

ADRIFT ON THE GANGA

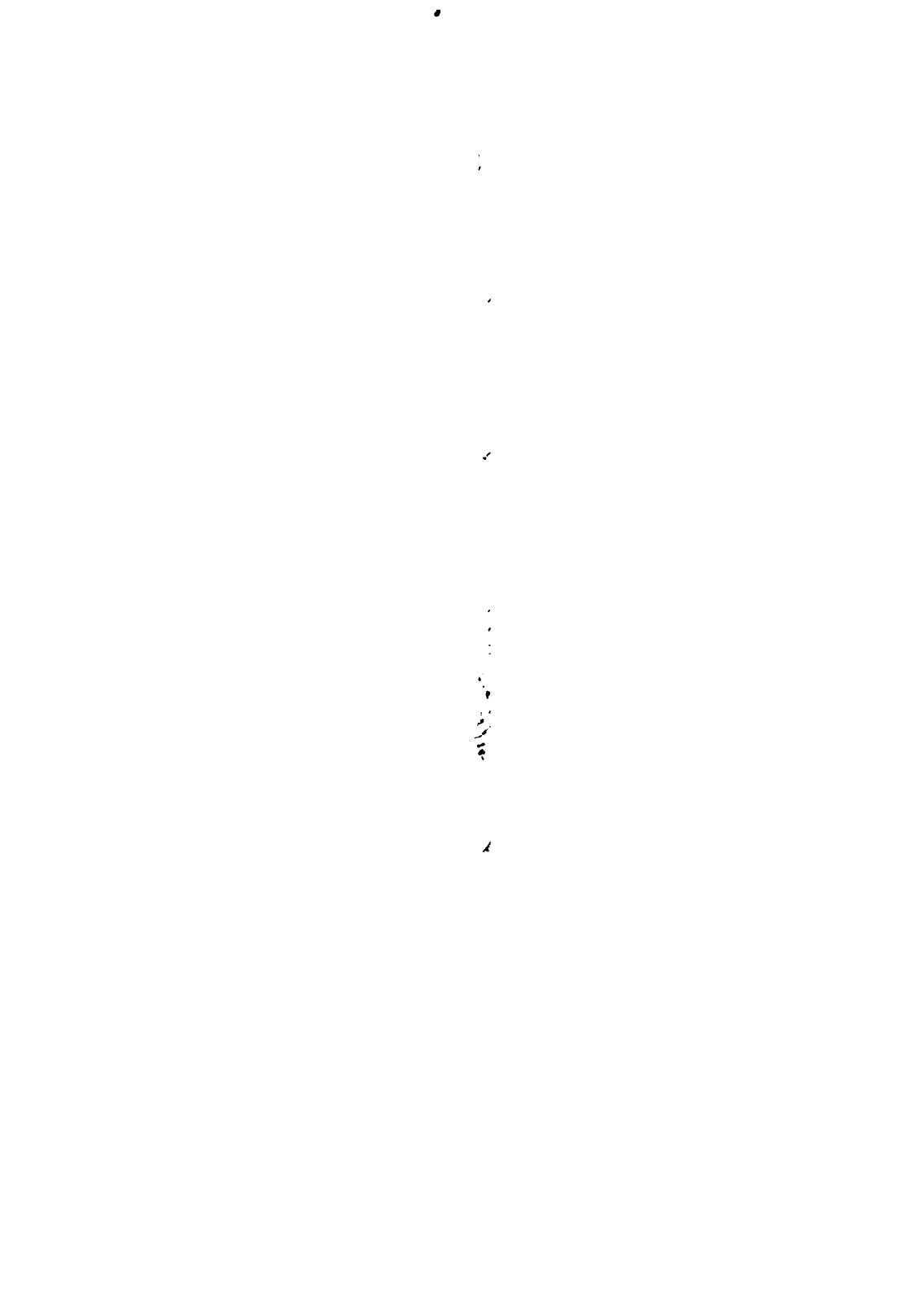
By

SATYANARAYAN SINHA

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BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN
BOMBAY



आ नो भद्रा : क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ।

Let noble thoughts come to us from every side

—Rigveda, 1-89-i

BHAVAN'S BOOK UNIVERSITY

General Editors

K. M. MUNSHI

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120

ADRIFT ON THE GANGA

BY

SATYANARAYAN SINHA

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SATYANARAYAN SINHA



1964

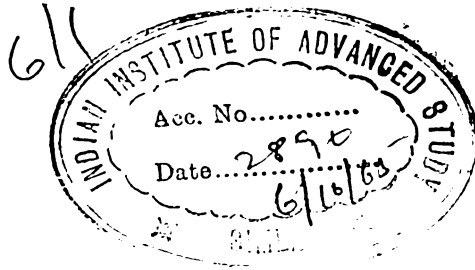
BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

CHAUPATTY, BOMBAY

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First published, June 1964



De Luxe Edition

Price Rs. 6.00, Sh. 11/- or \$ 2.80

Rupee Price (Outside India) Rs. 7.00

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PRINTED IN INDIA

By P. A. Raman at *Inland Printers*, Victoria Mills Building,
55 Gamdevi Road, Bombay 7, and Published by S. Ramakrishnan,
Executive Secretary, Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay 7.

GENERAL EDITOR'S PREFACE

THE BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN—that Institute of Indian Culture in Bombay—needed a Book University, a series of books which, if read, would serve the purpose of providing higher education. Particular emphasis, however, was to be put on such literature as revealed the deeper impulsions of India. As a first step, it was decided to bring out in English 100 books, 50 of which were to be taken in hand almost at once. Each book was to contain from 200 to 250 pages and was to be priced at Rs. 2.50.

It is our intention to publish the books we select, not only in English, but also in the following Indian languages : Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam.

This scheme, involving the publication of 900 volumes, requires ample funds and an all-India organisation. The Bhavan is exerting its utmost to supply them.

The objectives for which the Bhavan stands are the reintegration of the Indian culture in the light of modern knowledge and to suit our present-day needs and the resuscitation of its fundamental values in their pristine vigour.

Let me make our goal more explicit :

We seek the dignity of man, which necessarily implies the creation of social conditions which would allow him freedom to evolve along the lines of his own temperament and capacities ; we seek the harmony of individual efforts and social relations, not in any makeshift way, but within the frame-work of the Moral Order ; we seek the creative art of life, by the alchemy of which human limitations are

progressively transmuted, so that man may become the instrument of God, and is able to see Him in all and all in Him.

The world, we feel, is too much with us. Nothing would uplift or inspire us so much as the beauty and aspiration which such books can teach.

In this series, therefore, the literature of India, ancient and modern, will be published in a form easily accessible to all. Books in other literatures of the world, if they illustrate the principles we stand for, will also be included.

This common pool of literature, it is hoped, will enable the reader, eastern or western, to understand and appreciate currents of world thought, as also the movements of the mind in India, which, though they flow through different linguistic channels, have a common urge and aspiration.

Fittingly, the Book University's first venture is the *Mahabharata*, summarised by one of the greatest living Indians, C. Rajagopalachari; the second work is on a section of it, the *Gita*, by H. V. Divatia, an eminent jurist and a student of philosophy. Centuries ago, it was proclaimed of the *Mahabharata*: "What is not in it, is nowhere." After twenty-five centuries, we can use the same words about it. He who knows it not, knows not the heights and depths of the soul; he misses the trials and tragedy and the beauty and grandeur of life.

The *Mahabharata* is not a mere epic; it is a romance, telling the tale of heroic men and women and of some who were divine; it is a whole literature in itself, containing a code of life, a philosophy of social and ethical relations, and speculative thought on human problems that is hard

to rival; but, above all, it has for its core the *Gita*, which is, as the world is beginning to find out, the noblest of scriptures and the grandest of sagas in which the climax is reached in the wondrous Apocalypse in the Eleventh Canto.

Through such books alone the harmonies underlying true culture, I am convinced, will one day reconcile the disorders of modern life.

I thank all those who have helped to make this new branch of the Bhavan's activity successful.

1, QUEEN VICTORIA ROAD,

NEW DELHI :

3rd October 1951.

K. M. MUNSHI

AUTHOR'S NOTE

During Christmas 1962, I began writing "Adrift on the Ganga" along with "China Strikes" (published in London, April 1964) in the death cell of Ranchi prison on fruit wrappings. When released on January 31, 1963, I took the bundle of scrap paper with me, and finished writing this story while flying over the Kanchenjunga region in January 1964.

I have attempted in this book to narrate an autobiographical chronicle against the social and political background of our time. Fate had pitchforked me into the midst of the events I have described.

While dealing with my own personal problems and troubles, I have been conscious of the fact that they were not the centre around which the world revolved. Whatever happened to me personally is insignificant. It is our country that matters, and it is she who is destined to become the dynamic, revolutionary nation of this century.

This "Adrift on the Ganga" is just a photoflash to record the march of historical forces leading us ever onward.

SATYANARAYAN SINHA

*Over the Rhine on a Berlin-Bonn flight
May 1, 1964*

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PART I

THERE IS A TIDE

There is a tide in the affairs of men—

SHAKESPEARE

IN THE CURRENT

(i)

The Ganga is in full spate. Hundreds of villages have been swept away overnight. Black billowing clouds loom all over the horizon.

A young teacher is trapped on his school-island. At the first break of day he scanned the sky, and cried, "Good Lord! Is it Ganga or a howling sea?"

To the south-west drifted a straw roof like a raft. A boy of five clutched a bamboo pole, looked at a huge snake coiling round it, "Do I dive, sister?"

"No!" came the stern order. "Let's sing 'Fear not'".

"I can't".

"You must! Ten times".

Solemnly, thin childish voices chanted the song as a prayer. The wind became a hurricane. At the sixth count waves tipped over the straw-raft on to its side. Both children were thrown into the engulfing water.

When the teacher saw that the children had disappeared, he plunged deep into the swift current. In his first dip he found nothing. The maddening waves kept rising. He allowed two of them to pass over his head. Moving slowly, persistently, he spotted the long dark hair of the girl. Her arms now gone rigid stretched over her brother to hand him to the teacher as she had often done in life.

Tenderly, the teacher lifted the tiny body and swam back ashore. Quickly he removed the blouse with which

the sister had covered it against the cold. The boy had gulped much water but was alive.

When he regained consciousness, he enquired, "And... sister?"

The same question I repeat to this day.

(ii)

"Fear not! Fear not!!

Assured! Assured is victory".

The familiar Tagore song woke me, today, on January 26, 1963.

These last few weeks I have been thrown into cell No. 1 of the Ranchi prison. I do not know for what crime.

My only neighbour in cell No. 2 is an innocent man waiting to be hanged for a crime he probably had not committed. This morning it was he who had wakened me with that Tagore song. He has a striking similarity to Guruji, the teacher of my boyhood.

Upon the canvas of the dark condemned cell, a panorama of memories began to unfold images of my early days. From the loud roaring of the Ganga emerged human life fighting everything that blocked its strenuous course to progress and happiness.

I moved a little to receive the touch of warmth of the scanty sunrays penetrating my cell. In that glimpse outside, the scaffold of the jail-yard struck my eyes.

That was a challenge to life. Death so near to man. It touched me like an electric shock.

Instinctively I was thrown back into the folds of the Mother Ganga of my childhood.

(iii)

No river in the world has played such a great role in the emotional, devotional and national life of a people as the Ganga to India. For me, personally, not only the necessities of life—food and water—have been provided by mother Ganga, but also the very strength of will to fight for my existence as a Man. Besides, I have been the witness of many historic events on its banks, in some of which I have taken an active part. Here I saw and worked for the end of British rule, and the emergence and growth of a free India.

From my childhood on, whenever I have faced a difficult situation, I have put the sacred water of Ganga on my head for new inspiration and new determination to go on fighting.

Now, I lay as hypnotised in the condemned cell. With open eyes I imagined reaching the confluence of the Sone on the south and the Sarju to the north with the Ganga about four hundred miles from the sea.

In these regions the Ganga is restless in nearly all seasons, and changes her channel at whim. The poverty-stricken Gangetic population lose their straw-homes and land quite often during floods, and when spared by the currents are forced to build new ones.

Big villages and important settlements often yield to the terrific impact of the huge mass of water. Perhaps it is for this play of devastation and reconstruction that the Ganga is said to emerge from the hair of the great God of constant destruction and creation—Shiva, abiding on the Kailas peak of the Himalayas.

(iv)

My own first suffering on the Ganga came at the hands of a foreign ruler. By his one blow all the budding joy of life, all the latent imaginative force of future creative talent was cruelly bruised. That has been for me the most bitter lesson of the naked wickedness of man.

I was hardly five then. Mother had taken me to Ganga for a dip. Because of her daily bath in the river, her 'sari' was always the colour of the Ganga's water, muddy in rains and clear for the rest of the year. With the only spare 'sari' she possessed, she wrapped me up to stop me from shivering from my dip in the cold water. Now, she was about to return home in her wet clothes, and remain so until I warmed up and returned her 'sari'.

It was windy and through some holes in mother's 'sari' the cold reached my bones, prominently poking out in my thin body. Mother had still to stand in the water to pray to the Sun-God.

To get me warmed up quicker, she asked me to run ahead on the path to our mud house in the village. She was to catch me up halfway. And there, halfway to home I encountered my tragedy that day.

I had to cross a railway line to get to the village. A train had just stopped at the signal. Before me was a shiny saloon through which the red face of a white sahib looked out. His face was to me like an upturned pitcher just taken from the fire. He smiled at me throwing out a banana skin at my face. I remained motionless from awe and fear. Then he threw his burning cigar at me which somehow burned through mother's 'sari' and singed my skin. I had to throw away the 'sari' and was left with no clothes on.

I was sick with shame. The white sahab roared with laughter.

Caught in a blind fury, I picked up a stone to smash his face. But the guard of the train, another half-white sahab, turned up at that moment and struck me a hard blow with the butt of his red flag. The stone in my hand struck my own ankles and lamed me.

Hardly had I realised my handicaps when I felt some heavy slaps fall on my face. Blood streaked down my nose and I felt my cut lip uncomfortably thick. The guard scolded me and pushed me down forcibly to beg pardon from the white sahab. Only a porter dared to intervene on my behalf. "Merciful Sahab! Pardon him kindly! He is a poor grass-cutter's child."

The train moved on. The white sahab still laughing in his saloon threw out a copper piece which struck my head. Quite a number of people who were returning from the Ganga after washing away their sins were detained there due to the unscheduled stoppage of the train. I looked for my mother, but her prayers to the Sun-God were unusually long. Instead of her, my eighteen years old elder brother turned up. Without hearing what had happened, he began to scold me, "You are a disgrace to our family! How dare you throw away clothes and get smeared up with dust?"

He gave me a slap which blinded me completely. I fell down on the spot. His kick hit me on the very spot which had been singed. I reeled.

The swelling on my eyes did not allow me to see faces, but I heard and recognised voices. A railway pointsman was explaining to the crowd, "This small beast had the audacity to pick up a stone to throw at our *bara* Engineer Sahab!"

"Unheard of crime!" said a fat railway contractor, the

richest man of our locality, "stones at a white sahab? He is kind like God himself!"

"Now he may come back to take revenge on the whole village", said the betelnut seller at the railway station.

"Let his parents and all of us here thank our stars that we all have not been skinned by that white sahab for the ghastly attempt to stone him", a shoe-maker said.

"He has been served right", came the hoarse voice of my father; "he must have stumbled down running fast to cross the rail line."

And I felt another cracking whip fall on my back. Blows falling on me during those few minutes, seemed to transform my child's body to that of an old man's. I had seen the floating dead so often in Ganga. I would gladly have preferred death, so hated, despised and persecuted I felt.

(v)

Then the coarse hands of my mother picked me up. That moment I detested her most, for it was she who had brought me into this cruel world. I bit her hand.

She dragged me by force and forced my head in Ganga's current until I choked. I was determined to run away. It was immaterial to me, whether it was on Ganga's current like a dead body or alive in a new world. Only never to return to this wicked world.

But she pulled me up again with a violent reproach and further chastisement, "Don't cry like a girl! You are a boy—a lion's cub at that!"

IN SEARCH OF THE MAGIC FLUTE

(i)

The deep wounds inflicted upon me then, perhaps in 1917, have remained painful to this day. After all that misfortune, even as a grown-up, it looked for quite some time strange to me to have faith in human justice or the basic goodness in man. Life had become disgusting and shocking. The Ganga too had looked melancholy since then.

Now, as I recall the past, I find it could not have been otherwise. The thrashing I had received was not an exceptional case with me alone. In an average Indian village that has been, and to some extent remains, an usual procedure the children have to pass through. Maybe, it is the horrifying starvation and the naked poverty still existing in Indian villages which finds its expression in the cruel treatment to children.

Only when a new man came to our village seeking shelter as a teacher, whom we called Guruji, my luck took a different turn. He introduced us to Rabindranath's dream:

"Where the child is without fear
 Into that heaven of freedom,
 My Father,
 Let my country awake."

(ii)

That day, choked by Ganga's cold water and the fear of

further thrashings, I clenched my fist and teeth, and refused to revive. My mother pressed me hard to her bosom and covered one half of my body with the end of her 'sari' freshly dipped in Ganga. Nothing happened. She got alarmed.

The only fire available in the neighbourhood was in Guruji's prayer room. Hearing my mother cry, he came to us and carried me in his arms to the fire. After they had massaged me with some hot mustard oil, I opened my eyes.

It was a day. But not a care-free one any more. For several days after that I had to lie face down in fever. Several years after that I had a sickly health. Even much later, it looked as if my very soul was skinned out, making it unbearably sensitive to both—the human and the dehumanised behaviour of man.

(iii)

"In one salutation to thee, my God....", hummed Guruji at his prayers. He sang it in a rhythm which moved me much and whirled away from the surrounding cruel world. Finding me attentive, Guruji said, "This is Rabindranath's tune. When you are a little grown up and would like to learn, you shall go to see him. He will make something of you. He is the one who has come forward to stop child-beating."

(iv)

Already since the birth of my younger brother who was now three and had come to the world a little more than two years later than myself, I had become an unwanted child in the house. The only person left to shower her full

affection on me was now my cousin sister Rekha, who was about twelve. Considered as a grown-up girl soon going to be given in marriage according to the orthodox traditions of the village, she was not allowed any more to set her foot outside the small enclosures of our house. She had sheltered me often from the blows directed against me and taken over my shares of the thrashings as well.

The imprints of her face deeply engraved on the canvas of my memory are that of a perfect beauty. It is full of deep sincerity and emotion. Never have I seen those simple, childish, careless sad lines even on the faces of the Madonnas in any museum of the world. Not even in my mother's but in the lap of that sister had I the happy feeling: "I am not alone on this earth. This sister is always there for me."

It was she who broke open the doors of the fodder-barn I was locked in as a punishment for loitering alone on the banks of the Ganga. Pressing me deep to her bosom she wept and cried, "My poor little orphan!"

"I don't want to live any more!" I whispered sobbing.

"But you must, my darling!" She kissed my swollen face. "One day you will be a big man—shall be happy! For my sake. . . . dearest!"

The warmth of love I experienced those moments has never been repeated.

(v)

She pressed the food she had brought for me into my mouth. "You must get strong, my sweetheart! Stronger than those who have thrashed you today. All for my sake! My angell"

Her caresses brought me on the way to recovery. She

guarded me day and night from any unexpected blows falling on me. Then I asked her, "Why don't you come out of the house to guard me?"

"I am a big creature. They will kill me the moment I set my foot outside this house alone. When you are grown up, you will know, how many times they have thrashed me for taking you for a walk to Ganga."

"What are they afraid of?"

"If a stranger takes away a grown-up girl like me, that becomes a shameful affair for the family for all time to come."

"But they themselves forced our eldest sister to be dragged away by a stranger. Don't you remember how she howled when they took her out of these doors?"

"That was because sister was given in marriage to that man."

"Will they also drive you out of this house the same way?"

"I have only overheard that when the summer comes, they will marry me to a big man who works as a night watchman in Calcutta."

"But the moment you go away they will tear my body to pieces."

"I must do something about it."

"What can you do? Father and brother are very strong."

"Perhaps we would go away together somewhere far away."

"Where the boats in Ganga go and vanish altogether?"

"Yes. That is what Guruji had suggested once. He told your father that where this Ganga ends, there lives a sage who teaches children to read and write and to pray most wonderfully, without beating them. Those children who have learnt from him have become cleverer and have acquired more land for growing food than even the white

sahabs. Guruji had been to him, that is why he is so nice to all of us.”

“Of course, that sage would give us some candy and would not permit our elders to beat us. But how to reach him?”

“That is the problem I am going to solve.”

“Solve it soon, sister.”

“I will. I hate to think of becoming a slave of a night watchman. I will kill myself before they force me to go with him.”

“You can’t kill yourself and allow them to crack my bones. Why don’t you tell Guruji to tell a boatman to take us to that sage?”

“Once I did try that, but could not succeed. Your father gets wild if he ever detects me on the path leading to Guruji’s hut. You know, I’m an orphan myself. Your father can do anything with me that he likes. He has threatened to drown me in the Ganga if I ever talked to Guruji.”

“But it is Guruji who saved me.”

“Yes, it is also he who taught me to pray with a song which heals all the red and blue bruises of thrashings on the body of a child.”

“Would you not sing it for me?”

“I have been always singing it for you softly when you are asleep.”

“Sing it now.”

“No, your father will kill me, if he hears it. And he will kill Guruji too.”

“Why will he kill Guruji?”

“Because he suspects that in order to save me from the night watchman, Guruji may send me away to that sage who lives on Ganga’s end. But we can’t go on living in this

hell. We can't. I must find a way out for both of us, my little sweetheart."

(vi)

Through a hole in the roof of our fodder-barn a milky beam of moonlight appeared on the face of the sister. She had an idea: "My grandmother was considered to be the wisest woman in our locality. Before she died, she disclosed to me a secret. Lord Krishna had passed through this part of Ganga in a boat in his childhood. He had his favourite flute with him. As soon as he touched a child with that flute, all the wishes of the child were fulfilled, and thence onwards no one could touch his body. But a very wicked demon lived those days in our village. His habit was to have breakfast of two children a day. The day Krishna was passing this way, the demon came forward to devour him. Then Krishna had to hide his flute in the sand and take up a wheel-weapon to kill the demon. The demon was killed, and Krishna had still the wheel in his hand when his boat sailed for Mathura-Brindaban, his home place. That flute remains buried in Ganga's sand to this day."

"You must find it out, sister. That flute will touch our bodies, and no one dare thrash us. Then that night watchman will also not take you away from me."

"The grandmother said that only in full moon of this month that flute can be found out in the sand. It is good that everyone is sound asleep. I shall go tonight to get the flute."

As it is with the children, as soon as the idea came, it was put into action. Giving me a long, long parting kiss she assured: "You will see, dear brother, everything will come right. You shall be happy, we shall be happy for ever. Just don't move until I return."

Stealthily she left. Night became terribly fearful to me inside the fodder-barn. Hallucinations made me their prey till I fell asleep.

Loud barking of some dogs awakened me with a feverish agony. Creaking of a plank of the fodder-barn terrified me. My sister entered panting and suppressing her shrieks by biting her lips. My father thumped on the door with hard kicks, broke it open and knocked her off her feet shouting monstrously, "I must kill you. How dare you go out at night?"

She wailed in her thin voice, "I searched for the flute! Didn't go out to meet anyone. The dogs of the burning ghat have devoured a lot of my flesh. These are mad dogs. Leave me alone! I'm going to die just the same! If I bite your finger, you too will get mad and die. . . ."

At that moment, my mother threw herself at me and snatched me away. They slammed the doors and locked in my sister alone in the barn. I heard an elder member of our house saying, "Let her die soon! We shall save the fifty rupees dowry to the watchman!"

(vii)

My sister barked like the dogs which had bitten her. My hand and feet were tied to a pillar, so that I could not reach her. But I remember my moans to this day: "I will go to her! I must die with her!"

They took me to her only in her last moments. I saw her last dying struggle. Desperately she raised her arms to press me to her bosom. Two persons standing near by held them back. Her lips moved to call me. Eyes directed on me beat their last flutter.

Then, she was no more.

GANDHI AND THE GARLAND

(i)

In 1917, some revolutionary efforts were made in several parts of the world to change the hard destiny of man. Maxim Gorky said about the Russian revolution: "... Thus restless man marches on—onwards and upwards; ever onwards and upwards!"

In India Mahatma Gandhi started the movement against political and social injustice, and declared a 'war' against the very nature of the prevailing cruelties. According to him, the root cause of all evil in India was the foreign rule. Therefore, the basic task of Gandhian movement became the fight for India's freedom.

(ii)

When they returned from Ganga after burning my sister Rekha's dead body, the elder brother said: "Tomorrow morning you are leaving with me for Muzaffarpur."

I had to surrender. In spite of my obstinate resistance, blows had triumphed over my childhood dreams.

Muzaffarpur is a district town about 30 miles away from our village home. We had to reach there by train. I was looking forward to a trip by train with great excitement, but when it did actually materialise, I felt myself to be the most miserable creature on earth.

In a flash I spotted the spot where the white Sahab had thrown his burning cigar-tip on me. A little ahead was the sandy patch of Ganga where my sister had gone to search for the lost flute of Krishna. Beyond that was the wide expanse of the Ganga where boats with their big sails on, drifted leisurely towards the horizon where the sage who made miracle-prayers was supposed to live.

They all threw a parting glance at me.

(iii)

On reaching Muzaffarpur life became a nightmare to me once more. My brother lived in a hut pitched in a damp and dirty locality. The whole day he spent in his college and used the hut only to sleep at night. A co-villager who worked in town as a porter used to prepare some rice and watery pulses we took as our sole nourishment in the morning and late at night. The night one was mostly forced on me in my sound sleep.

After the hurried morning meal when brother left for the college and the porter for the town, I was left alone in the hut. This was the time when I felt a horde of 'demons' surrounding me as their target of attack. Finding myself defenceless, I used to cry loudly.

This was the signal for Devaki, a young girl who used to earn her living by garland-making, to come to console me: "Your mother would be soon here."

"Never", I resented; "She is far away in the village."

"Then come to me. I shall teach you how to make garlands. You can also eat with me."

(iv)

Soon, Devaki and one of her customers—Revadi, a dancing girl—adopted me as their younger brother. Devaki narrated the life of the fairies living in flowers, and Revadi displayed their life through her songs, music and dances. Quite often, we gathered some other children and acted the story of Champa with her six sisters and one brother. For me it was not an acting, but a real life of light and love. The wounds inflicted on me by human cruelties seemed quite curable.

About sun-set was the time for Devaki to leave for the temple-doors where she used to sell her flowers. Then it was Revadi who taught me letters. I applied to learning with a zest which only Revadi's affection for me could have explained.

Certain of her songs have made an everlasting impression upon me. Particularly the one she played on the flute for me. To me it was as if my dead sister's voice had come back to tell me, "Learn brother. For my sake. One day it will make you happy and a big man!"

"Yes, for her sake," Revadi, too, assured me. "After all that suffering for your sake, she is sure to come back to you . . . but only when you learn."

The memory of sister and the emotions which Revadi's flute awakened in me painted letters to which I was just getting introduced, as in a dream.

Revadi told me stories of the tragic life of orphans, and how they had turned their suffering into great happiness through learning. At the same time, she was most reluctant to reveal anything about her own personal life. When I pestered her with my childish curiosities, she simply replied in trembling voice: "You must never ask such

questions, my dear. . . . Go to sleep now. I will come again, my sweet and bonny child, I will come again. . . .”

(v)

Some time after that a political event brought even more excitement into my life along with that of the country. The full implications of what I had seen and lived through those days became clear to me only when I had become a fully grown up man.

Mahatma Gandhi, the propounder of the weapons of truth and non-violence in the fight for independence of the country, was to visit the town of Muzaffarpur. He was going to hold a public meeting to disclose for the first time his plan of action against the British rulers, specially the British indigo planters who had grabbed the best land in northern India and made the local population their slaves of the most degraded category. The whole town was excited.

Until now, the political atmosphere of the place was dominated by the revolutionaries who believed and worked for the overthrow of the British rule through violent means. They were led by some of the finest idealist middle-class intellectuals of Bengal. Due to their indulgence in shooting and bombing activities, when Bengal became too hot for them, they took shelter in North Bihar to enrol new members for their party, and gave a stronger fight against the terrors of the British rule. Now, some of these stormy petrels had come to talk to Mahatma Gandhi about the shape which the fight for India's freedom in future was going to be given.

A large number of people from the distant corners of the province had come to see and to hear Mahatma

Gandhi. Even our small hut was overcrowded due to the arrival of a large number of peasants from our village. Amongst them was also my Guruji, about whose real activities I came to know much better this time. My brother took a leading part in receiving both—the followers of Mahatma Gandhi and the members of the ‘bombing’ party.

I got my chance to see the Mahatma from close quarters when I was selected to garland him. With the greatest care Devaki had selected the best flowers and Revadi had made an extraordinarily lovely garland out of them. But it was larger than the size of my own body, which prompted me to protest: “You should yourself go to garland him.”

“He won’t accept it from my hands,” Revadi said with a sad smile.

“You could reach his height all right.”

“I dare not go near him. He is a Mahatma and I am a degraded dancing girl!”

“Will he beat you if you did?”

“The question of reaching near him would not arise. People standing at the gate would not allow me to enter his place.”

“How stupid!”

“My little darling! You will also throttle me once you are a man.” She said holding back big drops of tears in her eyes.

“Never, never,” I protested. My great pride for my angel-like teacher was getting hurt.

Devaki packed up the garland in some banana leaves and tied it up to the handle of a bicycle. One of my brother’s class friends who had come to pick me up placed me on the front rod of his cycle, and we pushed off.

Gandhiji was putting up at a ‘Dharmashala’, a public

inn, near the railway station. When we reached there he was standing in the middle encircled by a number of students much taller than him. Seeing a garland in my hand they allowed me to stand facing the Mahatma. The student who had taken me there lifted me bodily so that I could place the garland easily round his neck. But the Mahatma just touched the garland saying, "That will do. Now, you may take it back."

"My Revadi told me that you won't accept it."

"Who is your Revadi?"

"She sings and dances."

People standing there laughed heartily. I felt my face getting red and hot. Only the Mahatma said somewhat gravely: "Singing and dancing is not good. Tell her to spin yarn and make a garland of her self-spun yarn, then only I shall gladly accept it."

The crowd had begun to push me back. Looking into my eyes Gandhiji asked, "And what would you do when you are grown up?"

I was still down-cast by the jeers of the crowd. Guruji, who was standing somewhere in the back row, came to my rescue: "He will take a revolver and shoot down the British rulers!"

"Is he so strong?" asked Mahatma with a smile. "How much milk you take everyday?"

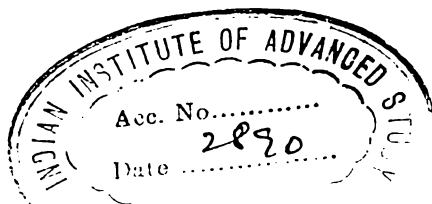
"Milk I taste only when malaria leaves me and I have to gain strength to stand up again."

