

5. Reflections

A few months have passed since I reached England. I have adopted the English ways in matters of food, attire, and other things. Perhaps my fellow countrymen would taunt me as a ‘*pucca memsahib*’¹. Let them! Their taunt will not affect me anymore. Everybody can make fun of others. In most such cases it is prompted by superstition and lack of experience. This habit of ridiculing found among our fellow countrymen is often the deterrent to our progress. If someone ventures to try something new the entire country joins together to make fun of him. People pounce upon him without even judging the merit of the endeavour, and later when the idea turns out to be good, no one cooperates with him. Rather, they turn away. In every country a new effort is initially ridiculed, but the difference between others and ours is that in our country people are reluctant even if the adopted way proves efficient while in these countries people appreciate such men. Well, those who are incapable of assessing and accepting the inner qualities and virtues of others and imitate only the outward appearance are justly the subject of ridicule. But then one must also keep in mind that change in one’s appearance such as clothes etc, does not change one’s heart, and just by wearing foreign dresses one does not lose one’s love for one’s own country. Say, when a person returns from abroad and dresses in a different manner, we must try whether there has been some real progress in him regarding other issues. We must see if there has been any positive change in his mentality as a result of staying in a more developed and independent country and also whether he has imbibed some of the virtues of the foreigners. Suppose we agree that all foreign dresses are bad, but if with such an insignificant aberration the person inculcates genuine virtues – would not that be more worthwhile!

¹ One of the commonly practiced form of ridicule for women imitating the Western lifestyle in the nineteenth century Bengal.

There is no sound logic behind the idea that imitation in any form is wrong. Imitation is of two types, good and bad. People very easily pick up what is bad; especially the superstitions and traditions of the foreigners. That is why the Indians are against imitation in any form, irrespective of its merit. Once, even I was completely against copying, but now I have learnt that without imitating what is good in others, people and country cannot progress. Why are the Europeans so civilized and advanced? A closer look will convince most of you that it has been achieved by the act of imitating. Whenever they find anything worthy in any other race, they immediately adapt it. The superstitions are quite similar in most of the races. So each race must first closely examine all the other races and discern whether the practices followed by those races are actually better than theirs and if yes, then what makes them so. If we can get proper answers to these two questions and help to inculcate those good attributes within our race, it would be a commendable accomplishment. This is the only way towards progress.

Unfortunately, we are engulfed by superstitions and ignorance. Moreover, the people of our country are so orthodox that it is very difficult to introduce any novelty here; especially, if they see anyone imitating the foreigners in any way, they take leave of their right senses and become hostile towards him. If a person sends his daughter to school till her sixteenth year, people immediately declare him an outcast; if someone's daughter remains unmarried till her fourteenth year, people look for means to ostracize him from the society. It is our misfortune that such incidents are rampant in our country. I know about one of my relatives who did not perform *sashthi puja*¹. Therefore, no one went to his house on his son's *annaprashan*². For such a trivial

¹ Goddess Sashthi is said to be a form of Durga. She is generally accepted and worshipped as the goddess responsible for the well-being of one's sons and daughters.

² It is the formal rice eating ceremony for a Bengali new-born when the baby is given cereals to eat for the first time.

shift from the customary ritual more than two thousand people got angry with him and criticized him to no end. This is a matter of great regret!

The prime reason behind our wretchedness is that we are not aware of our faults and even if we are we do not try to amend them. It is difficult to be aware of our own faults, and even if we are aware of them we do not like to acknowledge them. One who is drowned cannot measure the depth and width of the river. Similarly, we, drowned in darkness after losing many of our positive qualities along with our independence, cannot judge in what ways and by what degrees we are inferior. People determine what is good or bad by comparing themselves to an ideal, so if we just look at ourselves and do not compare us with any other independent and developed race, we can never know our actual status - what are our virtues and vices. There cannot be any change in the person's mind if he remains constantly at one place and in the same way. People can never leave their vices and embrace the qualities present in other races unless they interact with them. Since we do not realise our faults and wretchedness of life, we remain like inert objects: we do not move in any direction nor do we want to. If we compare our lives to that of any free human being we shall realise properly the huge gap that exists between these two modes of lives and how wretched our lives are!

These days many people say that the Indians on their return from England only abuse their own country and hate it. I do not know how much truth there is in this statement, but I hope that there is no such person who hates his motherland. I can say this much that those who come to Europe (obviously those who have brains), learn many things from their stay in this free and civilized country and therefore can better understand the condition of their own country. After coming here they wake up to the reality of their country and feel pained to see the wretched condition there. Perhaps for that reason when they return to their country and mention the

pitiable conditions of India people misunderstand them and make such false accusations against them.

When we travel abroad we see many novelties – new country, new city, new trees, new mountains etc. We derive a lot of pleasure from them; feel fulfilled by seeing new sights of nature; we are amazed to see huge palaces and buildings; to sum up – we feel really happy by seeing different kinds of new things. But from what do we get proper education – from all these inanimate things or from man and his nature? If you talk of the beauty of nature, the overwhelming beauty of nature that one gets to see near the Himalayas in our country cannot be seen anywhere else in this world. And if you talk of the man-made beauties of the palaces and the buildings, then no building can be compared to the temple of Ellora and the Tajmahal of our country. Then what attracts us more – people or inert objects?

Many countries share similar natural conditions. But in spite of their having such similarities, there are other issues in which they differ completely. Difference between the human beings is the chief reason behind it. Of course it goes without saying that any two countries which differ in the climactic condition, will have people with different dispositions; but it has been often seen that even in countries with similar climate, people's temperament differ. The reason behind this is that the people in any two countries are different. Again we also see that in the same country there arise different situations in different times. India itself is one such example. The weather condition that we have today is the same as we had in ancient India, but what was the condition of the Indians then and how is it now! I have talked about Italy earlier; in Greece too we can see a similar example. In the ancient times, like the Indians, the Greeks too were famous in the world as cultured and learned people. The Romans, after adopting the knowledge and refinement of the very Greeks, spread it across entire Europe. With time, the

Greeks too, like Indians, lost their knowledge, intelligence, and many other human virtues along with their freedom. For centuries they remained in complete darkness being totally subjugated by foreign powers; even the name of Greece was almost lost. Now again, that same country, is regaining its splendour gradually; with independence they are slowly regaining their knowledge and culture as well. This small country of the Greeks has faced so much of changes, yet it has remained just the same as it was in the ancient times.

All these examples tell us that situation in a country changes with changes in human conditions. Holding discussions with some people increase our curiosity and enrich us; when someone returns from abroad, then people first and foremost want to know about the people of that country from him. It is interesting to describe a country, but it is more useful and educating to observe the people and their characteristics. Therefore, though during our trips abroad we get to see and learn many new ideas and thoughts and are benefited from all these, the greatest benefit can be reaped only through discussing about the people and their character as seen in those countries. So, during any trip or stay abroad it is our important duty to learn about all the aspects of that country.

6. London

London is a vast city; the biggest in the world. It is about ten miles in length and eight miles in width. London is about four times bigger and eight times more populated than Calcutta. Forty lakh people reside here. One needs to drive continuously for four to five days to take a complete tour of the city but still one will not be familiar with all its roads. Though London is

already a vast city, it is still expanding. Wherever you go, you shall come across hundreds of ongoing constructions and the adjacent localities of London are merging with the expansion. Even five years back there were green fields around London but now there are innumerable buildings instead. Looking at all these it is difficult to believe that a few years back these places were nothing more than villages.

An Indian once described London in a single phrase as “the city of advertisement”¹. Perhaps his comment was provoked by the abundance of advertisements that he found throughout the city. But apart from advertisements London has many other things as well. At first sight you can call it the “city of shops”, “city of theatres”, or ‘city of wealth”, but after staying here for a few days it becomes difficult to decide what kind of a city London primarily is. That is why I could not ascribe any particular epithet to it. Wherever you go you shall see similar rows of grey houses standing close to each other. While some roads have houses on both sides, some others have shops. In our country we do not have such an arrangement of shops and houses. Perhaps, the total number of houses in Calcutta is far lesser than even the number of shops here. The beautifully decorated shops look splendid at night. Their wares shine brightly under gaslight and appear extremely attractive. I have a feeling that such sights appear very tempting to the poor people but they have to suppress that temptation and return home with a heavy heart. It is true that one cannot be happy in London if one does not have money. It is a treasure house and only the rich people can enjoy life here.

London is divided into eight parts: north, east, south-west, west, north-west, south-east, central-east and central-west. These divisions have been made by the postal department. In order

¹ Romesh Chandra Dutt’s ‘*Europe e tin Batsar*’ or *Three Years in Europe* has a similar comment. He says, “Napoleon Bonaparte had said that the British are a race of shopkeepers. He could have also said that they are just a race of advertisers” (19) (my translation)

to write a letter to someone, the house number, the name of the road, and also the part of London in which that road is situated must be mentioned. The north and the north-west divisions are chiefly occupied by middle class people; a few rich and some poor people may also be found there. House rent is not too high here and good accommodations are available at a cheap rate. Unless explained, people of our country may not understand the concept of 'getting an accommodation'. Here, many people rent a house for themselves and let out a few of the rooms; many families also let out a few rooms of their own house, furnished or unfurnished. Those who offer furnished rooms also provide all the basic amenities like cooking, making the beds, and cleaning the rooms for the tenants. You will use their things, eat in their utensils, and sleep in their bed. If you tell the mistress of the house what you wish to eat each day, she will cook it for you. You only need to pay her the charges for the room and food every week. Women who own these houses are known as 'landlady'. The quality of the accommodation depends on the rent paid. If you pay twenty-five shillings per week, which is almost fourteen rupees, you will get two well-furnished rooms on the first floor of a house in the upper class neighbourhood. There will be a comfortable bed, hand and face wash, cupboard for clothes, mirror, pictures etc. The drawing room will be furnished with a table, four or five small chairs with cushions, two sofas, a small couch, a big mirror, pictures etc. Such houses often have carpeted floors. You can get a house at a much cheaper rate as well but either that will not be as good or will be situated in a poorer locality. Unfurnished rooms are also available and they cost much less, but then one will need to buy all the furniture and utensils and on top of all these one would also need a maid-servant for all the household chores. Therefore, it is more convenient for the foreigners and newcomers to rent a furnished room. Such furnished rooms are let out not just in London but in other parts of England as well and also throughout Europe. Staying in such a room saves a lot of

hard work and time. You can enjoy a comfortable meal in your house within an hour of returning from a long journey. There are hotels almost everywhere, but they would charge double the amount of what one spends here.

The gentry of London live in the West and Southwest parts of the city. It is difficult to get an accommodation here and even if it is available, it is extremely expensive. If you stand on this side of the road, you can see rows of tidy buildings, standing as tall as mountains on either side. The more you see this place, more you would wish to live there. But all these houses ask for an exorbitant rent of about two to three hundred rupees a month. The main roads in this part of London are better than those in the other parts. The shops here contain a greater variety of things and they are more expensive too. Looking at the rich people and the expensive things in this place it becomes difficult to believe that there is even a single poor person living in London. The palaces of the Queen and the Prince of Wales, Parliament house, royal offices and many great buildings are situated in this part of the city.

All the offices are situated in the central-east and central west parts of London. In the central west division there are many theatres, schools, colleges, important offices and shops. The central-eastern part is known as the 'city'. This place reminds me of Burrabazar of Calcutta though it is not as unclean and unhygienic. Here there are banks, huge industries, numerous shops etc. Every building has a shop or a few offices. There are a number of narrow lanes and by lanes here. The houses on either side of the roads are huge and they are so black that they appear to be covered with slime. This place is extremely crowded throughout the day and no one wants to go out unless they have some work. There is a constant flow of traffic on this road at all times of the day. The pavements on both the sides are so crowded that one has to move very carefully

and slowly, or even stand still at times. In this part of the city, prices of land and house are double than those in our Burrabazar area.

The eastern part of London is starkly different from its other areas. The houses here are small and untidy; roads are narrow and dirty, most of them being by lanes. There aren't many shops, and those which are there are full of inferior stuff. This is the place where all the labourers, porters, sweepers and all such working class people live. And there are a number of ship manufacturing industries here. You shall not find a single rich person or a gentleman in this area. All the lower class people reside here. In this country, the poor are called the lower class¹ people. While in India as well as in other European countries, such people are quite humble and pay due respect to everyone; in England, and particularly in London, they are almost like animals. After a visit to this part of the city, no one will believe England to be a civilized country or that any gentleman lives here. This part of London is vast and has a large number of small and dirty houses. Four or five different families stay together in a small house. Each family has four to five children. One family cannot occupy more than one or two rooms and there are no open courtyards for the children as we have in our country. So in one room seven to eight people are herded together like animals. London has its equal share of the rich and the poor. In no other place in the world so many rich and poor people can be seen to exist together. In this part of London people often engage in bitter fights among themselves and even commit murders. And later in this book I shall describe in details how they behave after getting drunk and in what condition they are then found. The paths here are so narrow, dark and dirty and the smell so repelling that I did not have the courage to walk. I have heard that once a foreigner wanted to

¹ Though lower class in English refers to economically deprived section of the society, it is used as a counterpart for 'chhotolok', the word which the author uses in her text. The Bengali word carries the connotation of not just lack of money but lack of culture and minimum social virtues as well.

meet these people in order to know their condition better, but the guard stopped him from doing so because these people in general were quite beastly by nature and when they got drunk, they completely lost their senses. So if any stranger or foreigner went there, that person might face problem.

In London there are a number of places of sight-seeing like the Eden Gardens of Calcutta. They are known as ‘lungs of London’¹. Since the city is vast and overcrowded with buildings and people, these parks provide a breathing space. The largest among these is the Regent’s Park, situated in the northwest part of London. It is almost three miles wide. There is no pleasure in visiting this place in the winters, the trees are shorn of leaves – the field is full of dry grass – no flowers – on the whole it looks rather dismal. From a distance it appears that a grey field with leafless trees, looking more like a crematory, lies ahead. Yet there is a sort of bliss here as well. On any of the evenings, if you go and sit on one of the benches beside the lakes, you can see flocks of ducks swimming in the lake, flying to and fro their nests. In the north wind, river like ripples are formed in the lake. In the middle of the water body there is an artificial island on which there are various kinds of plants which do not look attractive. Once here, it would seem that one is in some village, far away from London. Noise of the city does not reach here; neither the steady sound of traffic, nor the din of human voices disturbs my ears. Though this is a man-made garden, one can enjoy the bliss of nature here and forget the boisterous London for some time. In spite of the chill biting the limbs, I never feel like leaving this secluded place.

In summer, Regent’s Park looks completely different. The grey trees deck themselves up in new leaves. In between are the beautiful flower-beds. This country does not have the variety of fragrant flowers as we do, but they take care of what they have and arrange

¹ Krishnabhabini freely translates it as ‘*galar nali*’.

them so beautifully that the flowerbeds look like pieces of painting. All the gardens of London that we have visited reflect the great amount of attention and care that the British lavish on them. In our country flowers and fruits grow without much effort on our part, but in this country, growing even a small plant requires a lot of hard work. Moreover, in this polluted atmosphere of London, it is not easy to maintain a flowerbed. In all the places that I have visited, I have seen that whatever these English people do, they do it with a lot of care, hard work and perseverance. They do not leave any work partially completed, and if they find any flaw, they try to correct it, however difficult it might be. I have seen a few Sanskrit books printed in England; I wonder how they could print them so beautifully and precisely. Without knowing the language they arrange the types merely by looking at the letters as images. This is a very difficult work which requires a lot of patience. Though printed in this way they contain very few mistakes. On the other hand, though the Bengali books in our country are printed by Bengalis most of them have numerous printing errors!

In the summers whenever you visit the park, you will always find people there; that place is really crowded especially during the holidays. In this country, flowers bloom only for four months in a year, therefore this is the period when the trees and gardens look beautiful. And in just these four months, the British try to enjoy as much as possible. In these gardens, during the three summer months, music programmes are organised thrice a week. Whoever wishes may go and attend. There is no discrimination between the local people and the foreigners; no vile words are exchanged on account of being ‘natives’ or ‘sahibs’¹. Everyone can enjoy equally. There is the Eden Garden in Calcutta, built by the British but they do not want the Bengalis to visit and enjoy in that place along with them. During summer, men and women row boats in the lake in

¹ Counterpart of ‘*memsahib*’ as explained earlier, this word is used to refer to the English/European men.

Regent's Park as a kind of exercise. There is a place in the park where people play games like cricket, 'lawn tennis'¹ etc. In the central part of the park is a very small botanical garden, created for educational purpose. On the other side is a zoo, which though much smaller than the Alipore zoo in Calcutta, has many animals brought from different countries.

