

15. Education and Education System

The education system of a country helps us to understand the extent of that country's culture and progress. The level of higher education, the extent of education among the common people, the literacy rate among the poor and how much of the education is converted into practical use are some of the factors that help us to decide how prosperous and civilized a country is. Let us take the example of China. Though its education system is much better than that in other Asian countries, most of its common people can read and write, and it has a rigorous examination system, it lags far behind the European countries in terms of progress. The reason behind it is that the quality of higher education in China is not as good as in the European countries and though they have some scientific knowledge, they have not yet learnt its application. Now look at the Germans. They are extremely well-educated; even a layman knows two to three languages and is proficient in all aspects of general awareness. Their scholars are famous throughout the world, making new inventions or solving difficult mysteries. Still, England is more prosperous than Germany. Unlike the British, Germans have not learnt to make use of their knowledge. The English say that, though the German scientists make new inventions it is the English who enjoy their benefits.

None of the towns in England lack educational facilities. Even the villages have two to three schools. So neither a city dweller nor a village folk, wishes to remain uneducated. It is impossible to count the number of schools and colleges that England has. Apart from these there are many other means of mass education as well. Anyone in pursuit of education is bound to be delighted by the educational set up here. Here the people do not wait for any government aid to set up a school or college. Most of such institutions are founded by a common man or a rich

person. Also, just as there are schools for men, there are ample schools for women as well. Wherever you go, you will find an almost equal number of schools for boys and girls. Apart from that, in many places, particularly London, women study alongside men in the top colleges.

Along with studies, the British are skilled in physical activities as well which strengthens the body. Most of the schools have provision for sports like gymnastics, wrestling and cricket. They start going to school at the age of six or seven and continue their education either in schools or colleges till they are about twenty five or twenty six. But their actual education is not limited to schools. Once they complete their schools their process of self-learning starts. That is the time when they are actually educated. In our country, it is only in Bengal that education is so widely respected as well as practiced. That is why the people of Bengal have progressed more as compared to the rest of the country. Unfortunately, most of our young people stop learning as soon as they finish their college because they consider their education to end there. But here, people consider college education and the related examinations to be just a signpost towards the actual storehouse of knowledge. In their educational institutions, they only learn the right way to gain knowledge. Later, with their own efforts they enrich their minds with knowledge from various fields. While in school, they study a limited number of books which confine their knowledge, their only motive being how to compete with their classmates. This makes the students enthusiastic about studies. But once they complete their college education, they develop a yearning for the vast resource of knowledge. That is the real source of education. Taking this as their capital, they delve into the vast reservoir of knowledge and develop themselves.

There are a number of people here who spend their entire life in educational pursuits. For some of them, writing new books is like a game, some enjoy discovering new heavenly bodies, and there are some others who have chosen various disciplines of Science as their area. There are

numerous poets and authors here. Apart from them, there are also many mathematicians, astronomers and scientists from various other disciplines. Here the schools, colleges, clubs, hospitals and clinics are run by well qualified people. Many people here hold important posts like that of barristers, attorney, doctor, teachers, etc. Though England is a prosperous country, many educated people here fall prey to poverty. The reason behind this is excess of education. With the rise in the number of educated people, there is a proportionate increase in the competition among them in all aspects. Here, many a university educated people have to wander in search of jobs. There are no vacancies for a teaching post; if there comes up an advertisement for a single teaching post, more than five hundred people apply for it. If any teacher dies, more than three hundred people nurture a dream of getting that job. With the development in education, the number of educated people is also increasing in this country. So it is very difficult to find jobs for all of them.

In our country, Hemchandra babu¹, Bankim babu² and a few such authors have created some great literary works and have made Bengal proud. That is why they are famous throughout Bengal. But here there are many authors of such repute; hence their names are not that well-known as well. People do not value things that they have in abundance. Yet in England, the importance of education is not less than that in any other country. Though the British are slaves of wealth, they do not ignore education. That is why they have already established many schools and are still doing so. It is due to their love for education that hundreds of books are being

¹ Hemchandra Banerjee (1838-1903) was an important Bengali poet inspired by patriotic ideals and a member of the Brahma Samaj. His writings also dealt with women's issues and the injustice meted out to women in the nineteenth century.

² Bankim Chandra Chatterjee (1838-1894) was an important Bengali novelist. His most famous novel was *Anandamath*, based on a patriotic theme which also contained the song *Vande Mataram*, which was later accepted as the national song of India. He was one of the forerunners of the cultural revivalist movement in Bengal.

written and published on various subjects and lakhs of people read them. This shows the extent of influence that education has in their society and the pride they take in it. English language is so rich because the British respect education. There is neither any subject in the world nor any new invention on which the British have not written a book. A visit to the libraries is enough to understand the range of English literature. There are twenty to twenty five thousand books stacked in the rooms. Apart from that there are many more books have been printed or are about to be printed. There is no dearth of books on complex and difficult subjects such as geography, history, science, philosophy, etc. And again there are plenty of books like biographies, dramas, farces and novels which are thrilling and entertaining. There are about hundred such libraries in England. I have already talked about the British Museum Library; apart from that there are a number of libraries in London itself whose collection go up to forty to fifty thousand or even a lakh.

Though a number of people here know foreign languages such as French, German, etc. they do not like to read books written in any language other than English. If any outstanding book is published or already exists in any foreign language, they immediately translate it into their own language. On the contrary, these days many English educated Indians do not enjoy reading books in their mother tongue. Some even hate doing so. Perhaps lack of good books is the reason behind this. But instead of being contemptuous, if they could write some important and useful books in their own languages or even translate some good works from other languages, they could serve their own language and people better. There are very few people who can access knowledge from foreign texts. If there are no good books available in the language of the common people, we cannot expect the common people to progress or be benefitted in any way.

You can find loads of books, newspapers, magazines, etc. in this country which are a signifier of the number of educated people here. The common people here, whether men or women, are educated enough to read and understand newspapers, plays or novels easily. Almost every British has faith in government and politics and that is why they consider reading newspapers to be an important duty. In our country, certain section of the society, say the shopkeepers – grocer, butchers, green grocers etc., do not even know what a newspaper is¹. But in this country, people belonging to these very sectors take a lot of interest in reading newspapers and gain knowledge from them. Even the coachmen travelling to various places eagerly read newspapers to know what is happening both within the country and abroad, or whether there has been any wars anywhere etc. They are not just inert readers; rather, they critically analyse and carry out animated exchanges among themselves on various political, social and other issues. In India and a few other countries the general public believes that only those in the government must agitate about all these issues and there is no need for rest of the people to lose sleep over these. But no one thinks or talks like this here. The people here believe that every person has a say in the country's governance, however small that might be. Therefore it is the duty of every person to critically consider the pros and cons of their government's actions even if there be a number of people selected for this job.

A mere carpenter in England can tell you more about the government and other issues of the country than even a well educated clerk of our country. Reading newspaper is almost an integral part of their daily breakfast here. If you visit any of the houses in the morning, you will

¹ When Krishnabhabini left India, Indian newspapers, both English and vernacular, already existed but their circulation was limited. It was primarily because most of the people were illiterate. The rise of Bengali newspaper was associated with the spread of modern education and it was one of the tools used by our nationalist leaders. For a more detailed role of Bengali newspaper, see Chatterjee Partha, *Bangla Sambad Patra o Bangalir Nabajagaron*.

find people taking food and reading newspapers simultaneously, fulfilling both their physical hunger and intellectual cravings. While visiting a shop we find the shopkeeper reading newspapers during his free hours; his face reflects various emotions of happiness or sorrow according to the news item which he is reading. Even the maid servant here reads newspaper in her leisure hours to improve her knowledge, after completing the day's work. In this country, there are a vast number of newspapers and they are available at an extremely low rate. So even the poor people can spend a few pennies to procure and read them.

In London, there are at least twenty different newspapers being published each morning. 'Times' is the chief among them and it costs about two *annas*. Other important newspapers are 'Daily News', 'Daily Telegraph', 'Standard' and 'Chronicle'. Each of them costs only 3 paise and they are the ones which are generally read by the common people. There are seven or eight evening newspapers, two of them cost one and a half paise only and the rest are about 3 paise. In other cities of England too, some newspapers and weeklies of excellent quality are published. One can find a couple of newspapers even in the smallest cities of England.

Previously, people belonging to the lower classes or the extremely poor ones did not get any education. They did not have the means to access it. But a few years back a law has been passed which makes it compulsory for every parent to send each child to school. If they fail to do so, they will be fined and their children will be taken away by some school. The government has established a number of schools for the poor children. They are called 'board schools' where these children can be educated either free of cost or for a very little money. The country has benefitted greatly by this law. Ten years ago some people were completely deprived of education but now even those belonging to classes much lower than them can at least read and write. Perhaps fifty years hence there will not be a single uneducated person in England.

There are some famous and old schools here called the 'public schools'. These are the mostly attended by the children of rich families and a few from the middle classes. The chief among these are 'Harrow', 'Eton' and 'Rugby'. Along with studies, here the students are also trained in games and physical exercises. They excel in various kinds of games such as 'cricket', 'football', 'tennis' and rowing. Harrow and Eton constantly compete against each other. If one of the schools outdoes the other in any field, the latter feels insulted. So both the schools try hard to remain unbeaten in all fields. The students of both the schools form into various societies and organise debate competitions. Their competitive attitude helps them to stand out both in studies and games. Since both schools maintain an equivalent standard, such endeavours only improve their qualities. Sports such as rowing and cricket are organised among the students of both the schools. The one who wins is rewarded. So the students take a lot of care in their education.

If we compare the level of education between the two countries of England and India, only the Bengalis among all the Indian races can be compared to the British. But in spite of being intelligent and clever, the Bengalis generally lack physical and mental alacrity due to underdevelopment. Bengalis in their seventeenth or eighteenth year consider themselves to have crossed almost half of their youth. They immediately put on a more serious appearance and abstain from all kinds of games and exercises meant to provide physical strength, considering those to be children's pursuits. Many of our countrymen believe that if they undertake such activities, they will lose their focus from studies or become wayward. I do not have much to tell them but just that if they once come and see how games and academics coexist in the schools and colleges of England they shall get rid of their misconception. I think everyone will agree that education of the mind is closely associated with physical well being and vigour. A look at the biographies of great and knowledgeable people tells us that many of them who belonged to the

poor families had indulged in various physical games in their childhood. These activities had made them strong and healthy and also helped them in their later lives in their pursuit of education.

Everybody knows that if we are not physically fit, we do not feel mentally fit too; when we suffer from some mental agony we feel a physical weakness as well. When the body is healthy and strong, the mind is fresh and able. So it is not surprising that the healthy boys will be better in studies and retain their knowledge for a longer period. One must particularly keep in mind that human beings have both mind and body. If we take care of only one of them and neglect the other, then at the end we shall only be harmed. Along with physical weakness, lack of spirit, fear and many such vices set in. I had heard about some young Indian men who had earned university degrees with distinction quite early in life. But as they neglected their physical well-being and exercised their minds day and night they fell sick and lost their lives quite early. Is not that very sad? The British understand such things well. They might neglect their education of the mind but never their body. In a number of places in this country, children indulge in physical exercises and games, neglecting their studies. They acquire better skill in these activities than in education. Though too much of everything is bad, it is much better to live long with a healthy body than to lose all physical and mental well being at an early stage.

