Chapter-V

Customs, Traditions and Religious Beliefs

The customs and traditions of the literate and illiterate men and women, poor and rich, provide a great deal of cultural and philosophical justification. They have the merits of creating an atmosphere of a real, living, and pulsating India. ‘Religious beliefs’ include the manners and customs which attracted, repelled or disgusted the characters and the social life. Indian religion, mysticism, and philosophy cast their spell on the characters.

Anandamath

Bankim Chandra's great interest in science served as an aid to national development. His involvement in this field incorporated the recollection of ancient India’s great scientific achievements. He mentioned explicably the fact that Indians had a highly developed knowledge of astronomy. “He mentioned a number of other sciences for which ancient Indians were famous: Algebra, Geometry, Medicine, Psychology, Acoustics, and Ventriloquism.”

Bankim’s novels reveal a conflict that haunted his mind – a conflict between the achievements of the Rishis in scientific endeavour as compared to the scientific progress of the British. However, he referred directly to the conflict and

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described it in one of his essays:  

This sort of controversy exists between ancient science and modern science. Indians are caught in the middle... one group says, “The ancient darshan is our country’s. Whatever is our country’s is good, honourable and true. Modern science is foreign...” and there is another group in the middle who say, “We do not know which one we should respect. We do not know what is in philosophy or what is in science... If it is possible to go along believing both, then we believe both. But if you really force us to a decision, then we will support science... If we do not support science, people nowadays will call us idiots. If we support science, release from the rigid rules of Hinduism can be obtained without difficulty. Therefore, we will support science... The third group of those in the middle say, “We have no special liking or dislike for the ancient darshan simply because it is native. We will believe whatever is true, ... we will not feel harmed if anyone call us... an idiot because of this... we shall decide on the basis of our own understanding...”

This may be a superficial analysis of the conflict of which Bankim Chandra described in the above-mentioned analysis. His strong leaning towards the occult is contained in his essays, but they are explicitly revealed in the novels, exposed straight and raw. Many of his novels feature a ‘guru’ or a spiritual mentor with superhuman merits. This role is handed over to the mystic leader of the ‘Sanyasis’, Satyananda in Anandamath. Miraculous events in Bankim Chandra's novels are concerned with the attainment of physical cures by the mystic touch of a miraculous being. The mysterious physician of Anandamath revives Jiban with his healing touch and disappears. Bankim Chandra frequently restores to supernatural elements intervening the deadly serious tone of Anandamath. Supernatural and magical elements serve as a means for rescuing his plots:

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2 Chattopadhyay, Bankim Chandra., Jaibanik, Bangadarshan, Kartik 1280.
This observation is important because it is one of the most tangible manifestations we have of that turn of mind. Bankim Chandra exhibited when he was led away from objective studies in history to the more subjective pursuits of nationalism, from the reasoned discussion of philosophy to the mystic discourses on ‘Krishna’ and the impassioned references to “Kali”, from the creative art of his earlier fiction to the undisciplined emotionalism of his later work.\textsuperscript{4}

The degenerating traditional values were a predicament of the contemporary social reality. Bankim Chandra breached in such an exigency of social reform. He heralded the dawning of an age of progressive social thinking related to people who formed the society. In his step towards social regeneration, Bankim Chandra created a bond of brotherhood between high and low caste people. This was prolifically portrayed in Anandamath. It remains a notable and praiseworthy example when Bankim deals cruelty with the extremely harsh social rules by presenting the character of the strong-willed patriots — the sanyasis,

“The sanyasis of Anandamath renounced caste upon entering order and were forbidden to observe any of these social restrictions. It is much probable that this was a device intended to drive home the point that the service of Mother India was the responsibility of all strata of society.”\textsuperscript{5}

\textit{House of Cards}

Tarashankar was a man of traditions and remained deeply adhered to old values. This was the reason why he was readily accepted by the readers. He wrote

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4} Van Meter, Rachael Rebecca., \textit{Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and the Bengal Renaissance} (Michigan University Microfilms, 1965), p. 40.
\item \textsuperscript{5} \textit{ibid.}, p. 53.
\end{itemize}
not about a particular individual but of a group of people acting, reacting and sharing the feelings together. Though he wrote continuously of human progress, he was a lover of the traditions deeply rooted in the mind of our nation. He wrote about the people around him and his writing finds root in the lives of the people of rural Bengal. Tarashankar excelled as he had the knowledge, depth and an expansive vision.

