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THE COMPLETE PLAYS OF ASIF CURRIMBHOY

Volume II.: INQILAB



This is the second volume in a uniform edition of the complete plays of Asif Currimbhoy to appear under the WORKSHOP imprint.

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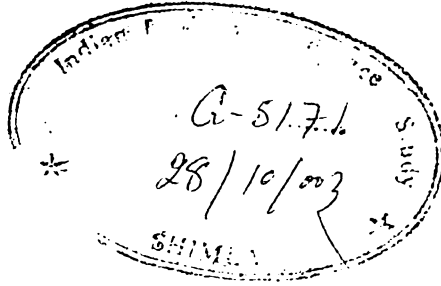
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THE WORKS OF ASIF CURRIMBHOY

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*The Mercenary*  
1969 *An Experiment with Truth*  
1970 *The Great Indian Bustard*  
1971 *"Darjeeling Tea ?"*

ASIF CURRIMBHOY

Born in a distinguished Khoja baronetcy family in Bombay, he studied in a Jesuit Mission school, graduated from California, worked in France, and then travelled extensively through India in his present job as executive for Burmah-Shell. Family man with wife and three children. Articulate, physical, liberal, remote, he is drawn to the human condition everywhere, and now plans to write on Tibet and China.



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THE PLAYWRIGHT AND HIS WIFE





**Asif**

**Currimbhoy**

**INQUILAB**

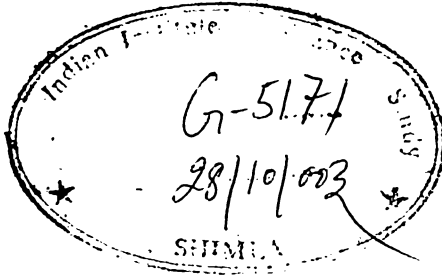
**a play in three acts**

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**A WRITERS WORKSHOP PUBLICATION**

DEDICATION

To my son Tabrik



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## CHARACTERS

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### MAIN

*Professor Datta / Wife*  
*Amar (son)*  
*Suprea*  
*Jain (Landlord)*  
*Ahmed*  
*Shomik*  
*Deudas (Politician)*

### SUBSIDIARY

*Sarla (Shomik's wife)*  
*Dada (Shomik's father)*  
*Old Woman (Shomik's mother)*  
*Upperclass Type / Goonda*  
*Inspector*  
*Big Wheel (Politician)*

### GENERAL

*Villagers / Peasants*  
*College boys / girls*

*A few months elapse between Act II and Act III Scene 1.*

*A few more months elapse between Act III Scene 1 and Scene 2.*

## INQILAB

Much is known about Asif Currimbhoy's earlier works which gained recognition abroad and his pioneering efforts at home in the English-language theatre. Little is known about his recent works, most of which were written in the last two years during his stay in West Bengal.

*Inqilab* explores the depths of Naxalite revolt and is a nonpartisan, honest account of the violent events that overtook Calcutta in 1970 and continue unabated today. "*Darjeeling Tea ?*" by contrast is a delightful tragi-comedy on the planters' lives in the Darjeeling hills, and carries the pathos of changing times. *An Experiment With Truth*, based on Mahatma Gandhi's confessional autobiography, paradoxically shows the vulnerability of the great man to the ordinary trials of life which lesser men are able to take in their stride. *The Great Indian Bustard* is a hit-back to the old Anglo-Indian days of Bhavani Junction, now symbolized in the death-throes of the noble bird that is becoming extinct. His latest play, *The Refugee*, speaks of the crisis of conscience on Bangladesh, which the playwright says "forms the ultimate reality of our lives today".

Like his other recent works, *Inqilab* shows greater maturity and power than his earlier plays, and significantly bridges the gap between the so-called "Indo-Anglian" and regional / national "language" theatre. *Inqilab* is coming up for production soon at the National Centre for Performing Arts in Delhi.

*The Refugee* and "*Darjeeling Tea ?*" are available as Writers Workshop Bluebird Books in limited editions.

## ACT I SCENE I

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There are basically three scenes in this play, without formal divisions or structures, i. e. there is transitional fluidity from one scene to another through lights focusing at different levels and parts of the stage where sets are built to conform with the different scenes.

The sets are basically threefold (corresponding to the scenes) :

The first and main scene is a classroom in one of the colleges of Calcutta. Sets show part of the college building with communist slogans scrawled on the walls and a red picture of Mao with hammer and sickle.

The second scene is the prayer room at the residence of the Professor. Sets suggest a modest home conservatively decorated with a library containing leather-bound books on law lining the shelves and walls.

The third scene is the beautiful green Bengali countryside, portion of a fertile plot of cultivable land, and suggestion of the ostentatious Zamindar's house beyond.

Because of transitions in time and space, the sets have to be both realistically suggestive and symbolic. Framework of structures should be built, preferably at different levels of the stage, to depict this.

From time to time we revert to the classroom scene and therefore there would be some merit in having it placed at the rear (if it is a proscenium stage) which can be partially or fully blanked out with translucent / opaque curtain & lights with a range of colours and intensities. Background music in the non-dialogue scenes would also heighten the dramatic impact of certain violent climaxes.

Classroom scene : Professor leaning on dias. Distinguished looking man of about 50 with a conservative air, old worldish, and the hint of a British traditionalist approach (from the colonial days when Calcutta and the Bengali aristocracy bore the stamp of the old British capital with its cultural and

*political values).*

*Young students, alert, intelligent, at the same time bored, restless. The electric air of revolt surfacing from time to time. Amongst them the son of the Professor, young Amar. The period of time is THE PRESENT : with Naxal revolt and violence having reached University campuses.*

PROF. DATTA : Ah . . . Yes . . . aren't we all . . . understandably . . . restless . . . before the break of Durga Puja holidays . . . (*slight nervous laughter amongst students. Tension already there*) Perhaps . . . (*Voice toning down*) . . . this is the time for . . . reflection over the past. The taking of . . . decisions that sometimes become . . . historic. (*shuffle of feet*) Impatient? Let us not get carried away, young men. Difficult times, I admit. Calcutta, my Calcutta, a "dying city"? Processions? Strikes? Gheraos? Violence? Bandhs? Breakdown of law-and-order? Revolt? Naxal revolt, my friends? Slogans of Gandhi or Mao? (*Gradually anger building up with each interrogation that whips the students alert like repeated lashes — the undercurrent of vibrant anger in the older man*) Are there bombs in your head or brains, gentlemen: I hear . . . there are some amongst you . . . the tyranny of the minority I call it . . . who question these holy institutions of learning, like our holy mother Durga . . . (*Provoked rebellious students who start banging desks with fists, rulers and chappals, slowly at first, more furiously later, all in rhythmic unison. Shadow of a man outside the classroom window . . . the stranger . . . the protest of students is like a morse code that gets translated in stacatto teleprinter tape messages that are flashed on the walls already crowded with slogans.*)

*Flashed on wall near stranger. voicing student slogan belief :*  
BOURGEOIS ! BOURGEOIS UNIVERSITY !

PROF. DATTA ; (*raising his voice over the din of deskbanging noise*) These are institutions of democratic learning in a democratic government !

*Teletype message flashed in mental telephonic reply on wall*

*in red letters* : BOURGEOIS-LANDLORD GOVERNMENT OF INDIA.

PROF. DATTA : Principles founded on freedom of thought and speech by Gandhiji, the father of our nation !

*Repeat, repeat* : THE CRYSTALLIZATION OF REVISIONISM. HE IS . . .

PROF. DATTA : (*raising voice louder over din*) A free economy, socialistically oriented, ownership of private property a fundamental right, protected by law, enforced by law, enforced by police, and if necessary, the army ! (*sounding sloganish himself*)

*Repeat* : CLASS ENEMIES ! CLASS ENEMIES MURDADBAD ! JOTEDARS MURDADBAD ! POLICE MURDADEAD ! INQUILAB ! INQUILAB ZINDABAD ! (*The Professor is aghast. Blackout.*)

(*Light on library with Professor sitting alone and distraught, lightly touching the leather bound volumes of books on law, looking up to the painted portrait of Mahatma Gandhi, feeling like a blind man trying to probe meaning from the venerated statue of Sir Asutosh Mukherjee. This is a meaningful scene in itself, suggested through his soliloquy*)

PROF. DATTA : (*either sound of tape voicing memory, or articulated through whisper*) Gandhiji . . . Gandhiji . . . how to make them understand ? That when you broke the law, the old British law that you respected so much, it was because it came in conflict with your natural law of justice. The Divine Law. Gandhiji . . . with whom I fought for our freedom . . . how to make them understand that when you broke the law, you asked for punishment ! Yes, your own punishment, because you still recognized that the law of civilized society could have no exception ! Gandhiji . . . who I worshipped as my own father . . . how to make them understand that nonviolence is an active philosophy. That it was used by you to fight violence. Remember . . . our Noakhali pilgrimage. What happened then ? You didn't die a disillusioned man, did you, Bapu ? (*Going up to the statue of Sir Asutosh Mukherjee,*



& touching his features lightly) Many were your *chelas*, those inspired by you who rose to eminence, brought this great nation together . . . Sir Asutosh, Vice-Chancellor, Chief Justice, a true Tiger of Bengal . . . those humbler too . . . like me . . . (Amar enters) Ah, there you are, Amar. Come in, come in. Don't slouch. Can't understand why young people slouch these days . . .

AMAR : Not upright like the last generation, huh ?

PROF. : (*suspiciously*) What do you mean ?

AMAR ; (*shrugging his shoulders*) Oh, nothing.

PROF. (*mumbling, grumbling*) Nothing . . . Now . . . Nowhere. Inarticulate mumblings. Half-baked slogans. (*turning around, suddenly*) Are you a rebel, son ?

AMAR : Huh ?

PROF. : I was . . . when I was young. And proud of it too. Upright, as you call it. Bengal has a great tradition for revolt : a thorn on the side of the British . . . the Mogul Empire too, earlier. Nothing to be ashamed of.

AMAR : The traditionalist revolutionary, the accent being on traditionalist.

PROF. What's that ?

AMAR : Revisionist.

PROF : I don't know what you mean.

AMAR : You believed in rules of the game, father. The old British game of cricket.

PROF. : If you mean that we didn't indulge in senseless acts of terrorism and violence, you're right. Ours was a national cause, and we fought the right way.

AMAR : Oh, yes, moral conscience. The right way. I've heard that before. There's another side too, father, that fights today for proletarian internationalism.

PROF. : (*equally sarcastically*) Ah, I've heard that before too . . . "the front paw of India's revolution", they say. Radio Peking, isn't it ?

AMAR : It's not the V. O. A. !

PROF. : (*suddenly tired, finding argument fruitless*) in the

classroom. I saw you there. With the others. Banging on the table with the chappal . . .

AMAR : (*unexpectedly smiling*) . . . like old Khrushchev at the U. N. . . .

PROF : (*smiling wryly*) . . . like Khrushchev . . . yes . . . (*looking at him*) you smile at the most unexpected times, Amar.

AMAR : True, father.

PROF : Do you think I lack a sense of humour ?

AMAR : Sometimes.

PROF : It takes more than a sense of humour to deal with so many "rowdies" in college.

AMAR : (*smiling*) I guess there must be less hazardous professions.

PROF : (*meeting the smile, momentarily close to each other*) Ah, then you do respect some of us.

AMAR : Of course I do, but that doesn't mean I agree.

PROF : Would you rather agree to disagree ?

AMAR : No.

PROF : But surely that's sensible, Amar. You're accepting a fundamental democratic doctrine if you agree to disagree.

AMAR : (*suddenly passionate*) I don't. I disagree. That's all there is to it. No rules of the game. No present system. It's rotten to the core.

PROF : Why, Amar, why ? I don't understand !

AMAR : (*going up to him, almost pleadingly with a sense of profound urgency*). Listen, father, understand. I'll say it only once. This is my passion, my poetry, my cause. Look around, father, open your eyes : the poverty, the terrible poverty. People dying of hunger, father. Look at the gap between rich and poor. It's growing, father, dangerously . . . and unfairly. It's true, the city's dying, your old beloved city of the privileged. Do you feel the stranglehold ? The bustees growing, enveloping the city with the stench of faeces and dirt. Trams coming to a halt, burning burning, the extra 2 paise increase in fare

more than the dying man can bear. Not logical, is it? Not the game of agree to disagree. There's no time for that. We're drowning under the Hooghly, silting up with doomed humanity. The processions will grow, like nightmares, death processions of the 10 million around the funeral pyre of the burning city. (shouting) And you talk of EDUCATION, father! Institutes of education that have now shackled us for generations and generations. What for? WHAT FOR, I ASK. So that there can be more unemployed millions? So that your bourgeois hierarchy remains intact! So that you've doped the masses sufficiently into complacency and resignation? You can have it, father, you can have it, but don't stuff it down our throat! You were the Gods that Failed, father! (father slaps him, breaks up the hysteria)

PROF: (quietly, not untenderly) A moment ago you were smiling. Sane. I can hardly believe it. I can hardly believe you're my son.

AMAR: (with equal deadliness) I belong . . . to the cause . . . of the revolution. (then whispers almost to himself) and my guru . . . outside . . . (suggestion of shadow of the stranger? Blackout. Light and scene shifts to the prayer room, the Professor's wife decorating a statue of Durga, ten armed, with sword and spear carrying traces of blood)

PROF: (looking at her from afar, again in meditative soliloquy) Whom do you wait for, dear wife, dressing the statue of Durga, or is it horrific Kali, with strands and straw, and clay from the depths of Ganga, infinitesimal strand and straw, patiently waiting, like Penelope who wove by day and unravelled by night, created and herself destroyed, while she waited patiently for beloved Ulysses . . . Grieve no more for the elder son who was lost afar in the Mizo hills, wait no more for his homecoming at Durga Puja, thou Mother of Earth with fertile loins, for your child was lost long ago and will never return again. Bring back to your distraught

mind . . . sanity, for it is like a fever that grips all of us . . . (*enters prayer room aloud*) Mother . . .

WIFE : (*there is a strangeness about her distraction*) Is it you ?

PROF : Me.

WIFE : (*returning to her work*) Oh.

PROF : Whom did you expect ?

WIFE : No one.

PROF : But you turned around with expectation.

WIFE ; Did I ?

PROF : (*intent on drawing blood*) Yes. (*She turns around — faces him now, with steady withdrawn eyes*) You're waiting for your elder son's return, aren't you ? (*pause*) He's dead. (*Turns back and starts working on the statue*) Every year it's the same thing. Every Puja you dress that damned statue, then drown it in the Ganga. Homecoming. Homecoming for the Puja holidays . . .

WIFE : (*quietly*) It's true. I wait.

PROF : (*stifling his anger, unable to contain himself*) He's dead, don't you understand ! (*she turns around, her eyes in tears. He wavers . . .*) My dear . . . it was so long ago. And none was to blame. It just happened. It was one of these tragedies. How far are you going to draw it through your life ? And how deep . . . ? There are others too. Your husband, your son. I've been talking to Amar. Sometimes I think he's as crazy as . . . He needs guidance. He needs a home.

WIFE : There's nothing wrong with the boy . . . that understanding won't cure.

PROF : (*stung*) Nothing wrong with him ! Understand ? I understand him very well . . . very well indeed. He believes in force . . .