Just as the big public schools here have excellent arrangements for both studies and sports, Harrow and Eton, the two important schools for the rich ones here have an evil tradition as well. This tradition is called ‘fagging’¹. The younger and weaker boys have to serve as slaves or servants to the bigger and stronger boys. Each of the elder boys has a number of such servants.

¹ Fagging was a tradition followed in the English public schools till late twentieth century where the senior boys of the boarding house kept the junior boys as their ‘fags’ to do them personal services. The system was much like that of domestic helps in their houses and taught the boys various forms of housekeeping. At times it took evil turns and senior boys exploited the younger ones.

They obey their orders, clean their rooms, dust the lamp stands, toast their bread, help them at their play, wake them up in the morning, and do many such chores which are otherwise done by servants. These days this bad practice has much decreased and hopefully it will be completely abolished in the recent future. The teachers of these schools are not very strict with the students. So from an early age the students learn self-help and self respect. The chief motive of these schools is to teach the students Greek and Latin and to help them compose beautiful pieces of prose and poetry in these languages. But nowadays they have also included arithmetic and science in their curricula. I have heard that one has to spend about two hundred rupees per month in order to study at Harrow and Eton.

In England higher education is provided only by the universities. There are eleven universities in Great Britain and Ireland together. The chief among them are Oxford, Cambridge, London and Dublin. London University was established in 1838, towards the beginning of Queen Victoria's rule. It is not as expensive as the Oxford or the Cambridge and it does not have any kind of orthodoxy, religious or otherwise. Irrespective of their race or religion, people can pursue their education here without any hassle. It is more economical too. The system of these universities is quite similar to that of the University of Calcutta. The only difference is that the examinations here are much tougher than those in Calcutta. The universities in Calcutta, Bombay and Madras have been established along the lines of the University of London. As they are exactly like the London University there's no need to describe this university in a great detail.

London University is different from the rest in one particular matter. Here women too can pursue education in the same way as the men. It is comparatively more famous because it was the first university to award degrees to women. Oxford and Cambridge have followed London University to certain extent in this matter. In these two universities, women can take up certain

examinations like men but they cannot obtain degrees such as B.A or M.A. like the latter. Some new colleges for women have been established under the universities of Oxford and Cambridge recently but the University of London remains the chief centre of higher education for British women. Its doors are open to all irrespective of their gender. Both men and women attend the same college and same lessons under the same teachers and attain same degrees after qualifying in the same examinations. This appears both amazing and wonderful to us. When both breathe in the same air, eat the same food and live in the same house, then who will not like to see both of their minds to be nourished in the same way?

Oxford and Cambridge Universities are almost similar to each other. Both are extremely rich and ancient. In certain matters they differ completely from all the other universities of the world. Oxford University had been established in 886 A.D. by King Alfred. People say that Cambridge University is even older. In this book I am going to provide details of the Cambridge University in particular and all my readers can also know about the Oxford University from it.

The chief aims of these universities are to provide education, take examinations, confer degrees, and distribute scholarships and prizes to students. Apart from the college faculty members, there is another set of teachers here. They give 'lectures' in the university which can be attended by the students of all the colleges. Cambridge offers various courses, prime among them being mathematics, Latin, Greek and Natural Sciences. Its mathematics is famous throughout the world. Prizes and scholarships are impartially awarded to those students of these departments who show overall excellence. These awards are given from the money donated by various individuals. This university also has excellent libraries, museum, botanical garden, etc. Those who are responsible for maintaining discipline among the students are known as

‘proctors’. These proctors and their assistants are like the police in the university. They keep vigil and if the students commit any offence, they punish them as well.

This university holds different exams for different subjects. One can earn a degree by qualifying any one of these. Every student has to qualify a ‘previous’ examination before taking up the final examination to earn the degree. This examination is commonly known as the ‘little go’. Here two kinds of degrees are conferred – general and honours. The examination for honours degree is comparatively more difficult. Almost all the universities of this country, such as London University and others follow this system. In Calcutta, we do not have such different degrees. In Cambridge University, the examination for Honours degree is known as ‘tripos’. A person gets a B.A. degree on qualifying any of the degree offering examination. Perhaps many of us are not aware that in this university, one does not have to appear for another examination in order to obtain the M.A. degree. Those who procure B.A. degree can get the M.A. degree after three more years¹.

Cambridge has seventeen colleges under it. These have been established at various points of time by grants given by various great people. Each college has a principal who is generally called ‘master’. He and some other people with the title of ‘fellow’ run the college. The fellows select the principal of the college. They get a yearly stipend out of the money provided by the founder of the college. The number of fellows differs in every college. Some colleges have only seven to eight fellows while in some there are as many as twenty to twenty-five. If there is a vacancy for fellowship, the principal and other fellows of that college select the best person from among those who have attained the degree from that college and appoint him to that post. The fellow who looks after the studies of the students is known as ‘tutor’. The students can take their

¹ Such a detailed description of the English education system has a twofold social importance in the nineteenth century Bengali society. Firstly, it would be useful for those students who wish to pursue higher studies in England; secondly, it would offer our thinkers a model education system to follow in our country.

queries to him and learn a lot. He is like an advisor and guardian to the students. The fellow who is in charge of the religious matters of the students is known as 'dean'. Each college has a small church. It is the dean's responsibility to see that the students attend its services regularly. His role is that of the priest. Each college has different teachers to teach various subjects to the students. Often the fellows of the college act as teachers. The best students of the colleges get scholarships. These scholarships range from thirty rupees a month to about two hundred.

The students either live within the college premises or in some of the assigned houses in the city. They have to attend the college cathedral once a day regularly, either in the morning or in the evening. But nowadays this rule has slackened quite a bit in a number of colleges. The college authorities exempt students from this rule if there is some special reason for it. In every college the students are taught from nine o'clock in the morning to twelve noon. In the evening, every one dines in the 'hall'. The students sit on one side and the administrators on the other. Before and after dining, one of the students says the 'grace'. Most of the students indulge in outdoor exercises or physical activities in the evening. They take a lot of interest in rowing boats, playing cricket and other such pursuits. Sometimes, they end up taking more interest in these than in their studies.

Each college has separate societies for debating, rowing, cricket, etc. Also, there is a '*milan samaj*' that is social group to help students interact among themselves. This is similar to a 'club', and one can also read newspapers or other books here. The students meet here once a week to discuss and debate upon political, social and other issues. The kind of confidence and interest they show during these discussions will make one feel that these are mini parliaments. Apart from this, Cambridge also has other associations for people interested in literature, music, etc.

In order to graduate, one has to study in a college for three years and then pass an examination conducted by the University. Some people take up the examination without going to

the college. Such students spend much less for their education but they remain completely shut out from the pleasures of the college life. Here the students wear gown and a flat hat when they go somewhere, or attend their lectures, go to the church, dine in the hall or take their degrees.

Perhaps after reading this description of the universities, people will understand that getting a degree from here is a costly affair. One has to spend about three hundred rupees per month. Some spend even more but some of them manage with much less as well. Generally, the rich people's sons come to these universities. So one ends up spending more in order to keep up with them. But studying at Oxford or Cambridge has its own advantages as well. Since the students live in the same house, eat together and attend the same lectures, they develop a strong friendship among themselves. Since every college and university has various clubs and societies, students get better opportunities for interacting among themselves. They also play and exercise together. Also, the fact that they all are young and come from similar backgrounds, helps them to bond easily. Often these friendships remain strong lifelong. The students get a glimpse of the worldly life here and gain experience regarding people and their characters, lifestyle, etc.

16. The British Religion and Religious Festivals

Before coming to England I used to think that everyone here follows the same religious tradition but once here, I was much surprised to find the variations that existed within a single religion. There is no want of religious variety in our country where people practicing different faith, such as the Hindus, Muslims, Christians, etc. live together. Within Hinduism itself, there are so many different sects that it is almost impossible to count all of them. It is not surprising that a vast country like India would have many different religions and religious groups, but

England is a much smaller country where majority of the population practice Christianity. A very small section of the population practice Judaism or other religions. Yet you can find more than one hundred and twenty-five different cults among the Christians here.

Christianity is divided into two main branches – the Roman Catholics and the Protestants. Majority of the British people are Protestant Christians and Protestantism has so many different factions. Bible is the primary religious text for all these sects but each of them focuses on certain aspects of it, overlooking others. They have widely divergent religious practices. They believe Jesus Christ to be the Son of God and the Saviour of man. They say that Christ had taken birth to salvage the sinners. Nowadays a few communities consider Jesus Christ to be a mere human being. They believe that he was an extremely saintly and religious person who guided the people to the right path; yet these communities too acknowledge themselves as Christians.

The main Protestant Church is known as the Church of England. A little more than half the entire British population belongs to this church. This has become the national religion because it has the patronage and supervision of the national government. The Church of England has two archbishops, about twenty eight bishops and their subordinates to carry out its work. People treat them at par with the noble men and they attend the House of Lords in the parliament to look after the affairs related to the government. All of them are very well-paid. The two bishops receive fifteen thousand and ten thousand rupees respectively per month. Other priests also get somewhere between two thousand four hundred and ten thousand rupees.

Bishops are the supreme among the ecclesiastical community. They are helped by a few assistant bishops who in turn have priests subordinate to them. These priests do not earn any fixed salary. They are given a parish which becomes the means to their livelihood. All of them do not earn the same. Some can earn about a thousand a month from their parish but majority of

them earn much lesser than this amount. A few of them earn as less as a hundred rupees a month. These parishes are owned by the rich people like the duke, earl and other members of the aristocracy. They dole out these parishes as gift to whoever they want.

In this country, the ecclesiastical profession is considered to be quite profitable and of great dignity. Just as people take training to be doctors and barristers, many of them take training for ecclesiastical jobs as well. Quite often sons of the aristocratic families happily join the orders and daughters of such families prefer to marry the priests. Almost every cleric belongs to a noble family and is educated. They hold degrees from the universities of Oxford or Cambridge. Many among them are wealthy as well. Some of the clergy lead the life of a rich man; they maintain nice carriages and horses and keep to the rich and the powerful. The common people revere them. In the country sides, the parsons visit the houses of their parishioners. They affectionately enquire after the education of the children and chastise them in case of any wrong doings. They preach against consumption of alcohol, talk to the people about their jobs and advice them on various issues. Though there are a few among the clergy who are very orthodox or love to lead a life of luxury, they are generally pious and honest. Under their care the common people have developed quite a lot in terms of education and morality.

