewhat controlling his anger] Go, take ‘your’ money and go. Don’t make me more angry. [aside] I shouldn’t have got so angry. Tears have welled up in his eyes. [holding the man’s hands] Brother, please don’t mind. I got so angry and said what not. Brother, I loved Saroj dearly – I still love her – you don’t know. [weeps]

Man: [wiping his tears] Sir, I am a miserable man. You’ve scolded me, what does it matter? Then I leave, sir. [about to leave] Oh, it’s good that I remembered. Luckily I didn’t forget. She gave this another letter; have a look at it. [gives the letter]

Sarat: Another letter? [sighs] No, I won’t read this one. I don’t have the courage to read it. This might be containing some another bad news.

Man: Why don’t you read it?

Sarat: [hesitatingly] Okay, let me see. [reads]

‘Dearest Sarat,

I am ‘yours’. I don’t know anybody other than “you”. I’ll come soon; don’t worry. How is Sukumari and Binay?

Yours Saroj’

[with bowed head] I am feeling giddy. – I can’t make out anything of this. Do I wake or sleep?

Man: [in a changed voice] Then I am leaving, sir. You were actually driving me out.
Sarat: [looking at the man’s face for once and again with bowed head] I’ve gone completely out of my head. I am constantly under delusion. I felt as if I heard Saroj’s voice.

[Man throws down the disguise and stands as Sarojini]

Saroj: [smiling slightly] Then I am leaving, sir.

Sarat: Again, that same voice! [lifting his face] What! [holding Sarojini with both hands] You harpy! You pitiless, merciless, cruel harpy! [wipes tears]

Saroj: [weeping] Sarat, beloved, I am only ‘yours’, only ‘yours’ Saroj.

Sarat: Why were you tormenting me since these three hours, you harpy? Why were you punishing me like the school teacher by making me do sit-ups, you harpy?

Saroj: [laughing] When did I punish ‘you’ by making ‘you’ do sit-ups? And when did I ever become a school teacher?

Sarat: Why, what was this doing on so long? Once you were giving me hopes and making me feel like in heaven, next you were having me submerged in the sea of despair and yet again you were making me go blind with rage. [holding Sarojini’s hands] Saroj, I scolded you without knowing it was you; are you angry with me?

Saroj: [laughing] Yes, very much.

Sarat: But why did you cry?

Saroj: [affectionately] Seeing that ‘you’ love me so dearly.

Sarat: Then, say why did you still continue to torment me? [turning away] Go, I won’t talk to you anymore.

Saroj: [laughing and getting up] Well, then I am going and getting married to that Ranjan.
Sarat: [making Sarojini sit near him and smilingly] You’ve learned to tell stories so well. Well, of all that you’ve said, how much is true and how much is not?

Saroj: Till that woman taking me to her house, nursing me and saving my life is true. She doesn’t have a son named Ranjan [smiling] and neither did he want to marry me.

Sarat: [complaining lovingly] I was in so much pain; searched you so hard. Why didn’t you come so long, Saroj?

Saroj: [with tears in eyes] Sarat, I made a mistake without knowing; forgive me. I didn’t know that ‘you’ were facing such adversities. When I had somewhat recuperated in that woman’s house, I saw your advertisement on a packet containing spices. I came as soon as I saw it.

Sarat: Why did you come disguised as a man?

Saroj: At the advice of that woman. – And to some extent at my will as well.

Sarat: So why so much drama once here?

Saroj: Firstly, to judge ‘your’ feelings. – Had I seen it so, I would have left.

Sarat: Now have you understood? Or will you again run away some day?

Saroj: [laughing] I’ll go today itself. And I also thought that if ‘you’ were really so seriously ill, then ‘you’ shouldn’t see me at once. Disease might aggravate due to extreme joy. It would be harmful instead of good. [slightly smiling] Well, let’s leave this for the moment. ‘You’ promised to give me four times the prize money if I brought you good news. Then give it now.

Sarat: [lovingly, holding Saroj’s hands] Saroj, on receiving good news I promised to give that sum. But I didn’t say that I would give that if I got you back. You are mine. Whoever buys something that is one’s own?
Saroj: [looking at the backstage] Sukumari is coming. Don’t tell her anything. Let me see what she does. [stands at a side]

[Enter Sukumari]

Suku: Brother, the sarkar said that sister is alive and that someone has come to you bearing her news.

Sarat: [sadly] Very bad news. That woman is coming from her. Ask her.

Suku: [going near Sarojini] Yes, dear – oh, my! Here’s sister! Sister, hold me, hold me; I am feeling uneasy; I can’t look at your face properly. – [after regaining her composure, embracing Sarojini] Where were you during these days, sister? Was it fair to make us weep like this? I am your little sister. Didn’t you feel sad in leaving me, sister?

Saroj: [holding Sukumari’s hands] Don’t make me feel ashamed, sister. I shall never again do this.

Suku: Hmm, as if I am letting you do! I shall keep an eye on you day and night. Shall I order a chain for you?

Saroj: [looking at Sarat for once, softly] There’s no need for ordering the chain; my feet are already enchained.


[Exit]

Saroj: [smiling] Everyone means Binay!

Sarat: How do you know?

Saroj: I know.

[Re-enter Sukumari with Binay]

Binay: I lie prostrate in respect, sister. Do you recognize me? [lies down at full length with his face to the ground]
Saroj: [helping Binay to his feet and holding his hands] Brother, I beg of you, don’t make me feel any more ashamed. I have endured enough shame. I’ve endured shame as well as pain. [weeps]

Binay: [in a pained voice] Sister, you endured pain and also made us endure pain.

[smiling] And the other thing that I’ve been hearing, well, when is it?

[Sarojini blushes and bows her head]

Sarat: [smiling slightly] Both of us can decide that.

Binay: [to Sukumari] I am the only one to be born ill-fated. None can stand me.

Suku: [frowns] Well, how do I know? [aside to Sarojini, anxiously] Sister?

Saroj: [smiling] What’s now again?

Suku: [aside] I say I’ve been calling you sister. And brother is brother. Well, when people ask, ‘Whom has your brother married’, should I say, ‘My brother has married my sister’?

Saroj: You naughty girl! Just see, I’ll have your mouth shut! [talks to Sarat]


Suku: [with bowed head, to Sarojini] As if I am a book or dress! ‘I give you Sukumari’!

Saroj: [smiling slightly] Well, tell me the truth; whether or not you love Binay? Why do you keep quiet? [putting the aforementioned chain round Binay’s neck and giving him the watch] Brother Binay, I love you dearly. Here is the dowry of your marriage. [giving the money and notes to Sukumari] And these I give you.

Suku: Where did you get these, sister?

Saroj: [laughing] This is the reward for bringing the news of Sarojini to your brother.
Binay: Well, where did the watch and chain come from?

Saroj: He was very anxious to know. But he didn’t have Rs.2000 at his home.

Binay: [taking the four medals] Then why do these remain? Let me have them too.

Saroj: [immediately] No, dear, leave them. He was much pained in parting with them.

His eyes were filled with tears while giving them away.

Sarat: As if! My eyes were filled with tears! Why do you lie?

Binay: [aside] Let me have some fun. [Exit and re-enter with a small pamphlet. Standing on a wooden cot] I will deliver a speech. Kindly listen to it. [reads] ‘The dull and the ignorant think pure love is the house of uninhibited pleasure and the clean steps of religion’. ‘Love destroys the humane qualities of man... It routs patriotism completely. What more shall I say’ – [Sarat snatches away the pamphlet] Well, what if you’ve taken it away; I’ve got it by heart. ‘Love itself is detestable; love itself is dirty filth. It has no distinction of pure and impure – it is altogether impure’. [getting down from the wooden cot] I’ve delivered such a speech and still no one claps!

Saroj: Binay, what pamphlet was that, dear?

Binay: It’s nothing serious, a mere speech.

Saroj: Whose speech is it, dear?

Binay: [pointing Sarat with his fingers] Why don’t you ask him whose it is?

Sarat: [blushing] That was my show of erudition at a particular stage. Many youths who have passed out of the university and take pride in their scholarship have made such speeches. But I am the only one to have been caught with the loot.

Saroj: [laughing] Well, what is your view now, Sarat?

Sarat: [holding Sarojini’s hands, lovingly] Here you are the witness.
Binay: Many in the world hold the view that women are the major impediment in our deeds of selflessness, patriotism and our efforts of social reformation. History is the witness of the fact that this view is not completely true. But neither is the fact entirely baseless. Many a time women indeed exhibit extreme narrow-mindedness. But at the root of this is their lack of education or bad education. I don’t have the courage to say this, but I firmly believe that till education doesn’t bring the minds of men and women on an equal platform, till their hopes and aspirations are not on the same line, it is difficult for India to get rid of her haggard look.

Saroj: Dear, may your tongue be blessed! There are very few people who raise their voice for our miserable lot.