London experiences very dense fog. People of our country cannot even imagine such an extremely foggy day. Other parts of England also have fog but that is not as dense and hazy as it is in London. This fog is at least four times denser than what we have in the early dawns; say four o' clock in the month of *poush*². In the months of November, December and January, fog is the densest here. It is because of the smoke. London has too many motor vehicles. Also the chimneys of each of the houses emit so much of smoke in the winters that at times the smoke becomes heavier than the surrounding air. At such times the air cannot rise much higher and hangs at a little height over the city. It is this fog that makes the entire city dark. Sometimes such fog remains throughout the day and assumes different colours – grey, or black or yellow. One day I woke up at eight in the morning to find it dark outside; nothing was visible and one had to switch on the lights to work. Only those people who had some urgent work were walking on the roads, groping in the darkness. No houses or buildings were visible, there were lights in every shop but the city did not look appealing due to the fog outside. All kinds of vehicles, including the big ones such as trams and omnibuses, were moving slowly. Being apprehensive of causing fatal accidents in the darkness everyone drove at a slow speed. Though hundreds of motor vehicles move around in London, not much noise was audible at that time, everywhere there was silence. The city appeared lifeless. Nothing was visible while walking along the road and one

¹ The single quotation mark is present in the original text.

² Bengali month, stretching from mid-December to mid January of English calendar.

had to walk cautiously. Darkness during daytime is worse than that of nights as the darkness caused by fog cannot be removed by any artificial lighting. Breathing becomes difficult; a kind of black oily substance enters our nose and obstructs the air passage. Lights look dull. I could not work properly as I had to grope in the dark. One becomes depressed, unfocussed and languid in such times. This is a very trying time for the people, particularly for us, foreigners here. It seemed like living in hell. On such difficult days we wanted to run away from London. London loses its charm in such times and the densely populated wealthy city of London turns into a hated city, shrouded in darkness.

Fog is common in winter, but it remains very dense only for a few days in a year. Had it been an everyday affair, no one could have lived in London. On some of the days there is a clear sky at times. Sometimes it is foggy just for an hour or two. Often a clear morning suddenly becomes overcast with dark clouds, and we seem to be plunged in the dark underworld. Windows cannot be kept open when there is fog because then the entire room will be filled with smoke. At such times, people go about their work quietly, with their eyes and nose almost shut. They do not laugh, have fun or talk. Everyone use exclamations like, ‘what a horrible fog!’, ‘So difficult!’ etc to express their anguish.

Here, just as there is fog in the beginning of the winter, certain years end with extreme snowfall. But this is not as difficult and intolerable as fog and it is quite nice to watch the snow. There is snowfall throughout England but it is very heavy in the north. December, January and February are the months for snowfall but at times it happens during March and April as well. The sound of a snow fall is very similar to that of a light drizzle. Later gradually, the roads, roofs of the houses, window sills, etc, all turn white. Wow! It is wonderful! There is no other sound; while walking on the roads, one feels that one is walking over a layer of flour. There is no sound

of footsteps or of the vehicles moving; London, which is otherwise so noisy, suddenly becomes very quiet. After snowfall, roads of London become quite dangerous for walking. Snow on the paved footpaths makes them very slippery, and therefore at every step there is a chance of slipping. People try and remain indoors as much as possible, yet none of the work places are closed. All of them stay busy with their own work. Children enjoy a lot during this period. In spite of the severe cold they play on the roadsides, collecting snow and making snowballs. Indeed, it is a pleasure to see the early morning London dressed all in white. Again if you go to the countryside by train, you can see miles after miles of land covered with snowflakes, turning everything white. There is no grass visible. And the leaves of the taller trees are covered with ice in such a way that they appear like big white feathers hanging from trees. Hailstorms are quite rare here. Due to severity of cold in winter snowfall is a common occurrence.

Everything in this country was new to us but one particular scene appeared newer than any other. I have heard that the Sundays of London appear amazing to the foreigners. Here is one such Sunday. People sleep till eight or nine in the morning. Many wake up even later. When I woke up I found the city silent. All the fancy shops along the roads were shut. Everything was closed. Peddlers' calls did not pierce our ears; everyone was quiet. The great noise of London could not be heard. It seemed that people had evacuated this place. All recreational centres were closed, there was no fun in strolling on the roads, and everything appeared depressing. Slowly as the day progressed, one could hear the sounds of people around. London was waking up from a long sleep. After a while bells started ringing from all the churches, I learnt that everyone would be going to the churches then. Sunday is the day of worship for the Christians. All the people, dressed in their finest outfits, go to the church. Both the rich and the poor have special dresses for Sundays, just as we have for our festivals. The women in particular dress up quite elaborately

on such days. All women, old and young, are extremely busy with their dresses and the unmarried girls are engaged in their effort to outshine each other. Everyone comes out in new and bright clothes.

The church bell kept ringing loudly; gradually one could hear the footsteps. Women were in various kinds of dresses. Men did not have much ado about their attire and all of them were in black. Like many men of our country, the women here dress up as ‘fulbabus’¹ while going out. Men do not care much about perfumes or fancy dresses. There were more women on roads than men. I have seen that in every country, women are more engaged in religious rites and rituals than men and they are also more conservative. Many women here go to the church in order to appear religious and the young girls go there to show off their dresses as well as to hunt for grooms. Slowly all of them left their houses banging their doors behind, and only the maidservants stayed back. They did not have any rest even at this time.

In this country, the church holds prayers thrice a day – at eleven o’ clock, three o’ clock and seven in the evening. The mode of worshipping is akin to that of our Brahma Samaj². After working hard for six days, the people take rest on Sunday in keeping with the Bible. The orthodox ones do not work on this day. Many people cook Sunday’s food on Saturdays itself. They do not read any book apart from the religious ones; do not sing anything apart from religious songs. I have heard that in Scotland, people do not even read newspapers on this day.

¹ Those men who spent a major part of their time and money in making themselves look good were termed as *fulbabus* of Bengal.

² Brahma Samaj was established by Raja Rammohun Roy in 1828 and was then known by the name Brahma Sabha. It was a reaction against the ritualistic orthodoxy that had corrupted Hinduism, its central belief being in the existence of one God. It was against many Hindu rituals such as idol worshipping, forbidding the non-Brahmins from access to Hindu religious scriptures etc. Most of the eminent Bengali nineteenth century thinkers were associated with the Samaj, prominent among them being, Devenranath Tagore, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Keshub Chandra Sen, and many others as a result they were a new but important force in Krishnabhabini’s contemporary society.

Also there are many people who do not talk about anything apart from religious matters. Many modern Londoners do not observe these so strictly nowadays. Though these are superstitions, many among those who practice these are truly religious. They actually worship God although they can be seen praying to Christ¹. There are a few people who go to the church simply to show off, but most of them have accepted prayers as the only way to salvation and hence go to the church. If someone cannot go to the church on a Sunday on account of some illness or because he loves to pray in solitude, then he can do so in his own house with his wife and children. One can also see here the ailing parent lying on a bed surrounded by daughters who are singing melodious hymns and praying for the sick one's quick recovery. Is this not a touching scene?

On Sundays when the weather is pleasant, most people go out in the afternoons and evenings. All the major roads are full of people, in some places the poor and the servants outnumber others. Gardens are more crowded, as everyone one wants to relax on this day of the week. People wear cleaner and better clothes, compared to that of the other days of the week. Sundays are holidays for everyone; even the servants are given a break for a few hours in the evening. In the main roads, various kinds of people move about in various kinds of attire such that it becomes difficult to differentiate the gentlemen from those of the lower classes. All shops remain closed except those selling liquor and tobacco. The liquor shops remain open for sometime in the morning and throughout the evening. What an amazing race! Of all the shops only the wine shops are opened today. In the mornings people are busy going to churches while the evenings are spent at liquor shops.

¹ Though the sentence appears short and simple it has a very deep meaning. Krishnabhabini here is trying to distinguish between Christ, who is the representative of God and God himself. This is not an easy thing for a Bengali Hindu woman like her. Idol worship being an integral part of the practiced Hindu religion, it is not an easy task for a Hindu woman to discern between religious icons and the actual God. This once again reflects her sharp mind and her acquaintance with the principle thoughts of her times.

A foggy or a rainy Sunday depresses everyone. No one can leave the house or go to the garden to enjoy; everyone has to remain shut indoors. There is neither the bustle of going to church nor the spectacle of women going out in their splendour. Very few people carrying their umbrellas can be seen on the roads walking. The 'squares', roads and gardens are desolated, silent and depressing and look as terrible as a graveyard. It is beyond my capability to describe such a heart-rending scene but this occurs quite often in London. It drizzle quite fast causing slush all around and pools of stagnant water at places. Rain falls incessantly and along with it there's the smell of smoke and soot everywhere. Rainfall on a Sunday is itself unbearable and to top it there is fog at times. Along both the sides of the dreary roads, the dark houses appear like a heap and dense yellow fog can be seen across the sky. There is no breeze at all. Dirt and soot come down along with the fog. Such a scene is terribly oppressive. On such a day if someone saunters along one of the main roads for an hour the person might even want to commit suicide. For us, who have come from the land of clear, bright sky and white mansions, such Sundays in London appear dreary.

7. The British Race and their Character

Generally the British appear strong, brave, industrious and intelligent. Many among them are more than six feet tall, muscular and robust. Such men are mostly soldiers, peacekeepers, or the bodyguards of high ranking officials. Not only here but throughout the world men of such stature are recruited for the tough jobs of a soldier or a guard. The affluent section of this country also employs such physically impressive men as their chief attendants,

perhaps to show off their status. And then the master takes every care to see that the attendant maintains his figure and the attendants are equally mindful as well. These attendants look like puppets in their shining brass-buttoned coats, white gloves and tall hats. Dressed in this fashion they stand for the vanity of the rich. Men of such physical stature are found among both commoners and gentry. Their well-built physique, broad chests and long arms make them appear warrior like.

In England, I have come across strong and well-built women as well. When these ladies fashionably dressed, ride past in great speed, they resemble goddess *chamunda*¹ all set for war. Children here are healthy and good looking. Their young fair faces remind me of fresh red roses. Village children are healthier and stouter than the urban ones. Their well-developed bodies indicate that they too will grow to healthy adults as their parents were. Boys, seven or eight years old, have amazing strength and capacity to work. Though young, they are very enthusiastic. Throughout the world these young men are noted for their bravery and valour; they are healthy and strong, and are fond of physical exercises. They hate to remain idle. They eat healthy and spend their time in wrestling, playing cricket, rowing boats or riding horses. They are efficient in all types of physical activities. From an early age they learn to be brave, patient and capable of enduring hardships. They undertake various heroic feats. The British youth dare danger in full enthusiasm and eagerly await such a chance. They are not scared of climbing rugged mountains or swimming at the base of a steep waterfall or hunting in dangerous forests even if there are chances of getting one's head smashed or death by drowning.

¹ A Hindu Goddess known for her battles against evils. Aggressiveness, one of the key features of this goddess is not a quality traditionally associated with Indian women. The author perhaps is trying to highlight this aspect of English women.

There are people of a medium height as well. They are calm and patient. They do not seem to belong to the race described above. They are also very different from other races like Indians, Persians, French, Italians, etc. I have never seen such people earlier. Their faces are expressionless which make them appear lifeless. They have dull, stony eyes. I shall not be exaggerating if I call them heartless because even if they have one, there is no external manifestation of its existence. They never give into anger or any other emotional outbursts for trivial reasons. They seem to move mechanically and are always so quiet and solemn that they seem to be going through a rigorous penance. Gentle emotions such as kindness, generosity, etc are rare among them. They are the ones who can remain steady in times of crisis and try to overcome danger patiently.

There is another type of British people. Their appearances are of various kinds – some are huge and strong, some are quite short and weak; but they are well-known for their courage, enterprise, tolerance, capability to work, etc. They are not easily dissuaded from any task even if they fail for a hundred times. Earning money is the chief motto of their lives. Their greed for money inspires them to overcome difficulties, take up arduous and life threatening tasks and to willingly go to dangerous places. They are the ones who set up industries or trade in different countries and make their country prosperous.

It appears as if everybody in England worship selfishness. They look for their profit always and at all cost. They will never do anything unless it benefits them and once they find any prospect of profit, they will accomplish it at all costs. They believe that all other countries and races of this world exist to fulfill their desires. These British people are like vultures, they not only refuse to share anything with others but also covet what others have. Though they are wealthier than other races, they are always discontented. ‘I shall possess everything’; ‘I shall

own everything'; these are the thoughts that constantly resonate in British hearts. Their limitless greed has driven them to all the corners of this world. And because of this British Empire has gradually expanded and is still expanding.

Money is the supreme god of England. Anybody spending a few days in England will get the hint of how much these Englishmen crave for money and how they pursue it. They earn money both in their own country and abroad. Just as vultures hover around a place where they can smell meat, British rush to any place where there is a slightest chance of earning money. Probably there is no such country from where they are not sucking money. While making money they do not even care for right or wrong. They do not suffer from any pangs of guilt even while extorting money from other countries by unfair means. They explore every possible opportunity of earning from India and other countries. They caused immense bloodshed and incurred heavy expenses in order to introduce opium forcefully into China. Such is the stronghold of Mammon in England that even after poisoning the Chinese in this way for their selfish profiteering the British did not suffer from any guilt conscience. In India, China, Germany, France, and other countries, knowledge and wisdom are worshipped more than money, but in England money is supreme. In our country, a poor but educated Brahmin is revered by kings as well and the king does not consider it beneath his dignity to step down from his throne and with a *galabastra* and touch the Brahmin's feet¹. But in this country, however wise or knowledgeable a person might be, people will ignore him and respect someone foolish but wealthy. Wealth being so important here it is not amazing that even the educated will hanker after it.

¹ Describing a typically Hindu custom where a person puts his shawl or some other piece of cloth around his neck before bowing down to touch someone's feet as a mark of deep respect. The word *galabastra* literally means a cloth around the neck.

The British are very proud of their wealth. Sprawling empire and immense wealth have made the British excessively arrogant. They consider the entire world to be at their feet and all the other races inferior to them. They firmly believe that they are the first among all the civilized people of the world and better than the rest in terms of knowledge, wisdom and strength. If any race differs from them in any particular aspect, they express their contempt for those people. Countries such as France, Germany, etc are neither less civilized, nor backward in terms of knowledge, wisdom, prowess, or courage when compared to England; rather, in many aspects they are much better than the British. Yet the arrogant British express their contempt for the different customs, rites, principles and lifestyle of these people. When they visit other European countries, they behave arrogantly considering themselves superior to the people there. They constantly try to prove that they are better than others. In England, when foreigners talk to them, they maintain a stern look and go around bragging. The common people cannot tolerate the foreigners at all. The British go to different countries to bring back whatever they can. But they are intolerant of foreigners in their own country.

It is not surprising then that these people will look down upon us or consider us uncivil. It is the Indian blood that has nourished the British so far; because of India they can be so arrogant. Such excessive pride comes only before fall. This pride has led to the fall of the Roman Empire. And again it is this pride that caused a prosperous country like France to lose its face in a defeat in an unfair war against Germany.

The British do not have caste discriminations as the Hindus do but they have severe class distinctions. This discrimination is based not on religion but exclusively on money. The Lords never get their wards married to common people nor do the rich come forward to marry the poor for the fear of being ostracized by their society. Caste discrimination in India seems much better

when compared to the way the rich people here loathe the poor. In this country a foolish rich man considers himself superior enough to insult a wise and level-headed poor person. Here the one who draws a salary of five hundred rupees a month will contemptuously look down upon another who earns only three hundred; a person having ten rupees does not want to speak to another who has eight rupees as he considers himself to be much better than the latter.

This division of class has caused much harm in this country. Common people instead of caring for the poor ones flatter the lords and the other rich men. The rich people are busy with selfish motives; and have no concern for the poor. It is because of this contempt of the upper classes that the poor in England do not grow up to be civil and educated in spite of all the facilities being available here. They do not ever get a chance to interact with the gentry and therefore they do not know what civility is. Just as it is gratifying to meet the educated gentlemen of this country, it is as loathsome and regrettable to meet the uneducated lower class people. It is a matter of deep regret that these people live in a civilized society and yet remain deprived because of the evils of class distinction. It is also abhorrent that these people behave abominably and do not have any self respect or respect for others. In our country we have the rich and the poor but in England, there is the gentleman and the lower class. The social structure in this country makes life difficult for the penniless. Without money one cannot claim to belong to the gentry or interact with them. It is a trend in this country that many poor gentlemen are finally reduced to live with the vulgar. After living with them for sometime these gentlemen lose their natural virtues and start behaving like the lower class people. The lower class is the cruelest and worst of all the classes in this country. They behave almost like wild animals.