Here, I do not want to go into a comparative discussion of the merits of our religion to theirs. Almost every religion has its faith in God and most of them talk about piety and sin. It is not that only the Hindus are superstitious. Even the Christians fall into this category. If we root out the undesirable parts of both the religions, it becomes difficult to judge which among them is better. Hinduism has gone through degradation. While the Hindus themselves have been reduced to almost insignificance the Christians have progressed much. Their influence has spread throughout the world. Therefore it is not surprising that many people will consider Christianity to

be the best religion in this world. The British consider Christianity to be the supreme religion and the only way to man's salvation is by conversion to Christianity. Even if any other religion appears to be better and free from superstitions, no British person, whether educated or not, will convert to that religion and insult that of his own. This proves that whether an Englishman is pious by nature or not, his faith in his religion is unshakable. Perhaps their self-esteem is the cause behind this. Our educated Pandita Ramabai¹ on coming to England has denounced Hinduism and embraced Christianity, much to the chagrin of all the Hindus. Such degradation of self respect cannot find a parallel among the Englishmen.

The British appear quite religious by nature. Instead of leaving the religious duties to be performed by the priests only, they actively participate in them. Going to church every Sunday with the entire family and reading Bible or discussing religious matters at home are some of the very important engagements of the British people. One can also find a lot of religious orthodoxy here as well. It is almost a sacrilege if someone works on a Sunday or does not visit the church. Playing cards or reading novels, etc. on a Sunday is considered almost a sacrilege. I have already discussed how London appears on a Sunday; it is similar in all other parts of England as well. I have heard that at a few places, one is not even supposed to talk loudly on a Sunday.

Along with orthodoxy, there is much hypocrisy as well. Some people visit churches for public appearances only. And most of the young women go there to show off their attire. Many

¹ Pandita Ramabai (1858-1922) was one of the first women reformers in the nineteenth century India. Initiated into education by her liberal father, Ramabai continued her studies on her own after becoming an orphan at the age of 15-16. She and her brother wandered to various places before moving to Calcutta after the death of her parents. There she was bestowed with the title of *saraswati* and *Pandita* because of her learnings. Her marriage to Bipin Beharidas Medhavi, a lawyer, was quite a revolutionary one because she being a Brahmin girl had married an untouchable. This marriage was shortlived as Bipin Beharidas died early. Ramadevi, left with her only daughter Manorama went to Pune where she established the *Arya Mahila Samaj* for the upliftment of women. From there she sailed for England in 1883 to teach Sanskrit in Cheltenham Ladies College. There she embraced Christianity which turned her almost instantly in to a villain, a traitor in the eyes of her contemporary nationalists. In spite of the controversies surrounding her she continued her work for women throughout her life.

people do not understand the true significance of religion, nor do they want to understand. Many young people of London do not have much faith in religion. Like the newly emerging class in our society, even here there are some who do not care much for any religion or are completely atheists. Then there are some other people who believe in monotheism and consider Christ to be a human being. They are very few in number. In London there are only two Unitarian churches. I had visited one of those on a Sunday. I felt as if I was sitting at the Brahma Samaj. The only difference was that here the prayer was said in English.

There are innumerable churches of various sizes and communities that are found in this country. However, one cannot see the poor frequenting to any of these. In almost all the countries majority of the poor practice some religion. But here, they not only lack virtues like kindness or compassion, they are ignorant of religious practices as well. They are just Christian by name. Nowadays, a new society called the ‘Salvation army’¹ has been formed to try and inculcate religious feelings among them. Like the *sankirtans*² of our country, they sing religious songs on the roads. Their songs which have tunes similar to those of our *Tappa*³ or *Panchali*⁴ are

¹ The Salvation Army was founded by one-time Methodist preacher William Booth and his wife Catherine in 1865 at East-end London. He founded it with a mission of bringing religion to the destitute and the very poor. When not accepted by any of the established Christian Churches, Booth trained his followers to preach and bring back the faithless within the folds of religion. It gained immense popularity and gradually established its wings in various countries of the world like the United States, Australia, India. Salvation Army was modelled on the army with its own flag and uniform, its chief being called as General-lieutenant. It had its own hymns, often set to tune in popular folksongs.

² Devotional songs associated with the *bhakti* tradition of Hinduism, Sankirtans are performed in public gatherings. The lead singer often accompanies his songs with appropriate physical movements and his followers take the cue from him.

³ Tappa is a semi-classical Indian vocal music, usually sung by the *baijees* or songstress for a select, often affluent audience, mostly males. The lyrics speak of extreme romantic love.

⁴ Panchalis are narrative folk songs of the Bengal region deriving their sources from mythologies, epics or *mangalkavyas*. According to some thinkers these later gave rise to the *jatra* performances. By using *sankirtan*, *tappa* and *panchali* the author is trying to find some kind of equivalence for her audience in Bengal. But the three are very diverse from each other, in terms of style, audience and place of performance which then raises question regarding her effectiveness in finding equivalence to the songs of ‘Salvation Army’ for her readers at home.

meant to draw the attention of the poor people. Their prayers involve various physical actions or poses. It is true that they have rescued many drunkards and sinners from their chosen path of evil, but they have also irked some people by presenting religion as a form of entertainment.

The number of Christian festivals is much lesser than that of the Hindus. In our country the true Hindus pray and worship at every available occasion but it is very rare to find the English praying on a day apart from Sundays. We do not reserve any day exclusively for prayers and for enjoyment but the British do not lag behind in their acts of devotion as they reserve one whole day for it. On that day, that is Sunday, they do not indulge in any entertainment activities. Most of us must have heard the names of their important occasions like the Christmas or the Good Friday. Christmas is the greatest of all their festivals.

The British celebrate Christmas on the 25th of December. This day is called Christmas Day because Jesus Christ was born on this day. I do not know why it is called '*Borodin*'¹ (long day) in our country. One of the reasons can be because it is the most important occasion celebrated in the land of our rulers; or perhaps people lovingly call it so because it has the shortest duration of day time. Though Christmas is said to be a religious occasion, I do not find much correlation between the religion and its celebration. There is no fixed religious activity or ritual associated with the festivity and even praying to Christ is not obligatory. Actually, Christmas in its current form is more of a social or domestic occasion. The British follow certain funny set of rules at this time. These have been continuing from the times of the '*Druids*'² of the ancient ages. In those days these had religious significance but over the years the British have

¹ From 25th December the day starts becoming longer, so it is referred to as *borodin* or long day.

² Druids are the ancient priestly class existing in Britain, Ireland and Gaul and other regions of the Celtic Europe around the Iron ages. There is almost no written record existing about them except some written accounts by Greek, Romans or medieval Irish authors.

accommodated these as social customs. Just as the *Durga Puja* in Bengal, Christmas in England is a time for great enjoyment. People indulge in a lot of charities during this time. This festival of happiness truly brings delight in the minds of those Englishmen fraught with worry and miseries of life. Many people have to stay away from their friends and families in different parts of the world on account of their livelihood. But on this day they all come together to enjoy each other's company and wish their near and dear ones. Amid such merriment and feasting in the company of friends, the Christian year gradually takes its leave. During this time people think about the year about to end and at the same time feel hopeful about the coming year.

The evening before the Christmas is known as the Christmas Eve and it is as pleasing as the *Sashthi*¹ of our *Durga Puja*. On this evening the entire family sits together in a room. In the middle of the room a branch from the Mistletoe tree hangs from the ceiling and a huge log burns brightly in the fireplace. Traditionally, on this day each member of the family, young or old, men or women, kisses each other freely under the mistletoe branch. So everyone gathers under this branch and kisses each other amidst a lot of laughter and fun. This day the generally silent and grave British people assume a new appearance. Even the boys and the men of the houses play children's games like the blind man's bluff and others. Later when they are tired after so much of excitement, they sit around the fire and take their dinner. There are certain dishes kept particularly for this occasion. At the centre of the table there are hot apples boiling in a big bowl. Its flavour and the sweet sound of its boiling makes it irresistible for the people. After getting their fill of many such delicacies and wine, the entire family along with their servants waits near the fire till midnight to welcome the Christmas to their homes. During this time they play various games and tell stories. If it so happens that there is a heavy snow fall or a strong cold wind

¹ *Shasthi* marks the beginning of celebration for the Bengalis during the *Durga Puja*.

blowing, in such times, well past midnight some tell spine-chilling stories of ghosts. In between they also drink alcohol and sing songs to welcome Christmas with almost everyone either lending a voice or clapping loudly.

The Hindus, on their religious occasions, keep a fast throughout the day and pray to God. Thereafter they feel happy to invite a large number of people to a feast. But on the Christmas day here, some people might just visit the church in the morning; and later in the day, all the people, whether rich or poor enjoy a feast. Many people save money to spend on food during Christmas and on this day treat themselves to a variety of delicacies including meat, wine, fruits and sweets. During the prime course of their meals they eat special dishes like roasted beef, plum pudding, etc and drink. After their meals they engage themselves in music, dance or different games. The sounds of their merriment can often be heard from a long distance.

Just as we wear new clothes during our *Durga Puja* days, the people do so on the Christmas. They also send various eatables as gifts to their relatives and friends. Apart from these, friends send Christmas cards to each other. These cards look like playing cards with different kinds of floral designs on it. They also have verses on good wishes printed on them. Even if a person has spent the entire year in extreme sorrow, he will spend this day cheerfully with good food, music, laughter and games. And those who cannot afford to eat to their fill or have proper clothes, they wear new clothes and eat to their heart's content on this day; everyone talks of food and enjoyment. But this entertainment remains confined within everyone's own family and a few close friends. Actually one can even say that this festival is not related to religion but to food. Very rarely some rich person might distribute food or clothes among the poor here; but unlike India, people here do not have a habit of making large donations to the poor. In our country people generously feed and give clothes to thousands of people during

festivals. But here the British benevolence remains confined to only a single family and this selfish race finds its happiness in feeding themselves only¹.

17. The British: An Independent Race – Their Government and Election of the Members of the Parliament

If anyone asks which among all the differences that exist between England and India is, according to me, the most striking one, I shall briefly reply that England is a free country while our India is under servitude. It is said that even a slave becomes free as soon as he steps on the soil of England. Even I can feel a change within me since the time I started breathing the free air of independent England and lived in the company of these independent people. But I cannot explain these newly emerging feelings to my sisters in India. As long as I was in India, I knew nothing of these. Back then, I could not even imagine that human life could have such different aspects. I used to read about different countries in books and learnt of countries which were independent, which were not, which had an autocratic form of government, etc. I understood them in my own way then. What I did not know then that these had so many underlying layers of meanings and such complexities. Words like dictatorship, autocracy, etc, did not leave any mark on my mind. They were simply words that I came across. But now I realise that at that time I had been blind. Just as for a blind person everything is dark and she cannot understand the difference

¹ In nineteenth century Hindu society, any celebration, religious or otherwise was generally followed by a big feast. The richer the person concerned, greater the number of invitees. In fact among the *baboos* of her society, it was like a competition as to who could outnumber the rest in terms of inviting people to a feast and feeding them. One such description of a *Durga Puja* celebration by a *baboo* is as follows, “the *babu* and his hangers-on prostrated themselves before the idol and then hurried towards the sitting room; the *Brahmins* scrambled for the food offerings. The rest of the day was spent feeding guests and distributing alms to the poor.” (157, Sinha, 2008)

between night and day however hard she might try; mine was the vision of an enslaved person. Now I can understand the true meanings of the things that I had read in my childhood. The more I compare the two countries, the more knowledge I gain.

