



Library

IAS, Shimla

891.441 T 126 S



00075296



Syamali

Rabindranath Tagore

891.441
T126S

The suggestiveness of the word SYAMALI eludes translation. Perhaps the last poem will help to convey some of its significance ; it addresses the beauteous earth, dark and green.

It is interesting to note that there is an exquisite poem in Rabindranath's well known collection of prose poems SESH SAPTAK on the idea of spending his last days in a home made 'of earth' to be called SYAMALI. The mud-house of that name became, in fact, the Poet's favourite abode during the last few years of his life. The opening lines of the poem, translated by Somnath Maitra, run thus :

The home of my last days I shall build of earth,
and call it SYAMALI.

When it crumbles,
it will be like a falling asleep of earth
in the lap of earth.

No broken pillars will be left
to raise high their complaints in strife with earth,
nor cracked walls with ribs exposed
to harbour the ghosts of lost days.

MFN 723

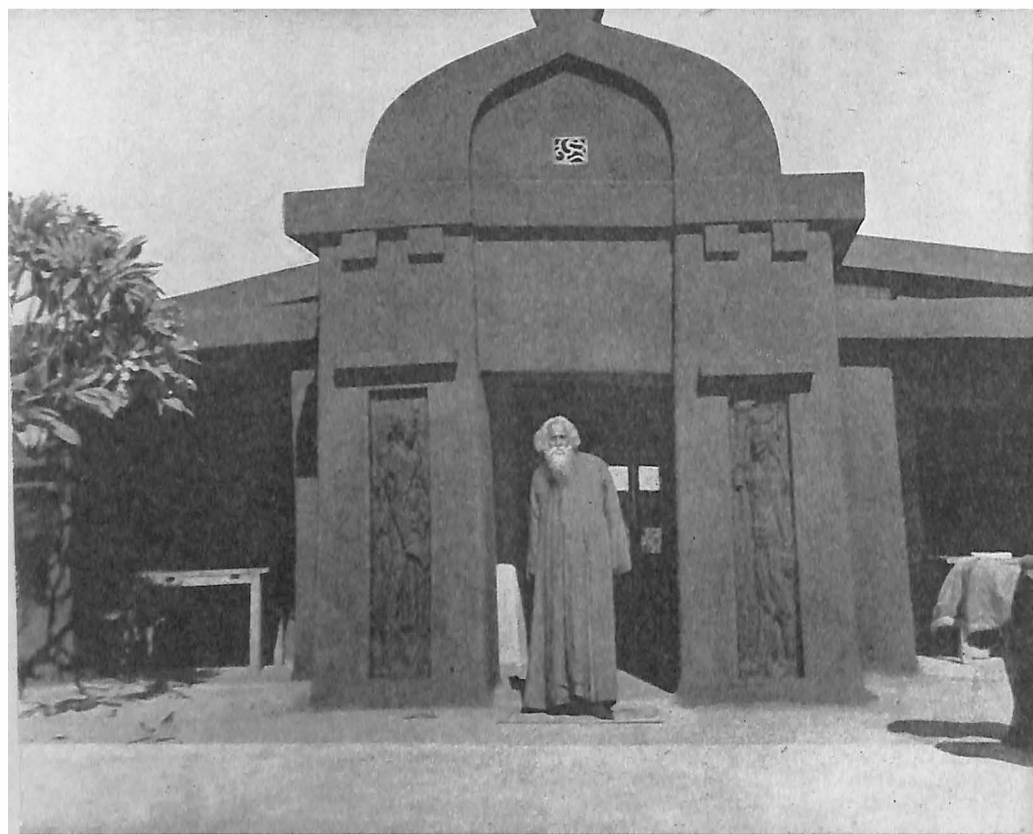
DATA ENTERED

Catalogue

S y a m a l i

The suggestiveness of the word SYAMALI eludes translation. Perhaps the last poem will help to convey some of its significance ; it addresses the beauteous earth, dark and green.

THE ETERNAL MARCH was translated by the poet himself, and is reprinted here from POEMS.