WIFE : (*adjusting the spear arm*) Does he . . . ?

PROF : (*his eyes widening*) Shakti. (*She continues with the statue*).

WIFE : (*softly*) Yes . . .

PROF : (*almost to himself*) It's true . . . you came from the countryside. Picked up . . . the superstitions . . .

WIFE : . . . *superstitions* ? . . .

PROF : . . . beliefs without logical foundation. Yes, your son has inherited his passions from you. And so . . . (*comes closer and touches her*) I was attracted by you too . . . (*for the first time we see her intense form and vitality. Much younger than her husband, there is a definite sensuality about her.*) . . . fearing at the same time . . . (*whispering*) . . . your demanding sensuality.

WIFE : You wouldn't know. You came from the city. Had western education. Everything for you . . . has to have a logical foundation.

PROF : (*smiling*) my dear . . . I suspect divinity in your motherhood too.

WIFE : (*Attending Durga*) Do you know . . . what it means . . . to have a child torn out from your womb ! The cry of the mother that is at once a relief and a despair too. For the child that is born is the child that is lost.

PROF : (*shaking his head*) I . . . I don't understand.

WIFE : And then one day he returns and demands all that life had promised but never fulfilled. All that the Mother had instilled when he was born as child, and returned as man.

PROF : (*withdrawing ; whispering*) Witchcraft. Witchcraft and demons. Gods from the pantheon. Madness.

WIFE : (*shadows darkening over blood-red clay*) You'll see . . .  
(*fadeout*)

(*Feast at home : diya lights — cotton wick in kerosene with earthenware receptacles decorating Goddess Durga ; thalis of food being eaten squatting on chhatai at Professor's residence with wife, son Amar, and two visitors : Zamindar Jain and daughter Suprea.*)

JAIN : (*licking his fingers*) No one can cook, my friend

Datta, better than your wife. Delicious. (*a slurping lick*) Absolutely delicious. (*a little belch ; nudging his daughter*) Huh Suprea? When will you learn to cook like this? Your mother, bless her dead soul, was equally good. Made me fat like this... (*showing his big tummy and laughing easily ; all laugh : mood of cordiality*) But you watch out, young lady. Love husband first, then love food. Youth... ah youth is like... the overripe mango...? ... feed it too much and it falls!

SUPREA : (*embarrassed*) Father !

JAIN : How beautifully she blushes. The quality of a true bride's innocence.

SUPREA : (*Almost in tears*) Father !

JAIN : Oh well. I'm sorry. Get carried away, you know. No wife's restraining hand Only pride for the daughter.

PROF : And nothing could be better, Jain. You look after her well. Much better than I can, my son. Huh, Amar? What do you say?

AMAR : (*busy eating, mumbling*) I can look after myself.

PROF : By the same token are you suggesting that Suprea cannot look after herself? (*There a distinct pause now, while Amar looks at Suprea and she looks back at him.*)

AMAR : (*grunting*) Huh.

PROF : What's that supposed to mean?

MOTHER : (*who has been serving the food*) It means she can look after herself too. (*All laugh, except the two self-conscious young ones who smile wryly*)

PROF : (*in a change of subject*) How are the crops this year, Jain?

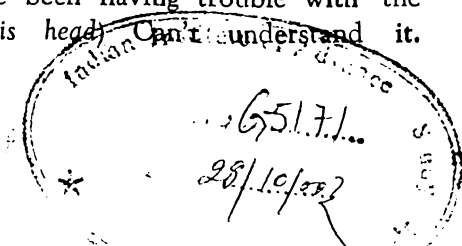
JAIN : (*a bit slowly, carefully*) Oh... alright.

PROF : You don't sound very convincing.

JAIN : Nothing's wrong with the crops, Datta. Something's wrong with the men.

PROF : What do you mean?

JAIN : You know we've been having trouble with the labourers. (*shaking his head*) Can't understand it.



They're part of my . . . family. Yet suddenly they've turned around . . . viciously ! Like I were some damned capitalist !

AMAR : (*quietly*) To be a benefactor is the same thing.

JAIN : (*surprised*) How do you mean ?

AMAR : Tell me, they've been with you for many years, haven't they ? Possibly their fathers and grandfathers were serfs to your ancestors ?

JAIN : Yes.

AMAR : And you looked after them, like one big family. And their problems were your problems. In fact you were like a father to them, indulging yet correcting them, with a firm and gentle hand.

JAIN : Yes, what's wrong with that ? I've seen lots worse landlords.

AMAR : (*still with a trace of sarcasm*) In fact you were one of the more *progressive* ones. No *adhiyar* system of contract labour for you. In being absolute master you could measure out your charities, and still keep them in their place.

JAIN : (*still uncertain about him*) I still don't get you. What's so wrong with that ! (*Amar doesn't reply*)

PROF : (*dryly*) He thinks you're a revisionist, my friend.

JAIN : A what ?

PROF : Revisionist. Revisionist. A pacifier for maintenance of an existing order. An order of vested interests.

JAIN : Show me one better.

AMAR : Land to the landless. Collective farming. Community holdings. A distribution of surplus land to be done immediately.

JAIN : (*nodding his head slowly*) Oh, I see . . . you're one of those. (*turning to Professor Datta*) Haven't you been able to knock some sense into him, Datta ?

PROF : The distribution of surplus land is one of the accepted Government objectives.

JAIN : I didn't mean that ! I mean the other thing ! Oh



I know a lot of young people take to it, but it's dangerous. He's not dirty and underprivileged, Datta. He's my friend's son!

AMAR : *(standing up, spilling the food, in anger)* Now, you look here, old man. I've had my fill of you. Yes, I'm one of those, and I'm here to stay. Like your dirty landless underprivileged labourers, who are also your friends' sons by your own definition . . .

PROF : Amar!

AMAR : No, Dad, let me have my say. And I mean it for his good, whether he believes me or not. Time's changing. Jainji, time's changing. And you'll be swept with the change unless you change too. Listen, listen to me. It's no longer a question of distributing surplus land. You've flaunted that law, laws that well-intentioned men like my father made. It's too late now . . . *(with deadly earnest)* We'll grab the land, old man, because the young like me are impatient and hungry. Then there'll be no distinction between the good and the bad landlord, because being landlord is bad enough! *(Jain gets up in anger)*

JAIN : Enough!

AMAR : *(measuring his shout)* That's what I say! Enough! You have enough land! Don't go putting it in your brothers' and sisters' and dogs' names. Don't go on having captive labour through compulsion or reward. The land belongs to the tiller!

JAIN : *(quivering with anger)* It belongs to me! Me! Me! My father, my grandfather, son, my grandson! No one's going to grab it from me! I've worked as hard, harder than my labourers . . . Look at my hands, son! Look at the callouses! Just because I'm fat and rich doesn't mean I don't work. I work harder than you . . . you idler! I don't sprout theories like you, nor write law books like your father. I work with my hands. *(passionately)* That land's mine, son. I've tilled it and I

shall reap its harvest till I die. (*his teeth clenched, this man who grows in stature till he's a giant*) And I shall kill anyone who lays a hand to grab it. Even my friend's son, be he the labourers or men with whom I break my bread! (*Amar looks at him with furious hate, then leaves the house . . . presumably to the garden outside. Mother about to leave after him*)

JAIN : (*softly, tenderly*) No Ma-ji, let him go outside. Cool off. (*raises hand to Datta who is apologising*) No, Datta, my dear friend the fault's mine. I'm older. His is the young passion. I should have restrained myself. I'm sorry. Go, Suprea, bring back your young hero. He'll respond . . . to you. (*slapping the old Professor on the back affectionately, yet somewhat disturbedly*) My God, Datta, what a son you have! A real *mastaan*, and I mean it in the best sense of the term. What I wouldn't give to have a son like him . . . (*lowering his voice*) . . . though he does need breaking in . . . Cheer up, Ma-ji, I . . . (*looking around to make sure Suprea is absent*) . . . perhaps I . . . we shall have grandsons by him Oh, I hope Suprea's not listening. She's always pulling me up. . . . (*Scene in garden outside, Amar pacing restlessly, kicking stone, plucking flowers, throwing to ground. Suprea comes behind him. Just stands for a while. Suddenly sensing someone's presence, he wheels around*)

AMAR : Ah . . . it's you. (*she merely looks at him, belligerent without knowing why*) Come to spy on my thoughts, I bet. (*she still doesn't reply*) I . . . I bet those . . . people sent you here . . . to pry the secrets out of me. (*no reply ; angrier without knowing why*) Isn't that true? Isn't that true?

SUPREA : Yes.

AMAR : (*victoriously*) Ah, I knew it!

SUPREA : But I would have come anyway . . . to share your secrets with you.

AMAR : (*uncertain, glowering*) I . . . I have no secrets.

(then turning around defiantly) Yes, I have them, but they're clear for anyone to see. I write them on the walls, I write them on the streets. It's the destiny of the nation.

SUPREA : But what about us, Amar ?

AMAR : (fumbling, avoiding her eyes) Us ? Us ?

SUPREA : Yes, you and I.

AMAR : I . . . I have a mission. It's dangerous. It leaves . . . no room . . . for other things.

SUPREA : (her eyes clouding) I see.

AMAR : No, you don't. I'm possessed, Suprea, don't you see ! My heart and soul goes out to everything I see in life. The poor, the needy, the down-trodden. I walk the streets of Calcutta and the hands of the beggar tear at my insides. I roam the green acres and the tiller's sweat touches my brow with the taste of salt on my tongue. I say then . . . that my life does not belong to myself. Do . . . do you understand ?

SUPREA : (from the docile to the defiant) No . . . no, I don't ! I see life that was meant for us to live ! Not sacrifice. I see the earth and the sky same as you, Amar, but to be shared by us. Not lost and wasted . . . Amar . . . Amar . . . take my hand . . . (she touches him) . . . and put it to your heart. Let the fever drain out. It is your passion that I love . . . and I beseech that you keep some for me. (Amar takes her hand and smiles) Ah . . . you smile so easily, Amar. Why then do you make others weep ? (Amar relaxed, smiling, boyish . . . pulls at Suprea's hand . . .)

AMAR : Come, we play a game !

SUPREA : (laughing) No, no . . . they may be seeing us.

AMAR : (dragging her) Oh, come on.

SUPREA : (suspiciously) What's the game ?

AMAR : A kiss.

SUPREA : No.

AMAR : Yes.

(Suprea disentangles and runs behind the tree)

SUPREA : Do you call that a game ?

AMAR : (chasing her and laughing) Yes.

SUPREA : Are you solving the problems of the world, Amar, or chasing a poor defenceless girl ?

AMAR : (just missing her) Playing games.

RUPREA : (almost allowing herself to be caught) Where will it end ?

AMAR : You know where.

SUPREA : Not till after . . .

AMAR : (stopping) After . . . what ?

SUPREA : Run, Amar . . . my turn to chase you.

AMAR : (playing the game fully ; turning tail and running while she chases him) After what, my love ?

SUPREA : You know what, you rogue ! Ah ! Almost caught you !

AMAR : Hush ! Our parents may be watching.

SUPREA : Damn them !

AMAR : (eyes twinkling mischievously) What did you say ?

SUPREA : (returning the same look) I said damn them ! (both laugh and fall into each other's arms)

SUPREA : (in his arms) Oh, Amar, let's not laugh any more . . . or else I shall cry. (She turns her face to kiss tenderly. She does cry. He touches her face lightly)

AMAR : (softly) It's true . . . you cry, my dear.

SUPREA : Oh Amar, Amar . . . (concern, joy, anxiety all written over her face)

AMAR : (protective, consoling) Hush . . . Suprea . . . all will be well . . . eventually . . . but I must realize myself first, you understand.

SUPREA : (showing her character, will and understanding) Yes, Yes, Amar, I understand. If I ask you to be careful, you still may not. So I'll only ask you to care . . . care for me. This my faith. You.

AMAR : (sincerely) I promise, Suprea. I more than care . . . and I always will. Come, let's go inside.

(They enter, and the three elders look at them.)

JAIN : (Putting his arm cordially around Amar's shoulder) Ah, the prodigal son returns . . . tamed, if I may say so, by the maiden . . .

AMAR : (with a smile in his eyes) . . . temptress . . . (whispers aside) . . . and spy . . . (earlier tension broken, everyone laughs)

MOTHER : Come and finish your food now ; it's gone cold.

JAIN : (to Mother) The Durga statue, Ma-ji, it's beautiful.

MOTHER : (absently) Yes ?

PROF : It's a good occupation, Jain. It keeps one's mind away . . . away from . . . (voice tapers off)

JAIN : Each year the intensity of the statue grows. I never know which form it will take.

MOTHER : (eyes afar) I wait. The monsons end. Puja's here. Autumn comes. I still smell the fresh wet earth, longing for planting of the new seed . . . (almost sharply) for it's all barren ! The new harvest, the new green. The food for survival, turning of the new generation. It needs to be planted with care. For the earth is fresh and fertile. Only the seed must be strong . . . like the growth of new revolt ! (Everyone is taken aback ; even she is not conscious of what she has just said)

AMAR : (quietly) I'm . . . I'm expecting a friend to come shortly . . .

MOTHER : (absently) What . . . what did you say ?

AMAR : I said I'm expecting a friend soon.

MOTHER : (awake, flustered) But . . . but you didn't tell me. Is he coming for dinner ?

AMAR : No.

PROF : Who's he ?

AMAR : Oh, just a friend.

PROF : What friend ?

AMAR : (smiling, mysterious) We call him *Guru*.

PROF : That doesn't say much.

AMAR : He doesn't speak much either.

PROF : Who's he ? Where's he from ?

AMAR : I don't know. He has an ease of . . . association, and yet he's very far away.

MOTHER : When . . . when is he coming ?

AMAR : *(looking out)* I . . . I think I see him now . . . *(The stranger enters. His face is care-worn and deeply lined. A remarkable resemblance to Amar, though older. An indefinable age. His figure in partial darkness. He comes in quietly. Looks at the mother, not at anyone else. She stares at him, unknowingly, afar.)* Come in . . . come in, Ahmed. Let me introduce you to my family.

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ACT I SCENE II

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*Same as beginning of the first scene i. e. the class room except with the important difference that this is a clandestine night study with a few student-Naxalites and the man standing at the dias is revolutionary leader, Ahmed. One of the students present is Amar.*

AHMED : (cool, soft) Gentlemen . . . or should I say my "rowdy" comrades . . . (snigger from students) . . . what better place to hold our secret meetings . . . our own classrooms . . . than here . . . But remember : revolutionary theory without revolutionary practice means nothing. Everything that you learn here, must be put into practice outside. Marxism-Leninism holds that "force is the mid-wife of every old society pregnant with a new one" . . .

*(Flashes of light, stacatto-like, on wall, subconscious messages, as in early first scene : sound of table tapping, intense and prickly : MAO'S THOUGHTS . . . MAO'S THOUGHTS . . . PEOPLE'S WAR . . . PEOPLE'S WAR . . . PEOPLE'S WAR . . . PEASANT MASS ACTION . . . PEASANT MASS ACTION . . . (students in rapt attention. No shuffling of feet, no banging of chappals on table, these bright alert passionately intelligent faces, all absorbed ; lights dimming and brightening to indicate passage of time . . .)*

AHMED : Parliamentary democracy is not an effective weapon for socialist revolution : an armed struggle is inevitable . . . A revolution in backward countries can only be brought about by peasants : start organizing peasants for militant action . . .