A close introspection of the *House of Cards* may reveal the true flavour and fragrance of Bengali culture. Culture forms the backdrop of the story and even enhances Shaila’s various exaggerated circumstances. As the story opens, we find the mother-in-law making a fuss over a small issue of missing cup. The mystery of the missing cup had left her shouting noisily like “a piece of brinjal spluttering in burning hot oil” (*HOC*, 2). This simile of a piece of brinjal spluttering in hot oil is a common Bengali proverb used for someone spluttering in anger and irritated utterly to heights. This proverb is used quite often in a Bengali household while discussing about an individual spitting wrath all around in anger and disgust. ‘Begun Bhaja’ or Eggplant fritters is also a common scene in each and every Bengali kitchen, a common delicacy and a necessity in the Bengali menu. The ‘bhaja’ or fritters, which is a common accompaniment, literally means deep-fried, coated in chickpea flour and poppy-seed batter.

Another ingredient used most specifically in Bengali cuisine is ‘hing’ or

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6 Debi, Mahashweta., *op.cit.*, p. 54.
asafoetida. ‘Hing’ finds mention quite strongly in the story and more specifically the Afghani ‘hing’ which is supposed to be rare and the best.

Tarashankar furnishes each and every minute detail that may seem to be habitual and in close proximity to a reader akin to Bengali culture. But the finesse in the art lies when the translation of the text embraces the reader and holds him firm, not even once letting him realise the cultural difference. Sanchayita Chatterjee presents the whole story in a compact frame that reflects a true, just and genuine image of the original text. She has not missed even a single minute detail that completely finds mention in the original. The translated work very well carries its responsibility of transcending the cultural barrier. One, who is ignorant about Bengali culture and is devoid of its flavour, may ultimately appear to be a part of it, contented and gay in his mind and heart after a close introspection of the translated work.

Towards the end, a hint of the cultural tradition mesmerises the readers when Shaila’s mother-in-law accepts her again even after her fault, calling her ‘Lakshmi’ of her house. Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, spreads success and prosperity and it is supposed in Indian culture that daughter-in-law of a family is considered to usher in the wealth and prosperity along with her auspicious steps in the house. This is immensely touching and also a matter of pride that we are bound together in the strands of love, joy and happiness not only for ourselves but for each and everyone. This comes out habitually as it is dug deep in our souls as the seed of culture and tradition.
*Song of the Road*

*Song of the Road* is a motley multi-coloured absolute portrayal of the life of a Brahmin household seen through the eyes of their two young children Apu and Durga. Bandhopadhyaya's apprehension of the childlike innocent mind, society and nature remains unrivalled. He writes with a natural realism unmarred by adult condescension. The social environment embraces the cultural legacy in every sphere of life, whether quirk and holidays, religious festivals, daily worship or the grim rites of death. The customs and traditions guide the reader to sense the reality of family ties and to see through the power of the supernatural in ordinary things, the relations between the castes and between rich and poor. Bandopadhyay creates such a picture of rural Bengal that introduces one to an area of life which is a raw scene to those who know only a little about it.

The first part of *Song of the Road*, entitled *The Old Aunt*, depicts the social customs prevalent in Bengal, even before the early 20th centuries and the throttled existence of the victims of the erstwhile social system in the early twentieth century. Indir Thakurun, living in utter disaster as a burden of the Roy family, more explicitly points out the poverty stricken Roy Family. Indir Thakurun, being the victim of the system (Kulin Marriage) always had been the liability of her father, later his brother Horihor. Finally, when she was turned out by Shorbojaya, she felt completely helpless without the shade of his brother and eventually died on the road.
Every occasion celebrated with gaiety, pomp and fervour becomes an inevitable reminiscence of the few faint memories in Indir’s life. How the bright golden days of merry and rejoice flew away, “that there had ever been a time when the whole village gathered there to celebrate the ‘Lakshmi Puja’ Festival. What dice playing went on in that vast room every morning and evening?” The most popular festivals of Bengal being: ‘Saraswati Puja’ - worship of the Goddess of learning, ‘Durga Puja’ - worship of the divine Mother, ‘Lakshmi Puja’ - worship of the Goddess of wealth, ‘Dol’ - the festival of colours and a celebration of the triumph of good over the evil, ‘Kali Puja’ - the worship of the Goddess of destroyer of evils, ‘Bhai Phota’ - the special day for brothers, on which the sister prays for the brother’s safety, success and well-being. The greatest social and religious event of the Bengali calendar is ‘Durga Puja’, a festival in October given over to the worship of the Mother Goddess. “And for the winter festival eighty to ninety pounds of rice used to be ground up for cakes and sweets. If she closed her eyes Indir Thakrun could see it all as before.” (SOR, 7)