"Then you can't get to shooting anyone. It is better you become a good spinner, and don't allow the rulers to rob your milk in exchange for your clothes."

"But Revadi teaches me to read and write."

"How is the learning going to help you?"

"When I have learnt, I shall become a big man, and no one, not even a white sahab, will dare to thrash me."



"I myself have a different experience", said Gandhiji in a serious tone: "I was a foreign-trained barrister in South Africa when the whites hit me."

He began talking to students again. I was going to place the garland I still held in my hand in a corner, where some fruits were stored. At that moment Gandhiji looked again at me and said, "Return it to the down-trodden sister, and ask her to present me a self-spun yarn garland."

He dismissed me with a wave of his hand. All around him commanded me to touch his feet. But I felt bitterly crushed at the words "down-trodden" used for my so good a teacher.

(vi)

On return to the hut, I lay on a wooden plank, with a heavy blanket folded round and round me. Every one from the village putting up there had left after meeting the Mahatma. My brother had told me that his duties in Gandhiji's camp would not allow him to return that night. Left alone in the dark, I had a rising fever with shivering cold. Devaki had turned up before leaving for the temple, seen my pulse and announced: "It is nothing, just malaria. The fever will last only a few hours."

Pain and terrific jolts throughout my body made me feel as if I was not to survive beyond the next few hours. Crying and howling did not help either. So, I remained as Devaki had wrapped me in the blanket, struggling desperately to be relieved from the malarial attack. Deep, deep in my heart I prayed for Revadi's coming to perform some miracle.

As I was getting forced to give up all fight, she came

and sat down on the plank by my side pressing my head against her bosom. I clung to her and held her close for fear she may leave me again. I clearly heard her heart beating. But hardly had I felt comforted when she released herself whispering into my ears, "Courage, darling! I must pray for you."

She clasped my hands between hers, and I listened to her praying: "Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. Thou hast given me seats in homes not my own. Thou hast brought the distant near and made a brother of the stranger. . . . Oh, grant me my prayer that I may never lose the bliss of the touch of the one in the play of the many."

When she had finished praying, she took me in her arms again and pressed my forehead which did relieve my pains.

THE REVOLUTIONARY

(i)

Late at night when Devaki returned, Guruji also entered our hut stealthily. Devaki warned me in a soft trembling voice: "Don't make any noise. The police is after Guruji."

"For what crime?" Revadi asked.

"About that I shall tell you later," Guruji himself replied. "I had no food or sleep for the last two days. First get me something to eat."

Devaki asked Revadi, "Can you get some?"

"Sure, mother would be still waiting for supper. This boy held me so tightly that I could not return home. Shall I bring the food here?"

Devaki was thoughtful. "Guruji should not be detained in this hut for long. The police are sure to turn up here in his pursuit. They know this hut belongs to a person of the same village where Guruji had lived so long in hiding."

"In that case, I can get everything, food and shelter ready for him in our house. I shall fix it up and return in a moment."

Guruji enquired, "Wouldn't that be troublesome to you?"

"No, my mother would consider it a great honour." Revadi was off.

"You know," Guruji began to explain: "When we join our revolutionary party, we take a vow by writing with our blood: 'I dedicate my life to the country. I would not

allow love or money to distract me from my duties. If ever I fail, I shall suffer the penalty of death.' And now you say that I should have food and shelter in a dancing-girl's house?"

"Please do not misunderstand them", pleaded Devaki. "They are the purest of the people I know. Only their fate had taken a tragic turn once, for which they cannot be blamed. Reva's mother comes from a very respectable Calcutta family. Her father was a well-known reformer. He gave an English education to his daughter. A London-returned civil service man of their own community married her. Once it happened that one of her professors who had taught her, asked her to act as Seeta in a drama where he was taking the part of Rama. That was the first drama of the now famous Bengali stage in which a woman had played the part of a woman."

"She took a very bold step," Guruji commented.

"And that very boldness proved so tragic to her. Her husband disowned her for that crime and made Reva an illegitimate child. Since then society has not accepted them as decent and honourable members. Left out literally in the street with her child, she had to earn her living. A famous landlord of this town invited her for songs and dances on the occasion of the marriage of his son. He was so pleased with her performance that he pays her even now her yearly honorarium, though she has long ceased to participate in any performance. But the shamed distinction of 'dancing girl' has stuck to her name and is now ruining the future of that innocent talented girl."

"What does she propose to do now?" Guruji asked.

"Reva had her schooling at Tagore's institution. Now she is getting trained up further by her mother. Some day she may get employment in some girl's school as a music teacher."

"I doubt whether she would ever get that sort of job. Our society is so backward."

Revadi had returned to report that food and shelter was ready at her place. But Guruji had some hesitations left. "In case they come to arrest me in that house, I shall have to commit suicide with this revolver I carry to kill the tyrant white rulers."

"No, Guruji," Revadi said with tears in her eyes, "I shall keep this revolver for you with me, and hand you over only when you come back from our house."

Finding it too late to decide any other safe course for his escape before the arrival of the police, Guruji handed over his revolver to Revadi's custody, and left by the back-door for his food and shelter for the night.

(ii)

High temperature did not allow me to sleep. I listened to what Devaki told Revadi about the crimes of Guruji for which the police was after him. "He told me everything this evening. The Bengal police is looking for him in connection with some political murders. The Bihar village, too, where he had taken shelter has become hot for him due to the stand he took in the interest of the villagers."

"What was that stand?" asked Revadi.

"Recently a railway engineer who was a Britisher, had made the life of the villagers of that Gangetic region a hell. According to him all the land in India belonged to the British and to the railways run by them and, therefore, the railway engineer had every right to treat the 'natives' as his slaves. Those villagers who did not agree to forced and unpaid railway work were flogged. Under such terror

Guruji came forward to protect the life of his countrymen by the use of a revolver. One day by threatening the engineer to kill him, he saved a hundred villagers from getting flogged. Since then, the British government is after him to arrest and to hang him under a number of charges."

"The foreign rule is forcing him to lead a more and more dangerous life," added Revadi. "He had come here to consult Mahatma Gandhi about the problem of defending a large number of villagers from the brutalities of that British engineer."

"What was the Mahatma's advice?"

"Most surprising," Devaki said in a whisper. "The Mahatma told him to surrender himself to the police."

Still clutching Revadi's neck with both my hands, I fell asleep.

(iii)

"Catch him. Thief! The murderer!" They shouted on the road at day-break. Soon, we saw Guruji running for his life followed by a number of robust men with long bamboo poles in their hands. As if under the effect of an electric shock, Revadi reached the scene of fighting with the revolver in hand, shrieking, "Stop! I shoot!"

One of the pursuers of Guruji stumbled down due to fear. The others, too, had high respect for a weapon spitting fire. They, too, stopped instantaneously. Guruji got his chance to disappear beyond their reach.

"Fools!" An Englishman in the uniform of a police boss came gasping and scolding in broken Hindi, "I shall get you all flogged! Snatch away the gun from her hand."

Two men, apparently assigned to guard the body of the police boss, pushed Revadi from behind. She fell down.

The men with bamboo poles struck blows after blows at her. The Englishman asked them to continue without a break for breathing.

I, too, had rushed to the place without knowing how. Between a gap of two policemen I had managed to squeeze in to fall upon Revadi to cover her with my body. But someone pulled back my hand and struck me to the ground on a stone.

All turned black before my eyes.

(iv)

It was dark when I found myself lying on the stale flowers scattered on the floor. My head, hands and legs were bandaged clumsily. I could hardly take a turn. Getting up was out of question. The odour of carbolic was so strong that its memory makes me sick.

I recollect to have seen Revadi's eyes getting choked with streams of blood streaking from her smashed up skull.

Finding some movement in my body, Devaki put her hand over my forehead. She cried and in between her sobs related: "After I had carried you away and brought you to this bed, I attempted to rush back to her. A brute of a policeman gave me such a kick that I could not get up for a while. But even then, I was able to peep into Reva's face. They had beaten her half-dead. Like a dying bird, blindly and desperately she fluttered her limbs. Strength had failed her to say to me what she wished. Then they stopped a municipal garbage-cart and loaded her over it. On a jolt, before she vanished, I heard her groan, 'My God! . . . Mother!'"

I tried to look towards her house. Other evenings I saw

the faint flames of a small earthen lamp burning in the prayer-room of her mother. It was not there now.

Devaki gave me more details. "One batch of policemen followed the cart on which Reva was carried. The other one, under the direct command of the English boss, encircled that house. The white Sahab himself thumped the doors with the butt of his revolver. No reply. From another corner a policeman shouted: 'Fire! The inmates of the house are setting it on fire.' With the blows of the poles they forced the doors open. Reva's mother had gathered all her clothes and furniture to make a pyre. After setting it on fire, she herself had jumped into it. Her burns were so serious that she expired on the way to the police-station. Perhaps it was better so."

"How can you say?"

"After all that she had suffered for the sake of her daughter, it was better that she spared herself the crowning sorrow of seeing her child die in terrible agony under the beastly tortures of the police of a slave country."

Wiping out her tears, she continued, "You know, every evening I have to take flowers free of cost to the wife of the chief of the police station. The chief himself gets his free gift of garlands from me at the temple gates. Today I took a basketful of flowers to the chief's house and fell at the feet of his wife to tell her husband to spare Reva's life."

"Did she try?"

"How could she? She had known all about Reva's case from her husband. They claimed to know much more about Reva than even myself, her friend since childhood. Anyhow, according to them, Reva had committed a political murder for which they had all the evidence."

"What evidence?"

"That revolver they found in her possession was stolen

from the house of a British officer, and with that particular weapon Reva was supposed to have killed a secret-service policeman."

"Nonsense! Revadi that day could not stand the sight of a chicken getting slaughtered."

"They knew it better. Repeatedly they asked her to admit her crimes and disclose the names of all her accomplices."

"She hardly knew any one besides us."

"When the police boss asked her whether she had other relations in the town, she replied 'No, nobody.' No one there believed her. Finding it impossible to get any names from her, they literally twisted her bones, and then subjected her to that most inhuman torture. Ultimately, when she became unconscious, they left her alone until she regained consciousness. Here, they were mistaken. During those few minutes, when they had left Reva alone in the torture-cell, she fixed up her 'Sari' with a rod of the high window, made a noose, and hanged herself."

Turning her face away, Devaki wept bitterly. "These Bengali girls have the courage to face death. I waited and waited to place all my flowers at her pyre. How she loved these flowers! For the last time I wished to assure her that Devaki would never, never forget her. This my prayer was not granted. The police boss had declared her a political criminal, and he did not allow anybody to see her even after she was dead. They handed her body over to the municipal caretaker who deals with the dead stray dogs."

(v)

A few days later I mustered some strength and enough courage to go to the sun-lit corner where Revadi used to

sing for me and teach me. The small plank she used as her chair was now occupied by Devaki. Without looking at me, she beckoned me to take my old seat. Never before I had seen her so grave.

“Are you angry?” I enquired.

“No, it is not anger. There is something I have kept secret from you so far. Now look. . . .!”

The garland Revadi had made for Gandhiji had gone stale. But it had served in the meantime as a paper-weight on a thrown-away copy book leaf. On top of that page were alphabets in Revadi’s hand, written large, so that I could easily copy them on the lower lines. Below that was a date and some scribbling by her. As was her habit, while singing for me, occasionally, she put on paper something to remind her to look later on into the notes of the tunes she hummed.

In Bengali letters was a dedication:

“Through my little brother:

Mahatmajil

At your feet,

All sin, all suffering, and the Life of the
Dancing-girl.”

was a little put out, "You have always been a difficult child to feed."

"Give it to me", the younger brother turned up, gulped the milk down, and left happily to play.

Then mother hugged me, "My poor little boy!"

She had nothing more to say. We understood each other better in silence.

(iii)

The overgrowth of cancer tissues had disfigured her to such an extent that I had to fancy to see her again alive, gay and smiling as she had been in the past. The only surgeon we could afford to get was the village barber. One day he cut out so much flesh from the face that the teeth got exposed. Mother could not bear the pain and her disfigured looks.

That night, when we were all asleep, she went to the Ganga, jumped into it, and was about to be drowned. A passing boatman fished her out and put her in Bawa's hut, unconscious. She regained her senses just to beg forgiveness from all the villagers for any injuries she might have knowingly or unknowingly done to them. Then she called me alone to put some Ganga water in her mouth, put her hands over my forehead to bless me and fixed her last gaze on the waves of the sacred river to carry her away.

That night, I could hardly realise all that it meant to my future.

(iv)

For hours I remained near Bawa when he was sitting motionless in prayer.

"Can I survive all the misfortunes which befall me?" I asked him once.

"You must, and you will."

"What would become of me ultimately?"

"You have a bright future."

"How can I believe it when I face only terror and despair as my fate?"

"Everything will pass. Life is like a river, ever changing. The water is muddy today, but it is sure to become clean after the rains are over."

He took much interest in teaching me to read and write. Soon after I had finished the first readers, he gave me his newspaper and some old books to read aloud to him.

Suddenly, this education opened up a new vista for me. For the first time, I realised that my problems were not the centre around which the world revolved. Whatever happened to me was only a very small, insignificant incident in the affairs of a country groaning under the yoke of a foreign rule.

One day, in some old newspapers I was dusting out, I saw a picture in which tall, well-built men with big moustaches and long beards were stripped naked and flogged. When I pointed it out to Bawa, he showed me a news-item saying that more than a thousand people, irrespective of whether they were children in their mother's arms, old people leaning on their sticks, fathers, mothers, sisters, young men or girls, were all shot down by machine gun bullets.

"Why were they all killed, Bawa?" I asked, seeing in my imagination a whole river of blood.

"Jalianwalla Bagh is the name of the park where those people were going to protest against the flogging and hanging of people who wanted to lead the life of free

men. A British General asked his soldiers to encircle that park and got everyone assembled there massacred in cold blood.”

“Can we not kill those British butchers?”

“That is what your Guruji and his party tried, but without much success. Now our whole country is getting mobilised under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi for the fight for freedom on a country-wide scale.”

“Gandhiji tells everyone to spin yarn. How can the spinning of yarn kill the British tyrants?”

“Gandhiji has started a big movement now—what we call non-co-operation. This means that we will have absolutely nothing to do with the British rule. Without the help of our countrymen, they won’t be able to run the Government. We will not use any cloth imported from their country and we will not have the education of their schools and colleges which makes us their clerks, slaves and henchmen.”

“Will the British not force us to serve them, the same way they forced our villagers to build that railway line for them?”

“They may come forward to force us, but we shall keep away from them. For that, they may beat us, send us to jail or even shoot us down, but we will not serve them anymore. Our suffering will be the road to our freedom.”

The waves of political turmoil and the Gandhian spinning movement reached our village on the northern banks of the Ganga, in their full force. My elder brother was one of the first in the country to dedicate his all for the Gandhian cause. Appreciating his enthusiasm for the ‘constructive work’, as Gandhiji called it, he asked some of his millionaire admirers to advance the necessary capital to my brother to start a Khadi (hand-spun and hand-woven cloth) producing centre in our village.

The Khadi production ideas of Gandhiji took a practical economic shape. Since the commodity was new to the market, it fetched good money which gave some extra incentive to my elder brother for work. In the name of good 'education', I got my assignments to help Khadi production.

One particular job entrusted to me was the preparation of two meals for about thirty Khadi workers and to clean the utensils. After having served the morning meal, I had to barter cotton for hand-spun yarn to the spinners of the neighbouring villages. In the afternoon I had to spin for a few hours myself. This whole routine was arranged in such a way that I had to work for about fifteen hours a day. Hardly any time was left for a walk to the Ganga or to relax in any other way.

Within a few years the high reputation of Khadi production in our village reached the Mahatma himself and he decided to visit the place. After the rains in 1924, when he was passing through Patna, his programme of visit to our village was arranged. A steamer was chartered to bring him along with his party to the northern bank of the Ganga.

This time, I had such a close view of the Mahatma that I began to get disillusioned about the use of my own education and his philosophy of "salvation through suffering."

DRIFT TO FREEDOM

(i)

The wheelman of the steamer which was going to pick up the Mahatma from Patna was known to me. Formerly he was a boatman, and when he had found out that I liked to get on a sailing boat, he had given me a number of joy rides. This time too, he took me aboard the steamer at his steering bridge.

The Ganga had a different look from the mid-stream. It seemed as if not we, but the villages and the people on shore themselves moved. We saw human beings rejoicing because nature in its full bloom was dragging them out to sing and dance. That sight filled us with a heart throb of happiness.

"You should come once to the Sundarbans with me on a steamer", said the wheelman. "It is a real paradise on earth."

"With your wheel in hand, you have a real joy in life. I am miserable at the spinning wheel."

"There is no comparison. With your spinning wheel you can hardly earn two annas a day. What can you get for two annas? Perhaps a little rice and some salt! Sitting at this wheel I earn eight rupees a day, our food and clothes are paid for by the steamer owner. And a journey to big cities like Calcutta does not cost me anything. How much fun we have there!"

"Do you see any singing and dancing there?"

“The best you can imagine. And there we tie our steamer alongside the big steamers sailing to foreign lands. Life in foreign lands is still happier. When I have seen all there is to see on the Ganga, I shall get a job on one of those ocean liners and sail the seven seas to enjoy all the beauties of the earth.”

“You are making me crazy. I have begun to hate the spinning wheel.”

(ii)

On reaching Patna, the first to board our steamer was a college friend of my elder brother, known as a poet. A conspicuously pretty, luxuriantly developed woman followed him. Showing her the way to the upper deck, the poet remarked: “The wheelman’s place is always the best on a steamer. We can have the best view of the Ganga from there.”

“I do not care much for the view. I shall have to do my spinning,” replied the poet’s companion.

“You must spare a few minutes for good songs and sights, Hiraben”, the poet persuaded her.

In reply she smiled a little sadly, but ultimately followed him. I had heard her name quite often mentioned as an ideal example of making a great sacrifice for Gandhiji’s cause. She was the daughter of the Bombay millionaire who had advanced money to my brother for khadi work.

Gandhiji entered the steamer engrossed in deep thought. He took his seat on the cushioned seat prearranged for him on the lower deck. Without wasting a moment he took to his spinning and writing alternately. He had no time to spare even for a casual look at the scenes through which the steamer passed.

Returning to the wheelman's place I found Hiraben spinning and the poet singing. "Early in the day it was whispered that we should sail in a boat, only thou and I, and never a soul in the world would know of this our pilgrimage to no country and to no end."

"This song is vulgar and meaningless", said Hiraben without taking away her glance from the yarn she spun.

"This is Rabindranath", the poet protested, "imagination and prayers have also their use in the life of a man".

"Just the same I find music an useless distraction, unless it is a praise to God at prayer time."

"Even the correct timing and the exact use of an emotional outburst is hardly a criterion to judge its beauty. For example, can you say that a flower has its use only when it is offered to the Gods at prayer time?"

"Since I have become Gandhi Bapu's disciple, I shall talk only of yarn and not of flowers."

I was comparing her youthful face to that of Revadi's in my imagination. Hiraben's preference for yarn to the flowers made it clear, what particular 'flavour' was missing in the ingredients of the beauty of her face, which actually made her look slightly more aged. The impressions she had created on me on entering the boat vanished before the steamer touched the temple ghat of our village.

At the entrance of the spinning hall I presented to Gandhiji a garland of my own handspun yarn. I was also tempted to remind him about the flower garland I had once taken to him, but that had already become a long-forgotten chapter which could not be revived anyhow.

"Did you spin this yarn yourself?" he asked.

I nodded.

"What is your speed?"

"Above six hundred yards an hour."

"Excellent. You should come to the next exhibition at

the Congress session, and if we find after testing you that your claim is a correct one, we shall give you a reward.”

“Will that be enough to cover a steamer trip to the Sundarbans?”

“What for do you want to go to the Sundarbans?”

“There the people have the best music and dance.”

“How does music and dance interest you?”

“They make me very happy—more than anything else in the world.”

Before I was able to explain my point, the poet interrupted me, “He wants to copy Rabindranath.”

Everyone present there laughed at the stupid idea I had in my mind. As punishment for that I was not allowed to get into the steamer on its return trip to Patna.

(iii)

Since then, my routine duties made me feel more and more miserable. I did not know which one I detested more, the spinning wheel or my poverty. Since I had felt more miserable after taking to spinning, and a hard life had begun, I took the spinning to be a greater curse.

In spite of this hatred, I had to participate in the spinning competition at Belgaum where Gandhiji himself was to preside at the session of the Indian National Congress. As I was promised payment for my train trip to that far-away place, I had to work hard.

When I stood first in the spinning competition, I was called by Gandhiji to take a gold medal from his hands in the open session of the Congress. Due to my hatred for the job I had to perform perforce, I hid myself in the

vast crowd, and for the first time wept over the 'misfortune' which had persisted so long in my case.

For another year I had no change in my hard lot. Then suddenly I had a call from Gandhiji to report to him at his Sabarmati Ashram. He wanted to get more speed at the spinning wheel from me. This visit to his Ashram actually became my last suffering before salvation as an ill-paid child labourer.

(iv)

A nephew of Gandhiji, who looked after the administrative side of the Ashram, fixed up a 'generous' scale of payment, according to his standards, for my work. It was to be half a rupee for ten hours work a day.

"Eight annas won't be sufficient even for my food," I complained.

"But you will have to live according to an experimental scale fixed up by us."

"I won't. Let me have my return ticket to go home."

"That would cost about thirty rupees, two months' pay. You will be entitled to have it only when you have worked here for one year at least."

"In a way you are forcing me to slave labour. You are taking advantage of my skill, because I am poor."

"We cannot do anything more for you."

Burning with rage and determined not to become a guinea-pig, I looked for some acquaintances. On enquiries I learnt that Hiraben, who had been to our village, was there.

"You must feel proud of being our spinning-wheel teacher", she said with a smile.

I requested her to help me out of the difficult position

where I felt stranded. She suggested, "You remember the poet! Now he is a teacher in a neighbouring national school. He comes to our evening prayers. Putting our heads together, we may find a way out for you."

The way they had overcome their differences over the spinning-wheel and poetry was interesting. It had its effect on their outlook and behaviour. Now she did not look careless about her luxuriantly developed body, nor did he leave his unruly hair unkempt. Their discovery was a pleasant one: the human body and mind needed to be beautified for the achievement of joy.

I could not think of beautifying myself. My problem was just to keep the body going. Since in no way did I stand in their way, the couple I knew slightly came forward to help me. She gave me a chit in the name of a restaurant in Ahmedabad, explaining, "You can have there as much food of any quality you like, and you may bring some provisions as well."

To reach the place I had to cross the Sabarmati river and to walk about four miles one way. Hiraben suggested, "We shall come with you up to the river, show you the way and wait near the bathing ghat until you return."

The food I got in the restaurant was the best I had tasted so far. They obliged me also by giving me a big packet of provisions, and some fruits. Roughly I calculated, the bill must have equalled my whole month's wages from the Ashram.

Those days I had to walk without shoes since I could not afford to buy them. Therefore, walking on the Sabarmati sand was noiseless. As there were no beaten tracks on sand, I was at the point of losing my direction in the dark when I heard Hiraben's voice: "... It is a sin. What will Gandhi Bapu say now?"

"He will not know about it," said the poet in a whisper.

My feet made a good deal of noise while I crossed the shallow river. Telling them about the variety and taste of the food I had taken, we returned to the Ashram.

(v)

Next morning I got a reproach from the Ashram administrator: "How dare you violate our Ashram discipline? The matter has already been reported to Gandhiji."

When the evening prayers were over, I was called to Gandhiji's presence. Very gravely he said, "If you commit a sin, you must have the courage to admit it, then only the permanent injuries of the sin are removed."

"Where have I committed a sin?"

"You took non-vegetarian food in a place of bad repute. You must not have gone there."

"I was very hungry."

"Since you are not a member of the Ashram, your mistake can be overlooked. But why did you not report to the Ashram authorities about the sinful intimacy between Hira and the poet?"

"I am not concerned with their private affairs."

"Anyway, Hira has admitted to me her sins. If she had not done so of her own accord, I would have undertaken a fast for seventy days. Since she had the courage to admit, I am going to fast for seven days only."

He dismissed me from his presence, but I began to feel partly guilty for causing him the suffering of a fast. To leave the Ashram as early as possible was the only course open to me for saving myself from the curse of the members.

(vi)

Fortunately I got an invitation from Kanpur where, in December 1925, the next Congress was to be held. I had to appear there in a spinning competition. They sent me the train fare for the cheapest class, but that of a grown-up man, because now my growth was such that the railways did not allow me to travel on half fare.

At Kanpur I had to perform a task I hated. But that was really the last occasion. On return to my village, I told my brother that I had stopped touching a spinning wheel and also decided not to work as a slave.

He replied with a slap on my face. When I staggered, he repeated: "This one is for disgracing me before Gandhiji! This one for refusing to work! And this one for sending you to hell!"

The blows hurt me, but they did not make me senseless. I got up with the determination: "I must go."

(vii)

The sun was setting on the Ganga. A boat passed upwards on sails. Care-free fellows navigating it showed that they were from Banaras.

Finding me stranded, they took me on board as a helper.

The boat moved. Our sails caught the wind. Night had fallen on the horizon.

I set my course towards the unknown.

PART II

OBEDIENT TO GANGA

“Floating obedient to the stream”

—SHAKESPEARE

ON A HOUSE-BOAT

(i)

BANARAS is beautiful but stinky. It is packed with beggars, bulls, 'sadhus' and the most innocent plumpy belles. The sultry heat during rains drives them all to the river bank. Everyday there, the Ganga holds them high as a show-piece in the natural amphitheatre carved out by her currents.

I was fourteen when I reached there. In the late twenties an Englishman, looking like a typical John Bull as painted on Scotch Whisky bottles, decided and directed what was good or bad for the population of the sacred city.

(ii)

Hazari, the boatman who had picked me up from my village home, offered a glass of intoxicating drink: "Gulp it down and soar to high Heavens".

"It tastes rotten", I complained.

"Because you yourself are rotten. Boys like you have no future."

"I'm not worried about the future. Where am I to go now?"

"Nowhere. Stay in my house-boat. That would also feed you."

"How?"

"Young girls who pay most for boating take me to be a

drunkard and get scared. They will feel safe in your company. Twenty per cent of the earnings will be yours."

"Sounds excellent."

"What I do is always the best thing for the world. Only the d—d policemen often stand in my way. Those wretched idiots act always against the laws of our Lord Shankara."

"What are those laws?"

"Do all what keeps you happy."

Hazari smiled to impress his cleverness: "What is wrong in taking Shankara's drinks? Nothing. Rather this is the best medicine against all human miseries. You take it and begin to laugh, sing and dance. The police say it is rowdy, and put you in jail. What a shame!"

"There cannot be anything wrong in laughing, singing and dancing."

"The police stop people from these joys and make them feel wretched. At the slightest provocation of defeat in any of our innumerable struggles, one feels so miserable that you feel like discarding yourself into the Ganga, where the fish and the crows are ready to make a feast of your rotten body. That is the way you bring your end yourself."

"Quite right."

"Don't say I'm right. See it for yourself. Your work will start in the evening. That is the time when the lovers come to the ghats in herds. Girls and boys just wish to look at the faces of their opposite numbers. Allow them this liberty on your boat. It's no crime. But if a criminal policeman gets after them and challenges them, some of the weaklings just jump into the river and commit suicide. So, as a good boatman you will see to it that no one gets drowned."

"I will."

"And don't give a free ride to any policeman."

"I will never."

"Now, the last question! I am a *swarajist*—a freedom-

fighter. Will you join the fight to topple down the foreign rule?"

"I'm already an all-out fighter for the cause."

"Then repeat our battle-cry three times — 'Har Har Mahadev'."

I repeated.

"Now jump into the battle. Row away."

(iii)

Looking up from my boat the sacred city looked a panorama of temples. At sunrise and sunset their tops looked like solid gold. Their bells rang. This was the signal for people clothed in all imaginable shades to turn up at the river ghats. In the evening silhouette, the whole crowd reflected in the water trembling and moving like a grand puppet show.

I tied my boat at the Dasaswamedh Ghat and soon came across some desperate characters. They dragged me from one excitement to another, on and on.

(iv)

A girl of my age pulled her mother towards the boat. "Today we must have a joy-ride!"

"Asha! Just hear me! It's so embarrassing. My purse is empty."

"The young boatman won't mind it. We shall pay him next time."

"Looking at your face will not nourish his body."

"He is smiling. I shall just ask him."

"Why should I charge you at all?" I explained to her:

"You may tell me stories about the ghats. Without that there is no fun in rowing."

"Agreed. Come Ammy! You can pay him in my discarded story books as well. He isn't greedy."

They came aboard. The girl taking it as her natural right to command me, ordered, "Upstream. When you get tired we can just drift on our way back."

A few strokes brought us to a crowd of gay people. They were looking at some folk-artists from Bengal who were enacting the life of Krishna in a song-drama. Asha explained: "This is Kirtan, the story of the eternal love of Radha and Krishna. Do you know the name of this ghat?"

"Tell me."

"It is the world-famous Ahalyabai Ghat. Even when your eyes are closed, you know the place when you pass it."

"How?"

"Don't you hear the sweet 'sahnai' played from that top? The melody and tune tell you the season of the year and the time of the day. In the morning they play *Bhairavi*, *Yaman* in the evening and *Bihag* at midnight. And do you know, why this is called Ahalyabai Ghat?"

"No."

"Once upon a time there was a girl called Ahalya — the sweetest and the most beautiful in the world. She fell in love with a prince and spent all her time dreaming of their coming marriage. As ill-luck would have it, a nasty 'sadhu' turned up at her doors. Ahalya did not give him any food, and the sadhu turned her into a stone — a stone of this very ghat. Then one day Lord Krishna turned up here, touched that stone with his magic flute and Ahalya at once came to life, fell in love with him and accompanied him to his Heavenly abode."

"What a chatterbox you are, Asha!" interrupted her mother. "You are mixing up so many stories in one. This

ghat has nothing to do with all your fantasies. It is named after the Holkar princess who built it.”

“Mummy dear! What’s wrong in painting even that Holkar princess Ahalya a little romantic?”

“That won’t be historically correct. Anyway, we have skipped over many more ghats in the meantime. Here we are below Chet Singh’s fort, where. . . .”

“Let me tell it, Ammy! This one I have read in my history book. Chet Singh ruled Banaras when the British came here as traders. In his first battle, Chet Singh defeated the British Governor-General, Warren Hastings, in such a way that he had to flee. Next time, Hastings turned up with reinforcements. Chet Singh got scared and jumped down from that window into a boat, leaving his city and its people at the mercy of the British. Ever since we are slaves of the British.”

“This slavery must be brought to an end somehow,” Ammy said looking into the greenish water of the Ganga.