*Flashes : GUERRILLA SQUADS . . . GUERRILLA SQUADS . . . VILLAGE MILITIA . . . VILLAGE MILITIA . . .*

AHMED : I repeat, "without the poor peasant, there can be no revolution. To reject this is to reject the revolution." Remember the four commandments : One, we must go among the masses and concern ourselves with their weal and woe. Two, the mobilization of the people will create a



vast sea in which to drown the enemy. Three, seem to come from the east but attack from the west . . . avoid the solid, attack the hollow . . . deliver a lightning blow, seek a lightning decision. Four, the only way to final victory is the strategy of protracted war.

Flashes : THE RED ROOK . . . THE RED BOOK . . . THE RED BOOK . . .

AHMED : (*voice steely, hard but still cold, chillingly dishing out the hot words*) Establish peasant bases. Appoint area committees to launch violent struggles . . . As Mao put it bluntly, "it is necessary to bring about a brief reign of terror in every rural area". Learn to combine persuasion, terror and aid . . . Organize the Peasants Union, the Krishak Sabha . . . (*semi-darkness*) Your weapons : bombs, spears, knives . . . yes, the sickle too, for these are peasant armaments . . . (*the students lay them down on the desk for examination . . . more darkness, dim lights, as though they were in the background learning and preparing . . . perhaps a semi-transparent screen, while the action changes to the front . . . in the front are two scenes : first, a Peasants Union taking place in the village farm-land, and the second is a peasant's home . . . First scene ; Peasants Union, a clandestine meeting of peasants with an outsider, the Naxalite organizer, young man who might well have been one of Ahmed's students*)

YOUNG MAN : (*to villagers squatting around kerosene lamp*) You get what you deserve : disease, hunger, want, and death. You give your children an even larger share : scurvy, slavery, deprivation and death. Every bigha of zamin you toil for, you'll make them toil harder. For whom ? For whom, I ask ? (*rustle of discontent amongst peasants ; shouting*) For the damned, bloody, greedy zamindar ! who never worked a day in his life ! who sucks your blood like leeches, grovels in food and luxury : What gives him the right to own, and you to suffer ! Peasants ! (*spitting*) Peasants ! (*protest noise ; all want to speak together, but one of the older holds up his hand.*)

VILLAGER : *(older but not too old)* : Ah, hold on, young man ! Brothers, may I speak for you ? *(others nod ; turning to the young man)* You're from the city, aren't you ?

YOUNG MAN : Yes.

VILLAGER : Well, I suggest you go back and learn some more before coming here to teach us.

YOUNG MAN : *(taken aback)* Huh ? *(Villagers smile at his astonishment)*

VILLAGER : It isn't quite like what you say. As it happens, our landlord is not a tyrant. He is also working with his own hands. And for your information, we do not starve.

YOUNG MAN : *(disappointed)* Oh ! *(Villagers nod consent)*

VILLAGER : And we're not ignorant peasants either. The literate amongst us are fully aware of ceilings on land holdings, and the political workers of the present Socialist State Government keep us informed about reforms being introduced by them.

YOUNG MAN : *(completely dejected)* Oh . . .

VILLAGER : *(kindly)* But don't be downcast, young man. We would not have asked for someone to come from your side if we were content to let things be. *(laughing dryly)* After all . . . we have our firebrands . . . *(turning to one of the young villagers)* . . . huh, Shomik ? *(as though by understood invitation, Shomik stands up and the villager sits down)*

SHOMIK : Comrades, both sides are right, but our cause is the only cause that matters : liberation through revolt ! *(at once a new electric feeling. Here is a natural leader amongst men. Murmur of consent)* Nobody denies that our landlord, Jain, is just. Nobody denies that he works as hard as we do. *(raising his voice effectively without shouting)* But he's working on our land and not we on his ! *(cheers ; animated consent amongst villagers)*  
 • We want our law ! Not the landlord's, and not the Government's ! How long have we heard the political

workers come here and tell us about land reforms. Our fathers were serfs, and even if we're not, we're not free either! (*more cheers, hot consent to this persuasive firebrand*) No . . . No . . . No more waiting. The law cannot work equally for both of us. It's either ours or theirs. At the moment it's theirs, so we have to reject it. But the only means we know: fight! FIGHT! (*picking up his lathi / spear. People clap him on the back. Applaud. Shomik holds up his hand. Calls the young man and embraces him*) Brother, we agree with everything you said. (*smiling*) We only wanted to bring you down a peg or two. Now we need your help. You need ours too. So let us clap with two hands . . . tell your people . . . we're ready! (*Fadeout, with peasant Shomik returning to his village home: old father, blind mother, anxious wife, playing children. Children run out to greet him, at doorway; relieved, smiling, in the privacy of their house, he touches her face . . .*)

SHOMIK: Worried? (*wife nods, turns her face away*)  
About what?

SARALA: I . . . I don't know.

SHOMIK: Then why are you worried. (*she turns away*)  
You couldn't be worried for nothing.

SARALA: (*looking at him gravely*) No.

SHOMIK: (*trying to change the subject*) Ah, so it's something. (*smile in his eyes*) Another woman? (*she looks back reproachfully*) Ah . . . no. Money? (*staring beyond*) That's nothing new. What's left? Maybe, it's drinking. No, that couldn't be; I don't drink . . . much, that is. (*his hands going up subconsciously to the light iron rods lying on the ground which he picks up and twists in his powerful hands.*) What could it be? (*more restless, using his strength and sweating over the iron rods*) What could it be? (*his wife looks at his hands, he does too, self-consciously*)

- SARALA: It's there. A strong . . . cruelty. A fierceness that frightens.

SHOMIK : (*laughing artificially*) Don't be absurd. You've been listening to Mother's nonsense. Her blind visions. (*She looks at his hands.*) Oh, this? It's . . . it's like the plough. I have to use my strength to furrow the ground. Plant the seed. Grow the food . . . so we can give most of it to our landlord !

SARALA : Ah ! I see.

SHOMIK : You don't see, my dear woman. You blot it out. It's frightening, so you blot it out !

SARALA : . . . at nights, in bed . . .

SHOMIK : (*touching her hair, the same strong hands*) . . . I don't hurt you, do I . . . ? . . . these cruel hands . . . (*she kisses his hands in tears*)

SARALA : It's not what you do to me, my love. It's what you're doing to yourself.

SHOMIK : (*looking outside, eyes afar*) I'm righting a wrong : something that should have been done long ago . . . Unlike our city friend, I'm *involved*. Because I am poor, but  
 • not humble, unlike my father . . . and I believe. I am teaching myself to think, Sarala, the thoughts that great men have on equality . . . and revolution.

SARALA : (*shaking her head, not understanding, trace of apprehensive grief, swaying slightly*) What are you saying ? What are you saying ?

SHOMIK : Our children. Our children, Sarala, I'm doing whatever I'm doing for our children.

SARALA : (*like a flash*) You're doing this for yourself ! (*Shomik recoils ; anger breaking through desperation*) Yes, for your own power and glory ; I don't want  
 • you to be *their* leader. I want you to protect this house ; bring safety for yourself . . . and your children.

SHOMIK : (*angry, raising voice*) You don't know, ignorant woman, you don't know anything outside of this house. How we work, what we do . . . A dog . . . you want me  
 • to be a dog the rest of my life. Or like those animals ploughing those fields . . . I'm a man. I've got a

soul. I earn my bread. I work hard. I want my respect, RESPECT !

SARALA : *(slowly, trying to understand)* You . . . want . . . your . . . respect.

SHOMIK : We're not starving. God Almighty, in spite of all the propaganda, we're not starving. What we have is not much, but the hunger that consumes me is not food.

• It's me, my self-respect, my freedom.

SARALA : And you'll have it with your . . . your . . . revolution ?

SHOMIK : *(clenched teeth, twisting iron rod again)* I . . . want . . . my revenge !

SARALA : Revenge ? Why ? What for ? Has anyone harmed me, your children ? Your parents ? This I don't understand.

SHOMIK : *(unreasoning)* Others have been harmed. Do you know most of the peasants still live almost in a state of cruel slavery ? I can speak for them. Ours is a common cause. I must show it.

SARALA : *(insistent)* In what way have we been harmed ?

SHOMIK : *(angry again, eyes burning, looking after)* I want my revenge. A leader of the people. One of them. They believe me. No city men can lead the revolt : they need me. My hunger and theirs is the same. Some for food . . . some for the things beyond. And I shall get it . . . the only way I know . . . *(the iron bar now lies out of shape, Shomik sweating, his wife frightened and quiet. Another part of the house ; Jain and Politician enter to meet the old man and his blind wife)*

JAIN : *(clasping the old man)* Ah, Dada, how are you ? You're looking more fit than ever ; more than my father ever did at your age.

DADA : Your father worried about others too much.

JAIN : *(laughing, going up to old woman and folding hands respectfully)* Ma-ji. *(the blind woman touches his head)* Ah, Dada, I'd like you to meet my good friend, Devdas . . .

(“*namaste*”) Devdas is a politician . . .

DADA : A good friend, you said . . . ?

JAIN : . . . as good as any politician can be, Dada. (*smiling at Devdas*) Not like you and me, of course.

DADA : I'm a poor old man . . . (*his wife tapping her stick as she moves blindly around*) . . . with a blind old woman.

DEVSDAS : You have a very . . . fiery son.

DADA : Ah ! But all young people are hot-headed.

MA-JI : (*stops tapping her stick : her ears alert*) Has he done anything wrong ?

JAIN : (*almost together*) Of course not.

DEVSDAS : Not yet.

JAIN : (*covering up*) The young still have to learn in life, huh Dada ?

DADA : (*shaking his head*) They don't listen to old people any more.

JAIN : Don't worry. Devdas here is very persuasive. He's an important man, you know. Belongs to the present Government. (*looking almost slyly at Devdas*) Keeps me abreast of all happenings. Finds ways out.

DADA : (*almost pathetically*) I don't know anything about politics.

JAIN : (*patting him reassuringly*) And you don't need to as long as I'm here. Tell me, how's Ma-ji keeping ?

DADA : Oh, the usual ailments. You know old people . . .

JAIN : (*interrupting*) Yes, yes. You should get her some medicine. Here . . . (*stuffing some money in the old man's breast pocket in spite of his feeble protests ; the old woman taps the stick and laughs weirdly*)

MA-JI : (*like cracking dry stick*) He'll spend it on food.

DADA : (*angrily to wife*) How can you say that ?

JAIN : Don't you have enough to eat ?

DADA : Yes, we do. Don't listen to the old woman. Her mind is feeble as her eyes.

MA-JI : (*spurt of vituperation*) Not so feeble as to hear you eat greedily, Dada ! Yes, Jainsahib, there's enough to eat,

but not enough of the right things. My husband has lived longer than your father because he's eaten roots and barks of trees in the old days ; yours died through too much rich food and wine. My son won't stand for that any more !

DADA : *(raising his voice)* Shut up, old woman !

MA-JI *(stick tapping, going away)* Plenty of time for that . . . when I'm gone . . . *(her voice fading)* . . . because my bones ache so . . .

DADA : *(resignedly)* I apologise. We old people . . .

JAIN : *(gesture of quietening him)* . . . Yes. I know, Dada. *(nodding his head)* I know.

DADA : I'll go and fetch my son. *(He leaves. Jain turns around looks at Devdas)*

JAIN : Well ?

DEVIDAS : He gets his ideas from the old man.

JAIN : Wrong. He gets his ideas from politicians.

DEVIDAS : We wouldn't put him up to this kind of thing.

JAIN : I'm not saying it's you. It's the others : those who have broken away from you.

DEVIDAS : I can't be held responsible for every politician's views.

JAIN : Sure you can be held responsible ! You're the present Government ! You're responsible for law and order !

DEVIDAS : Nothing's happened here yet.

JAIN : But it will, unless you watch out. I can feel it . . . in the air. There are secret meetings, I hear. Today it's me here, tomorrow it's you there, in the seat of power.

DEVIDAS : *(wringing his hands)* What can I do ? What can I do ?

JAIN : Stop placating them. I'm not blind enough to believe that I can have larger and larger holdings of land. But what I have is mine, and I shall be protected by law . . . and if necessary force ! I warn you, Devdas, if you can't stop them, I will !

DEVIDAS : Be careful. There'll be no end to it if you take law into your own hands too.



JAIN : (slyly) You're no Gandhian, Devdas. I've seen the kind of things you've done.

DEVIDAS : (pricked) What do you mean? What do you mean!

JAIN : Come now. Now-a-days neither the peasants, nor the landlords, are ignorant. Each of us . . . are important voters, quantitatively and qualitatively . . . (Devdas looks at him attentively) Peasants form large votes. I can buy them, or most of them. Until I have a trouble-shooter. And then it's for you to keep him quiet.

DEVIDAS : How?

JAIN : You have your own ways, I'm sure. (carefully) Inter-party conflict is not a new thing . . . (Devdas is sweating) . . . That's how you came into power. You stood for constitutional change, the other for revolutionary overthrow. Not only of me; of you too! (Devdas quiet, watching) Why are you telling the police to soft-peddle them! Are you afraid of losing your peasant votes? You're under-estimating me . . . (laughing unhumorously) My good friend, (Devdas stockstill) Do you know what I carry in my pockets? (removes from one a purse with coins, and removes from the other a revolver) Power? From the barrel of the gun? Or from the purse of gold? (laughs and leaves. Devdas wipes his brow with the handkerchief, the tap-tapping of the old woman's stick being heard, the sound of voices as the old man reappears with the son.)

DADA : Here . . . but where's Jain-ji?

DEVIDAS : Er . . . he's left.

DADA : Oh! (ruefully) I wanted to give him a cup of tea. In my humble home. But never mind. You'll stay? You wanted to meet my son, didn't you?

DEVIDAS : Yes. (both men look at each other, sizing up; casually) I was wondering . . . (Shomik looks at him) How the two of you could be so different. Father and son.

DADA : My son is not too different from me.

DEVNAS : Oh, I wouldn't say that.

DADA : I'm old of course . . .

DEVNAS : . . . of course . . .

DADA : But when I was young . . .

DEVNAS : . . .yes . . .!

DADA : *(sighing)* Er . . . *(trying to recollect)* . . . Hum . . .  
*(sighing again)* I guess I was different.

DEVNAS : *(smiling)* Ah. *(turning to Shomik)* No opinious  
on this, young man ?

SHOMIK : You didn't come to see me to talk about the  
difference between father and son.

DEVNAS : Ahh . . . quite. Quite. *(then suddenly)* But  
when I saw your father taking money I somehow thought  
you would be different. *(Father yelps fearfully, indignantly  
too. Son turns to father with angry eyes)*

DADA : It wasn't anything like that !

DEVNAS : Oh, I didn't suggest it was bribery. It was  
. . . a gesture of friendship, gracefully accepted.

SHOMIK : *(stretching out his hand, steadily)* Give it to me,  
father.

DADA : *(moaning)* It's mine. He gave it to me. His  
father and I were old friends.

SHOMIK : *(unwavering, hard)* Give it to me, Dada.