By long established custom the Durga festival was celebrated at the Ganguli’s house everyone in the village was invited, and no one, not even the poorest’ was excluded from the banquet. It was an elaborately organised affair. The workmen came at the appointed time and erected the image of goddess; painters decorated it; gardeners decked it with garlands and men of the bauri caste brought piles of lotuses from the Modhukhali pond. Dinu, the flute player from Ansmali, came and played as he had done for many years past; and the tune he played was one which expresses the joy of the earth that with the dawn the goddess Durga would come home again. It is a song of loving welcome to autumn, with its new rice and budding shephalika flowers, when the migrating birds come flying in over the Himalayas, and the dark goddess’s evening lotuses are fragrant and heavy with dew. (SOR, 298 – 299)
Along with the cultural festivals the ritual of ‘Jagaddhatri Puja’ and all the preparation of ‘grinding rice’, ‘the noise of the husker’ and ‘the golden bangles sliding up and down the hands of the wife of Ray family’ enamoured an appearance of goddess ‘Jagaddhatri’ herself. Mingled with the tender moments are the demoniac moments when her bangles and silver wristlets were taken off her arms and she had to rub the vermillion mark off her forehead leading to a brutal acceptance of turning a widow.

The innocence in the trivialities of Apu and Durga paint an altogether delightful cultural hue in hiding the ‘cowrie’ shells which they “kept hidden away for fear anybody should know they were there . . . .” (SOR, 59) as they had pulled them out from the basket their mother used while saying prayers to Lakshmi. The naughtiness in the fear of receiving beatings for touching the oil jar without wearing washed clothes required in the preparation of a delicacy, mango pickle, to tickle their taste buds:

Indir Thakrun was lying under the plinth of the Palit’s rice barn; and there could be no doubt that she was dying . . . Phoni, the eldest son of Dinu Chokrobarti, heard them talking as he was going by, and he came into see what was happening. ‘How very fortunate that you’ve come!’ they all exclaimed as they saw him. ‘Pour some Ganges water into her mouth. You can see what a fix we’re in. There aren’t any Brahmins in this part of the village, and we are at our wit’s end to know who would give her Ganges water.’ (SOR, 47–48)

In the case of death rituals among Bengalis, when death is imminent the person is administered a few drops of ‘Gangajal’ by the son or a close relative and
in case of the dying person being a Brahmin, only another Brahmin is assigned to pour the Ganges water. After death the body is bathed and clothed in white except for a woman survived by her husband who is dressed in a coloured sari. Before the body is taken to the cremation ground the foot impression of the deceased is taken with red ink on a piece of paper. The body is then carried to the cremation ground for the funeral. It is then kept on a pyre. The priest after whom the eldest son of the deceased circles the pyre seven times then performs a ‘pindo daan’. Then he lights the pyre to the chant of mantras. This is called ‘Daho Sanskar’. Then the remains are collected and kept in an earthen pot- ‘matki’. These are brought home and purified with milk, curd, etc. and made into a ball. This ball is then immersed in the water in a ‘matki’. This is called ‘Asthi Bisorjan’. No cooking is done in the house for three days.