SYAMALI, the favourite mud-house of the Poet

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

Syama li



Visva-Bharati Publishing Department
Calcutta

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL BENGALI BY
SHEILA CHATTERJEE

Library

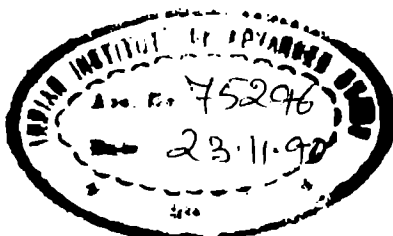
IAS, Shimla

891.441 T 126 S



00075296

© VISVA-BHARATI



FIRST PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER, 1955

SECOND EDITION JULY, 1968

REPRINTED SEPTEMBER, 1986

891.441

T126S

PUBLISHED BY
SRI JAGADINDRA BHOWNICK
VISVA-BHARATI PUBLISHING DEPARTMENT
6 ACHARYA JAGADISH BOSE ROAD, CALCUTTA 17

PRINTED BY
SRI HARADAYAL SINGH
THE STATESMAN COMMERCIAL PRINTING PRESS
STATESMAN HOUSE, CALCUTTA 1

CONTENTS

DUALITY	1
AT THE LAST WATCH	3
I	6
AN ADDRESS	9
DREAM	12
THE SAP OF LIFE	14
THE LOST HEART	17
THE ETERNAL MARCH	19
FAREWELL GREETING	22
THE TAMARIND BLOSSOM	24
UNTIMELY SLEEP	29
KANI	32
THE FLUTE-PLAYER	40
THE BREAK	45
ACCIDENTAL MEETING	49
LAST NIGHT	52
NECTAR	55
INCOMPRHENSIBLE	63
DISAPPOINTED	67
THE OTHER PARTY	70
SYAMALI	72

TO RANI MAHALANOBIS

Out of a joyless cage of bricks and timber
You invited my heart, which delights only in the skies,
With gentle service
Into your garden yard fanned by the breeze from the coconut
groves.

There the goddess of autumn plenty
 Bedecks her plaited hair of clouds with garlands of gold
 And the line of areca palms
 Paints a picture on the canvas of the blue sky.
 On the south are winding steps, broken in the middle,
 Leading to the tank,
 Its sloping banks covered over with lilies.
 Countless blossoms of the Jāmrul tree
 Have robbed young nymphs of their myriad earrings.
 Bees flit about
 Among the groves of jasmine creepers.
 On the banks of the tank
 Sweet-scented tuberose scatter their fragrance.
 Loose petals of the magnolia keep dropping down
 on the grass,
 While pumelo blossoms announce their presence
 from behind the house.
 A line of fat proud palms with heads raised arrogantly
 Stands by the roadside like British sentinels.

When I sit in the balcony
I see a bank of water plants at a corner of the tank.

The afternoon light draws on the water
Lines of green and gold and black.
Light and shade shimmer secretly
Tracing the footprints of the passing breeze.
In the summer months
The eye turns to the mango boughs, looking for their
golden dower.

The lichi trees are filled with fruit
Shared alike by bats and guests, both by day and night.
Beyond the hedge season flowers weave a dream of colours.
Through looking at them constantly from it
I have named my window 'Netra-konā'.

Orāon gardeners, male and female, work since early dawn,
Now digging the ground, now watering the trees.
Their smooth limbs look as if moulded of earth,
Their birth ties with the earth
Make them akin with trees and plants.
As soon as day dawns, the village milkman comes
with two cows,
Their restless calves running about by them.
Near half past six the sunlight streams straight into my room
While the newsboy is seen in the street on his bike.
Beyond the compound wall there is an old two-storeyed house ;
Women with flowing hair hang down their sārīs
From the parapet of its roof.
Village girls come to the tank steps to fetch water.
I pass the golden mornings dipping my eyes in the
depths of green.

SYAMALI

DUALITY

You were then between darkness and light,
 Standing at the world's portals of beauty,
 One foot stretched towards the earth end
 Of the Creator's dreamland.
Like a slight gesture of dawn,
 A faint stir in the leaves of the Sāl forest,
 An oblique glance of light before the break of day
 Raising shivers of delight,
When dawn is self-forgetful,
 Before she finds her pet name in birds' calls,
 On mountain peaks, in the writing of clouds.
Then she comes down to earth ;
 From over her face
The shadow-veil of infinity rustles down
 On the rose-pink edge of the sea of sunrise.

The earth dresses her up
 In her own green-gold garments,
 Clothes her in coloured robes of her own air.
Thus too you brought the outlines of your portrait
 On the canvas horizon of my heart.