DADA : *(almost pleading, yet trying to maintain self-respect)*  
It was for Ma-ji. Her ill health.

SHOMIK : *(palm extended, whiplike)* Here ! *(Old woman  
appears as though from nowhere, in and on the way out)*

MA-JI : *(cracking voice)* Give it to him, old man. Or he'll  
thrash the life out of you. *(laughing weirdly)* I know my  
son. *(Old man almost has tears in his eyes as he waveringly  
and reluctantly puts the money in his son's hand. The son looks  
at it, spits on the money, throws it out)*

SHOMIK : *(shaking with fury)* Charity ! He should be beg-  
ging your mercy, father, instead of giving you charity !  
*(old man leaves, bowed, with wife)*

DEVNAS : *(calmly)* You don't respect your father much,

do you ?

SHOMIK : Wrong there. I respect him in ways you wouldn't understand.

DEVDas : (*nodding his head*) I thought you were different.

SHOMIK : Wrong again. He and I are the same. Both peasants.

DEVDas : Ah, you have your unity . . .

SHOMIK : . . . and strength.

DEVDas : But not everybody feels the way you do.

SHOMIK : Many of the young people do. Those that don't will come around.

DEVDas : How ?

SHOMIK : We have our ways, Devdas-ji, same as you.

DEVDas : Wouldn't it be better to pull together ? Instead of different directions.

SHOMIK : As long as you work together with landlord Jain, there can be no meeting in our ways.

- DEVDas : (*shrugging his shoulders*) I have to keep up with him, you understand, but the real people I'm interested in are you . . . the peasants.

SHOMIK : I see. You'd be ready to cut his throat, wouldn't you ?

DEVDas : Only metaphorically. I can't afford to believe in violence, either.

SHOMIK : You don't or you can't afford to.

- DEVDas : In practice, it's the same thing. As long as you represent Government, even if it is made up of a coalition of parties with different views, you can't afford . . . outwardly . . . to condone violence.

SHOMIK : . . . outwardly . . . ?

DEVDas : Correct. Even the maintenance of law and order, you admit, involves force.

SHOMIK : Yes.

DEVDas : So if I'm faced with a difficult situation, I might, ultimately, have to resort to it.

SHOMIK : (*shrugging his shoulders*) I don't blame you. But

how does this concern me ?

DEVDas : (*nonchalantly*) Sometimes, even outside of my control, there are interparty conflicts.

SHOMIK : So ?

DEVDas : A lot of people get killed. (*Shomik looks at him with cold eyes*) Good men who could have worked for us . . . get deflected, your understand . . . So violence meets with violence, so that peace can prevail. (*suddenly laughing*) Ironical, isn't it ? Ah, Gandhiji would never have believed it . . . (*shaking his head*)

SHOMIK : (*quietly*) Are you threatening me ?

DEVDas : (*feigning surprise*) Good lord, no. Shomik, champion of the people here. Swayer of passions, the village messiah . . . Me . . . threaten ? Good lord, no. (*again sudden change*) Look Shomik, let's be practical. I'm not here to bribe you, or threaten . . . unless I have to. You want more wages, better conditions of work, I'll give it to you.

SHOMIK : I want land, my own.

DEVDas : If you work for my party, even that is possible. There's going to be distribution of waste . . .

SHOMIK : Not waste ! Productive !

DEVDas : . . . productive land. I'll see to it that your name comes up. Your father is the oldest tiller here. It may take time, but I'll arrange it.

SHOMIK : (*coldly*) I want this land . . .

DEVDas : . . . this . . . ?

SHOMIK : . . . now ! (*fractional pause*)

DEVDas : (*angrily*) Oh come now, Shomik ! You want too much, too soon !

SHOMIK : (*catching Devdas by his coat*) I've been waiting too long, Devdas. Generations ! And tell me, how much land does Jain have ? Ceiling of 50 acres ? I know he has much more. You make the loopholes to play his game . . . and now you want to use me. No, Devdas, no. You have your friends . . . I have mine too . . . Ah, I think I see

them coming now. Yes, you should meet them, Devdas. They come at the right time . . . (*enter Ahmed and Amar ; clasping Ahmed's hand, nodding greeting to Amar*) Ah, Ahmed, good to see you. Come in, both of you. I want you to meet a good friend of my landlord. Politician Devdas, Jack-of-all-trades, come to offer me party-membership, who says "join me . . . or else" . . . (*Devdas flushes ; turning to Devdas*) That's what my father felt like when you trapped him.

DEVIDAS : (*flushing*) Insolent man ! You've pushed me too far !

SHOMIK : Yes, and what are you going to do about it ?

DEVIDAS : I've got my ways, as you so discreetly put it. I suspect there's more talk than muscle with you and your friends. (*Hot-headed Shomik catches hold of him to beat him up*)

- SHOMIK : Did Jain leave his pistol or his purse with you ? Or did you think your political position will save you ? Let's see now ! (*pulls him up*)

AHMED : (*very softly*) Leave him. (*Shomik is ready to beat him up ; purring even more softly*) I said let him go, Shomik, (*something in his voice stops Shomik*) Shomik, not that kind of muscle. Give me a few minutes with him. (*Shomik lets him go. Devdas tries to recover courage and dignity, and fear is quickly replaced with indignation.*)

- DEVIDAS : (*foaming in the mouth*) You've gone too far, Shomik ! I warn you. (*turning to Ahmed*) You're in this goonda-gang too, aren't you ? I'll remember all of you ! (*then looking at Ahmed again. Coming closer.*) You . . . have I seen you before ? (*looking closer, the thin prickle of fear starting.*) I have . . . a long memory . . . (*then breaking it*) A few minutes you wanted, to show me real muscle. What is it ?

- AHMED : (*approaching, looking him in the eye*) Yes, Devdas, we met long ago, in your old days of struggle for power, when you didn't care how you got it . . . But there was a

- weak point within you, Devdas. Fear. Fear, Devdas . . . terrorists and counter-terrorists, do you remember? When violence came slowly and stealthily . . . There were traitors, of course, to the cause. Easier to compromise when rewards are so close at hand. That was your other weak point, Devdas, greed . . . Greed. (*Devdas is again sweating, unable to ward off the compelling fear*)

DEVSDAS : (*unsteadily*) I . . . I stood for socialism as much as anyone else.

AHMED : You stood for yourself, Devdas.

- DEVSDAS : The . . . the socialist revolution will come, but it must be done constitutionally.

AHMED : These are opposites, Devdas.

DEVSDAS : It . . . really is absurd that we should fight. Ours is still a common cause. It's just that the methods are different.

AHMED : As between heaven and earth, Devdas.

DEVSDAS : Your way won't work. You're too few. We can achieve more through votes.

- AHMED : In order to get votes you are following the same old dirty path, having to pander to people like the landlord, who in the last analysis still controls the Government.

DEVSDAS : Is your path any cleaner? It's washed with the blood of innocent people.

AHMED : As innocent as yours, Devdas, remember that.

DEVSDAS : Are you . . . are you threatening me?

AHMED : (*approaching*) Look closely, Devdas, and remember . . . In the Mizo Hills . . . long ago. A para-military party was sent out, by you . . . to catch a terrorist, one single terrorist who was single-handedly bringing about a revolution. None returned, your party — all dead, all hideously tortured, and murdered . . . because they dared to turn the inevitable tide that was ordained on that man, who was planting the seed of violent revolution. (*Devdas literally shrinks with fear on recognition. His eyes become wider, his mouth goes dry, and without a further word, he turns*

and leaves quickly. Shomik and Amar look at Ahmed, quietly, respectfully, and no one mentions a word. A long moment of silence)

SHOMIK : (with quiet confidence and friendship) Good to see you out of that dammed classroom, Ahmed. (Ahmed smiles: there is a quiet understanding between the two men) Why did you send that raw recruit to meet us here ?

AHMED : (still smiling) Because he's good material and I wanted him to learn something outside of the classroom.

AMAR : There's nothing wrong with the classroom. Revolt starts from there, It must be taught to grow, fed with ideas and ideologies of the great men.

SHOMIK : There were no great men who did not prove themselves in the field.

AMAR : Nor were there any revolutionaries who did not fire the minds of men with that indelible pen. (Ahmed is looking with quiet humour from one to the other)

SHOMIK : Balls !

AHMED : That has its place too, my friends. (All laugh)

AMAR : But seriously, Ahmed, I do think we are laying too much emphasis on the rural areas. The real unrest starts from the industrial complexes : strikes, lockouts, bundhs, gheraos. That's where we should flame the fires of discontent . . . (Amar raises his hand to stop Shomik from interrupting) No, Shomik, let me have my say. Half of Bengal lies in Calcutta and the Eastern Coal & Iron Belt. Here we have the real boiling pot ready to burst. You're spreading out your revolt too thin in going into a relatively peaceful countryside.

SHOMIK : (Like a tiger) Nonsense ! There's nothing peaceful about the countryside, Amar. It's lurking there, underneath our skins, revolt against this unspeakable tyranny we've suffered on the lands . . . Listen to me, Amar, you're like a blood-brother to me, but your place really is in the classroom and those ineffectual bombs you keep throwing around the city to frighten a few people. The

real revolution starts here, here, Amar, on the land . . . and spreads and spreads . . . till it engulfs the whole country.

AHMED : (*raising his hands, wanting to both encourage and stop this friendly duel*) Hold on. Hold on, both of you, my true *mastaans*. Of course both of you are right, because revolution carries no separate or individual ideology. But, my friends, let's wait. The true test is still to come. What stuff we're made of, and who shall survive . . .

AMAR : You . . . you've seen action before, Ahmed. And much more. Neither of us really have. What is your . . . individual . . . thinking ?

SHOMIK : (*also turning to Ahmed*) Yes, Ahmed, you've never really spoken your mind before. (*Ahmed in deep thought. He moves over to the bagful of rice, takes it in his fist, walks outside the door, presumably in front of the fields*)

AHMED : (*softly, distantly*) There is a personal meaning in it for all of us, you in the classroom Amar, you in the fields Shomik, others in the factory, those who have gone underground, the martyrs who have died, the search and cry that calls out to all of us, who refuse to stay unmoved . . . Such is our mould, sometimes heroic, sometimes selfish too, in those obsessive human ideals of the future, the frantic struggles of the present, that moves us on and on and on until death and fulfilment . . . So I search for the ultimate : the cause and effect. The cycle of generations that revolt. The great burning desire within us that is prepared to kill and recreate. Build the new world that is as close to God's image as Man is . . . (*Opening the palm of his hand and seeing the rice*) It's all here. In the seed. The urge, and longing. The creation that rebels the moment it's born. And there . . . (*looking at the fields*) . . . the earth lies fertile. Me ? What do I want out of life ? (*laughs peculiarly*) There ! (*he flings the rice seed to earth beyond . . .*) THIS !

(*shutout darkness*)



## ACT II

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*Daytime. Class-room, Professor lecturing to students :*

PROF. DATTA : . . . Some have described land-grabbing as moral, legitimate and legal. I am not here to contest the moral aspect of the problem : this is purely subjective. I will give you . . . my legal opinion . . . (*goes up to the black-board ; writes :* INDIAN CONSTITUTION ARTICLE 31 SECTION (A) (1) ARTICLES 19. *As he writes, he speaks*) . . . our Constitution guarantees . . . all citizens . . . the right to hold or dispose of private property . . . including land . . . any attempt therefore to grab land is an attack on this fundamental right . . . (*messages flashing on the wall as before :* BOURGEOIS LANDLORD GOVERNMENT . . . PEASANTS UNION . . . MASS ACTION . . . PEOPLES' WAR . . .) . . . if excess land held by some persons is to be made available to those who are deserving and desirous of using it for agriculture, our law provides the power to acquire land for this purpose . . . But it also protects the owner. . . . under article 31, no person can be deprived of his property save by authority of law. Section 31 (A) (1) (a) provides that any law providing for acquisition of any estate or any right therein or the extinguishment or modification of such rights, cannot be void . . . (*a loud yawn from one of the students : general laughter : Prof. taps on the dias to restore attention*) . . . cannot be void on the ground that it is inconsistent with or takes away or abridges any right conferred by Articles 10 and 31 . . . (*louder yawn of tiresome protest and longer laughter*) Gentlemen ! Boys ! Attention please. This is vital, the point I'm trying to make. Look at the board. What does it say ? It says that in a democracy where the rule of law prevails, the action must be through appropriate legislation . . . (*Teletype messages :* CLASS ENEMIES MURDABAD . . . INQUILAB . . . INQUILAB ZINDABAD . . .)

*(fadeout)*

Scene shifts to field with two peasants sitting on their haunches. Typically laconic. Equivocating.

1ST PEASANT : Well, what do you think ?

2ND PEASANT : (taking out a pan and preparing it) Difficult to say.

1ST : Should we or should we not join ?

2ND : (offering him the pan, taking one himself) Yes.

1ST : On the one hand, we could become landlords ourselves . . . (benign smile)

2ND : (chewing slowly ; then faster) Yes. Yes.

1ST : . . . on the other hand we could land up in jail. (downcast gloom)

2ND : (chewing slowly once again) Yes. (long silence ; shifting the pan from one cheek to another) There's another side too.

1ST : Yes ?

2ND : If we do join, we're brothers . . . all united.

1ST : Yes. Yes

2ND ; If we don't join, we're outcasts . . . victimized.

1ST : True. (shaking his head) Only too true.

2ND : (raising his finger) But . . .

1ST : Huh ?

2ND : But there's a third side to it too.

1ST : What ?

2ND : The Politician and the Police.

1ST : (shooting out a spitful of juice in reply)

• 2ND : No. No. Don't forget them. Just because they haven't taken any action yet does not mean they will not.

1ST : They're afraid.

2ND : Of whom ? The terrorists . . . ?

1ST : No. They're afraid any action against us will upset their votes . . . or at least Shomik says so.

2ND : Ah, Shomik ? (shoots out a spitful of pan in disdainful reply)

1ST : No, no, my friend, don't underestimate him.

2ND : Bah !

- c 1ST : He has friends. They don't talk ; they kill. (2nd peasant carefully silent ; no reply. Another long pause)
- 2ND : So we're caught between the deep, are we ?
- 1ST : I don't know . . . (then thoughtfully) . . . I've been thinking . . .
- 2ND : (surprised) Yes ?
- 1ST : (ignoring the facetiousness . . . there is an underlying humour about this scene) Are we ?
- 2ND : (now irritated) Are we what ?
- 1ST : Are we between the devil and the deep ?
- 2ND : (more irritated) That's the question I asked you !
- 1ST : You did ?
- 2ND : Yes.
- 1ST : Well, I've been thinking . . . (second one in quiet exasperation, keeps quiet ; thinking away, repeating for the last time) I've been thinking that we should join. Look, we've really got nothing to lose. Land grab is taking place everywhere. Even this State government has a sneaking sympathy for it.
- 2ND : What if they jail us ?
- 1ST : What if they do ? Our greatest leaders were once in jail fighting against the same sort of unfairness. All this means is that they'll change the laws faster, or make
- sure there is less delay in seeing that the laws apply to us fairly.
- 2ND : Yes, they won't keep us long in jail if we're fighting for a just and moral cause.
- 1ST : There's only one thing I don't like.
- 2ND : What ?
- 1ST : Where to stop. Oh, you know and I know, or think we know, how far to go. But when leadership is
- in the hands of . . . of extremists, I'm afraid it may not stop with the land-grab.
- 2ND : What do you mean ?
- 1ST : I don't know . . . yet. But I've got a strong feeling something's going to happen soon. There've been secret

meetings held of late: an inner group that seems to control and guide.