From backstage: There’s a woman who wants to meet the elder sister.

Saroj: [folding her hands and very politely] Sarat, I’ve kept one secret from ‘you’.

‘You’ve’ got to forgive me.

Sarat: [holding Sarojni’s hands] What have you kept secret, Saroj? And why do you beg forgiveness? You could simply say it.

[Enter Ramasuncari]

Suku: Mother! [stands still like a doll]

Saroj: [going near Ramasundari and embracing her] Mother, I got everything from you.

[weeps]


Saroj: [weeping] I don’t believe those. She’s the woman who saved my life.

Suku: I too don’t believe. [going near Ramasundari and holding her feet] Mother, I am your daughter.
Rama: Dear, since so many days I didn’t hear you calling me ‘mother’ [weeps, helps Sukumari to her feet and kisses her]

Binay: I somewhat know about Matilal Babu. I too don’t believe.

[Enter Bhagaban]

Bhag: And I don’t see any reason behind believing such things. [gives Sarat the second paper signed by Matilal. Sarat reads.] It was she, who paid the fine and got you released from the prison. It was again she who rescued everything from getting devoured by Matilal.

Sarat: [softly, to Bhagaban] Why didn’t you tell me this earlier?

Bhag: [folding his hands] She forbade me to do so.

Sarat: [kneeling before Ramasundari and putting a piece of cloth round his neck]24

Mother, I am your unworthy son. I don’t have the courage to beg forgiveness. But, by virtue of your being a mother, if you kindly forgive me – [tears choke his voice]

Rama: [helping Sarat get up and weeping] Dear, it’s difficult to have a son like you even after practicing austerity. It’s all because of my fault. I shouldn’t have left in a fit of rage. It’s my good luck that I could again see you. [holding Sarojini’s hands] Dear, again don’t get lost. Not every day does one find a jewel like you on this earth. I know all about my daughter’s feelings. [giving her hand to Sarat] My daughter is now feeling shy.

Sarat: [taking Sarojini] I shall never disobey your order.

Binay: [aside, to Sarojini] Brother is so devoted to his mother! As if he’s accepting you only because his mother is giving! I too can accept if someone gives me something like that.
Saroj: [smiling, aside to Binay] Why, dear, is it to happen twice? Well, I’ll tell Sukumari.

Rama: [to Binay] Dear, I know everything. [giving Sukumari to Binay] But, dear, you can’t take my daughter anywhere else. You’ve to stay here.

Binay: As you wish.

Rama: [looking at the two pairs] Dear, people say you can’t see heaven till you die. But, dear, for one who has two such sons and two such daughters, this itself is heaven!

Bhag: If not heaven, see the land of fairies.\textsuperscript{25} [hits the ground with foot]\textsuperscript{26}

[Land of fairies where fairies are dancing]\textsuperscript{27}

Ragini Jangla- Tal Jalad Ektal

What an auspicious day has arrived

Seeing the union of the lovers, the heart overflows with joy

But o children, think once

Of the plight of the country due to the neglect of everybody

You are enslaved for your own fault

Disgrace and feebleness has overcome the three worlds\textsuperscript{28}

For the deliverance of India, men and women together

Get ready assiduously, and do not get slack.

Sarat: Just due to your fault, you are under the control of others

The three worlds are burning with the disgrace of lassitude.

May these words be thunderously echoed throughout the breadth of India.

[Exeunt]

THE END
ANNOTATIONS

DEDICATION

1 Hemantakumar Ghosh was the brother of Sisirkumar Ghosh.

2 The Amrita Bazar Patrika was published as a weekly in 1868. It was brought out by Hemantakumar Ghosh and his brother Sisirkumar. They resigned their posts as Deputy Collector to devote themselves to journalism.

3 Sisirkumar Ghosh (1840 – 1911) was very kind-hearted and could not tolerate the torture to which the indigo planters were subjected. After the death of his brother Hemantakumar, he became the editor of the Amrita Bazar Patrika. His courage in boldly stating his observations astonished people. After the enactment of the Vernacular Press Act, he brought out a bilingual edition of the journal.

FOREWORD

1 Upendranath Das uses a single word for the phrase 'is filled up with obscenities'. He was following the style of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838 – 1894) in using long compounds. This novelist was in his turn falling back on the style adopted in Sanskrit texts. The ‘obscenities’ consist in the depiction of the use of alcohol, the mention of some simple love affairs, the mere presence of prostitutes and so on. Upendranath Das humorously calls these ‘obscenities’. Interestingly the British colonialists too found obscenities, not in Sarat-Sarojini, but in a similar play, Surendra-Binodini. It is needless to say that in the eyes of the readers and critics as well, both the plays are equally innocent. But this did not prevent the British from enacting the Dramatic Performances Act, thereby barring theses plays and similar other ones from being staged in the theatre halls.
2 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay was well versed in both western and eastern science, philosophy and literature. Rabindranath Tagore regarded him as the best among the educated. He established himself as a novelist with his *Durgesnandini* (1865). People were amazed by its style and characterization. It was as if Bankimchandra wanted to change the tastes of his readers. However all did not like his language which took the midway between the Sanskritised Bengali of Vidyasagar and the *alali bhasha* or the colloquial style of Pearychand Mitra. Dwarakanath Vidyabhushan was highly critical of this style and called Bankimchandra and his likes ‘न-परंक्रमक मूल्यांकन’ (Sastri Ramtanu Lahiri 336), a phrase that cannot be translated into English. In spite of the presence of such critics, he was a popular novelist. His other novels include *Kapalkundala, Mrinalini, Chandrasekhar, Bishbriksha, Krishnakanter Will, Anandamath, Debi Chaudhurani, Sitaram, Raisingingha* and many more.

3 Here is an excellent use of litotes by Upendranath Das. From what is attributed to the imaginary friend of Durgadas Das, it is amply clear that the playwright holds Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay in high esteem.

**DRAMATIS PERSONAE**

1 Interestingly, contrary to the usual practice, Upendranath Das first mentions the female characters. This may be taken to reflect the esteem in which he held women. It is more so, for in this particular play women have all the good qualities. However this might be reading too much meaning into something about which the playwright was not much concerned; for in his other play, *Surendra-Binodini* the male characters precede their female counterparts in the *dramatis personae*. Again, there are characters in the play that are not mentioned in the list of *dramatis personae*. These shall be pointed out in the notes as and when they appear.
ACT I

Scene 1

1 Charles Darwin’s book, *The Origin of Species* was published in 1859. Since then many scientists and scholars have written books and articles for or against Darwin’s theory of biological evolution. There is also a touch of humour about the event. When the wife of the Bishop of Worcester first heard about this theory, she hoped that it was not true, and if it was, that it may not become generally known. *Sarat-Sarojini* was written around fifteen years later. Darwin’s theory thus comes into it. The self-styled scientist Haridas strongly believes it, while others make fun of it.

2 The famine of 1865-66 was severe and affected Bihar, Bengal, Madras Presidency and Orissa. The relief afforded by the Government was belated, inadequate and ill-organized. Cockrell mentioned in his Report: ‘Had the money been expended some months earlier / in the employment of people on works of public utility, numbers would have been saved from either falling into conditions of helpless paupers or perishing “through wants” (qtd. Bhatia 71-72). There was another famine in 1873-74. But judging by the loss of life and the distress suffered by people, it was so mild that people later even refused to call it ‘famine’. It came to be known as a mere ‘scarce’. This was so because of the new food policy of the Government as well as the administration of relief on a more liberal scale. However with the memory of the 1865-66 famine still fresh in their minds, people panicked. *Sarat-Sarojini* was composed in 1874 and the famine referred should imply the 1873-74 one. But Sarat’s criticism of the Government seems to refer to the 1865-66 famine.

3 The sarkars were invariably associated with the houses of the rich. They looked after all expenses and maintained the accounts. They also looked after all domestic matters. Fanny Parkes
write about them: ‘A very useful but expensive person in an establishment is a Sircar [sic]; the man attends every morning early to receive orders, he then proceeds to the bazaars [sic], or to the European-shops, and brings back for inspection and approval, furniture, books, dresses, or, whatever may have been ordered; his profit is a heavy percentage on all he purchases for the family’ (qtd. B. Ghosh Banglar Samajik Itihaser Dhara 177).

4 Sarat speaks this in Hindi. But it would be too much to call this Hindi. It would be better to call it Bengali with some Hindi suffixes.

5 Sarat is actually welcoming his friends and could easily dispense with these formalities. But this was the style adopted by cultured Bengalis when they had to welcome someone who came from a similar socio-economic and cultural background as well as someone who was more respectable.

6 The first public theatre of Bengal, the National Theatre, opened on December 7, 1872. Before this there were amateur theatres in the houses of the rich, where ordinary people had no access. Besides, there were the English theatres which staged plays in English. The National Theatre staged its first play in a house taken on rental basis. Bengal Theatre was the first to have its own theatre house. The Great National Theatre was soon to follow. The increasing popularity of theatre and the stage artistes forming their own groups resulted in a number of theatre-houses in the city. Some were short-lived while others continued to stage plays for longer periods.