Tender virtues such as love, affection, humility, kindness, charity etc are rarely present in the hearts of the English people. Their heart seems to be as hard as stone. They are neither

influenced by the misery or the happiness of others, nor are they dissuaded from their purpose by mere words. Often, these English have no feelings for the problems of their nearest of kin. Usually they torture the weaker ones and do not sympathise with the miserable. They keep quiet in the face of spirit or courage, but do not spare the humble or the cowardly. Like dogs, they run away if someone retaliates but keep on teasing the weaker ones. The two great faults of the British are extravagance and drinking. Both rich and poor, spend as much as or even more than they earn. When it comes to their habit of drinking, they have no parallels. I shall tell you in details later about how much they have to suffer because of these two evils.

There are many hypocrites among these people. Often there is a difference between what they think and what they express. Most of the time, their politeness is just a sham. The sweet words of the shopkeepers that would charm you are not genuine. Rather, that is money-induced politeness. The generosity that many of them show towards the foreigner is just a show. Such polite behaviour for the sake of business is common among the people belonging to all sections of their society. Foreigners are often taken in by the affectation of hospitality of the British. But after spending some time with them the former discovers their true nature. The British have all those vices that are generally present in other races, but they never acknowledge it. They indulge in all these vices but act innocent. Just as they only wipe their lips after eating and consider themselves to be clean, they think that just by feigning solemnity they can be saintly in spite of the evil in their hearts. Many Englishmen aim to be gentlemanly by imitating only the appearance of the gentry. Such people are known as snobs; no one outside the British race can describe the snobs in the way in which Thackeray¹ has done. Many foreigners call the British a race of fake believers. Truly I doubt whether any other race overdoes everything as much as the

¹ Perhaps a reference to William M Thackeray's *Book of Snob* and *Vanity Fair*. Shows her familiarity with English literature.

British. Each feigns to be richer than he actually is; many people have to forego meals or pawn their valuables in order to maintain a gentlemanly status. It is difficult to identify the actual class of the people one meets on roads by their attire; but their knowledge, wisdom or wealth can be judged by their faces and attitude.

For the common people refinement is nothing more than a show; to all intent and purpose they are still as uncultured as before. However, one can still find some civilized people among those who have travelled to other places and interacted with different types of people; but in general, the common people are not really civilized. In spite of all their education and intellect, they are blindly superstitious. This is evident in their interaction with the foreigners. If they find a man who happens to be different from them, they stare at him as if they are looking at an animal. Sometimes even the elderly people join the children in making fun of such people and commenting derisively. I have heard from a foreigner that initially when she could not speak proper British, the shopkeeper, instead of being compassionate laughed at her and made fun of her. One day in a fair I saw a crowd laughing at something. Initially I had thought that it must be some strange animal or a monkey dance show. But on approaching nearer I found that they were making fun of a Chinese. One woman was waving her hand in front of him and making faces; another was tugging at his plaited hair. That unfortunate Chinese laughed at their barbarism, but they were not at all ashamed. Perhaps no other civilized race indulges in such a shameful act; at least we, the uncultured Indians do not behave in this manner with any of the foreigners.

In fact the British culture is derivative. The Hindus, the Greeks, the Arabs and other races had created their own cultures; but the British – from their beginning to end have imitated other races. If the general population of all the countries are compared then this fact can be easily proved. In almost all the countries, it is the rich and the higher classes that form the cultured

section. But the real culture of a country is determined by the knowledge, wisdom and conduct of the poor people. Anyway, one of the greatest merits of the British is that they inculcate only the virtues from other races. However, they do not easily acknowledge that these virtues exist in those races. Once they recognise anything good, they immediately imbibe it. If a person tries something new, rest of them first make fun of him, then keep quiet, and later when they find the thing to be good, the entire race accepts it. This is how the British has progressed. We do not imitate anything good from others either out of diffidence or out of fear of being ridiculed; and this is what has brought us so low. There is a story about this British habit of imitating. Previously they did not use umbrellas; even if it rained hard, they walked on roads getting drenched. Gradually when a few British started using umbrellas following the examples of the French and others, rest of the race started teasing them, calling them French. But in spite of all the mockery those Englishmen did not give up the practice. Later rest of the England followed them and learnt to use umbrellas during the rains. Till now, in England, it is only the children, the aged and the women, who use umbrella under scorching sun.

In certain aspects, the British are very different not just from us but also from other European races. In one particular matter however, they are just incomparable; I have not heard or read anything similar among other races. In all the countries, whenever people meet each other on way or at market places or anywhere else, they talk, smile or share a joke and laughter with each other. But the British do not like talking to others unless they are relatives or acquaintances. At crowded places such as roads, railway stations etc, one can hear a deafening roar of vehicles but not any human voices – everyone is quiet and mechanical. Unless introduced by any friend or family member, no one likes talking to or interacting with each other; associating with strangers is against their code of civility. It is said that a man had once fallen in a hole and cried

aloud for help. Just then another British man was passing by. When he heard the cry of that unfortunate person, he said to himself, - "oh such a bad luck! Had I known that person I could have saved him right now." I do not know whether this story is authentic but often their insensitivity surprises me. I have also seen about ten to twelve people sitting quietly face to face in a train or a tram car. No one will make the first attempt to talk as if it would hurt his prestige. I feel an uncontrollable urge to laugh at this dumbness found among both the gentlemen and the uncultured ones.

Many people say that conversation is like salt in human life; truly, life appears dull without it. I do not understand how the British can be happy without talking to each other. If you enquire about something from a person, he would reply in monosyllable. It appears as if they want to save words more than money. One day I came across a man thrice, and each time he just said 'it's a pleasant day today'. When the British boys play cricket or football, they try to avoid talking. Even when they are hit by the ball, they do not clearly express their pain. I think that it is because of such horrible climate that the British love to keep quiet. Truly, such is the weather of this place that even mere interaction with the people one meets along the way becomes a difficult task. This silence also signifies certain merits that these British have. They do not talk when engaged in some work and concentrate on the task only. They do not lose their presence of mind easily. Even when in deep trouble, they try to find a solution without losing their cool. There are many historical evidences of how the British soldiers maintained their calm during wars and fought with patience in keeping with the rules and regulations.

Till now I was describing the faults of the British; now I shall discuss their virtues. In spite of many vices, their race has an excellent foundation. Qualities such as efficiency, capacity

to work hard, perseverance, spirit, courage, etc have made them civilized and prosperous¹. It is due to our own faults that we Indians are being dominated by the British and it is due to our incapability that the British are self-interestedly ruling over our country. Most of the British people leave their virtues behind at home before they set out for other countries. Self interest is their prime goal, therefore in foreign lands, their selfish propensities become stronger. Particularly, when they are in their colonies, their nature undergoes a drastic change. Thus, we consider that all the British people are bad as we get to see only the darker side of their nature there in India. Since we have been under foreign rule for a long time, we are not always capable of valuing the virtues of a race which is free. It is not right to overlook their virtues and discuss their demerits only. The British people have achieved such greatness only because of their merits. If the British had nothing but vices then we would not have known about them at all and I too would not be writing this book.

For the British people, work is like their constant companion. They love to work; the reason could be the weather or their natural propensity. They do not shy away from hard work nor do they tire easily. But in our country, may be due to the weather or their lazy nature, people grow weary just after working for a couple of hours. The British neither get exhausted after five or six hours of work nor do they require rest at short intervals. If you observe them while they are at work such as constructing roads or buildings you will realise that they work in the same spirit and intensity from the first till the last working hour. They are not just efficient but are committed to their work as well. They do not like to waste their own time nor of the others by indulging in unnecessary conversations. They do not wish to pester or be pestered by others. For these reasons, it's a pleasure to work with them.

¹ The word 'sree' which I have translated as 'prosperous' here actually has no counterpart in English. This is associated with the goddess Lakshmi who is also the deity of wealth.

Because of their industriousness the British are unparalleled in today's trade and commerce. Trade is their great strength; it is through trade that they have become so prosperous and have gained colonies throughout the world. I shall particularly deal with this topic in a separate chapter. Enthusiasm is another of their merits. They are always on the alert and the moment they find a chance for any new enterprise or trade they pursue it zealously. They constantly invent new machinery, and advance in the fields of industries and handicrafts. Also they keep a track of all the new inventions and industrial developments taking place in other countries. They try to make those available in their own country too. As I have already said, the British are not inferior to any other race in terms of courage and valour. From their first step in life till the end they work with courage. Each chapter of British history speaks of their courage and spirit.

The British are selfish no doubt, but they are also self-dependent and have self-respect. They would be the last one to ask for help if they can accomplish it on their own. They neither help others nor seek other's help. When approached for some help their advice generally is, 'self help is the best help'. Here each person, whether grown up or young, takes care of his own self. Whereas in India even the grownup wards find nothing to be ashamed of in remaining financially dependent on their father, here such cowardliness or indolence is not seen. Once the sons become adults, they seek their own means of earning a living. Even daughters find it demeaning to live idly in their parents' house or live as a dependent with any of the relatives. Self-reliance comes quite early to them. I have often seen that if a child falls down on the road, he doesn't look at his mother for help. Rather he tries to get up on his own. And when he succeeds, his friends, who are themselves very young, and his parents, praise him. If the people of our country had such

awareness of self dependence and self esteem then the habits of laziness and dependence could never have existed.

One can see great unity among the British. Though they are selfish, their unity has helped them to successfully establish many large industries, business and trade. Without this unity their entire empire and business would have collapsed in a moment. By being united, these inhabitants of a small island have achieved so much and without it, people of a larger country like India are unable to accomplish any great task. In this world there are many tasks that cannot be accomplished singlehandedly, it is not possible for an individual to take a country forward or conquer countries all by himself. It is easy to break a single twig but not a bunch of those. Unity adds to the beauty of a race but we are completely deprived of that beauty. Because of their unity the British can run a laundry shop or an empire with equal ease. But we are not united anywhere – neither in family, nor in society or country.

The British are not only united but also possess a strong love for their race. Because they are extremely devoted, they cannot put up with any insult to any of their countrymen or bear any wrong done to their country. Just as they are eager to maintain their self respect, they are equally keen to preserve the honour of their race. As a race and a country they are proud of their independence. This sentiment does not allow them ever to act wrongly towards their country or their people. If any of their countrymen is tortured, they take that as an insult and try their best to avenge it. If any foreigner beats up an Englishman on the road then fifty other Englishmen would gather there and prepare to beat him up. We do not have such love or devotion towards our own country. Forget about working for the country's upliftment we are not even bothered if the entire nation goes down the drain. And to talk about our love for our own race - if we see a foreigner

beating up any of our fellow countryman, we leave that place arguing that, 'why should I be bothered if he is being beaten?'

When the British go abroad, they prefer staying together with their own people rather than staying with the foreigners; they help each other and trust their own people more than those belonging to other races. They would never recruit any foreigner for a job if there are Englishmen available and always prefer one of their own people over a better qualified foreigner. Otherwise, they believe, it would be a dishonor to their community. They generally do not indulge in knavery, deceit or falsehood among themselves. They might cheat people belonging to other races but they will never do so to their own. The kind of malice and envy that is seen among the Indians is not generally found in them. The British never ridicule their own race nor do they stoop before anyone.

In this context I shall briefly discuss another merit of the British. One can find a great sense of duty among these people. Here, right from the prime minister to a minor labourer, each one performs his own job meticulously. Both a high ranking government official and an employee at a very junior level do their work with same concentration. If you call a carpenter for a job, he will complete the assignment appropriately even without your instructions. There is no need to monitor his work so as to get it finished in stipulated time. I have often been amazed by their sense of duty. Even in storm, rain or snow, the British people never neglect their duties. Again, just as they themselves do not talk much, they do not waste our time asking for much explanation. The moment they get a job, they get busy with it. They hate abuses or rebuke; and young or old, no one likes to be rebuked or does anything to deserve so.

The British love to travel in foreign countries. Many of them go on a tour of other countries whenever they can manage some time. They visit France, Germany, Italy, Spain,

America, and often go up to India or Australia. In this way they come to know about the conditions of the different countries and their people. Many of them save money throughout the year to visit foreign countries during their holidays. And after going there, they gather information regarding those people and also learn their language in order to understand them better. Not just men but even women undertake these trips along with their husband, father or brothers. There are very few gentlemen here whose sons have not travelled to other countries of Europe. The British regard travelling to foreign countries as a part of their education therefore most of the rich people here consider it their duty to visit other countries with their families whenever they have time. Travelling helps in eradicating superstitions; new sights make them wiser, new feelings help to develop their minds and living with unfamiliar people help in their self development.

Though the British are not at all amiable towards the foreigners, they also do not disturb them without a cause. Many people from other countries have taken shelter here after being tortured in their own over religious or other matters. Though the British do not like these people, they do not make lives difficult for them and at times even show some generosity towards them. Just as there are extremely selfish people in this country, I have also seen some humble and noble people as well. Many rich men of this country are always engaged in charitable works and donate huge amount of wealth for the benefit of the others. Several British men are world famous for their charity; they always donate large sums of money for various purposes within their country and also send huge amount if there is crisis in other countries as well. The British are neither obsessively polite nor extremely rude. And though they are hard at heart, they are rarely mean minded. It is difficult to forge a friendship with the British but if you once become friends, then it is hard to find a more faithful, helping and long lasting friend. Most of the educated

British are polite. After interacting with them, we feel respectful towards them and tend to forget all the flaws of their race. They are the chief assets of England and they are the ones who bring glory to their country.

8. Queen Victoria and her Family¹

Every Indian must be curious about the one who has sovereignty over our country and who, with the help of the parliament, is ruling over the entire kingdom of England in perfect law and order. Empress Victoria is not indisposed towards India; she tries her best for the happiness and well-being of the Indians. But we are not a free country. Today the sceptre of Hindustan² is in the hands of the British, instead of the Hindus. It is not the Queen's fault that the crown of India is today shining brightly on her head. Though we are under her rule, our benefactress should try her best towards our welfare.

The queen was born in the year 1819. She was coroneted at the age of eighteen. At twenty-one she was married to the German prince, Prince Albert. Now she is sixty-five years old and she has been ruling the country for forty-seven years. Her skill in running the government even in this old age is amazing. In her kingdom neither the guilty is let scot-free nor is the innocent punished. The queen herself has set example that moral transgression should be

¹ After the Queen's Proclamation in 1858, Queen Victoria was not just looked upon as the Empress of India but also as a benevolent mother, responsible for her Indian children's well-being. This sentiment prevailed throughout her reign and was most visible after her death in 1901 when Indian newspapers carried black borders and contained descriptions of numerous condolence meetings organized for her. All kinds of recreational programmes remained cancelled and eminent personalities including Rabindranath Tagore wrote articles in commemoration. For more details see, Paul, Prashanta. *Rabijibani, Vol IV 1301-1307*.

² The land of the Hindus, referring to India as Hindus were the dominant group here.

universally hated and treated as a heinous sin. She is a truly virtuous¹ woman; no blemish has ever touched her character. She has all the qualities of compassion, charity, etc. She is unparalleled in the feminine virtues such as love and affection. And by ruling the country justly for so many years, she has proved her skill in running a government.

Prince Albert, the Queen's husband expired in 1861. She was almost mad with grief. Since then she does not like meeting too many people or making public appearances. She spends most of her time in solitude in the mountainous regions of Northern Scotland. A statue of Prince Albert named 'Albert Memorial' has been erected in the Kensington garden in London to offer her some contentment. Her husband was also as honest and virtuous as she. He had a great love for literature, science and art. England had made great progress in these fields under his care and it was due to him again that the Great Exhibition² was first organised here.

Queen Victoria is herself very religious and expects the others to be so too. If the moral disposition of any of her grooms or maids arouses her suspicion, she immediately expels the person from her palace. She also tries her best to help her servants lead an honest life. I have heard that her eldest son, the Prince of Wales, was a philanderer in his youth. There were a lot of rumours about him. As a result of these for many years the Queen refused to even see him though he was her own son. Later, when the prince fell very ill and begged for her forgiveness, the mother within her relented. She then paid him a visit and once again talked to him. Since then the prince has taken a vow to mend his ways. Such an exemplary deed has touched everyone's

¹ The author uses the word *sati* here which has a much greater significance in Hindu context than what 'virtuous' communicates. *Sati* is conferred to women almost God-like in stature such as Sita, Savitri, etc. Though Krishnabhabini might be using the word in a more secular sense, implying the meaning of 'virtuous' or a chaste wife, the religious significance of the word cannot be missed by her contemporary readers.