In spite of all the faults that the English might have, the best of human virtues shine brightly in them. They do not lag behind anyone in terms of physical strength, spirit, and industriousness. It is because of these virtues that they are such an independent and progressive race. For example, there are many people in some countries who would be content with their bestial state and never raise their head against their tormentors however much they be tortured or repressed. Similarly, in this world there are races, which in spite of being subjugated live their lives in utter compliance. They happily carry on with their habitual life, even after surrendering their country to some autocratic ruler or to some foreign power. They have lost all their honour and pride. The English people are completely different from all such races.

Here people do not know autocracy. They have a queen but they also know that a country cannot be ruled according to the wishes of a single person. Each of them has some responsibilities towards the governance of the country. They are fully aware that the country belongs to its people. As long as they are alive, they will not tolerate any one person, whether a foreigner or one of their own, trying to rule the country single-handedly. In fact, though many tasks are accomplished in the name of the king or queen, it is the people of England who perform them. Ask a British person about the wars, he will answer with a lot of enthusiasm using phrases like “our clever soldiers”, or “our brave people”, etc. One often comes across spirited phrases like “this independent country” and “I am a British”.

In this country nobody tolerates another’s domination, or allow anyone else to get the better of him. No one can force his opinion on another. Each one expresses his views freely.

None is scared of the king or the government. There is complete freedom and nobody can force people to do things against their wishes. Everyday scores of newspapers are being published and in these all government actions are being discerned and criticised. People express their independent views unhesitatingly. If there is any crime or injustice within the country, it is immediately reported by the newspapers; the issues are generally discussed in every home till they are addressed. Newspapers are like mirrors of public opinion. The common people express themselves through newspapers and the authorities too accept their opinions instead of neglecting them. The reason behind such overwhelming influence of newspapers in this country is the complete freedom enjoyed by the common people here. Another remarkable quality of the British is that they never misuse their freedom. They are alert and thoughtful in all their work. They never act unfairly or unreasonably just because they have the power.

British history consistently provides us with such examples. Even in the very old times of the Saxons, the wise men participated in the court and advised their king regarding sundry matters. They were also the ones who chose their ruler. After the Normans conquered England, there were some problems in the system of governance, but even then the king had not turned totally despotic. The common people did not enjoy much freedom then but the king was under the control of the nobles. Gradually these aristocrats had reduced the power of the king quite considerably. Many a times the king depended on their advice. Gradually, when the Normans and the Saxons intermingled, the nobles of both these races sat together in the court and counselled the king. Kingship became a matter of inheritance. As a matter of practice, down the years, some of the common people also got nominated to the king's council of advisors. In this way that advisory body took the form of the modern day parliament. But its roots can be traced back to the ancient times.

In the seventeenth century, King Charles I had tried to establish an autocratic rule but he lost his life in that endeavour. He had tried to levy a number of taxes without consulting the parliament. Though most of his nobles were with him, other members of the parliament could not tolerate the move and they protested against the king. The king did not pay heed to them and thus started a battle between the king and the members of the parliament. The king's party was badly defeated and the king was beheaded. This increased the common people's say in the government and ended the monopoly of the aristocrats. Since the eighteenth century, no single party of the parliament could indiscriminately frame and promulgate any law for its benefits. Kingship is hereditary in this country. Just as one inherits property, the crown of England too is inherited by the heir to the throne. Among the European countries, only in England a woman can rule the country. In Indian history, many Hindu queens are celebrated for their chastity and spirited achievements, and we are not surprised to hear of a queen's rule. But one does not hear of a woman's rule in countries like France, Germany or Russia.

Parliament is the law-making body in this country. It has two different branches: the House of Lords and the House of Commons. In the House of Lords, members of the aristocratic families and the clergy discuss and debate on the issues related to the governance of the country. Two archbishops and twenty-four bishops sit in this house but the number of lords is not fixed. It depends on the wishes of the king or the queen. There are five kinds of titles for them – duke, marquise, earl, viscount and baron. All the people, who hold these titles, are customarily called lords. Like kingship, these titles and the power of these title holders are hereditary. The house of lords is the highest court of justice in the British society. It is this house which sits on the final judgement of any legal issue. The House of Commons has about six hundred and seventy members. The people of the country, except the nobility, choose the representatives of this

house. The members of the House of Commons are the elected representatives of the cities, districts, villages or universities and in that capacity they present their views on matters pertaining to the governance. The special power of the House of Commons lies in the fact that they control the financial matters and that is why they can keep a check on the king.

Ministers are appointed from the two houses of the parliament and it is these ministers who actually run the country in the name of their king or queen. Any new bill can be proposed in either of the two houses. When any law is first presented it is called a 'bill'. It can be introduced in any one of the houses where it is read thrice and debated upon; the changes recommended are included. If majority of the members of this house supports the motion in favour of the bill for all the three times, then the bill is sent to the other house. The same process is repeated here as well and if majority of the members again supports the bill all the three times, it is sent to the king or the queen. The bill becomes law only after the queen signs it.

Any member belonging to either of the house can introduce a new bill but it is usually the ministers who start such motions. If any major bill brought in by any of the ministers is not sanctioned through the above mentioned process; that is if majority of the members oppose it, then the ministers resign from their posts. In such cases the houses of the parliament dissolve and new members of the House of Commons are elected by the people of the cities, districts, etc. New set of ministers are then elected from amongst these members of the parliament.

The British are divided into two main political wings. One faction is known as the 'liberals', that is progressive, and the other is called 'conservatives', that is orthodox. The Liberals want to bring in a number of progressive reforms in the government and look forward to an overall development, free from all orthodoxies. They publicly declare peace, economic restraint and development to be their primary aims. They love to live in harmony with other races

and take into account their merits and demerits as they would do in their own case. They share the happiness or sorrow of the people of the different races. But the conservatives want to preserve the present system of government as it is. They are quite reluctant to bring in any development or change and are only concerned about the prosperity and well being of their own country over that of the others.

Apart from these two parties, there are a few smaller ones. But most of the people either adhere to the liberals or to the conservatives. Majority of the members of the parliament belong to either of the two parties. Once a parliament is dissolved, the members of the House of Commons have to be elected again. In that general election, if the number of liberals exceeds that of the conservatives, then the new set of ministers has to be chosen from among the liberals. In such a parliament, the conservatives belonging to both the houses are called the opposition because during this period they are supposed to counter most of the bills presented by the ministers. Similarly, if after a general election, the number of conservative members exceeds that of the liberals, then ministers are selected from the former group. And then in that parliament, the liberals constitute the opposition.

Generally, new parliament is formed after every six or seven years and in this period the members of the House of Commons are freshly elected. If the parliament has to be dissolved before its time due to the resignation of its ministers for the reasons already mentioned above, the general election for the members of the House of Commons occur within a much shorter period of time. At least every seven years a general election has to be held because according to the government policies of this country, no parliament can function for more than seven consecutive years. It is almost impossible to describe the euphoria that accompanies any general

election of this country. Particularly, the Indians will not be able to understand it unless they are personally present here during that period.

A famous British author has given the following description of a general election of a particular city.

In this city there has been such a terrible commotion regarding parliamentary elections. John wants to be the representative of the Conservatives and Smith has agreed to the request of his friends to become the representative of the Liberals. Both the candidates have issued a pamphlet each a few days back wherein they have explained about the political issues which they would support in the parliament, the parties to which they will adhere to, the ways in which they will argue for the benefit of the people of that city and other such issues. This has led to a severe factionalism in the city. Almost everyone has joined one party or the other. The liberals wear blue ribbons or carry some blue mark so they are known as the blue party and the conservatives carry some kind of red mark about their person, and are hence known as the red party.

Both the parties are trying their best to save their side. Wherever the two parties, blue and red, meet, whether in society or in the market-place, they break into fierce row. For every issue, whatever the blues say, the reds will oppose them. Both the parties are organising meetings to praise their own party and vilify the other. There are four newspapers published in the city. Among them two favour the liberals and the other two oppose them in their bid to support the conservatives. All around the city the blue and the red flags are fluttering and on big posters written in blue or red ink, there is a call to the people of the city to support either John or Smith. Wherever you turn to see - on the windows of the shops, rooftops of houses, public vehicles or on the back of some men, everywhere there are pamphlets written in red or blue ink. The

candidates are visiting all parts of the city and going for door to door campaigning to convince the people to support their candidature.

This continued for almost a month. The furore kept on mounting. Finally it was the day of the election. From the early morning itself there was a huge racket in the city. Everyone seemed to have lost their mind in their heartiest effort to make either John or Smith win the election. From early morning onwards there were sounds of drums and bugle. Roads echoed with people's shouts and sounds of vehicles. At times there were even skirmishes between two rival factions. Eventually it was past noon. Jack and Smith talked to the people of the town for one last time. Both of them said that those who were going to support them were the wisest, most free minded, spirited, and understanding while those supporting their opponent was utterly foolish and out of their minds. They also said that they will try their best to help the city and its people, improve the trade and commerce in the city and work towards the well-being of its people. Both the parties took out large processions along with horses and carriages throughout the city. There was a large crowd on either side of the road – some cheering them up and others hooting them.

Finally it was the time for voting. The voters went to their designated places and started casting their votes for either John or Smith. Commotion plagued the town. There were huge crowd of people travelling in vehicles or there were other groups on foot, going to the site of election. Crowd jostled on roads and almost everyone was in frenzy. No one could keep silent for a moment. All around only red and blue colours were visible. The liquor shops were the most decorated ones. They had the brightest of flags fluttering over them. There was a large crowd around the building where the polling was taking place. People entered it with a lot of difficulty. The crowd kept on increasing as was the disorder. People's cries became sharper.

After some time the polling was over. Suddenly everything went silent. Everybody awaited the result with abated breath. Soon the counting was over. The city's magistrate announced the result that Smith has won by a hundred votes so he would become the Member of Parliament from this area. Once again there started a terrible commotion – Smith's supporters cheered loudly for him while his opponents gave vent to their dissatisfaction in disgruntled voices. At places there were even squabbles between the two parties. Gradually the confusion subsided and the crowd dispersed, each going back to their jobs. In this way the election was completed.