2ND: As long as I get the extra land, I don't care.

1ST: I hope so . . . *(darkness. Scene shifts back to college . . . corridor with 2 or 3 boys and maybe a girl grouping around for a chat)*

1ST BOY: I don't know how you feel about it but I'm quite fed up.

2ND BOY: Fed up with what?

1ST BOY: Oh the whole bloody thing. This damned University that doesn't know how to teach or what to teach. They're a hundred years old . . . backdated in their ideas.

3RD BOY: Still . . . a degree here can land you with a job.

GIRL *(butting in)*: How many and whom?

3RD BOY: What are you worried about? You're a girl.

GIRL: *(not to be put down)* Who do you think you have for a Prime Minister today! *(everybody laughs)* Though my ideals are different. I'd rather be a Leila Khaled or a Angela Davis today.

2ND BOY: Who's that?

1ST BOY: *(dryly)* . . . Palestinian commando . . . Black Marxist . . .

2ND BOY: *(quiet, slightly awed, slightly frightened)* I . . . I see. . . nener quite thought of girls that way. *(Others laugh again. There is a humorous freshness, a pleasantness about them, which can immediately become serious and frightening.)* You . . . you mean you're a Naxal. *(The girl does not reply; she opens her compact and begins to put on lipstick)*

1ST BOY: *(looking at her and winking)* Naxals don't talk. They do.

3RD BOY: Look. Let's not get carried away. Being a Naxal sympathiser is not being a Naxal. A lot of us in College are sympathisers . . . for various reasons, not

all of it political.

1ST BOY : For once I agree.

GIRL : What difference does it make ? Activist or sympathiser ? It's the same cause. Overthrow of this present rotten system.

3RD BOY : What's so rotten, for argument's sake.

GIRL : Anil said a little while ago they were antiquated. I can add a few more. Would you say they're . . . honest with us ? Or purposeful ? Have they done anything to fulfil their promises, either with us or themselves ? Ever since they grabbed power 23 years ago, they just kept perpetuating British colonialism.

1ST BOY (Anil) : Right.

3RD BOY : Oh it's not as bad as all that. Mind you, I think the College could do with a lot of improvement, but to throw it all overboard saying that it's bourgeois or rotten to the core does not solve the problem.

2ND BOY : (yawning) Me ? I love holidays.

GIRL : What do you do ?

2ND BOY : Oh, at first I just wait in queues. Queues for trams, queues for cinemas, queues to take a pee. But there are so many of us who are not prepared to wait . . . So when we see the end we rush, whether it's the tram, the cinema ticket or the w.c. Then it's a fight for survival . . . (from the humorous to the deep thought. All of them are moved by the philosophical content, which has escaped none.)

1ST BOY : What about the poverty ?

2ND BOY : What about it ? It's disgusting, that's all.

GIRL : Disgusting that it's there, or that it is allowed to remain ?

2ND BOY : Never thought much about it.

GIRL : (softly) Amar often talks about it. Blames it on the present set-up.

3RD BOY : Amar ? He's a poet. Deeply moved, emotional. Not the stuff that activists and politicians are

made of.

1ST BOY : *(looking at him ; it is clear that each student respects the other, despite their honest agreements or disagreements)* Do you think so ?

3RD BOY : *(looking back steadily)* Yes.

GIRL : *(pensively)* Some say he belongs to the "inner sanctum." Being a poet may be a pose.

1ST : You never know. Till the police start gunning. When the suspicion gets deep, the real ones go underground.

3RD BOY : Still it must be awkward for him to have a father as a Prof. here. Or rather the other way around.

2ND BOY : I smell trouble. My nose . . . is intuitive.

GIRL : Why don't you give it a holiday too sometime.

2ND BOY : *(lumbering up to her)* Then how will I "sniff" "sniff" you. *(all laugh as she gives him a playful push)* Gosh ! I'd hate to fool around with you never knowing when your couple of bombs go "bang" "bang". *(Ogling her, others laughing louder, she somewhat embarrassed and angry now)*

GIRL : Oh you ! *(She whacks him on the head with her bag-hand and runs after him as he disappears zig-zagging out of the corridor, to the genial laughter of the groups)*

*(blackout)*

*(Another quick scene, this time the suggestion of two prisoners in a cell being interrogated by an Officer [Intelligence] and a policeman. One of the prisoners looks like a real goonda and the other a slightly upper-class type. The latter could be the same young man who was talking to the peasants in one of the earlier scenes. All these peasant and plebian scenes of course are in the vernacular or regional language : not English)*

GOONDA : *(lying down, smoking the Char Minar)* Well . . . look who's here. *(As the Inspector and Policeman enter, closing the iron-barred door.)*

UPPER-CLASS TYPE : Reception Committee.

GOONDA : Where's the Mayor, and those l-o-v-e-l-y fashionable ladies with fat arses and fatter purses.

POLICEMAN : Shut up !

INSPECTOR : (*to policeman, coolly*) I presume it's the other one.

GOONDA : Oh, so you've come here to question my friend. I-n-t-e-r-r-o-g-a-t-i-o-n. (*to the U.C. type*) That's another word. For beating you up, chum.

POLICEMAN : (*to Goonda*) You're itching for it, aren't you !

GOONDA : (*Scratching his balls*) I got only one itch.

INSPECTOR : (*to U. C. type, ignoring others*) So you look upon him as your friend too, do you ?

U.C.T : (*steadily looking back*) I know you're not mine,

INSPECTOR : (*coolly taking out note book, reading . . .*)

Name : Ashok Chandra. Family : the Chandra Group . . . (*looking at him significantly*) Occupation : Post-graduate . . . drop-out . . . Correction : Present Occupation : No more the armchair intellectual : the active Naxal caught red-handed in the act of throwing a petrol-bomb on a policevan . . .

U.C.T : (*coolly*) As my friend would say, too bad it wasn't shoved up your arse . . . (*he cannot complete the sentence because the police Inspector has slapped him hard across the face ; then catching his hair and turning his head to face the goonda*)

INSPECTOR : (*turning angry fist*) Look here, you fucking bastard ! Look what you've become ! A bloody goonda who only knows violence and hate ! (*For a mesmeric moment the Goonda and U. C. type stare at each other*)

U.C.T : (*softly*) For a purpose. For a purpose you wouldn't understand.

INSPECTOR : I understand all right. That's the trouble. We've been too patient. Too kind. Too understanding. May be it was political. I don't know. But you've gone too far. And you don't change. You're worse than the

criminal type. What I can't understand is why you do it. You're privileged. Alright, so you're inspired. For the good of mankind, you're prepared to kill. It's the same thing. There's no difference between you and he. You're worse.

GOONDA : (*raising himself with facetious dignity*) Now don't you go casting aspersions on me, police-Inspector sahib. (*Policeman raises his baton and he cowers giggling away in the corner*)

INSPECTOR : (*not unkindly*) Now listen to me, young man. I've got pressures on many sides. Building up. Your father's gunning, my boss is gunning, the political party is gunning. Still I have to do my job. And my job is first and foremost to protect my own people : the policemen on duty. One drop of blood from my brother and I'll cut your throat. (*then earnestly, trying his last*) Why the policeman, you idiot, why the policeman !

U.C.T : (*softly, almost hypnotically to himself*) Symbol of law-and-order. It didn't matter earlier : you didn't come in my way. We stepped up our activities. Now you do, so you better watch out . . . (*stands up, looks out of bars, back to others*) No use being armchair intellectual. Universities . . . Armed Police . . . all the same . . . (*he is almost talking to himself so his words almost appear disjointed as he rationalizes to himself*) . . . Symbols of Authority . . . of Government built on preserving the Good and the Rich and the Powerful. But there are others too . . . humanity that suffers . . . reaches the point of no return . . . then retaliates ! (*Nobody interrupts his almost sacred and passionate discourse with himself*) The overthrow . . . involves use of all methods . . . most of all terror and violence. Leadership . . . can only come from the intellectual few . . . to stir up the masses into revolt . . . organized so that they replace the present corrupt administration when the time is ripe. I . . . must be actively involved . . . or withdraw into cowardice and abstraction, believing but doing nothing



like the older generation . . . (then suddenly coming back to the present, turning around) I'm warning you, Inspector, lay off! Lay off us, or we'll kill you.

INSPECTOR : (laughs dryly, the cold killer glint in his eyes too ; softly) There's nothing . . . I love more than a direct confrontation. I tried my best with you (rolling up his sleeve and baring his knuckles, shoving the policeman and goonda aside who moves away fearfully, while the Inspector's muscles build up to twice the size of his opponent's) But you've brought out the brute in me. Come on! Fight, you fucking bastard!

(blackout)

(Shift of scene again to main-line story : light sharply focused as a narrow beam on a cultivable field, and then the sudden plunge of a spear . . . gradually circumference of the light enlarges to reveal a large group of peasants, armed with lathis and spears and sickles asserting themselves in the process of the land-grab. The spear is of course the inarticulate assertion of their claim. Shomik the leader.)

SHOMIK : (with raised challenging voice) Any man . . . who removes this spear . . . gets it in the throat. (wild cheers ; an excited crowd) We have staked our claim, brothers. On the same spot where your fathers worked as slaves, you will earn your freedom . . . (cheers again ; men with measuring tapes busy demarcating . . .) That's right. Each man an equal share.

VILLAGER : Jainsahib carries a revolver . . .

SHOMIK : (raising a lathi) Let him try ! (applause)

ANOTHER : The police carry lathis . . .

SHOMIK : (raising the sickle ; laughing) Let them try ! (more applause. Gaiety mixed with nervous excitement)

ANOTHER : Politician Devdas . . .

SHOMIK : (interrupting, glowering) Ah, as for politician Devdas . . . (leaves sentence unfinished, but that is enough) Brothers, how long ago was it that Politician Devdas gave

us promises of land distribution . . .

VILLAGERS : . . . long, long ago . . .

SHOMIK : And how many promises has he fulfilled . . . ?

VILLAGERS : . . . nothing, nothing . . .

SHOMIK : How long are we going to what, huh ? Till we grow old and infirm ? Meanwhile he makes deals with landlord Jain and others like him who control the Government (*nod of consent and approval*). Let's not fool ourselves. We are taking laws into our own hands . . . because this is the only law that produces results ! (*nods of wise approval, the measurer of land whispers to Shomik. Shomik turning to crowd*)

SHOMIK : The measurements of land are complete. As I said before, each one equal share. But I have an extra person to suggest for equal share.

CROW : Who ?

SHOMIK : Landlord Jain.

ONE OF THEM : Huh ?

SHOMIK : I want landlord Jain to share alike because he is prepared to work with his hands. Let it not be said that we do not dispense justice ! (*new idea ; crowd still baffled*)  
 I also want him to feel . . . a sense of humiliation. This is our revenge, brothers. No more will he order us around. He will grow his own . . . and stand on his own feet. (*Drift of crowd in his favour ; pretty soon all agree ; cheering*) If he resists . . . if he resists, my friends . . . (*again, leaves sentence unfinished*) . . . we shall have to try him out, according to our own laws . . . (*others puzzled again*) Every revolution has its own laws. Its Courts and Councils of Justice . . . (*laughs*) All of you needn't worry. Leave it to our inner Council. Meanwhile, let us have your expression of confidence !

CROWD : (*slowly at first ; then louder in volume and anger and collective threat*) JOTEDAR MURDADBAD ! INQUILAB ZINDABAD ! INQUILAB ZINDABAD !

SHOMIK : (*in frenzy*) Again. Again and again. Louder

and louder again .

CROWD : *(the volume growing to frightening proportions ; this is the first occasion when the words are collectively uttered ; the earlier ones were silent written ticker-tape flashes)* JOTEDAR MURDABAD ! INQUILAB ZINDABAD ! JOTEDAR MURDABAD !

SHOMIK : *(Real demagogue)* Right ! Now let us march on, to new villages, to new fields ! To grab . . . and call our own.

*(fadeout)*

*(Again sharp transition back to college scene with sound and flash of sudden explosion : a bomb planted or thrown . . . a cocktail. Confusion, shouts, screams presumably on road adjacent to College campus which has its immediate repercussions on the excited students. Students running helter-skelter, forming animated little groups)*

1ST STUDENT : . . . bomb thrown . . .

2ND STUDENT : . . . police van . . .

3RD STUDENT : . . . one dead, two injured . . .

4TH STUDENT : . . . pedestrian too . . .

5TH STUDENT : . . . assassin unknown . . .

ONE OF THEM : . . . presumed Naxalite . . .

ANOTHER : . . . who else . . . ?

YET ANOTHER : . . . warnings . . .

ANOTHER : . . . and counter threats . . .

AND SO ON : . . . confrontation . . .

BOUNCED BACK & FORTH : . . . bound to explode . . .

FRAGMENTS OVERHEARD : . . . wonder if it was a student . . .

AGAIN : . . . who else . . . ?

ANOTHER : . . . easy to get lost . . .

BACK AGAIN : amongst us . . .

ANOTHER : blood everywhere . . .

AGAIN : . . . land-grab becoming violent too . . .

ANOTHER : . . . building and property grab to start too . . .

AGAIN : . . . good thing. I'm sick of monopolists . . .

- ANOTHER : . . . the rich make me vomit . . .
- AGAIN : . . . but wait, wait. Violence no answer . . .
- ANOTHER : . . . no time to wait . . .
- AGAIN : God ! The blood I saw . . .
- ANOTHER : . . . it's quite another thing to theorize . . .
- AGAIN : . . . that's all we learn here. Theories, and theories, and theories . . .
- ANOTHER : . . . so you want to go' out and bomb too . . .
- AGAIN : . . . not that far ! Not so much ! Protest that must stop.
- ANOTHER : . . . where . . . ?
- AGAIN : . . . I don't know . . .
- ANOTHER : . . . do you doubt ? . . .
- AGAIN : . . . God no !
- ANOTHER : . . . No God ? Do you believe in God ?
- AGAIN : . . . what a time to ask !
- ANOTHER : . . . what a time to die.
- AGAIN : . . . I believe in nothing . . .
- ANOTHER : . . . I believe in a New World . . .
- AGAIN : . . . a Brave New One ?
- ANOTHER : . . . anything better than the old one . . .
- AGAIN : . . . Yes . . .
- ANOTHER : . . . and then what ? Are we going to commit the same mistakes . . .
- AGAIN : . . . at least it will be our own . . .
- ANOTHER : . . . ones we are prepared to suffer for . . .
- AGAIN : . . . I felt sick seeing so much blood . . .
- ANOTHER : . . . serves them right . . .
- AGAIN : . . . as long as it wasn't your own . . .
- ANOTHER : . . . I am prepared to die . . .
- AGAIN : . . . but what if the man you kill is innocent . . .
- ANOTHER : . . . too bad.
- AGAIN : . . . No ! It matters very much. It . . . bothers . . . me
- ANOTHER : . . . Conscience ? You suffer from conscience ?
- AGAIN : . . . vote of conscience, they say in politics . . .