² The Great Exhibition, was organized by Prince Charles in 1851 and marked the beginning of a series of international trade fairs. It was organized to showcase various artefacts and other things from the colonies of Great Britain and thereby proclaim of her vast empire.

heart. Everyone is grateful to her for her impartial judgment and rule; everybody is happy with her.

The queen now has three sons and four daughters. She had four sons and five daughters but unfortunately a few years back she lost her second daughter Princess Alice. These losses, that of her husband and her daughter gravely affected her. Then again, some days back, she received another rude shock on the death of her youngest son, Prince Leopold, Duke of Albany. The prince was very kind and scholarly. Not just the queen but all the people of England were heart-broken for him. Unfortunately, he had married just two years back. Everyone was also sympathetic towards the young widow, the Duchess of Albany, who had to accept such a fate at such a young age. In spite of all such heart rending afflictions, the Empress still manages her affairs of the state with a remarkable fortitude. This has earned her commendations from one and all. It is rare to find such a religious and virtuous woman in such a prosperous country. I hope she would become an example for every Indian woman¹.

For the most part of the year, the Empress lives at the Balmorals Castle in Northern Scotland. She spends a couple of months in a small island named Wight in the south of England and then spends about three months in the city of Windsor which is about twenty miles from London. She does not like to stay in London, and if at all she has to stay here, then she stays in the Buckingham Palace. If any foreign king, queen or prince comes to London, the heir to the throne, the Prince of Wales welcomes them on the behalf of the queen.

It needs no mentioning that the Empress has a large household. In her household there are at least a thousand office-bearers, servants, maids etc. Among them many hold hereditary posts.

¹ Forbearance was one of the qualities demanded from women in nineteenth century Bengal. Krishnabhabini's interpretation of the queen is characterised by her own subject position. In spite of being in a post sepyo mutiny society, the nineteenth century Bengali intelligentsia looked at the empress as a benevolent maternal figure. The author too is following similar tradition in her representation of the Queen.

All of them receive a generous wage; some of them are quite handsomely paid. The chief of her staff is called the 'Lord Steward'. He has to look after the entire household. Only those who work in the Queen's bedchamber, her stable and the Chapel Royal are exempted from his authority. The rest of the staff obeys his orders and execute them promptly. He can bring them to book for any kind of misdeed and resolve their quarrels. But all his actual tasks are in fact done by another employee. The Lord Steward has to be present in the court during all its proceedings. His salary is two thousand rupees a month.

The person under Lord Steward is the 'Lord Treasurer'. In the absence of the former, he has to be there during all the activities of the state. His salary is nine hundred rupees a month. There is another such official called the 'controller'. He does not have as much work but earns a similar salary. There is another officer called 'The Master of the Household' whose salary is about twelve hundred rupees a month. He is the actual representative of the Lord Steward carrying out the actual duties of the latter and it is he who takes charge of the servants of the palace. There are a number of officials and servants under him who maintain record of the accounts. All these four officials under the Lord Steward can dine with the Queen.

Next in line is the clerk of the kitchen. His salary is seven hundred rupees a month. There are three employees to assist him. They keep the account, weigh all the things purchased and give orders to the shopkeepers. The chief cook of the kitchen also gets a salary of seven hundred rupees a month. He has ten cooks and twelve servants under him who do all the jobs related to cooking. Apart from these, there are fifteen people employed to prepare the desserts and condiments. The chief butler of the palace, or the supervisor of alcohol, earns five hundred rupees a month. He has to select and buy drinks for the royal family and take care of those. He also makes the drink for the Queen and sends it to her. He has five or six subordinates who help

in laying the table. It is their job to see that the table is properly arranged before the Empress comes for her dinner.

Ten to twelve people take care of the utensils of the queen. Though they do not have much work to do, their high salary is justified as they are in charge of a number of very precious items. Just Windsor Palace itself has gold and silver utensils worth more than three crores. There are almost thirteen people recruited in the palace just to buy coal. Apart from these there are gate-keepers, doormen, grooms to light the lamps and for various other purposes.

The other department of the royal household is the department of Lord Chamberlain. The Lord Chamberlain has to undertake many great tasks. His main duty consists of supervising the servants, maids and keeper of the wardrobe of the Queen's room – to move beddings, furniture, tents etc as and when required, and to oversee the musicians, hunters, various artists, ambassadors, doctors, priests etc. During coronation ceremonies, royal weddings and feasts, he has to look after the entire proceedings. His monthly salary is two thousand rupees. The Treasurer of the Queen is another high official in this department. He too receives a monthly salary of rupees two thousand. He keeps an account of all of the Queen's money.

There is a man and a woman to look after the Queen's wardrobe¹. The former earns a salary of eight hundred while the latter gets five hundred rupees a month. Apart from them there are her messengers, mistresses of bedchamber and many other servants. They have a number of women subordinate to them to do the actual chores of the bedroom.

There are a number of waiting women² as well whose primary job is to help with the Queen's attire. They get a salary of hundred rupees a month each.

¹ They are officially designated as the Master of Wardrobe and the Mistress of Wardrobe.

² I have borrowed this phrase 'waiting woman' from the notes by Simonti Sen in the Bengali (original) text *England-e-Bangamahila* edited by her.

Apart from these there are so many other kinds of officials, servants and maids that it is almost impossible to describe them all here. There is a royal chapel here for the Queen to pray. The priests and other officials of this chapel are considered to be a part of the royal household. There is a royal orchestra which plays during the coronation ceremony, weddings of the princes and princesses and other occasions. To maintain this orchestra, one has to spend a thousand and nine hundred rupees a month. There is a poet in the royal household called the 'Poet Laureate'. Though his salary is not even a seventh part of the master cook of the Queen, his post is one of great prestige. The present poet laureate is Lord Tennyson. He is the chief poet of England at present. A few days back he was bestowed with the title of Lord.

The Queen had a very loyal servant by the name of John Brown. He has recently passed away. He was her favourite and the trusted one. There was no such place which the Queen visited without him. In one of her books, the Queen has praised this servant a number of times and the death of this old and trusted servant had greatly affected her.

9. A Tour of London

If an Indian steps out on the roads of London for the first time, he might get confused and keep standing like an imbecile. Everything appears different here. Houses, vehicles, people, their dresses, way of talking, etc. are so unlike that of our country. If you go to any of the main roads, you can see blocks of black, four to five-storied buildings on its either side with nothing but lanes separating them. As far as you go, you will get to see endless roads and buildings. You can see a number of chimneys on every roof, some of them emitting smoke. The roofs are slanting

and covered with black slate. Hence you will not find people there. At some other places you will find wires of different types running over the roofs. These are wires for telegraph, telephone, etc.

If you look below, there are alluring shops on both sides of the road. Since the front of the shops has glass, the various items displayed neatly within the shops are visible from outside. The name of the shopkeeper and the type of the shop are engraved in bold letters on well polished brass or wooden plates, and fixed at the top and bottom of the wall. The roads are very clean and paved with hard stones. On its either side there are pavements for pedestrians on which hundreds of people of different stations in life and from various places can be seen to be walking together. Little conversation is heard and at times you can also hear some foreign tongues. There is an incessant flow of various types of vehicles moving along the roads – brougham, barouche, phaeton, cab, omnibus, shopkeepers' carts, etc. Crossing these roads is quite risky; one has to cautiously look towards both the sides and then cross carefully. There are no palanquins or bullock carts in this country; and on the roads, the noise of the vehicles drowns people's voices. People are fair complexioned and mostly dressed in black. Each dresses to the best of his ability. You cannot see their bare hands or feet.

There are some roads where the volume of traffic is much less. All the peddlers gather there, carrying their merchandise in baskets or hand pulled carts and go up and down the roads calling out loudly. They do not stop to take rest. Their cries seem to rend the sky. They keep on peddling from eight o'clock in the morning till afternoon and at times even till eight or nine in the evening. Initially we could not make any sense of their shouting; we could only see what they were selling.

After a few months I could gradually figure out their words. At times they sell fish in hand drawn carts and call out ‘mackerel’. Some peddlers are tin smiths, some call to sharpen knives and scissors and some more who sell coal¹. There are a few Jews who call aloud to buy old clothes. On certain roads in the evenings peddlers sell hot roasted potatoes which appear quite tempting in this cold weather. In this way people here shout on top of their voices to sell their merchandise. From six in the morning till five in the evening the milkman pulls his milk cart to deliver milk at every doorstep, shouting ‘milk – milko – ko – ku’ etc.

At times we can see a few well-built Irish women carrying milk cans upon their head but, unlike in our country, this is not usual here. Almost all the vendors own horse carts or hand-drawn carts to carry their commodities. On some evenings a man can be seen walking along certain streets carrying a box on his head. He rings a bell as he walks. And in this way, instead of shouting, he informs everyone that he is selling muffins which is a condiment resembling our *pitha*². At some other place one can see an old woman carrying a small basket upon her head or along her waist and calling out ‘watercress’. She sells a kind of leaves which are eaten uncooked.

Apart from the ‘cries’ that I have discussed here, there are many other kinds as well. But it is the cries of the newspaper boys that draw my attention the most. They call out ‘newspapers’ from seven o’clock till eleven in the morning in all the main roads, important crossings and in front of the railway stations. They approach the passersby and ask – “O sir! Which one would you like – the Daily News or the Daily Telegraph?” or “Which newspaper do you need sir, Standard or Chronicle?” In the evenings too, along the crowded areas like the main roads and crossings, these young boys call out the names of the evening dailies like ‘Echo’, ‘Globe’,

¹ Since I could not find the actual calls used by these peddlers, I have done a sense translation of these lines here.

² A Bengali sweet dish usually made of rice powder.

‘Standard’, ‘Special’ etc. There is no dearth of either newspapers or readers. And since they come quite cheap everyone can afford them. In almost all the roads you can hear ‘organ’, a kind of a musical instrument, playing a plaintive tune. Many poor Italians come to this country and they play these instruments, walking down the roads. People at times give them a penny or two for their music, or may be out of pity for their miserable condition. Sometimes these musicians also ask for money from people by touching their hats or through other gestures. Since begging is not legal in this country, beggars use various ploys to extort money. If you enter any of the lanes to get rid of the loud noise of the main roads, your ears will be deafened by the jangling sound of the organs played by those poor Italians.

London has numerous shops. They are so well-decorated that people are attracted towards them at the very first sight. Many people have described London as a ‘jungle of shops’. I think this name befits the place. Almost everything is available in this great metropolitan city. If you have money you will get everything and within every possible range. I have even seen mangoes here which they import from America. Those which cost only half a paisa in our country are sold here for ten to twelve *annas*¹. The very fact that it is available here is amazing. It is difficult to get coconuts in the north-western parts of India, but here almost every fruit shop has loads of coconuts. Even in cases of clothes, jewellery or toys, such a huge range of products in terms of variety and price cannot be found anywhere else. Here there aren’t any bazaars as we see in our country, but every locality has shops where all the things are available. One has to just go and buy whatever is required.

I have already mentioned earlier that the part of London which is known as the ‘city’ is full of huge shops. There are important streets like the Oxford Street, Regents Street, Strand

¹ An old form on Indian currency, not in use now. 16 annas make a rupee.

Road, etc. which also have a number of big and famous shops full of precious items. London has a number of long roads but none is bigger or grander than the Oxford Street. Regents Street is very well constructed and the shops along it are brighter as well but Oxford Street has a greater variety of shops and the shops here are better stocked. And, since this is an old street, there are both old and new types of houses along its sides. Though the Oxford Street is quite big, there is not much space left. Rent for a house here is one hundred and fifty rupees yet none of them remain unoccupied.

Just across the footpath there are four to five storied buildings, some are even six to seven story high. Each building has a shop and the things are stored in the store-rooms in the floors above. A walk down the Oxford Street gives an idea of England's wealth and grandeur. It has all kinds of shops – jewellery, garments, furniture, glass wares, books, food items etc. All the things that a person might need are available here. Alongside these shops there are also shops selling that ruinous substance – alcohol. They fiercely compete with other shops. At some places you can see a scene like the one I am going to describe: a rich lady, expensively dressed, gets out of her horse drawn carriage and enters a jewellery shop. Immediately four to five young women employees hover around her asking her, 'what do you want ma'am?' and show her the things she wishes to. After some time that lady leaves the place in her carriage. Young boys and girls are dazed by her beautiful carriage, horses, the well dressed coachman and her servants. And again in some other places you can see the tired workers in tattered clothes entering the liquor shops after their day's work. Some are sitting inside the shop and drinking and some are coming out, their drinking being over. One feels pity looking at them.

On the footpath there is an endless variety of people walking. The daily crowd is similar to the crowd that we have during our festivals or fairs. People walk, stop for a while and again

start walking; some of them stand near the glass panes of the shops and ponder what they might buy; some talk to their friends, some of them stand and watch others' dresses and still others stand and gape at the people passing by. There are policemen at various points along the roads. They control crowd or stop vehicles near the crossings to help pedestrians cross the roads. Many people can be seen entering and coming out of the shops. All these shops are so fascinating and have such a variety of things that it becomes difficult to make up one's mind. Such is their allure that it is difficult taking one's money back home.

After walking past these shops you will see some old houses being replaced by newly constructed buildings. In our country, some Muslim women can be seen working among the masons but here women are not involved in such heavy hazardous jobs. The workers are young men and they work like the busy bees. They have erected scaffolds on each side. These scaffolds are not like those of bamboo that we see in our country; instead they have used strong wooden pillars and planks. I am sure they will laugh at the idea of climbing the bamboo scaffolds which are used in India and if they are asked to do so, they will say that "our lives are not so cheap that we shall foolishly lose it by climbing on such scaffolds". Yet hundreds of poor Indians climb on these bamboo scaffolds even when they are constructing huge buildings. Money begets luxury which in turn leads to foppery. Since England is a prosperous country, the British seek their own comfort in everything they do.

The place where these new houses are coming up has been barricaded by wooden planks to stop traffic movement through that area and also to ensure the safety of the pedestrians. These planks look like the walls of a house with multi-coloured drawings on it, similar to those seen in pictures. But on approaching nearer, you will find that it is actually covered with hundreds of advertisement bills – advertisements of a theatre with images of the leading actors, or of some

‘music hall’ with a picture of a clown, etc. Someone has invented a medicine for long and black hair. An advertisement shows its effectiveness by portraying a woman sitting with her long, flowing hair. There are advertisements of different types of hard drinks with the pictures of the bottles of different types. Some are of the newly published books with the names of the books written in such huge fonts that a man can pass through each letter.

There are innumerable such posters and advertisements, and I am not sure whether anyone even reads them. Whether they gain by these or not, the companies use advertisements for their publicity. Often these advertisements run through such long stretches that they hurt the eyes if anyone tries to read them. The British are crazy about advertising. There is no such place where hoardings are not visible. These are present everywhere – on roads, on the walls of the houses, inside and outside the vehicles etc. At times, hoardings on wooden planks can be seen hanging from people’s back as well. In the omnibuses and tramcars one can see advertisements such as “such and such salt is excellent” or “such and such match box is the best”. All the walls of the railway stations are covered with such advertisements. It becomes difficult to identify the station’s name out of so many brand names in the advertisements. When the train stops at a station, one has to carefully look for its name. And after searching for a long time you might think that the name of the station is “such and such mustard”. When you try to verify that by asking others, they would laugh out aloud. Then you realise that you have mistaken an advertisement of some brand of mustard for the name of the station. Most of the newspapers here have become rich due to these advertisements. You will see that half or more than half of any newspaper that you read is taken up by advertisements. I do not know whether this is for the better or for worse. Any newly published book contains at least twenty pages of advertisements. Advertisements here are costlier than in our country, yet there is no dearth of them. The bigger

companies and shopkeepers consider this to be one of their essential expenses. What more shall I say; such profusion of advertisements make the British appear quite stupid at first, but they are hardly wrong in matters of money. They put up advertisements wherever they find some place because they want to make maximum profit by minimum investment. I have heard that many companies spend about a lakh on these every year. Often these advertisements help sell trivial objects and raise the profit of the company.

One has to go to 'Hyde Park' via Oxford Street. This garden is situated to the west of London. Though I am referring to it as a *bagan* or a 'garden', it has no fruit trees and very few flower bearing plants. It has a lawn and some big trees at places. It is smaller than Regent's park but if you also include the 'Kensington Garden', a garden full of flowers situated to its south west, then their combined area becomes much bigger than the Regent's park. This appears to have been constructed only for the rich people of London. Though the poor people are not barred from coming here, it is surrounded by houses of the rich on all sides and mostly the gentry visit this place. This is so beautifully maintained that no sign of poverty is visible here. There is a big lake within Hyde Park where many men and women go for boating during summers. The rich people come here for a drive in the fresh air and many men and women come here to ride as well. I felt extremely happy to see men and women taking walks together, rowing boats or riding but at the same time felt sad to realise that such a scene is not to be found in my country¹.