7 One of the main reasons behind the presence of so many theatre-houses in the city was the profit that comes with running shows. The proprietors could not wait till they had proper ambience, orchestra and efficient performers. In their haste, they opened the doors to the public with whatever they could gather. Again, due to the presence of actresses who had been hired from prostitute quarters, the environment was not always decent. The plays were staged in late
evenings so that office-goers could also attend the shows. Thus it often happened that some actor got inebriated before the show began. This greatly hampered the performance.

8 Many educated persons vehemently opposed the theatre due to the presence of actresses recruited from prostitute quarters. Among them were Iswarchandra Vidyasagar and Kesabchandra Sen, the noted leader of the Brahmo Samaj. Swami Vivekananda was also a most unsympathetic and uncompromising fanatic and would not walk on the footpath on the theatre side of the streets in Calcutta. Once Herambachandra Maitra, an arch Brahmo, was asked where the Star Theatre was. He replied that he did not know. Then he realized that he was telling a lie. So he called back the person who asked the question and corrected himself, 'I know but I won’t say’. The educated Bengali youths were greatly influenced by the Brahmo Samaj. Even those who actually did not join it developed views similar to those who were active supporters. Here Bipin thinks Sarat too might be sympathetic to the Brahmo Samaj.

9 The Bengali text has ‘Ratipati’. He is the counterpart of Cupid in Hindu mythology. Rati is his wife, ‘Ratipati’ meaning the husband of Rati. Ratipati is the god of love.

10 The love-god has five arrows which he uses to make people fall in love.

11 The exaggerated romanticism of the Bengali cannot be properly translated into English.

12 Like Sanskrit, Bengali is a language rich in synonyms or near synonyms. When these are piled up, they prove helpful in declamatory speeches. But when these are translated into English, they do not make a smooth reading.

13 Each language has its own set of idioms. Sometimes it becomes difficult to find an equivalent of a particular idiom in another language. This is one such example. If translated into English, word by word, it come to, ‘Should they cut gress for horses?’ But this will not mean in English. The sarcastic tone that comes with the Bengali idiom is absent in the translation.
A single word is used in Bengali for this phrase. As already mentioned, using long compounds instead of simple phrases had become a fashion in Bengali. Reading such words in the prose form is fine. But when a character starts using these words in his speeches on the stage, the audience has a hard time.

A single word is used for this phrase in Bengali. See Note 14.

In the kathakata, the person who recited and explained the passages of the Mahabharata was called Veda Vyas. When the recital was stopped for the day, he had his rest. Since Sarat has been arguing with his friends about the over-indulgence of the Bengalis in the emotion of love, Nanda calls him a ‘Vedavyas’. The translation does not use this word because it would not be idiomatic in English.

Scene 2

Opposite Baboo’s Ghaut [sic] and immediately south of the Esplanade Road are the Eden Gardens, for which the inhabitants are indebted to the liberality and taste of the Misses [Emily and Frances] Eden, sisters of Lord Auckaland, Governor General of India, whose statue stands in the gardens. Here is the Band stand, where the Town Band, or the Band of the European Regiment stationed in the Fort, discourse sweet music every evening. A large space is laid out and turfed as a promenade [...] Of late years the gardens have been greatly enlarged, and laid out with winding paths and artificial water, interspersed with a profusion of beautiful flowering trees, and shrubs – a pleasant place for a morning or evening stroll. In the gardens is a Burmese Pagoda, removed from Prome after the [...] war in 1854, and re-erected here in 1856’ (Carey 143).

There was an old Fort William that was built by Sir Charles Eyre and was completed in 1706. After the Battle of Plassey in 1757, the British knew that it was vulnerable to attack. It was then
that Robert Clive began building the new Fort William on the bank of the Ganga. It was completed in 1781 and was named after King William III.

3 A single word is used for this phrase in the Bengali text. See Note 14 on Act I scene 1.

4 A single word is again used for this phrase in Bengali. The weapons of the world-conquerors is said to be thunder and lightning. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition, these weapons are possessed by God. In the Hindu mythology, Indra, the king of gods, has thunder as his weapon. Whichever theology is taken, these world-conquerors, who are none but the British colonialists, are ironically portrayed as divine beings. As the devout Christian or Hindu is subservient to the God or Indra, so also the natives are expected to bow before the colonialists.

5 Referring to the ills of the state as a disease can also be found in Shakespeare. Most of the educated Bengalis of the nineteenth century were well acquainted with Shakespeare. Upendranath Das might have borrowed this phrase from the famous English playwright.

6 Using obscene languages or referring to something carnal was a taboo in Bengali literature of the nineteenth century. Educated people abstained from uttering these words in public. When they had to say something like this, they merely uttered a word or a few, followed by a pause. This would be enough for the listener to comprehend what the speaker had to say. Here Sarat means to say that the Magistrate of Anantapur did something indecent with the woman who came to fetch water from the pond facing his court.

7 Haridas uses two different synonyms for the common word ‘monkey’ in this speech and the one that follows. Unfortunately English does not have any synonym for ‘monkey’ The words like ‘orangutan’, ‘chimpanzee’, etc. actually signify different species. Thus the comic effect created by the use of the synonyms in the Bengali text cannot be translated into English.
Scene 3

1 This was a common mode of relaxation in the nineteenth-century Bengal. This is common even now in rural India. Those who could afford had their body massaged by professionals or servants and those who could not afford had this done by their wives and children.

2 The English equivalent of the word used in modern Bengali would be ‘rice’. But Matilal actually means “food”. He uses this particular word because rice happens to be the staple food of Bengal.

3 ‘माली’ ‘fat woman’ seems to have been misspelt. Matilal means whether the ghataki has left for Pushra, a place in Bengal. Again, ‘Pushra’ might also be another typographical error, because later in the play, Matilal has actually sent a ghataki to Rishra.

4 See Note 6 on Act I scene 2. Here the servant wants to imply that throughout the night Matilal enjoys himself in the company of women.

5 This is a weapon often mentioned in Hindu mythology. It can never be defeated and will surely kill the victim at whom it is aimed. This was used as a last resort, only when all other weapons had failed. A modern equivalent for the ‘brahmanastra’ would be the nuclear weapons.

6 The word used in the Bengali text does not exactly mean ‘starving’. It means the food taken when someone is practising austerities. Rice is boiled with potatoes and raw banana and is taken only once before sunset with rock salt and clarified butter. No oil or seasoning can be used in cooking this. Matilal means to say that he has not eaten anything tasty in the last two days.

7 An Act was enacted in 1854 to better the education imparted to the underage zamindars. Under the guidance of the Court of Wards, the Wards’ Institution was established in 1856. Likewise underage zamindars, aged within 8 – 14, were given education at a separate building under the supervision of a Government servant. This Institution ceased to exist from 1880.
8 Kalidasa was a famous Sanskrit playwright. Scholars differ in their opinions regarding the period to which he belonged. His works include \textit{Abhijnana Sakuntala}, \textit{Vikramorvasi}, \textit{Malavikagnimitra}, \textit{Raghuvaamsa}, \textit{Kumarasambhava}, \textit{Meghduta} and \textit{Ritusamhar}. His works reveal the picture of the contemporary social and political life.

9 This refers to a verse attributed to Sankaracharya. It runs: “জমিদারভালিক ভয়ন, জলে জলে মটলেরকে দেখি ব্যাঘ্রাঙ্গন লোকে মেলে ছিলেন” (Mumukshanada 397) Roby Datta translates it: ‘Our life is fickle, dim and brief / As water on a lotus-leaf / For, Dragon Malady devours / This care-beladen world of ours’ (162).

10 The dancing girls are not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

11 Here is an idiom in Bengali, meaning rain without a cloudy sky. It refers to something totally unexpected.

12 This phrase is in Hindi. The thumri being in Hindi, Matilal praises the song in the same language.

\textbf{Scene 4}

1 There are different sets of words in Bengali that are used when one is pleading with another person. Translated word by word, it will not make sense in English. The words in the Bengali text mean ‘eat my head’. ‘For God’s sake’ is something that comes close to what Bhubanmohini wants to say.

2 The Bengali text has something else. Translated word by word, it comes to ‘I am touching your hand and saying’. This sort of gesture is common in Bengali culture, but cannot be understood by one outside it. Also see Note 1.
As already mentioned in Note 1, this is again a typical style in Bengali of showing how much one is pleased. If the Bengali sentence is translated word by word, it would come to ‘May your face be showered with flowers and sandalwood paste’.

See Note 5 on Act I scene 2. Binay means Bhubannohini has an immoral relationship with Matilal who happens to be her brother-in-law. But he is too decent to actually utter these words.