18. Daily Life

In England there is a vast difference in the daily lives of the rich, the middle class and the poor. Most of the gentlemen get up by half past eight in the morning and take their 'breakfast' around nine o'clock. This is not an elaborate fare. They have butter toast, boiled egg, fish, sometimes a little meat, and tea or coffee. After breakfast, the master of the house leaves for work. The mistress of the house then either looks after the household or occupies herself with her dresses. At one o'clock they take their lunch which means *jalkhabar*¹. The English people living in India call this meal 'tiffin'. During lunch they take bread and butter along with some meat and a couple of glasses of liquor. Most of the men take their lunch at their workplaces. Post lunch, the women go out, either to their friends' place or for shopping etc. Dinner² is the chief meal of

¹ In Bengali, *jalkhabar* generally means a light repast.

² The word 'dinner' itself means the chief meal of the day.

this country. The rich ones take their dinner between six or seven o'clock in the evening. The cook spends at least four to five hours to prepare various delicacies and the maid or a servant lays the table. The table is covered with a table cloth on which cutlery, glasses, etc are neatly arranged. Food is brought in only when it is dinner time and a bell is rung to inform the family members that the dinner is ready to be served. Then one by one the master of the household, the mistress and their children take their seats; but before they do so the master says the 'grace' which is an offering to the God. It is only after that the dinner begins. There is no stipulated duration for this meal. In some of the families, people finish eating within an hour and there are some others who keep on gorging on meat and liquor through a couple of hours. Dinner is an elaborate affair. There is a variety of food items - soup, fish, roasted or fried meat, potatoes, vegetables, sweets, fruits and liquor. Prior to dinner, all the members of the family wash themselves and wear nice clothes. In most of the upper class houses, dressing up for the dinner is a grand affair. The rich ladies often take up about two to three hours to get ready for the dinner. This might amuse us but great men have their own fancies; and particularly when dressing up is one of the chief engagements of the women here.

After dinner the entire family gathers in the drawing room and engages in conversation, plays music or reads books and newspapers. When I see the parents along with their grown up or young children sitting together and enjoying themselves in simple conversations then it seems to me that the everyday lives of the unfortunate Indians are truly devoid of all such pleasures. In India we do not have this system of taking our meals together or spending some time with the entire family. Here, the head of the family has a separate meal, his wife hides herself in some part of the house and satiates her hunger, the grown up boys rush through their own meals at some another time. The women of the household remain satisfied with whatever is given to them

as charity and the smaller children come under no special treatment. In our country, we do not have any custom of the family members to sit together and chat. At nine o'clock in the evening the rich Englishmen have tea with an occasional biscuit or two. After that they again go back to their own work. After two more hours, around eleven, most of the Englishmen go to bed.

The middle class and the poor Englishmen wake up at six or seven in the morning and take a sparse meal of some bread, butter, egg, etc. Thereafter, the men go out to work and the women get busy with their household chores. They have to do a lot of work themselves and those who cannot afford do not have even a single maid. The middleclass people take their dinner by one or two in the afternoon. The poor people take it even earlier. Though dinner is the chief meal of the day, it is not an elaborate affair for them. They generally have roasted meat, boiled potatoes, some sweets and beer. Most of the workers come home for dinner and thereafter go back to their jobs. Women, after finishing the rest of their domestic chores, get dressed up and either do some needlework or go out for some work. When the men return from their work at around six or seven in the evening, all the members of the family gather to have their tea along with some bread and butter, etc. After that they chat among themselves or read newspapers and relax. They take their 'supper' at around nine or ten at night. This class has simple fares for their supper, such as meat, potatoes or bread. They go off to sleep around ten o'clock.

This is how the British people spend their daily lives. Under no circumstances would they deviate from this schedule, not even when there is an accident in the family. Such a disciplined life not only keeps them healthy, it also saves a lot of time and does not leave any scope for indiscipline in the family. Since we do not have any such discipline in our everyday affairs we keep on getting into some scrapes or the other. We always hear about complaints and grudges pertaining to disorderliness of the Bengali family - one day someone has to go to office hungry

because the rice was not cooked at proper time; or the head of the family got very angry because the evening meal was not prepared at the correct time. Indian women have no fixed time for their meals. If on a day they take their food at around ten in the morning, the next day it can be late afternoon. But as the British have a fixed time for their meals, one does not come across such problems in their families.

When someone comes here from India for the first time, he is surprised to see the bolted doors of all the houses irrespective of their categories. It would appear that people have locked their houses and have gone visiting some other country. But that is not the case. It is the custom of this country to keep the main entrance shut. They do so either because of the cold climate or for their safety in such lonely surroundings. In the front doors of all the houses there is an iron hammer fixed to it which is called a 'knocker'. A number of houses have both a knocker and a bell. If someone wants to enter a house or call anyone, he will have to either beat the door with a knocker or ring the bell. In order to avoid confusion they have assigned different styles of knocking for different types of people. If any gentleman or a friend comes, he knocks the door three to four times. The postman knocks twice rapidly, and the hawkers, servants or maids knock only once. The people within can guess the kind of person knocking their door. So they can get prepared accordingly and open the door soonest.

A middle class British house consists of a drawing room, dining room, and according to the size of the family five or six bedrooms, a kitchen and a room for washing clothes. Apart from this, there is a small courtyard just in front of the main door, a cellar and a room for utensils in the front and a small garden at the back of the house. Here, the size of the room and the purpose to which it will be utilised is decided during the construction of the house itself. And the rooms are constructed accordingly. Therefore there is neither any unutilised space within the house, nor

any confusion regarding the use of the rooms. In addition, the rich people have a big drawing room, reading room, a room for smoking, a chamber for clothes, wine cellar and servants' rooms in addition to those mentioned earlier. Some houses also have a glass-room, known as 'conservatory' to grow flowering plants at home. Nowadays a number of houses also have a bathroom. The British generally do not have the provision for taking bath. Nowadays, some of the rich people have started taking a bath, a practice that they have learnt from other races. But whether out of cold or by design, the lower class people of England are extremely dirty. I doubt whether they clean themselves even once a month. Apart from the rich Englishmen, the middleclass or lower class people do not have any provision for bath. Nowadays there are a few common baths in London and other big cities meant for the common people. Everyone can go there and bathe as much as they want to. But these baths are quite expensive. To take a bath in one of the first class facilities, one might have to pay from six *annas* to one rupee, depending on its type, and from two to six *annas* for the second rate ones.

In this country, the houses are not as big as those in our country. Since a number of houses stand together, they appear huge. But generally, they are not more than thirty feet wide. The exterior of the houses are not very impressive here; the walls are not whitewashed, and they do not even have blinds or a window. Except the larger ones, most houses here are made of bricks and wood and have glass windows.

The interior looks quite nice. Most of the houses have a staircase running right from the bottom to its topmost floor. They are usually made of wood, except in a few big houses where they are solidly built with stones. Their floors are of wooden planks and there are wall papers on all the walls. All the rooms have a fireplace where they light a fire in the winters. Just above the fireplace is a mantelpiece. In posh houses they are made of marble. In our country one could at

least count the joist or rafters in the ceiling when one was idle. But here even that is not possible because the ceilings are either plain or at times have some floral design in the centre. While constructing, they first place the joists and then instead of rafters and tiles they fix wooden planks on both the sides. Then they strengthen the ceiling lime and sand filling. In the entire house, only the roofs are whitewashed. The doors do not have double panes as we have in our country; instead they have a single large door. Neither do they have any threshold and in place of a chain and a latch, the doors have a bronze handle and a lock fitted to its surface. Only the main entrance and the door to the garden have iron bolts or big latches. The roof is set on a number of small joists. They neither have tiles nor stone chips as we have in Bengal. The houses in England look quite strong from the outside but after staying in them for a while we can understand how weak they are. If a strong wind blows as it does in India, all these houses will topple down within an hour or two. Generally the houses have thin walls and a shallow foundation. The joists are thin as well and instead of bricks, stone chips and lime mixture; they only exhaust loads of wood.

Unlike in India, they do not have to shout themselves hoarse to call their servants. There is a brass handle fitted in the wall near the fireplace in every room. These handles are connected to a number of bells in the ground floor. Each room is connected to a separate bell. So the moment anyone pushes the handle, the maids and servants can identify the room and immediately rush into that room. But the British are not satisfied even with this. With the new developments in Science, they try to make their lives as comfortable as possible. Nowadays some of the houses have an electronic switch instead of such bells. If a person presses a button on a wall of the house, a bell rings downstairs.

The decor of the houses display the British love for comfort and their increasing foppery. Everywhere the affluent have an inclination towards luxury, but here, in England, even the most

average households have a carpet, a sofa set, a mahogany table, a piano, a nice cupboard, full-size mirrors, pictures, chandeliers and many such expensive and lavish items. In addition to these, the houses are stuffed with various furnishings. If you visit the house of even a humble carpenter or a blacksmith, you will find a carpet on the floor of the drawing room, a nice window curtain and a table cover, a sofa set, a shelf, a picture, clock and other such things. The room will be neat and clean. When it comes to the decoration of the house, the poor people try and imitate their social superiors. The latter in turn look up to those even more affluent than they are. Thus, even the poor here learn profligacy. What is considered a luxury in our country, here is taken to be a necessity even among the poor. Some of the houses of the common middleclass people appear more luxurious than the houses of the rich people of our country. The worth of decorating a ten-roomed house in the British style is about a thousand rupees.

I shall attempt a brief description of the British kitchen to substantiate their love for a comfortable living. I have already stated that most of the kitchens are in the basement and do not get much light or air. But their kitchens are much tidier than even our bedrooms. They do not use mud or brick *unoon*¹. Attached to a wall is an iron stove for cooking which is lighted with the help of paper, small pieces of wood or coal. There is a chimney enclosed within that wall with an opening at the roof which is used to vent out the smoke. Whether rich or poor, every household has proper facilities. Kitchens vary according to the lifestyle though at times they go beyond their means. Everyone except the lowest class of people keep their kitchen clean. All the necessary things needed in a kitchen are kept within or near it. They do not have to run hither and thither to find the things they need. In most of the houses kitchen floor is covered with old rugs and are furnished with a table, a cot, etc. They also have racks along the walls for crockery

¹ *Unoon* was the mud or brick stove used for cooking in nineteenth century India. It is still in use at places where gas stoves have not reached.

and other utensils. In one of the corners there is a tap and a small tank underneath it. The kitchen walls have neither cobwebs nor oil stains and the floor is clean. Things are neatly arranged and kept in their proper places. In some of the houses, there are couches, cupboards, pictures and books as well in the kitchen. Here the poor and the middle class people take their meals in the kitchen itself. Though the British do not maintain personal hygiene¹, their discipline and tidiness in all other aspects is worth praising.