I am a colleague of your Creator,
I too was to draw the brush of my mind
 Over your beauty,
 Give fulness to your form.
 Day by day I have painted you
 In the tints of my emotions.

I have made the breath of my own life
 Blow all around you,
 Now with the fury of a storm,
 Now in gentle sway.
Once in your privileged solitude you were unattainable,
 Belonging only to your Creator,
 Segregated in the one.
I have tied you with the knot of duality.
Your creation binds you with me,
 Your pain with mine.

 Today you have known yourself
 Through my knowing you.
My wondering eyes have touched you with a wand of gold,
 Awakening visions of beauty
 In your own consciousness.

23 May 1936

AT THE LAST WATCH

Pity, in place of love,
 That pettiest of gifts,
Is but a sugar-coating over neglect.
 Any passerby can make a gift of it
 To a street beggar,
Only to forget the moment the first corner is turned.
 I had not hoped for anything more that day.

You left during the last watch of night.
 I had hoped you would say goodbye,
 Just say 'Adieu' before going away,
 What you had said another day,
 What I shall never hear again.
 In their place, just that one word,
Bound by the thin fabric of a little compassion
 Would even that have been too much for you to bear ?

When I first awoke from sleep
 My heart fluttered with fear
 Lest the time had been over.
 I rushed out of bed.
The distant church clock chimed half past twelve.
 I sat waiting near the door of my room
 Resting my head against it,
Facing the porch through which you would come out.

Even that tiniest of chances
 Was snatched away by fate from hapless me ;

I fell asleep
 Shortly before you left.
Perhaps you cast a sidelong glance
 At my reclining body
 Like a broken boat left high and dry.
Perhaps you walked away with care
 Lest you wake me up.
Awaking with a start I knew at once
 That my vigil had been wasted
I realised, what was to go went away in a moment,
 What was to stay behind stayed on
 For all time.

Silence everywhere
 Like that of a birds' nest bereft of birds
 On the bough of a songless tree.
With the lifeless light of the waning moon was now blended
 The pallor of dawn
Spreading itself over the greyness of my empty life.
 I walked towards your bedroom
 For no reason.
 Outside the door
 Burnt a smoky lantern covered with soot,
 The porch smelt of the smouldering wick.
Over the abandoned bed the flaps of the rolled-up mosquito-net
 Fluttered a little in the breeze.
 Seen in the sky outside through the window
 Was the morning star,
 Witness of all sleepless people
 Bereft of hope.

Suddenly I found you had left behind by mistake
Your gold-mounted ivory walking stick.

 If there were time, I thought,

 You might come back from the station to look for it,

 But not because

 You had not seen me before going away.

23 May 1936

I

My consciousness has coloured the emerald green
 The ruby red.
I opened my eyes to the heavens.
 Light flamed up
 In east and west.
I looked at the rose and said—'Beautiful'.
 It became beautiful.
You will say this is philosophy,
 Not a poet's words.
I will say—this is true,
 That is why it is poetry.
This is my pride,
 Pride on behalf of mankind.
The creation of the Creator
 Is on the canvas of man's proud consciousness
The philosopher repeats with each single breath
 'No, no, no.
 No-emerald, no-ruby, no-light, no-rose,
 No-you, no-I'.
On the other side the Infinite realises Himself
 Within the limits of the human world,
 Calling man "Myself".
In the depths of that 'I' darkness met light,
 Beauty appeared and sweetness.
Negation suddenly become assertion as by magic
 In line and colour, in joy and sorrow.

Do not call this philosophy ;
My heart fills with joy
When my hands lift brush and colour bowl
In the creation hall of that universal 'I'.

The scientist says—

The old moon, his smile cruel and crafty,
Comes crawling like a messenger of death
Towards the ribs of the earth.

One day it will exercise its final pull on our seas and mountains ;
In the land of the mortals, in the new ledger of the god of
destruction

One cipher will fill a whole page,
Swallowing up the daily accounts of income and expense.
Man's deeds will lose the pretence of immortality,
His history will be besmeared with
The black ink of eternal night.

Man's eyes on the day of his departure
Will wipe away all colour from the universe,
Man's mind on the day of his departure
Will strain out all its sweetness.
The vibration of strength will pass from sky to sky.
No lights will burn anywhere.
In the hall bare of harps the musician's fingers will play,
No tune will be heard.
That day the Creator bereft of poetry will sit alone
In a sky devoid of blue,
Wrapped in the mathematics of impersonal existence.