Rows of earthen lamps got lighted along the ghats. The reflections in the water seemed to give some indication of the coming events. Asha relieved me from rowing. “Now, we drift. But not so quick. I shall put a paddle in the water to slow it down.”

The boat touched Kedar Ghat. Bells rang for evening prayers. Ammy signalled to stop, “We shall go to the temple for prayers. Will you wait for us?”

“Of course.”

“You are a charming good lad. Can you come to dinner at our house this evening?”

“Most gladly. I feel always hungry on this boat.”

Asha showed a mischievous smile.

A few steps higher an orator lectured his audience of a few dozen young men: “Intolerable! Life is not worth living as a British slave. The British Emperor has sent a

commission to India. What for? To find out ways to tighten further the iron fetters of our slavery. We must demonstrate against it. When the commission reaches our city we shall show them black flags."

"And shout," someone called up from the crowd, "You English oppressors! Go back!"

"To Hell with foreign rule!" shouted all the assembled before dispersing. They stood aside to let Asha and her Ammy reach the boat.

Asha's face brightened up under the soothing earthen lamps. In a flash she reminded me of Revadi, from my dormant memory. She lifted her right arm and caught my shoulder to settle down in the boat which was shaken by small waves.

"Asha!" another girl of her age shouted rushing down the steps: "Good luck! I have caught you."

"But your father doesn't like to see you in our company, Shaila!" Asha's Ammy reminded her.

"I would have long ceased breathing, had I followed his wishes."

"I can't stand his cruel looks," said Asha.

"No one can," Shaila admitted: "I can never forget how cruel he was to a girl arrested as a terrorist."

"When was it?"

"Long time ago. It happened when his posting was at Muzaffarpore as a crime investigating Sub-Inspector. But let's forget about it."

"So, it was he who tormented Revadi," flashed in my mind. I began to sweat though I had not exerted in any way.

The boat drifted smoothly. Asha and Shaila talked about the political events of the day.

"My father is scared to death these days," Shaila said.

"What has happened?" enquired Asha.

"His agents have reported to him that a batch of Calcutta terrorists has reached here to kill him."

"Kill him? What for?"

"He has unearthed quite a number of political terrorists' nests and sent quite a lot of young men to the gallows. Now the terrorists are bent upon taking revenge."

"That is why there are two armed policemen posted at your doors!"

"They are father's dogs. At whomsoever he points out they jump upon him like bulldogs. They also shout at me whenever I try to go out alone."

"I have stopped walking on your road. Whenever I pass that way I feel terrified."

"Anyway, I have decided to join other girls at the next week's black flag demonstrations."

"Good!" Asha pressed Shaila's hand. "You are a brave girl."

So long Asha's Ammy had prayed looking towards the Ganga. She turned to me when I began to fix up the mooring: "Now you have brought us safely. We owe you a hearty meal. Come with us."

Shaila was the first to land. Someone from the shadows below the huge bamboo umbrella of the ghat caught hold of her hand. The girl gave out a suppressed shriek: "Daddy! I haven't done any wrong. Just a few minutes earlier I got into the boat to reach here quickly."

"How dare you?" the wolf-faced man's teeth grinding in anger exploded: "You were in that rowdy anarchist meeting! I'm going to lose my job. For your crime..."

She was dragged away like the condemned to the gallows. None of us dared to look in that direction. Silently walking like unknown to each other we reached the main road.

(v)

Every day there is a festival at the Dasaswamedh Road of Banaras. Shops selling fruits, sweets, garments and sweet drinks exult as in no road of any other city of the world. Even the birds sing, though confined in cages for sale. Thousands of men, women and children from all parts of the world gather there just to loiter merrily and to laugh.

Then suddenly, we came across the long avenue of beggars. Hundreds of people squatted, who could scarcely be called men, women and children, so filthy and grey they looked. A child in the laps of his skeleton mother cried, "Hungry, Mum!" My appetite for food was gone. It looked very strange to me to see a marriage procession passing with fanfare on the same road. To avoid the main road I took a circuitous lane. Observing me to be carrying my food absent-mindedly a dog snatched it away. I was not in a mood to care much for it.

From the boat I saw the empty ghats and the Ganga itself bathing in full moon. It looked like a paradise. But some wind brought the smell of burning corpses. I could not stand that.

I rowed the boat to the other bank, pulled half of it on to the sand and holding the mooring string still in hand, fell asleep. The wavy sand was cool and refreshing.

THE TWENTY-MILE SWIM

(i)

Next morning, while it was still dark, I was awakened by a large chorus of country women on their way to a dip in the sacred stream. Their singing, called Kazri, typical of the rainy season, accompanied by drums and shouts, carried me away in their expressions of joy, vigour and energy.

I got up refreshed and merry. In a very high spirit I rowed back to Ahalyabai Ghat. That very spirit turned into a fountain of new inspirations and chalked out the course of a purposeful life.

A wave of historic events dragged me on and on in their swift changing currents. It was not possible for me to set the tune of movements I was to fall in.

(ii)

One day a batch of young swimmers turned up at my small house-boat with a plan of action. Their leader was a young college student whom they addressed as 'dada', the elder brother. Many years later I was to know that his real name was Sachin.

In our first meeting itself he impressed that he had a genuine affection for me as his own younger brother. He

bought me a new set of clothes including a swimming costume and got from the shops all the food which had so far tempted me but I was unable to purchase. Then he rowed my boat and brought it into mid-stream. There he asked me to put on the new swimming costume for a refreshing bath. Both of us jumped into water and talked about our future, occasionally pushing the boat to stop it drifting far away.

"You swim like a fish!" he complimented.

"But not so fast as you can."

"You will go faster if I teach you the technique. Will you learn?"

"Sure, right away."

He showed me how to float, to make hand strokes, quick feet paddling and to keep the rhythm of breathing.

"It's much easier this way and less tiring," I said.

"Now try to adjust your movements to that 'Asavari' tune played on 'sahnai' at Ahalyabai".

"This is real fun."

"My younger sister has set Rabindranath's dance-drama like 'Mayar Khela' and 'Kacha Devyani' in a swimming display."

"How wonderful!"

"If you do well we shall give you the role of Kacha at our next display during Puja holidays. Do you know the stories?"

"Very well."

"You would be a success."

We towed the boat to the opposite bank to have some breakfast of fruits we had brought along.

While returning he said, "I have already fixed up the boat-hire with your boss."

"How is it?"

"We shall pay him two rupees a day simply for the boat.

You will live at our cost and at the end of the job we shall pay you a good remuneration."

"How do you intend to use the boat?"

"That will be put at the disposal of our swimming club. We shall use it as our floating club-house. In a month's time we are having our annual twenty-mile swimming competition. The race starts at Chunar Fort and ends here at Ahalyabai Ghat. On the racing day we need one boat for each competitor. But for the training, one will do for the time being. We shall take you quite often to our Chunar camp."

"I'm happy. Many new things I shall see and learn."

"It will make you a good sportsman."

(iii)

Whole days we spent in water-sports. There were summer holidays; therefore, my house-boat was always full with teen-agers. Jayadi, about whom our leader had told me the very first day, looked after our food very well. No amount of cooking could ever rob the natural cheerfulness of her face. In the evenings she used to sing in a chorus from the boat and we enacted it swimming in water. Asha and Shaila also turned up regularly for practising their side-roles in the dance-dramas.

One evening after we had finished our rehearsal, Sachin ordered: "Tonight we shall set sail for the Chunar camp. Just after dinner bring the boat at the University Ghat. A team of swimmers will board it with some provisions."

When I reached there, they were already at the ghat with quite a good number of packets which did not look like provisions. Without making any noise or speaking a word they boarded. Only when we reached mid-stream,

Sachin himself took the rudders in his hands whispering softly to me: "Now, lie down for a few hours. Sleep until I wake you up. At the right moment I shall tell you what to do."

Instead of setting sails for upstream, he let the boat drift with the current. For me it was immaterial where we went. Following his instructions I closed my eyes. But the excitement of this new secret venture did not allow me to have my usual sound sleep. In dreams I joined Ali Baba and his forty thieves.

Sachin awakened me from the Arabian Nights: "Look! We are going to raid the house of an informer who has betrayed our Chunar camp secrets to the police. You will remain here to keep guard on this boat. Challenge everyone whosoever may approach you. In reply he will say — 'Om', the first word of every Sanskrit prayer. If some one does not repeat it, shoot him down."

"Where have I a weapon?"

"Here is one for you." He handed me a revolver with precise instructions: "After taking aim, the moment you would press this trigger it would kill your enemy."

"I know how to handle it."

"That's fine. You are the cleverest chap I have ever met."

Left alone, the ripples shook my boat. I got startled and looked for the enemy which turned out to be mere darkness.

Attacks on the boat by invisible enemies were getting frequent. Suddenly there was a loud thud in the direction our party had vanished. A flame rose high in the skies. Perhaps a straw barn was set on fire. Shouts and cries, too, became gradually louder.

The members of the boat party returned in a single batch. I challenged them and they replied in code. No sooner were they counted and found correct, Sachin pushed

the boat into deep water. Finding some favourable wind we set our sails to move upstream.

"Sure enough!" Sachin checked it once more: "We haven't left any trace behind?"

"None", several of his companions replied.

"Then let's open the box."

With a few hammer blows they broke open a small wooden box full of golden and silver ornaments. Sachin commented: "This is enough to buy a dozen revolvers and with that much fire we can terrorise the nasty police agents of the whole of northern India."

"What about returning money to those girls who have financed this raid by lending their hostel expenses received from their guardians?" someone interrupted the leader.

"Sudhir!" Sachin showed his annoyance at the distraction. "These ornaments we have secured by shooting and robbery. We would never be able to justify our action if we didn't spend every penny from their sale in acquiring as many fire-arms as we can get."

The crossing of a boat at a short distance stopped all discussions. At the leader's order we stopped the boat at the Raj Ghat bridge before entering the city limits. Everyone left as silently carrying the booty as they had entered with their explosive packets at the start of the venture.

Pushing the boat back to the stream the leader reminded me: "When asked where you have been that night, go on repeating the Chunar Fort and the forthcoming twenty-mile swimming competition."

Ahalyabai Ghat was just coming to life when I tied up the boat there. When all others had got up I went to sleep under the cover of some wooden planks sheltering me from the sun and the intermittent rains.

People kept saying prayers around me but I had neither peace nor sleep.

(iv)

Some time in the afternoon, Shaila came to warn me, "I have just overheard my father's instructions to his agents. He has set his mind for vengeance on the swimming club members."

"What harm have they done to him?"

"They have spoiled me, he says."

"How ridiculous!"

"It isn't ridiculous for him. Everyday he scolds me for coming to these ghats. He may lose his job in disgrace on account of me."

"Anyway, he has a hateful job. If he loses it, may be the terrorists would spare his life."

"He isn't afraid of the terrorists. Those suspected of such inclinations are brought before him to be flogged. Each one is savagely beaten without exception. A twelve-year old child was so brutally punished that after only an hour's torture he looked aged like sixty. Fear of such tortures keeps the terrorists miles away from him."

"What crime had that child committed?"

"Who cares to know? Simple suspicion is enough to break anyone's bones."

"Do they cry during beatings?"

"And how! In the beginning mother used to resent, but now she herself is scared that father may treat her the same way in case she intervenes on behalf of his victims. Those cries and wailings in our house drive me mad."

"Why don't you run away?"

"For girls it is not so easy as for you boys."

"Are you sure his agents may come here to arrest me?"

"The first evening he saw me in your boat he has become your sworn enemy. Today he has received fresh reports about a robbery committed by some college boys. He suspects many members of your swimming club to have committed that crime."

"Has he any evidence?"

"Can't say. If there is none, even then he is capable of concocting them. I wouldn't like to see you in our house as his victim."

The boat owner, Hazari, too, turned up. He sounded sober: "A police inspector came and he has ordered that no boat should be rented to any member of the swimming club. Anyway, I have a load of passengers for this boat to be taken to your village."

"I have no intention of returning there."

"Then you will have to leave my boat. I can't survive if the police turns against me."

I had very little to pack. The few story books lent by Asha I wrapped in a small bundle and deposited it with the priest of the nearest temple.

My boat shelter was lost.

(v)

The black clouds cleared up late in the evening. People addicted to the Ganga breeze turned up as usual. Asha, too, was there with her mother. She located me first and said: "That heavy squall stopped our rehearsal. What a shame!"

"The musicians turned up but not the girl swimmers," I replied.

"We were not afraid of the rains, but of heavy waves.

It is difficult to display expression with both arms when you have to keep your head higher than normal.”

“Jayadi said, the waves would have helped us to depict battle scenes better.”

“We shall try when ‘the clouds like a nightmare oppress the sky’.”

“You have read Rabindranath the whole day, it seems,” Asha said smiling.

“And now I have to discuss the details with him before entering into deep water.”

“I shall recite the story of the dance-drama for you.”

“Why not right away?” Asha jumped with enthusiasm.

“Where is the book here? We shall do it at home.”

“Then let us return.” Asha pulled my hand.

Due to some logged rain water on the road, it was hardly lively. The big holes of the lane were also deceptively covered with water. In one of them Asha’s feet slipped in. Her new sari got spoiled. She instantaneously got furious on the whole world: “Even Rabindranath didn’t come to pull me out of this mud.”

(vi)

After meals Asha picked up a book hidden behind her pillows, but without opening it, she questioned me: “Why don’t you get serious about your studies?”

“Don’t get any opportunity.”

“That is not correct. Banaras is one place in the whole world where feeding pupils is the responsibility of their teachers.”

“Have’nt come across such a teacher yet.”

“That you have to look for yourself when you get serious about your studies.”

"Where should I look for them?"

"That boat is hardly a good place for your mental growth. I am also not sure whether you are in good company. You are wasting your time and energies for nothing."

"What is your advice?"

"Before asking you I have thought about it. There is a national institution here called the 'Vidyapeeth' near the Cantonment railway station. I advise you to go there."

"Will they accept me?"

"They will examine your general knowledge which, I am sure, is excellent. Then they would find out whether you can follow their college course in your mother tongue. They are not fussy about school certificates. They care more for your desire and capacity to learn from them."

"But how do I meet my expenses there?"

"Once they accept you, that is no problem. According to our old Banaras tradition, they would provide you some food and a shelter. But I warn you, that would be a Puritan type."

"Any type will do which keeps me alive. Tomorrow I shall go there."

"Reach there at sunrise. They begin their work that early."

(vii)

Ammy opened the book which she had held in her hand. "It's 'Chandalika' (untouchable) by Rabindranath, taken from a Buddhist legend about a girl belonging to the lowest caste."

"I remember it very well, mother!" Asha interrupted: "You recite only mother's part. I shall sing and dance Prakriti's."

“But first let me tell him the story. One hot day Ananda, Lord Buddha’s famous disciple, stops and asks for some water from a girl condemned by birth to a despised caste. Finding her embarrassed, the monk teaches her not to judge herself by the unjust standards of society, but by her capacity for humane service and love. The girl gives him water, and in so doing yearns to offer herself to Ananda. To achieve her aim she induces her mother to practise magic. It is successful, and the monk comes to the girl at night. Then, as the girl prepares the bed, Ananda feels degraded and shamed. He prays to Buddha for strength and help. The mother revokes the spell, and dies in the process. The girl, Prakriti, throws herself at Ananda’s feet and realises that true love does not claim possession, but gives freedom.”

Asha expressed more the idea than the story through her dance. The music was more important to her than action. At her last movements the mother chanted, “Lord! At your feet my sin and my life.”

Her prayers revived a picture in my memory. Outside the window it was lightning. The curves were like Revadi’s lips.

A gust of wind smashed the doors open. I came out to meet her. She was not there.

A DANCE-DRAMA

(i)

A heavy storm passed over the Ganga and the rain fell in torrents for hours. I could not reach the temple where I had left my bundle of clothes.

Instead, I took shelter in the shed of a Kali temple. A few goats were tied up there for the next morning's sacrifice at the altar of the deity. They brayed all night. When I dozed occasionally. I dreamt the scenes of the 'sacrifice'.

Actually it was water which rushed out over the steps and rolled the loose stones about, but I went on repeating: "Why is this blood..?"

I woke up as soon as the rains stopped and walked towards the national institution.

(ii)

The friendly face of the principal of the national college, who was reverently addressed as Acharyaji, assured me that he would not disappoint me. He greeted me with a hearty laugh: "So, you couldn't stay with Gandhiji?"

"Do you know me, Sir?"

"Some years ago I was at his Ashram on a short visit. There I saw you justifying your non-vegetarianism. You

were very bold. Can I do anything for you?"

"I would like to stay here as your pupil."

"Do you think I would be able to tame you?"

"I don't want to get tamed, but taught."

"I shall gladly teach you. What interests you most?"

"History."

"Modern or ancient?"

"Both."

"You can join the classes I take. During this term I am teaching Buddhism."

"That is one of the most fascinating subjects for me."

"Then you would fit in my class very well. Come along right now. You haven't missed anything so far. Today is the first day we start."

On his way to the class, he warned me: "Mind it! I won't force any learning on you. To get educated is your own responsibility."

(iii)

I got a new shelter in Acharyaji's covered verandah. Food was arranged in the students' mess for which money came from donations to the institution. For books the doors of an admirably rich library were always kept open.

Acharyaji's personal affection for his students and his message of hope encouraged me in my studies. Once he related his own story: "I owe my learning to the good fortune that my father went bankrupt when I was a child. It is poor, helpless people with indomitable mind and spirit who have really created something worthwhile in the field of learning. Yes, it is also those fighters against fate who create a better world — a world worthy of man."

"Do you mean that those who go hungry and cold can

also achieve something worthwhile in life?" I asked him.

"Sure! Make use of that fire which scorches your body and turn it to light up the path of your great future. New material or spiritual wealth, whether in the field of human happiness or that of art and learning of permanent value, has always come from the masses bending under a cruel yoke, never from the oppressors who get rich at the cost of their people."

(iv)

One evening while I was engrossed in deciphering Buddha's great renunciation in original Pali, someone turned up stealthily in my sanctuary. He laughed to attract my attention. When I turned, I found it was Sachin whom I had known also as the 'leader'. His movements were restless and he talked nervously: "Of course, you are better off here than on the boat. But you must not leave our sporting club."

"These days I have no time for those distractions."

"But you are creating a lot of doubts and misunderstanding about your behaviour."

"Doubts?"

"The timing of your disappearance is peculiar. The police, though they have no proof, connect it with our raid that previous night."

"Are they investigating that affair?"

"They are, but we have succeeded in side-tracking them. Only if our members go on showing their faces as usual, there would be nothing to worry about."

"Are there any other members who have gone in hiding?"

"Yes. Sudhir. You remember, he wanted to hand over our booty to the girls."

"Where has he gone?"

"He is still in the city. But a friend told me, the police took him for interrogation once or twice, and he has lost his job at the book shop he worked. Now we shall have to be very cautious about our further activities."

"What would be the best thing to do?"

"As if nothing has happened, you should come to our club and make the swimming competition and the subsequent dance-drama on water a success."

"When do you want me there?"

"This Saturday you would take your boat to the Chunar fort and the next morning we shall return swimming."

"All the way?"

"Sure. It is not so difficult as it looks. You simply float on water and mind it that you don't leave the current. If that goes on well, you cover the 20 miles in about five hours' time."

"Five hours in the current, quite thrilling!"

"It is, do come."

He put his hand on my shoulder to assure himself that his orders would be carried out.

(v)

Hazari smiled to make good: "Everything has cleared up. The police had suspicion that you had robbed several villages and brought to me a whole boat-load of gold. How fantastically their imagination runs! I wish it was true. A whole boat-load of gold! Just think of it. Even Alibaba didn't possess that much of gold in his life time."

"Has the matter cleared up now?"

"Thank God! It has. Now they are convinced that you went to Chunar for your rehearsals that night and not for

robbery. That is what I had told them and they got it corroborated during their interrogations of some members of the swimming club."

"They won't doubt our movements this night?"

"In no case. And I am giving you a helper. In case you decide to jump for the competition he would take care of the boat. He has got the boat ready. It is time you started."

"I have come prepared for it."

"The two girls, Asha and Shaila, are also going with you. You will have to pick them up from the University Ghat."

"Why there?"

"They have to attend some evening classes there, and the place is on your way."

"What about Shaila's father's consent?"

"She said he has allowed her."

"I am surprised."

"Anyway that is not your worry. But be careful. She is after all a policeman's daughter."

The girls had prepared not for a picnic but for an Arctic trip. After fixing up their luggage, there was hardly any room left for their relaxing.

Asha was unperturbed: "We have been looking forward to this night most impatiently. We wouldn't get any time for sleep."

"What would you do throughout the misty darkness?"

"Try to peep through into our future," Shaila replied. "Our chattering would never end. Don't get annoyed."

I found it hard to keep myself awake. As soon as the sails caught wind I directed the helper to keep the boat nearer to the other bank.

"Don't you trust us?" asked Shaila.

"If we leave it to you, we are sure to collide and sink."

"No, no," Asha assured taking the control of the rudders: "I am going to land you on the shores of the fairies."

When I opened my eyes next morning, the boat was tied with a dozen other boats at Chunar. Asha and Shaila were still chatting. I had a hurried wash and breakfast.

Competitors were lined up on one boat. At the fire of an airgun they had to plunge. A college student counted them and assigned helping boats for each one. But he was worried to let go the unlucky number of thirteen in this dangerous venture. He felt relieved when I joined them as the fourteenth competitor. I had also my own boat to follow me.

All others took the competition seriously. The moment they struck water the race went on for becoming the first to reach the ghats.

For me that was a sport for joy. I allowed them to leave us far behind. Shaila was disappointed: "We won't reach there in time to see the crossing of the final lapse. That's most interesting. The tired limbs of the swimmers move only mechanically by that time."

"That's not sport," Asha replied.

"But my father would be expecting me by that time at the ghats."

"You will get there in time if you leave us at Ramnagar. I will plunge into water there and you may take the boat."

"This arrangement suits me fine," Shaila said and became cheerful again.

I allowed myself to drift with the current. They cheered me up and talked to me from the boat. Asha told her day-dreams loudly: "Some day I shall become a fairy princess. Then I shall keep a yacht and go around sight-seeing throughout the world. Won't you come with me?"

"I will. But I won't be able to swim that far," I replied.

"Why should you always swim? I will take you as the captain of my yacht."

Our talks took us away from the main current. When we reached Ramnagar the other boats were already on their way to touch the ghats. Shaila got worried: "My father would get wild if we delay any more."

"You always pull me back to the miseries of this world", Asha resented.

"I haven't got a boat-load of gold like you to get a yacht and go around the world."

"Where have I a boat-load of gold?"

"That is what my father suspects."

"Then take all this gold and the boat as well to your father. We are plunging deep into the Ganga to seek our new luck."

She dived. The helper rowed the boat away. We began to swim hand in hand.

(vi)

The force of the main current did not allow us to reach the ghat we had aimed at. We were carried away much further down the river. It made us rather more happy.

Asha switched over to back-strokes: "What do we care where we land! Main thing is that we are together. Let's both think that we are sailing to unknown lands."

The current struck Raj Ghat and threw us on dry land. We had to walk back a long way. A boat passing that way picked us up.

It had got dark when we reached our boat at the Ahalyabai Ghat. The leader awaited us there. He had the champion's medal pinned up on his shirt. But he looked

furious: "You both upset our water dance-drama programmel"

"We were swept away by the current against our will," Asha smiled.

"The public had bought tickets for that show. Now they will consider me a cheat."

"Why didn't you return their money?" Asha retorted.

"Nothing is left with us. I had to promise them another show for their money at the Bengali School premises. You both will have to work hard and make good for your absence today."

(vii)

Concentrated on studies and sports, time passed fast and happily.

But Banaras vibrated with violent reactions of the political upheavals taking place in the country. A train was stopped near Lucknow at gun-point and its cash-bag robbed by some educated young men. This incident was fully utilised as a pretence for the arrest of a large number of political suspects at Banaras. Shaila's father became very active.

Our dance-drama faced unexpected handicaps. The 'leader' who had to take Ananda's part went underground. Asha's house was searched. She came to tell me: "You will have to take Ananda's part."

"But I have never acted."

"Then you have more reasons for acting tonight. Your part is not difficult. You come in a monk's garb at the end and chant a prayer to Buddha. Besides, you know that prayer in original Pali."

(viii)

The stage set up at the Bengali School was an open one under the clear skies of an autumn evening. The arrangements could not have been better. The tragedy proved moving and effective to the public. After the show, repeated demands were made for Prakriti's last dance falling at Ananda's feet. At the end, Asha, still in the costume of the redeemed untouchable, caught my hand to go out through a back door.

A voice stopped us in a dark lane: "Asha dear! Here I put all my sport medals in your hand. How magnificent it was!"

We were surprised to come across the 'leader'. Just as he was about to take a turn in a side lane, we heard from that direction Lahiri's cracked shouting: "Catch him alive! Don't let him go. Give him a good beating!"

Before we could realise what was happening, some blows began to fall on my head as well. Instinctively Asha came under the shelters of my arms and hid her face into my shirts.

They put all three of us under arrest and marched us on before them goading us with their bamboo poles.

I tried to see where we were going. Though blood streaked over my eye-lids, I recognised Lahiri's house in front of us.

Shaila came out opening the doors. She asked her father, "Why have you arrested my class friend and her partner in the drama?"

"I will let those two go," her father promised.

Pretending to have a close look at the leader, Shaila passed on something in his hand. The next moment there was a big thud. Lahiri rushed inside the house to protect

himself. Shaila followed him. The policemen holding the leader ran off for their life.

That confusion provided us opportunity to disappear in the dark lane leading to the ghats.

Next day the newspapers reported: "A desperate terrorist shot at an intelligence officer at Godawlia Chowk in Banaras, but the officer was not hurt."

Finding me 'bruised by city hooligans' at the theatre melee, our Acharyaji did not allow me to go out of the college compounds any more without his previous permission.

LUCK THROUGH DISASTERS

(i)

Acharyaji showed satisfaction at my studies. During the third semester he took us around to see some archaeological excavations. As a good scholar of ancient Indian history, he himself read original Brahmi and Kharoshti scripts in which the edicts of Asoka and the inscriptions of Kushan period were inscribed. In a remote place like the Barabar Hills in Gaya district where once Buddha wandered seeking enlightenment, he deciphered some stone engravings which threw much light on the way of life during Buddha's time.

On our way back he was thrilled: "Surprisingly enough, it is Buddha who shows the road to our salvation even from our present British oppressors. You see, Buddha spoke to the masses. We too must start a mass movement. That's the only road to our freedom."

His political aim was clear: "Buddha fought and wiped out bigotry. With the same missionary zeal we have to fight and drive out foreign slavery. His disciples crossed the Himalayas and the high seas to spread his message of salvation. We shall have to do the same with our independence movement."

Our ten weeks annual summer recess started. For reasons of health and in the interest of his work Acharyaji left for Mussorie, a summer resort. For me he assigned

some work in connection with our studies. If possible, I had to visit the site of some Ladakhi Buddhist monasteries in Kashmir and Lahaul to collect literature on the mystic cult of Buddhism. In the course of this work Acharyaji intended to test my resourcefulness and the spirit of adventure.

(ii)

Asha told me her holiday plans. "Ammy has been invited by aunty Dipa to spend the holidays at Lahore. You know I was born there and was only a few months old when Ammy brought me here."

"Do you go there quite often?"

"It's a far-away place. The railway fare costs a lot. Even then we have managed to get there every second year. Ammy knows many people in Lahore. They offered her a teaching job and a house to live, but Ammy wouldn't like to live there where Daddy was humiliated and punished for speaking the truth."

"How was it? You never told me about your Daddy."

"We never talk about him."

"Why not?"

"People get scared to talk to us when they know the facts."

"You can tell me without any fears."

"Of course, but it's a long story."

"I shall row you to Ramnagar from where we were that day swept away by the current. The boat will take quite some time to drift back. I will have plenty of time to hear your life story. But tell me, does Ammy get worried if you return late?"

"No, she likes you and has confidence in me. In any case,

she has some evening classes, and wouldn't return home before eight."

She held the rudders and looked straight into my eyes: "Mummy has confided me all the details. Since you are my only boy friend, I mustn't hide anything from you."

"I shall never betray your trust in me, Asha!"

"My parents had a love marriage when they were both at the college. Ammy was born a Brahmin and her fiance a Khatri. No Hindu priest would help them, so they got married at the Brahmo Samaj. The Bengali society treated them as out-castes. So they went away to a far-away place—Lahore. Both of them earned their living, Ammy in a Montessori school and he as a journalist with an English newspaper."

"Fine."

"Their honey-moon did not last very long. Some America-returned freedom-loving people started the revolutionary movement in the Punjab."

"The Gadder Party you mean?"

"Exactly. They enrolled Dad as a member. Then the police implicated him in a bomb outrage case. A summary trial took place and they sentenced him to transportation for life in the Andamans."

"Is he there even now?"

"Yes. I was born when his trial was going on. Ammy says the police didn't allow him even to see me before the convict ship sailed."

"They are very wicked."

"Everyone who was jealous to see we were doing so well even under heavy odds, became jubilant. Ammy could not stand their laugh. She came over to Banaras because since time immemorial this city has given shelter to all down-trodden and oppressed souls."

She turned back the boat: "Uncle Pal was the only

one who had come to put us in the train. He could not do anything more even if he wished. The police would have dragged him into some robbery or a revolver case. After several years when Daddy's name was forgotten by the police, he invited us once during holidays. Since then Aunty Dipa presses him to invite us often. They have no children, so they love me as their own daughter."

Her mother had not returned when we reached her home. She took leave feeling a bit sad: "Tomorrow we leave by the Punjab Mail."

"I shall be at the station."

I promised, and rushed back to my room.

(iii)

I felt lost and left behind. All was dead silent around me. Only the hot wind made me feel I was alive. The loneliness was unbearable.

I was given by the college some money for food during vacations. Counting it, I found, that was just enough for a third class ticket to Lahore.

My bed on the heat-scorched grass didn't refresh me. Though the Punjab Mail was not arriving before ten, I reached the station at day-break. The booking clerk issued me a ticket an hour before the departure of the train.

Ammy, and Asha came in time on a pony-drawn 'tonga'. To save them portorage I carried their bundles. Ammy smiled at this unexpected help: "We will miss you very much. Will the heat drive you back to your boat-house?"

"Can't say."

The train came with all third-class completely packed-up. Even then all its doors and windows were mobbed in by hundreds of new passengers. Stout men threw into

the compartments their bundles and family members indiscriminately.

We could not get in anywhere. The Anglo-Indian guard blew his whistle and showed green flags. The same moment Asha saw an empty third-class compartment at the rear of the train. I opened it for her. In a flash, we threw in the luggage and got in. The guard shouted: "Not there! That is for Europeans only."

"No European is there!" Asha told him.

"Just the same. It may go empty but Indians are not allowed there."