In England, most of the things are costlier than in India. Firstly, England is a very small island; on top of that, most of the available land is either used up by mining industries, or have become hunting grounds for the rich people, or are utilised as pastures for the cattle. A lot of care and hard work is required to make the land fertile and yielding. So it is quite natural that things will be more expensive here. I have heard that about fifty years ago, things such as bread were three to four times costlier than today. They had to pay a very heavy duty for things imported from other countries. So, even if the foreign goods came for a cheap price, due to such duty, it was not at all profitable to sell them in England. Gradually, the British abolished this import duty. Since then, as a result of imports, indigenous productions from the newly set up industries and the competitive market, things have become much cheaper. In the process food has become affordable. Even then if we compare the prices of commodities between England and our country, everything appears much costlier here. These days, food items have become widely available as they have started importing a number of things like wheat, potato, eggs etc. If we look at the British population and the sparse amount of food products produced here, it becomes

¹ The Indian concept of cleanliness was very different from the English concept. In the *Europe Prabashir Patra* Tagore well highlights this difference. “There is a big difference between the cleanliness practiced in our country and that here. Here cleanliness is born out of a sense of art and beauty while in our country there seems to be a distinctive consciousness regarding the essence of cleanliness... Here people do not rinse their mouth after eating because spitting water out while rinsing looks very ugly.” (Tagore, 86).

evident that England will not be able to sustain itself even for six months if its relationship with all other countries gets disrupted. It will surely be affected by a famine.

Among food crops, they grow wheat, barley, and oat in huge quantities. They also grow some peas and beans as well. But apart from these, things such as rice, pulses, sago, etc, which are crops of warmer countries, are imported either from America or Asia. Here the best quality rice costs about seven *annas* per *ser* and the inferior varieties come for about three *annas*. The price, though shocking to us is not at all high if we consider the complete situation. They have to bring these from far off lands like India or America, and then they have to store them with so much of care and cleanliness. The rice here is so clean that once bought it need not even be washed and can be directly cooked. This saves a lot of effort and time. Many vegetable grow here and some are imported from foreign lands as well. Vegetables such as potatoes, onions or cabbages are available throughout the year. Those vegetables that grow in our country in the winters, such as green peas, radish, cauliflower, french beans, etc are available here in the summers. Good quality of potato costs about six or seven paise a kilogram and one cabbage comes for around five paise. At times vegetables are even cheaper. The fruits available here is no match to those found in our country, but here one can find a couple of varieties of small delicious fruits throughout the year. Their chief fruits are strawberry, guava, grapes, apple, pomegranate, etc. A huge quantity of oranges is imported from Spain. Here all the fruits are dearer but again there is nothing that is not available here. Certain varieties of Indian fruits, such as pineapple, banana, coconut, etc are also found here. These are imported from the America. Their cost is exorbitant and they are not at all delicious.

One can enjoy shopping here in spite of the fact that most of the things are more expensive in this country. The British values both money and time. Unlike our country, there is

no scope for bargaining here. In India, even for buying something trivial, we have to haggle a lot over its price. An hour long bargaining might help us to buy a one rupee priced item for say, six *annas*. Yet the suspicion of being cheated lurks in our minds. In the process there is much wastage of time and gives one a headache. Here such situations never occur. Customers do not suffer from the constant fear of dishonest shopkeepers. Also, they do not have to pick up a quarrel with the shopkeepers for every small thing they buy. There are various kinds of shops on either side of the road, very close to the houses. When you need something, you go to a shop where the shopkeeper offers you two or three options. You only have to select the one you need and pay its actual price. The whole transaction gets over in five minutes. You do not have to enter into an argument or face any hassle. The shops are so clean and beautifully decorated that even the richest of the society will not hesitate to visit it. In our country, a look at the grocery is enough to put such people off. As it is, all the items are kept in the open and are quite untidy. To add to it, oil leaks from its jar, the salt catches moisture, flies hover over jugs of molasses. A mere look will keep the gentlemen away from these shops. Here, be it the grocer, green grocer or the fish monger, each keeps the shop spic and span. No woman, irrespective of her social or economic status, feels it beneath her dignity to do her own shopping. Once you buy anything, the shopkeeper delivers it to your home. So ladies need not undertake the trouble of carrying the things herself. The food needed for daily consumption, such as bread, milk, potato, vegetables, meat, are delivered to every doorstep by the shopkeepers going their rounds by hand pulled rickshaw or horse drawn carriage.

Generally, the food items here are of superior quality and taste good, though they are quite highly priced. The breads which are a bit bigger in size cost ten paisa, but such fresh and delicious bread is not available even in the best British hotel in our country. The butter that we

get here is also of a good quality. Moreover as this is a cold country, the butter remains fresh for a longer time. This butter is not the milk white variety that we get in Bengal; rather, this has a yellowish colour. The butter costs between one rupee and twelve *annas* to two rupees and four *annas*. In Bombay a similar variety of butter is available but I have never seen such in Calcutta. Perhaps, the milk here contains a lot of fat, so the butter that is made from it is of such a superior quality. Milk generally costs fourteen paise per *ser*. Unlike India, here *ghee* is not available. They mostly use lard for cooking purposes; at times they also use oil or butter. Here there are various kinds of sugar. The variety that is generally used is similar to the one that we see in our country – white and clean, but it has smaller granules. It costs about six *annas* per *ser*. For cooking, they use a kind of brownish powdered sugar which is imported from the United States of America and costs about five *annas* per *ser*. The molasses that is available here is of a very poor quality. Honey is delicious but very expensive. Various spices like turmeric, chilli, coriander, small cardamoms, etc are imported from India. But they are highly expensive; about sixty grams cost four *annas*. Salt is very cheap here – three paise per kilogram. Unlike in India, here the British do not impose heavy taxes to rob the poor of their last penny.

The fish here is not as good as in our country nor do they have many varieties. In summer ‘salmons’ are available; these are quite big and taste good. They resemble the *rohu* fish of our country. They cost about one and a half rupee per *ser*. There are a few varieties of smaller fish as well but most of them appear tasteless to us and are very expensive. Whether due to high price or other reason, here the people are not much fond of fish. Hefty British crave only for meat. I have seen huge crabs and lobsters here. A huge crab resembles a tortoise. The British prefer beef, veal and pork more. Veal is very soft and delicious. One can even fry it in four to five minutes and have it. Beef is the national food for the British. I have heard that England has

the best quality beef. The poor people mostly consume pork because it is the cheapest available meat. Different types of domestic animals like chicken, duck and rabbit are also available but they are found on the rich men's platter. The chicken which costs about four *annas* in our country would cost no less than two rupees here.

I hope by now my readers have realised that surviving here is a costly affair. In most of the countries, food items are cheaper in villages than in cities. But as the British import most of these items, things are more easily available in the cities. Therefore, in this country, though land and property are cheaper in the country side, the cost of living is not less than that of the cities. And in this country of extreme cold and frequently changing climactic condition, one has to spend a lot on clothes. In England, a rough estimate shows that a poor person spends between fifteen to forty rupees a month on housing, food and clothes. Those who belong to the lower economic group spend around fifty to hundred per month while the middle class has to spend between hundred and hundred and fifty rupees. And after that more the amount you spend, you will be known as that much richer a person. The cost of living reduces if four to five persons stay together like a family. But this estimation does not include educational and other expenses.

19. The Hard Working British – Craftsmen – Trade – Workers

The British are famous throughout the world for their hard work and this is the best of qualities that a race can possess. If you read their history, you will see that all their achievements are the testimonies of their hard work. In the present, their hard work exists as a model everywhere. It is due to this industrious nature that in such a short time they have transformed

themselves from a barbaric tribe who lived in forests to one of the most cultured races of the world. And it is the hard work of the common people that has sowed the seeds of British greatness. In short, the British have achieved everything including their wealth, freedom and empire by dint of this particular quality. The prosperity of the entire nation has been achieved through every individual's uncompromising commitment towards tasks however difficult they might be. The main cause of this prosperity is the physical and mental labours of various people – such as that of a farmer, manufacturer of useful items, inventor and maker of weapons and different kinds of machines, author, artisan, etc. Diligence is not only the lifeline of the British race; it is also the chief means by which they correct their faults. If they find themselves to be lagging behind any of the races in any affair, they try their best to improve upon it. Also, if they can locate any fault within their administrative system, they are never lazy to ignore it; rather they try their best to rectify it.

The industrious nature of most of the British amazes us. Here I have often read about such men who in spite of their birth in poor and lowly families have rose to fame and prosperity by their sheer hard work. Invention of steam engine has helped a number of races around the world. It has also made British industrial production and trade and commerce easier and faster. It was the working class people who invented this useful steam engine. Famous inventors like Newcomen¹, Smeaton², James Watt³, and others were coppersmiths, carpenters or mere labourers in their early life. Among the contemporary renowned people of this country, there are

¹ Thomas Newcomen (1664 – 1729) created the first practical steam engine for pumping water around the year 1712. It was known as the Newcomen steam engine.

² John Smeaton (1724- 1792) was English civil engineer who designed canals, bridges, lighthouses, etc. He also improved upon Newcomen's steam engine.

³ James Watt (1736-1819) was the Scottish inventor and mechanical engineer. He made considerable changes to the existing form of steam engine and thereby helped in the English industrial revolution.

quite a number who has ascended to their social position through sheer hard work. Some British authors work hard for about twenty to twenty five years at a stretch in order to write a book well and become successful. Some spend their entire life and money for the sake of their inventions. Generally, the British are found to be more focused and hard working when it comes to industry and trade than most other races. The British are never idle, either due to the climate or out of their natural disposition.

Industriousness has been the best means of British education. Their appreciable development from an ignorant race to a knowledgeable one has been only due to toil and labour. Some poets say that slog and suffering are the only means of attaining heaven. Truly, there is nothing sweeter than the fruits of one's own sweat. It is through this that human civilization has been possible. Many people consider laziness to be the actual bliss and hard work to be the bane of life. But if they consider a bit, they will realise that just as the body becomes inactive if all its parts are not in action, in the same way human beings become dull in absence of any activity. The ability to work is a gift of God and it is this gift which has enabled the British to undertake all difficult and arduous tasks. It is because of this gift that they have remained engaged in trade and industrialization and thus surpassed many other races. The British had first come to India for trading purposes. It is trade that has led England to unfurl its flag in all parts of the world. On the other hand, see how weak we Indians have become in absence of any hard work. Due to laziness we have lost all our wealth, respect, etc. and it is our indolence and contempt for physical labour that has left us far behind other civilized races. In spite of watching the way the entire of our trade and industry have been appropriated by the foreigners and how they are draining away our blood, we are not yet conscious. We are so inert!!¹

¹ This double exclamation has been used by the author in the original text.

It is amazing to note how these British people have made gradual progress in the field of industrialisation. At the time when France, Spain, Holland, Belgium and some other European countries were setting up industries to make silk gloves, socks etc, England did not have any source of livelihood except agriculture. Such a situation continued even long after. In those days the British used to exchange their indigenous products to get silk from the foreigners. They remained contented to either buy silk garments or buy silk thread and then weave them into clothes in small quantities. Later, with the rise of Protestantism¹, many hard working Western Europeans who had gone through religious conversion, had to escape from their lands. When they found a refuge in England, they were glad to set up those industries here and teach the British this new craft in return for their hospitality. This was the beginning of industrialisation in England. Eventually steam engine was invented. This invention coupled with British hard work and skill has made England unparalleled in industrialisation.