Poverty being attributed a pivotal role, the whole family of Apu – Horihor, Shorbojaya and Durga, toiled with the rising sun until dusk, in order to satisfy their hunger. The hunger for a good life, peaceful living, enjoyment and lip smacking food, either of which was a dream for all. Ignorant, yet aware of this vicious circle of meeting ends meet – aspired in Apu a thought, understanding and compassion for human struggle. Apu was in awe of the character of Karna. “Karna, the mighty hero . . . it was Arjun who won the Kingdom; it was Arjun who won the fame . . . but his was not the victory. Karna was the Victor; Karna it was who lived on in the tears of countless generations, ever present where love is born of human pain.” (SOR, 71)
The never-ending monotony of poverty was rarely interrupted when the festive season was around. Apu and Durga’s twinkling starry eyes waited gleamingly with a dream of hope – that their father would return having earned some penny. Good enough for them to rejoice.

All the buzz of Durga’s wandering aimlessly, the impending intolerable insults could not drive away his undaunting spirit and immense love for Apu. Durga would not have been careful of her childish triflings and responsibilities but her deeply endearing love and affectionate care for Apu did not let her slip the ritual of annual Brother’s Day, “She had slipped out and had her bath early in the morning to get away from her mother, and then went to say her prayers under the papaya tree in the inner yard. It was the festival of the Holy Pond, when sisters pray for their brothers.” (SOR, 92)

Durga was well aware of all the traditions, customs and rituals. Her haughty and careless self had a cultural inclination essentially. Durga “went on with her prayers. Firstly she went through a number of ritual acts which were prescribed for this festival; then, drawing a deep breath, she began to intone –

Oh, holy pond; oh holy flower!
I worship you neath the noon-day sky
A maiden’s purity is my dower;
My brother lives and blast am I” (SOR, 93)

Blessings showered on Apu with immense love, care and heartfelt prayers of Shorbojaya. Although she had to manage too hard, the miserable state of
poverty, yet she managed to protect her children in whatever she could. From scolding Durga time to time, “Shorbojaya snapped her fingers, as mothers often do, and prayed to Shashti, the goddess of Children, to watch over. (SOR, 102) She even marked the baby face of Apu with Kohl to save him from all the evil eyes and happenings.

The inmates of the village also followed certain customs believed to be auspicious the violation of which was considered to be inauspicious. If the first job of the day was done unpaid, it was believed to be unlucky. Not only this, there were stringent rules about drinking from other’s glasses, being specifically mandatory among Brahmins. “If a Brahmin who has for any reason lost caste goes into an orthodox Brahmin house and asks for a drink of water, they will give him one; but the glass he drinks from immediately becomes unclean and has to be scoured and washed before anyone in the family can use it.” (SOR, 233) Offering water to an outcaste or anyone who had lost caste was considered to be ominous.

The people at Nischindipur could not keep themselves at bay at the news of the ‘Jatra’ coming up to their village. ‘Jatra’ or the street theatre rippled waves of exhilaration into the hearts and mind and most ineluctably into their mundane course of life. Day and night they planned their visits, sharpened their vision and toiled hard to make the most out of one of the heart rendering much awaited event. “Each evening people said they were coming by the morning train; and in the morning they said they were bound to arrive that afternoon. Apu was beside
himself with excitement . . . He had almost given up eating and washing and at night he could not sleep. He spent the whole night tossing this way and that all over his bed; for the 'jatra', the 'jatra' was coming. (SOR, 250)

Apu was elated, his joy knew no limits when a long-aspired and duly nurtured dream came true. “The 'jatra' at last began; and from that moment the earth for Apu ceased to exist, and all the people on it, except for himself and the actors on the stage in front of him.’ (SOR, 255)

The festal jubilation and merriment atoned to the toilsome arduous life of the villagers at Nischindipur. Their arduous back-breaking lives turned jubilant with cultural festivals marking the start of feasting and banqueting. The celebrations and preparations perpetuated as the seasons paved way for the auspicious days of praying and merry-making:

The 'Chorok' season was approaching. 'Chorok' is an annual festival in honour of the God Shiva. It is held at the end of the Bengali year and lasts for several days. In Nischindipur it was a village affair and every household was expected to make some contribution towards expenses. . . . It began with the arrival of a party of religious mendicants, sannyasis as they are called, about a fortnight before the date of the main festival. They went round the village, house by house, performing the 'gajon' a wild ecstatic dance which commemorated the ancient dance of the deity himself (SOR, 245–46)