Then in the great universe
From distance to distance in the far rway eternal myriad worlds
These words will nowhere be heard—
 “You are beautiful”,
 “I love you.”
Will the Creator sit again in meditation
 Through the ages ?
Will He repeat in the evening of the day of destruction,
 “Speak, Oh speak” ?
Will He say—“Say,—‘You are beautiful’,”
Will He say—“Say,—‘I love you’ ” ?

29 May 1936

AN ADDRESS

Every day I call you by your name,
I call you Chāru.
Suddenly I wanted to call you something else,
To 'address' you, as it is called,
As lovers did in the golden age.
The easiest form of address is 'Dearest'.
I had repeated that silently in my mind ;
I heard your loud laughter in reply — also in my mind,
And realised that soft gentle smiles belong not to this age,
For this is neither Avanti nor Ujjayini.

What is wrong with my everyday name ?
This is your question.
Then let me explain.
Work had been light
And I returned home early.
The afternoon paper in my hand,
I sat in the verandah with feet up resting on the railing.
Suddenly my eyes noticed in the adjacent room
The rites of your afternoon toilet.
You were doing your hair before the mirror,
Plaiting and pinning the coils.
I had not observed you with such attention for a long time,
Seen your head bent like this
In the fine workmanship of your coiffure,
Such comradeship of your two hands
In time with your jingling bangles.

At last the broad end of your soft green sari
 You loosened at some points
 And tightened at others,
At places pulled it slightly downwards
 As poets change their metres
 With little twists and turns.

'Today did I first realise
 That for this man
 Of slender means
 My bride of use and wont
 Has been dressing herself
 Each day in a freshly valued form.
 This cannot be my Chāru as seen every day.
Just like this would have appeared Avantikā of another age,
 Dressed exquisitely to please
 The startled eyes of love.
Into the quatrains of the Amaru-Sataka,
 Either in the metre Shikharini or in Sragdharā,
 Would she have fitted perfectly.
 From her dressing room to the sitting room
 There comes the tryster ;
 She comes into the present age
 Like a message of the past.

I went down into the garden.
I decided that I too would honour my love
 With an artistically got up address.
When I invite you into my room
 It shall be like a formal adress of welcome.

The creeper before me is covered with white flowers,
 They have a foreign name I cannot remember,
 I have named them the shower of stars ;
 Their fragrance at night
 Is like the delirium of a flower garden.
 Now it has flowered out of season
 Without waiting till the end of winter.
 I have brought you a bunch of those flowers,
 A signature of theirs will endorse my offering.
 In this auspicious twilight hour you are Chāruprabhā of the
 classic age
 And I Ajitkumār of the classic times.
 I will say a few words today,
 Words deliberately arranged ;
 You may laugh if you like.
 I have built up those words in my mind
 As you have prepared your coiffure,
 I will say, "Beloved, this bunch of foreign flowers
 Was searching the skies for a spring night.
 I took pity on them and brought them here
 For that black hair of yours."

30 May 1936

DREAM

The night is pitch dark,
The rainy wind
Blows about at random in all directions.
Thunder rumbles,
The doors shake,
Shutters rattle.
I look out and see
The line of areca and coconut palms
Wave their heads restlessly.
On the thick-leaved boughs of the jackfruit tree
Sway lumps of darkness
Like a dense crowd of ghosts.
From the road a slant of light has fallen
On a corner of the pond,
Twisted like a snake.

I remember that verse—

“The thunder rumbled deep on a dark July night
...Then I had a dream.”

There must have been a certain girl that day
Behind the picture of Rādhikā
Before the poet's eyes,
That shy girl

With love budding in her heart
And eyes darkened with collyrium,
Who came from the bathing ghat in a blue sārī,
‘Wringing water’ from it as she walked.

On this windy night
I want to bring her back to my mind
As in her mornings and in her evenings,
In her words and her thoughts,
In the glance of her eyes,
That Bengali girl known to the poet
Of three hundred years ago.
I cannot see her clearly.

No such picture was there
Before that poet of three hundred years ago,
Of those behind whose shadow she is hidden today,
The way they tie the ends of their sārīs
On their shoulders,
And coil their hair
Sliding down their backs
With what clear eyes they look at one's face.
Yet "the thunder rumbled deep on a dark July night
.... Then I had a dream—"
On that July night like today blew
The rainy wind ;
There is a harmony
Between dreams of the past and dreams of today.