ANOTHER : . . . bloody hypocrites . . .

AGAIN : . . . Yeah. We may be wrong, but at least our thinking is clean.

ANOTHER : . . . give it time. You'll learn to become as dishonest as anyone else . . .

AGAIN : Talk for yourself !

ANOTHER, ANOTHER, ANOTHER : WHEN THE HELL IS THIS GOING TO END ?

AGAIN, AGAIN, AGAIN : NEVER, NEVER. NEVER !

*(fadeout)*

*(Same scene. Fadeout on students, brighter light on Amar, dishevelled, restless, pacing, waiting for someone . . . until Suprea comes. Dashes up to her.)*

AMAR : *(holding her hand, almost with sense of urgency)*  
Suprea !

SUPREA : *(wide-eyed, fearful, almost hysterical)* Where have you been, Amar ? I've been frantic searching for you.

AMAR : I . . . I was . . . caught up in the rush.

SUPREA : Close. It was just next to our College building. Imagine . . . this happening in broad daylight.

AMAR : Nobody's afraid . . . and yet of course they are.

SUPREA : How terrible ! How terrible ! Did you see the . . . the . . . dead and injured . . .

AMAR : *(eyes afar)* No. Just a blur . . .

SUPREA : *(her excitement lessening ; returning more to normal)*  
. . . just a blur . . .

AMAR : That's how life is, Suprea. It travels fast and deep . . . just a blur . . . and before you know it . . . it's over.

SUPREA : Is it . . . ?

AMAR : Like the moths who are born in the day, cover their life span in a few hours, and die by evening.

SUPREA : . . . unless they are drawn to the flame . . .

AMAR : Meaning ?

SUPREA : Meaning you can destroy yourself earlier too . . .

AMAR : It's what you do during those few hours that

matters.

SUPREA : Yes, even moths propagate before they die, and in so doing, learn to love life. Indeed, find it beautiful too . . .

AMAR : (*facetiously banging his head on the wall*) Oh, that I were a moth. Dear God, oh that I were reincarnated a moth !

SUPREA : (*laughing, and cupping his face in her hands, the transition from fear to love to laughter so easy for the young*) I'd ask to be born a mothess then . . . (*both laugh*) But seriously, Amar, here we are laughing in the middle of horror . . . a tragedy. Something must be wrong with us.

AMAR : (*knocking on her head*) Yes, I'll have to get your head examined.

SUPREA : (*pushing him away*) Oh silly ! (*then looking at each other, the glee in their eyes suddenly fading. her eyes gradually becoming clouded, coming in his arms with her head protected by his chest*) Oh Amar . . . Amar . . .

AMAR : You're not going to cry again.

SUPREA : (*looking up*) I'm worried, Amar, I'm worried sick. I want you to protect me like this . . . always. But I'm worried.

AMAR : It will pass. It will pass.

SUPREA : Oh you should have seen them, lying in the pool of blood, moaning with pain . . .

AMAR : . . . the risks of being a policeman . . .

SUPREA : (*separating from him*) What are you saying ? Amar . . . they're . . . they're human beings . . . with flesh and blood like you and I . . .

AMAR : I . . . I was merely suggesting . . . that theirs is a dangerous profession . . .

SUPREA : It didn't sound that way to me . . . almost as though you were justifying . . .

AMAR : It's a war. It's a war, Suprea. That's what they claim. Any attack on a policeman is a war with the Government. All's fair in love and . . .

SUPREA : No. Amar, no. It's not fair. Because it's not human.

AMAR : Both sides are prepared.

SUPREA : And the innocent ones . . . ?

AMAR : None are innocent. None can abstain. We're all involved.

SUPREA : Even the poor woman who died on the footpath near the police van, and the child who was injured ?

AMAR : (*his composure shaken for the first time*) C . . . child ? Woman ?

SUPREA : Yes. These things happen in a blur. There are innocent . . . bystanders in life, Amar, or don't you know ?

AMAR : (*repeating*) I . . . I didn't know . . . there was a . . . woman and child . . .

SUPREA : You don't know a lot, Amar, and yet you're prepared to pass judgement.

AMAR : (*angry, retaliating without knowing why*) As though you do ! What would you know living in that well-protected farm of your father.

SUPREA : I know a lot !

AMAR : (*blurting out*) Well, do you know your father is in danger !

SUPREA : (*silent, shocked, realizing*) Wh . . . what are you saying ?

AMAR : N . . . nothing.

SUPREA : (*insistent*) What did you say just now, Amar !

AMAR : Y . . . your father carries a gun. That's dangerous. That's inviting trouble.

SUPREA : (*holding him, urgently*) What do you know, Amar ?

AMAR : (*harassed expression, undecided, moved by his concern for her*) His land is being taken . . . forcibly.

SUPREA : (*turning around to leave*) Oh !

AMAR : (*catches her*) Wait ! Wait, Suprea. Tell . . . tell him . . . not to resist. The mood's bad. Anything could

happen.

SUPREA : (*alarmed*) He will resist. I know he will !

AMAR : (*holding her with greater urgency*) Tell him he must not ! Let things cool.

SUPREA : (*wanting to tear herself away*) Let me go.

AMAR : (*holding on*) In a moment. (*trying hard*) Suprea . . .  
Suprea . . .

SUPREA : (*apprehensive, not moving, not resisting, sensing him*)  
What's it, Amar ?

AMAR : (*steadying himself*) Suprea . . . I won't be seeing you . . . for a while . . .

SUPREA : (*afraid now*) What do you mean ? Why ?

AMAR : (*holding back in spite of himself*) I . . . I can't tell you . . . now . . .

SUPREA : D . . . did it have anything to do with the bombing now ? (*no reply*) D . . . does it have anything to do . . . with my father's land . . . ? (*Amar opens his mouth, but no reply. She turns around, crying, and dashes away, whilst Amar stands helplessly, alone*)

(*blackout*)

Scene moves to Professor's residence. Professor Datta in his study . . . dim light on wife decorating the statue. Professor working on table with light. He has a troubled, distracted air. Shadow fall, stranger, Ahmed. Professor looks up with a start, trying to focus his eyes through glasses ; momentary disbelief and apprehension.

PROF : . . . A . . . Amar ? (*Ahmed steps into the light*)

AHMED : (*quietly*) No, it's me, Professor Datta.

PROF : (*abstractly*) Oh . . . I thought for a moment . . .

AHMED (*repeating firmly*) No, it's me.

PROF : Ahh . . . yes, Ahmed. I . . . we . . . were expecting . . . hoping for Amar's return. (*Ahmed does not reply*) He . . . he's disappeared. Perhaps you may know something. You're his friend. Spoke very highly about you . . . too little though . . .



AHMED : If he's missing, why don't you call the Police ?

PROF : (*stammering, hesitating*) I . . . I . . .

AHMED : It's their job to find missing people.

PROF : (*helplessly*) They . . . they were here.

AHMED : Oh . . . in that case they'll be searching for him.

PROF : They are. (*Ahmed looks at him. He falters again, they blurts out*) They . . . they think he's connected with the police slaying !

AHMED : (*deadpan*) I see.

PROF : You don't think he's responsible for it, do you ?

- I mean . . . I mean it's one thing to theorise, quite another . . . to . . . kill. He's not the type, Ahmed. He . . . (*almost pathetically*) . . . he's like me . . . involved in his own abstractions . . .

AHMED : You don't seem very sure about your own son.

PROF : He . . . he always was remote. Poetic by nature, I said. But there was a ferment within him I could neither understand nor control.

AHMED : (*softly*) Perhaps you didn't try . . .

PROF : (*awakened from reverie, provoked*) Try ? To understand ? His mother said that too. Have you thought of it the other way around ? Did he try ? To understand me ?

- The inner laws and philosophies that the older live by. The young can be selfish.

AHMED : (*softly*) . . . sometimes shy to show themselves, sometimes resentful at being discovered . . .

PROF : (*mildly surprised*) Strange. You seem to know his qualities well. Like someone close. Yes, he is that.

AHMED : Then there was not any deep conflict between you.

PROF : Are you asking me whether there was love between us ? Yes. The answer is yes. But if you're asking whether there was any conflict, the answer is still yes. We stood poles apart

AHMED : (*hard smile in his eyes*) I understand.

PROF : He's seen me . . . over the years . . . engrossed in

teaching. In the rationalism of laws. In objectivity and fairness. He cannot escape it. He will not. However much he tries. (*Ahmed quiet*) That's why I cannot believe he's guilty.

AHMED : He might have his own standards of action and judgement.

PROF : No doubt. But mine are bound to wear off on him . . . somewhat.

AHMED : You might be right. Perhaps that's the source of  
 4 his own trouble . . . a sense of doubt . . .

PROF : (*to himself*) May be . . . I was . . . too rigid. Too inflexible outside, too weak inside . . . (*to Ahmed*) Where do you think he's gone ?

AHMED : Underground. Probably in the countryside.

PROF : (*again introspection*) Sometimes . . . I feel . . . too detached, too effete . . . to cope with everything. Too close to the end, unable really to understand. His mother . . . his mother is the opposite. A strong instinct . . . all consuming . . . And I too removed . . . (*Ahmed stiffens imperceptibly*)

AHMED : (*very softly*) . . . his mother . . .

PROF : (*unbroken mood*) His mother . . . suffered terribly . . . the loss of her first child. Somehow never forgave me, as though I were responsible. He was lost . . . lost, you understand.

AHMED : (*cold*) You never . . . search for him.

PROF : (*weakly, lamely*) How ? Where ? Oh yes, the usual things . . . Police, friends, enquiries . . . But she expected me to turn the whole world inside out. She was like some mad beast, possessed. A frightening passion. I felt paralyzed . . . paralyzed, you understand !

AHMED : (*hardly audible*) No.

PROF : (*intent on convincing himself*) She kept insisting that I search him out. Out in the wilderness ? Where there was no chance for survival . . . in those primitive hills . . . either for him or me ? There was no proof that he was

alive. How was I to convince her, a primitive superstitious woman, who unreasonably drained me . . .

AHMED : *(softly)* You began to wish him dead, didn't you.

PROF : *(self-hypnotized), his eyes wider)* Yes, YES ! I began to wish him dead ! For she was killing me. Every day . . .

*(his voice rising)* . . . every night I wished that some evidence would turn up . . . bloodstained clothes, a torn doll . . . teethmarks of a wild animal or the bloody knife of a savage ! . . . *(closing his eyes, controlling himself)* . . . forgive me.

• Forgive me . . . these demons of the night, which she creates from clay and flesh, make me wonder, drive me frantic, how insane her desire, how craving her fertility, that she takes from me my last vestiges of manhood, and then keeps searching on and on and on for her lost sons . . .

AHMED : *(gently pushing him aside)* I will see her now . . . *(Professor tired, slumps back in chair, saying nothing. Ahmed enters her prayer room. Some of the horrendous expressions of the faces of the victims . . . the slain devils, evils in fatal combat, animals, man in combat . . . are taking shape. So are the weapons of destruction . . . clubs, spears, knives, axes . . . and the determined, serene face of Goddess Mother with her full voluptuous figure. Ahmed enters. The Mother looks at him without saying a word, one hand to her heart and the other tremblingly stretching out to touch him)*

*(blackout)*

Scene shifts to field at night with kerosene lamp and "Council of Justice" squatting on the ground in a circle. This is the "inner sanctum" meeting, with peasants giving summary justice, along the methods adopted by the Maoist revolutionaries. Tied in the center is landlord Jain, mouth muffled. Ahmed, Amar and Shomik are there. Ahmed one hardly sees, but his presence is always felt. He is not an active participant, but his authority is unquestionable. Surrounded by peasants, excitable, rebellious, thirsting for blood.)

AHMED : (*raising his hands to hush them*) Friends. Landlord Jain trespasses. Yet he calls this land his own. Some have called him friend: others enemy. Who's to judge? You. But fairness must prevail. The laws of society one such as we have created in our midst today. Jain's on trial. His freedom or punishment is for you to decide. Is he guilty, or isn't he? I nominate... Shomik as prosecutor... (*cheers*). To find a defence is difficult. Perhaps we are as biased on this side as they are on the other. Absolute justice... there is none. So we shall try and come close... examine the doubts that there are... by one most suitable: young Amar here... (*slight restlessness and comment; softly*) I withdraw... (*he disappears into darkness*)

SHOMIK : (*getting up, coming to the centre, pointing finger at Jain*) I accuse ! (*pause; abruptly*) He's guilty. That's all there is to it.

AMAR : (*intercepting*) This is a trial ; not a verdict.

SHOMIK : I'm giving him as much chance as he gave us.

AMAR : You're giving him none.

SHOMIK : Exactly.

AMAR : (*turning to the council*) Look, I'm not one of you. But I'm with you, you understand. We decided on something: a trial. Let us have the honesty to pursue it. (*nods from Council members*)

SHMIK : So the first round goes to you. Alright, we'll play it your way. I hear you're the son of a teacher, a lawyer. Friend of landlord Jain, they say.

AMAR : (*flushing*) That has nothing to do with it.

SHOMIK : We'll see.

AMAR : (*to Council*) Let us judge Jainji as an individual ; not a class enemy. Everybody admits he's been fair in his dealings, and a hard worker. Look at his calloused hands if you don't believe me... (*Jain's eyes flicker with new recognition at Amar*) Ask Shomik's father if you don't believe me...

SHOMIK : (*flushing*) That has nothing to do with it !

AMAR : We'll see.

SHOMIK : (*to Council*) Don't be misled by his cleverness. He has the forked tongue of the privileged class. There are some things that never die within us. For him, the

- loyalty to his own people ; for us the hatred that burns for generations.

AMAR : That's not true ! We're looking for justice. Laws are based on reason. They amount to the same thing. The laws we make today are the laws that will survive tomorrow. Let us not start on the wrong footing.

SHOMIK : Jain must be judged as a class enemy and not an individual. Every time you make excuses for the individual you weaken the cause.

AMAR : (*sweating*) There is no such thing as a *system*. There are only *individuals* that find themselves caught in it.

SHOMIK : Anyone that perpetuates is as guilty as the doer. What are you fighting for ? Your right, or Jain's charity ? The charity is meant to humiliate us, deprive us of the will to oppose.

- AMAR : Oppose by all means. Change through opposition. Be careful before you overthrow . . . (*distantly*) . . . , harmless lives may be involved . . .

SHOMIK : Constitutional change did us no good. We waited . . . and waited. Until hope died and the new life withered. Cruelty . . . (*reminiscing*) . . . is inevitable. Let us suffer it no more than we have to. Enjoy it no more than we must.

- AMAR : There is no summary justice. It must come painfully. Once you use a revolt to your own ends, it destroys what could be most meaningful.

SHOMIK : Enough ! No more platitudes. We've come here . . . not to learn . . . from the son of a schoolmaster, but to take . . . corrective action ! (*sounds of consent from*

*crowd ; aside to Amar*) Hear them, Amar. They're judging you too, you know. It's one thing to be defence counsel, another to be . . . defector !

AMAR : (*aside to Shomik*) You're using this for your personal ends, Shomik !

SHOMIK : (*aside back to him*) What's your loyalty, Amar ! If you're willing to do this for your father's friend what wouldn't you do for your father and the other bourgeois.

AMAR : (*aside reply*) I'd do what I think is right.