By that time the train had caught motion. Ammy sighed in relief: "Good, you came to see us off."

"He's coming with us to Lahore." Asha disclosed.

We spread our bedding and relaxed comfortably. The next stop was after two hours. There, the guard woke us: "Get down!"

"We are booked for Lahore," I showed him our tickets.

"But I can't permit you to travel in this compartment."

"Why not?"

"It's only for whites."

"Your rules disgrace us."

"I haven't time for arguments."

"We refuse to vacate."

"I will have you thrown out."

He called some railway staff. They could not reach quickly. The train left again. The guard threatened: "Not only thrown out, I will hand you over to the railway police for violating law and order."

We had no time to reply. The next stop was at Lucknow. At the calling of the guard two policemen turned up in uniform. They were about to push us out. Quite a crowd gathered at the platform. Most of them had sympathies for us but were afraid of rendering any support openly.

One of the policemen opened the door to throw out our luggage first.

"Stop." A tall stout man with remarkable personality ordered him: "You dare not touch them."

"They are breaking the railway rules, which is punishable under the law." The guard argued.

"Such insulting laws, the symbol of white slavery, must not be obeyed. They have done the right thing to enter that compartment."

"Lalaji, Lala Lajpatraiji, has intervened!" The public shouted at the guard and the policemen: "Clear out. Leave them in peace."

Before going to his own compartment, Lalaji patted on my back, "Brave lad! How far are you travelling?"

"Lahore."

"I too. Come and stay there at my place."

People shouted: "Glory to Lalaji! Long live Lalaji!"

We three, too, joined them. The train pulled on.

We reached Lahore undisturbed.

(iv)

Uncle Pal was at the railway station to receive us. We all drove in a 'tonga' to his residence in the daily "Tribune" compound. Aunty Dipa had prepared all the rich food we had ever dreamt about. Only the excessive heat made us more restless. Asha gave me the idea of a Mother Deity of refreshing coolness residing on mountain tops. We pined for freedom to reach there.

The same evening I went to see Lalaji and introduced myself as a student of Acharyaji. He had a room and exceptionally delicious food ready for me: "You must get strong to fight and thrash down the British Tommies. There

is something better than your studies with Acharyaji. You should become a good fighter for freedom. I would like to see you a seasoned soldier."

"An army man, you mean?"

"Yes."

"But where can I get trained?"

"Perhaps abroad."

"I must follow your advice."

"What are your immediate plans?"

"To jump over some mountain peak."

"Excellent. Have you any particular one in mind?"

"No."

"I had better send you to Kashmir. There you will have a good choice. When can you start?"

"Tomorrow, if possible."

"Why not! My friend Bawa is at Srinagar. I have to send a lot of our 'Servants of the People's Society' literature to him. If we send it by railway parcel, the police would intercept and destroy it. We need someone to take it to him. Will you act as our messenger?"

"Gladly."

Next morning he handed me two small parcels for Bawa and an envelope for me which contained a hundred rupee note. I looked dazzled at so big an amount. Lalaji assured with a smile: "This is only for your outward journey. Bawa will fix you up for your return trip."

With so much wealth in hand the very Himalayas looked like bowing down at my feet.

(v)

Asha leaped as if the laps of the mountain Deity of her dreams were already within her reach: "Our sailing

to far-away lands would turn into a reality once we have Her blessings.”

Ammy came out with her long-suppressed wish: “Amarnath caves! There lives Shiva incarnated in ice. All sins, all sorrows vanish once you reach his feet.”

“We shall take you there too, Ammy dear!” Asha said kissing her mother: “We both have strong bodies to carry you high up over the mountains.”

“Your don’t have to carry her,” Aunty Dipa smiled. “There are plenty of mules you will get there.”

“You must come”, I said.

“Will it not be a burden on you?”

“No, no!” Asha repeated.

The same afternoon uncle Pal brought Frontier Mail tickets for us up to Rawalpindi, the rail-head for Kashmir. I offered to pay the cost, but he quietened me: “Keep it. You have to go a long way.”

This time the third-class compartments, too, were sparsely occupied. We took a coupe meant for four passengers, but the fourth one remained empty up to our destination.

Feeling fresh after a night’s good sleep, we got down at Rawalpindi next morning. But all seats in the road bus to Srinagar were sold out for the day. We made reservations for the next day.

To utilise the time gained we decided to visit the ancient Buddhist University site at Takshasila and the Sikh shrine at Panja-Sahab, which were only a few stations away on way to Peshawar and the Afghan borders.

At Takshasila we stood before a masterpiece of Indian art, Buddha’s figure in stucco. The image was excavated from the Jaulian monastery of Takshasila and represented Lord Buddha seated in meditation.

Ammy still rested near the entrance. Asha prayed softly:

“Lift me up from dust and darkness. Destroy all our sin and suffering. Let the fountain of our life flow in ‘Ananda’, the greatest happiness. Fulfil our wishes. . . . Lord!”

(vi)

Covered with dust and parching thirst we reached Panja-Sahab.

Amidst an arid hilly patch there is a pool of deliciously cool water which does not dry even in the hottest and driest season. It is below some rocks carved with the hand-print of Guru Nanak Dev. They say, the Guru had stopped the hill there, which was rolled down by a jealous mendicant. Further below is the spring of bubbling water that rises in the middle of the pool.

Ammy went to the adjacent temple. Asha pulled me to plunge. Bowing at Guru Nanak Dev’s palm-impressions reverently she murmured: “Lead us to a new happy life.”

(vii)

Next morning our bus passed through the dreamy Chenab and Jhelum bends and by the evening took us to Srinagar – the ‘Venice-Superba’.

On the shores of the Dal Lake at Srinagar, a villa stands in the shadow of the hill-temple of Sankaracharya. The gardens around it spread up to the surrounding foot-hills and link their flower-beds with the historic Mughal gardens – the Nishat and the Shalimar. A water-fall passing through Chashma Shahi entertains the landscape with its music.

This was Bawa's home we were looking for. Our 'tonga' driver stopped at the Lake Road: "Now, you will have to climb a little on foot. Bawa is an ex-army captain. He loves to see his guests present themselves at his villa after a little climbing parade."

I climbed up alone. The tall stoutly-built white-bearded captain sahab received me at his garden door holding back his Alsatian: "Lalaji has already sent me a wire about your arrival. You are most welcome."

"I have two parcels for you."

"Yes, we shall get them. But first things must come first. I see you have two lady family members with you. You can have a suit of rooms in the villa or stay in our house-boat there which has three bedrooms, besides a drawing and a dining room. For cooking food you will have a 'donga' and for going around a 'shikara'."

"That house-boat will suit us better."

"Excellent," he called one of his orderlies: "Bachan Singh! Fix them up on the 'Viceroy of India'. Tell Gafara to take the house-boat to any lake or 'Bundh' they choose. You will provide them all the provisions from the villa."

"We are most grateful to you, captain sahab!"

"I don't believe in words. You must prove your gratitude in action by winning some battles in our fight for freedom."

"Your orders! Captain sahab!"

He smiled: "Now, capture the throne of the 'Viceroy of India'. Double March!"

(viii)

Asha got impatient at the sight of the colourfully-decorated 'shikara': "Let's get in and go around."

"Won't you have some food first?" Ammy asked.

"Food we have always. But the views of this lake only now."

"If you go around this lake it would take you the whole day," Gafara explained.

"And if you get lost?" Asha enquired.

"Then a whole life," Gafara smiled.

"I would like to get lost," Asha decided, "and right now."

She got into the 'shikara.' Gafara asked her: "Do you know rowing well?"

"Sure, we come from Banaras."

"In that case my 'dongi' would suit you better. You see those vast patches of vegetable gardens! They are all floating on the lake. This is a speciality which you have nowhere else in the world. A 'dongi' can cut its way through which is hardly possible for a 'shikara'."

"So much the better." Asha became more impatient: "We get into your 'dongi'."

"I have to get some vegetables from Nasimbagh anyway; you both can come with me."

He rowed us to the floating gardens. There he got involved in a drinking bout with some of his friends. Asha complained: "It's a pity to stop here."

"Do one thing," Gafara suggested: "You take this 'dongi' and go around a little. I shall come back in another one. But handle it with care. It's more delicate than a Kashmiri girl."

"We know how to handle it," Asha assured him.

Some under-current drifted us towards the currents of the Jhelum. The bends of the river lured us more. Very soon we got caught and carried away with it. Asha clapped with joy: "Most wonderful! Here you can really swing on the river."

We looked towards the horizon. The last rays of the

setting sun touched the snowy summit of a nicely carved peak. Asha pointed out: "That must be the throne of the all-wish-fulfilling Deity. We must offer her some flowers. There are some on that bank."

She herself rowed to that place. When the boat was about to touch it, she left the oar and stretched her arms to pluck some flowers. Twice she missed. Then she got up and leaned out. A strong branch of the flower plant proved stronger than her. That pulled her on. She would'nt let it go. As a result of their struggle, the 'dongi' toppled over.

We were thrown into the icy water. First we didn't mind it. But in our effort to set the 'dongi' right we sank it down. Finding no other way, we made it secure with the roots of a big tree.

Asha's teeth clattered: "Let's run and get warmed up."

We trotted quite a distance, but did not know how far we were from our boat-house. Anyway, the good exercise cheered us up. She stopped me to look towards those peaks again: "Wish anything now, that Goddess will make it a reality."

All shades of red clouds played ballet around the throne of the Deity. She pulled my head close, shivering: "They are telling our future."

"Interpret it for me."

"As my French teacher once put it – we stand – *avant le Deluge*. Yes, we shall have to pave our luck through disasters."

IN THE HIGH HIMALAYAS

(i)

The aroma of the proverbial spring spread all over the Dal Lake. Bees hummed. Birds sang. All life exulted. But Asha's fantasies had joined Rabindranath's Jhelum birds: "Stay not here! Stay not here! Fly, fly! Elsewhere to elsewhere! From unknown to unknown."

Looking at the peeping snow-peaks she promised: "We are coming."

(ii)

The sinking of the 'dongi' was reported to Captain sahab. To celebrate our 'triumph' he invited us for tea: "No one had ever dared to take that waterfall route to Jhelum. I myself had never thought of that strategic attack on the city palace through the romantic corridor. How did you feel when your 'dongi' had the sudden fall?"

"As we were looking at the snow-peaks, we crossed that point without having any warning of the danger ahead," Asha replied.

"Now, hardly anything remains at Srinagar worthwhile for your conquest."

"How to reach those snow-peaks?"

"Not very difficult. The easiest approach to a glacier is

that of Kolahai and the nearest view of the peaks from the Sheshnag or the Zozila."

"We would like to go there."

"That's the easiest thing for me to arrange." The Captain explained the route showing some photographs he himself had taken: "Your base will be at Pahalgam. One of my friends has a small hut between the two channels of the Liddar. Spend the night there. Next morning, Rahima, the famous horse-thief of the locality, will call on you. Tell him, I command him to take you to the Kolahai glaciers, then to Amarnath, and from there through the short-cut to Zozila. When you have made it, you will surpass most of the trekkers of Kashmir."

"Can we start tomorrow?" Asha put it impatiently.

"Of course. I shall right now reserve your seats in the Pahalgam bus."

"You are doing a lot for us!"

"You children should keep going, that's the best reward for me. I had a chance meeting with your father. You should also grow up into a revolutionary who can endure all things, trample down all obstacles and march on to free our country from slavery."

(iii)

The roaring Liddar guided us to the source of its life on a mountain top. We had to get there.

Rahima turned up with five ponies and an equal number of attendants: "My caravan is at your disposal."

"Will Ammy be able to ride?" Asha asked.

"You may safely depend upon me. Amarnath is a picnic compared to the pilgrimages we do in the Lamaland. We

are used to taking disabled pilgrims even to the trans-Himalayas."

Our trek led through pine forests along the mountain streams. At the other end of the first stage we crossed a snow-bridge. Further up there was a steep climb of three miles. Ammy measured it with her strength of devotion: "These obstacles are the best parts of a pilgrimage. You must pass through trials."

Once we reached the top, rain drops froze into 'cotton-flakes'. Asha tried to catch them before they melted: "What's this?"

"Snow", replied Rahima: "It's better than water. How nicely it rolls down! You don't get drenched."

Before it got dark we reached an artistically carved lake. Rahima reported: "It is the Sheshnag lake. We shall spend the night here. A little ahead is a small dak bungalow. We shall go ahead and make some fire for you."

"Food as well?" Asha ascertained.

"Sure, Kashmiri dishes."

Ammy rode ahead. We handed over our ponies to the attendant and strolled to a spacious field covered with red, yellow, violet and golden wild flowers. Asha pointed out at the glaciers: "Let's walk over them. They are made of that falling ice which builds up the lake and secures all the ingredients of its beauty."

She ran at that thirteen-thousand-feet height as in the plains. Then she threw herself on the wet flower-bed pulling me close to her: "Look!"

Three peaks, all covered with fresh snow, stood before us. We had never seen such beauties before, not even in our imagination.

Her body trembled: "Hold me tight."

"Yes."

"More tightly. My heart is jumping out."

Bathing in moonlight the three peaks kept smiling at us. I lifted her and brought her to the dak bunglow. Rahima had lighted a nice fire. We sat around it and heard his stories about the Lama land. To keep us and the food as well warm he served us nearest to the fire.

Through a broken window, the three peaks still reassured us. Not knowing when, we fell asleep.

(iv)

As the first rays touched the snow-peaks we set on our trek to Amarnath. Due to the high altitude no trees were to be seen anywhere. About noon time, the Amarnath caves came in full view. But a two-mile stretch of snow still separated us from them.

Rahima walked ahead: "This fresh snow looks quite treacherous. It has fully covered up the fast-flowing stream. We better cover it on foot."

He had thoughtfully brought a few pairs of straw shoes: "Feet get wet just the same with these shoes, but the advantage is that you don't sink deep."

We covered the snow-road without any mishap. Entering the caves Ammy prayed before Lord Shiva for an hour. She offered the Lord some snow flowers we had picked up on our way. As the blessings of the God she put one flower each at Asha's and my head. Asha smiled: "This will keep away sorrows from us."

Ammy's feet were getting blue due to her walk without shoes on the snow. Rahima suggested: "Mother! I shall get your mule."

"Will the snow stand its weight?"

"We must take the risk."

In the middle of the snow-road stood a barren rock.

The mule got scared and stampeded. He threw off Ammy and sank himself deep into the river bed. In spite of our best efforts we could not get him out. Within an hour he was dead.

We had to carry Ammy on an improvised stretcher made of canvas which covered our bedding and provision bundles. Rahima chalked out another route of safe return: "Though the trek to Baltal from here is a bit tricky, it is much shorter. If you have good luck, some motor vehicle may give you a lift from Sonmarg to Srinagar."

Crossing over into another valley to Baltal took several more hours. Towards evening we got caught in a gale as well. It was late at night when Rahima leading our way smashed into a stone-house: "Habiba! Fix us up for the night."

A startled couple awakened from sleep stared whispering with fear: "Sure, you are not ghosts?"

(v)

Rahima woke me from my dreams of a Snow White: "Come with us for some shopping on Zozila."

"Shopping?"

"That's our bartering market with the Lamaland people."

I alone rode on a mule. Rahima with all five of his men followed on foot. Under the cover of falling snow we reached the centre of the Zozila pass. It must have got about midday.

Visibility was restricted to a few yards only. But the noise of some grazing ponies directed our attention. Rahima whispered some orders to his men.

They all got hold of a pony each and jumped over their

saddleless back. Then catching the reins they set off in full gallop on the same trek we had climbed up.

A little ahead I heard a groan: "Lord! They have trampled me to death. The robbers, murderers!"

Tying my pony to a rock I went to the man in agony. He was a yellow-robed Tibetan monk. He cried in Pali, Lord Buddha's dialect: "Don't kill me."

"I want to help you."

"Both my arms are broken. I can't lift them. I'm thirsty. Put some snow in my mouth."

Gulping a few balls of snow he recovered: "Only the Devil could have tempted me to take this road!"

"Why? What has happened?"

"I'm an incarnate Lama from Western Tibet. A month ago I started on a pilgrimage to sacred Sarnath. My original plan was to take the Lahaul route. But a disciple from Leh persuaded me to take this route. Everything went on well till yesterday when we reached the top of this Zozila pass. Last evening a blizzard started. I got separated from my men. A robber pulled me down and rode away on my mule. I was waiting for my men to turn up. Instead of my attendants five robbers passed this track at break-neck speed. They trampled me down one after another. The last one got down from his pony and threw me into this ditch. I don't want to die here."

"You won't," I assured him and put him on my mule. Since he could not hold the girdles I tied him to the saddle and brought him to Baltal.

Rahima got wild with rage at me: "Why did you pick up our victim? His reports to police would ruin us."

"If you spare my life I would not go to the police," the Lama pleaded.

"Then you can come with us to Sonmarg. There, I shall

put you in charge of a horse doctor to set your bones right. When you recover, get one of your own."

The trek to Sonmarg was an easy one. To our right we had the romantic-looking green hills. From the left started the snow-lines of Thazivas. They looked so majestic and full of life that it seemed improbable that under their very shadows people could commit murder and robbery and remain unpunished.

The horse doctor put a bandage around the Lama's arms tightly: "You won't lose them any more."

A few hours later some foreign tourists turned up in a car. They had a fortnight's plan to fish and hunt at Sonmarg. The driver was returning to Srinagar without any passengers. He agreed to take the Lama also with us for a small tip.

As we were Captain saheb's guests, Rahima did not take payment from us. He was used to collect his bills at Srinagar from him directly. Only as some 'Bakshish' we purchased some wind jackets for him. He was so pleased that he said to the Lama at parting: "Allah may bless you and cure your arms."

(vi)

Captain saheb was deeply impressed by the religious studies and the attitude towards life of the Lama. He felt genuinely hurt that someone he knew had harmed him so grievously. One of the best rooms of his villa was put at the Lama's disposal. Under the treatment of a qualified doctor his arm injuries began to heal up.

The Lama never complained or grumbled about anything. According to his philosophy, life itself meant torture. Even then he suffered most the loss of his prayers and

other sacred books. Getting robbed of a heavy precious solid gold brick he carried for his expenses was immaterial to him. He said, "I can live without gold, but without those holy books my prayers at Sarnath would remain incomplete."

"What can you do now?" the Captain asked.

"I have an inner voice telling me that I should get those books from Kailang monastery in Lahaul before proceeding to Sarnath."

"How do you reach Kailang?"

"From Pathankot rail-head you go in a bus up to Manali and from there it is about ten days trip both ways."

"I can fix you up to Manali. There, one of our Society members has a big orchard and a nice garden house. I shall give you a letter for him. You can stay there as long as you like."

We had heard about Manali that it was a real heaven on earth. Our vacations too were to last another month. After a little consultation on our house-boat we decided to accompany the Lama to Manali and then to return with him to Banaras.

(vii)

The Vyas valley which led us to Manali was again quite different from what we had seen so far. There were rarely any tourists coming here for enjoyment as we had seen on Dal Lake and Sonmarg in Kashmir. Places of pilgrimage, too, were rare and none so famous as the Amarnath.

For us the orchard at Manali which Captain saheb had recommended turned out to be an ideal and most comfortable place for a longer stay suiting our meagre pockets. Ammy's feet were still swollen from the forced march on

snow. Asha stayed with her to look after. I alone accompanied the Lama on his trip to Kailang.

Luckily for us the weather at the twelve-thousand-foot high Rohtang pass, which is usually swept by blizzards, turned out to be most favourable. Facing us we saw the junction of two most picturesque valleys — the Chandra and the Bhaga. It was Nature's most magnificent rocky masterpiece at the top of the Himalayas. They were not yet spoiled by human habitation.

The snow-peaks of the region had a sage-like look. Asha was not there to pass judgements on them. For a moment I felt sad and lonesome.

Breaking silence the Lama asked: "Do you know what Rohtang means?"

"No."

"The pass of death."

"Is it because many people die while crossing it?"

"No. It is because the Pandavas, the legendary heroes of your Mahabharata epic passed this way on their way to heaven. Even today when you cross it you feel like having crossed death."

Stopping for the nights at the caves of the Tibetan and the Lahauli monks, one day at noon we reached our destination. Straight on we went into the prayer hall of a Lamasery. The head priest of the place gave us two copies each of the prayer books and the scriptures our Tibetan Lama had lost at Zozila.

Next morning we joined a merchant's caravan taking herbs to Manali. The Lama opened his prayer book while riding a mule and began to chant loudly. To keep proper rhythm he gave me a gong to strike hard at suitable intervals.

When we reached Rohtang, we found it covered with

mist. After a few hours' descent Manali came in view. With great enthusiasm I tried to locate our orchard.

"No", the Lama stopped me, "that's not the right path."

I looked surprised at him.

"I have found out your future in my holy book."

"What does it say?"

"You will not get Asha as your life's companion."

"But we have taken vows to march forward in life, hand in hand."

"Your separation is not far away."

"It makes me sad."

"You needn't be sorry for it. Only when you are separated from her, you will enjoy the bliss of emancipation."

"I have no hankering for that emancipation."

"In spite of that you have to achieve it. That's the highest ideal of man."

We came to the small wooden bridge on the Vyas at the entrance to Manali. A swarm of birds and bees greeted us inviting us to their festival of joy. But the Lama commented: "You know, the male bee always dies after making love."

"Hope I won't," I replied opening the wooden gates of the orchard.

(viii)

We lived under the self-invited guardianship of the Lama. He taught me the old Buddhist philosophy Acharyaji had asked me to study. Learning was one thing but to follow those teachings in actual life was quite a different matter.

Our vacations, too, were coming to an end. With

blistered feet but with real exhilaration we reached Pathankot to catch the train for Banaras.

All over the planes the monsoon was in its full swing. It drenched me when I went back to Acharyaji.

I told him all about our adventures and the new fears the Lama had awakened in me.

“Lord Buddha has shown us the right path to follow,” Acharyaji said, and he read Buddha’s first sermon delivered at Sarnath. “. . . These two extremes should not be followed by one who has gone out from home to the homeless life. What two? The giving up to the pleasure of sense, which is low, vulgar, worldly, unworthy and harmful; and the giving up to self-mortification which is painful, unworthy and harmful. . . . By avoiding these two extremes the Tathagata has found out that it is the middle path which giveth vision, which giveth knowledge, which tends to peace, higher wisdom, enlightenment and ‘nirvana’ (emancipation).”

A heavy squall of rains threw open the windows and filled our lungs with a fresh aroma of earth.

PART III

ESCAPE ABROAD

SAILS SET TO THE UNKNOWN

(i)

MY THREE YEARS' studies and sports at Banaras came to an abrupt end. One dark evening, Sachin, the revolutionary leader', turned up in agony of acid-burns all over his face and said: "Bandage it as best as you can."

"I shall take you to a hospital."

"Are you mad? The police will be called and they will find out that these burns are due to the explosion of a country-bomb. Besides, we have no time to waste. I must get another bomb ready by midnight."

"Why such a haste?"

"Don't you know, our great leader Lala Lajpatrai died of wounds inflicted on his head by a British police officer?"

"I saw it in the papers."

"Does your blood not boil? Only the blood of that foreigner who killed him would atone for the blood of the father of our national revolutionary movement."

I bandaged his wounds as best as I could. We stopped a tonga and drove to a secluded ghat to take a boat for the secret camp at Chunar. Asha joined us at the University Ghat. Finding me amazed at this surprise meeting, she exclaimed: "What the devil should I stay at home for? Become a wife and a housekeeper? I'll have none of it."

The isolated hut on the Ganga had turned into a fair of desperate youth. From here the armed terrorist move-

ment spread all over northern India. I located some familiar faces known to me three years ago, and enquired about some old comrades: "Where is Ram Prasad?"

"Hanged."

"What of the poet Ashfaq?"

"Awaiting execution in a death-cell."

"How fares Shukla?"

"Transported to Andamans for life."

"They were the bravest."

"Now, we shall have to fill up their ranks. Bhagat, Sukhdev and Raj Guru are in Lahore to shoot down the police officer Saunders who killed Lalaji. As soon as there is that thud, the British rulers will sweep down over us for reprisals. We are getting armed to face their bullets."

A number of blacksmiths were getting some sort of primitive revolvers ready. Bullets of right calibre for them were so rare that the guns were to go straight into terrorist action without testing. Two chemistry students at college filled nitric acid in empty fruit cans. They were to be used as hand-bombs.

Next day the newspapers actually reported that Saunders had been shot and killed at Lahore. Cheered up by this success, the youth assembled at the camp became impatient to march straight to British officers' houses to avenge all the injury and disgrace to their country under their rule.

Late at night under the cover of darkness we loaded the explosives and revolvers into the boat and drifted noiselessly towards Banaras. In midstream Sachin began to address our secret meeting: "These rusty weapons are only a symbol of our revolutionary spirit to fight against foreign domination. Our enemy has far superior weapons and organisation. The worst thing is that we have no shelter in our own country. Most of our countrymen

are too mortally afraid of the savage punishments for being sympathetic to our cause. But there cannot be any greater ideal in life than to fight for our freedom. If we have to suffer, let us suffer; even if death faces us, let our joy of fight not fade out."

A sharp whistle interrupted him. It came from a passing boat. Sachin whistled back in the pre-arranged way. The other boat touched ours. A girl from there said in a whisper: "Sudhir has turned an approver and betrayed you. Turn back and scatter. The police are on your track."

It was Shaila, the secret police officer's daughter and Asha's closest friend at the college. Sachin warned us: "In no case should anyone of us fall into police hands. Whether we know anything or not, they will implicate us in the Lahore conspiracy case. Under their brutal tortures many revolutionaries will be forced to admit their 'guilt' and handed over to the henchmen. Our life is before us, it has rather just begun. We must live. And now each one should find his separate shelter to survive."

Both boats drifted side by side. Shaila told Asha: "Ammy has packed up your suitcase. It is here in my boat."

"Any message?"

"Nothing but 'save yourself'."

"That I must."

"Best thing is my boat takes you to the Ramnagar Ghat. From there you get 'tongas' for the railway junction at Mughalsarai. I know, they are guarding only Banaras cantonment railway station. You will be able to catch some train safely at Mughalsarai."

"It's good idea."

"No one will know where you have disappeared."

"Your boatman?"

"I haven't brought any."

"Will you be able to reach Ramnagar alone?"

"Only these blisters are troubling me."

Asha looked at me. Both of us shifted to Shaila's boat. Sachin bade us farewell: "Where do we meet again? In free India or, if we fail, at the gallows."

None of us was able to peep through the dark Ganga so far.

(ii)

Shaila told us the true story: "Sudhir was in love with me. Many times he has presented me costly jewellery. I knew, he stole them from the booties of political robberies. Here they are. Last night I took them to throw them down into the Ganga, but it's a great pity. . . ."

"Why did you not give them back to the 'leader'?" Asha asked.

"If my father got an inkling that I had anything to do in this matter, that would become a sure evidence to implicate you all in several robberies with murders."

Holding the cardboard box with 'sari' advertisements printed on it, Asha looked at me: "Can you not convert it into cash and get some good foreign-made revolvers to raid jails and get our revolutionaries out, who are awaiting death?"

"It's worth trying."

"You must handle it carefully," Shaila warned. "This is more dangerous than your actual explosives."

"What has happened to Sudhir?" I enquired.

"I warned him that my father's agents followed me too, but he wouldn't listen. Father came to know about our intimacy, and in order to break it, he got him arrested and brought to our house. Seeing our Nepali door-keeper sharpening his dagger, Sudhir lost his nerve and told my father all about our boat adventure. Your name has

appeared in his reports very prominently. My father has got so determined to get you hanged that he said, 'I will flay him alive.' The main purpose of my leaving the house by the back-door and setting out alone in a boat was to warn you not to return to your college. Policemen are already posted there to arrest you."

Taking care that no one saw us, we left the boat at Ramnagar. Shaila allowed her boat to drift leisurely back to Banaras. Our way up leading to the station road was a steep one. Asha helped me in holding her suitcase from one side.

When the 'tonga' had brought us to the railway junction's ticket-counter, Asha paid him off and revealed her plans: "Ammy has prepared me weeks ago to face this predicament. She got in touch with Shantiniketan and has me already enrolled in the arts section there. The only problem was who could take me there. This has now been solved. She trusts you, and has always felt that I am safe in your hands. Here in this suitcase she must have put enough money for both of us to reach Shantiniketan."

We had not to wait long on the platform. An express train for Calcutta pulled in. The guard showed us into a sparsely occupied compartment. Looking into his timetable he said, we had to change the train at Burdwan and from there could catch another one to reach Shantiniketan at mid-night. Nothing else could have suited us better.

When we actually reached Shantiniketan, it was a great relief to discover that no one had followed us.

(iii)

The rest of the night we spent on the railway platform under the open starlit skies. At dawn, the station master

turned up. Leaving Asha's suit-case in his care, we walked towards Shantiniketan.

No one asked any questions. We selected for ourselves the direction of more shady trees. Asha picked up some wild flowers just for fun.

Soon we reached a small mud-coloured house. Gurudev Rabindranath was at the window. The rising sun lit his face with its first rays and gave an illusion as if his long white beard was on fire. We went to him.

He put his hands on our heads. Asha spread the flowers in front of him.

"And here," Gurudev took out a rose from the arms of his relaxing chair, "is one for you, Usha!"

"I'm Asha, Gurudev!"

"Usha may suit you better. You have the colour of the morning clouds."

Music was played in the garden and songs were sung in a low voice. A batch of girls and boys in their graceful costume came on their morning round to Gurudev. He asked one of them, "What are we celebrating today?"

"Varsha-mangal—the rain-blessings—with a new play."

Gurudev softly clapped his hands following the rhythm of the dancing children returning after having received his blessings.

Asha hummed a tune on our way back through the mango-grove. I wondered what it could be.

"It's 'Udara-Charitam'—the generous." She looked at me: "Don't you remember his quadruple—'The great and generous heart does not distinguish between small and big. A small insignificant flower is mocked by the garden flowers but the sun with all his greatness greets and treats her with equality'."

(iv)

She came to the railway station to see me off. A gong announced the arrival of the Calcutta train. Taking out a small packet from her handbag, she smiled at me: "This will help you in going abroad."

"That terrible explosive?"

"No, that is to be returned to the 'leader'. These are some of my own gold ornaments."

"What should I do with them?"

"Cash them and buy a ticket to leave the country. You are not safe here, you know!"

She pressed the packet into my shirt pocket. The train whistled. As if to confide a great secret, she whispered into my ears: "Come back to me, dear!"

(v)

The train got into motion. She remained looking at me until the train plunged deep into the darkness.

An elderly person was spreading his bedding on one of the wooden berths of the carriage. He invited me to make myself comfortable: "Do you not feel sad to leave Shantiniketan?"

I nodded.

"It is natural. I came here to leave my daughter, Vimala, for her studies. Those few minutes with Gurudev! Even when he does not speak to you directly, you feel your very soul radiated with his love. Our true self reveals itself in his presence—just as the day is born out of the darkness of the night."