30 May 1936

THE SAP OF LIFE

Let me listen,

My ears are waiting to hear.

The day sinks to rest ;

Birds sing out at the end of day

The songs that empty their throats of music.

They have drawn away my body and mind

To the many-tuned many-coloured

Joyful

Abode of life.

Their history is mute

Save for this—

We are, we are alive,

Alive at this wonderful moment.

These words reached the depths of my heart.

As in the afternoon girls fill their pitchers with water and carry
them home

So I dip my mind in the skies,

Filling it

With the murmur of life.

Give me a little time ;

My mind waits eagerly.

In this ebbing hour of the day,

In the afternoon light strewn over the grass

There is silent joy in the trees,

Joy hidden in their very pith,

Joy scattered from leaf to leaf.

My heart spreads itself out in the wind
 To feel the touch of the world spirit
 Strained through consciousness.
Now let me sit quietly
 With eyes open.

 You come with logic.
Today in the receding sun at the end of day
 I have a little leisure ;
In it is neither good nor evil,
 Neither praise nor blame,
Confusion or hesitation—
 But only the green of the forest,
 The sparkle of water,
On the surface of the tide of life
A slight tremor, a little gurgle,
 A little ripple.
This little leisure of mine
 Is flying along
Like a short-lived butterfly
In the sunset sky
 To finish its last play of coloured wings ;
 Do not argue in vain.

Useless are all your demands.
 I sit with my back to the present
 On the banks sloping towards the past,
 Life driven about by many pains
 Had once played here

In the lattice-work of light and shade
Woven by branches of those forest trees.

In the autumn noon

On this quivering grass
In the thicket of Kāsha reeds beyond the meadow
The conversation of winds amongst themselves
Fills the pauses made by the harp of my life.

The web of doubt
That twisted and coiled about life
Has no knots left.

The travellers on their way have left behind

No preparation, anxiety or desire ;

Only in the shivering of the leaves

This message endures—

They too were alive,

Truer than that they are no more.

Today I only feel

A shade of the colour of their garments.

The air stirred by them as they pass by,

The message of their eyes,

The rhythm of love,

In the eastward stream of the Gangā of this life

The westward current of their life's Yamunā.

1 June 1936

THE LOST HEART

You stand outside

Wondering whether you would come in.

Once I heard a little tinkle of your bangles.

A tiny piece of the edge of your terracotta sārī

Is seen fluttering in the breeze

Outside the door.

I cannot see you ;

I see, the sun of the western sky

Has stolen your shadow

And cast it on the floor of my room.

I see from under the black border of your sārī

The hesitancy of your fair golden feet

On my doorstep.

Today I will not call you.

Today my light consciousness has spread itself

Like a nebula in a dark moonless sky,

Like fading white clouds after a shower

Against the autumn blue.

My love

Is like a field with boundary marks broken down,
Abandoned long since

By its tiller ;

Absent-minded Nature

Over it has spread her own rights

Unknown to herself.

It is overgrown by grass,
By saplings of nameless trees,
And has merged into the surrounding wilderness.
It is like the morning star before daybreak
Which dips in the morning light
Its own pitcher of light.

Today my mind has no boundaries ;
So perhaps you will misunderstand me.
All its past impressions have been wiped out ;
You cannot make me one with you anywhere,
Bind me with any ties.

1 June 1936

THE ETERNAL MARCH

Since the first daybreak of human age
Misted with myths,
They walk wonder-eyed
On strange shores ;
The seekers and the fighters
March at the drum-beats
Of storm gods,
Towards an ever-distant time,
Along an endless stretch
Of battlefields.

The earth trembles
At the ceaseless treads
Of deadly pursuits,
The midnight sleep is troubled,
The easeful life
Is embittered "
And death
Is made precious.

Those who rushed out
At the urge of the road
Ever move on
Beyond the boundaries of death,
And those who clung to their homes
Are doomed to lie
Perpetually encased

In the shell of a rigid life
In a soulless world.
Who is there who must be lured
By an insipid peace,
By a stagnant stinking security,
And dully choose
To build his shelter
In a realm of ghosts ?

In the beginning man found himself
At the cross-road of existence.
The provision of his journey
Was given him of his blood, in his dream,
In his path itself.
When he sat down
To fix his plan
And raised his tower
High among clouds,
Its base crumbled away ;
He built his dyke
Only to let it be swept away
By floods.