London has most of its visitors in the period between the end of spring and the middle of summer. This is the period when the rich come to stay here. All the lords, including the prince also come here during this time and the parliament is in session. People from different countries enjoy visiting this place at this time of the year. So for these few months London becomes a

¹ The author is always aware of this difference between men and women as practiced in her society and the freedom the women enjoy here.

bustling place. A visit to the Hyde Park during this time will give you an idea regarding London's wealth and opulence. If anyone from my country visits London, the person should not go back without visiting the 'Rotten Row' in Hyde Park because it has no parallel.

There is an area in Hyde Park exclusively maintained for horse riding. This is named Rotten Row. On a summer day if someone visits this place before two in the afternoon, he would see hundreds of men and women riding horses as a part of their morning exercise. The women outnumber men here. The place becomes so crowded that it appears as if all the rich folks of London have gathered there. Dense smog hangs over London most of the time and the trees do not look beautiful then. But now, dressed in new leaves they provide shelter from the scorching heat of the July sun. On one side of the footpath there is an iron railing and on the other there are beautiful flowers beds and greenery of creeper and foliage. Flowers are all in bloom and their fragrance is wafted far and wide by the mild breeze. The breeze would often carry to you the strong fragrance of a rose or some other British flower. We cannot decide whether to praise the gardener or nature for such beautiful and vast flower beds. Tens of thousands of people stand along the sides to admire these. Horse riders, variously attired, gallop past them. The entire scene is as amazing and exquisite as that of a scene from any theatre.

Here you can find people from almost all the races. Almost every civilized country like France, Italy, Germany, Spain, etc has its ambassador here. They ride beautiful horses. At times you can also see a Hindu or a Japanese young man. Here you can find members of the parliament, wealthy businessmen, and aristocrats strolling together in this park. You can also see women of various age, social position and status. Some of them are highly educated, graduates, while some are uneducated; some of them are extremely beautiful, while a few are ugly looking but extravagantly dressed. Along with some chaste women you will also come across a few of

questionable reputation. Nowhere else in this world you will find such diversity of dresses as you can see here. It is difficult to guess the amount of money, skill and different types of materials that go into the making of these dresses. Men and women on horses sometimes gallop fast and at times they take a leisurely ride. Often if they come across their friends they ride together deep in conversation. After spending their time till two in the afternoon here, they go back to their homes.

I have told you earlier that there is another garden called Kensington Garden adjacent to the Hyde Park which appears to be a part of the latter. Most part of Hyde Park is covered with lawn while there are many big trees in Kensington Garden. This garden looks especially beautiful in summer. Wherever you look there are climbers, plants and many kinds of beautiful flowers. At places there are cool and pleasant bowers surrounded by huge trees. There is a round pond ahead of these which reminds me of the pleasant gardens in the north of our country. But a big difference is that while in our country every garden has fruit-bearing trees, here they have grass, flowers, flower beds, tall trees, etc.

In this Kensington Garden, there is a huge statue of Queen Victoria's late husband, Prince Albert, built in his memory and named the Albert Memorial. This is one of the important tourist sites here. The metal statue is placed under a beautifully painted and decorated canopy made of stone. The walls of the canopy have carved images of various great European poets, musicians, sculptors, scholars, scientists, etc. In its four corners, there are four big stone carvings symbolizing the four continents of Asia, Europe, Africa and America. One of the carvings consists of a veiled Indian woman sitting on an elephant and a Chinese and a Muslim standing on her either side. This represents Asia. In the same way the carving depicting Europe shows a European riding upon a horse; in the African one, there is a Negro riding a camel and in the

carving for America, an American is sitting on a cow. Looking at these carvings, one can know about the various kinds of dresses that were earlier worn by the people of these four continents. The clothes of the people of Asia and Africa are still very much the same but that of Europe and America has undergone a lot of changes. Previously the Europeans had turbans on their heads, wooden shoes, and dresses like us, but today they have changed so much. Along with their way of dressing a lot of change can be perceived in terms of their knowledge as well.

It is pleasing to see the images of so many great Europeans carved on the canopy walls. Believing in '*Kirtijasya se jeevati*' or people live through their deed; I recalled the great deeds of these people and disregarded all other thoughts. Years have passed, yet their names remain inscribed in the hearts of all the civilised and educated people! Look at Shakespeare here holding a book and deep in his thoughts; and here is blind Homer with lyre in his hands, as if he is about to sing right away. Each of these carvings represents the art for which each one was famous and that made these images appear life-like.

London has many wonders but the most amazing one is the London underground. One can see a London above the ground. There is another underneath which is equally vibrant. This is already a big city with its numerous houses. Our country men will be surprised if they know that there are still more houses underground. They might even think these to be very dark and scary. Here the houses on each side of the road have a basement. The rooms in this floor are mostly used as kitchen, laundry, and coal storage. Most of the households use this space for comparatively messy chores like cooking and washing. They use the basement for all those chores which might make the place untidy. Here they store their coal and food stuff as well. Poor people often sleep here. Since there is some empty space in the front and there are windows in

these rooms, they get enough light and air. Anyway, even these rooms are much cleaner than the kitchens which are located above the ground in our country.

London has a system of underground railway¹. It continuously goes around London moving under the roads and houses. No other country has such astonishing railways. While coming to England, our train did pass through a number of very long tunnels but the experience of moving under the earth in darkness like insects appeared quite new to me. There is no pleasure in boarding these trains. We have to travel through dark tunnels throughout. At times a part of the sky is seen. The stations have dim lighting. They have developed various means to let out smoke and let in fresh air. Even then after travelling for a while, we find the smoke suffocating us, making life difficult. But gradually we get used to everything. Thousands of people commute from one part of London to another by these trains. If one has to travel from one part of London to another, these trains are faster and cheaper modes of travelling as compared to horse carriages. Since the stations are underground, one has to climb down the stairs to board the trains. The stations are quite near to each other – within two miles there are two to three of them. At first it baffles us that while there are so many people, cars, etc moving on the ground above there are also underground trains moving in darkness. But men, women and children here are quite comfortable travelling this way.

Apart from this railway, there are various pipelines running underground – such as pipeline for gas, for water, drainage etc. So one can say that London is completely hollow from within. Many a times while walking on the roads, it seems that one is walking on a bridge.

¹ Since this is also a new concept for the author, she has explained the term ‘underground railway’ to her readers.

Many people have heard about the tunnel under the Thames. This is even more spectacular than the underground railway. Previously, it was for the pedestrians and now for the railways. I had read in my childhood –

“Ships sail above, underneath walk men

What more surprising there can be then?”

Now I can really see that surprising thing for myself. Trains move under the river while various types of boats and ships sail on it. Also many people, carriages, trains etc travel on the bridge built over the river. This, in true sense, appears marvellous to us. Is there anything that these Europeans have not accomplished by the virtue of their Science, skills and hard work? Sir Isenberg Brunel is the architect of this tunnel. Once he saw a small insect drilling in a piece of wood with its sharp head and making way for itself through it. That gave him the idea that even men can dig tunnels underground with the help of big machines. So he took lesson from that small creature and used his knowledge, wisdom and labour to build the Thames Tunnel.

There is a lot of noise, heavy traffic and many shops on the roads of London, but there is not much entertainment. The British are not fond of conversation and that is why while walking on the road they do not chat or joke. They always walk in a hurry as if they have a train to catch. One cannot see celebrations such as the immersion procession after the *Pujas*¹, the chariot festival, wedding processions, etc on the roads here. Only once a year, they take out a procession on the streets of London to celebrate the appointment of the first magistrate of London which is similar to the wedding processions in our country. The magistrate dressed in an extraordinary fashion rides a magnificent carriage and is accompanied by spectacularly dressed people in carriages as well as pedestrians. The entire entourage goes round parts of London. Apart from

¹ Here she is referring to the immersion of idols after *durga puja*, the biggest festival of Bengal, which is accompanied with a huge procession and merriment.

this, in some of the roads of London, we can see ‘Punch and Judy’¹, which is similar to the puppet dance of our country. But it is much inferior to our puppet dances.

Though London is a big city and is still expanding, various means of transport make commuting from one part of it to another quite fast and inexpensive. England has twenty different railways. Among these, the Northern London railways and the underground railways travel only within and around London continuously. Apart from these there are some important and some small stations in London. If one looks at the railway map of London, it looks like a cobweb. Throughout the day, there is a train at every station at the interval of five or ten minutes so that one can quickly reach from one place to another if one so wishes. In this city, one can move by tram in all the directions. The trams here look like a train. There are cushioned benches inside, on both sides there are glass walls and two doors; there are stairs leading to the roof-top where there are seating arrangements. . Twenty-four people can sit in a tram-car.

For the commoners there is another kind of vehicle similar to the tram. It is called an ‘omnibus’. People usually call it a ‘bus’. They resemble a tram but are smaller in size. They do not move on tracks. It is easier to move around in a bus. These buses are seen plying within and around London. They cover all the important and major roads. In London, about a thousand trams and buses ply every day. Just as there are trams, busses and trains as land transport, there are motor boats to travel through water. Many people go from one part of London to another in these by crossing the Thames without much expense.

Apart from all these means of public transport, there are about five thousand four wheeled coaches and six thousand five hundred two wheeled coaches which are for hire. Both these kinds are drawn by a single horse. The four wheeled coaches resemble the palanquins of

¹ A popular puppet show that had its origin in the 16th century *commedia dell’arte*, it featured Mr. Punch and his wife Judy.

our country. Two-wheeled coaches are not found in Bengal but I have seen such in Bombay. It does not accommodate more than two persons and opens in the front. When it rains, the glass pane of the window is pulled down and the coach man sits at the back of the carriage instead of the front. There are still many other types of carriages – privately owned ones, shopkeeper's carts, carriages owned by the railway companies, those of the liquor shop owners, and also hand pulled carts. So many of these vehicles ply on the London roads that it becomes impossible to keep a count of them.

Here they mostly use gas light in all the major places like roads, shops, theatres etc, as well as in most of the houses. Now in some places like a few renowned shops, theatres and museums, electric lights can be seen. These are brighter and safer than the gaslights but more expensive too so they cannot be used everywhere. As they constantly fluctuate, they are not good for the eyes as well. Every evening the main streets of London are illuminated like the temples of our country. There are lights both inside and outside the shops. When these lights fall on the glass walls and on the shining objects inside the shops they reflect with double brightness. Because of this in winter it is more pleasurable to move about the city in evening than during day time.

10. British Women

British women are not all perfect but they have many good qualities. They are very efficient, intelligent and a number of them are educated. Like the men of this country, the women too never neglect their duties. They do not laze away if there is work on hand. When there are no

household chores, most of them engage themselves in some useful crafts. Here the men are just bread earners; the responsibility of the household is entirely on the women. Man might be the master of the house, but it is the woman who is truly the queen of the household. They do not have separated 'outer' and 'inner' sections of house as we have in our country. So the women take care of the whole of the house and also have to look after the friends or other guests visiting them. The British women are efficient in running their houses; they watch over all their maids and servants, keep the accounts of household expenses and do whatever is necessary for the proper running of a house. Here mostly the housewives perform all the domestic chores from washing clothes to looking after their children because a maid is not easily affordable. And it is expensive to hire someone from the outside to do the jobs.

Among the affluent there are many women who are completely given to luxury. They leave the responsibilities of their homes and children on their servants and spend their time indulging in music, fashion or reading novels¹. But how can I blame them for this? In almost every country it is seen that the rich women are lazy. Everywhere, surfeit of wealth is the root cause of a luxurious living. Women build the foundation of a family. So if the women in general had been lazy here, then British household could not have run efficiently and England too would not have developed so much. I feel that they are the true counterparts of their men. The way these women help their men and at times even do men's work are things that we almost never see in our country. Apart from their own work, these women can also execute men's jobs efficiently. They often run shops, work as clerks, teachers, write books and contribute in newspapers, arrange meetings and accomplish much more. Women constitute half of a country's population:

¹ Tagore in *Europe Probashir Patra* devotes a considerable space to the British ladies who spend their time just on fashion and flirting. "They all are either daughters or widows of the upper class men – they have servants and therefore need not work... only one major work is left for her... and that is , of adorning herself." (Tagore 129)

their aversion to work and inclination towards laziness harm the whole nation. British women have not restricted themselves to just household chores. They cooperate with men in many other works. Because of this, great tasks are being accomplished here and there is such progress.

The British women who live in India are extremely lazy because everything they need, including servants, come quite cheap in this country. Also, they do not care much about money as their husbands earn a high salary. Food, fashion, gossiping, music and strolling in the open air are their chief preoccupations. Taking these women as models, the Indians consider all British women to be '*babu*'¹. There was a time when I too believed that all British women were lazy, but after seeing everything here that impression has changed. I have been greatly surprised to see them capable of as much hard work, tolerance and diligence as men. Instead of just aping the manners of these women if we can imbibe their virtues, then perhaps we shall be truly benefitted.

England provides a lot of opportunity for women's education. There is no dearth of good schools or colleges for girls in any city here. In almost every neighbourhood in London there are two to three girls' schools. Nowadays in the universities of London, Oxford, Cambridge, women can get the same education as men. In the University of London², women receive education together with men, attending the same classes and under the same professors. They pass the same examinations and receive the same degrees. Though the examinations here are tougher than the B.A and M.A examinations of our country, many women competing with men pass these and often score much higher marks. In London there is no dearth of women who hold university

¹ The word *babu* as discussed earlier, refers to those nineteenth century men who spent their time and money in luxury and foppery. But interestingly, though it is used for men in Bengali society, Krishnabhabini confers this on the rich and idle English women given to laziness.

² Though the author presents an almost utopian view of women's education, it was not until 1878 that the University of London opened its doors to women. According to the brief history of the institution provided in their official website "in 1880, four women passed the BA examination and in 1881 two women obtained a BSc."

degrees like men. One can often hear names such as Miss Smith, B.A, Misses Jones, M.A, etc. Now women do not hesitate to participate even in those tough examinations which few men take up. This proves that women are not inferior to men in terms of intelligence; on the other hand, the fact that they have achieved as much as men in spite of all the hurdles they face prove their superiority. I have heard that in North America, women can attain the high posts of judge, barrister etc, and preside over legal cases as men do. All the upper class women are quite well-educated! The British women yet do not take part in professions that might require higher degrees of efficiency than teaching or practicing medicine. But here too there is such a progress in the field of education that it seems quite soon the British women will surpass the American ones in this regard.

I cannot express the happiness that I feel when I see girls and young women going to schools and colleges in groups like the boys and young men. Here the girls too go to school from the age of six or seven till they are twenty to twenty-five. Many women are not satisfied even with this. Like the educated British men, they continue their pursuit of education till the end of their life. Here there are many women who are authors, scholars and scientists. In certain aspects the women dominate men. Best of the novels of recent times have come from women authors¹.

In the provinces girls not only study but also learn stitching, knitting, music, physical exercises and at times even cooking. British parents take good care so that their daughters can learn all these skills. They take equal care to impart education to both their sons and daughters.

¹ Victorian novel was dominated by women authors, many of whom have obliterated from public memory in the later years. Nineteenth century saw prolific novelists like Mary Elizabeth Braddon (1835-1915), also known as the “queen of circulating libraries” who authored about eighty books; George Eliot (1819-1880), one of the most learned and scholarly writers of her times, whose chief concern was the contemporary society and women; Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865), immensely popular in her times though not remembered much by posterity, her most popular work was *Mary Barton*, her contribution to the ‘condition of England’ novels along with Dickens, Disreili and others. There were many more women novelists in this period, the Bronte sisters, Jane Austen, Mary Shelley, Fanny Burney to name a few.

There is no lack of female teachers here and that is why while appointing teachers for their sons they do the same for their daughters as well, spending almost an equal amount of money for both. Not just in the rich households, but even the daughters of middle class houses pursue education and learn music and other necessary art forms till they are eighteen or nineteen. Parents spend liberally till their daughters become skilled enough in all these subjects. They feel happy to have done their duties towards their daughters. Compared to India, here the girls of much lower class are better educated and more intelligent. In this country, barring the lowest strata of society, almost everybody's daughters and wives can read, write and play on the piano. Almost everyone is skilled in household chores and dress making etc.