ACT II

Scene 1

Baisakh and Jyaishtha are the first two months of the Bengali calendar. Baisakh begins on April 15 and Jyaishtha ends on June 15. This is the time of summer when the sun blazes fiercely. Therefore persons who could afford distributed gram and water to the poor. Anyone who came till the stocks lasted would get a share. Some even offered these to horses and bullocks that pulled the carts.

This man is not mentioned in the dramatis personae

Bhola is also not mentioned in the dramatis personae.

Till smoking cigarettes became a fashion, any guest who came to the house of a Bengali, whether on business or social visit, would be given a hookah to smoke. Biswanath Datta, the father of Swami Vivekananda was a lawyer. His house therefore had many hookahs, because among his clients were Muslims as well as Hindus belonging to different castes. Since one person would not smoke from the hookah of a person belonging to a different caste or religion, Biswanath Datta had to keep many hookahs ready. The tobacco in the hookah was prepared to suit the tastes of different persons.

The man has come to Bhagaban for business purpose. He need not worry about Sarat’s marriage. But in the nineteenth century, it was nothing unusual for someone to ask such
questions. Some asked these merely for the sake of gossip, while others out of genuine concern. This was not taken as offensively as someone would today. However educated people did not engage themselves in such trifles.

It was possible for salaried persons to talk to the employer about his own marriage as well as that of his sisters'. They did not feel that they were discussing something that should be kept within the family. That Sarat too did not react to these questions as one would in the twenty-first century is clear when Bhagaban is seen to be still employed by the former.

Child marriage was prevalent in the nineteenth-century Bengal. Most of the girls were married by the time they were ten or eleven. People who had not got their daughters married soon were treated as outcasts. Sarat did not meet this fate because he had money. Nevertheless all his wealth cannot prevent the man from saying that Sarat ought to feel ashamed for not having married off his sisters.

Bengali abounds in aphorisms in form of couplets. People composed them extempore. This particular one, if translated word by word, comes to: 'If one is not fated to have clarified butter, one will not get it, however hard one may shake the container'.

This sort of curiosity and audacity was common amongst the not so educated people. The man wants to know whether there is something that Sarat wants to hide from the public eye. He actually means that these young people are not marrying because of some other problem.

In those days, women had to follow an unwritten code of conduct. They did not talk to men easily. They spoke to men only within their family and servants. It was not that they would not speak to outsiders. But it was only after they got somewhat acquainted. They had their heads covered when they came in public. With education, girls stopped following these codes rigidly.
They did only what they found reasonable. It is needless to say that many men found this absolutely revolting.

11 In the absence of hotels, travellers came to any house on their way for food and shelter. People were hospitable and did not ‘mind the arrival of the unexpected guests. They took all the trouble to satisfy them. The philosophy behind this was ‘अजिष्ठि लाैि ड़े’ ‘The guest is God’. Therefore entertaining guests was held like a form of worship. The host took food only after the guests had settled for some rest after having their food.

12 The Bamabodhini Patrika was first published in 1853 and was edited by Umeschandra Datta.

13 The Abalabandhab was published by Dwarakanath Gangopadhyay in 1869.

14 Bhagaban is talking about the singing of hymns by Christians.

15 The Mahabharata is an Indian epic. It was considered holy and people used to swear by its name.

16 The man promises not to repeat what he will be going to hear. However it is obvious that he too will not be able to keep it to himself and will pass it on to another person; but only after having that person promise to keep it a secret. If Bhagaban wants the man to remain silent over this, he too should not have discussed this with him.

17 Bhagaban realizes that he and the man should not get involved with what Sarat, Sarojini and Sukumari do only after he has finished telling all that he knew.

18 Khemta is a type of folk dance of Bengal. It accompanies khemta songs that are based on the story of Radha and Krishna. Drums and cymbals form the musical instruments. These dances may be performed at any occasion. This is a women’s dance, but in some areas eunuchs are associated with it. They are the ones who are still keeping this art alive. Khemta dances are characterized by complex foot movements and meaningful expressions of the eye and the face.
This dance may be called the rural version of the urban dance of baijis or nautch girls. The way of presentation did not match the refined tastes of the educated people. However Khemta dance was a popular form of entertainment in rural Bengal.

19 Since Khemta was not considered to be quite polished, Bhagaban prevents the man from breaking into a song and that too where women were present.

20 Every language has its own idioms. These cannot be translated into another language. If the Bengali text is translated word by word, it comes to ‘making the Mahabharata polluted’. The translation retains the sense while sacrificing the idiom.

21 There are four different eras, viz. Satya, Dwapar, Treta and Kali, according to Hindu mythology. The first era comes immediately after the Creation and has everything perfect. People belonging to this are righteous and pious. Corruption gradually creeps in. The last era is Kali, when all values are lost. God then destroys the world through Pralay or a great flood and goes on to create another world order.

Scene 2

1 Annapurna is the Hindu goddess, who provides food to people. She gives people cooked rice, which actually stands for food. There are slight differences in the powers of the heavenly beings. Lakshmi gives wealth and rice in the uncooked form, while Annapurna gives cooked food. By comparing Sarojini with Annapurna, the villagers mean that she looks after the overall well-being of the village and sees that all their needs are fulfilled.

2 See Note 1 on Act I scene 4. There are slight changes in the meaning in different contexts. In this particular instance ‘have mercy on me’ is closest to what Sarojini wants to say.

3 Arranged marriages were common in the nineteenth-century Bengal. Marriages were brokered by middlemen or matchmakers. Ghataki is a female matchmaker. Earlier this profession
was confined to the males. Ghatakis came into existence with the emergence of the bhadramahila. The latter looked after the household affairs while the bhadralok remained busy with outdoor activities. Ghatakis therefore came to the bhadramahila with a marriage proposal for the young people of her house. If the former could convince her, she would convey the proposal to the bhadralok. They charged fees from the families of both the bride and the groom for rendering their service, only if the marriage materialized. As in this particular instance, they did not always speak the truth if it could cause a hindrance in the materialization of the marriage. It is needless to say that many of their falsehoods would be discovered when it was too late.

4 Kartik is a Hindu god, who is considered to be the epitome of masculine beauty.

5 Indra is the king of Hindu gods. As the king of gods, he must be having a lot of wealth. But it is Kubera who is said to possess the maximum of it.

Scene 3

1 The guard and the man are not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

2 Krishna is a Hindu god.

3 The Company here stands for the East India Company. The British began to influence its authority over the Indians first by establishing this Company. Gradually the Company got the whole of India under its control, thereby making the British conquest over India complete.

4 Monkey-dance is a common form of entertainment in India. Monkeys are trained to dance to certain songs or make some particular gestures or perform some small feats. People stand to watch this and give some tips to the trainer. Usually the monkey collects the tips and hands them over to his trainer.

5 Chowringhee is one of the most important thoroughfares of Calcutta. 'Between the Government House and Garden Reach is a broad open plain, about 150 acres in extent, called the
Esplanade (Hindustani, maidan). It is laid out with fine macadamized roads, bordered with trees: the space between the roads is plain turf” (Carey 76).

6 ‘Dambaru’ is a type of small Indian drum.

7 See Note 4 on Act I scene 1.

Scene 4

1 If the Bengali text is translated word by word, it comes to: ‘I am a foreigner’. In the nineteenth century native land meant the town or village where a person was born. Any place beyond his native land was ‘abroad’.

2 In Bengali there is no single word for ‘uncle’. Father’s elder brother, his younger brother, the husband of his sister, mother’s brother and the husband of her sister – all have different names by which they are addressed. The uncle here means mother’s brother.

3 See Note 2. Uncle here means the younger brother of one’s father.

4 Kabiraj is a doctor who practises Ayurveda. This is an ancient Indian school of medicine. Medicines are prepared with different botanical extracts. This was the sole mode of treatment before allopathy and homeopathy came to be practised in India.

5 Two persons cannot be each other’s uncle. But people in the nineteenth century addressed each other by such far-fetched names. It was something that they found amusing. Sometimes only one person was so addressed, while the other was called by his name. In this instance, Gopinath and Kenaram call each other ‘uncle’.

6 In the past, a woman were not supposed to utter her husband’s name. But gradually, times changed and with the spread of education, this custom was abandoned. Some women began calling their husbands by their names.
Amaravati is a mythological town built on the Sumeru hill by Viswakarma, the Hindu god of architecture. It is the dwelling place of the gods and has no misery or death. The season is eternally spring. Besides all commodities of luxury, it has beautiful apsaras or heavenly courtesans and gandharvas or heavenly singers. Music and dance thus go on incessantly.

ACT III

Scene 1

1 Nidhu Gupta was the originator of Bengali tappa, a type of classical song. He worked as a clerk in the East India Company at Chapra in Bihar, where he took lessons on tappa from a Muslim music teacher. Nidhu Gupta composed Bengali tappa lyrics and sang them himself. Most of his songs were about his love for a prostitute named Srimati, whose house he visited and for whom he sang his songs. Nevertheless his lyrics are free from bawdiness.