After ten days of trumpeting and hymning the 'gajon' dance arrived the Blue-Worship Day, so named after Shiva, one of whose many epithets was God of the Blue Throat.
The principal rite of the Blue-Worship ceremonies took place in the evening. The sannyasis first performed a dance round a date-palm tree and then broke off the spikes from its trunk . . . the procession to the tree was followed by a swarm of children, Durga and Apu among them, who clustered round to watch. The spike-breaking dance over, the sannyasis led the way to the 'Chorok' tree, the huge 'Chatom' in the village cremation ground. Nearby stood a hut, walled in with palm branches where the Blue-Throated God would be venerated by the people. (SOR, 247)

Not a single festivity went uncelebrated nor was a single day of merriment whiled away. As a famous Bengali proverb goes – “Thirteen festivities in twelve months”, similar was the zeal and enthusiasm of the people who were so grounded and attached to their culture as a child is to its mother by the naval chord. Human society and culture breathe the air of customs and traditions and is kindled with values to attain the true reason behind humanity.

*The Puppet’s Tale*

Manik’s, *The Puppet’s Tale* is a live documentary of Bengali customs and traditions. As the story proceeds, the customs compliment the plot and the characters as a whole. The customs find subsequent mention throughout the play, and are depicted parallel to the story enhancing the ethnicity of the cultural heritage.

*The Puppet’s Tale*, though revolving around Sashi and his clan, covers not only the story of their life, but their merriment and joys in their festivities and celebration also. Amidst the hustle and bustle of Gaodia’s day to day life, Sashi finds a striking cultural unity in the thought process and belief of people. In
whatever matter they discussed or talked about, “They had identical feelings, identical notions of humour and identical sets of fears and superstitions” (PT, 23)

Sashi dealt with their views indifferently but couldn’t manage to escape the “closely attuned . . . minds of all these people devoid of individuality and originating . . . and how alike they thought.” (PT, 3). This attunement in attitude and belief of people was accorded on by the deep cultural bounding. Sashi’s mind couldn’t rest wandering about the practical reality that, “a clerk in zamindar’s estate office . . . a retired head postman . . . a teacher . . . and . . . a farmer” all belonged to a different trade and “they all measured up to identical standard of meanness and generosity”. People from varied strata of life were held together and welded of a common element – culture.

As a complete household, Haru Ghose’s family is introduced, where at the onset of dusk the ladies get ready for the evening lamp to be lit. At this moment when Kusum, the daughter-in-law of the house, omits to light the evening lamp in time, her mother-in-law creates a great fuss over the matter. Kusum’s omission of not lighting the evening lamp was a serious fault as “theirs being a respectable household and there being a daughter-in-law in the house, the omission was a serious matter” (PT, 23). It is customary and too auspicious to light a ceremonial lamp at dusk, among all the Hindu families irrespective of their caste and class. It is usually lit before the idol of the family God or Goddess and a ‘Tulsi’ plant in the yard. This custom is accompanied by blowing a conch shell three times, whose
trumpet and echo is believed to drive away evil spirits and the act is even good for one’s respiratory systems and in turn strengthens the lungs.

There are many more customs attached or to be followed with the lighting of evening lamp. One has to change clothes, preferably take a bath and purify oneself before prayers. Evening prayer and lighting the lamp is followed by purifying the household either by water or ‘Gangajal’, the holy water. It is also seriously impious to light holy lamp from the fire from oven. The divine sound of a conch shell is bolstered by the mystic sound of 'Ulu-dhwani'. The amalgamation of these magically angelic sounds reinforces an aura of peace and calm. It is a trilling sound made by moving one’s tongue against the lips. It is believed to be too auspicious in any spiritual, religious and family gathering. The ‘Ulu-dhwani’ purifies and sanctifies not only the environment but the inner soul also. It is an inevitable ritual whether during a marriage, a child’s birthday and in any good celebration.