Cotton is their prime industry. They import raw cotton from countries like the America and India and make dresses from them which they later export to various countries. By the end of the year 1874, England and Ireland together had about two thousand and seven hundred cotton factories. Among its employees, one lakh eighty-eight thousand were men and the rest were women. Manchester is the hub of these industries. After cotton, fur and woollen garments manufacturing industries came next in importance. Till the end of the above mentioned year, there were eighteen hundred fur industries and about seven hundred wool industries and about two lakhs and eighty thousand people worked in all these. England imports most of its cotton

¹ Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* draws a parallel between the protestant belief and its contribution to the beginning of capitalism. According to him the Protestants believed in 'a calling' which was "a strenuous and exacting enterprise to be chosen by himself and to be pursued with a sense of religious responsibility" (2). This led to the belief that it was the duty of man to 'labour' and earn its fruit. So in the protestant ethics there was no 'conflict between money-making and piety' (3). Krishnabhabini also points at this underlying principle when she talks of the hard working Protestants coming to England.

from other countries but wool is primarily available here. Leeds, a city in the northern part of England is the chief place for wool industries. England also makes various other kinds of garments and other necessary textile materials such as silk, jute items, socks, lace, etc.

The owners of these factories in England are almost like emperors. Like monarchs they have immense wealth, various ambitions, huge enterprises, threat and apprehension as well as pride and conceit. They too send their ambassadors and representatives to different parts of the world; keep a track of the condition and needs of the people living in the nearby or far-off countries; they rule over the working class and take into account their conditions. If they so wish, they can help a large number of people. In short, they are the masters controlling human labour. One can hear of money in crores when it comes to their enterprises. The stockpiles in their godowns appear well beyond belief. There is no place in the world, such as, India, China, Japan, Australia, Egypt, and South America, where you will not find their representatives. They gather information about the various items that are used and are in demand in those countries and send it to England. Those things are manufactured in the factories here and exported to the respective countries. In India we always come across new products manufactured in England. It seems that the Indians have stopped using their handloom products. This is because the clever British gets hold of samples of all kinds of clothes used in our country and then manufacture exactly similar ones here and send them back to India. Though these machine-made clothes have not been able to surpass our handloom products such as clothes, shawls and other items, they are manufactured at so low a cost that the poor Indians are gradually preferring them.

The extent of British enterprise renders one speechless. The godowns have fur garments stored in heaps as high as hills. There is a godown at Leeds which has a space of about 200 yards in the front and it is so high that a machine working on air pressure has to be used to stack or

bring down a bundle of wool from its place at the top of the heap. In a cotton factory at Manchester, about three lakhs shuttles are used. It has been recorded that a profit of twelve crores is made just from the cotton threads and clothes produced in Manchester only. A single 'company' earns a profit of about two lakh rupees a month and employs about five thousand people. All these companies have a huge capital. They use machines of superior quality and have excellent arrangements. The employees are skilled and hard working. All the labourers, supervisors and clerks work with discipline and dedication.

I have already discussed the impact of iron and hard coal upon this country. Without these mineral resources, England perhaps could not have achieved even one percent of prosperity that it enjoys today. It is so because all the industries are completely dependent on iron and coal. There are in all about fourteen coal mines here, of these the ones in the north are the larger. A single field spreads up to twenty to twenty four miles. These fields are full of deep mines. There are four hundred and thirty pits for digging out coal and innumerable number of people working in these. Apart from iron, England also has substantial amount of other minerals such as tin, copper, etc. Just as Manchester has a number of cotton mills, Birmingham is full of huge iron and brass factories which produce excellent iron implements. Necessary items such as iron nails or hinges made in England are found all over the world. There are innumerable millionaires involved in this trade and each of them is perhaps richer than the kings in our country. One of the masons here has become very affluent through his business in screws and has eventually become very influential. Many of you must have seen the name Sheffield on British knives and scissors. That place is famous for manufacturing all kinds of sharp tools. Apart from the things that I have just mentioned above, England also manufactures various other items; machines, ships, furniture,

crocery to name a few. I shall have to write three to four voluminous books to give a detailed discussion of each of these.

Like industries, trade is another important source of income here. In this they are second to none. There are no such ports where one does not see a British ship. Standing near the 'dock', which is hub of ships, at London, that is the place where ships are anchored; it seems that all the wealth of the world sail into England and accumulates beneath her feet. London has six such 'docks'. All of them are vast and at the very first sight look like huge treasure-houses. Each of the docks resembles a big port and almost always they are crowded with a number of ships. Stand aside and look at the boats sailing in all directions and ships waiting in queues. It seems that they have raised their heads above water to proclaim to everyone know the extent of British industriousness and mercantile power. One has come from Russia carrying freight of about eighty maunds¹, a certain other has come from India, another from Africa or America, carrying various kinds of merchandise within them. None contain less than ninety to hundred maunds. Anyone looking at all these mercantile ships, assembling from all the four quarters of the world, will be amazed at the British industriousness. According to the records in a year about forty thousand ships visit these docks and at a time there are about five to six thousand of them on the Thames or at the docks in London. It sends shivers down the spines to even think of the amount of wealth these ships extort from other countries.

London and Liverpool are the places for international trade. They mainly import items such as food grains, flour, cotton, wool, sugar, tea, coffee, wood, etc. The items which they export to other countries are chiefly cotton and woollen textiles, thread, iron and steel products, coal, weapons of various kinds, machines and tools, etc. There are twenty thousand sail ships assigned for this purpose and about one lakh and forty thousand people are employed in these.

¹ 1 maund = 37.3242 kilograms

There are about three thousand steam ships and about sixty eight thousand people work there. Apart from these British also have a number of war-ships which employ a huge number of people.

After reading all these perhaps my readers have understood why there are so many rich people in England and the factors responsible for their immense wealth. The amount of wealth earned by one British merchant is often more than the accumulated wealth of a number rich Indians. The British people have also used their money to set up industries in many other countries. In India, the capital investment for all the railway companies has come from the British. They have also invested their money in other countries such as Russia, Turkey, Africa, Canada, Brazil, etc. There are about two hundred banks in London and all other cities have at least two to three each. These banks are store-houses of money. Here money comes from all over the world and from here again they are sent to various countries in huge quantities. Here, all the people whether he is a landlord, a trader, a shopkeeper, doctor, barrister or a government employee, keep their money in the banks. Again it is this money which helps in the running of all kinds of trade and commerce, industries, companies, etc. In this country money is never left idle. The fact that money begets money can be proved by England.

If you take a stroll along the roads of the important cities in England you will realise that there are number of rich people living here. A journey of four to six miles by a car in certain areas of London brings to our view huge buildings on both sides of the road. The houses proudly holding their heads high stand as a proof of their owners' wealth. None of these people earn less than two to three thousand rupees a month. All the houses have stable, horses, carriages, grooms and coachman and other servants. All these houses are full of expensive furniture and other precious items in these houses. Here, the doctors, barristers and other professionals earn more than their counterparts in other countries. In our country one can pay two to four rupees to a

general physician for a home visit but one has to pay a fee of not less than twelve rupees for the same in England. The distinguished¹ professors at Oxford and Cambridge earn about two to three thousand rupees a month. I have heard that though the poet laureate Tennyson receives a small salary from the royal treasury, he earns even up to five thousand a month for the poems that he writes. The proprietor of The Times, the most popular British daily, pays even a thousand rupees for the articles of excellence that are published in it. The clerk who earns a monthly salary of thirty rupees has his equivalent here earning about a hundred and fifty rupees a month. But just as the people earn more here, they also have a lot of expenses. After looking at everything here it seems that spending commensurate one's income here. After reading this section on British wealth I hope my readers are not persuaded into thinking that everything is bright and beautiful here, you must remember that there are always two sides of a coin.

There are many big and small factories, workshops and similar places of production that provide for to a huge number of people. I have told earlier that they have a wonderful system here. The labourers are very hard working and trust worthy. They can very cleverly reproduce a replica from a model. In an iron factory a skilled worker can earn up to eighty or ninety rupees a month. Even the ones who are not so skilled earn about forty rupees a month. Women and children earn about twenty-five rupees per month. In the cotton factories at Lancashire, a young labourer has a monthly salary of fifty rupees. In this country all the workers here earn as much as or even more than the clerks in India. Even the sweepers and other such workers get no less than fifteen or sixteen rupees per month.

In spite of earning more, the poor people of this country are not well-off in terms of money or their lifestyle. The reason behind this is extravagance. They are spendthrifts and in

¹ The author uses the word *pradhan* which can be translated as chief or main. But since there is no such post called chief or main professor, I have loosely translated it as 'distinguished' professor.

addition to it, here most of the things are quite expensive. So they have a high domestic expense. One who earns about eight rupees a month can spend a sort of comfortable life in our country, but here even after earning twenty five rupees per month one has to lead a miserable life. One has to spend a lot on coal, light, alcohol and meat. Even the poor people here cannot survive without meat and alcohol, just on vegetables, so it is not surprising that they cannot sustain themselves in that amount of money. Also, though they do not have the custom of child marriage, the working class people have many children. Almost every family has four to five children. In this cold country with its fluctuating weather, the poor labourer has to struggle hard just to provide food and clothes for the family.

Now many measures are being taken here to improve the conditions of these working class people. They are given lessons in politics and are keen learners. In many places these uneducated or little educated and physically exhausted people gather together to form societies where they discuss and debate upon political and other issues and are quite knowledgeable about the affairs of other places. Some libraries have been established for these people with the help of the common public where they can read various kinds of books and newspapers for free. There are a number of places where they can receive education for a nominal payment. The labourers go to these places after their day's work, in the evenings to learn various subjects. Here men and women equally learn to sing, play instruments, paint, knit and sew garments.

20. Last words

I have seen many new things here, learnt about new subjects, and gained new knowledge; but the more I see and learn, more the time I spend here, greater is my sorrow for India. The

more I compare the two countries, starker I find the contrast between the two. Now I can better understand the wretched condition of India and it gives me a lot of pain. At times I lose all hopes of India's ever being able to regain her happiness and at times I can see some rays of hope. I think some of my fellow countrymen are also going through the same feelings as mine; many of them are suffering like me for the degenerated condition of the country. Such people can come forward to work for the betterment of the country once they clearly understand the merits and demerits of the two countries.

By reading the sections on British education, trade and women's education, every Indian will realise how much superior England is to India. Similarly, on reading about the British society, domestic life, the individual's love for independence, patriotism, self respect, etc., they can see how much the British life is different from that of ours. We are the children of the ancient Hindus of the Aryavartya – those who in the ancient past, even before the Greeks, had been famous throughout the world for their civilization, spirituality and education; those who were unparalleled in their devotion to *dharma*, truth and their control over five senses. In fact when all the civilized countries of the world were practicing slavery, then only the Hindus had condemned and stayed away from this hateful practice of keeping a man enslaved for life. The fame of their brave deeds had spread throughout the world. Various civilized races of the world have learnt ancient Mathematics, Astronomy and Philosophy from us and are now becoming famous by their new inventions and discoveries. We are the descendents from that race of Hindus, then why are we in such a state today? Why are we wandering in wretched condition in our own country, deprived of our spirit, strength, wealth, fame, freedom and all happiness? Today, why do we consider Calcutta more significant than Kashi, Prayag, Mathura and other such places which were pillars of Hinduism? Everybody knows the answer yet no one is willing

to say so or even listen. But no one can deny the fact that we ourselves are responsible for this current state. In no way are the British physically different or better than us. Is not this current state of subservience a fault of our own?