2 Bastubichar (1859) is by Ramgati Nyayratna. In his Mudrita Bangla Granther Panji, Jatindramohan Bhattacharyya mentions it to be a collection of the sources, properties and description of various commonly used medicines (136). There is also the mention of a book by the same name on physical science by Iswarchandra Chakrabarti.

3 There is one Bhugolbibaran by Taracharan, the second edition of which appeared in 1865. Another book by the same name was first published by Tarinicharan Chattopadhyay in 1857. Pages were added to its subsequent editions. Kalidas Maitra wrote a four volume book Geography Ba Bhugol Bijnapak, the first volume being Bhugol Bibaran (1857).

4 Patiganit (1863) is a book by Kaliprasanna Gangopadhyay. Another book by the same name was written earlier by Prasannakumar Sarbadhikari in 1855.

5 Charitabali (1856) was written by Iswarchandra Vidyasagar. He discusses the lives of such people as who may encourage the students to improve themselves. These lives would make them...
devote themselves to study. The lives discussed included Winckelmann, Heyne, Dr. Adam and Lomonozov.

6 Akshaykumar Datta wrote the three-volume Charupath (1853, 1854, 1859). These have essays on geography and science. It also has some translations from various English books. There are some illustrations as well. The third also has some essays on moral science.

7 Prakritik Bijnan (1856) is a two-volume book written by Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay.

8 Ramer Abhishek might refer to a book named Ramer Rajyabhishek that Iswarchandra Vidyasagar began writing in 1869, but left it incomplete because in the meanwhile Sasibhushan Chattopadhyay published a book by the same name. Later, the former’s son, Narayanchandra Vidyaratna wrote Ramer Adhibas in 1315 BS and incorporated the portion written by his father under the name ‘Ramer Rajyabhishek’.

9 This book might be a Battala publication. They brought out books that were as varied as books on mathematics, geography, history, grammar, medicine, treatises on law, Panchatantra and Hitopades on morals, erotic texts like Ratibilas, Rasamanjari and Besvarahasva, translation of Sakuntala, farces like Ki Majar Sanibar, holy texts of Islam and stories of Laila Majnu. The books were inexpensive and ranged between 1 anna to Re 1 or Rs. 2.

10 If the Bengali text is translated word by word, it would come to ‘I don’t know whose face I saw when I woke up today’. It was a commonly held belief that the face of the person whom one sees first after waking in the morning determines how his day will pass. While some face brings good luck, others do not.

11 If the Bengali text is translated word by word, it comes to ‘performing the funeral rites of one’s ancestors of fourteen generations’. This actually means quarrelling very badly.

12 The guards and the mob are not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.
Sarat had already talked about this cowardly attitude of Indians. The shopkeeper here is the representative of the Indians in general. When there is a scuffle or something even more serious, they would first go for cover, instead of coming forward to help the innocent victim or someone needy. Worse still, they would not stop here. Their curiosity gets the better of them and they watch the goings-around from the safety of their hiding place. Sarat therefore knew quite well that it was impossible to fight the powerful colonialists with such cowardly Indians. But there were at least some Indians who were brave enough to come forward and fight any sort of oppression. Sarat knows quite well that this courage is needed to drive the colonialists away from India. That there were some people like Sarat in real life can be seen from the resistance that the British faced from time to time.

Scene 2

There are three different forms of the personal pronoun ‘you’ in Bengali. This is something like the pronouns vous’ and ‘tu’ in French. The pronoun ‘apni’ corresponds to ‘vous’ in French and is used while addressing someone who is older or even an unknown but respectable person. There are two different pronouns corresponding to the French ‘tu’. ‘Tumi’ is used within the members of a family and someone who is quite familiar with the speaker. It may also be used for someone who is unfamiliar but not respectable. ‘Tui’ is used with someone who is not at all respectable, like servants, etc. Husband and wife usually used ‘tumi’ when they addressed each other. In more orthodox families, the wife used ‘apni’ while addressing the husband and the latter used ‘tumi’. Among those who did not belong to the polite section, husbands used ‘tui’. Matilal uses ‘tui’ while talking to Bindubasini but she uses ‘tumi’. Later in the play, Matilal uses ‘tumi’. He now uses ‘tui’ to show his anger at his wife. But this cannot be done in English.

In Hindu mythology, ‘three worlds’ mean heaven, earth and hell.
3 Jagadamba is a Hindu goddess.

4 This one phrase shows that the husband and wife did not get the same respect. The pronouns they use while addressing each other has already made this clear. Therefore Matilal and Bindubasini do not share the same platform. Instead he is her ‘lord and master’.

5 The not-so-educated people of the nineteenth century were of the opinion that women lacked intellectual faculty. Bindubasini too echoes the same sentiment. She gets kicked by her husband for saying something that is indeed true. She immediately apologizes for her wise observation and says that she said this because she is a ‘foolish woman’.

6 Uneducated women lacked self-respect. Instead of getting angry with the way she has been treated, Bindubasini asks her husband whether he hurt his leg while kicking her.

7 Though the presence of British colonialism in India was not desirable, it was not altogether non-beneficial. Spread of education, modernization and the maintenance of law and order may be attributed to the British, even if to a certain extent. They tried to educate Indians so that they could hire them for certain jobs. Modernization was to make their stay in India more comfortable. Though they manipulated law for their own selfish ends, where their interest was not concerned, the British were strict. Matilal has to be very careful. He is planning the abduction of Sukumari. This is a criminal act and therefore he is afraid of the British.

Scene 3

1 Goldighi is a tank near College Square in Kolkata.

2 See Note 5 on Act I scene 1.

3 Sarat and Binay were talking at Goldighi till Becharam called them. At this same place Bipin, Nanda and Haridas too come and are shortly joined by Sarat. When they leave, this same space is occupied by Matilal and his goon, Gopinath. They are planning the abduction of a girl
who is of course Sukumari. In absence of any stage direction, the reader has to take it for granted that it is the same Goldighi. But one does not discuss criminal activities in a public place.

4 ‘জন’ might have been misspelt. ‘জন জন’ does not make any sense. Upendranath Das must have used ‘জন’ ‘then’.

Scene 4

1 The first speaker uses the phrase ‘warm thanks’ that does not occur in Bengali. He merely translates the English phrase, word by word. This shows how some people blindly imitated the British and thus cut a poor figure.

2 When the previous Creation was destroyed in the great flood during Pralay, God selected a pair of each species for the next Creation. Manu was the man whom God selected. So, all human beings are regarded in the Hindu mythology to be the descendants of Manu.

3 Auguste Comte (1798-1857) was a French philosopher and founder of Positivism. He was born in a devout Christian family. However at the age of fourteen he announced that he had naturally ceased believing in God. At the same time he abandoned the royalist sympathies of his family and became a Republican. As a result, Comte’s relationship with his family was strained throughout his relatively short life.

4 In the text, the Chairman stumbles on ‘বুগি’. But no such word exists in Bengali. The dramatist might have meant that the Chairman stumbled on some small object while walking with his head held high.

54 An idiom is used in the Bengali. It consists of two synonyms for the word ‘head’. It means ‘nothing’. But as with most of the idioms, it does not have a parallel in English.
ACT IV

Scene 1

1 See Note 1 on Act III scene 2. Sarojini is using ‘apnô’ while addressing Binay.

2 Verbs in Bengali are inflected, as they are in French. Sukumari is using ‘apni’ while addressing Binay. She has not actually used this form of the personal pronoun, but the verb suggests this. But this is something that cannot be translated into English.

3 See Note 1 on Act III scene 2. Binay does not want himself to be addressed ‘apni’. Therefore Sarojini tells Sukumari to say what she has just said properly. The latter now uses another verb that is used with ‘tumi’.

4 Villages in Bengal have many ponds and lakes. The ghats of these water-bodies functioned as meeting places for the villagers. These ghats did not have proper names. They usually got their names from some prominent place that was nearby.

5 Bengalis addressed women as ‘mother’ out of respect.

6 Fighting with sticks is a form of martial art of Bengal. Such fighters were very common during the pre-independence era. Most of the zamindars patronized some such fighters and often needed their service.

7 Nineteenth-century Bengal was not a lawless country because it is ruled by the British. See Note 7 on Act III scene 2.

8 See Note 7 on Act III scene 2. Sarojini is confident that law and order will be maintained in the country.

9 Before independence, certain areas were ruled by zamindars. They tortured their subjects to extract money. If they failed to give money, other forms of torture followed.
Scene 2

1 kros corresponds to a little more than 3 km. Thus the distance mentioned in the Bengali text is a little more than 9 km.

2 The idiom used in the Bengali text, if translated word by word, would come to ‘the desire of the dwarf to touch the moon’.

3 Yama is the Hindu god of death.

4 The idiom in the Bengali text means sprinkling salt on an open wound. There will be a burning sensation when the salt comes in contact with a wound. The idiom is used to mean doing something that would add to the already existing pain.