Our train had a four hours' run. During this time we became friendly and covered all possible topics for talks.

Vijayasena supplied provisions to boats touching Colombo. He extended me an invitation: "If ever you come to Ceylon, you wouldn't be a foreigner."

When the train reached Howrah station, he asked me: "Where will you spend the night in Calcutta?"

"I will have to find out a place somewhere."

"In that case, you can come with me to the Mahabodhi at the college square. It is managed by Ceylonese priests. You will be well looked after there."

That night I spent under a statue of Lord Buddha in the pose of turning the wheel of the Law. Early morning I was awakened with the chanting of a priest: "I surrender to the Fully Enlightened One."

I, too, decided to surrender to the will of Buddha rather than to the police. Asha's ornaments were cashed without any difficulty. In exchange I got about one hundred and fifty rupees. With that much wealth, I measured the length and breadth of the earth with a sure confidence that now even its most distant end had come within my reach.

Vijayasena was much pleased with the idea of my accompanying him to Ceylon: "You will like my country. Not far from our house is the Kelaniya Buddhist College. They will welcome you as a student of Buddhism most cordially."

His company saved me from all the trouble expected in a long trip. The Ceylon police, too, believed my bonafides that I was expected at the Kelaniya College.

But when I actually entered the Buddhist College, I felt very lonesome. When I closed my eyes for the prayer, instead of the Lord's, Asha's face and memory took possession of my very being.

To calm down, I rushed to the sea shore.

(vi)

An ocean-liner had anchored in the port. Vijayasena was going in a launch to deliver some provisions. Guessing my restless curiosity to see the big boat, he called me: "You can come with me. I shall tell them you are one of my assistants. For me it will take some time to fix up several things with the Purser. You can go around, see the ship and come back of your own on any of these launches."

After passing the gangway, I got mixed up in a crowd of porters and the crew. But there were no further checks or barriers. Whatever deck or cabin looked interesting, I was free to inspect. Soon I lost my way.

One of the cabins fascinated me. It had some fresh water kept above the wash basin. So thirsty had I become that I emptied the bottle in one gulp. Then I tried the bed. It was the softest and cleanest I had ever seen. In order to experience how comfortable one felt, I lay down on it.

This was the most luxurious relaxation I ever had. I closed my eyes to enjoy the soothing comfort thoroughly. I fell asleep.

(vii)

No dreams. It was the fulfilment of all my wishes in reality.

Ultimately when I opened my eyes, I felt my body moved in the rhythm of the boat. Looking through the porthole I could not see any land.

Trying to locate where I was, I entered a dining room. One of the stewards setting tables asked me: "Are you a passenger?"

"No."

"A crew?"

"No."

"Then you must be a stow-away. I shall take you to the captain."

The captain showed his regret: neither could he take the boat back to Colombo nor could he throw me down into the sea: "The only thing that I can do about you is to hand you over to the police at Port Said. That's our next calling port. Meanwhile, you can polish the life-boats on the top-deck."

For food I came in touch with the ship's cook—the red-bearded Kassimov. None of his companions had time or liking to hear the stories of his great exploits in the underworld of the oriental and mediterranean ports. But I found them most interesting, since, by a mere patient hearing, I got the best of food I had ever tasted, as a reward.

Kassimov felt flattered: "I won't allow the Port Said police to disembark you by force. I shall hide you in my store room. Or you can sleep in a hammock fixed up in one of the bunkers. I shall see to it that you get fattened like a pig until the boat touches Naples, our next call after Port Said. There I will take you out to fight a duel for me with an Italian who has set his eyes on my Carmencitta."

The sea-breeze refreshed me and the good food cheered me up. The wide expanse of sea opened new horizons.

My sails were set on for the unknown.

MORNING AT SORRENTO

(i)

I landed at Naples. The Italian police arrested me. They had genuine reasons for their suspicion. I had only a pair of torn pants and a buttonless jacket on my body, lent by Kassimov.

They took me to the police-station, and questioned: "British Indian?"

"No."

"Then what nationality?"

"Simply Indian."

They noted down: 'Red Indian'.

"Name?"

"Satyen Si"

"Slowly. Repeat slowly. So your surname is Satan, and the first one 'sinner'."

"Yes."

"Age?"

"Don't know exactly."

"Look, can you read the dates printed on that calendar?"

"Yes."

"What is it today?"

"Fifth of March 1930."

"How many years before were you born?"

"It is probable on full moon this month I may become seventeen."

"Fine. We shall put 14-3-1914 as your date of birth."

"Makes no difference to me."

"Where are your travel documents? Your passport?"

"I don't know what you are asking for."

Very soon they found out that I was neither a smuggler nor a security risk for Mussolini's fascist regime. The police chief shouted at me: "Go to hell!"

"Is it nearby?" I asked.

"Everywhere outside Italy. Get into your boat again. We won't object."

They let me go.

(ii)

Outside the port's barrier I met Kassimov: "My Carmencitta ran away with that champion rogue Leopardo. Now, you need not fight any duel for me. Anyway, I shall help you."

He put me in the care of a Capri boatman with whom he had bartered some illegal merchandise, and directed him to take me to a Russian emigrant's house.

The boatman asked me to put up the sail. We had a fine helping wind. Within an hour we were at Sorrento. There, the boatman put me ashore, spoke something which I took to be: "Red-Indiano! Go to the den of that Red-bear! There it is."

I felt hungry: terribly hungry. But I found it difficult to ask anybody for food. I had never begged in my life. At a spring I gulped plenty of water. It tasted bitter due to hunger.

I reached a house surrounded by an orchard. Fine red oranges hung from the tree. An old man worked at a distance. He had an extraordinarily friendly face.

"I'm a stow-away," I introduced myself.

"Da! Da! (Yes! yes!)" he murmured.

"I'm hungry."

"Idi (come)."

I followed him. He called a girl from the opposite tavern to interpret.

"Who sent you here?" he asked.

"Kassimov."

"Who is he?"

"A red-bearded vagabond cook on a ship coming from the Orient."

"Excellent! Excellent!" he laughed heartily patting me affectionately.

The table got laden up with varieties of food and a jug of red wine. While gulping down everything which tasted nice, I told him my travel experiences.

When I looked tired, he sent me to bed.

(iii)

Next morning I got up fresh and cheerful. Now, the gulf of Naples did not look broad enough. I could swim even further.

The Italian girl who had interpreted the previous evening, knocked at my door: "Granpa Maximo — Maxim Gorki is calling you."

"You mean, the one who wrote the 'Mother'?"

"Yes. He wrote also a lot of vagabond stories."

"How did he turn up here?"

"It is his house. You told him about Kassimov. Now he wants to paint that character in a short story."

"Good. I'll give him the details."

He greeted me as a very old friend. His laugh was also reassuring: "You will make a good writer."

"So far I'm not so well educated."

“What of that? Now, you will take up studies seriously and become a qualified engineer of human heart.”

“When I left home I got committed to a different plan.”

“What’s that?”

“I have to learn fighting techniques to drive out the British who are ruling us.”

“Only in Soviet Russia you will be able to master that technique.”

“Then I would go to the Soviet Union.”

“I’ll arrange your trip, but it will take some time.”

“Meanwhile I shall roam about taking some job on ships.”

“No, why waste time? The Western world can teach you many useful things.”

“For example?”

“The scientific outlook of life would prepare you better for your fight for freedom. To acquire that you should go to some European university.”

“Shall I get admission?”

“Go to Berlin. There we have got the secretariat of our organisation – ‘the League against Imperialism’. I am one of its executive presidents. My recommendation will solve many of your problems there.”

“How do we reach there?”

“By train, of course. But before you start you will need a proper pair of suits and an identity card.”

“Can I get some job to earn money for those necessities and my train-fare to Berlin?”

“We shall see to it. Yes, I must help you to come forward in your life’s battles, so that you may prove helpful in making India free, and that may create a better world, worthy of a real man.”

(iv)

One day some journalists who had come to see Gorki reported to him: "A revolution has broken out in India. This is the most important international news of the day."

"Tell me some more details," said Gorki sipping some Capri wine: "We must actively help that revolution."

"Gandhi has started a salt campaign. In action, it means, Indians do not obey the laws framed by their British rulers any more."

"Concretely speaking", another journalist said, "this is a revolt against British imperialism. Shattering that centuries-old chain of slavery, India has declared its independence."

"We are propagating India's cause to secure for her international support." The first one continued: "Every day we are getting hundreds of letters for more details of the happenings in India. Not relying on British news services, we have sent our own correspondents there. They have sent some valuable material in Indian languages. We want to use them. But our problem is how to get them deciphered."

Gorki replied: "Let me have those materials. I shall see what I can do through my secretariat in Berlin in this respect."

When the journalists had left, Gorki patted my back heftily: "Lucky boy! I never got such an excellent opportunity to serve the cause of the Russian revolution. Now, you should become a first-rank fighter for the cause of your country."

A few days later he gave me some crudely printed Hindi leaflets to translate and to dictate them in English to the Italian girl who had been interpreting for me. He said about his arrangement: "Work and enjoyment should

go together. I shall put plenty of wine and food in a boat. Enrico will take you all around the islands of Capri and Ischia. You like boating, isn't it so? Ella will go with you. She will show you the wonderful Grotta Azure. In case you like Capri better than Sorrento, you need not return here every day. Ella's mother runs that pension Ercolano. It is situated on the most picturesque site of the island, just below Monte Tiherio. You can stay there and translate the Hindi leaflets for me."

Rowing in the bay of Naples or the Mediterranean sea was different from what I was used to on the Ganga. Enrico and Ella taught me many sailing tricks and Italian legends.

One was about an unexplored Grotto. Ella related: "A dragon lives in that Grotto which is constantly flushed by high sea-waves. He has kept there quite a number of Italian belles in captivity. Only on full moon days he allows them for some fresh air to climb the Faraglione, at the meeting place of the bay and the sea waters."

"Have you ever seen them there?" I asked her.

"No, they remain invisible to girls. Only boys in possession of the magic stick of Saint Michele can see and rescue them."

"How to get that magic stick?"

"None has succeeded yet in that task. They say, the boy who gets that, would marry the fairest of the fair belles of the Dragon-Grotte."

Though I climbed quite a few times to the top of St. Michele, I did not get the magic stick. In the meanwhile, Gorki used my translations for newspaper articles and paid me most generously. Ella helped me in my purchases of European clothes and other necessary items for my trip to Berlin. One of Gorki's friends managed to secure

the identity card for me in order to facilitate my crossing of international borders.

Every preparation made, I went to thank and to take leave of Gorki. Now, I talked to him in broken Italian mixed with a few words of German, Russian and Hindi. He invited me to celebrate the farewell with a glass of red Capri wine, and advised: "Go to the Soviet Union. They will make you a fighter to shatter the chains of the imperialist slavery of your great people."

All my energies were released. Ella ran with me to the beach. Enrico took us to Naples.

There, they put me on a train to Berlin.

(v)

From the Anhalter railway terminal in Berlin, I drove to the secretariat of the 'League against Imperialism' in Friedrichstrasse. The man in charge of that office was an old revolutionary of India, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, called simply 'Chatto' by his colleagues. Having recommendations from Gorki, I needed no further credentials.

Chatto was very talkative by nature, and so was another colleague of his, a Chinese named Yue. Both of them advised me: "The Comintern way is the only route open to you to reach Moscow. Learn the use of arms to drive out the British from India."

At the same time they warned me: "It may take quite long before a clearance for you is received from Moscow."

As advised by Gorki, the League against Imperialism continued to provide me with some translation job which enabled me to meet my expenses. In order to make good use of my long wait, I picked up the German language and

enrolled myself at the University in the faculty of Social Sciences.

During those early thirties bewildering changes were taking place in the social, economic and political arenas of German life. Socialistic elements were getting badly mauled by the militant Nazis. So far as India was concerned, the Socialists were sympathetic towards India's freedom movement gaining momentum under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Such considerations in their natural course threw me into the fold of socialist circles at the University and their youth organisations.

On our first holiday, a group of nature-loving students invited me to cycle around some lakes and forests near Berlin. They called themselves 'wandervogel' — wandering birds. We were altogether eight, four girls and four boys including myself. Starting at day-break, within an hour we reached a wonderful forest on the Lake Wannsee. There we pitched a small tent to keep our provisions and clothes dry. Water was warm enough for a long swim. All of us spent the whole day in our bathing costume—bathing, singing, boating or dancing—whatever pleased us.

Rudi had his mandolin on which he played unending tunes. In the evening, joining our hands we all sang German folk songs. Such freedom of self-expression I had never enjoyed even at Banaras.

I did not feel like returning to my fourth floor attic which shivered all the time with the thunder of trams and the underground trains. Rudi came to my rescue: "Our villa is on this Wannsee Lake. As my classfriend and a fellow 'wandervogel' you are most welcome there."

Taking leave of the others, I cycled with him on the forest path along the Lake. His mother herself opened the door: "Rudi told me all about you. You know Tagore?"

see what he wrote in the family book of a Danish friend. I have framed it and put it in the drawing room.”

I read: “Thou hast made me known to friends whom I knew not. . . .”

Rudi introduced me to his father who was a judge, and two sisters—Ushi and Irene—who were in a high school. They all made me feel at home from the first moment.

At dinner, the mother said: “I have seen Tagore in Berlin when he was received at the university in a festive manner. His voice is surprisingly high. He quoted Heine who had said that the German nation had been the only one that did not try to capture outward treasures in India but had striven for the spiritual values of India. He is right, Indo-German understanding has deep roots untouched by selfish motives.”

When I got up to take leave the mother smiled: “Your room is here, the one adjacent to Rudi’s.”

Since that evening I had a real home.

(vi)

In winter the Schlachtensee Lake froze hard and turned into a natural ice-skating rink for the Berliners. Ushi herself was a good skater. I became her pupil and, by the time the ice softened, danced on that ice as her partner. This recreation and achievement helped me in obtaining good results at the University.

One of the professors, who had visited Tagore’s Shantiniketan in India, took a personal interest in my studies. Finding me doing well in his ‘Seminar’, he got me through some examinations and recommended my name for the Humboldt stipend. Before my second semester

with him came to an end, he suggested a subject for my Doctorate work.

Further satisfied with my research work, he encouraged me: "With this speed your Doctorate examination cannot remain very far."

Long vacations provided me opportunities for wandering into far-away corners of Europe as a 'path-finder'. The more I saw of the Western world it made my life happier and richer.

The most enjoyable time of the year I found to be the Christmas and the New Year. During my second Christmas in Germany, Ushi knitted a pullover for me, and suggested: "Our Oma, grandmother, has invited both of us for skiing at Garmish where she owns a beautiful house on the Eibsee. That is a paradise."

Skiing proved to be the most thrilling sport of all I had known. On return to Berlin I really could not imagine of a happier life.

STOWED AWAY TO THE SOVIET LAND

(i)

Chatto rebuked me: "You have no right to lead a happy bourgeois life in Berlin. Do you know the fate of your revolutionary comrades in India? Three of the Lahore conspiracy case are hanged. One from Bihar, I am told, is also going to be hanged. And here you are crazy about the degenerated way of Western life."

This time I tried to defend myself: "I do feel for our country and brave comrades. But experience has taught me, a few broken revolvers or tin-bombs do not solve our problem."

"Sure, they don't. Only a proletarian revolution can bring freedom and save the Indian people. But what about your personal contributions and sacrifices?"

"You are the first one to tell me about the proletarian revolution. What about Gandhiji's movement? Is it not taking us nearer to freedom?"

"No! No! No! Gandhi is a slave of the Indian mill-owners. His movement is to get some cotton-goods concessions from the British and to betray the real interests of the working classes."

"I am unable to follow your reasoning."

"This is why Gorki is very particular that you leave for the Soviet Union as early as possible. There you will have to unlearn all you have learnt at the Berlin University."

"My professors have not taught me anything wrong.

One with whom I work helps me to come out of my personal difficulties, and get acquainted with the basic problems our country is facing today."

"All rotten degenerated bourgeois philosophy. That's what you are picking up here."

"No! These are not rotten ideas. My professor has taught me, even when a people had to bend under a cruel yoke, they attempted and actually reached the greatest heights of human culture in the process of their very fight. In comparison to this idea your theory of the proletarian revolution has no appeal."

"You have drifted very far away in the wrong direction. Gorki wants to put you on the right track. He himself is shortly leaving for the Soviet Union to settle down there for good. He has instructed us to send you to the Soviet Union as early as possible."

"Has Moscow approved my coming to the Soviet land?"

"Partly. They say, if you manage to get on any Soviet ship as a stowaway, the Captain will connive and take you to a Soviet port."

"I am ready to take that risk if they give me the military training which I may put to our country's use."

"That's a small matter. Gorki will fix you up in the Soviet Union about this matter too."

"When do I start?"

"I'll find out the arrival of a Soviet boat in Hamburg port and let you know. In any case, your departure must be kept secret."

(ii)

In February 1932, I passed my oral examinations for the Doctorate. The next problem was to submit to the Uni-

versity 150 printed copies of my thesis. For that I had no money.

Those days Germany itself passed through the greatest economic crisis in its history. There were several million workers unemployed. Though I had tried my best, I did not succeed in solving my economic problems. Chatto, too, had stopped giving me any translation work due to my pro-Gandhian views. In desperation, I decided to return home via Soviet Union.

I went to enquire at Chatto's office about the possibilities of travel on a Soviet ship. That day one of the Comintern inspectors from Moscow examined my political heritage and whispered: "The Soviet ship 'Sibir' (Siberia) is leaving Hamburg today at midnight. Tell the captain you are 'Sasha'. Wish you good luck! Here is your ticket to Hamburg."

No margin of time was left for my packings. I hardly managed to ring up the mother at Wannsee: "A ship's captain is taking me on an Arctic cruise. We leave at midnight from Hamburg. I shall write to you when I come to it."

"Enjoy new adventures!" she replied: "I shall be looking forward to see you after your Arctic conquest."

I caught the Hansa Express at the Lehrter Bahnhof. It passed through the Berlin suburbs, full of my student days' beauty spots.

Now only I realised how deeply I had gotten attached to the German capital emotionally.

(iii)

The port of Hamburg was covered in darkness due to fogs. A few electric lights which pierced through, looked

like the eyes of giants. With an animal instinct, I avoided them.

But I was not sure whether I had not lost my way to s.s. 'Sibir'. An innocent-looking young girl passed by. I asked her: "Tell me, how do I come to the Soviet ship 'Sibir'?"

"It is berthing around the corner on Kai 87."

"Thanks a lot."

"But that ship does not carry any passengers."

"How do you know?"

"I'm the radio officer on that ship."

"I am going to see the captain."

"What is your name?"

"Sasha!"

"Come with me. The captain is about to raise anchor."

Under the next lamp-post I observed her minutely. She was a plump girl with a soft round boyish face. Her hair was tied under a red kerchief.

"Are you a Russian?" I asked.

"Yes! Why are you astonished?"

"Your German accent is very good."

"My mother is what you call a Volga-German. Now, may I ask — are you a Tovarish (comrade)?"

"An Indian."

"So, an Indian Tovarish." She stopped and looked around. No one was in sight. Softly she whispered: "The captain told me to help you board the ship. Crew members are not challenged by police. I shall talk in Russian, you simply nod and say 'da' at times."

"A few words of Russian I know."

"That's excellent. Call me Tanya."

We walked holding hands. The German police at the gangway did not challenge us.

Once on board, she warned me: "A customs officer will

come on board to check before the ship leaves. You had better be careful."

"What is the time fixed for our departure?"

"Just in an hour's time."

"I had better hide myself in the coal-bunker."

She showed me the way and closed the door of the bunker once I was in. It was total darkness. I made an even bed on top of the coal and spread myself out on it.

There was some movement on the ship. The lifting of the anchor. The chains clattered. Somebody commanded. A whistle. The ship shook.

Then it began to move.

(iv)

I woke up when Tanya opened the door. It was a beautiful morning. She pointed out above: "Come to the upper deck. You need fresh air."

"Where are we?"

"We haven't come out of the Kiel Canal yet."

I looked ahead. There were innumerable curves in the canal and at every curve new and unexpected scenes appeared as a surprise.

The steamer stopped only a few minutes at Kiel for getting clearance to the Baltic. Nobody disturbed me. From the top deck I watched the boat gradually leave the German shores, far far behind. Within a few hours we reached the open sea.

I felt free. Absolutely free.

The captain came to enquire: "Are you Uzbek, my boy?"

"No."

"A Tatar?"

"Not that either."

"Then, of course, you are a Mongol?"

"Do I look like a Mongol?"

"My fantasy cannot fly any further."

I told him I was from India. He opened his eyes wide:

"So, besides tigers and elephants there are sailors also in your country who drink all their earnings and travel as stowaways? That's fine. But I must give you some work.

What are you fit for?"

"On an Orient boat I painted boats at the top deck."

"You can have the same job here as well." He told his first mate: "Let him have all the facilities of a Soviet sailor."

My work was light. I found enough time to gaze at the horizon, and dream.

Tanya's radio cabin was on the same deck. Whenever off duty, she came to see me. We used to look at the waves together and talk at random. Once, while we were standing side by side at the railing of the deck under a brightly starlit sky, she said: "You know, I have enrolled myself for the northern Arctic route. That will be a real adventure."

"It must be very cold up there. Why did you not choose the south sea waters?"

"My adventure has some definite purpose. It is not bourgeois adventure just for some thrill. My adventures would open a new route between the West and the East and make the lives of millions of people happier. This realisation of the higher purpose would also give us sufficient strength to conquer all the obstacles on that unexplored Arctic route."

I admired the ideas and congratulated her for setting a noble aim in her life.

When our ship passed the gulf of Finland, we came across thick layers of ice. Then we got actually marooned.

A cold Arctic wind lashed the upper deck. The captain intended to relieve me of the work, but I insisted on staying there. I told Tanya: "Your wish has been fulfilled. We are in the Arctic."

"Hope, you are enjoying it. It is a good training—fighting your way through. Nature blocks our way and we shatter her obstacles."

We saw a light far away in the sea. She put her arms round my neck and pointed out: "Look! The ice-breaker 'Krassin' is coming to relieve us. Tomorrow we will be in Leningrad. I shall show you around our wonderful city."

After passing Kronstadt, we had a good view of the Soviet mainland. The shore looked like an enormous garden. It had a dark-green colour. We could distinctly mark the peculiar look of the landscape before us. It had its northern touch and carried a serious-looking gaiety. The flavour was severe-sweet.

Soon we entered the Newa and passed Peterhof, the famous Russian Versailles. The grand palace buildings, the marvellous fountains and the carefully dressed picturesque parks came in full view. The tall trees had struggled hard against the severe winter. One could see the marks of struggle on their barren trunks and branches. But they had come out victorious and nature had already begun to put delicate green foliage and all sorts of spring blossom over them. Meadows were covered with May-flowers.

The stiff-looking sailors came to the upper deck to look towards the landscape. They turned rather sentimental. One of them looked at Tanya and sang a folk song in tenor:

"Ach ti, devka, devka Krasnaya!
Ne khodi, devka, moloda zamuj!"

("Oh, girl, you red girl!
Don't get married so young!")

(v)

The 'Sibir' berthed at a neat and clean dock. Soldiers with rifles were the first to enter it. They took positions as guards on the exits.

A few minutes later, one of them came to me and asked me to follow him. He took me to the captain's cabin. I saw there a G.P.U., the Soviet Secret Police Officer, waiting for me. He greeted me with a laugh as if we were good old friends: "How was the voyage?"

"Fine."

"The ship's radio officer will take you to MOPR, our organisation which helps foreign political sufferers."

The captain smiled: "Mind it! She is all right on water but gets sea-sick on land."

Sailors and other ranks of crew began to land. Tanya winked at me. Within a few minutes we crossed all barriers and came out of the port area.

We walked holding hands, just like any other boy and girl on the Soviet soil.

(vi)

The MOPR official to whom we reported gave me a cut-and-dry reply: "I am directed to send you to Moscow. There you will report at the Comintern Hotel Lux in Tverskaya Street. For tonight I am fixing you up in Hotel Europa in Nevski Prospect. You will get your rail ticket at the hotel counter. For pocket expenses I am giving you

fifty rubles. Here they are. Sign here that you have received the money."

Coming out of the office, Tanya consoled me: "Our bureaucrats are worse than those found in Capitalist countries. Never mind. I shall show you something of Leningrad. You will meet my mother, too, in Moscow."

"What does she do there?"

"Works in a textile factory."

"Do you live alone when you come back to your home-port Leningrad?"

"No, I share a flat with Vera who works in the Intourist travel bureau as an interpreter. I shall take you there first."

She lived on the 'Naberezni', a street on the Vasilevsky island. The island is a large one with many boulevards and modern buildings.

Vera opened the door for us: "What an agreeable surprise! Did you hunt him out from the Indian jungles?"

"No", Tanya replied: "I fished him out from the black sea. Don't you see his colour?"

Vera got the Samovar ready. I looked through the window. Tanya put her arms round my neck: "From here you see all the three parts of Leningrad. The left one is Petrograd side. At its tip is the small island of Peter-Paul fortress. Many revolutionaries were imprisoned, tortured and killed in that fortress jail during the Tzarist regime. Our great writer Dostoevsky, too, was condemned to the dungeons of that prison."

"What is it now?"

"A mint-house and a museum."

A flock of northern birds flew over the fortress. Pointing out towards the middle, Tanya said: "That is winter palace and the Hermitage—the greatest treasure of paintings in the world."

"We will go there some day."

"I am a qualified guide", Vera intervened: "If I explain, you will see Russia in all its glory and beauty there."

Pointing out another majestic structure with magnificent pillars, Tanya said: "We call it the Church of Issac, the finest specimen of our Slav art. And just before us we have the bronze statue of Peter I on horseback. You must read Pushkin's poems about it."

We stood for a long time admiring the unique Leningrad panorama. Tanya and Vera both promised to pick me up from the hotel next day to show me Pushkin's house and other historical monuments of their city.

I preferred to walk back to my hotel. My path went through the Admiralty gardens. It was full of young people who talked and laughed freely and noisily. From one direction some one turned up playing harmonica. A group of young boys and girls made a circle around him. Someone ordered: 'Yablachki'.

The harmonica poured out lively, festive music. A girl was pushed into the centre. She dragged a boy companion with her. Both of them began to dance with the music. Everybody clapped to the rhythm, and sang:

"Huisya! Huisya!

Ti nie boisia,

Ya nie tronu,

Ti nie bespokisya!"

(Hup, hup, don't be afraid,

I won't touch you!

I won't touch you!

Don't fear, my maid!)

(vii)

The evening got prolonged. As is usual in the north in

summer, there were no signs of darkness although the clocks showed midnight.

The dancing group pulled me into their group, and we proceeded towards the Nevsky Prospect. They accompanied me to my hotel.

For me it looked really amazing, how quickly I could not only mingle with, but become one with the people. All that was required of a stranger was to leave himself to drift with the currents of the life of the country.

MOSCOW DOES NOT BELIEVE IN TEARS

(i)

Tanya and Vera did not turn up. I did not feel like going to museums or for other sight-seeing without them. Mustering courage I went to their flat thrice, but every time I found it locked. The neighbours, too, kept silent when I enquired about those two girls. The silence around that flat was comparable to that of a graveyard.

The whole day I walked the Nevsky Prospect up and down. Towards evening I went to Pushkin's house. A guide took me to a hall: "It was here that the father of Russian poetry and literature died in agony of the wounds inflicted on him during a duel engineered by the Tzarist regime of that period."

"So, they killed that great genius!"

"The Tzar could not tolerate his revolutionary call for freedom."

"Revolutionary call for freedom" still rang in my ears when I returned to Nevsky Prospect. Opposite the Kazan church, which was turned into an anti-God museum, I looked at the reflections of the centuries-old dome in the waters of a canal. A girl's face, too, reflected in water. I looked up. It was Vera.

She took me to the ancient churchyard which was completely empty. I saw in the northern light of the white night that she was terrified.

"Sashka!" she sighed, holding my hand.

“What has happened?”

“It is terrible!”

“Tell me soon.”

“They have taken Tanya away.”

“Where to?”

“From their talks I gathered to the G.P.U. headquarters at Lubyanka in Moscow.”

“What for?”

“For interrogation. She had got perhaps too friendly with you.”

“What’s wrong with me?”

“You are a foreigner and, in the eyes of our State Secret police, every foreigner who sets his foot on Soviet soil must be an imperialist spy.”

“So, I’m the cause of Tanya’s troubles!”

We parted, never to meet in public again. Without loitering any more, I took the midnight train to Moscow.

(ii)

The night express ‘Krasnaya Strela’ (Red Arrow) rushed towards Moscow. Over the radio we heard the tune of the ‘International’ broadcast from the Kremlin tower. It was a signal for the end of the day’s programme.

I travelled in the soft class. There were two berths in the compartment. I had the upper one. The lower one was occupied by an aged man who looked to be a musician. He put his violin carefully on the pillow till the train had gathered motion. Then he asked me: “Will it disturb you if I played the midnight street scenes of our beautiful Moskva now?”

“Of course not”, I had to say. The happenings of the

day were too disturbing to allow me much sleep anyway. I peeped through the window glasses.

It was not dark outside. My companion commented: "A real white night. It is warm, too."

"Let us open the window", I said, and pulled up the shutters. A gust of fresh air rushed inside. We felt much lighter.

The musician played his violin the whole night and in the morning he asked: "Did you enjoy my music?"

"It gave me a very sound sleep, anyway. Thanks and good-bye."

I went for breakfast in the large waiting hall of the 'Severnaya Vokzal', the northern station. It was a real museum filled with all sorts of people. There were as many varieties of poor dresses as there were of languages and modes of expression.

A few well-dressed gentlemen from Western Europe and America were also there, who spoke English and some continental languages. Occupying an empty seat there, I ordered some tea. The gentleman opposite me was obviously agitated: "Look at the breakfast they have brought! Even the pigs in our country would refuse to touch it. This black bread is hard to distinguish from clay in taste."

"You are in a worker's paradise," his companion corrected him.

"A paradise indeed! The food which the hungry cattle throw away in Europe is not available here to a skilled and good Soviet citizen."

"You are right. I was not anti-Soviet before I came here. But now, I will not forget my whole life what I have seen in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital. The sight of the starving peasants lying pitifully in the streets and babies

whose stomachs were bloated with hunger, were quite common scenes there.”

“Yes, there is a famine in Ukraine. It is bound to take a toll of a few million human lives.”

Afraid to get arrested for mixing with anti-Soviet foreign agents, I left my tea and rushed out of the railway station.

(iii)

Moscow turned out to be different from what I had expected it to be. I had imagined it to be a variation of some big European city. In fact, its real characteristic was that of an Asiatic ‘bazar’, a market-place.