SHOMIK : (*aside again*) Even break up what your father stands for ?

AMAR : (*sweating*) Yes.

SHOMIK : (*aloud to council members*) Comrades, the real test lies outside, for all of us. Come, let us reach a decision. Is Jain willing to repent ? Or is he going to be stubborn ? (*Amar goes up to Jain. Removes the cloth from his mouth : whispers urgently to him.*)

AMAR : (*whispering*) Jain. No time now. No after-dinner discussion. This is it. Listen to me. Possibly . . . I break my principles. I cannot be . . . unmoved. Justice . . . cannot operate in . . . vacuum. I doubt . . . myself, doubt my . . . father too. Only Suprea I believe. For my sake, your own, hers too, do one thing : plead guilty. Plead guilty. I'll seek your release.

JAIN : (*looks at him steadily in his eyes, a look of concern and care, more for the young man than himself*) NOT GUILTY.

(*blackout*)

(*Now from low tempo to high climax. The tension should be felt reaching a crescendo. Scene switches to politician Devdas, the police inspector, and the big-wheel politician from the Centre.*)

BIG-WHEEL POLITICIAN FROM THE CENTER : What do you have to say for yourself, Devdas.

DEVIDAS : (*slight subservience before Greater Authority*) Difficult, difficult situation.

BIG WHEEL : (*dryly*) I'm aware of that. But we each have our own jobs to do in the party. Me in the Centre, you in the State here. It's a tight-rope walk . . . with us on either side of the balancing pole.

DEVDas : (*wiping his brow with handkerchief*) I'm aware of that . . . I'm aware of that.

B. W. : Well, the situation is getting out of hand here. No law and order. Or rather no *semblance* of law and order.

DEVDas : I called the Inspector here to give you the latest report.

B. W. : Well, Inspector ?

INSPECTOR : Sir, I can only go as far as you allow me to. If I have to wait for trouble, then it's bound to precede me. I need to have special powers . . . for preventive detention.

B. W. : Easier said than done, Inspector. Our leftist colleagues will tear me apart in the Centre if I ask to invoke the P. D. Act.

INSPECTOR : (*shrugging his shoulders*) Then how can you expect me to stabilize things? (*pensively*) Behind every garbage-dump there's a *goonda*, and behind every College desk is a potential Naxal. I'm no magician.

B. W. : I'm afraid you'll have to be one . . . unless you want the Central Reserve Police to come on top of you. You're in the balancing act too.

DEVDas : What does the C. R. P. have to do with this ?

B. W. : It's not only the C. R. P. Your own neck's in the noose, Devdas. If the situation gets any worse, the Centre will intervene.

DEVDas : (*bewildered*) What do you mean ?

B. W. : President's Rule. (*There is a moment's stunned silence*)

DEVDas : (*sweating*) But . . . but they can't do that to me.

B. W. : (*humourlessly*) Can't they ?

DEVDas : (*stammering*) Th . . . they can't strip me of my po . . . position. Yo . . . you must stop th . . . them. Th . . . that's your job in the Ce . . . Centre.

B. W. : (*almost wearily*) Don't be naive, Devdas. I don't want it any more than you. We're caught between the devil and the deep. A revolutionary left that's taking the wind out of our sails : a conservative right that's trying to edge us out . . . (*laughing bitterly*) Ironical, isn't it, that in trying to be constitutional we appear the greatest villains. True, we're important in the Centre, but not that important we can have a ruling say . . . At best we play the game of checks and balances . . .

INSPECTOR : (*coughing apologetically*) Sir ?

B. W. : Yes, Inspector ?

INSPECTOR : This . . . this is outside my . . . my sphere . . . but a suggestion . . .

B. W. : Yes, Inspector ?

INSPECTOR : The problem at its roots is not one of law and order. It's . . . (*coughing*) . . . one of administration.

B. W. : (*turning to Devdas*) Well, Devdas ?

DEVIDAS : (*giving the Inspector a nasty stare*) Easier said than done. We've got *fourteen* splinter parties in Government here. You said you were the minority in the Centre ; well, we are the majority here, but it doesn't make the problem any simpler . . . Everyone's vying for a vote here. And everyone's climbing on each other's back. We're jockeying . . . with the lead now, but there are a pack of wolves behind me. I handle the situation too tough, and the political doves flutter ; handle it too soft, and the hawks start pecking. (*laughing bitterly too*) So you see : I'm no better off than you.

INSPECTOR : It seems we're forgetting the basic problem . . .

B. W. & DEVIDAS : (*together*) Yes ?

INSPECTOR : (*takes a deep breath, shuts his eyes, saying all that he's ever wanted to, once and for all*) Poverty. Unemployment. Injustice. Refugees. Corruption. Filth. (*opening his eyes to see them both*) Politics. Shall I continue ? (*both stare at him murderously, momentarily too astonished to reply*)



*(Before anyone can reply, Suprea comes in, breathless)*

SUPREA : Devdas. Devdasji. Father hasn't come yet. Something's wrong. I know something's wrong !

DEVDAAS : Sit down, Suprea. Take it easy.

SUPREA : *(urgently)* No, please come. I heard Inspector-sahib was with you. *(looking at the inspector)* My father's in trouble. I know. I know. *(before her affirmativeness both men waver)* Please don't question me. You're wasting time. Precious time. There . . . in the fields . . . I know where he went. Bring the torch along. *(Inspector briskly makes a decision)*

INSPECTOR : *(picking up his cap)* I'm coming. *(The two politicians look at him. Then decide to follow.)*

*(fadeout)*

*(Three men and a girl out in the field. Darkness. The glow of the flashlight, and its beam cutting through the night. Silence. Hard breathing, the cold of the night. Is the shiver that of the cold? The three plod silently, purposefully, in the certainty of a find that nobody dared guess. Unusual. Almost psychedelic. Another part of the stage : separated in time and space : an eerie mystique : the statue of Mother Durga, now complete. The Durga statue in darkness too : but flashes, pops of light . . . technically done through ordinary camera flashblubs fastened at different points on the statue . . . flashing the blazing face now, the demonic cries then, the whirring arms with weapons of destruction, all leading to one arm carrying something not yet clear . . . Meanwhile, mesmeric teletape on wall, on blackboard, everywhere : RED TERROR . . . RED TERROR . . . BATTLE OF ANNIHILATION . . . ANNIHILATION . . . ANNIHILATION . . . CHAIRMAN . . . CHAIRMAN MAO . . . CHAIRMAN MAO . . . DEATH TO CLASS ENEMIES . . . ANNIHILATION . . . ANNIHILATION . . . JOTEDAR MURDADBAD . . . ZAMINDAR MURDADBAD . . . A scream ; a penetrating horrifying scream : Suprea's ; shattering, completely shattering . . . Simultaneous-*

*ly two images : the tenth arm of Durga carries a bloody severed head of clay and together the beam of the torch shines full on Jain's severed head hung on two poles, eyes dilated into death, hair dripping with blood.)*

(blackout)

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ACT III SCENE I

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*A few months later.*

*In the beginning of earlier acts the scene opened with either Professor Datta or Ahmed lecturing to the students. Beginning of this scene is again the classroom but with a difference ; both Professor Datta and Ahmed are standing on two separate daises under beams of mellowed light, as though separated from each other in timing and event but with a singular connection. In place of the full-classroom-daytime-students, the present meeting is a hardened-inner-core-of-Naxalite-students-in-clandestine-nighttime-meeting, with a distinct similarity with the peasants' 'inner council'. This is important : the parallel between the 'inner council' of the earlier act, and the students' 'inner council' now, because both are in the act of passing judgement. (Incidentally, there is no communication between Professor Datta / Ahmed and the students. It is as though the two were silent and subconscious witnesses to events which will involve them later)*  
*The student Naxals.*

ONE OF THE LEADERS : Is Amar guilty or not ?

SECOND : Dfector.

THIRD : No, loyalist.

AND SO ON : To whom ?

ANOTHER : That's the purpose of our meeting. To pass judgement and punishment.

YET ANOTHER : Let's reconstruct.

BACK TO LEADER AGAIN : Amar is chosen to defend land-lord Jain in the peasant trial. He defends well . . . perhaps too well. His integrity's suspect. Why ? Because he is the son of his father ? Because he has his own doubts ? God ! If only there were God left to pass judgement, it would be so much easier for all of us.

SECOND : Let's forget God for the moment.

THIRD : If I start to defend him . . . Amar that is . . . I'll

become suspect.

AND SO ON : I always had doubts about you.

ANOTHER : Are we going to degenerate ? This is no peasants' meeting. Worse, we should not be swayed by ideological propaganda.

YET ANOTHER : Yes, let us dismiss all preconceived notions : capitalists' power, peoples' power . . . (*smiling*) yes, even flower power, it's all the same : a blind dope. Let's judge Amar as one of us, with honest conviction, who was perhaps put in a difficult position.

AT RANDOM NOW : That's the acid test. Under pressure, how would you react ? That's when your true colours come out.

ANOTHER : Temporary insanity. We're all overcome by it. So why not a man who stops to think ?

AND ANOTHER : That could be dangerous : thinking. You're implying a freedom . . . (*laughs cynically*)

ANOTHER : Are you suggesting that we are ruled by terror ?

YET ANOTHER : I don't know about you, but I get frightened sometimes. As though the situation had got out of hand, and we're chasing something we really don't mean to catch.

BACK AGAIN : You just lack conviction. A spell in the action squad would do you good. That's one thing I'll say for Amar : he's a veteran by now.

AGAIN : Surprisingly the police don't have anything on him yet. They haven't been able to prove a thing.

BACK : Then why the hell did he have to go U. G. ? He's just arousing suspicion.

AGAIN : On which side ? (*slight pause*)

ONE : (*clearing his throat*) In law . . . a man is assumed innocent until proven guilty.

TWO : It's the other way around with around with us : man's guilty until proved innocent. Summary justice.

THREE : It might be your turn next. How would you

like it ?

FOUR : This is an emergency. A sort of . . . military trial.

FIVE : Whose law are we talking about anyway ?

SOMEONE : The natural law of justice.

SOMEONE-ELSE : There is no natural law . . . unless you are talking of the law of the jungle.

VOICE : Is this then . . . the concrete jungle : worse : the classroom jungle ? Grown on foundations of great men.

✓ ANOTHER : What do you think of the statues of great men ?

✓ ANOTHER : They should be smashed. Decapitated.  
4 Unless of course it's the statue of a worker.

YET ANOTHER : Can't stand this cult of the great men any more. They give me a pain in the neck . . . (*smiling crookedly*) looking up, that is.

A THIRD : Yeah. Statues should be at eye level. Made of you and me.

FOURTH : What about Amar ?

ANOTHER : Yes, getting back to Amar . . .

ANOTHER : . . . this classroom . . .

ANOTHER : . . . his father . . .

ANOTHER : . . . resolve his doubts . . .

ANOTHER : . . . and ours . . . (*momentary silence*)

CHIEF : (*getting up to close meeting, looking around*) I think we understand each other. Know what we're going to do. Let us . . . put him to the test.

(*blackout*)

Scene shifts in dim surrealistic light to blind old woman (*Shomik's mother*) and Amar's mother.

OLD WOMAN : (*scraggy laughter*) You have finished with the statue of Mother Durga ?

A'S MOTHER : Yes.

OLD WOMAN : (*blindly feeling for her stick*) And you repeated the works I told you ?

- A'S MOTHER : Yes.
- OLD WOMAN : (*finding the stick*) Ah, here it is. In the dark, who but the blind can see. And in life, the dark shadow . . . of death.
- A'S MOTHER : You think of death, old woman ; I think of life.
- OLD WOMAN : Can one exist without the other ?
- A'S MOTHER : I don't know. I think of Mother Durga . . .
- OLD WOMAN : . . . Kali . . . ?
- A'S MOTHER : Most of all the wound within me . . .
- OLD WOMAN : It heasl. It heals. Time . . .
- A'S MOTHER : And the expectancy. Oh, the burning expectancy . . .
- OLD WOMAN : And then the realization, my dear. All the doubts and uncertainties of life. All the fears . . .
- A'S MOTHER : (*amazed*) How did you know ?
- OLD WOMAN : How did I become an old woman ? How do I come to love death . . . without having loved life at one time ?
- A'S MOTHER : (*shaking her head*) I . . . I cannot think of becoming old.
- OLD WOMAN : Your husband ?
- A'S WOMAN : (*faltering*) My . . . my husband ? What about him ?
- ✓ OLD WOMAN : He lives in the past, doesn't he ? He's reached . . . the turning point . . . whereas you still have a long way to go.
- A'S MOTHER : (*reflecting*) I was young . . . village girl. He, much older, when he married me . . .
- OLD WOMAN : City dweller. Didn't believe in the things we live by.
- A'S MOTHER : Old woman ?
- OLD WOMAN : Yes ?
- A'S MOTHER : When my first child was born. You brought him into this world. Did he . . . did he . . . ?
- OLD WOMAN : Yes ?

A'S MOTHER : Did your blind eye see something mine did not? An . . . invisible identification. A certainty that would dispel all doubt. A vision of the future . . .

OLD WOMAN : Give me your hand. (*hand stretched. Felt. Lines read. Old woman utters a scream. Stick drops. Her blind eyes widen. A's mother steps back triumphantly.*)

(*darkness*)

(*Scene shifts to Politician Devdas and the Big-Wheel from the Centre.*)

B. W. : I told you to watch out. You brought it on yourself.

DEVIDAS : We're regrouping for a fresh election.

B. W. : (*laughs hard*) You won't get it. President's Rule is here to stay for a while.

DEVIDAS : (*sarcastically*) Can't say there's been any improvement in the law-and-order situation since the Centre intervened.

B. W. : How much can you do through remote control ?

DEVIDAS : So how are we better off ?

B. W. : The rate at which you were going, there would have been a revolution . . .

DEVIDAS : (*interrupting*) . . . which you would not have minded as long as you were on the right side.

B. W. : Oh come now, Devdas. Speak for yourself. The fact that we're office-bearers means we have a responsibility to the existing order . . . (*Devdas laughs bitterly in reply ; the voice hardening*) . . . so why don't you join them them ? Isn't there a saying that if you can't lick them, then join them ?

DEVIDAS : I got over my madness in the early years of the political arena. Besides, I don't think they're going to win . . . ultimately.

B. W. : I can't say they're even winning now. What with the P.D. Act and C.R.P., we'll have normalcy pretty soon.

DEVIDAS : There won't be any "normalcy" ever in Bengal.

And *you* robbed us of it, friend. Exploited this state through taxes without ploughing any of it back.

B. W. : There was the rest of the country to be thought of.

DEVSDAS : At what expense ! Do you know, I think there was something to what the police inspector said the other day. These root causes of unemployment . . . and politics . . .

B. W. : Look who's speaking.

✓ DEVSDAS : We put you there in the Centre. To represent us. Now I find you burrowing your own hole there.

B. W. : Well, at least I didn't make the mess you did here.

✓ DEVSDAS : How do you expect me to control millions of unemployed poor ? Why, every boy coming out of college expects a white-collar job and often ends up being a labourer. Come down from your pedestal and work here one day with us.