We are the daughters of those Hindu women who encouraged their husbands to go to the battlefield and did not hesitate a bit to sacrifice their own lives on the pyre to preserve their honour and chastity. Their brave deeds echoed throughout the world and they stood for *dharma*, *satitva* and courageousness. Yet today our place is at the feet of our subjugators; is it not the fault of ours – the children of India? Today, where is the Indian woman's pride in her *Dharma* and courage? Once we used to proclaim "let us sell all our meaningless jewellerys to buy provision for our soldiers" but where is that pledge now? In spite of seeing our men sitting idle like cowards, do we have the power any longer to ignite them into some action? There is nothing left for us. We have lost everything due to our own faults. Lack of unity like a poisonous viper has brought our doom. It is this lack of unity that has divided our country into various fragments and made us subjects first under the Muslims and then under the British. And it is due to their unity again that the British, who are inhabitants of a very small island, have successfully defeated a country much bigger in size than itself, which is Hindustan, and are ruling it without any difficulty. Due to our divisions we have become pauper and completely spineless. In spite of being a civilised race we are considered uncivilised as we are under foreign rule. Termites which are very minute insects can build a huge mound collectively and if any human being disturbs it, they are not afraid. Instead they put up a united front to take their revenge on this much bigger being. But, in spite of being similar in terms of our physical appearances, we are scared to resist our oppressors just because we are not united.

There was a time when the Hindus were revered throughout the world as the very resource of civilization and knowledge. But now the people belonging to the independent nations dismiss the subjugated Indians as uncivilized, spiritless and cowardly. Though we are creatures of flesh and blood, we easily bear with these insults and do not react. Are not these our faults? The Bengalis in particular, are the most knowledgeable and intelligent among all other Indian races but they are extremely coward and timid. Then what is the need for such knowledge? None of the people of the other regions of India are as subservient as the Bengalis when they encounter a British person, neither do they remain at the feet of foreign race.

These are the very men who are oppressive towards their women. The educated Bengali youth are busy earning degrees and in pursuit of their own pleasure; silent tears of the caged Bengali women fail to draw their attention. British women are trying their best for their right to vote to elect the members of parliament; if we could similarly fight for women's liberation here and drive it straight into the hearts of every Indian or if we could discard our helpless attitude and not repress our desire to shout our hearts out in front of our men, then perhaps we could make our Bengali brothers lend an ear to our sufferings. But we have lost all the spirit and strength for an independent life due to years of servitude. That is why now we are not able to fight with all our might like the British women to be equal to the men of our society.

This country has many enjoyable sights but of these I prefer the gathering of men and women, their playing together, adult women marching to school, etc. Which Indian woman will not feel contented to see men and women going for a stroll, playing, or laughing like brothers and sisters? Again their happiness does not help us to forget our misery, rather redoubles it. The more I see the expression of happiness on the faces of the British ladies here, the more I am reminded of the humble and tired faces of the subjugated Indian women.

Many races lack the strength, intelligence or unity but with the help of a strong patriotic feeling they have succeeded in retrieving themselves from their wretched condition. But we do not even know what patriotism is. We go on with our lives normally in spite of watching the miserable condition of our country. And even after witnessing tyranny on our country, we are not agitated enough to give up our selfish, luxurious pursuits. Like animals everyone is concerned with his own happiness only, completely unconcerned with the well-being of the country. We never think deeply about things which will help the country to progress further or things that might hamper it.

In conclusion I would just like to say that in the present times it is more advisable to think of the present and the future and not to go into unnecessary boasting about the past. The wise man understands the history and treads cautiously in the present and the future. We can get the actual picture of the present by looking at both our country and the foreign ones. How can we improve our present state and what will be better for our future should be our constant thought and course of action. A historical discussion of all the civilized and prosperous races shows that there have been constant changes among them. They have changed gradually and in due course have transformed themselves a lot to become a developed country. It is also seen that those races which have remained static have gradually become degenerated. Like human beings, animals and plants also constantly evolve; it is also one of the chief duties of the races to constantly modify themselves. So there is only one way to solve the present miserable state of our country – change and development.

Many people keep shouting for freedom and also get others unnecessarily excited about it; but we must first contemplate whether we truly deserve to be free, whether we shall be able to maintain that state of freedom and most importantly, whether we have the strength to attain that

freedom. Before attaining something it is important to find and follow the ways to attain it. We must first think out clearly whether we have the qualities of that race which we want to defeat and whether we have inculcated that strength, knowledge and means with which they have managed to rule us. If we do not have these than we must stop our tall claims and first try our best to inculcate those qualities and weed out all our superstitious and harmful traditions.

I have left all my friends and relations to live in this foreign land. It was very difficult to leave my motherland and come here. There is no such hope that I shall even get to see the land of my birth and my dear kith and kin again. For a number of days my mind was being agitated with various kinds of thoughts and at times it becomes difficult to contain my heart's anguish and misgivings. Since my arrival in England these sufferings have doubled and that is why I have tried to express a part of it in this book and console myself. If any part of the book appears bitter to my countrymen, I hope that they would remember the statement that one who shouts most, feels most, and pardon me. There are other people who could have written such a text in a much better language, could have expressed themselves in richer words but nobody could have had the intense sufferings this Bengali lady, living in a foreign land, had undergone. Readers, both men and women, please discard the sections of this book which you deem unfit and accept if there is anything worthy in it. If this book is able to generate new perceptions or help reconsider the issues of *swadesh* and *videsh*¹, then I shall consider all my efforts fruitful.

Oh mother! Here, I had come to England, a free country / with a lot of hope that/ I shall find everlasting peace here./ but oh Mother India! Where is happiness?

¹ Literally, it means one's own country and the foreign land. But *swadesh* cannot be fully explained as one's own country. It has a nuance which Tagore pitches against nationalism on his essay on this subject. Consequently then, *videsh* becomes that which is opposite to *swadesh*.

The more I listen to the songs of freedom here, / the more I see the happy people all around, / the more my heart breaks into a hundred pieces, / and I drown myself in my tears.

Look at England here, small enough/ to be your daughter. But by her prowess, / strength, courage and spirit, makes the world tremble / and all the human beings are scared/ of her brave sons.

But no one is scared of us. / Finding us to be gutless, they chase us away. / Oh mother! They then take away all your wealth and put you in fetters.

That is why when I see these spirited souls/ their happiness, wealth and fame, / I hate to continue living/ in this lowly state of disgraceful bondage.

If you had been devoid of any beauty/ only a vast stretch of desert, / even that would have been better than this state of subjugation. / What is the use of this life without any respect/ where we have to tolerate only humiliation by others.

Or it would have been better mother, if all of us / were surrounded by the darkness of ignorance/ like the uncivilised race of the Zulus but had our freedom with us. / Even then we would not have suffered thus.

What is the use of becoming knowledgeable, / civilized and accomplished/ if we do not get that priceless gem/ that which is considered the greatest in this world? / It will only make us suffer.

I can understand your misery better/ from this distant land / which only redoubles/ the excruciating pain. / Oh mother! My life as a Bengali is becoming unbearable

That is why I think once again/ if I could live in complete ignorance/ then I would not have to cry so much / or suffer due to my broken heart/ living in this distant land of England, the land of independence.

I can see here immense wealth/ that has sailed to England / from India / making her a pauper forever. / These will never be returned to her again.

I can further see their flag/ fluttering proudly over the palace/ from where the Empress rules/
England and India/ wearing the crown of *Koh-i-noor*¹.

But whenever I think/ of the History of *koh-i-noor*'s jourey to England/ and how it was
appropriated by them/ my heart swells with sadness.

The Goddess of Britain/ does not do any injustice by you. / Yet I cannot think of that. /
Whenever I think that the jewel which once belonged to Ranjit² is now worn by her/ my blood
boils.

Again, see these sons of England/ they own the priceless wealth of freedom/ and therefore they
move about proudly as if they are as brave as/ *Bheem*³, *Duryodhan*⁴ or as steady as *Karna*⁵. /
They are always immersed in their own happiness.

Look at the fair-skinned women here/ proud and happy in their mien. / The shackles of bondage
cannot even touch them / and their faces glow with sparks of courage.

Even if I search near the high Himalayas/ or the Vindhya or near Kanyakumari, / I cannot see
any such brave son born out of your great womb./ This has disgraced entire India.

¹ The 105.6 metric carats diamond which forms the central jewel of Victoria's crown after she was proclaimed the empress of India in 1877 originally belonged to India and was the largest diamond of that period. The British East India Company had confiscated it and sent it to England where it later became a part of the British Crown Jewels.

² The *koh-i-noor* had changed many hands. For a period of time it had also belonged to Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab. After the British confiscated his estate and proclaimed India to be a part of the British Empire, the jewel was also taken by them.

³ The second brother of the *Pandavas* known for his prowess in fighting with mace. In the battle of *Kurukshetra* in the *Mahabharata* he had played an important role.

⁴ The eldest brother of the *kauravas*, whose claim to throne led to the battle of *Kurukshetra* against the *Pandavas*. In spite of being a valiant fighter, he was defeated and lost his life in the battle.

⁵ The illegitimate son of *Kunti* and therefore the eldest brother to the *Pandavas*. He had been brought up by a washer man and hence not accepted to be a warrior by the *Pandavas*. In the battle of *Kurukshetra*, he fought for the *Kauravas*.

Punjab, located in one part of the country, is crying hard. / Maharashtra too is crying day and night. / Bengal, on seeing tears in the eyes of her educated sons, /thinks how can they bear their mother being tortured and do nothing?

At some other place the *sati-sadhwis*/ know nothing better than shedding tears/ or a child-widow, unable to bear the hardships of widowhood/ cries hard in a lonely cottage. / Yet she cannot come out of that bondage / which instead of giving her happiness/ has caused only immense pain.

Again somewhere a daughter of India/ at all times sorrowful thinks silently/ of the shackles of *adhinata* that has bonded everyone. / This drives her almost mad/ but whoever cares for their pains? / Whoever peeps through their cover of fear and superstitions?

And here a son of India/ has tears in his eyes. / He has neither wealth nor respect. / But oh mother! Who will now come/ to his help in such bad times/ and for how long will he spend his time in weeping?

Seven hundred years have been spent in weeping/ and our *swadesh* has remained under the *videshis*./ I cannot stand your agony anymore./ it seems that a fire of sorrow burns within the country./ I spend my days/ thinking of India's pitiable condition./ I cannot anymore bear / this miserable condition./ A fire burns within me.