I walked through broad boulevards. Their junctions had statues of great Russian writers like Pushkin and Gogol. At the end of a narrow street was the famous Red Square. Standing under the shadow of a Kremlin tower, I saw a maroon-coloured mausoleum with an inscription over it in Russian letters – ‘LENIN’.

The line of visitors at the entrance was quite long. I waited and took my turn. Inside was Lenin’s body looking as if he was only sleeping. Taking care not to awaken him, I got pushed out by the crowd behind me through the exit doors.

On the other side of the Red Square was the Tverskaya I was looking for. Now it is called Gorki Street.

Lux Hotel was not difficult to find. It was a special hotel for the fairly high-level Comintern functionaries. Passing through its corridors, one met the representatives of practically all parts of the world. In Room 7 lived Wilhelm Pieck of Germany, in 23 Kitayama of Japan, and in 43 Sardar Isar Singh of India.

On the first day of my stay there, an assistant of

Manuilsky and Kuusinen, the heads of Comintern, came to see me in my room. He gave his party name as Majut, but he clearly looked like a Russian Jew. Authorised to chalk out a plan for my training, he took me to the KUTV, the university for the workers of the East.

As Majut said, first of all certain angularities of my Gandhian and European education were to be filed out. To achieve that aim, I was put in a company of about thirty of our countrymen having their political and military training in Russia. The idea was to train us as Comintern agents and then to send us back to India to play our pro-Soviet role at the time of the liberation of India from the British colonial yoke. Those suited for army life were to get enrolled in the Indian Army to undermine it, and the others were to function as Communist trade unionists, agitators, propagandists, insurrectionists or secret Soviet spies.

Quite soon I was to find out the basic line of our training, too. In our political classes it was made clear that Gandhi was an agent of the British Imperialists and his National Congress was a reactionary, counter-revolutionary organisation of the Indian bourgeoisie. Further, it was taught, the interests of the Soviet Union had the highest priority in the international affairs. If India's interests were ever to clash with Russia's, we would have to take up the cause of Russia, since that was the fatherland of the world proletariat and the oppressed people of the colonies.

The largest group of Comintern cadets was formed by the Chinese. They were put before us as ideal models of Comintern products, and we were supposed to copy them. Every now and then some Chinese guerilla leaders who were said to have taken part in actual fighting in their country came to teach us their technique of insur-

rection. Huge models of Shanghai and Canton were placed before us to exhibit the proper strategy in street fighting. Cyclostyled copies of that type of training literature were distributed amongst us.

In one of our gatherings, a Chinese leader told us: "The Soviet Union is helping China with arms and political training to liberate the country. In the same way India will get all the support from Russia and China to liberate itself. As Lenin has said, China and India combined together under the leadership of Comintern will lead the whole world to revolution and rule it."

Obviously, I regretted having come to the Soviet Union for studies and training. My disappointment and resentment got its expression in some of my unguarded actions.

Very soon I was taken to Lubyanka for interrogations.

(iv)

On Lubyanka Square in Moscow are situated the huge buildings of the Soviet Secret Police. Many of their real stories are internationally famous.

A bald-headed cruel-faced man in the Communist party's typical civil uniform had picked me up from the KUTV dormitory on the pretence that I was to translate some secret Hindi handwriting. Passing through unending corridors and check-posts of bayoneted riflemen, he took me to the sixth floor of the grey and cheerless building. There in a small room he left me in the charge of a sentry and went to find out the particular officer to whose section I was supposed to belong.

In a thick iron-door cell on one side a young girl squatted on the floor. A secret police officer in uniform questioned her. She pleaded her innocence but the

officer would not believe her. There were tears in her eyes.

"Don't you know, pretty girl!" the officer laughed, "we have an old saying — 'Moscow does not believe in tears'."

There were other prisoners waiting in a corner. One of them asked me: "Are you also a suspect?"

Without waiting for me the next to him replied: "Of course! And I bet a dangerous Trotskyite."

"How did you get arrested?", asked a third one.

"Betrayed by some girl friend, indeed!" said the second one.

Just then, the man who had brought me there turned up and signalled us to follow him.

We were ushered into a large room of a G.P.U. officer who had a pile of papers before him on the table. The sentry who had kept guard on us walked over to the officer, saluted and reported pointing out at one of the prisoners: "This young man, Vasili Isakovitch Musalov, is a member of the Young Communist League, but has failed in the duties demanded of him."

"What are his faults?"

"Vasili is employed in the photographic department of a factory working for the Red Army. He is in charge of the films of valuable military secrets. During a checking, it was found that two films were missing. So, there is no doubt that Vasili is connected with anti-Soviet activities."

"The charges are very serious."

"Comrade Major!" Vasili cried, "the films missing are unexposed ones."

"What happened to those films?"

"I will admit my crime, comrade Major! I used those films for a private purpose — to take snaps of a girl I knew."

"The girl must be belonging to our enemy class! How

did you dare use a film belonging to the Soviet Government to take photos of a whore?"

"It was my mistake."

"Not a mistake, this is the worst crime you could have committed. You will be kept in custody until full investigations are made. Next one. . . ."

"The officer threw a reproaching glance at me: "How long did you know Vasili?"

"I met him only while I was awaiting to be brought before you."

"My sentry reports you were having intimate conversation with him."

"I did not talk to him."

"Ah! From your papers I see you are at KUTV."

"That's true."

"Your dormitory has become a nest of anti-Comrade-Stalin elements. Who is this Johnson who talks against the Comintern method of work in India? That fellow's head is too heavy for his trunk. And this Levin, who talks like a Trotskyite. He will be sent to Siberia for his deviationist crimes. I will be lenient in your case. But for that you will have to cooperate with me."

"In what way?"

"You will work as my eyes and ears in the dormitory. Report to me the details of every piece of gossip going on there."

"You want to use me as a police informer?"

"What's wrong in it? That way you will be performing your sacred duty of destroying the enemies of the working class. I shall expect the first secret report about your most intimate comrades in one week's time. I allow you to go back to the KUTV dormitory."

Never in life had I felt so depressed and disgusted as

when I came out of Lubyanka. I cursed myself for coming to Moscow.

Johnson was in reality a trade union worker from Madras. He did not suffer from any ailments, still he was sent to a G.P.U. 'hospital', where he died. Levin was actually a Sikh belonging to the Gaddar party. The G.P.U. officer's orders were carried out the very next day. Levin was sent to Siberia condemned to hard manual labour.

I looked at the grey Moscow sky and awaited my punishment.

(v)

Only Gorki could help me, I thought, and tried desperately to contact him. My Russian teacher gave me his address. It was at a stone-throw from the KUTV in Strasnoi Boulevard, where I lived.

I met him leaning on the railings of his garden. He had aged a lot since I saw him last at Sorrento several years ago. Now, he had a long, loose overcoat on. His collar was turned up. Only a part of his face was visible above the chin. But the simplicity and grace of his gestures were the same — tender, sensitive and sympathetic.

Glancing at me with his eyes which looked as if they could pierce everything, he smiled: "So, you have become a Russian, eh..."

I related to him my worries and also Tanya's case. He turned sad: "My desire was to put you in Lenin's Russia. Unfortunately, the very soul of that Russia is getting wounded by the present ruler. If I speak frankly how I feel, I will become the first victim of his liquidation list. However, in spite of all you have suffered, do not hate the Russian people. They have nothing in common with the

present Soviet dictator who is after the blood of millions of unfortunate people simply to safeguard his power over the Kremlin throne."

It looked as if it was going to drizzle. Gorki reached his hand to me: "Since I have brought you here, it is my responsibility to get you return home safely. I shall speak to Yagoda who is a big G.P.U. boss. Let's hope everything will end well. All the best . . . my boy!"

(vi)

Gorki's intervention seemed to work. I was not called to Lubyanka any more. Shortly, they despatched me to a Red Army training centre at Kovrov, a few hundred miles north of Moscow.

The main emphasis at Kovrov was on guerilla training and night marches. Once I had picked up the basic training, there was no point in continuing my drills unnecessarily. After a few months, the commanding colonel at Kovrov gave me leave to take rest at a Red Army sanatorium in Cremia.

I broke my journey at Moscow and went to see Gorki. This time he had some concrete plans for me: "Are you interested in seeing how we convert the energies of our enemies of society to turn them into good citizens?"

"Very much, indeed."

"Then I suggest, you should visit our school for waifs started at Kharkov and named after me."

"Is it not the juvenile prison where you send young thieves, robbers and murderers?"

"The same one. But it is a school now."

"On my way back from Cremia, I can easily visit that place."

“Your Tanya is already there,” he said with a mysterious smile.

“But for what crime?”

“She has gone there willingly as a teacher, not as an inmate of the school.”

“What will she teach there?”

“Radio technique. They were looking for some highly skilled radio technician, to help the activities of the Kharkov school. Tanya herself has volunteered for the job.”

I thanked him for all he had done for us. Jumping with a thrilling joy after quite a long interval, I left for the Cremian health resort.

ON THE DNEIPEP, THE VOLGA AND THE WHITE SEA

(i)

The discipline at the Red Army sanatorium in Cremia was so strict that only on the third day I decided to run away from there. Instead of obeying the restrictions on my movements to avoid meeting any outsider, I decided to set on my return trip to Moscow and beyond.

Since Yalta and Feodesia were on my way, I spent there a few hours to see the views of the Black Sea. At the same time I assured myself that I was not followed by the secret police.

Amongst Russian stories, I had found that the most interesting ones were about the Cossacks. They were supposed to have their centre at Zaparozhie on the Dnieper. On my way to Kharkov, I got down there to see the place.

Those days the Dnieper hydro-electric project was nearing completion on the very site where once stood the camps of the Cossackdom.

At the same time, the whole of southern Russia in those middle thirties was suffering the agonies of a horrible famine. Peasants died in millions when their land and crop was snatched away by force officially. Collective farms were getting organised only to put all power of deciding life and death of the population in the hands of the secret police, the henchmen of the Soviet dictator.

I had known poverty and scarcity in India from my

childhood, but the famine and horrors of cold death as I saw in the Dnieper valley went far beyond my imagination. Even the Mongols of the grim fifteenth century could have hardly brought disasters and calamities of this magnitude when they robbed Cossack homes and laid waste the whole of this countryside.

It was during the time of that mediaeval plunder that the formidable Cossack settlements had sprung up on the Dniepur, bound together by danger and hatred of the Mongols. The Cossacks were hardened by miseries and looked every peril straight in the face, and forgot that there existed a thing like fear in the world. But under Soviet rule nothing but fear, hunger and horror existed for the millions of helpless victims throughout the southern regions of Russia.

(ii)

I reached Dneprostroi railway station an hour earlier to catch the train for Kharkov. The barriers for entering the platform were still closed. A boy in rags stood under the statue of Lenin and sang:

“Umru, umru, umru ja,

A nikto ne uznaet gde mogilka moja!”

(I die, I die, I die!

And no one will know about my grave!)

His voice was sweet and pathetic. Humming the tune of his song, he stretched out his hand to me. I put some money in his hand from my purse. The boy went further to collect money from others, and soon disappeared from my sight.

Passengers rushed forward trampling each other when the barriers to get into the train were opened. Everyone

had to show his ticket. I searched my pocket for the ticket and the purse. Both were gone.

The train was about to start. I stood on the platform and looked at the peculiar construction of the roof of the Russian train. Towards the door was a pocket-like thing. It was dark inside it, but when my eyes got accustomed, I saw two eyes sparkling there.

I pointed it out to a G.P.U. man on platform. He said with a joyful smile: "You have detected the waif."

The train began to move. The G.P.U. got in and asked me to follow him. He looked at the roof-pocket, and smiled: "Come down, boy! It's uncomfortable there."

"I haven't stolen," the boy twisted his body out of the pocket and jumped down.

"Are you not Vanka?"

"Yes! Vanka all right, but not Vanka the thief. I haven't stolen, comrade Slavinsky!"

"So, you remember my name as well!"

"You shouldn't arrest me, I haven't stolen."

"I will get you some food, if you return this foreign citizen's purse."

"Take it". The waif threw back my purse on the floor: "You had no gold. Only paper rubles. They are useless stuff anyway. No one barter them for food."

I gave him a few pieces of black bread from my rations. The boy devoured it. Then he picked up a burning cigarette stump discarded by a passenger. Most demonstratively he puffed it as the highest enjoyment of a human life.

(iii)

When we entered the waifs school compound, I felt

a bit nervous. I was glad but felt a little guilty and afraid.

We stopped near the office door. A laugh and a soft, clear Leningrad voice disclosed her presence.

"Tanya", I called.

"Sashka! Here?"

Slavinsky explained: "You must thank the G.P.U. for that. This citizen had lost his rail ticket and purse. I had to recover it and bring the waif also to put him in your school."

She thanked Slavinsky and turned towards me: "You do deserve to be put in this school. I shall take special care of you. First of all, let me show you your room. Mind it, it is a guarded one. I live only next door. Don't try to escape."

I stopped her in my room: "You must be cursing me for all the police troubles you had?"

"You had nothing to do with it. I was very indiscreet in choosing my words when I took you to MOPR. In anger I had said that the Soviet bureaucrats were worse than those found in capitalist countries. This was reported to the MOPR officer by his doorman. The officer in his turn informed the G.P.U. about it, and they had to take action."

"It was very serious action, indeed."

"No crime is considered worse in Soviet Union than criticising its officials and the leader. Thousands, hundreds of thousands have been tortured and shot dead at the mere suspicion that they were anti-Stalin."

"I am glad all your troubles are over now."

"In any case, there is a marked change in G.P.U.'s consideration of my case. They have informed me, if my work in this school is satisfactory, they will allow me to take up the radio operator's job on a ship going for exploration of the northern Arctic route. This has been the job of my dreams."

A few days later, she received a letter in appreciation of her good work at the school from its top patron—Maxim Gorki. She had reason to be proud of that letter, as it read at one place: “My child! Know and believe that you are the most necessary being on earth; in doing your small job you have in truth begun to build a new world.”

Before a month had passed, Slavinsky came to stay at the school as a teacher. He told us that the most difficult job the Soviet Government had undertaken was the construction of the White Sea-Baltic canal, and the waifs must help that construction by offering their services voluntarily. On behalf of the inmates of the school he drafted a resolution: “Now we assure our greatest benefactor, Comrade Stalin, that we are proceeding to build the most difficult canal he has ordered to be built.”

The waifs’ school was soon shifted from Kharkov to the Tundra regions of the Soviet Arctic. Tanya said: “I’m glad I shall be migrating to our northern home. But on our way I would like to show you our ancestral home on the Volga.”

Newspapers reported that Gorki was coming to revisit the places on the Volga where he had spent his childhood as a waif and a vagabond. I requested Slavinsky to allow Tanya to see her birth place and to allow me to join Gorki on his cruise. He wrote about it to Lubyanka, which consulted Gorki and our requests were granted.

(iv)

Early one morning I had the first glimpse of the Volga. Dark clouds moved low over the river. The chilly air was clear but windy.

The expanse of the river was vast. Miles ahead we

could see the steep white bank on the right and the sandy steppe land on the left. The bright waters flowed freely in between.

Mother Volga was rising high. It evoked a feeling both cheerful and gloomy.

Here, on the Volga, the fate of many historic wars for Russia's freedom was settled.

Tanya's village, Kandibovka, was situated right on the river bank. It was a busy crossing and a stopping place for river steamers. Large crowds waited there for the incoming and outgoing steamers.

The village had also a cinema. As it was a busy market day, the show began at mid-day. We went inside.

The film was based on one of Gorki's stories. It showed how the Tzar suppressed the peasants in every way. A peasant, in his turn, finding no other outlet for his rage, took terrible revenge on his wife, whom he actually loved.

An old peasant who was sitting next to me looked very attentively at the film. While coming out of the hall he told us: "The beating of the woman had taken place in this village. I was there when the incident took place. A stranger who was passing by tried to intervene and save the woman, but the Muzhiks beat him too, and left him half dead in the street."

"The same stranger is coming back to our village today," Tanya disclosed him the news.

(v)

The steamer in which Gorki travelled was called 'Maxim', in memory of the tramp days of his youth. It moved at a leisurely pace without a definite time table, according to the whims of the great writer. This gave us enough time

to spend in the villages lying on both banks of the Volga.

All villages were collectivised. Old peasants who feared less, told us openly: "Collective farming has uprooted us from the land. It has taken away everything we had, and now it is after our very life. We did not want to part with our cattle, so we slaughtered them rather than hand them over to the collective farms. You may pass through hundreds of villages, but you will not hear one cock crow. We have wrung the necks of every one."

"Do you think you have acted rightly?" I interrupted them.

"Of course, we have acted rightly. You cannot imagine how cruel Comrade Stalin has been to us. Especially for us, who are called the Volga Germans, our only hope of survival now is through the help of Western Europe, where they are forming an organisation called 'brother in need' for us."

Hardships and miseries were visible throughout the Volga region, similar to those I had seen in the Dnieper valley. Many peasants had taken Gorki to be a Soviet leader who had come to them to hear their grievances in order to get them ameliorated. They encircled him and complained: "We are forced to starve and die."

"Who advised you to kill your cattle?" The collective farm official of the village questioned them.

"Our old village elders."

"Nonsense! If you followed their advice in slaughtering your cattle, why did you not follow their advice in other matters as well? Did they not tell you that all your women folk would be collectivised? Then why did you not slaughter your women folk and eat them up?"

"We had indigestion at the time," a young farmer laughed.

“Just the same, we are capable of that brutality,” said the collective chairman.

It was about to rain. The steamer whistled for departure. Gorki returned from the peasant gathering without speaking a word. Only when he took out his overcoat in the cabin he talked more or less to himself: “Selfish! Selfish! A peasant is always selfish. Bunin and Vony are right when they portray the peasant as a man devoid of social feeling, as a semi-brute who looks upon his fellow-men as his rivals and enemies in the struggle for survival.”

The next moment his anger on peasants vanished. “And yet it is they who built the cities and cathedrals. While they built those monuments of art, they created tales of admirable wisdom, beautiful songs and legends, and biting satires directed against their enemies.”

Looking at me he said: “These peasants did not mean any offence. They have used strong and obscene words merely because they thought them more accurate and expressive.”

(vi)

Three weeks of steamer travel brought us to Nizhni Novgorod, now renamed Gorki. This was the town most intimately associated with Gorki's childhood memories.

Nizhni had played a significant role in Russian history. This was the centre in the middle ages where East and West came into fusion. It was a meeting-place for a variety of people—Mongols, Tatars, Uzbeks, Muslims, Fins, Poles, Jews, Germans, Persians and several others.

Gorki was moved to meet some old hands engaged in river transport work. One steamship engine-driver recognised him as one of his apprentices at the end of the last

century. He patted on Gorki's back and forcing some banknotes in his hand said: "Last night I saw your 'Lower Depths' (a drama written by Gorki). Here are Luka's (a character in the drama) one month's wages for the propagation of your Russian ideals."

Gorki looked at his face astonished. The engine-driver was the real man whom Gorki had painted as Luka in his drama. The writer pressed the greasy hands of his character.

The driver vanished in the surrounding crowd as quickly as he had appeared. Gorki rubbed his eyes hard with the back of his palm. His lips quivered: "A driver's gift for literature. What a treasure! Yes! What a generous human heart! A product of my Russia!"

(vii)

On our return to Moscow, Gorki told me in confidence: "Yagoda will give you an exit permit to enable you to leave Russia. Avail of it as quickly as you can."

"Am I still in trouble?"

"Not alone. There are thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of Russians whose heads may fall on Stalin's guillotine. We are supposed to laugh in misery and agony and cry out 'Hurra Stalin! Our Saviour!' Any one not doing it will face a firing squad. I, too, will not be spared if I do not shout the slogan, more loudly than others."

"What a terror!"

"More we shouldn't talk. I most heartily wish you all the best in life."

A car had stopped at the gate. Someone had got down and was coming in our direction. Gorki looked like a giant

tree bending down gradually to fall under the terrific impact of a cyclone.

Silently he put his hand on my forehead as a parting blessing: "Trample over us who are at journey's end and march forward. On and on. Ever and ever forward."

(viii)

Tanya ascertained for me that the s.s. "Sibir" was shortly leaving from Arkhangelsk for the West European ports. She had also to board her ship there on a trip to Arctic routes. We left for Arkhangelsk via Leningrad.

Our train rushed towards the north. When we reached the White Sea the deep red sun had just taken a dip into the sea and come out. Far, far away in the horizon hung some white clouds. Tanya remembered, "Was it not two years ago that you had boarded "Sibir" as a stowaway?"

"Twenty-six months ago to be exact."

"When do we meet again?"

The white clouds were unable to tell our future.

(ix)

My steamer whistled. I realised, this time I was taking leave of her.

Tanya had come to the jetty to see me off. I looked into her sea-blue eyes. They smiled at me: the same soft smile which had always attracted me towards her like a magnet.

The ladders which connected the ship with the shore were about to be removed.

Our old captain, who was standing a little to the side,

came nearer. He paused, reflected and then quietly taking both of us into his arms, made us embrace.

I felt as if in a dream. But this was reality.

We understood. No words were necessary.

The heavily laden ship had already begun to move. I jumped on board.

She walked by its side. Then ran. Stretched her arms towards me. I could not reach them.

The ship had left the Soviet shores.

She still stood at the end of the jetty. Became gradually fainter. A dot at the tip of the land. More and more tiny. Rising and falling with the waves.

Then, she became one with the horizon of the wide Mother Russia.

PART IV

THROUGH THE WARS FOR FREEDOM

,

ON THE ABYSSINIAN FRONT

(i)

S. S. SIBIR touched Antwerp, Captain Tumofei provided me a sailor's card to go on shore. The port police did not care even to ask for it.

The Captain took me to a tavern to celebrate my freedom. An atmosphere of complete freedom combined with alcohol released his tongue: "I envy your good luck."

"Are you not happier in the Soviet Union?"

"If I may speak plainly — to the Devil with our leader Stalin. Does he even allow us to imagine what freedom is? Have we Russians any idea of the happy life one can live on this earth? We are nothing but slaves of that fanatic despot and his secret police."

"You will be shot outright if your curse ever reaches the Soviet officials."

"Before I fall into their hands, I shall hang myself. So much sense I have learnt. Had I not my wife and children in Wologda, I would have ended my life long ago."

"You do not believe in Stalin's paradise?"

"I came with you just to give you a warning. Forget all you have learnt on the Soviet soil. Never act as an agent of Comintern in India. If ever Stalin has promised any help for the overthrow of foreign rule in India, it is just to get himself into the shoes of the present British imperialist rulers there."

He paid the bill and we came out into Cathedral

Square. The captain gave me a packet of Belgian currency: "Your wages for the work on my ship."

"Won't it put you in trouble?"

"No, they themselves have authorised me at Arkhangelsk to pay you generously."

"I cannot thank you enough."

"You will thank me some day for the advice I gave you in the tavern. Now, I give you an advice as an international seaman: never marry. A wife is nothing but a mill-stone round your neck. And be always on the move if you want to enjoy life."

He had changed the topic purposely when he had seen a Russian sailor getting down the tram he was going to board.

The Cathedral gong was calling people for the evening service. I too entered the gates with a crowd. But I stopped looking at the first big painting on the wall. It was, "Bringing down the Christ from crucifixion."

"It is Rubain's masterpiece." A passerby helped me to understand. I stood silently before the painting until the end of the service. In the meanwhile my mind chalked out my future action.

Coming down some stone-steps a newspaper vendor pushed an evening paper into my hand. I took it to a restaurant and ordered a costly dinner.

Glancing through the headlines I saw the statement of a Belgian Minister, Henri De Man, warning his countrymen to remain on guard against Hitler's designs of attack. De Man had been one of my professors in Germany and an outstanding leader of the Socialist movement in Europe.

The maid who had served dinner asked me whether I cared for some coffee. I enquired from her whether there was a train to Bruxelles that evening.

"Every half hour till midnight."

Without wasting any time on coffee, I took a tram, reached the railway station and got into a train.

Bruxelles dazzled me with its illumination and life at night. To mix freely with the people I had to brush up my French. A book-stall was still open. I picked up a copy of "Jean-Christophe" by Romain Rolland to read before going to bed.

The book opened with a dedication — "To the free spirits of all nations — who suffer, fight and will prevail." To find out whether it had some concrete message for me, I opened a page at random and read — "...heard the voice of his God: 'Go, go, and never rest'." Then I read the last words of Christophe — "Some day I shall be born again for a new fight."

I repeated it in original French — "Un four, je renaitrai pour de nouveaux combats."

(ii)

My good old professor Henri De Man got quite interested in Soviet affairs and my future plans. Readily he agreed to ring up one of his colleagues in the Belgian foreign office to get me a Nansen pass, the international passport for Stateless persons. Besides that he recommended my name to a news agency to appoint me as one of their roving correspondents.

Armed with a valid passport and an agreeable job, I left for my first posting at Genève. I would have very much liked Berlin, but it was too risky for me under Hitler's chancellorship.

Anyway, I wrote a letter to my benefactor family at Wannsee. Within a few days I received a packet containing my clothes and a new skiing pullover stitched by Uchi.

There was also a letter from the mother: "...I enclose a copy of your thesis printed in book form. The required number of copies were sent to the university, and they have sent your Doctorate diploma which I am despatching separately. Our dear boy! You are the youngest Herr Doctor we know of. We are all proud of you...."

For my first newspaper reporting, I rushed to Villeneuve-du-Leman to interview Romain Rolland who was a great friend of Gandhi, Tagore and Gorki. He was not satisfied with the handling of the international relationships by the League of Nations. According to him, if Mussolini was not stopped from invading Abyssinia, that affair was to become the starting point of a new world war.

In fact, the Italo-Abyssinian conflict took a quick turn towards an armed conflict. My press sent me funds and instructions to proceed to Addis Ababa to cover the war news. In September 1935, I left Marseilles on a boat for the north-east African continent.

Already on board of the ship I met a group of Africo-Arab slave dealers. Two of them were Italians. They were the directors of a company which got Sudanese and Abyssinian natives kidnapped and loaded in Red Sea dhows to be sold in Arabian ports at a very handsome profit. Their arrogant fascistic white-race behaviour proved so disgusting to me that I left the boat as soon as it touched Port Sudan, though I had paid fare up to Djibouti in French Somaliland.

At Port Sudan I met some Indian merchants who very helpfully equipped me for a caravan trip to Addis Ababa via Tsana Lake, the source of the Nile. First they put me on the dusty desert train which took me to a place called Tomat, nearest to the Abyssinian border. From there I had to travel along the Atbara river on camel-back. Only on entering Abyssinia I was going to change over to mules.

One evening at a small place called Sofi on the Atbara I met quite a number of caravans. It was a junction on the trade routes between Sudan, Abyssinia and Eritrea an Italian colony in those days.

The moonlight gave a romantic touch to the desert. There was also some soft human cargo tied up along the camel-backs. Some barter and bargaining was taking a lively turn in respect of that particular commodity.

"Won't you make a good bargain, Sir?" My caravan leader, Jamal, asked me pointing out at the profile of a young, kidnapped, enslaved and tied-up girl. "Here is a fresh beauty for you. And quite cheap."

"No use for me."

"Of course, this girl is destined to become the brightest jewel of the best harem in the world."

"Your name?" I asked the girl in Egyptian Arabic.

She replied something in a musical voice. The words I could not follow, but I told her: "Since I met you here I shall call you Sofi, anyway. Don't you find it a beautiful name?"

This time she smiled at me, perhaps amused at my vocabulary. Feeling encouraged, I enquired, "Where will you go if set free?"

"To my mother. She lives in the heart of Abyssinia."

"I shall take you there."

I paid one hundred Reals, silver rupees, to her Arab captor and Sofi became my property.

The ropes with which she was tied down were removed. Relieved from agonies she heaved in joy: "Master! Have me always as your own slave. I shall keep you pleased. But if I make some mistakes, will you sell me back to the Arabs?"

"No, never."

"You promise?"

"I do."

We reached Abyssinian jungles inhabited by various wild tribes. But their behaviour was not so savage as I had imagined it to be. On the other hand, Italian bombers began to hover above us after we had passed the Abyssinian trade centre at Gondar.

Five halts before Addis we reached Sofi's village, Birhan on the Abbai. The same river further up is called the Blue Nile becoming the main source of water for the Big Nile. We now inhaled the fresh air of the mountain whose peaks reached beyond 13,000 feet.

But the village looked quiet, more quiet than Sofi had ever experienced. It seemed to be inhabited by the ghosts of the people who lived there before, and were killed recently by Italian bombings. Only the geographical features of the river and the mountain had remained unchanged.

There was no sign of Sofi's hut. An incendiary bomb had set it on fire and the heavy showers had washed out the charcoaled remains. The sole survivor, a wood-cutter, told Sofi that her mother was not hit directly by a bomb. She had inhaled a terrible fume which had choked her within a few minutes. I picked up some ashes of the unburnt chemical filled into a bomb-shell. The samples I sent later on to the Red Cross headquarters at Genève. They confirmed that it was from a mustard-gas bomb.

"Where should I go, now?" Sofi wept. I asked her to continue with me to Addis.

(iii)

Nearing Addis Ababa we met larger numbers of northern Abyssinians driven southwards by the invading Italians. Those who had lost their all told stories of unheard-of

human brutalities, rapes and massacres which were taking place on a large scale in every region through which the Italian columns advanced towards the Abyssinian capital.

Clearly, it was a one-sided war. The Italians had trained soldiers and modern weapons of warfare. The Abyssinians fought for their freedom literally with wooden sticks and primitive swords. This unequal fight was not going to last very long. What actually proved a greater obstacle delaying Italian conquest was the rough terrain, and not so much the Abyssinian resistance.

Some of my reports about the Abyssinian war were published in European newspapers. But they were not believed. The Italian propaganda and the success of their armed forces succeeded in getting their invasion accepted as the achievement of their noble civilising campaign.

Anyhow, as my reporting was the only one which went in favour of the preservation of Abyssinian freedom, it did attract the Emperor's attention. His Majesty invited me for an audience and subsequently for a dinner. I reported to him in detail what I had lived through in his country and requested that I should be allowed to visit some of the fronts. He readily agreed, but advised: "You may visit any fighting region you like, but it is advisable that you ascertain beforehand whether we have any 20 mm. Oerlikon anti-airguns in that sector for your protection."

"It is an excellent advice. In an emergency I may be able to operate the gun myself."

From that day, for all practical purposes, I became a combatant on the Abyssinian side. For this very reason, my name topped the Italian list of the most dangerous persons, who were to be shot as soon as they fell into their hands.

Very soon, as it was expected, the organised Abyssinian resistance collapsed. The Emperor decided to leave and seek asylum in England. He suggested that I should

also join him there to organise a new fight. It was not possible for me in any case.

After the departure of the Emperor, chaos reigned in the capital which made the Italian task of capturing it much easier. Reports began to pour in that they were going to snap off the only railway line connecting Addis Ababa with Djibouti and the outside world.