Time and again he fell asleep
In his hall of tired carousal
In the gasping light
Of smoke-bedimmed lamps,
Till a sudden assault of a nightmare
Choked him,
Rattled his ribs together

And he woke up
In a groaning agony of death.

A sudden awakening has often
Startled him forth
From the ring-fence of decrepit centuries
Towards undefined horizons,
And an impulse forced him away
From the fetters
Of his swollen success,
Reminding him that
Pillars of triumph
Across Time's chariot path
Bury the builder
Under their nameless ruins.

He hastens to join the army
Of the wreckers of patterns
Coming from all ages,
Crossing hills, breaking stone walls,
Bursting iron gates,
While the sky throbs with the
Drum-beats
Of Eternity.

3 June 1936

FAREWELL GREETING

With heavy wind soaked by nightlong rain
The morning stands still ;
The eyelids of the gloomy sky seem almost closed
With the weariness of its vigil.
Along paths made slippery by rain tiptoe the hours ;
Flitting shadows of various ideas
Fly in swarms around my mind,
Spreading a colour of faint melancholy.

The mind wants to capture them ;
I would make them captive in writing ;
But words slip past.
They are not tears nor smiles nor thoughts nor philosophy ;
They are all the forms that have faded away,
Scents that have evaporated,
Songs whose words are forgotten,
The shot silk of memory and oblivion, both without anguish,
Forming all together a dream picture with face turned away
Like a piqued woman with a veil drawn over her.

My heart cries—Call her, call her
Who is adrift in the ferry boat,
Call her back once,
Hold up the evening lamp
Towards her face ;
Offer her a farewell greeting.
Say, 'You are true, you are sweet,
It is your pain which plays hide and seek

Between the flowering of spring and the falling of flowers.
Your writing in pictured letters
Lies everywhere,
In blue, in green, in gold,
In the red dye of blood'.

So my heart has floated today
On glossy waves of the Palāsh groves,
On a sudden burst of sunshine brimming over
The edges of broken clouds.

3 June 1936

THE TAMARIND BLOSSOM

In my life I have missed many riches,
They were beyond my reach ;
I have lost many more
Through not asking for them.
Amidst familiar surroundings
Like an unpolished village beauty
Was this blossom with its face veiled.
Scornfully has it neglected neglect,
This tarmarind blossom.

A stunted tree by the wall
It could not thrive on the miserly soil ;
Its shaggy boughs have risen hugging the ground.
It has aged unperceived.

Nearby blossoms the lime.
The champak is covered with flowers,
The bauhinia in the corner is in bloom,
The kurchi boughs are all white
With flowers in meditation.

Clear is their speech,
They have called me aloud and conversed with me.
Today suddenly I thought I heard
Whispered words from under a veil.
I found on the roadside in a corner of the tamarind bough
A shy blossom
Of a pale yellow shade,

Faintly perfumed,
Petals delicately traced.

In our town house there is
An ancient tamarind tree we have known from childhood,
Standing like a sentinel of the skies
In the north-west corner
As if it was an old retainer of the family,
Contemporary of my great-grandfather.
At chapter after chapter of lives and deaths in the family
Has it stood silently
Like a dumb court historian.
Of those who had absolute possession of that tree at
different times,
The names of many
Are more faded than its fallen leaves,
Their memories
Are fainter than its shadow.

Under it once there was a stable
Restless with the clatter of hooves,
Housed in a tiled shed.
Long over is the noisy shouting of the grooms,
Gone that age of horse-drawn carriages
Beyond history.
Still is the horses' neighing today,
The colours have changed in the picture of time.
The carefully dressed beard of the head coachman,
His arrogant stride, whip in hand,

Have gone with the fashionable pageant of those days
 Into the great greenroom behind the scenes.
At ten o'clock in the morning sun
 From under that tamarind tree
 With unfailing regularity each day
 Came the carriage for school.
It dragged along the helpless load of a boy's unwillingness
 Through the crowded streets.

Today no longer will that boy be recognised
 In body, mind or manner.
But all along has stood
 That tamarind tree self-absorbed,
 Wholly unconcerned
 About the rise and fall of human destinies.