Another remarkably auspicious feature of Indian or Bengali culture is procrastinating before elders. Touching elders’ feet is a widely practised and a strongly held custom, a gesture to make our obeisance to elders. “It has been a Hindu tradition since ‘Satyug, Tretayug and Dwaparyug' to touch the feet of one’s father and mother, teachers and elders . . . This promotes humility in an individual and also makes the other person feel important, thereby a person learns to be humble, courteous, and respectful. The physical effort involved provides useful
exercise and promotes vigour, enthusiasm and concern for others. It rids one of tension, it is motivating.”

Culture manifests itself in many forms and ways, customs and traditions with a logical and a deeply embedded philosophy. Sashi is portrayed being silent and subtle in his father’s presence. Although Sashi is always against his father Gopal’s wrong acts, yet he manages to display utter silence, for the respect as a son towards his father even when he protests. As consenting to parents’ or elders’ will is staunch Indian belief which may have loosened its clutch in today’s modern world, yet he can be dominantly seen even today in Indian culture.

A significantly traditional belief of Bengali culture is portrayed in the form of 'Ekadasi' day. It is the eleventh day after each full moon and new moon. This day is observed as a day of fast by Hindu widows and devout people, but it is customary and a must for a married woman to eat fish or meat on this day. It is meant to be auspicious bringing long life to husbands. Kusum is rebuked by her mother-in-law for observing fast on 'Ekadasi' day, as this is considered a cardinal offence and a severe sin in failing to observe this.

Sashi’s bonds with his sister Bindu always remained strong, but being helpless at the state of affairs and her illegible marriage, both could not meet each other for a long time. Sashi decides to meet at the annual Brother’s Day. This being

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a festival of great rejoice and festivity for the brothers and sisters especially in Bengal. It is the second day after the new moon in the late autumn, observed piously by the sisters for the welfare of their brothers, who are smeared sandalwood paste on their forehead thrice along with a prayer and blowing of the auspicious conch shell as a blessing for long life and good health.

Two other events of festivities that find profound mention are the Harvest festival and the Chariot festival. “The Harvest festival drew near. The village resounded with the ceaseless working of masking tapes in every home” (PT, p.78). The Harvest festival brings with it loads of merriment and various sweet dishes prepared out of rice flour and date-jaggery. It is celebrated on the thirteenth or fourteenth of January as per the calendars – to celebrate the harvesting of main crop of paddy.

The Chariot festival is a major event for the Vaishnav Hindus specially. It is held on the second day after the new moon in the early rainy season. The wooden images of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balbhadra and Goddess Subhadra are placed on huge wooden chariots, specially designed and drawn by men from the temple to Lord’s maternal house. Here, Lord Jagannath is believed to rest for eight days. This day is considered highly auspicious and also marks the start of sowing season of summer crops in eastern India.

Apart from the festivities, the worship of mother Goddess also forms a major part of the eternal devotion of Hindus. A belief practised sincerely
religiously and enthusiastically all over India till date. The worship of 'Mother Sitala' (Goddess Sitala) for the cure of epidemics like smallpox and cholera is strikingly mentioned in the story. People tend to neglect vaccination and believe in prayers for the cure. Although the scene has changed in the present world, with people being aware of vaccination and proper treatment, yet 'Mother Sitala' is still believed to be the deity who cures it.

The 'Sharadiya Navaratri' or the Durga Puja celebrations are yet another staunchly believed ardently followed and joyous custom. Held in mid-autumn, it is the greatest festival in Bengal for nine days with great ceremony, feast, music, fairs and lots of entertainment. This festival is observed as the victory of Goddess Durga, an incarnation of the all powerful 'Shakti' over the demon and evil power. With people clad in new clothes, being another customary, visit various Pandals vividly decorated with full artistic fervour, where Goddess Durga and her complete family including Goddess Lakshmi, Saraswati, Lord Ganesha and Kartik are instituted and life is infused (‘Pran pratishtha’) into them. The prayers and rituals take place strictly and people offer their presence devoutly.

Another significant custom being followed ritually is the cremation of the dead, whether Haru Ghose or Jadav – the sage, rules of caste were maintained strictly. According to Hindu culture, the dead is cremated and the ashes are consigned to the holy rivers, “in a gesture symbolic of the return of the physical elements of the body to the source.”