B. W. : (*softly*) I've been through it before. We're . . . veterans — or have you forgotten, Devdas ?

DEVSDAS : (*removing his Gandhi cap*) Oh, hell I haven't. What are we arguing about anyway. We're both trying to make the best of a bad situation. (*unlocking his cabinet*) What we need, friend, is a drink of the good old Scotch whisky. (*both laugh*)

(*blackout*)

(*Shomik and his wife Sarala. He is hastily packing his clothes*)

SARALA : How long will you be gone ?

SHOMIK : I don't know.

SARALA : Where ?

SHOMIK : I don't know.

SARA A : What will you be doing ?

SHOMIK : (*turns around irritably*) I don't know. I don't know. I don't know. (*Sarala catches her breath, the tears in her eyes. He softens*) Sorry. I'm sorry, Sarala. You wouldn't understand. And if you did, it would be dan-



gerous for you to know.

SARALA : Why do you have to run ? What's become of your friends, the hundreds that were there behind you . . .

SHOMIK : They're still there. The real ones . . . they're unseen. And they'll always be there, as long as there's discontent.

SARALA : You seem to have forgotten your dream. When it all started, all you wanted was a small piece of your own land. That made me happy. Now you want to lead the whole nation into revolution. That makes me unhappy.

SHOMIK : Why ? It's the same thing. The better man gets something more. There's much more to life than a small plot of land.

SARALA : Is there ? Is there ?

SHOMIK : There's power. There's undreamt of power in the plough. You can then possess men who possess land.

SARALA : Is that better ?

SHOMIK : It's greater. Much greater than ownership or money. Or even ideals that men speak of . . . It's greater than poets . . . or lawyers. When you revolt, you're never defeated. Every attempt to crush, revives you all the more. It's made from strong men. Yes, even the ruthless. Someone said once you had to be cruel to be kind. I was much impressed.

SARALA : I . . . I . . . don't understand.

SHOMIK : (*touching her tenderly*) But you love ?

SARALA : (*kissing his hands*) Yes.

SHOMIK : (*whispering*) Yet you fear my violence.

SARALA : Yes.

SHOMIK : It's the same thing. I wouldn't know how to love .. without being violent. In a way, it's like cruelty . . . and kindness . . . (*leaving*) Don't worry for me. I'll be back. Look after my children. I'll be back. They'll never catch me. As long as I have the breath of

life in me, I'll return. I promise, my love. (*laughing suddenly*) Revolutionaries like me never die or give up . . .

(*darkness*)

(*Amar and Suprea*)

AMAR : (*trying hard*) S . . . Suprea . . . (*Suprea sits with her head bowed, a look of sadness and distraction*) Suprea . . . (*she turns around to see him, almost listless ; he tries again*) Suprea, you must get over it. It's been months now since he . . . he . . . died.

SUPREA : (*softly, recalling yet suppressing*) It was . . . horrible.

AMAR : (*tenderly*) Yes . . . I know.

SUPREA : (*searching*) Monstrous, Amar. How could people do things like that ?

AMAR : (*distantly himself*) Yes. I know.

SUPREA : (*turning to Amar*) How much did you know Amar ? (*Amar does not reply ; repeats*) How much did you know, Amar ?

AMAR : (*hesitating*) I . . . I knew some. Dreaded to know, all.

SUPREA : And yet you didn't do anything to stop it.

AMAR : I couldn't do anything to stop it . . . (*Suprea turns her head away*) I couldn't do anything to stop it, Suprea. You must believe me.

SUPREA : I . . . don't know what to believe. My . . . my father looked upon you as his son. Felt that one day we . . . we'd be married, and that you'd carry on the tradition.

AMAR : We will. We will, Suprea.

SUPREA : (*bitterly*) But then you don't believe in marriage or traditions, do you, Amar ? No, you believe in causes, and martyrdom . . . and endless suffering . . .

AMAR : Don't say that, Suprea.

SUPREA : What do you expect me to say ? Go on, you're doing the right thing, you're bringing peace and happiness

to your nearest and dearest . . .

AMAR : Stop, Suprea, you're not being fair.

✓ SUPREA : How fair were they with my father ? Did they do justice, to the man and the father that he was ?

AMAR : They . . . they didn't see him as an individual ; but as part of a system they hated.

SUPREA : And you ? You too ?

AMAR : I . . . I don't know. I saw him . . . I think . . . as your father. I . . . I recognized him . . . as an individual with the right to live ; yes, even make mistakes.

SUPREA : He was prepared to recognize your mistakes : so why not you his ?

✓ AMAR : There's something merciless about a cause, Suprea. It leaves no room for mistakes, or even someone as near and dear as your own father.

SUPREA : Are you speaking about my father ?

AMAR : No, I was speaking about mine.

SUPREA : What do you mean ?

AMAR : I don't know ! Don't question me too closely ! I just don't know. There's something wrong in our society, our teaching — just as there was something wrong in the way your father . . . was killed.

SUPREA : What are you saying, Amar ?

AMAR : (*almost in agony*) I can't find my way, Suprea. It's as though I were suddenly blind, after coming so close. I was never . . . traitor. They now want me to prove . . . my loyalty. Loyalty ? (*he laughs harshly*) To whom ? To whom, I ask ?

SUPREA : (*concerned, moved, broken from her earlier withdrawal and reproach ; touching him tenderly*) Are there . . . so many to whom you owe loyalty ? What about . . . yourself ?

AMAR : (*tortured*) I'm not sure. I'm not sure, Suprea. I ✓ keep driving myself . . . to believe, but can't make it there. I hear my father saying the same things over and over again, at home, on the dais in the classroom, and I feel like

tearing the whole world apart . . .

SUPREA : *(caressing his hair)* My dear . . .

AMAR : *(sheepishly)* My hardened . . . revolutionaries, would really laugh at me now.

SUPREA : Is that why you don't want to give it up ?

AMAR : *(withdraws, pride slightly offended)* I'm not playing games, Suprea. This is a matter of life and death.

SUPREA : *(steady)* I should know.

AMAR : There must be some midway answer in life that is complete. No, not a compromise. A belief . . . that others can share. Do you know . . . for a moment . . . when I tried to save your father, yes really save him, I almost had it there.

SUPREA : Then why do you persist in this madness ?

AMAR : Because . . . I'm coming close. Very close. It comes . . . from a pull . . . in opposite directions. My mind and heart are taxed . . . to the extreme. The next . . . will be the most revealing. The ultimate test of loyalty and guilt.

SUPREA : Are you going . . . to hurt more people . . . to prove things to yourself . . .

AMAR : *(looks at her, troubled, worried)* I don't know.  
*(blackout)*

*Back to Professor Datta, alone, contemplating fondly on the books in the library, rearranging carefully the statue of his venerated Sir Asutosh . . . Sudden violent invasion by a band of Naxal students, well-organized and planned like commando tactics, who burst into the room and start fury of the active alienated. It's like a blitzkrieg of anarchists, dedicated to the total cause of destruction. The change from Professor's quiet academic contemplation to violent revolt must be stark and startling. Amongst the leaders is Amar. Professor's face incredible with alarm and amazement. Shouts from the boys : DESTROY ! DESTROY ! OVERTHROW ! OVERTHROW ! BOURGEOIS ! BOURGEOIS ! BOURGEOIS LANDLORD UNIVERSITY !*

BOURGEOIS LANDLORD GOVERNMENT ! REVISIONIST EDUCATION ! REVISIONIST PROFESSORS ! (if the director wishes, these could be flashed on the blackboard / walls since the shouts are really quite confused and one can only hear the smattering of sounds and words.)

PROF : (protest rising to a scream) BOYS ! BOYS ! ORDER ! ORDER ! DEMOCRACY ! DEMOCRATIC FREEDOM ! PROTEST WITHOUT VIOLENCE ! RATIONALISM ! SANITY ! REASON ! CONSTITUTION ! THE ULTIMATE ! MAN'S LAW IN SOCIETY ! LAW AND ORDER ! (again, these are random shouts on his side, and these could equally be flashed on the opposite blackboard / walls ; one piercing scream) AMAR ! AMAR ! (Amar freezes, his face and body under considerable strain and sweat faced with the crisis within himself and around, pretends not to hear his father, and furiously applies himself to destruction.)

SHOUT FROM ONE OF THE BOYS : THE LIBRARY ! GET THE LIBRARY NOW ! BURN THE BOOKS !

PROF : (aghast, a'armed) NO ! NO ! (shelves ransacked, books torn and flung, bonfire)

BOYS : GET GANDHI ! THE GANDHI BOOKS !

PROF : STOP ! (he is flung back, becomes conscious and alarmed for the first time of physical impact)

BOYS : AND NOW ASUTOSH'S STATUE ! TAR IT ! BREAK IT ! (Professor shouting "No !" gets up to protect the statue, is flung down again, his glasses broken, the blood now showing on his face and clothes. Amar is nowhere to be seen.)

BOYS : AMAR ! WHERE'S AMAR ? (Amar's taken a bicycle chain and swiped it across the face of the boy who pushed and hit his father.)

✓AMAR : (softly) Touch him again and I'll kill you. (Dead silence. All looking at him, encircling him, with knives, chains, sticks.)

AMAR : (turning around and shouting, breaking desk, tables, fan, books, the whole lot ; in frenzy) I WANT TO TEAR THE WORLD APART ! (Cheers. Cheers from the boys, who attack property around with abandon.)

ONE OF THE LEADERS : I APPOINT . . . AMAR AS PROSECUTOR, JUDGE AND JURY TO CARRY OUT VERDICT IN THE EXECUTION . . . OF SIR ASUTOSH ! (cheers, then pindrop silence ; each student shuffles quietly to his desk, takes out his chappal, and start pounding it systematically in rhythm till it reaches a crescendo. Amar in sheer sweat now, axe in hand, approaches the statue of Sir Asutosh, father looking on horrified. As he walks up to the statue, there are flashes on the screen / wall / blackboard of Jain's decapitated head with blood, Kali's victim. The beat of chappals is like the beat of the drum reaching the climax. Amar is like a man hypnotized, working on a conditioned reflex with a look of insanity in his eyes. Flashes of blood and Jain's head. [memory recall] He stops in front of the statue, gradually raises the axe.)

PROF : (screaming) NO, AMAR ! NO ! MY SON ! MY SON ! (the axe falls, breaks apart the marble head from body, as the students shout and scream in victory, take hold of Amar in exhilaration and leave. Dead silence. Loneliness and dead silence. Professor Datta alone lying on the floor, feeling for his glasses, slightly bloody, putting them on, trying to wipe the tears from his cheeks, blinking unbelieving, like being confronted with disillusioning, shattering nightmare. Darkness and silence, faint perceptions of light, same scene, with shadow of man, a stranger, yet not too unlike Datta himself : Ahmed standing in the shadows. He does not move. Stands as though he had been there all along : a silent witness. Professor Datta peers, tries to see beyond darkness to recognition, a recognition that goes back over the years, a cry within himself too poignant to describe. Professor staggers up. Ahmed still unmoving in partial darkness. Exhilaration, fear, love, all written in Professor's face as the staggers up to Ahmed, practically falls and clasps him to his breast.)

PROF : (hardly a breath) It's you . . . you . . . (Ahmed's face expressionless, unmoving ; Ahmed slowly disentangles one arm. It holds a peasant's sickle. With a jerk he buries it deep into Professor's back whilst still in the embrace. No scream.

*Just a gasp and a deep pain. An undescrivable expression on Professor's face before he falls lifeless, still in Ahmed's arms, the moist kiss drying on his cheek through which serpents a streak of red blood. Pitch black darkness and silence.)*

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ACT III SCENE II

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*A few months later.*

*Last scene : Amar and Ahmed, outside of Professor Datta's house. Heavy silence for long time as though both were in deep personal thought and silent dialogue.*

AMAR : It's all over, isn't it ?

AHMED : For you ? For me ! For them ?

AMAR : No, I was speaking for myself. I was wondering for you. As far as they are concerned, it continues, as it always will.

AHMED : Do you mean you've given up . . . the cause.

AMAR : No, I still believe in the socialist revolution. But I disagree with their methods.

AHMED : Meaning ?

AMAR : *(a faraway look of sadness)* I . . . I think . . . my father was right. I mean . . . his approach was right. That . . . that change should come through the will of the majority . . . expressed through a free vote . . . That society . . . such as we live in, must follow certain norms . . . of law and order . . . to make such democratic expression possible . . . *(suddenly conscious, them almost shyly)* Am I talking like my father . . . a bourgeois . . .

AHMED : *(smiling)* You always did, like your father, not a bourgeois.

AMAR : I . . . I feel responsible for his death. Suprea . . . Suprea warned me beforehand . . . that in finding myself . . . I would harm others . . . closest to me . . . I . . . I didn't realize then . . .

AHMED : *(almost sharply)* You had nothing to do with your father's death. Remember that. It happened after the Naxal raid. That's all.

AMAR : *(looks at him puzzled)* They swore to me they would not harm my father. *(Ahmed doesn't reply)* My mother . . .

AHMED : Yes ?



AMAR : (shakes his head, not understanding again) She's become different. Not the same person I knew. True, she grieved for father. But I think she thinks of him less now. No more does she wait expectantly. No more Durga statues. She sometimes brims . . . with new life . . .

AHMED : (softly) Yes.

AMAR : It's all over, you see. I've found my path . . . and it will be the same as that of my father. (Ahmed is silent)

AMAR : Do you think I've betrayed the cause ?

AHMED : No, Amar. The cause is larger than either of us. And each of us still continue to follow it differently. Our friend Shomik is becoming a great leader. Perhaps, one day, you'll battle each other again, on the methods, but not on the cause, because both of you believe in equality and social justice, and who's to say who's right and who's wrong . . .

AMAR : (softly) Ahmed ?

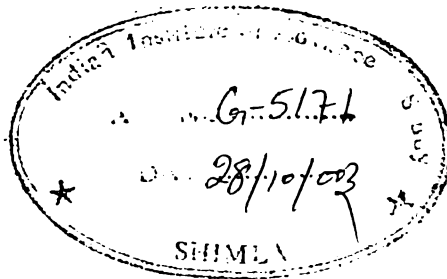
AHMED : Yes ?

AMAR : (looks up, meeting his eyes, a permanent bond between the two) What about you ? I . . . I never did understand. Sometimes I thought your . . . revolt . . . was not political at all.

AHMED : Whose was ? We were all caught in the vortex of a struggle. Each of us searched the ultimate in our own emancipation . . . Yes, mine had turned full circle, or so I thought. People, events, this life, meant nothing to me. Only the root cause of revolt and liberation . . .  
 Where passion reaches furthest, the unrealizable becomes true, and life . . . life is reborn in a desire that defies all fulfilment . . . So revolt is conceived. The seed thrown in the fertile soil. There is the harsh inevitability about it, the struggle for birth, for survival, where one has to kill to live again . . . (This is almost like a soliloquy as the light dims on him. There is the sound of Suprea's voice calling out "Amar", "Amar". Amar leaves silently. Ahmed is

alone for a moment. Then, in the balcony of Professor Datta's house comes his wife, with a tray of rice from which she is picking out the healthy seeds . . . She looks at Ahmed with profound distraction, recollection and desire. There is the faint sound of shehnai music, much like a marriage, very faint; very suggestive . . . Ahmed looks back at her as she flings the rice into the fertile green soil . . .)

[DARKNESS & END]



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writers workshop calcutta

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