

Appendix I

Translation of Selected Poems of Krishnabhabini Das' Daughter

Tilottama Dasi, the only daughter of Krishnabhabini and Devendranath Das, had left behind a collection of poems which was posthumously published by her mother in an anthology titled *Akkhep* (Regret). There are seven poems in the anthology and all are personal evocations of Tilottama's sufferings. Apart from speaking of the emotional turmoil that she had to go through, these poems also give an insight in the mother-daughter relationship from the daughter's perspective. They have been included in Simonti Sen's edited *Englandey Bangamahila* but since none of these poems contain any dates, their chronology remains unknown. In this section I have translated three of her poems, those in which she talks about her mother, to present another aspect of Krishnabhabini's life. These translations are not important for their poetic value but for the complexity of Tilottama's feelings towards her mother. While on the one hand she understands how difficult it must have been for Krishnabhabini to leave her daughter and go abroad, on the other she cannot forgive her mother for leaving her and going away and holds her responsible in certain ways for the tragic turn that her life had taken. Here I have just tried to provide a sense translation of these poems to convey their meanings to the readers. Apart from the poems included here the other four also dwell on the miseries of her life and her hopelessness. In the poem called *Sansar* (This world) she wants to run away from her world in which she finds no one to call her own. There is another poem dedicated to her husband, *Swamir Proti* (To my Husband), where she laments that her husband has forgotten and forsaken her but she like a true Hindu wife cannot ever forget him. The poem *Dekhi kotha pai e bhober kool* (Where shall I find an end to this life) is the most positive of the lot in which she says that in spite of all her sufferings, she will think of God and be good to everyone around her till she can find an end to this life of hers. In *Uchchas* (Outbursts) she talks about her husband's impending remarriage. All of Tilottama's poems speak about intense sufferings and a life completely devoid of love. It is a life completely opposite to that of Krishnabhabini's and the dejection that the daughter felt is reflected in all her poems. Such intense sufferings of her daughter perhaps made Krishnabhabini nurture a feeling

of guilt throughout her later life. She tried to do her penance by wearing a widow's clothes after the death of her husband and daughter and dedicated her entire life to improve the lives of other women

Complaint

You who are my mother, one who has borne me in your womb/ how could you say such a thing.

I have been crying since I heard your words/ tears streaming down my eyes unchecked.

Is there any pride in leaving my husband forever/ and to whom shall I remain accountable for it.

You left your only daughter in the lurch to accompany your husband.

You did not even think for a moment/ that you were leaving your only daughter behind.

What will be her fate/ how and with whom shall she live.

Oh my mother you had thought that/ without husband nothing is worthwhile.

Then how can you ask me to leave my husband/ have you noticed the tears in my eyes.

Oh mother even if my husband/ is forever dishonest.

Or if he be mad or a drunkard/ and remains so forever.

Even if my husband kicks me a hundred times/ or hurts me extremely.

Even then oh mother I shall keep on waiting/ for my husband throughout this life.

But I could not bear the pain of my ailment anymore/ so I have left my husband's home.

I came here for the sake of my eyes/ lest I lose them and spend my life as a blind.

Tell me my mother/ can a woman ever leave her husband.

One who has stayed in a Hindu home, who is the daughter of a Hindu/ she is the one who becomes a Hindu wife

Even if her husband is not in the country/ or if he is lost

Even then she will remain in her husband's feet.

So mother, as long as I live/ I shall not be able to leave/or forsake my husband.

Even if I lose my life crying for him/ I shall continue to think of him.

To Mother

1

In this desert like world,/oh mother you do not even know how I live.

Your miserable daughter is almost dead/ forsaken by her father, mother and husband.

2

Did you even think for once mother/ there was no one for me in this barren world.

When I tried to hold on to my mother's *anchal*/ I found that even she had deserted me.

3

The one whom I had nurtured in my womb for ten (?) months/ left me alone.

He had made me forget much of my pains/ but once again my life became dreary.

4

If I try to reduce my pains by seeking my husband's company/ he turns his face away.