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When Haru Ghose’s body was identified by Sashi, the boatman Gobardhan was forbidden by Sashi to touch his body, since he was a boatman by caste and was not apt to touch Haru’s body. Also it was believed that unnatural untimely death shows the doors of salvation, “Since Haru had died an unnatural death, there was no salvation for his anyway, whether Gobardhan handled it or not” (PT, 2).

When Jadav’s wife breathes her last, “A married Brahmin lady washed the froth off lips with holy Ganga water.” This was a custom to be followed by a married woman only, since Jadav’s wife died married – in her full beauty of ‘Sindoor’ (vermillion) and the traditional ornaments worn for husband’s long life. “Jadav breathed his last at dusk. Sashi, debarred from touching his body because of his lower caste, anxiously cried from a distance . . .” for Ganga water to be poured between his lips. The pouring of holy Ganga water is again a ritual that ushers in salvation for the soul. It purifies the soul and helps in its union with the almighty.

*Evam Indrajit*

Although 'Indrajit' marries another ‘Manasi’, yet he occasionally meets the real ‘Manasi’. Life seems no longer to be the same. Indrajit finds himself nowhere. To him, life seems to behold nothing exciting or new. His married life goes on smoothly and his friendship goes hand-in-hand. But Indrajit finds himself treading between the “rails of the railway line”, “I look back . . . the iron rails meet in a point far away; I look ahead . . . the same two iron rails meet in a point far away.
The further I move the more the points move too. What is behind is ahead. There is no distance between the past and the future. What’s there in the past is in the future as well.” (EI, Act III, 55)

For Indrajit, life is lifeless, stagnant, dormant, without any aim, any motive or any achievement. His dreams remain unfulfilled, his desires unkept and his thirst unquenched. Indrajit turns into a mechanical Indrajit, one like Amal, Vimal and Kamal. To what he changes is what he learns at the end, “Whatever I wished to have, I have got. But there is no sense of achievement in it that is the bitter truth”. (EI, Act III, 48)

As Indrajit prays and insists on his being just an ‘ordinary man’, not Indrajit but Nirmal, we find the identity crisis haunting him once again. The Writer also asserts at this point that they have no hope and no future. Wherever they are marching towards, the journey remains futile and meaningless. We visualise all three of them drowning in an “inescapable sadness of life” with their hands stretched out calling for help, when it’s not too late for them and us to understand the Sisyphus analogy.

Man’s futile search for weaning unity and clarity in the face of an unintelligible world devoid of God and eternal truths or values leads one to compare his state and the absurdity of man’s life with the situation of ‘Sisyphus’. This Greek mythological character was condemned to repeat forever the same

9 Dubey, Satyadev., Introduction.
meaningless task of pushing a rock up a mountain, only to see it roll down again. One thus realises that the struggle in itself is a mighty job and one must imagine Sisyphus to be happy.\footnote{“The Myth of Sisyphus”, Encyclopaedia Wikipedia Online: 2009. Encyclopaedia Wikipedia. 7 Jan. 2009. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/the_myth_of_sisyphus.html>.
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Towards the end a question torments the reader as to what did Indrajit, Manasi or the Writer achieve? What will be the ray of hope that would ignite their souls to live their whole life and leave the world peacefully? Were they destined to remain alive in a state of loss all their life? Will God not look upon these innocent lives? “One needs faith to live. Faith in God, faith in fortune, faith in man, faith in work, faith in revolution, faith in oneself . . . faith in love . . .” (EI, Act III, 49).

None of the above faiths is alive in either of them – in the modern man. The trivialities and values of life turn us to puppets with unreal feelings, no one to share the bleeding heart, artificial likes and dislikes, posed respect and over-burdened mind – full of deadlines and responsibilities to meet. Life goes on worthlessly in the balancing act of satisfying each one around us. We feel so proud of being clinged to our family values and social laws that we turn a deaf ear to our heart which screams, pains, hurts and is battered and tattered – with no one to hear its innocent cry of love and life. “For us there is only the road – so walk on. We are the cursed spirits of Sisyphus. We have to push the rock to the top - even if it just rolls down.” (EI, Act III, 59). “We must live, we must walk, we must go on . . . There’s no end . . . There’s no hope . . . But the road, the endless road”. (EI, Act III, 60).