5 See Note 1 above. The distance comes to about 5 km.

6 On the eleventh day of the lunar fortnight, Brahmins and widows observed fast. This day was considered to be auspicious.

7 See Note 6 on Act I scene 2. Birajmohini means Matilal outraged her modesty.

Scene 3

1 What Matilal says is somewhat different. He says that Ramasundari’s youth was like the overflowing Ganga in the monsoon, with water up to its brim. This does not read well in English. Therefore this idiom has been changed and replaced by its corresponding idiom in English, to make the reading smooth.

2 The river Ganga is regarded to be holy by the Hindus. She is looked upon as a goddess. Thus Biswambhar wonders only the goddess will know what witness Matilal can provide.

3 Sometimes in a light-hearted mood Bengalis used short sentences in Hindi. Here Matilal is happy since he thinks that his shower of money will bring the case in his favour.
Scene 4

1 Yama, the Hindu god of death, has messengers whom he sends to bring the souls of the dead to the abode of death. Mythology has it that these messengers have such looks as strike terror in the hearts of the people.

Scene 5

1 See Note 1 on Act III scene 2. While talking to Sarat, Sarojini uses ‘apni’. She earlier used ‘tumi’ to address him. Sarat is not happy with the change and tells Sarojini to use ‘tumi’.

2 See Note 1 on Act III scene 2. A woman uses ‘tumi’ to address either her husband or her lover. Sarojini earlier used ‘tumi’ to address Sarat because she regarded him as her brother. But now she feels attracted towards him and prefers using ‘apni’ to hide her feelings. She is distressed because Sarat does not understand this change of feeling. He still has a brotherly affection for Sarojini.

3 The British speaks this in English.

ACT V

Scene 1

1 Sarat feels that he has fallen in love with Sarojini. He is afraid to admit it because he had earlier vociferously spoken against love. He is trying to convince himself that it is not romantic love, but a mere brotherly affection for Sarojini.

2 Sarat is of the opinion that love is something that prevents men from performing their duties. It is therefore abominable and none should indulge in it, at least not when British colonialists are ruling over India. Sarat apprehends that he has fallen in love. But he is trying to somehow cling to the belief that he has not developed any special attraction for Sarojini. It is nothing but brotherly love and does not go against his convictions.
Scene 2

1 The phrase used in the Bengali text means Lakshmi’s minion. Lakshmi is the Hindu goddess of wealth and prosperity. What Matilal means is one with plenty of money can do whatever one wants.

2 Many of the newly educated young men of the nineteenth century had nothing but book learning. They pored over books all through the day and did not exercise or practice the martial arts. Sedentary habits coupled with lack of exercise made the Bengali youth weak. They could not muster courage in the face of a disaster. But there were many like Sarat who were university educated and skilled in martial arts like fighting with sticks and boxing, using firearms, horse-riding and so on. They were brave and did not hesitate to take any risk to fight for anything righteous.

3 See Note 5 on Act IV scene 1.

4 This is how scandals spread. The fighter gathers some information and uses his imagination to create a sensational story. Every listener will add something more to it before passing it on to another person.

5 An idiom is used in the Bengali text and it cannot be translated into English.

6 This shows how people had faith in divine providence. In the face of such a succession of disasters, Bhagaban consoles Sukumari by saying that God will set everything right.

7 Beggars came for alms in the morning. They generally did not come after noon and never at night. Bhagaban is therefore surprised and wants to know what made them come at this late hour.

8 See Note 1 above.

9 This shows the society’s preference for the male child. By giving alms to beggars, Sukumari will be blessed with wealth and sons, not daughters.

10 Bhagalpur is a district in Bihar.
Scene 3

1 Rajmahal, earlier known as Akmahal, is a town in Bihar. In 1592, on his way back after the conquest of Orissa, Man Singh, the Mughal general, established this town as the capital of Bengal. Upto 4 miles on the west of Rajmahal, the ruins of the ancient capital lie covered in forest creepers and plants. The ruins of the Jumma Masjid, various palaces and garden houses testify to the earlier splendor of Rajmahal. The hills of Rajmahal do not form the part of any range, but exist separately.

2 Jakhu is not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

3 Jakhu uses a phrase that means ‘Allah’s slave’. But it could be extended to mean ‘your slave, my lord’. However it has to be admitted that this phrase has unmistakable Islamic connotations. But in the next two sentences that he speaks to Sarat, he uses Hindu terms of address. He and Sarat speak to each other in Hindi.

4 See Note 4 on Act I scene 1.

5 The blind Muslim is not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

6 The four Muslims are not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

7 An idiom is used in the Bengali text. It means ‘the big rohu fish has been caught’. What the speaker means is that the person they have got hold of is rich.

Scene 4

1 The exact word used by Sarat is ‘yaban’ that refers to anyone non-Hindu. It was also used to refer to the Greeks. But gradually it came to mean Muslims. The idea behind this utterance is that only Hindus can speak discreetly. This shows how university education too fails in helping Sarat overcome this racial prejudice. He is an otherwise admirable character. But he has this serious shortcoming.
2 Akbar is the famous Mughal emperor, well-known for his dispensation of justice.

3 Aamir uses the word ‘kafer’. This word refers to non-Muslims. The speaker here means the British. Here Aamir too betrays racial prejudice. The British are not colonialists, but non-Muslims. It is as if he would not have minded the British imperialism had they been Muslims!

4 These are very polite ways of answering. It does not mean that the speaker is degrading himself by speaking in such humble accents.

5 See Note 2 on Act V scene 2. Sarat shows his acute presence of mind in trying to bring the situation under his control. He threatens them by saying that he will set the gunpowder on fire and thereby killing all of them at once. He is not at all afraid to die. For him living like a puppet in the hands of his Muslim captors is far worse than death. So he prefers death to a life of captivity.

Scene 5

1 The four boozers are not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

2 See Note 2 on Act II scene 4. The uncle whom Sarojini is mentioning is her mother’s brother.

3 Three different words are used in the Bengali text. If translated word by word, this comes to ‘a sixteen year old girl, a beautiful girl, a young girl’. This is not idiomatic in English. But in Bengali the two different words for ‘a sixteen year old girl’ and ‘a young girl’ are significant. If one of them is removed, it reduces the impact of the utterance.

4 Lotus is a flower consisting of many petals and is generally available in white and pink shades. The boozzer here talks about the pink lips of Sarojini.

5 Rajkrishna Bandyopadhyay’s Nitibodh (1851) was a summary of Moral Class Book by Robert and William Chambers. In 1863, Nafarchandra Pal also wrote a book by the same name.
This is a kind of knife used by Indians. It has a big blade that is fixed on a piece of wood. A foot is placed on this wood to hold the knife in place. It is then used to cut vegetables, fruits, fishes and so on.

When Hindus offered food to holy men, the latter would leave some of it for the devotees. The boozzer holds Sarojini in great esteem and so wants to eat the leftover of the fruits that she will eat.

During the later part of the nineteenth century, there were three distinctly different attitudes of husbands or lovers towards their female partners. One attitude is presented by Matilal in his treatment of Bindubasini. He ill-treats her, kicks her and even threatens to kill her. He does not give her the human dignity. The second attitude is the way in which the boozzer treats Sarojini. He is ready to surrender everything, even his human dignity for her. Such men were either doting husbands or lovers of women with whom they should not have got involved in such a relationship. Matilal shows this attitude in his dealings with Bhubanmohini, dancing girls and his new companion. The ghataki too says that once Matilal marries Sukumari, she will get all his attention. The third attitude is presented by Sarat and Binay. They hold their women in esteem, are ready to take risks to protect them and are also aware of their responsibilities.

See Note 6 above.

The theatre-goers loved to listen to declamatory speeches. This is why such words are put to Sarojini. Otherwise the boozzers have not harmed her. One of them even offered to marry her. It is very natural that she should turn down such a proposal of marriage. The way in which the boozzers behaved was not quite gentlemanly, but neither can it be termed cruel.
This is in keeping with the tradition of playwrights in general. Any disturbance in the physical world is accompanied by a similar one in the world of nature. The disturbance in the world of nature is presented through storm, thunder and lightning.

ACT VI

Scene 1

1. The porters are not mentioned in the list of dramatis personae.

2. The porters are afraid that Sarat is some ghost. They are so sure that they find his head to be larger than what men normally have. This is due to ignorance. They react before properly analyzing the situation.

3. Haridas too finds the limbs of Sarat to be longer than those of humans. But, unlike the porters, he does not see them due to ignorance. In his joy of having made a discovery, he cannot see that the person coming out of the underground dungeon is Sarat.

4. See Note 1 on Act III scene 2. Haridas thinks Sarat to belong to some unknown species. So he uses 'tumi'. He could also have used 'tui'.

5. See Note 1 on Act I scene 1. Sarat feels that only one as intelligent as an ape can mistake Sarat to be a creature of some new species.