I had to take a quick decision and leave the capital as early as possible. The same way as I had organised a caravan to enter Abyssinia, I arranged one to leave it. This time, too, I took Jamal, who had been so long stranded there, as my caravan-leader. Sofi also accompanied us. One of the palace caretakers presented us a white lion cub as a souvenir.

Hoping for the best, we started from Addis Ababa by train and reached Diredawa, the second largest town of Abyssinia. There, we were told, an Italian unit had already occupied a railway station named Mello on our way to Djibouti. This time too, some local Indian merchants came to my rescue. They requisitioned a few mules and four camels for my caravan. We planned to take the desert route to bypass the Italians and to reach our destination in French Somaliland.

(iv)

We proceeded through a part of the Danakil desert. Ages ago, this part of the country was destroyed by a volcano. The terrain looked like melted iron. Our mules galloped to the sound of – *khun, khun, khun*: Blood! Blood! Blood!

Our onward track lead through the Danakil country, the abode of the most primitive, wild and ferocious tribe in the

world. Some rare scanty waterholes are their most precious treasure for which quite often bloody fights take place with those who dare to approach them.

On our third halt we were forced to occupy one of those waterholes. When it got dark, some Danakils turned up to attack us. I had given my rifle to Jamal who had volunteered himself for guard's duty. The first Danakil whom he located in torchlight was only at a distance of twenty yards from us. Jamal shot him dead.

According to Danakil custom, blood must be avenged only by blood. On our onward marches, there were definite signs that the Danakils followed and laid down traps for us. But according to our calculations, we had bypassed the Italian post at Mello, and were not very far from Ali Sahiet Railway Station in French Somaliland.

On our last lap of the journey we followed the rail track northwards. As it was getting dusk, an Italian Caproni plane hovered quite low over us. We scattered to lie down. But our camels and mules became good targets for them. Getting panicky at the noise of the motors they stampeded in all four directions. Sofi ran after her mule and was lured quite far away from us.

When the planes had disappeared, we heard the monotonous sound of Danakil drums at a distance. I asked Jamal: "What's that?"

"That's Danakil music when they offer some human sacrifice."

"Where is Sofi?"

"Last I saw she was running after her mule."

I was stubbornly reluctant to believe an inner voice telling me: "Ghastly! Shocking!"

Snatching the rifle from Jamal's hand, I ran towards the Danakil camp. My rifle shot stopped that drum-beating. But the Danakils, too, had disappeared.

There was freshly spilt blood at the altar and Sofi's trunk in deathly silence. Drops of blood showed the way through which they had dragged her head. But after a short distance that trail got lost in a volcanic ravine.

"All is over", said Jamal directing me towards the rail track, "you shouldn't mourn. . . . Only a slave girl."

(v)

At daybreak we found ourselves at the French Somali railway station — Ali Sahiet. A goods train took us to Djibouti. I saw a big liner anchored in the port.

An Arab invited me on his launch: "I shall take you to S. S. ANGERE."

"Where will it go?"

"It's East-bound."

I stepped into the launch. Jamal called me back, "... My Bakshish. . . Sir!"

"Take this rifle."

"*Khuda Hafiz!* Sir!"

"*Khuda Hafiz*", I murmured not only to Jamal but also to the African soil from which I was moving further and further away.

I signed some traveller's cheques and gave it to the purser of the boat. He asked: "How far are you travelling?"

Observing I could not name any port, he himself suggested — "This boat goes up to Shanghai."

"Then let it be Shanghai."

How could I have known whether my destination was home or still the unknown?

THE BLOWN-OFF NEST

(i)

On May 17, 1936, the S. S. ANGERE anchored in Madras harbour on its way to Shanghai. After an absence of six and a quarter years I saw our Indian soil. The evening was smoky. Hidden behind it, I imagined, the land was filled with ghosts, and my own among them.

A police officer in uniform met me in the ship's lounge: "How do you do? Are you not a transit passenger?"

"Yes, I am."

"Won't you like to see the town?"

"May be tomorrow morning. The boat will be here till tomorrow evening."

"So, I take it, you are definitely not disembarking here!"

"Definitely not. I have paid my passage up to Shanghai."

"So, so." He did not seem to believe me. When I went to my cabin, I saw an armed guard posted there. Without entering it I returned to the deck.

Left alone, I was standing at the rail, when a voice interrupted me: "Enjoying the sea breezes, sir!"

"Is'nt it refreshing?"

"I supervise the loaders here. You can trust me. From me alone you would get the highest price for any commodity you would like to sell."

"I have nothing to sell."

"What about this fine suit you are putting on, Sir? It

must be from Paris! The very best material I ever saw. I'm ready to pay fifty rupees for it."

"Can you also give me an Indian dress to change over?"

"Sure sir! I have one here in my suitcase. I carry it to put on after I finish my work."

"That would do."

I took his suitcase into a bathroom. In a minute I rolled down my European dress into the case and came out in a perfect Madrasi dress. The supervisor took me aside: "My assistant will take you to a cafe outside and pay you the money. Please get into my dinghy".

I was rowed ashore. No one challenged me when I stepped out of the port gates. The money I received was enough to buy a ticket for the Calcutta mail.

All the way on the train I dreamt and wondered like 'Sadko', the hero of a Russian fairy tale.

(ii)

Coming out of Howrah station, Calcutta looks like an ever-restless giant. He holds in his grip the ships heaving up and down the Hooghly like his adolescent daughters. One of them had two lights still burning in the morning light. They reminded me of the melancholic eyes of a girl submerged deep in my memory.

Having no particular place in mind to reach, I walked along the strand. When I reached Outram Ghat, a passenger ship was about to leave. But it was a strange vessel — all portholes and exits were blocked with thick iron bars. I read its name — S. S. MAHARAJA, and remembered it was the name of the convict ship taking the lifers to the Andamans.

A few visitors looked at the ship from the road railing. Having got to a vantage place, I too looked at the

Hooghly. Just then, a batch of female prisoners was crossing the gangway. One of them attracted me particularly. Though in a convict dress, she had not lost her elegance. Her complexion was fair like a Kashmiri's, but her bright dark hair fell down to her waist like a Bengali girl's after a bath. Her overall features gave the impression of a sincere and transparent innocence.

"What for?" She seemed to enquire everyone near her: "For what crime are they banishing me?"

"Quick! Walk quickly." One female warder commanded her: "Be quick, ye Demon's daughter."

They led her to a lower deck of the ship. She threw a last glance at the land before disappearing in one of its holds.

"That's the end," commented the crowd while dispersing.

(iii)

A passing tram had on its board — "Via College Street". I jumped into it. The college square tank was a familiar landmark to get down. I walked into the Mahabodhi.

"When did you return, uncle?" A college girl came rushing to me from the prayer hall.

"How do you know me?"

"Why — I'm Vimala! I saw you at Shantiniketan. You travelled to Ceylon with my father Vijayasena."

"Did you not wear a frock then?"

"Yes!" She laughed — "At that time I was in a school. Now I got to the medical college."

"Come! We have a lot to catch up on since I saw you last."

"Let's sit down under Buddha."

"Where's Asha?" I asked, getting most impatient.

"She must be getting transported to Andamans today."

"Asha? To Andamans? What for?"

"I must tell you from the beginning. After you left, she stayed at Shantiniketan. Then she went to see her mother during vacation. And she did not return. My father was going for a pilgrimage to Sarnath. I gave him Asha's address and asked him to see her. When father returned he related to me the misfortune which had befallen her."

"Also to her mother?"

"Yes, both were implicated in the Banaras conspiracy case. Someone who had turned an approver told police that Asha had given him some ornaments to sell and to buy revolvers to drive out the British from India."

"Who was that approver?"

"I don't remember the name, but he was someone from Calcutta settled down at Banaras. You know, those ornaments turned out to be from the booty the terrorists had acquired thorough a robbery with murder. The original owners of the ornaments recognised their things. Once that much was proved it became easy for the police to get both mother and daughter sentenced to life imprisonment."

"I can understand it."

"That sensational case had several off-shoots and it got prolonged for quite some years."

"No lawyer came forward to defend them?"

"None. They served their sentences in Central Jails. When they were at Agra a prisoner returned from Andamans for giving some evidence in some important political case. From her they learnt that Asha's father was alive, and released on medical grounds to settle down in Andamans. Having come to know that, Asha and her mother themselves applied to be sent to the Andamans. That matter took a long time to settle. Finally, only last week I received Asha's letter

that they were to sail one of these days for the Andamans.”

“Could you not meet her?”

“No. Only the nearest relatives of politicals are allowed to see them once in three months. Besides, Asha begged me not even to come to the jetty when she was to be taken to the boat.”

I got up to take a chance. Vimala stopped me — “No, uncle! That would be more than you could endure.”

People had begun to enter the prayer hall. Both of us went there to join them. Vimala repeated a popular Shantiniketan tune:

‘Who left in tears;

What’ll bless him back?’

(iv)

In the afternoon I went to the office of a news-agency I had contacted and worked for during the Italo-Abyssinian war. They owed me some money.

The director of the agency was surprised to see me in his office — “I can’t believe! You must be a ghost! Last we heard about you was that you were shot down or blown off by an Italian bomber.”

“The Italian gunners could not aim properly.”

“How happy we are to have you back home! I must flash the news. It must be front page news.”

It was not possible any more to keep my smuggling into India a secret. The director also came forward to help me in all possible ways: “You must write down your story. First I shall get it serialised in our newspapers and then get it published in book form. It will give you enough money to settle down as an author.”

He paid me all the money his agency owed me for my

reporting from the Abyssinian front. With those banknotes in my pocket, I had no reason to feel lost, even in Calcutta—the most heartless and cruel city on earth, so far as poverty is concerned.

I purchased some writing paper, took a taxi and asked the driver to take me to the Dakshineswar temples on the banks of the Ganga. The sight of the Ganga had been always a source of new life and inspiration to me. This time, I got determined to find out a place where I could work while Mother Ganga would be glancing at me all the time.

The taxi driver stopped at a corner to have some tea. I too felt hungry, but there were too many flies squatt-ing over the foodstuff. Walking a few steps ahead, I read the street sign. The name reminded me of a businessman who lived there and had once invited me to come and stay with him while he was on a short visit to Banaras at my professor's place. The taxi driver readily found out the place for me. The businessman became my host for the length of my stay there.

Everything seemed to work satisfactorily. The people with whom I stayed became nearer to me than any other I had come across before. My accounts were flashed well in newspapers, and my success as an author was getting assured. Over and above, I had the inner satisfaction that my energies were getting suitably channelled in the best services of the country.

But that comfort and joy were short-lived. One afternoon the police raided my room, hand-cuffed me and took me to their notorious interrogation dungeons at Lord Sinha Road. Inspector Lahiri was there to deal with me.

“You have kept me waiting so long,” Lahiri barked like a bull-dog: “Will you now readily plead guilty of all your crimes?”

"I haven't committed any crime."

"You can't deny any of the charges. We have all the evidence to get you hanged or at least to get you transported to the Andamans."

"What are those deadly crimes I'm supposed to have committed?"

"You were a member of the most ferocious gang of criminals, robbers and murderers at Banaras. One night you rowed them to a landlord's house, killed him and robbed his valuables worth several hundred-thousand rupees. Some of the ornaments from that booty you presented to your sweetheart — Asha. The rest you sold and became overnight rich to go abroad and live there for more than six years. When that money was squandered, you joined an Abyssinian gang of murderers and killed a princess to rob her for your passage back home. Do you deny any of these crimes?"

"These are all lies."

"Don't force me to put you on a treatment to refresh your memory. Here on these sheets your confessions are all neatly typed. Sign it right now."

"I won't."

"How dare you disobey me? Sergeant! Show this rascal around, then he will realise the value of his own bones."

An Anglo-Indian sergeant asked me to follow him. We passed a dark corridor with separate torture cells on both sides. In one of them where I was taken first, my stomach turned at the sight. A prisoner was being flogged. Some rag was forced in his mouth to work as a silencer. Under the keen eyes of an inspector, the executioner dared not lighten his blows. The whole back of the man had gone raw, a horrible red mass. He must have been a strong man, but now he had lost his self-control. When they released him from the hand-cuff, he collapsed. The

sergeant took me back to Lahiri's room. Once more he placed the paper before me to sign. But I repeated: "I refuse."

"Why?"

"This is all perverse lies."

"The story of ornaments too?"

"Yes. I had seen only some of the robbed ornaments which your daughter had implanted with Asha. . . ."

"How dare you drag in my daughter's name?" Lahiri ground his teeth and slapped my face with all his force—"I must kill you right now."

Two Nepalese doormen picked me up bodily and put me in the executioner's room.

I do not remember when and how I fell unconscious there.

I regained consciousness only about midnight. The police-guard of my cell told me I was in the Matiabruz police lock-up. He offered me a glass of liquid. It tasted like blood. That must have been some medicament.

Mental depression had reached its limit. The joy of living and human dignity became a matter of past life for me. That human machinery which generates confidence in the justice and goodness of man got badly crippled.

My living body was left to worms and mosquitoes to devour. I had to remain resigned and a helpless witness to it.

The sweeper who used to clean the cell occasionally, told me that some people who were reading newspapers at the market place had told him to convey it to me that the newspapers were agitating for my release. As for myself, I had begun mentally to take leave of life.

After six weeks, when the gates of my purgatory dungeons were opened, I could hardly believe there were

things like sunlight and fresh air in this world. I had become a complete stranger to myself.

(v)

The Intelligence Branch continued to make my stay impossible in Calcutta. They harassed my host for allowing me to stay in his house. Anyone who tried to help me was followed by police agents.

I did not know what to do. At this stage I received a message from Acharyaji, a message of complete faith in my innocence — “. laugh at the preposterous charges against you. India needs more villains as you are supposed to be, to attain her freedom.”

He asked me to come over to Banaras and teach current history in his college. I took that chance to survive.

The Ganga and the people on its ghats had the same affection for me as before, if not more. My brain began to work with clearness and precision again. Work on my books progressed satisfactorily.

By the time the Second World War started I had regained my energies and a stronger will to fight for the freedom of the country.

The ease with which the South-eastern Asiatic countries fell into Japanese hands brought a new realisation — an enslaved country falls an easy prey to any invader. Gandhiji demanded India's freedom to enable her to fight out the dangers and the consequences of the Japanese invasion. The British rulers refused to liquidate their imperialist enslavement and exploitation of the country.

Gandhiji launched a 'do or die' movement to achieve freedom. British tommies, who had the assignment to fight the Japanese menace, began to get deployed in suppressing

the so-called internal disturbances in India. The more the British rulers took resort to violence, the more was the flare-up of the movement for freedom throughout the country.

Those clashes reached their peak after the arrest of Gandhiji and other national leaders in August 1942. Thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands of arrests of freedom fighters were made by the Indian police. New camp-jails were started to lodge them.

Naturally, the Indian police could not have missed the chance and pleasure of throwing people like myself into jails. They arrested me in my village home on the Ganga where I had returned to join Gandhiji's mass movement.

Since my activities were considered to be more dangerous than those of the new followers of Gandhiji, the police took special care to humiliate me and to crush my spirit. After keeping me for 28 months in several jails, they interned me in Patna where I had nowhere to go. Politically, Patna was a backward place. The intelligentsia, newsmen or even those who had taken part in the national struggle were too afraid of the police vengeance to meet or to talk to me, let alone to shelter me.

My village home was across the Ganga, and I could have lived on ancestral land. But that land was unlawfully confiscated by the magistrate of the District and given as a gift to someone who had helped the British rulers during the Gandhi movement. Even the house there was dynamited and our library set on fire by British tommies.

In desperation, I broke internment orders just to live and keep possession of the ancestral land. For that a number of court proceedings were started against me.

At the same time, a very near relation was released from jail where he had contacted a mortal disease during his incarceration. The responsibility of supporting and taking

him to Patna fell on my shoulders. But the police harassment had reached its limit when all my movements were restricted in Patna and I was forced to live shelterless and starve. As a result of these cruel dealings my near relation died in a hospital for want of money to buy medicines.

This incident turned me into a ferocious fighter. Finding no other way out I escaped into Tibet to save myself from becoming a victim of the inevitable British atrocities.

(vi)

Historical forces at the end of the Second World War brought the fulfilment of India's aspirations for freedom. By that time it had become impossible for the British to rule India by force any more. It was proving very costly to them.

In 1947, the British decided to transfer their rule into Indian hands. Two outstanding nationalist leaders who came forward to shoulder the burdens of running the Government were Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. I knew them personally since my childhood.

When I met Sardar on return from my sanctuary on the Tibetan plateaus, he asked me: "What are your plans? Are you going to join the foreign service or stay in politics here?"

"Neither, Sir, I shall go to the Andamans first".

"You can't. I have decided to send you to Europe on some important assignment".

I related to him Asha's tragic case. Sardar promised to look into it and pressed me to go abroad.

With the greatest effort I had to suppress her call: "Come back to me, dear".

ON A DIPLOMATIC ASSIGNMENT

(i)

In autumn 1947, I made my way somehow into Berlin. Sardar had given me an assignment to get a plan for a dyes and drugs factory ready through the help of the old I. G. Farbenindustrie in Germany. A newspaper which had partly financed my trip had asked for some stories from Berlin.

After fifteen years I rang up the bell of the 'paradise-villa' of my student days on Wannsee. A maid opened the doors and looked surprised at me: "Whom are you looking for, Sir?"

"The owners of this villa."

"They do not live here. This villa is requisitioned by the United States Press Centre in Berlin. A lady correspondent lives here and she has gone to Hamburg for a few days."

"Can you not tell me the whereabouts of the people who lived here before?"

"We have put their books and photo albums in the attic. A few months ago a young gentleman came to dust them out. But I forgot his name."

"Was it not Rudi?"

"Yes, it was Rudi. He said that he worked at the sailing club here."

"I shall find him out now. Thanks."

Rudi was sunning in a sailing-boat. I woke him: "Dreaming, Rudi?"

“Good Heavens!”

I got into the boat and we sailed on.

(ii)

My first shock was to learn from him of his mother's death — “In a way it was good that she did not have to live through the barbaric occupation of Berlin by the Russians.”

“Where is your father?”

“In a Bavarian mental clinic. He could not endure what Uschi had to go through.”

“What happened to her?”

“She worked at the State library next to the University, you know. That was the first place where a Russian tank unit brought the battle of Berlin to its end. According to their customs and habits, when a town was taken by storm the men had the right to grab the women of the defeated as the trophies of war. In Uschi's case, a dozen soldiers misbehaved. The shame did not allow her to show her face. She swallowed a whole bottle of insecticide kept in her custody for the preservation of books. The soldiers threw her body out into the ruins as if she might have got buried during the artillery fire.”

“And Irene?”

“She worked in the rocket factory at Peenemuende on the Baltic coast. The Russians left every employee of the place untouched. Through their help they planned to develop the V2 weapons further. But Irene did not trust the Russians. She escaped. Now she is hiding in a village on the Russian zone side of the gulf of Luebeck.”

“Is the place a safe one?”

“Before the war she had been there as the guest of one

of her class-friends, whose parents are now treating her as their own daughter. But we must get her out somehow. You are from a neutral country. The job may be easier for you."

"Then I must plan it."

Rudi advised me to get accredited to the U.S. Press Centre. It gave me many facilities to live comfortably and to work. As soon as Rudi's villa was vacated by the American lady correspondent, I got it allotted in my name. Rudi and myself reoccupied our respective rooms. Only the memory of those who missed there made us sad.

With the coming of winter, when Rudi lost his job at the sailing club, he was re-employed at the Press Club as a jeep driver. I rented his jeep and asked him to drive into the Soviet sector.

We reached the Brandenburger-Tor. Rudi parked the jeep at a sign-post — "Here you leave the western sector."

A West Berlin police warned us: "It's dangerous to drive your jeep into the Russian sector."

"The University is not far!"

"Who knows, you may land in Siberia? Anything can happen there."

We looked inside the Soviet sector through the openings between the tall pillars of the Brandenburger Gate. Student days memories dragged us to the broad avenue — Unterden-Linden—which was now all ruins. It looked as if the houses on both sides were getting excavated by archaeologists after remaining for centuries under the earth. Road lamps dimly illuminated the ruins of the former American Embassy and Hotel Adlon at the corner of the Wilhelmstrasse which lead to the former Hitler Chancellery. Not a single sign of life was visible anywhere.

Nearing the Opera we stopped. A German girl on the

footpath whispered to her companion: "Sh...T..! Mind the Red bears!"

Looking around, we saw two Russian soldiers following us. The girls disappeared in a side street. The Russians looked at our jeep with some curiosity and went on at the same pace.

To our left was the tottering building of the former State Library. The large reading hall, the catalogue-rooms and the Oriental sections were all bombed out. Instead of books, we saw only pile after pile of bricks. Afraid to observe them closely, we diverted our glance towards the University. A group of students came out. None of them was decently dressed. They looked hungry, too.

To start a conversation, we stopped them: "Is the University functioning?"

"Yes, the roofs stare into our lecture halls, big holes in them, they look like bear-eyes."

We asked them about some of the Professors we had known. They shook their heads: "They were all bourgeois Professors, all have been turned out."

"Turned out?"

"Yes, the non-Stalinists have no place here."

"How is student life here now?"

"Coming from the Western sectors, you do not know the realities of this Soviet paradise. All our movements and even thoughts are watched. We are not supposed to differ or ask any adverse questions in the lecture halls. If we do not readily admit that the Russian culture is the highest and the people under the Soviet regime the happiest in the world, we will be branded as fascist or Nazi and get banished to Siberia."

Another student girl added: "I must tell you the truth. Nothing worse is imaginable than the plight of the average Berliner of this sector. Everyday someone or other who

dares to speak the truth, disappears. We live in the worst terror regime imaginable. You have simply to walk a few blocks down to the Alexanderplatz to get convinced of what I say."

The first student getting impatient asked us: "Have you any newspapers you are going to throw away?"

Rudi gave him one we had in the jeep. The student looked around and hid the paper under his shirt commenting: "This paper will educate us. The papers of the Soviet sector are filled with lies from top to bottom. Every word is twisted there. They paint a fantastic picture of an east-Berlin paradise which we know for certain is simply non-existent. You can't imagine a greater lie than what they print in the Soviet sector about our life here."

The Russian soldiers were getting nearer. We drove on towards the Wilhelmstrasse.

(iii)

More than three fourths ruined, Hitler's Chancellery gave an impression of a ghost-place. The bunker-tower before which the Fuehrer had burnt himself with his beloved Eva Braun stood on its last legs. Pointing out at a neighbouring high-walled building which stood now without roof, Rudi said: "That's the former German foreign office. Do you know I worked there for some time during the war?"

"In which section?"

"The Eastern which also dealt with the Russian affairs. I was present during the signing of that famous Hitler-Stalin secret protocol dividing the British Empire."

"Who was to take over India?"

"Stalin. Amongst my papers kept in the attic of our house I have a typed draft of that Nazi-Soviet secret protocol."

On return to the villa he showed me the document neatly typed on the German foreign office stationery. One of the clauses read:

“...The Soviet Union declares that the centres of gravity of its territorial aspirations lie in the south of the State territory of the Soviet Union in the direction of the Indian Ocean.”

I could not have imagined a greater threat than this Stalinist design directed towards our country, which had just acquired the status of an independent nation.

(iv)

One day, I got into a train of the Berlin overhead railway, and reached Potsdam to ask the Russian high command for Germany to allow me to visit the Soviet Zone as a journalist.

Potsdam was once a beautiful Prussian garrison town with its many grand parks and the palace ‘Sans-Souci’, which literally means ‘without worries’. This was built by Friedrich the Great, and Voltaire had here a library and a beautiful apartment with balconies of great artistic taste. Now, the buildings of the palace were damaged. They looked deserted and ruined to be appropriately named ‘Full of Worries’. The parks, too, were neglected.

The Russian General was impressed by my Leningrad accent: “I will arrange your trip. Captain Greenberg of our Press Department will take you around.”

I was not happy about being shadowed by a Russian secret service man all the time. But there was no other alternative.

Captain Greenberg drove me to Dresden, Leipzig, Weimar, Magdeburg and Schwerin. Since I was far more

fluent than he in German, his tricks of hiding the awful degradation of the Soviet Zone did not work. Everywhere the people talked about systematic plunder and rape by Soviet soldiers. Their tale of woe was most tragic. The curator of the Goethe House at Weimar who was forced to earn his living as a doorman at the theatre, said: "Stalin's policy is to exterminate everything good in Germany. He wants to make sure that the great German culture, civilization and power of national recuperation is reduced to zero and her national heritage is totally demolished."

Schwerin's Russian military commandant turned out to be one of my fellow-cadets at the Kovrov training centre in Russia. Due to our common admiration of Gorki we had become close friends. Realising my difficulties with Greenberg, he came to my rescue.

On an organised telephone call from his boss in Berlin, Greenberg had to leave alone. Having thus removed my shadowing, the Commandant gave me a car with chauffeur to go anywhere I liked under his jurisdiction which reached the Baltic coast. Thoughtfully he presented me also a case of vodka.

Following Rudi's directions on a map of the Gulf of Luebeck, I located the village where Irene lived. Leaving the car at the Russian outpost and presenting a bottle of vodka to the chauffeur, I walked through some peasant barns. I told one of them that the village had changed since I saw it in pre-war days. He replied: "Those days many came here from Berlin and stayed in Adam Schmitt's 'pension'."

"Where is that 'pension'?"

"There it used to be. Now he has no tourists, so he deals in dried fish."

At Schmitt's courtyard I saw a young 'lady' spreading out a wet net. Without recognising her I called out "Ira!"

She looked back astonished. Continuing my usual steps I let her know: "Come to the beach towards west. Quick!"

Her nod indicated she would avail the chance to escape.

My chauffeur and the Russian caretaker of some appropriated sailing boats were dead drunk. I informed them that I was taking a boat for fishing and presenting them my whole case of vodka as tips.

"Do you know how to spread nets?" the caretaker asked.

"Yes."

"Then don't get tangled. Never dare to disturb us for anything. We are flying back home with our sweetheart." They clutched a bottle in each hand with an assurance to remain in flight for days together.

As soon as I had fixed up the sails, the boat moved. A little ahead Ira jumped into it. To take cover, she slipped into the bottom and curled up as if she was fast asleep.

The sails caught wind. Our boat shot out like an arrow.

Soon the sun went down into the sea. Ira got up and took her seat by my side. Far away glimmered a light. That worked as a magnetic pull. We jumped out on dry sand and left the boat to drift.

"I wonder where we have landed," she asked.

A passer-by turned back to reply: "It's Neustadt in British zone."

We had left the 'iron-curtain' far behind. A taxi took us to the Luebeck airport. I showed my identity card to the British public relations officer. He put us the same night on a Berlin plane which landed us at the Gatow airfield. By breakfast time we reached our villa on Wannsee.

(v)

Instructions from India awaited me that I should take

three technicians of the former I. G. Farben to Patna. The British Army authorities were most helpful in fixing up their travel documents. The chief of the Indian Military Mission in Berlin gave me funds for the trip.

No one found anything unusual in our movements. Only when I was buying tickets in Genève's Trans-World Airways office, an Indian national looked at me with suspicious eyes. He seemed even to have measured exactly the thickness of the traveller's cheque pad I was using to pay our plane fare.

At the fulfilment of my assignment I reported to the Home Minister Sardar Patel at New Delhi. With a mischievous smile he said: "My intelligence chief has seen you with lots of foreign money no Indian could possess. He suspects you must have worked for the Americans in Europe. Now you must clear your name beyond all shadow of a doubt."

A letter from the Bihar Government which had financed my trip cleared up the stupid and malicious charges against me. Pandit Nehru, too, enquired from one of his trusted officers in Europe about my activities there. The officer informed him about the valuable work I had done there in the interest of India. Sardar Patel advised: "It is not enough that the intelligence reports against you have proved completely baseless. You should take some foreign assignment directly from Jawaharlal officially on behalf of his External Affairs Ministry."

The Prime Minister took me to lunch with him and asked the Foreign Secretary to fix me up in Central Europe. He got me accredited with the diplomatic rank of a First Secretary in Berne, Berlin, Prague, Vienna and the Vatican simultaneously. With an understanding that I would have the right to report to the Prime Minister directly, I left for Europe again in July 1950.

This time I concentrated solely on observing Stalin's sinister expansionist moves through his Cominform infiltration apparatus directed against the Himalayan frontiers of India. During one of my routine visits to Prague, I came across a Cominform sponsored Soviet map of Asia which was different from other international maps of the post-war years, so far as the Himalayan borders of India were concerned. The entire NEFA and a substantial portion of Ladakh were shown as Chinese territories and the Kashmir and Hyderabad regions were marked as 'British'.

I studied the map in the light of the Stalin-Hitler secret protocol regarding the Soviet Union's territorial aspirations in the direction of the Indian Ocean. Judging the importance of the map and the protocol which had been included in the "Nazi-Soviet relations" published by the State Department of U.S.A., I despatched copies of the original maps and the English translations of the protocol to our Prime Minister and the External Affairs Ministry at New Delhi. Only a glance at them made it clear that Stalin's design was to have a pretence that British warmongers continued to keep Kashmir as their base to attack the Soviet Union; so he had every justification for 'liberating' that and many other parts of India from the Congress rule headed by Jawaharlal Nehru.

In my special reports I also mentioned the news published in European newspapers that after the capture of power in Peking, the Chinese communist forces were ordered to march through the Himalayas. They had already begun to invade Tibet from Sinkiang by way of the Indian territory in Ladakh.

At the same time, two other forces advancing from Chinghai and Szechuan joined hands at Chamdo, where they had to halt for the winter. But the Chinese were in great haste to reach Lhasa. They approached the Indian

Government and obtained permission to transport rice for their troops via Calcutta and Gangtok into Tibet. Some Chinese military officers and other personnel also took advantage of the facilities granted to them to enter Tibet via India to attack Lhasa and to block the escape route of the Dalai Lama in the Chumbi valley.

Thus, when the Chinese armies entered Lhasa in September 1951, their passage was, of course, made easy through the Indian territory in Ladakh and Sikkim. I felt it strongly, and found it amazing, that the Indian Government was letting such violations of her territorial integrity take place without any indignation or protest.

But the External Affairs Ministry at New Delhi did not find anything strange in the new strategic or military developments taking place on our northern borders. Rather they reprimanded me for making an attempt to mislead the Prime Minister and the country by submitting reports of doubtful nature concerning our Himalayan borders. My reports were supposed to be based on some secretly circulated mischievous 'intelligence digest' published in the U.S.A.

The rebuff hurt me enough to resign from the post I held in the Indian Missions of Central Europe. But it did not crush my spirit to work for saving the Himalayas with greater zeal and enthusiasm.

My Berlin experiences had also made it clear that the same expansionist designs of the Stalinist Cominform were the real threats to the freedom of the people of Berlin and those of the Himalayan regions. It was worthwhile and a noble humane assignment to fight for the freedom and dignity of man.

For gaining new strength and fresh resources needed on the onward march, I returned to the banks of the Ganga.