Along with their intellect British women take adequate care of their health. In almost every girl's school there are facilities for physical exercises and games. In many cases, women are as expert as men in games like gymnastics which require physical stamina. They are also at par with men in walking, horse riding, running, and lawn tennis. Here I have often seen many such women who are stronger than many Bengali men in terms of both physical and mental strength. I doubt whether an Indian man would be able to walk as much as an upper class British woman does. Also, the women here are stronger and more industrious than the women of other European races. It is said that an Italian lady does not walk as much in a year as a British lady walks in a day. So it is not surprising that such strong and industrious mothers will bear healthy and strong children who will later grow up to be brave, spirited and hard-working British men.

Average British women are not bad-looking. They have elongated but well-shaped face. I have seen many very beautiful women here. Their faces seemed to be carved to perfection. The upper class women have a fair, pinkish and shining complexion which makes them appear so

attractive. It is due to their complexion that we often mistake them to be *apsaras*¹ at the first glance. But a closer look reveals that though most of them have a beautiful face and a fair complexion, their figure is not attractive and they lack in feminine grace. Most of the women are slim and since they have to work like men and with men, they become graceless like men. Often their attractiveness is due to their attire and make-up. Apart from England I haven't seen so much of artificial beauty among women of any other country. Had the Indian women been fair and better attired, they would have been more charming. There is another thing that I have noticed about them. In this country, we see many young women around us. Perhaps due to the cold or humid climate, English women do not age early. Often, women who are quite elderly dress themselves like the young ones to look as young as possible.

Dresses of women in England are amazing. They love to be extravagant in dressing. Both the rich and the poor are crazy about their clothes. Their craze for dresses is much more than the Indian women's craze for jewellery². Since it is quite cold here and sun shine is rare, women generally wear black dresses. But even these are of various types and display different patterns of embroidery. Almost always they go out wearing expensive dresses of the best quality. In summer, their dresses are more fashionable. Nowhere else can anyone come across garments of such different styles and colours. No two women are dressed alike. But I cannot praise the dress sense of the British women. There are few whose dresses reflect good taste. Generally they have no idea of what will suit them. When they go out they dress up in volumes of fabric and countless tidbits. It seems as if they have suddenly become rich and hence adorn themselves with a surfeit of valuable stuffs to show off their wealth. On Sundays, people dress in their best outfit

¹ Dancers in the court of the king of the Gods, Indra who are supposed to be extremely beautiful.

² Both dresses and jewelleries serve to accentuate the beauty of a woman and cater to her vanity. Indian women traditionally have been known to covet expensive jewelleries and horde them as much possible.

and it becomes difficult to find out their respective social positions by their attire. If for a few days one visits Hyde Park and other places frequented by the affluent Londoners, one can easily perceive the trouble these women take to dress themselves up: in their beautifully embroidered velvet hats, costly gowns made of taffeta or silk, different types of British shawls, gloves, gold chain, gold bangles and iron-circlet, they seem to step right out of a picture or a cupboard to show themselves off to the public. Some of the rich men's wives wear clothes worth not less than two to three hundred rupees.

The English women use numerous artificial implements to enhance their beauty and it is surprising to learn the objectives of the use. By using things such as corset, crinoline, etc they alter their figures in such a way that it becomes difficult to make out who is actually beautiful and who has made herself so. I have heard that they undertake a lot of pain to change their original figure in order to look beautiful¹. I have also heard that once upon a time they used to so tighten their belts to make themselves appear slimmer that they would often fall unconscious while walking along the roads. Now they do not go to that extent. Yet looking at the young women here it seems that they prefer being praised for their good looks to their physical comfort.

There is such an obsession for dressing up that many women would find no time for eating or for any other chores. And it is dresses here that determine one's class. If any lady comes out in ordinary attire, people look down upon her. On the other hand if a lower class woman moves around nicely dressed, people mistake her to be a gentlewoman and treat her accordingly. Actually for the British it is not culture but money which is important. An

¹ Tagore in *Europe Prabashir Patra* talks about tightening one's belt at waist to look slimmer. He too mentions the pain that they go through to make themselves look beautiful: "they are not hesitant to sacrifice their health and happiness in the elaborate ritual of captivating the heart of the other sex, they would tie their waists tight enough to make it as thin as that of a wasp's – and for such fancies they would willingly go through all types of pains and earn all types of diseases." (23)

expensively attired woman, irrespective of her class, draws respect from all quarters here. Therefore everyone tries to dress up as elegantly as possible. Husbands and fathers get fed up with their wives' and daughters' demands for more dresses. The pomp and show of dresses here is much more than that of jewellery in our country. Our men can still get some respite once a piece of ornament is procured but English men are constantly pestered with the demand for clothes. Here at times I have come across a carpenter's wife so elegantly attired that she can easily be mistaken for a rich man's wife. If you feel sad to see a man in tattered clothes, you will be equally surprised to see his wife in a beautiful dress. What more is there to say; looking around I am convinced that the British women's pathological fascination for clothes has become a terrible vice. It has gone beyond their control.

British women are quite restless by nature and learn to be smart from their childhood. They do not get married at the age of ten as happens in our country. So they do not have to shoulder family responsibilities at that tender age; nor do they become the mistress of the house by the time they are twelve or thirteen. But by interacting with various kinds of people from their childhood, they become clever in a number of ways. Women of no other European country are as sharp and loquacious as them. If you talk to a thirteen or fourteen year old girl of France, Germany or Italy, etc, she will answer you softly and in simple words. But a British girl of the same age will be more skilled in conversation and can surpass anyone at it. Again, if you visit any public place, you will hear the voices of women more than that of men. I have not seen any British girl sitting quietly. They keep on constantly moving their hands, legs or head without any apparent reason. Often, even young ladies behave improperly in public. British women do not know true modesty. Just by dressing up one does not become modest; rather it is a sense of humility that arises from within one's self. A modest woman is one whose personality reflects a

heart that is humble. But I have rarely come across any British woman whose face reflects this pleasing and innately humble modesty. At times they behave in such a shameless manner and show such lack of this feminine attribute that all their other positive qualities seem useless.

British women are neither humble nor hospitable by nature. They do not know the conversational etiquettes. Unlike Indian women they do not sacrifice their meals to feed guests who might arrive unannounced. I have heard that in certain houses, when they have guests, women first keep the delicacies aside for themselves and then serve the rest to the guests. This might be an exaggeration but you surely will never see or even hear of any such thing in our country. Indian women might lack in qualities of strength but they are adorned with tender feminine qualities like shyness, modesty, kindness, love, affection etc. We are not behind any other races in terms of all these virtues. Hindu women did once possess spirit and courage and they still do but lack of freedom and education has rendered these virtues ineffective. Man's apathy and superstitions within the society are responsible for Hindu women's degradation and misfortune. It is wrong to think that if a woman has strong qualities like courage and spirit, she will lose the tender virtues. Such a case is found only among the British women.

Since the British women lack modesty or other such qualities they misuse their freedom at times. Many of you will be surprised to know about their husband hunting. As soon as the girls here reach marriageable age, they go crazy over husband hunting. You cannot blame it on them. In England, women are greater in number than men and there is no dearth of educated and good-looking women either. Therefore, as in other aspects, in this field too there is a lot of competition among the young women. On reaching marriageable age every British woman goes crazy over finding the ways to attract men and ascertain that she is preferred over all other women. They frequently visit public places such as roads, gardens, theatres etc which are also frequented by

men, and try their utmost to display their beauty and virtues. At this point of life they become more restless and more adept in conversation. They refuse to stay at home and do not care about their parents' wishes. They go everywhere on their own, unaccompanied by any elderly person. Probably they do not have any ill intentions behind these acts. Their only goal might be to get a husband according to their own desires. Like fishermen, the women here spread their nets in the larger areas; if men, like fish, once get caught within these nets, then they will not find any way out of them. Their happiness knows no bound if they can catch a husband before they lose their youth or beauty. Those who are ugly, suffer a lot here. In spite of all their efforts they cannot procure a husband for themselves and have to remain spinster throughout their lives.

Many Indians consider majority of British women to be of doubtful moral character. The reason behind this is that they freely move about in public places such as roads, fields or gardens, and in the presence of men they do not hide their faces behind veils or keep their eyes downcast. But if for once such prejudiced Indians can come here, they will be rid of this misconception. If the British women had not been god-fearing, England could not have progressed so much. Also she could not have earned so much of love and respect from other civilized races. It is not just the uncivilized and wild races that know the value and honour of *satitva*¹; it is the civilized and developed people who accept *satitva* to be the chief *dharma*² of any woman. It is not that in England we do not come across any woman who has gone astray but they are outnumbered by the good ones. According to me those who are *satis* in this country are the true *satis* because it is easier to boast about *satitva* in a domain that excludes men but those who interact with men

¹ Roughly translated as chastity, *satitva* has a greater significance within the Hindu philosophy. It combines the wifely virtues of faithfulness both in action and thoughts and a devotion towards husband, almost treating him like a God. In the nineteenth century *satitva* was considered to be the guiding principle for all married Hindu women.

² *Dharma* does not mean only religion; it is the base of one's faith. Within the Hindu context it has a complex set of meanings. It derives from the Sanskrit word *dhri* which means 'to hold', so *dharma* becomes the very basis of one's existence – duty, vocation, religion and all that is considered to be correct and moral.

treating them as equals, hold conversation and go around with them, yet do not compromise their precious *dharma*, they are the ones who deserve proper praise and they are the ones who possess a greater strength of mind and *dharma*.

British women learn self-control from their childhood by going out alone in the world. They learn to maintain their dignity from the examples set by their parents. There is so much of interaction between men and women here that people do not think it wrong to meet or interact with a stranger. In this country, gentlemen and ladies relate to each other as brothers and sisters. Men too do not look down upon women, rather respect them. If anyone misbehaves with women, men come to their aid and punish the offender. Men are physically stronger than women so unless they know how to uphold the dignity of women, women's liberation cannot exist. In this country there are many strict laws against men torturing women. If any man assaults a woman physically or verbally, then he can get harsh punishments.

Indian men are afraid to give freedom to women. They fear that after staying subjugated for such a long time, women have become mentally so weak they will not be able to conduct themselves properly even if they become free. Well, this is largely true. If a person is suddenly given freedom after remaining under subjection for a long time, then he will not be able to use or retain it properly. But everyone has to learn at some point of time or the other; a baby does not learn to walk in one go, it has to be taught and supported again and again, yet it often falls down. The present condition of women in our country is similar to this situation. They are so weak and have reached such a degraded state that if men do not help them compassionately to stand on their own, their situation will never improve. And if they are not gradually initiated along the road to freedom, they shall never learn self-control or become independent. A few women, not knowing the use of the little education and freedom they had received had gone astray: this has made our countrymen apprehensive. But does it befit the wise men to judge the entire woman race by a few such examples! No one can gain complete success in any new enterprise; there is

bound to be some failure. Instead of being apprehensive if they can properly educate the women prior to giving them freedom, then we shall realise that Indian women are in no way inferior to the British ones.

British women have always known how to preserve their self-respect and independence. They openly interact with men in public places, play and talk with them and gain various kinds of experiences from their childhood. That is why they do not irrationally deify them and do not constantly dream of love and happiness as well. They become educated, visit various countries, as well as listen to the discussions that their fathers and brothers have with their friends on various subjects like politics, administration and other serious issues and therefore develop the capacity for serious thinking and learn to discern between the good and the evil. They spend most of their time in domestic chores and reading; so idleness cannot spoil their nature and ruin them. Therefore, it is clear to all that for these reasons, British women are not easily tempted to go astray. Indian women are famous throughout the world for their *satitva*. We never hesitate a bit to sacrifice our lives for the sake of our *satitva* or to leave this familiar world for the devotion towards our husbands. It is true that one does not get to hear such things in this country but here too the British women try their utmost to retain their *satitva*, the chief *dharma* of any woman.

Here there are many eminent women. Many of you must have heard of the names of the highly educated English women such as Miss Mary Carpenter¹, Miss Florence Nightingale²,

¹ Mary Carpenter (1807 – 1877), was a British social reformer. She had set up charitable schools for the destitute, called the ragged schools and reformatory schools for the juvenile offenders, supported the anti-slavery movement and was involved in many other charitable works.

² Florence Nightingale (1820-1910) was the British nurse, writer and statistician. She untiringly nursed the wounded soldiers of the Crimean war. She also laid the foundation of professional nursing by establishin the nursing school at St. Thomas' Hospital in London.

Lady Baker¹, and others. In spite of being single, Miss Mary Carpenter used her intellect and education for the progress of her country. She helped to improve the condition of the prisons and other established institutions. She also helped in establishing many women's organisations. She had founded an organisation for the benefit of those young men arriving in England. It is still functioning and has been very helpful. Everyone is aware of her efforts towards women's education in India. There is no such person who is not amazed at the courage and other feminine virtues of Miss Florence Nightingale who stayed at the military barracks during the Crimean wars and nursed the wounded soldiers.

It makes me happy to think of these women who did not get married to be led by others and served this world with their own strength. But in India, let alone the maidens, even the married women do not come forward to serve the country. British women, even if they remain single or become widows, do not consider their lives to be futile. Rather, they try their best to do their duties as human beings. One can achieve a lot with the help of other people, but those women, who singlehandedly and conscientiously work towards the betterment of this world, are rare: we cannot even imagine how precious their lives are.

Among married British women there are many who are truly devoted to their husbands and are always by their side. Though there is women's liberation here, there is no lack of faithful women who follow their husbands. Lady Baker is the chief among such devoted wives. She, in spite of being a woman, courageously accompanied her husband and stayed with him in those deserts where even men are scared to go. She too, along with her husband, traversed the dangerous and unexplored deserts of Africa to discover new lakes and rivers: she was her

¹ Refers to the second wife of Samuel Baker, the Victorian explorer. She accompanied her husband in all his voyages and explorations. Samuel Baker was supposed to have met her at an Armenian Slave market from where both of them finally eloped.

husband's sole companion in that place devoid of any friends and relations. She was endowed with manly qualities like courage as well as all the virtues associated with the women. Lady Bracey¹ is another such virtuous woman. She did not hesitate to sail with her husband across various oceans for about one and a half years and faced a lot of hardship. This great woman has immortalised her achievements by writing a number of books on her voyages and other matters. It is entertaining, encouraging and at the same time broadens one's mind.

1. Come sisters! Let us break free of our prisons/ or make our dear brothers realise that/ they must free us all, we the women of Bengal, / from the chains tied to our feet.
2. Come and see the freedom enjoyed/ by Germans, French and British women./ They are spirited and cheerful/ and have no reason to shed humiliating tears.
3. See here, the men neither/ neglect their women, considering them worthless/ nor do they imprison the women/ like animals, in their inner quarters.
4. In Europe, wherever I go/ I find women treated equal to men/ but in India, unfortunately, / women's place is at the feet of men.
5. For how long shall we remain / prisoners in our own house/ totally cut off from all that is happening/ within India and in the outside world?
6. You are happy to be confined to a few rooms/ which you call *andar mahal*². / You know nothing beyond the household chores/ do not even know who visits the *sadar*³.

¹ Probably the wife of Herbert Richard Bracey, the P&O Co ship's surgeon, travelled to various places in Africa, Asia and other parts.

² The inner quarters of the traditional Hindu house, where the women lived.

³ The outer part of the house where the master of the house received his visitors. The inner quarter was totally cut off from this part and women were not allowed here.

7. Consider the women here/ engrossed in their domestic chores. / But whenever they can, they do things they like to, / such as attending meetings or going for a visit.
8. They are not happy in the confines of their homes; /how can they be; / the higher forms of life cannot continue on this earth/ without progress or freedom.
9. We do not have that strength of progress/ all of us are tied in the chains of submission/ yet we live indifferently, do not realise our pains/ and spend our lives pleurably.
10. Sisters! You possess beautiful hearts/ adorned with virtues like *satitva*, humility and respect. / But these are not enough/ so immediately learn to be courageous.
11. Sisters! Everybody says/ Bengali women are weak/ so their brothers hesitate/ to allow them a life of independence.
12. So I say, arise and proceed/ Drive away their misconception. / Brace yourself up in boldness/ and dazzle as brilliant as lightning.
13. Sisters! I have earned my freedom/ but find no happiness without you. / Your pale faces and tearful eyes/ are always there before me.
14. If you could experience this freedom/ once in your life of bondage/ you would never wish to remain/ imprisoned in your houses or keep you faces hidden behind veils.
15. There is no shame in keeping our faces uncovered. / It is just our prejudice. / So I repeat! Wake up/ and do not spend your life in false fears.

11. Royal Palace – Club – Museum – Theatre – Drinking Houses

A look at the Royal palaces, great buildings and the public places is enough to make one take in the greatness and wealth of London. Here there are a total of eight to nine palaces.