6. When Haridas realizes Sarat to be his friend and not a creature of some new species, he reverts to 'apni' and stops using 'tumi'.

Scene 2

1. Matilal usually used 'tumi' while addressing Binay. But now he has got abducted of this man and thinks him to be under his control. He is thus denying him his due respect and therefore using 'tui'.

444
2 What Matilal means is that Sukumari is an unchaste girl. She is engaged in some secret love affair.

3 Earlier Binay used ‘apni’ while addressing Matilal. But once the latter presents himself in his true light and wants Binay to make false allegations against Sukumari, he is furious. Usually when one is very angry, one uses ‘tui’ instead of ‘apni’ or ‘tumi’. This is done to show disrespect to the person addressed. This is something that cannot be done in English.

4 This is a kind of expression used in Bengali. It is used to mean what is being said is so bad that the tongue too cannot bear it and therefore falls off.

5 See Note 7 on Act III scene 2. Abduction is an offence. But even in a case of kidnapping, the degree of the offence increased if the girl kidnapped happened to be innocent. So Matilal wants to somehow present Sukumari as unchaste.

6 What Matilal actually says is that he will send Binay to the abode of Yama, the Hindu god of death. There is a difference in the impact between ‘I will kill you’ and ‘I will send you to the abode of death’. The second way of saying is ruder.

7 Matilal here uses two words of Arabic origin. The two words together mean ‘completely ruined’. But using these two words is ruder than saying it in plain Bengali. This shows how easily Matilal could ruin someone and how much pleasure he took in seeing the pitiful condition of his victims.

8 See Note 7 on Act V scene 5. Binay, Sarat, Sarojini and Sukumari are in equally dangerous situations. But Binay is more concerned for the women.

Scene 3

1 An idiom is used in the Bengali text. In the nineteenth century women covered their head with a veil when they were in front of outsiders. Again, respectable women did not dance in
public. The idiom, if translated word by word, comes to ‘Why cover the head when you are dancing?’ What the woman means is that the boy had decided to come in the dress he is wearing. It was his plan. So, now he cannot feel shy.

2 In Act VI scene 2 Matilal said that none is fighting for the release of Sarat from prison because he does not have money with him. That all people are not like this man is evident from what Bhagaban says.

3 This shows Sarat’s courage and also his commitment for the welfare of his country and his distressed countrymen. Accepting the charge would have easily saved him. Instead he says that he can take any risk to liberate his country from the clutches of the British colonialists.

4 What Bhagaban says is, ‘Why Matilal, even his father will come’. He does not actually mean that Matilal’s father will come. What he means is that one even more committed to evil deeds cannot help coming in response to the letter that has been sent.

5 See Note 3 on Act VI scene 2.

6 Modern girls of the nineteenth century were aware of their dignity by virtue of their education. So they would use their reasoning power to judge a situation and react accordingly. The sort of ‘dedication’ that Matilal expects from traditional Hindu wives like Bindubasini cannot be expected from these educated girls.

7 Civil Marriage Act (Act III) was enacted in 1872. This marriage was to be monogamous. The bride should be at least 14 years old, while the groom had to be 18 years old. The parties had to admit during the marriage that they professed no particular Indian religion. Thus this form of marriage would remain open to all willing to renounce traditional religions.

8 Matilal means the mistresses kept by the rich.

9 See Note 4 on Act III scene 4.
Scene 4

1 Nanasaheb or Dhundu Pant (1824 - ?) was the adopted son of the last Peshwa Baji Rao and became the heir-presumptive. When, after the death of Baji Rao, he failed to get the allowances that the former got, he went against the Government. During the Sepoy Mutiny in 1857, he feigned loyalty to the rulers. But he joined the soldiers of Kanpur. He actually led them and fought with the British. The English residents surrendered when Nanasaheb promised to send them safely to Allahabad. But later most of them were brutally killed. Towards the end of 1858, Nanasaheb escaped to Nepal but was not allowed to stay there. So he stayed under cover in the forest and is believed to have died in the forest itself in 1859.

2 Swastyayan is a religious ceremony performed to cure someone or remove the obstacles one is facing. Bindubasini feels that performing this ritual will cure her husband.

3 See Note 5 on Act IV scene 1.

4 Now that Matilal is about to die and is begging forgiveness from all for his evil deeds, Binay once again uses ‘apni’ while addressing him.

Scene 6

1 After the birth of the first child, the husband and the wife would call each other as the child’s mother and the child’s father respectively. They would not use their names. Habi is Bhagaban’s child. Therefore he calls his wife Habi’s mother.

2 This sort of necklace was fashionable in the nineteenth-century Bengal. It was a big necklace consisting of seven different strings. Each string formed a heavy necklace and the ends of all the seven different strings were joined to make a single thick string. Thus when one put on this necklace, it looked as if one were actually wearing seven different necklaces.
3 Becharam is teasing Bhagaban. He pretends to be afraid that the latter has been possessed by some evil spirit. It was believed in the nineteenth century and still continues to be believed by the uneducated in rural India that evil spirits possessed someone and then that person would start behaving in an abnormal way.

4 It was believed that evil spirits cannot bear to listen to the names of divine beings. They therefore leave whenever these names are uttered.

5 The Banga Darsan was a Bengali journal first published in 1872 by Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

6 The Amrita Bazar Patrika was first published in 1868 by Hemantkumar and Sisirkumar Ghosh.

7 The National Paper was published by Nabagopal Mtra in 1865.

8 The Sadharani was brought out by Akshaychandra Sarkar in 1873.

9 The Bharat Sanskarak was published by O. C. Dutt in 1873.

10 The Saptahik Samachar seems to be a periodical of the nineteenth-century Bengal.

11 The Sahachar was published by Bipradas Bandyopadhyay.

12 The Bengalee was brought out by Girischandra Ghosh in 1861.

13 Once a Bengali journal criticized a Government act. Pratt, the inspector of the right wing of the education department, felt that the Government should bring out its own newspaper to make its policies clear to the public. As a result, the Education Gazette was first published on July 4, 1856, with Smith as its editor.

14 The Somprakas was first published in November, 1858 by Dwarakanath Vidyabhushan, with the help of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar.
Girischandra Ghosh brought out a weekly named the *Bengal Recorder*. In 1850, it changed its name and became the *Hindu Patriot*. ‘Some are of the opinion that Harish Chandra Mukherjee was its first editor. But there is positive evidence that Cirish Chandra was the first editor of the paper. However, Harish Chandra, a great intellectual was closely associated with the paper from its inception and later became the editor of the *Hindoo Patriot* in 1856’ (qtd. Sen 43).

There is a sly hit at contemporary journalism. The newspapers that were being published had to print enough news items. What the man means is that the editors, in absence of important news items manufactured some to fill in the pages. This is of course true of the less reputed newspapers. The picture was different when it came to journals like the *Somprakas* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*.

An idiom is used in the Bengali text. It means: ‘As long as one needs something from another person, one remains faithful. But after the work is done one turns ungrateful’. This is said in only six words, with the third and sixth word rhyming. This adds to the beauty of the utterance.

See Note 3 on Act VI scene 2. In his anger Sarat uses ‘tui’ while addressing the man. It may be noted that he earlier used ‘tumi’ to address him.

See Note 2 on Act IV scene 5. Now that Sarojini is expressing her love for Sarat, she is using ‘tumi’ while addressing him.

The two words are almost synonymous. They are used together to add weight to what Sarat is saying.

In absence of polythene carry-bags, packets were made out of old newspapers. Shopkeepers used these to pack their sold goods.
In India, this is a form of prostrating to pay homage to someone deserving the highest respect.

See Note 3 on Act I scene 4.

In the past, Bengalis put the loose end of their cloth round their neck to show their humility. They did so while bowing before someone very respectable or when requesting something very politely.

The audience always loved to listen to songs and watch some spectacles. Fairies cannot normally walk into a domestic drama like Sarat-Sarojini. This is how Bhagaban introduces them.

Fairies and humans cannot share a common stage. The former has to be conjured by magic. Bhagaban therefore hits the ground with his foot to bring about the change. It is needless to mention, the audience simply loved to witness this marvel.

The ordinary stage gets transformed into the land of fairies after Bhagaban hits the ground with his foot. The fairies are seen dancing to a song. Fairies, song and dance introduced for the sake of the amusement of the audience, mar the effect of an otherwise realistic play. But the playwright uses the fairies too for his own purpose. They do not sing about romance and beauty. Instead they too try to wake up the lethargic Indians and make them fight for the country.

See Note 2 on Act III scene 2.
Problems of Translation

Susan Bassnett defines translation as a process by which a source language text is so rendered into the target language that the meanings of both texts will be approximately similar. The translation also tries to maintain the structure of the source language as long as it does not seriously distort that of the target language (11). But the process of translation is not as simple as it seems in this definition. Sukanta Chaudhuri describes translation as 'the philosophically redoubtable project of transferring a “reality” from its native verbal habitat to another: or [...] extending a “reality” beyond its proper verbal confines, formulating it in terms other than the original ones in which it was experienced and defined – which are strictly, the only ones in which it can be valid' (Translation and Understanding 24).