Just think of my sorrows mother/ how one can live with so much of pains.

5

Mother, you have got such a husband after acquiring a lot of *punya*/ then why do you wish to die?

You had forsaken me in this dreary world /to follow his footsteps.

6

When you had left me, I thought you did not feel any pain/ I myself had not become a mother then.

I had said many harsh words about you/ and thought you to be cruel parents.

7

Now I know the affection that one has for one's child/ I know there is no greater love than this in this world.

In my heart there is a small voice which keeps crying.

8

What is the use of this life of mother/ so much have sorrow has already turned it stony

How much longer can I bear my illness? / how many more days are there before my life ends.

9

Bless me so that forever/ I can wear this vermilion dot

finally when I die may I find some peace.

10

To whom shall I speak of my heart ache/ who is there for me, except God

I had a body but even that is going away/ mother does this life has no end.

About myself only

I was born at eleven o'clock in the night of first *Aswin* in the year 1284 in Kolkata.

It was a Saturday and perhaps a fateful one.

I grew under my mother's tender care but did not know my father.

When I grew up to my senses, I learnt that my father was not at home.

When my mother was carrying me in her fifth month,

he had left for England, leaving my mother.

Since then my mother is always sad.

My father's thoughts keep her melancholy.

My grandparents were alive

And they took so much care of myself.

When I was four years old

My grandmother left this world.

My grandfather loved me a lot

He always kept me close to his heart.

In my fifth year

I saw my father for the first time.

I, the child was scared to see father,

As he was dressed in Western clothes.

I did not go near my father out of fear

And ran away to my eldest uncle's room

He was the one to whom I looked up for fatherly love.

After staying with us for two months

My father desired to return to England.

My mother, of whom everyone sings praises,

And the one who valued *satitva* very much.

Also wanted to accompany my father.

She left me all alone in this world.

I did not understand any sorrow then

Everyone tried their best to keep this daughter happy in various ways.

Quite soon I forgot my mother's face.

My grandfather immersed me in his love,

It is impossible for me to recount all that he did for me.

I lived in bliss, was always happy.

But the wheel of fortune (*niyatir chakra*) keeps on revolving

And people too turn with it.

I had thought that I will grow up in the company of my eldest uncle and mother

And there will be so much of happiness in life.

When I became nine years old,

My grandfather decided to get me married.

On my tenth year

I danced with joy at my impending wedding.

On sixteenth *phalgun*, 1294,

A night in the bright fortnight,

Saturn, that planet of my birth,
Devoured my happiness forever in this life.
As a child I did not even know whom I was wedding
Had only an image of the person.
I thought that my grandfather who loved me so much
Had given me this life of happiness as a further mark of love.
After my wedding, so many days pass
And I spend my youth with my husband in that house.
From that day I came to know what love meant.
It made my life one of constant burning/ sufferings.
I thought to myself that love is all about happiness
And devoted my entire heart and life to my husband.
Facing this challenge, I cried as I sad despondent.
And think day and night that is this love?
However much may I suffer, I have only one wish
That I shall never talk ill of my husband to anyone.
If someone comes with news about him,
I might cry within but will pose to be happy.
But who can undo what is there in my fate,
A son was born to me, from my ill-fated womb.
In the winters of 1300, in the month of *Poush*
A beautiful son was born to me.

I gained my husband's love

But at times felt sad.

But misery became a part of my life

I never got any happiness from my child.

That child of mine, after engaging my affection for him,

Left me after a year, tearing my heart apart.

In those days I used to ponder where my parents were

And how could they let go of their affection for their living daughter.

What had to happen, had happened; days kept passing

And my husband started squandering my money like crazy.

You came to me with a pleasing appearance but to guile me always.

But I was the most hurt when I fell sick and was bed ridden.

I came away without telling anything to my husband,

I was suffering a lot due to my ailment.

From the day when I came to my father's house,

My husband has forsaken and forgotten me.

I do not want to live in this house

I only want some peace from the deep of my heart.