STORM IN PARLIAMENT

(i)

The first general elections of free India were held in winter 1951-52. Practically without any serious contest I was returned to the Lower House of the Parliament on the Congress ticket from a constituency near my birth place on the Ganga. With great hopes and spirit to serve the country I went to New Delhi.

There, during my maiden speech, the Communist benches heckled me, and I had to place the Cominform map along with the Stalin-Hitler secret protocol on the table of the House as a proof of the military dangers our country faced on its northern borders. The authenticity of the documents was challenged and it was referred to the privileges committee as 'the Sinha case', the very first political controversy in free India.

While this fight was gaining momentum and having world-wide publicity, I joined a Congress Party delegation to the Andamans. I dared not ignore her call any more.

(ii)

The S. S. ORIENTAL PHOENIX took us to Maya Bandar in north Andamans. From there we boarded the launch MOLLY for Port Blair, the capital of the Andamans.

Leaning against the railing and relaxing, I watched a

long procession of big fishes. They seemed to be showing MOLLY the way ahead. Shaped like a torpedo, they swam very fast, even faster than our boat which was making about six knots. The crew of the MOLLY cried "Soosh" Soosh!"

Our pilot knew their story: "These Soosh fishes belong to the category of mammals. Nobody kills or hurts them. They are supposed to be the best friends of a drowning man. When a man falls into the sea and feels helpless, he is saved if the Soosh are near him. The fishes make something like a raft with their bodies for the drowning man, and push him forward till he reaches shore."

A crew told us he knew persons to whom the Soosh had rendered help and saved their lives. I had heard of only sharks in the Andaman waters. The stories about the Soosh were reassuring.

Leaving my other friends to talk to the bazar people, I hurried to the cellular jail. The Chief Warder, Rajnarain, said: "For the last 40 years I have been receiving here the convicts sentenced to transportation for life. You may ask the names of any of your friends or relatives who have been here, and I shall show you the exact cell where they were locked up."

I looked at the dungeons, the thick iron bars and the blood-coloured bricks. Only a devilish mind could have succeeded in devising such an insanitary and horrible place for human torture. This competitor of Dante's hell seemed to relate its own stories. What aspect of human and inhuman sensations they had not witnessed and lived through!

"What about the women convicts?" I enquired.

"There used to be a separate jail for them at the South Point. But that has been demolished long ago".

“Were all the prisoners of that jail repatriated to the mainland?”

“Some of them, not all.”

“What has been the fate of those who remained here?”

“So many jail records have been destroyed during the Japanese occupation. Now, you will have to try and find out about individual cases yourself.”

The jail clerk told me: “It is like looking for a needle in a haystack. No matter how hard you try, you will not find her.”

I continued to wander from one harbour to another, from island to island, from forest to forest. I even visited a number of convict and refugee settlements but could not find the face I was looking for.

Back to the cellular jail one evening, I met the Chief Warder. He enquired: “Could you locate her?”

“Not yet.”

“I am afraid you will have to return disappointed. When Netaji came to these islands, he made a thorough enquiry about some of his intimate friends the British Government in India had banished here. But he was not able to find out the whereabouts of even one of them.”

“Did they all perish?”

“Why, do you forget that the aim of the British rulers was to destroy the brave patriots silently, without any fuss made in the outside world? They saw to it that the most spirited fighters for India’s freedom were brought here to be crushed and to disappear without leaving any trace behind.”

In the light of the setting sun the bricks of the cell walls seemed to have turned blackish red. They reminded us of a huge bulk of frozen human blood,

(iii)

Now the moon was about to appear from behind a far-off island. The cocoanut grove reaching up to the shore was trying hard to keep away the moonlight. But the soft rays were persistent. They did penetrate and illuminate certain small patches of ground.

In one of these bright patches, it seemed as if someone was moving, dressed in white. The past inmates of the cellular and the south point jails had haunted me day and night since my arrival. This night I was walking alone through the dim cocoanut groves. It seemed as if some ghosts had surrounded me and were trying to re-enact their tragic experiences when they were alive, so that I may see for myself the true human stories lived and enacted on this island, but never brought to light before.

"Don't you recognise me?" she asked: "You saw me last getting pushed into the dark holds of the MAHARAJA!"

"Yes."

"I had just started to taste life when they cruelly snatched me away from the laps of Mother Ganga and threw me down here. I have perished in this dungeon with my parents. This island is the graveyard of thousands like us."

I crossed the cocoanut grove. She grieved: "The country has attained freedom — the ideal for which we fought and perished. Go ahead. Build a happy life. You would make me happier by enjoying a beautiful life. So long! my dear!"

I came into the full-moon light. She vanished.

The same night we sailed back. One by one the Andaman islands were left behind. The turn of the last one came the next evening at sunset. That one was particularly attractive. Painted in evening colours, its two peaks had gained the softness of human eyes.

Gradually, they too hid themselves in darkness.

On my return to New Delhi, I got married within a week. Vijaya was there to sing for me: "Love and happiness are far off, if they are sought only for pleasure."

(iv)

The Parliamentary Privileges Committee, after a year's deliberations, exonerated me and accepted the authenticity of the Stalin-Hitler protocol and the Cominform map concerning Stalin's ambitions towards the Himalayas. Even then, my task to convince the Parliament and the people of our country about the military threat to our northern borders did not become easier.

Stalin's designs for carrying out his expansionist policy continued until his death in 1953. In 1954, the Moscow Cominform bifurcated, and opened its eastern headquarters at Peking. Mao Tse-tung's long-suppressed ambition, to take over the supreme leadership of the Communist world, began to erupt, adopting violent measures. In the post-Stalin era, Peking considered only herself entitled to acquire all the Himalayan regions including those which Stalin had coveted since 1940 for the Soviet Union. To reach this aim, Communist China was to go so far as to make serious encroachments even on the territories belonging to the Soviet Union.

On the other hand, the Peking government from its very start had taken full advantage of the Indian ignorance of the Chinese designs. As a well calculated move, Peking posted her trained military intelligence men on the most strategic Himalayan defence spots, ostensibly to supervise the transport of Chinese rice into Tibet but in reality to

chalk out the routes for the future break-through of the Chinese army.

(v)

I found an average Parliamentarian's life in Delhi very dull. It was not only intellectually but also politically very lazy. In order to maintain my sporting habits, I took to flying and trekking. Whenever Delhi politics annoyed me, I hovered high over some Himalayan peaks or crossed some little-known passes leading into Tibet. During these escapes, I got convinced that the Chinese armies were getting ready on the Tibetan plateaus to attack India.

At the end of 1952, while at Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim, I had come across a number of Chinese officers dressed in civilian clothes, preparing military maps of the routes their army could take while invading India. When they got an inkling that as a Member of Parliament I was capable of exposing them, they forestalled me in approaching New Delhi. Through their skilful embassy apparatus they got our Prime Minister falsely informed that I was being used by the American press as a source of information to them of a doubtful nature regarding our frontiers. This incident proved to me finally the amazing hypnotic hold Peking Intelligence had gained over New Delhi.

(vi)

In May 1954, India signed a trade pact with China regarding Tibet. The 'Panchsheel', the five principles of behaviour in international relationship, was for the first time introduced in the preamble of this very trade pact.

To those who knew a little of the Himalayan topography, it was obvious that through the pact the Chinese were going to get access to the Himalayan passes, the virtual gateways into India, which they were sure to put to their military advantage during their planned invasion of India. I pointed out this danger to our Parliament.

The Prime Minister, however, came out with a strong support of the pact. He said on 18th May 1954: "... We have done nothing better in the field of foreign affairs during the last six years than signing this agreement over Tibet. ... Dr. Sinha had talked of the old arrangement made by the British in Tibet and referred to certain maps. All these maps are prepared by British imperialism. Is Dr. Sinha proposing that we should follow these maps prepared by British imperialists? ... Dr. Sinha had referred to traffic routes between India and Tibet and complained that certain passes had been closed. ... India would not have the slightest objection to Dr. Sinha entering Tibet from any pass he liked. But what would happen to Dr. Sinha on reaching Tibet through a closed pass, I could not say."

I felt miserable as never before.

(vii)

Acharyaji also lived in Delhi as a member of the Upper House of Parliament. He treated me as his favourite student: "Historical forces are going to justify your stand in the Tibetan and the Himalayan affairs. Your fight is not in vain."

He was leaving for treatment in Vienna and asked me to get there, if I could, to show him around Europe.

Next week I picked up a tramp freighter Dakota as a 'supernumerary'.

After a month of flying to the far corners of Africa, Arabia and the near-east countries, I managed to meet Acharyaji in a Tyrolean sanatorium near Innsbruck. One of the Directors of the Daimler-Benz very generously lent us a Mercedes to drive around, wherever we liked. Getting behind the steering wheel, the very first place of intellectual pilgrimage I could think of was Romain Rolland's house at Villeneuve-de-Leman.

Acharyaji stopped in the garden. "So, this is the meeting place of Gandhi and Tagore with Rolland. Were they alive today, they would have taken up the cause of Tibet and encouraged you in your fight. The Communist Chinese brutality in Tibet has reached unimaginable limits in inhuman methods of exterminating the people of a whole country. Compared to that, the Fascist cruelty in Abyssinia can be called only a random insanity."

In order to have a full view of Lake Leman, we climbed up a mountain road. It ended at the World headquarters of the Moral Rearmament movement. The people there were far more friendly to us than we had come across in any other part of Europe. Frank Buchman, the initiator and the leader of that movement, had been a personal friend of Gandhi and Tagore. I told him about the Tibetan tragedy. He assured me: "God will not allow you to remain alone in this fight. You should get determined more and more as the fight intensifies. Help will come to you from divine and unexpected quarters and lead you to achieve great historic victories."

Very kindly Frank Buchman gave us the address of one of his musician friends in Bonn who showed us the Beethoven house. The musician's words I still recall: "Do you understand? Once Beethoven composed the ninth

symphony with the blood of his heart. You should hear it when Fuertwaengler conducts that music in Berliner Philharmony. That will give you courage to live, and the belief that, in spite of all these wars, troubles and tears, the human heart will survive. You will find it true also in your fight for Tibet.”

A sudden flood catastrophe in my constituency forced me to return home immediately.

(viii)

It looked strange that sympathy and support for the Tibetan cause was more readily available in Europe than in India. Acharyaji used to say: “If we do not stop the present Chinese atrocities in Tibet, very soon the day will come when more cruel Chinese blows would fall on our own people. The enslavement of Tibet is bound to be followed by the Chinese military attack on India.”

He began to chalk out a concrete plan to save Tibet. India was going to celebrate Lord Buddha’s centenary in 1956. Acharyaji thought, the best celebration would be to end the Chinese brutalities in Tibet which deserved it the least as a Buddhist country. But before he could raise his voice in favour of this noble ideal, Acharyaji died.

About the same time I lost another of my great benefactors, commonly known throughout India as “Rafibhai”. Whatever adventures in long-distance travels I had undertaken since my membership of Parliament had succeeded mostly through Rafibhai’s support.

(xi)

The five-year term of the first Parliament was coming

to its end. The last important debate in the House was held on the Hungarian revolt which was inhumanly crushed by the Russian troops. The whole of the freedom-loving world had unequivocally condemned Russian excesses, but not the Indian Government. This alienated quite a number of her sincere European supporters. Somehow or other the general opinion was being formed that, since India does not support the cause of the people of Tibet or Hungary, she is conniving at the Communist imperialistic expansion even at her own cost. I did my best to express what I thought to be the real feeling of my country on that question. My views were, of course, not exactly the same as those of our Government.

(x)

The ruling party in Delhi was not tolerant of my views on India's foreign policy, specially in respect of Tibet. They thought that there was no Chinese military threat to our northern borders. I felt that the time had come for our country fully to realize the mortal danger to our freedom and people. For these differences, I had to go out of Parliament.

So, I crash-landed in Indian politics. All my well-wishers felt my downfall was going to be quite rapid, and unending. In summer 1957, I had to leave Delhi.

Where I was to go I did not know. This time, I had also the responsibility of my small family — my wife and two children. Literally, we had no roof over our heads. And it rained. Monsoon blasted Delhi heavily.

Amidst that heavy downpour, we got into our small Opel car, and drove off.

(xi)

We stopped at the ferry-crossing of the Ganga. The boatman hesitated to load our car, but when I presented him a rug he agreed.

The boat swung due to heavy winds. A number of uprooted floating trees threatened to strike our boat, now barely half-a-foot above water.

“Suppose our boat struck those logs?” the thought occurred to me.

“Never think of death or horror when you are adrift on the Ganga,” I repeated my teacher’s words who had taught me swimming in my childhood.

Getting to the other side we got lashed by a squall. Our children liked it and laughed. The wind turned into a hurricane. I was forced to stop the car on the roadside.

“Isn’t it wonderful here?” said Manjula pulling down the side windscreen. Her face got hammered by rain. But she went on repeating: “Strike harder! Harder still! How wonderful!”

(xii)

We looked for shelter. Lightning flashed out, and I saw a mendicant’s hut under a banyan tree. He had only a torn overall as his sole worldly possession. When the flash repeated, I saw he had a Tagorian beard and face carved out as if out of some brown sun-burnt rock.

The noise of the car had awakened him. When I begged his pardon, he replied: “I’m not so rich as to be afraid of robbers. A little ahead is a temple. You can take shelter. I’m coming to fix you up.”

He turned out to be a generous host. From the offerings to Lord Shiva he provided us some delicious dishes. I came

out to see him back to his hut. It was cold there. He laughed and lit some fire inviting me for a little chat.

"Shivering does not do any good", he commented: "It's only an indication that you are a weakling. There is no cure from trouble and misery except making yourself strong, both mentally and physically."

"I have never been a weakling, it's just. . ."

"It's just that you have given up willing and living. These are the symptoms of a weakling."

"Circumstances. . ."

"Don't blame the circumstances. Why be angry on others when for all your actions you alone are responsible?"

"I didn't fail due to my own fault."

"Well, why do you worry about what you could not achieve? A man becomes a hero only after accomplishing what he can. The others who are weaklings do not want anything much, and so they never become a man or a hero. We all have to stop shivering, and do what we can."

His teaching got me on my feet again. I realized that the Tibetan and the Himalayan fights had just begun. Now, more than ever, they demanded action in defence of human rights, dignity and the heritage of mankind. I had to do all I could do, without shivering, to deserve to be a man.

Next morning the small Sanjiva regretted that the hurricane had passed over. We passed through a forest. The children decided for us: "Let's settle down in this wilderness."

BLOOD ON TIBETAN SNOWS

(i)

The wild life in its natural surroundings thrilled us. I had stopped the car near a waterfall. There was a rustling in the forest quite different from the noise of the water. Our four-year-old child pointed out excitedly: "Look!"

It was a big royal Bengal tiger majestically grumbling at our impertinence in disturbing his peace with the noise of the engine of our car. I focussed the headlights on him. The tiger looked at us unperturbed, then slowly he turned away from the dazzling light.

The children wished to see him once more to get better acquainted, but it was not possible for us to follow his treks empty-handed.

Further ahead we pulled up at a forester's hut, who gladly accommodated us for the night. About the tiger we had seen, he said: "It's not a man-eater like the rich of your cities. The rich grab as much food off their fellow-men as they can, and are unable to swallow even a fraction of it, while others, who fall their prey, starve and die. These tigers have a better moral sense. They go for hunt only when they are hungry. As soon as their hunger is satisfied, they do not harm any one. You can play with them. They are far better and humane than your fat and clever men of the cities."

In spite of his warning I had to drive to Ranchi, a district town on the Chhotanagpur plateaus, to seek shelter

and food for ourselves. At the entrance of the town we saw the night-watch of a Government scrap-yard putting costly iron material on a private truck only for a small consideration. Next day I approached the officer-in-charge and purchased some material, keeping our car with him as mortgage. This trade deal provided us enough money to build a small cottage in the outskirts of the township. To make a living I got a truck on hire-purchase.

Having fixed up a small comfortable home for the first time in life, we began to chalk out our future course of action. But in the meantime, the declaration of the independence of Tibet by the Dalai Lama in Lhasa was proving to be 'an atomic explosion over the Himalayas', giving birth to a number of chain reactions. Communist China rushed its armies into Tibet for a blood-bath to exterminate the Tibetan people.

At this stage, a call for me, too, came from Tibet. I rushed to join the Khampa Guerillas in March 1959, when the Dalai Lama was on his desperate bid for safety in India. My taking up of this venture proved incomparably beyond anything I had undertaken so far, between the Arctic and the Andamans.

(ii)

That morning, on 12th March 1959, Lobsang — my indispensable head muleteer of several Tibetan trips — delivered me a letter dispatched 38 days ago from freezing Lhasa: "...Tenth March declaring Tibetan independence, Dalai Lama departs as planned. Plead asylum. Support break-through Choumolhari region. SURKHANG."

Soaked with perspiration in the unusual Indian climate, Lobsang thought of Choumolhari — 'the dream lady of the

snow,' a 24,500 feet high Tibetan mountain, and talked out loudly: "Doctor, if my wife fell into Chinese hands what will happen to me?"

His simple mind was charged with the tension of dangers ahead while he was on the most important mission concerning his God-King and country. How was that illiterate man going to shake off the attack of private misery and fight for a higher cause? After parting with his life's earning he had taken a wife, and now he had left her with freedom-fighters helping Dalai Lama's escape.

He was one of the selected five who knew the actual escape route of the Dalai Lama. On his way to India, he had been put to torture by the Chinese, who had offered him high rewards for the secret. But Lobsang never dreamt of such betrayals. Rather, his peculiarly Tibetan belief inspired him to face death and fight for the higher cause befitting the dignity of a man.

(iii)

On receiving the Lhasa radio-signal in 'commodity-code' that the Chinese boss of Tibet, General Tang Kwan San, had invited the Dalai Lama alone to his place in order to kill him, my Khampa friends had sent Lobsang to contact me and to accompany me to the rendezvous at Choumolhari. As it was planned to mislead the Chinese, I got the news 'leaked out' to the Press that the Dalai Lama had left Lhasa, and that he would be emerging on Towang route east of Bhutan.

Two years earlier, Surkhang Shape, who was Prime Minister of Tibet for nineteen years, had unearthed the Chinese plot of killing Dalai Lama. Ever since, escape routes were planned in which, along with Lobsang, I was

assigned to play an important role. A duplicate Dalai Lama was to take Lhasa-Towang route to divert the main Chinese forces, and the real Dalai Lama garbed as a poor Lama was to slip away undetected through the Lhasa-Yatung highway into India.

The same morning that Lobsang came to me, I left with him for Delhi. There, I saw our Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru. At my suggestion of granting asylum to the Dalai Lama, he said, emphasising his policy of strict non-interference in Chinese affairs, "The basic foreign policy of a country is not changed nor a war declared for such romantic ventures."

For Lobsang, a wide trail of blood on the Tibetan snows became a certainty. He felt he had lost everything—just everything. Clutching my arm, he said: "Let us rush to Choumolhari at once."

(iv)

Next day, we landed on a grassy patch of land surrounded by tea-gardens, and drove to Gangtok. On many previous occasions my caravan under Lobsang's supervision had started from the same place. This time, besides taking some imitation ornaments for his wife, he procured a transistor and two revolvers in line with the nature of our venture. Our officials at Sherathang, the last check-post before Tibet, provided us, as usual, travel documents valid for repeated journeys to Tibet.

As *bona fide* traders we slipped into Tibet unmarked and even passed through the most guarded Chinese military check-post at Yatung. Five days' march further up along the Amo-Chu river, mostly on wet snow, brought us to 15,000-foot-high Phari the topmost village of the world. Further up the road, blew a blizzard,

Our smoke-filled windowless tea-serai on the Lhasa road bulged with excitement at the arrival of dozens of Dalai Lama's bodyguards, claiming to be the spearhead of the crack Tibetan units escorting the Dalai Lama. Using some pre-arranged code, Lobsang gathered from them that in four day's time we were to see the Dalai Lama himself passing through Phari accompanied by 50,000 armed warriors.

We began to rehearse with scarves to greet the Dalai Lama. Lobsang tried the transistor to display the 'magic'. Feeling safe and comfortable in the stone-piled shelter, while a snowstorm raged outside, he switched on a voice — "...Peking confirmed that the Dalai Lama has left Lhasa. The 200,000 Chinese in Tibet are alerted for the greatest man-hunt in history." Bubbling with enthusiasm, Lobsang lit a yak-dung fire reminding me: "Alone from the soft outside world you must not catch your death of cold."

(v)

As soon as the snowstorm stopped, an aeroplane coming from the direction of Lhasa spotted us, but Lobsang remarked: "They are searching for Him."

As we looked through the stone gap serving as an entrance to our shelter, the plane showered bullets over us. Standing at the door Lobsang covered me with his body. But one of the stone walls with a chant written on it, 'Om Mane Padmahum' in Tibetan letters, got shattered. Lobsang took it to be a very bad omen for himself.

There was a loud thud. A heap of dust and stone chips blocked our view. When it cleared up, Lobsang pointed out towards a wooden bridge which was now blown off. From the same direction emerged a crowd shrieking in panic,

Lobsang did not find his wife there, but he gathered from them that the Chinese were on a hunt of every Tibetan through the blizzard. Anyone coming from north was to them the Dalai Lama in disguise.

Bullets whizzed from all directions as the Chinese units closed in on us. Lobsang gathered a few essentials including the imitation ornaments for his wife, and we dispersed hastily leaving all our pack and mules on the spot.

Large Chinese concentrations and troop movements along the Yatung highway convinced us that they expected to capture the Dalai Lama in that very region. Facing them stood the whole Tibetan population. Our unit was no longer just a small detachment to help the Dalai Lama's escape. We were all at one with the entire Tibetan people who had arisen as one man, burning with contempt for the Chinese. Lobsang pointed out: "Look, under the leadership of the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan masses are avenging the violation of women, religion and freedom."

During the last days of March, when the Tibetan rising was at its peak, we gathered that while the Dalai Lama was halting at Tongu-Gompa the Chinese had encircled him. Lobsang had received some news about his wife, too. She was last seen in the same neighbourhood as the Dalai Lama. We rushed to their rescue.

While marching on tracks covered with fresh snow, Lobsang and I got separated from the rest of our fighting units. Missing our track completely, we bumped into a Chinese officers' camp. But Lobsang had the nerve to introduce me promptly to the Chinese as a Russian technical adviser and himself as a Khotanese nomad, employed as an interpreter for me.

One of the Chinese officers who had been to Sinkiang got convinced of our *bona fides*, due to some Kazak accent in our vocabulary. Politely he placed a register for us to

put down our arrival. Claiming that we had lost our identity papers in the blizzard, I filled up the Chinese register in Hindi characters, which they were unable to decipher. Lobsang calculated correctly that, by the time the Chinese protest reached Delhi, the Dalai Lama, ourselves and his wife would be on Indian soil.

They gave us good food and a warm room to sleep in. But before we retired a Chinese officer jubilantly disclosed his intelligence report received just then that the Dalai Lama was already captured at Tongu-Gompa, put in heavy chains and was being dragged to Yatung under a very strong Chinese escort.

Lobsang checked himself from a painful cry with difficulty. Instead of lying down for rest, he slipped away to check up the Chinese claims and to get some news of his wife. We fixed a rendezvous for the next day a little distance away towards the Tang pass.

Opening the door to find out whether the moon had come up, and whether I, too, could leave the place, I heard loud explosions. This was on March 28 when, as planned, the Tibetans had made concentrated attacks on the Lhasa-Yatung road in great force. Practically all the Chinese road-blocks between Gyantse and Phari were wiped out. On the same day we also established contact with the Dalai Lama's forces which had left Lhasa on March 17 with him.

Turning up at the appointed place, Lobsang reported that a poor Lama in company of some Lhasa dignitaries had fallen into Chinese hands. The Chinese believed that the poor Lama was the Dalai Lama in disguise. They had taken the captive to their Chuen-Chu fortress at Yatung, which was now a liquidation and torture camp for notable Tibetans. Once taken in there, never had a Tibetan or a non-Chinese come out alive. He had some bad news about

his wife, too, which he tried to keep to himself, not being willing to believe it.

(vi)

Soon we heard the drone of a plane overhead. With a 'tak-tak-tak' noise our rock-shelter got chipped off. Though not hit bodily, Lobsang had a shock. He kept staring at the dazzling Choumolhari and bubbling out: "Glory to Dalai Lama! There she is! See that..."

His simple mind had given way to the most painful strains it was put to. Now he was a victim of hallucination. So long I had been dependent upon him, and now he was off his mind. Muttering some incoherent prayers he made several attempts to jump into the river hundreds of feet below. I had to use force to hold him back on the road.

Dejectedly we made our way southwards. By removing a couple of planks from the Indian trade-agency's boundary-wall, we were able to slip into Yatung. Outside, it had become very dark. Groping through some rocks we looked for the wooden hut of a Nepali friend. From the Chuen-Chu of the Chinese across the road, came a loud wail. Lobsang shrieked in panic. Recognising it, the Nepali pulled us inside the hut whispering: "The Chinese agent Sandup told me that it is the Dalai Lama wailing since hours. He was brought from Tongu-Gompa in a poor Lama's garb."

Turning to Lobsang he said: "Three days ago they took your wife there and forced her to disclose your movements. Since she did not prove helpful to them, they piled up stones round her neck until she died. Next morning we saw her body between some boulders floating into the Amo-Chu."

Lobsang shook his head in a violent protest. We declared him insane. Darkness around gave such a deep cover that we were sure the outside world would never know about the Chinese atrocities in Tibet.

The wailing of the Lama became fainter, and then stopped totally. But a loud-speaker installed in the middle of the road barked a jeering sound, which the Nepali translated softly: "The top Tibetan traitor Dalai Lama is dead. When the Chinese troops encircled him, he jumped into the Amo-Chu, from where his dead body was fished out and identified. Thus, the large number of Chinese army units concentrated on the Lhasa-Yatung sector have completely crushed the rebellion that was started and led by the reptile Dalai Lama. Only one notorious Indian bandit — Hsin-Hsi-Sheng — who incited revolts in southern Tibet is still at large. All troops have orders to kill the Indian snake at sight. . ."

The Nepali and I stared at each other in alarm. Hsin-Hsi-Sheng was my name in Chinese.

Lobsang laughed, stark mad.

(vii)

Under cover of the pitch dark peculiar to Tibet, we avoided the Chinese check-post in order to join our other friends at Kargyu-Gompa. On such marches so far, Lobsang had saved me from the bullets of Chinese snipers. Now, it was my turn to shelter him from the demons that possessed him and the Chinese border patrols that were on our hunt all over the region.

Meeting the main party, we found that they had sorted out a dozen mules loaded with Dalai Lams's gold and six Lhasa families to be smuggled into India by me. I felt

depressed for not having the Dalai Lama, Surkhang and Lobsang's wife with us.

The 14,000-foot-high Natu-la pass, which divided Tibet and India, came in sight. At the same time, some Chinese soldiers came out of a bush pointing their automatic guns at us, and shouting: "Who amongst you is the Dalai Lama?"

"We wish he were here," I replied.

Taking my reply to be a denial, they repeated: "What have you got on mules?"

We felt everything was lost. But Lobsang said in a clear voice with a smile: "Gold! Your Excellencies! Dalai Lama's gold! Pure gold."

"Are you mad?" said the Chinese: "We have no time for jokes, you stinky pigs! Go to hell with your gold! Pass on quickly . . . Get out of sight . . ."

(viii)

Under the cover of fine snow at the top of the pass, I said to Lobsang: "The Chinese truly beat us. Our fight was useless."

"Who knows?" he said kneeling down facing the Choumolhari—"See there! Glory to Dalai Lama! There she is! Don't you see that miracle?"

I knew it was only an illusion. But mechanically my fingers touched the transistor, and we heard the announcement—" . . . Dalai Lama reached Indian borders east of Bhutan. India has granted him asylum. . ."

Our fight had succeeded. The Dalai Lama had come out alive from the jaws of the Chinese dragon.

Lobsang was having his last vision of the Choumolhari before it vanished in the mist. According to Tibetan

belief, his wife had taken her abode there, since she died for a great pious cause.

Then he stood up and embraced everyone, more delicately the mules. We knew now that he was not off his mind anymore.

We took the imitation stones Lobsang carried with him, gathered some flowers peeping through the melting snow, and made an offering to Tara – the Choumolhari Goddess of beauty, sacrifice and success. Our fight in Tibet was over.

But not the fight for Tibet. Muleteer Lobsang had never heard of any high human ideals. But he dreamt of the Spirit residing at the Choumolhari and vowed anew to continue his fight for the Freedom of Man.

BEYOND THOSE PEAKS

(i)

India was caught unawares by the historic developments in Tibet and on her own Himalayan borders. The military expansionist drive of the Communist Chinese armies began to force its way through Indian passes, pastures, forests and the fertile lands of her border regions. When they encountered resistance in the fulfilment of their designs, they invaded the northern borders of India on a mass scale in autumn 1962.

Personally, I had selected a vital sector beforehand, and during the Chinese invasion, I got literally entrenched there. This position was precisely at the lifeline of the Indian defences, the narrow ten-mile corridor between Nepal and Eastern Pakistan. Through this gap ran the only railway supply line of India's armed forces fighting all along the forward positions of the eastern regions of the country. As I had expected, the Chinese agents operated there to blow off the railway line. I did my best to keep the lifeline secure.

Quite a number of Chinese agents who had infiltrated deep into the Indian Intelligence, got frustrated by my action. It was due to their intervention that I was arrested at Ranchi and thrown into a death-cell.

(ii)

On January 21, 1963, I had clear indications that the

enemy agents under whose directions I was put in prison, were after my life. A few days earlier when a cold-wave had set in, they had deprived me of the comfort of even an iron bed which had no mattresses anyway. Now I lay body and face swollen with cold on the damp floor of the death-cell. The piercing pain in my spinal cord made me unconscious.

When I woke up a little, I found they were carrying me on a stretcher. Yes, I had seen, those who were hanged got carried on that stretcher to be handed over to the scavengers outside. They must have taken me to be dead when I had fallen unconscious due to pains.

So, I got convinced, my body was going to be thrown away. Whenever I had imagined death before, I had a wish to get my ashes thrown into the Ganga.

Now, surely they were not going to take me to the Ganga. Therefore, I had to reach her in my imagination. A jolt by the stretcher-bearers brought me the consciousness that those were the last moments of my life. So in the last flicker of the lamp, I saw my whole life flashed for a moment.

And I talked to my Mother, the Ganga. I could clearly hear her roar: "You will have a new life, son."

I felt as if she carried me upstream, right to the white peak from where she originates. There was the grand panorama of the high Himalayas. Joy and terror took possession of me at the same moment.

When I passed the peak and was getting carried beyond, I clung to the Ganga: "New life? What for, Mother?"

"Pour de nouveaux combats".

Finally, all got engulfed in the Gangotri massif, the birth-place of Mother Ganga.



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