For Hans J. Vermeer 'translation is primarily a cross-cultural transfer' (Bassnett and Lefevere 82). The concerned language pairs may or may not be closely related. At any case, it can never represent an identical social reality. Edward Sapir says: 'No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached' (qtd. Bassnett 21). A translation thus involves an encounter of two different languages.

This implies that a work of translation is also an encounter between two cultures. It involves the assessment of another culture and also another value-system. As Katharina Reiss says: ‘The reader of a translation belongs, as a matter of principle, to another language or culture community as the author and reader of the original communication. This necessarily entails a gap between pragmatics of the original text on the one hand and those of the translated text on the other’ (Toury 49). The translator is required to bridge the gap arising due to the differences in the system of the languages as well as the differences arising due to historical, social and cultural
circumstances. He or she does this by having recourse to annotations, something that the author of the source language text did not have to do.

Mme de Stael says that the translator renders service to literature by transporting ‘the masterpieces of the human spirit from one language to another’ (qtd. Bassnett and Lefevere 26). But there are no strict rules by which one can translate. In other words, though there are scientific theories of translation, there is no science of translating. One has to translate by intuition. Whatever be the process of translation, the culture of the translator’s social milieu has the advantage over that of the author of the source language text. As Sukanta Chaudhuri puts it, the text in the source language is being reworked in the light of the host culture. However the source language too brings out possibilities in the target language that would have otherwise remained unrealized. In fact, postcolonial translation is marked by penetration of the source language into the target language. Rudolf Pannitz comments:

Our translations, even the best, proceed from a false premise. They want to Germanize Hindi, Greek, English, instead of hindi-izing, graecizing, anglicizing German … The fundamental error of the translator is that he maintains the accidental state of his own language, instead of letting it suffer the shock of the foreign language … [H]e must widen and deepen his language through the foreign one (qtd. Translation and Understanding 37).

Upendranath Das composed Sarat-Sarojini in 1874 and Surendra-Binodini in 1875. These plays portray the society of the nineteenth-century colonial Bengal. Translating these plays into English in the twenty-first century thus involves an encounter between two different cultures that are separated both geographically as well as by a gap of around 135 years. Much has changed even within the Bengal of the last quarter of the nineteenth century and present-day Bengal. Many customs and conventions prevalent in the colonial Bengal have now fallen out of practice.
Thus translation of these plays is, two-fold. First it has to be ‘translated’ (if the word may be used) into twenty-first century Bengali, and then into English. For example, the formality with which Sarat and his friends interact is no longer to be found in a close group of young men of the present day. Translation of their speeches becomes difficult, because in the present society, formality and friendship do not go hand in hand. To find a way out, the dialogues exchanged between Sarat and his friends have been made somewhat polite, thereby avoiding the stiff formality that exists in the Bengali original.

The Bengali language, especially one written about 135 years ago, abounds in tatsama words. These are complex words belonging to the Sanskrit vocabulary. It is impossible to substitute such words by a single one in English. One has to use a phrase, and this does not recreate the effect produced in the source language. Upendranath Das uses words like ‘অর্থপ্রতিক্ষিতিশস্তি’ (Foreword Sarat-Sarojini) ‘the rest is filled up with obscenities’; ‘জাতিভক্তিরন্নামেশ্বরনাথ’ (Sarat-Sarojini I.1) ‘vow to establish amity within the country’ and ‘গণতন্ত্রিকভাবেরন্ধন’ (Sarat-Sarojini III.4) ‘serious scholars’.

Another problem crops up with the presence of rather long compound sentences and the use of ornamental language. English, the target language, on the other hand, prefers simple sentences and an easy flow. A solution to this problem has been attempted by breaking the compound sentence of the source language into shorter sentences in the target language. An example of a long sentence from Surendra-Binodini:

কিন্তু আমার মনে অভাবচী, উৎপাদক ও উদ্ধরণার্থ হেতু উল্লেখ, তখন দর্শনসমকল গভীরভাবেনন্দুি হয়, যখন

- বিশ্বাসের ভারতস্মৃতি জন্মে পিচার ফলে ভারতস্মৃতি হতে আরম্ভ হয়, যখন জাতিভক্তির, ইতিহাসের, লাখটি নিদর্শন বালকদের উপর সংখ্যাগুলি পোড়ের ধন, প্রাপ্ত ও সান রচনা বা নট করবার সম্পূর্ণ ক্ষমতা নিশ্চিত হয় - তখন আমার সেই আশন বন্ধ আমাদের যে প্রায়বৃত্তি করে, তখন উপলক্ষী করে থাকে নার্তর, তীর্থতা, অবনতিকার কর্ম - তখন তুলনাতম
But when they become tyrants and selfish, these seats of justice become corrupted with partiality. When judgment varies with the change in the colour of the skin; when the power of preserving or destroying wealth, life and honour of thousands of people rest on sensuous, debauched foreign boys, yet to attain to manhood, then that original right returns to our hands. To ignore then is foolish, cowardly and inhuman. It is a sin to remain inactive.

Again the heavy use of tatsama words and lots of comparisons while describing natural beauty moves that particular place far from the madding crowd. It is difficult to produce the same effect in the translation. An example from Sarat-Sarojini will demonstrate this: ‘সন্ধ্যায় সোমবারিয়ার নামে কৃষ্ণর গিরিপুথ, চতুর্থিতে হরিহত্সাগরভূত মাঠ, মধ্য মধ্য অক্ষুল তরুণ, পুরুষ যুগল ননি — তিন বেন জীবাভাগ্ন’ (V.3) ‘Hills as dark as midnight in front, verdant fields on all sides, tall trees here and there, a small river at a distance — just like a silver screen’.

The Bengali language is a treasure house of adjectives. A single noun may be qualified by a series of adjectives that are slightly different in meaning. But English does not have that many adjectives. Whatever exists turns out to be synonymous. This again prevents the recreation of the same effect as produced in the original. The translation resolves this problem by rendering the source language sentence into English using as many adjectives as possible without producing a repetition. One cannot help being a traitor to the letter to be faithful to the spirit. In other words, the translation is done by omitting one or two words to retain the readability of the end product.

The following example from Surendra-Binodini may be cited: ‘মূর্ত বেঞ্চারিণী আর বেঞ্চারিণী? কপটচারিণী, - সরসাতকারি, নিজাতী — রাব্য’ (III.1) ‘Merely wayward and self-willed? Deceitful, murderess, witch’. Upendranath Das makes ample use of idiomatic Bengali. Hunting down the exactly corresponding idiom in English is indeed challenging. Two examples might be cited:
The Bengali language has three types of second-person pronoun and as many inflected verbs. The use of pronouns changes with the degree of intimacy and respect shown. A mere replacement of a particular pronoun or verb would suggest a change of feeling. For example, Sarojini earlier used the familiar form তুমি while addressing Sarat. This pronoun is used for people who are younger than the speaker, amongst siblings and amongst couples even after betrothal. When Sarojini grows up and develops an attraction for Sarat, she cannot use তুমি and turns to the honorific আপনি that is used for elders and outsiders. Birajmohini shows her consent in accepting Haripriya as her husband by replacing আপনি by তুমি. When Sukumari is told to use তুমি for Binay, she uses আপনি. Upon Sarojini’s insistence she bashfully utters the familiar form of pronoun. Matilal uses তুমি for Binay. But when the former abducts and ill-treats him, he uses the inferior form তুই. This particular pronoun was used in nineteenth-century Bengal while addressing servants. It is impossible to show these changes of feeling by means of pronouns and verbs in English. In sentence where the particular pronoun or verb has been deliberately used, the corresponding pronoun or verb in English has been put within inverted comma and a note has been inserted.

Surendra-Binodini has some dialogues in English, while Sarat-Sarojini has some in Hindi. The corresponding dialogues in the translation have been preceded by an asterisk mark and separated from the sections translated from Bengali. A corresponding annotation has also been added. Deciding upon the spellings of Indian proper names was another problem. These have been spelt in the translation according to current standard Bengali pronunciation.
Whatever be the problems of translation, the end product in the target language has to be readable. It should not show the signs of forcing the idioms of one language into the other. It should produce a smooth reading just as the text in the source language does. In other words, it should not look like an imitation of some other literary work. It has to read like a complete text in its own right. In other words, the readers of the target language text should share in the feelings of the readers of the original text. The attempt of achieving this was indeed difficult. Swarup Roy mentions a problem he faced while translating Kaliprasanna Sinha's Hutom Pyanchar Naksā. He writes: 'One of the risks of rendering an Indian text into English is that one's own familiar world gets foreignized in translation.' (xv). The same holds true for the translation of Surendra-Binodini and Sarat-Sarojini as well.