Among these, the one in which Queen Victoria resides during her London visit is known as the 'Buckingham Palace'. This palace had been built sixty years back and about a crore and twenty lakh rupees had been spent in building it. Buckingham Palace is situated in the south western part of London. There is vast expanse of garden around it and from a distance it looks like a very high and huge house. But its exterior is not very ornate. Moreover smoke and dust in London does not let any building retain its whiteness. I do not need to mention in this book the amount of expensive and exquisite items that are there within. Everyone knows that the kings and queens live extravagantly, yet it seems that this palace does not have the splendour suitable for the empress of England.

Among the great edifices of this place, Parliament House is one of the best. It is situated on the bank of the Thames, at a short distance from the Queen's palace. Parliament House is huge and occupies about eight acres¹ of land. It is built of stone and three and a half crore rupees were spent in its construction. Its architecture speaks of skill and expertise. It looks all the more beautiful because it is situated on the river bank. Apart from the House of Lords and the House of Commons, it also comprises of a library, conference halls for ministers and many other big chambers. There is an ornate throne in the House of Lords, for the Queen at times presides over its proceedings. The parliament remains in session for seven months in a year. To visit the House during that period, one has to seek permission from any of its members. But since there is not much space in the area where common people can sit, very few people get a chance to visit the parliament during that period. When the Parliament is not in session, one can easily enter the House and take a proper look around. The Parliament features a number of tall towers and the highest one has a large clock. This clock has four faces on four sides but is controlled by a single

¹ A unit of land measurement which varied in size place to place. In Bengal its size was determined to be about 1/3 acre. 24 *bighas* can be approximately converted to 8 acres.

machine. As soon as it gets dark, the clock is illuminated from within, so its hands can be seen from quite a distance. Its bell can be heard from a distance of four miles during day and from almost all parts of London during night.

The bank of the Thames near the Parliament House has been beautifully paved with stones. There is a path across the river and there are benches along it. The entire way is illuminated with electric lamps at night. It is quite pleasant to walk here in the summer evenings and from here one can get a nice view of the Thames flowing through London. Hundreds of boats and ships ply on this river to commute people. There is a well-constructed bridge over the river which is used by both pedestrians and vehicles. In Calcutta there is only one bridge over the Ganges whereas throughout London, there are seventeen bridges over Thames, each at a distance of about 300 feet from the other. But motor vehicles can use only a few of them. If you look ahead, on the other side of the river, there are many buildings and factories. If you notice properly you can see that the people are busy, moving and walking about, engaged in various activities.

Many of you must have heard about a house made of glass situated near London. This 'crystal palace'¹ or the house of glass is situated at a distance of about six miles from London. This had been inaugurated in 1854 for the Great Exhibition and more than one and half crore of rupees were spent in building it. There is a beautiful garden surrounding the house and it spreads across two acres of area. There are many artificial fountains and waterfalls in this garden. Flowers, creepers and plants of various kinds enhance its beauty during summer. It is said that there is no garden bigger and better than this one in any other country in entire Europe. From a

¹ The Crystal palace was originally built to house the Great Exhibition of 1851 organised by Prince Charles. It was first located in Hyde Park. After the Exhibition was over, it was relocated at Penge Place, atop Sydenham Hill, near London in 1854.

distance, the house appears ethereal. There is glass on every side. Even the ceiling is made of glass, circular and vaulted with a peak rising from the centre. Again when the entire palace and the garden are lit up by electric lights, it seems that we are looking at the palaces from the stories of the Arabian Nights, which we had read in our childhood. I have heard that nothing apart from glass and iron had been used to construct this structure. Though this is fully made of glass, it can withstand wind and rain like the buildings made of stone or bricks. Here, on every Sunday there are entertainment programmes such as orchestra, short skits and farce, flower shows and animal fairs, and many more. And in summers, beautiful shows of fire crackers are organised in the garden. During summers they also organise wonderful displays of fireworks in the garden. Apart from these, there are fish in aquarium, toys and things of various kinds worth seeing inside the house.

A number of impressive structures had been constructed under the care of Prince Albert, late husband of the Queen, among which, Albert Hall is quite famous. It is round in shape and so spacious that about eight thousand people can be easily accommodated. It has twenty six doors and at night it is lit up with eight thousand gas lights. Often excellent orchestra performances are organised here. High Court and other important offices in London are much bigger than those in Calcutta but their dull exteriors steal away the elegance. And none of them look better than the beautiful white-washed buildings of our country with their green blinds.

In the western part of London, there are many big buildings, called ‘clubs’¹. These are meeting places for a number of people, but not like the associations that we have in our country. Here there are facilities for reading newspapers and books, eating and even spending a night. There are about fifty clubs in entire London. Among them, the ‘Athenaeum Club’ is the largest

¹ Club is a new concept for her readers so she explains it for their understanding.

and the most famous. It looks like a palace from outside. There are many beautifully furnished rooms here along with a number of well-mannered and attentive servants. This club has all the luxurious amenities found in Europe and all that a gentleman might require. Its library contains around fifty thousand books and a well-constructed, spacious reading-room. Here one can read almost all the newspapers and monthly journals of England and the important newspapers of other countries as well. At night the entire place is brightly illuminated. You can read books or newspapers there whenever you wish to. When hungry, you can have what you feel like; and apart from that, there is space where one can sit and talk with friends, and arrangement for games like billiards, cards, etc. In short, this place has all that one needs for both physical and mental relaxation. These clubs show how fond these British are of their comfort and enjoyment in life. They can readily spend hundreds of rupees for making life comfortable – they cannot live a life without luxury. To be a member of any of these clubs, one has to pay an annual fee starting from about fifty rupees, going up to three, four or five hundred, depending on the status of that club. Almost all the clubs have numerous members. In some clubs there numbers go up to even eight hundred or thousand. Not only India, but most of the other countries are yet unaware of this aspect of luxury called clubs. It is quite surprising that in a country like England where people do not like to interact or talk much among themselves one can see so many clubs, societies and ‘companies’.

British Museum is one of the chief places to be visited in London. It is situated in the centre of the city. As in the museum of Calcutta, here also there are a number of ancient exhibits. Just near the entrance, on both sides, many statues of Egyptian, Assyrian and Indian gods and heroes can be seen. At the front there is a stone carving of *Indra* and his court at *Amarabati*¹.

¹ According to the Hindu mythology, Indra is the king of Gods, he rules from his capital at Amaravati, a place of opulence and splendor in heaven.

Amazing! We neglect these sculptures nowadays, but on a close scrutiny, they reveal a lot about the ancient practice of sculpting, customs, tradition and history. Once all these had been built by the Hindus and preserved by them, but gradually along with the Hindu's strength and spirit, they vanished as well. They have been reassembled here by the industrious British, involving a lot of hard work. They have spent a lot of money to collect and bring here many such ancient and exceptional articles from the countries of Asia, Europe, Africa and America. Which Indian will not be both keen and pleased to know about the kind of armours Hindus wore in the ancient times, the weapons they used in the wars, the kind of clay utensils they used to worship their gods, and the kind of things and clothes they used? Here, apart from the ancient objects, one can also get to see many extraordinary items related to science, art, and literature. Previously, here there were bones, skeletons and shapes made of burnt straw of various animals belonging to different countries. But now they have been shifted to another museum.

Apart from all the above-mentioned items, there is a very good library and reading room in the British Museum. Previously people here could only see the collection and appreciate; but now, after the reading room was built in the year 1856, people can read here whatever they wish to, without a fee. The museum has an astonishing collection of books in terms of variety, subjects and languages. Till now they have around two crore books and this number is increasing every year. I have heard that the National Library in Paris, the capital of France, contains more books than the British Museum, but there they do not have such fine arrangements for reading or books of such diverse types. The reading-room is very spacious. It can accommodate about five hundred people. It is round in shape. The dome-shaped ceiling is made of opaque glass. The counter for issuing and returning books is in the centre of the room where the library staff is also present. The seats for the readers are around that area, so no seat is far from the centre. There are

three tiered shelves along its walls holding numerous books. For every reader there is a chair and a table which is blocked at front so that the reader can read undisturbed. The tables and the leather covered chairs are very clean. On each of these there is space for keeping inkpot, ink, blotting, brush to wipe pen and a place for keeping hat. Every seat has a number. The reader has to write the name of the book he wants to read, its number according to the book catalogue, the name of its author, his own name and his seat number on a piece of printed paper and give it to the office at the centre of the room. After sometime, one of the attendants of the library will bring that book to the reader. One person can borrow more than one book in this way. The reader remains responsible for the book he issues till he returns that to the counter and takes back the slip. Women have separate seats reserved for them, but they can also sit anywhere they wish to. No one below the age of twenty-one is allowed to use this library and only those with reference and from among the gentleman classes are allowed to read here.

Apart from the British Museum, there are seven or eight other museums in London. Among them, South Kensington Museum is comparatively more famous. Here they have many art and craft objects. Other museums are not as big or famous as these.

In Calcutta, there are only two or three hospitals but London has sixteen big ones. All are full and they run on the charity. It is not possible to count the number of big or small churches that are there in London. I think if one counts, then there will be about five hundred churches in entire London, the chief among them being the Saint Paul's Cathedral and the Westminster Abbey.

Saint Paul's Cathedral has a fine architecture. They had taken thirty-five years to complete it and had spent about eighty lakh rupees. It is 510 feet high, 240 feet in breadth and 2100 feet wide. There is a high dome on its roof and above the dome there's a tower, about 375

feet high from the ground. This church can be seen from quite a distance and one can comfortably view the entire city of London after climbing to its top. There is a whispering room within the church where even a barely audible whisper can be clearly heard as it is echoed throughout the room. Westminster Abbey is built differently and its exterior is very beautiful. It is much smaller than the Saint Paul's Cathedral. Inside it, there are tombs and monuments of the important people of England.

There are about thirty theatres in London; performances are held there every day except Sunday. A few theatres can accommodate even up to three to four hundred people. Most of the theatres are well built and beautifully decorated. There are so many different types of plays and farcical performances in London that one cannot keep a count of it. And in all the theatres, there is always a big crowd. God knows from where so many people come! Apart from theatres, there are a number of big music halls which organizes superior quality orchestras. In London, there are also a number of opera houses: chiefly there are vocal performances accompanied with music. But I have heard that in these places there is a prevalence of drinking and people of both good and bad types visit there.

Apart from theatres, auditoriums and opera houses, there are many other smaller places of entertainment here. One who has money does not need to worry about entertainment in London. Whether one is young or old, woman or man – everyone has places to visit for recreation. Among the smaller places of entertainment here, there is a very interesting place. It is a room where the statues of the famous people of the earlier times as well as of the present are exhibited. These are made of wax. The figures of the king, queen and other great people are very beautifully decorated. They have such beautiful colour and form that in dim light, they appear to

be living people. Here there is a room known as the 'Hall of Horrors'¹ which has the figures of all notorious murderers, crooks etc. Among these there is also the statue of Nana Sahib of our country². I do not know whether Nana Sahib actually looked like that or not. But whatever his looks might have been, the British considered him to be a dangerous murderer. That is why his statue has a place here. This place was first opened by a French woman and since then it is running under her name, 'Madame Tussaud'. In the museum there is a fine statue of that lady as well. I think that it is possible to keep these wax statues here because this is a cold country. In our country, all these would have melted.

There is no dearth of hotels in London. People can choose them according to their pockets. In some hotels, the expense is three rupees per day, and in some other, it is ten. Some of them are quite huge; they are eight to ten floors high and are of similar width. There are five to six hundred rooms inside. Some are even bigger than the queen's palace. Here there are many shops where one can go at anytime of the day and eat anything one wishes to. While on road or if there is some problem at home, a person can go to these places and eat cooked food. Though it is more expensive to eat there, it is easier and more convenient. Such shops are known as 'restaurant'. This is a French word and this facility of eating out has come from France.

¹ Krishnabhabini had translated this name in Bengali as *bibhatsher ghar*.

² Nana sahib (1824-1857?) was one of the rebel leaders of the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857. The British version of sepoy mutiny hold him responsible for the massacre of British women and children at Bibighar though no direct evidence of his involvement has been found. As this version of the story goes: after defeating the British Company troops, he had offered them safe conduct under General Wheeler which was later broken and the British women and children imprisoned by his forces at Bibighar were brutally murdered. This might account for his place in the Hall of Horrors.

In this chapter, I have talked about many big buildings, palaces, etc, and now I shall wind up after telling you about the houses that have been dedicated to *sura devi*¹. These liquor shops are known as ‘public houses’. As they also sell ‘gin’, ‘brandy’, and other such liquors some people also call them ‘gin palace’. In London there are in all about six thousand licensed liquor shops and apart from that there are various other places as well meant for the consumption by the common people. Here, there are more liquor shops than churches and there is no such locality where a couple of public houses cannot be seen. These shops are quite big and they remain open till much later at night as compared to other shops. All other shops are shut by nine or ten o’clock at night but these remain open till about midnight². Big glass windows of these shops and the bright gas lights outside them dazzle the eyes. The street in front of the shop is flooded with light and if you look within, even the interior seems to be as bright as the outer side. Beautiful chandeliers of gas lights hang from the ceiling and various other decorative lights adorn the walls. There is well polished, fashionable furniture and the counter top is made of marble. A few young girls, fair and beautifully dressed, sit behind these counters and sell alcohol in small quantities costing a few pennies; in some places young men or boys are also employed to do this job. In front of the table many poor and ugly men in shabby clothes are found to be standing and drinking. Some spend their entire money in drinking, some others hurl abuses under its influence and still others start fighting. Men and women with ugly appearances throw themselves at *sura devi*’s feet. In many liquor shops, people indulge in bitter fights and even

¹ *Sura* in Sanskrit refers to the drink of Gods and in Bengali means alcohol or spirit. The author by combining *devi*, goddess with it makes an ironic reference to the goddess of alcohol and points at the extreme fondness of the British towards the habit of drinking.

² The author uses the ancient Hindu system of recording time in terms of *prahars*. A day has eight *prahars*, each *prahar* divided into three hours.

commit murders. It is really surprising that the public houses situated in these very poor and hideous localities are growing prosperous day by day.

12. British Marriage and Domesticity

In England, both men and women marry according to their choices and their parents do not create any problem in their lives by forcing them to marry someone else. The marriageable age in this country is, between twenty to thirty years for women and twenty-five to thirty-five for men. But many of them marry at a much later age as well. Men do not marry till they have a decent earning. Neither the rich, nor the poor marries till he has saved enough wealth needed to run a family. People in our country have children and often grandchildren as well by the age these English people get married. Due to early marriage and weather in India people look old at quite an early age; but here, the young people enter matrimony only after they are matured enough.

England does not have the provision for match making or match makers, as we have in our country. Young girls and boys look for their would-be spouses themselves. This period of choosing one's love is known as 'courtship period'¹. Young men and women assemble at some public gathering or friends' place; and after a few such meetings they come to know each other. Gradually some of the men may feel drawn towards some women. This is the first step of British love. The man first expresses his love to the woman directly or writes a letter and if the woman reciprocates his feelings, she accepts him. After both have made their feelings known, they start

¹ There is a difference between the actual courtship period and what the author considers it to be. Perhaps her cultural difference leads to the gap in this understanding.

meeting each other, on their own, in public places. They see each other as much as possible and try to understand each other. In this way, they spend two to three months or even more. Later, if none of them have any objection to each other and like each other completely, the man proposes marriage to the woman. If the woman accepts that proposal, they decide to get married and do not wait for their parents' approval. In no other European country, does the man or the woman dare to raise the question of marriage without the prior consent of the parents.

When both the British man and woman agree to get married, they inform their parents. Most of the times, the parents do not object to their child's wish and give their consent. The sons and daughters here decide to get married at quite a grown-up stage and after many careful considerations, so why should not the parents agree to their choice? Once the parents give their consent as well, the young man and the woman pledge to get married. This is quite similar to our custom of the *patra* or the final marriage contract as agreed upon by both the families. After this pledge, both are legally bound to get married to each other. This pledge is known as 'engagement' in English and after this engagement, both the man and the woman wear a ring; this is known as the engagement ring. Though people here select their life partners themselves, one can at times hear about breaking off an engagement. If after being engaged, the man refuses to marry the woman, then the woman can complain against him and if she wins the case, the man has to pay a heavy penalty.

After being engaged, they behave as prospective man and wife towards each other. Together they go to church, watch plays and visit various other places. This period is called the courtship period and this courtship can extend from about six months to even six years in certain cases. I have already said that the British do not get married until it is convenient from all directions; that is why, many of them, even after making all the arrangements for their marriage,

have to wait for it due to financial constraints or some other problem. When it becomes opportune from all quarters, only then they decide their wedding day and proceed towards their marital life. The British too respect the sanctity of marriage and consider it to be a sacred bond of human life. They do not support infidelity and even men consider it to be a serious offence.

In every country there are a lot of festivities on the day of wedding. The delight of the family members and specially the young ones knows no bound. Here, the bride and the groom enjoy the most because unlike in India, here, the bride and the groom are not children. Both know each other, so do not feel any kind of apprehension or tension. In this country, wedding takes place, not at the bride's place but at the church, in the morning. On that day the rich people decorate their houses and church with flowers, garlands and bouquets. Flowers are appreciated in every country and since these are natural and pure adornment, all over the world people decorate their houses with flowers during weddings. There is no splendour of *barjatri*¹ here, as in our country. Only a few rich ones go to churches in grand cars. Here, instead of the silk cloth, the girl wears a new white dress and the groom wears something nice and new. Both wear white gloves, have a bouquet in their hands and the girl's face is covered with a white veil. Just as we have *neetkanya* and *neetbor*², a small girl and a boy dressed similar to the bride and the groom, here too, the groom's brother or any near relative dresses as his best man and the bride's sister, own or by some relation, dresses as the bride's maid. The bridegroom has only one best man but the bride can have up to twelve brides' maids, depending on their affluence. They too dress in

¹ It is a procession that is taken out from the bridegroom's house to the bride's place consisting of the bridegroom, his friends and family on the day of wedding. It is a common feature of most of the Indian weddings.

² A traditional custom in the Bengali Hindu weddings where a small boy and a girl belonging to the bridegroom and bride's side respectively accompany the young boy and girl to-be married. Both the children are fully dressed in traditional wedding costume.

new clothes like the bride and the groom, and all the brides' maids cover their faces with a white veil as a sign of good omen, wear white gloves and hold a bouquet.

After everyone has gathered at the church, wedding takes place at the appointed hour. The bride and the groom stand near the altar and take a vow in the presence of the priest and all their friends and relatives, that they accept each other as husband and wife, that they will not part till their death, etc, etc. Then both of them pray to the God and seek His blessings. The priest reads selected portions from the Bible, gives advice to the new couple and prays to the Almighty for their well-being. Parents and other guests also participate in this prayer. As in India, here too, the father, uncle or elder brother gives away the girl to the bridegroom. After the promise and prayer of the wedding, the bride and the groom go to another room along with the priest and elders and sign their names in the registration book. Two more people sign their names there as witnesses. Taking marriage vows at the altar of God gives religious sanction to the wedding; similarly registration makes it legally valid. After the wedding ceremony is over the husband and wife comes out of the church. According to the custom here, the people present there throw rice on and around the newly wedded couple and hit the husband with shoes. This ritual of beating the husband with shoes is similar to the ritual of boxing his ears in our country. But in Bengal, at times, they box the ears so tightly that the bridegroom, who is just a boy, starts crying. In this country, they hit him with very soft, velvet shoes, which instead of hurting him, gives him pleasure. From the church, everyone goes either to the bridegroom or the bride's father's house and enjoy the wedding feast with their friends and relatives.

Like the iron bangle¹ of our country, a white gold ring is the symbol of wedding here. After the wedding ceremony is over, the bride takes off the engagement ring and wears this

¹ The iron bangle worn in left hand by the bride is considered to be the most important symbol of married woman by the Bengali Hindus.

wedding ring. The old and superstitious women of this country consider taking the wedding ring off one's hand to be an ill omen. There is also an advantage of wearing this ring – a look at a woman's hand will let one know about her marital status. In this country too, in some of the wedding rituals, one can get glimpses of a few superstitions. Such rituals are observed only by the little educated or uneducated women. The fathers of this country, unlike their French and Indian counterparts, do not have to gift a lot of jewellery, dresses or money to their daughters on the occasion of the wedding. One may gift a large amount of cash or various items if one so wishes, but it is not a compulsion. Parents and friends of the newly-weds gift them various items, watch, chain, books, clothes, etc. just as we do in our country.

The newly wedded couple goes to some secluded place for a few weeks to enjoy themselves. This period, immediately after marriage, is known as 'honeymoon'. Perhaps, this period of life, just after marriage, is the happiest time of life and that is why it has such a sweet name. This is the stage when the new couple knows nothing about the troubles of a family life, such as those pertaining to household, children or the servants and maids, etc. They take matrimony to be a pure bliss. Many couples spend even two to three months in this way, enjoying their love for each other. Worries of the worldly life do not touch them. After that, the couple returns home to start their life together.

In this country, an unmarried woman is addressed as a 'miss' and the married one as 'mistress' or 'misses' in short. Many think that the names of the British women change after marriage, but actually that's not so. Just as we name our babies during the rice-eating¹ ceremony, the British do that during baptism. Parents choose the names for their children. That name is

¹ Rice-eating ceremony is an important ritual among the Hindus in which the five or six month old infant is fed rice for the first time. The ceremony is usually accompanied with a *yajna* and followed by a feast where all the friends and relatives are invited. This is also the time when the baby is named.

called the Christian name and it never changes. After marriage, only the surname, which she got from her father's side, gets changed. Just as in our country if one Kumari Nirmala Dutt is wedded to one Mr. Mitra, her name changes to Srimati Nirmala Mitra; in their country too a Miss Smith whose name is Rose, when wedded to another Mr. Allen becomes Mrs. Rose Allen. Marriage between first cousins from both their parents' sides is allowed among the British. They have no misgivings regarding such marriages within family. But surprisingly, unlike our country, here a person cannot marry the sister of his deceased wife. Many people have been trying to change this system but have not been successful yet.

After marriage neither men nor women stay in their parents' house. They establish a new and separate household. The conjugal life here is very different from that of our country. Here, except for the times when the husband is at work, the couples stay together. They take their food together, go out together as well as have discussions on their household, religion and many other things of this world. Why do people marry? People belonging to every country including India will answer in unison that in order to find a constant companion in good times and bad, a help mate and a partner to share the worries of life. I have no doubt that the women of this country truly fulfill these requirements of their husbands. Men and women share their happiness and sorrows equally, pray together and the wife often helps her husband in various jobs. If the husband becomes incapable of working, many a times, the wife works hard to earn the bread for her husband and children.

Truly, to us, the British conjugal life appears to be happy and blissful. The couple shares their happiness equally when times are good and during the trying days too they are at par in bearing the hardships. When the husband goes for a pleasure trip or for some recreation, he never leaves his wife behind. He is not happy to spend all that he earns on himself only, rather, tries his

best to keep his wife happy as well. On every Sunday, men and women go to the church together to pray, read from the Bible, and sing psalms. The husband, though wise himself, seeks his wife's advice in whatever he undertakes. The wife too is quite intelligent. She does not consider her husband to be her lord, but her beloved; and therefore tries to keep him happy by showering all her love on him. The English men do not have to seek for pleasures outside their homes as their wives, who are quite educated, provide them with fit companionship. We can say that the British women are their husbands' right hand. They often provide good advice to their husbands and the husbands are equally happy and eager to accept them.

I feel depressed whenever I think of the challenges in the conjugal lives of the couples in our country. The wife, confined at home, does not know how her husband spends his entire day and the husband too does not know the way his wife spends her time. The mistress is scared of the master of the house. The *babus* sit in their lavishly decorated drawing-rooms where they smoke hookah, play cards and chat with their friends or they go out for walks. But the women of the house remain enclosed within, occupied with household chores only. The wife loves her husband and tries her best to prepare good food for him and to look after his comfort; but the husband does not treat his wife in a judicious manner. She too cannot or does not know how to treat him. Very few people in our country understand the actual relationship that should exist between man and woman. And one cannot put much blame on the men and women as well; the root cause behind these are superstitions, the evil practices of our society, child marriage and the improper conduct of the parents towards their children. Though Indian women are extremely chaste, all these factors come in the way of their mutual happiness.

On the other hand, though there is proper love and affection between most of the British married couples, the number of husbands deserting their wives or vice versa is also more here

than in any other country. If the husband tortures his wife or commits adultery, she can easily go to the court with her complaint and seek separation. Similarly, the husband too can leave his wife if she violates her chastity. And after being separated in this manner, they can once again marry according to their wishes. In our country, there is provision for leaving one's wife but one does not get to hear of any wife leaving her husband. Even if the husband has hundreds of faults or is adulterous, the Hindu wife, devoted to him, will bear everything in silence. She will be ashamed to file a suit against her husband and consider it a despicable task. In this country, both the men and women consider it a serious offence and a sin to break one's trust after marriage. Here the husband cannot always act according to his own wishes only. I had a notion that the British people are not very caring or affectionate towards their children. It is true that they do not live in joint families and their love for the foreigners is a fake one. But I do not any longer believe that there is no affection between parents and their children. British parents take proper care of their children till the latter learn to look after themselves or set up a family of their own. The parents put in their best efforts to teach their children to live independently when they grow up. In this aspect I think, the parents in this country are more considerate than those of our country¹. When the children grow up, they do not become a burden to their parents. Instead, they live in separate houses. Hence, there is not too much of intimacy between them. But that does not mean that all love and affection among them is completely lost. Whenever they wish to, they do meet and take their meals together. Unlike in our country, here the domestic quarrels are quite infrequent, so people have a congenial relationship with parents, children or siblings throughout their lives. Hindus have too much of parental affection and at times it seems superfluous but often the

¹ In *Europe Prabasir Patra*, Tagore devoted a large part of his ninth letter differentiating between the attitude of excessive reverence that is expected from the children towards their parents which delimits their mental growth and the comparatively freer environment in which the British children are nurtured. He then links it to the spirit of freedom required in the youth of his times. (145-157)

parents there are not appropriately dutiful towards their wards. Also, the horrible incidents of family dissensions that are heard at times have no parallel in this country.

When the British children come of age, parents treat them as friends. When the children do something according to their own choice, unlike the Indian parents, the parents here do not brand them as 'disobedient' and thereby make their as well as their children's life miserable. They understand that once their children reach their youth, they develop an ability to distinguish between the right and the wrong. Hence, then they do not want to follow their parents' wishes in everything they do, as they did in their childhood. So they advise their grown-up sons and daughters to act according to self-discretion. They do not consider it beneath their dignity to take advice from their children; on the contrary, they often consult them regarding various matters. Children too are not afraid of their parents or do not hate them as insensitive or uneducated. They always maintain a respectful and proper attitude towards their parents. If the parents are in the wrong and their children try to correct them, the parents do not get into a fit of blind rage; rather, they try to analyse if such suggestion is rational and act accordingly. Considering such a relationship between parents and their wards, who will not consider the domestic life among the British to be a happy one?

Here, the way siblings behave towards each other is very different from that in our country. From early childhood, brothers and sisters grow up together and in the same way. Brothers do not learn to hate their sisters just because they are girls, nor do they look down upon them. As they grow up, they become more intimate. Parents are equally attentive towards their sons' and daughters' education and treat them at par. Both the son and the daughter, one being the heir to the family and a bread earner and the other about to be sent to another family are not differentiated by the parents. Therefore brothers and sisters grow up both wishing well for the

other. And irrespective of their ages, they talk to each other, read books, go out or play together. In this country, quarrel or difference of opinion among brothers and sisters is almost absent. There is a loving relationship not just among the unmarried siblings; it continues even after they are married. The brother and sister get busy with their respective families, yet whenever they can manage, they meet each other with all warmth and affection.

In England, only the eldest son can inherit paternal property. The father, during his lifetime, can bestow his other children with some money or property but after his death, no one apart from the eldest son can have any right to his property. This system has both its positive and negative aspects. It seems a matter of grave injustice that only the eldest son will be the heir to the entire property and no one will get anything else. It must hurt the other siblings to find that all the property will go to the eldest son, who might even be lazy and uneducated, just because he had been lucky enough to be the first born. If the father meets a sudden death, his other children become very poor and helpless. It is often seen that the eldest son, having inherited his father's property leads a lavish life while other sons lead a life of poverty and hunger. A positive aspect of this system is that, since only the eldest son is entitled to property, younger ones do not file cases to inherit maximum amount of it, neither do they have any intention to do so. So fraternal relationships are not marred with quarrels, debates or envy. All the other sons leaving the eldest one engage in pursuit of livelihood from an early age. They know that in spite of being sons of a rich father, they will need to earn for their own families. So they learn to become self-dependent and carve out their own path in life. Existence of such a system ensures that property is not wasted and only one of the sons might grow up to be lazy while the rest work hard to earn their living; but in our country almost all the sons of a rich man grow up to be idle and they waste their assets by filing court cases against each other.

But again, it is this very system that makes the people selfish. Everyone wants to live independently. Each grownup son wants to live independently, and in a separate house. Instead of living in a joint family with a number of people, everyone wants to live only with his wife, children and servants. Often, they are concerned just with themselves and what belong exclusively to them and do not wish to maintain any contact with their other relations. This is very much prevalent among the common people. The father is least perturbed by the problems that his son might be facing. Since they are not bothered by the hardships of their near relatives there is no question of their feeling anything for people not related to them.

Well, the cultured people of England have a very nice way of leading their lives. All the members of the family take their meals together. From the youngest son of the family to the father, all sit around the same table. Before they begin eating, the head of the family stands near the table and says a prayer and rest of the members listen quietly. This prayer is known as 'grace'. This is said to thank the Lord for the food they eat and to seek his blessings. Together the family members entertain themselves and chat with each other. As men and women of the family take their food and spend time together, the young ones learn courtesy and good conduct from their childhood. They treat even the servants of the house as their children and take care of their physical as well as mental growth. The servants too respect their masters and are devoted to them.

The rich people in this country maintain seven to eight servants – a cook, a kitchen maid, two to three maids for household chores, a maid for the lady of the house, a coachman and a butler. In some houses there are even fifteen to eighteen servants. He is in charge of the overall supervision of the house, the keys and wine-cellar. He is held responsible if something gets stolen from the household. The lady's maid oversees the work of other servants. She is

responsible for the store room and other items. In most of the houses there are only maidservants. Here, only the rich can afford to keep a male one. The salary of a male domestic help is almost thrice that of a maid. Also, one has to pay a tax for the former. In this country, most of the servants are unmarried and young – within age group of twelve to thirty five years. The salary of the maid servants ranges from rupees eight to rupees twenty or twenty-five a month. The male servants' salary varies from rupees twenty-five to rupees fifty or sixty per month. .

Those people who can maintain about eight maidservants in our country cannot keep more than two or three here. Here the maids have to work quite hard and they do all sorts of jobs. They keep the entire household clean, do the dusting, make the beds, water the plants, polish the shoes, go to the market, act as doorkeeper, etc. Work of one maidservant is almost equivalent to what three servants do in our country. They do not get any rest from seven o'clock in the morning till ten or eleven at night. In this country, the servants are also as sincere in their duty as everyone else. Nobody has to rebuke them constantly to make them work. The mistress of the house has to only assign them their respective tasks. The servants consider such admonishments to be quite disgraceful; therefore, they accomplish their duties at proper time without needing to be constantly monitored. Well there might be a few among them who are not as good but majority of the British servants are very efficient, hard working, intelligent and trust worthy. Their only fault is that they love to be independent; unlike the servants in other countries, they do not like to be controlled at all times. And once their work is over, like their employers, they too like to dress up and go out.

In many respectable households, servants are included as a part of the family during religious services. The master of the family attends the Sunday prayers with his wife, children, friends and servants. The entire family along with their guests gathers to read aloud from their

holy books and pray to the Almighty. Generally, the master of the house plays the part of the priest. It is quite surprising to watch the religiosity prevalent among the family members during such times. All the members either kneel down or sit with bowed head, facing the wall. Finally the master reads out the precepts one after another and the rest of the family discusses those. At the end of the prayer, the servants leave the hall solemnly and one by one, and the members of the family spend time as they wish to.

Observing all these things it seems that in spite of the selfishness that one can see among the British people, their domestic life is much better and happier than many other races. Though they are not very social, they enjoy domestic bliss. They do not care much for the senseless foppishness, they only understand their own comfort and that is their chief goal. The British lead a lavish life-style if they own a house and possess a lot of money. A British, who spends most of his lifetime in a cold and desolate climate, considers a few things to be of great comfort. He loves to sit near the glowing fireplace in the fine and neat house of his choice, with all the doors and windows closed and indulge in sweet chitchats with his decked up, pleasing and devoted wife. He likes to see the smiles on the ruddy faces of his well brought-up, neat and clean children. He also cherishes a neatly decorated and well furnished house which will have both necessary and luxurious items. The British, howsoever rich they might be, do not bring disrepute to their homes by indulging in licentiousness or other evils. Every British gentleman firmly believes that one's own home is sacred. Their domestic life is so fulfilling and pleasant because they have kept their homes happy and unsullied.