I remember one day's incident.
 It rained incessantly all night long ;
 At dawn the sky wore the hue
 Of the pupils of a madman's eyes.
 The random wind blew aimlessly.
 In an invisible cage encasing the whole world
 A giant bird
 Flapped its wings violently on all sides.
 The streets were under water,
 The yard was flooded,
 From the verandah I saw that tree
Like an angry recluse, raise its head to the skies,
 Reproach in all its boughs.

On both sides of the lane the brick-built houses
stood helplessly ;
 Against the tyranny of the skies
 They had no words of protest
In the agitation of the leaves of that tree alone
 Was there a message of rebellion,
 A defiant curse.
Midst the dumb inertia of the endless mass of bricks and timber
 It stood alone, sole representative of the forests.
That day did I see its turbulent grandeur against the pale
monsoon horizon.

But when spring has followed spring,
The Ashok and the Bakul have been honoured ;
I have known it but as a sentinel, arrogant and unconcerned,
 At the outer gate of the king of seasons.
Who knew then
 The softness of beauty within that rough bulk ?
Who knew its proud lineage in the court of Spring ?
Knowing it from its blossoms, I see it today
Like the Gandharva Chitraratha,
 The great warrior who vanquished Arjun,
Practising his songs alone by himself,
 Crooning beside the shadows of the woods of Nandan.
If in the eyes of the adolescent poet of those days
The secret intoxication of that ageing tree
 Were revealed at the right moment,
 I think then
In the young morning of some wonderful day

When bees' wings were delirious with delight,
I would have stolen a bunch of its blossoms
And put them with trembling fingers
On somebody's ears which would redden with joy.
If she had asked its name,
Perhaps I would have said—
"That piece of sunlight which has fallen on your chin,
If your lips can give it a name,
That name I shall give to this blossom as well".

7 June 1936

UNTIMELY SLEEP

I came unasked.

I had wanted to have some fun,
To surprise her and obstruct her untimely
While she was busy with household work,
The sārī ends tucked about her waist.
Stepping across her door, my eyes were struck
By the picture of her untimely sleep
As she lay relaxed on the floor.

In a distant neighbourhood where there was a wedding,
The flute played in the Sārang tune.
The first half of the morning was over,
Drooping in the hot summer sun.
Her hands were under her cheek, one upon the other,
She was sleeping, her body limp,
Exhausted with the festivities
Of the previous night,
Beside her unfinished household chores.
The stream of work lay without a ripple on her limbs,
Like the trace of tired water
At the far end of the Ajay
At the time of a drought.
On her slightly parted lips reposed
The sweet insouciance of flowers about to close.
The dark shadow of the lashes of two sleeping eyes
Had fallen on her pale cheeks.

The tired world tiptoes
Past her open window
In time with her gentle breathing.
The signalling timepiece
Ticks away on a corner table of the unheeding room.
A calendar flutters in the breeze against the wall.
The passing moments lost their movement
In her suspended consciousness,
They merged into one breathless moment
Which spread its invisible wings
Over her profound slumber.
The pathetic grace of her tired form lies stretched on the floor
Like the sleepless lethargic moon on a full moon night
Seen in the morning at the far end of a treeless field.

Her tame cat reminding her of its need of milk
Mewed near her ears.
Startled she awoke and saw me ;
Hastily covering her bosom
She said to me in reproach, "For shame—
Why didn't you wake me so long ?"
Why ? I gave her no correct reply.

Even those whom we know we know not entirely—
This truth is discovered suddenly by accident.
When laughter and conversation are suspended,
When in the mind pauses the wind of life,
Then from the depths of that something unspoken
What is this that revealed itself today ?

Is it that pathos of existence
Which cannot be fathomed ?
Is it that voiceless question
The answer to which plays hide and seek in one's blood ?
Is it that pain of separation
Without history ?
Is it that sleep-walking through strange paths
At the call of a flute unknown ?
Under the transparent sky of sleep
Before what speechless mystery did I in silence ask her—
“Who are you ?
In what world will your real self be revealed ?”

That morning in the primary school across the lane
Boys were repeating aloud multiplication tables ;
Jute-laden buffalo carts
Twisted the air with the painful creaking of their wheels ;
Workmen were hammering the roof at a house nearby ;
In the garden beneath the window
At the foot of a Chāltā tree
A crow pulled
At the stone of a sucked mango.

Today over all this has spread
The magic light of that distant past.
In the sluggish sun of a commonplace noon
Which history will not remember
They have framed with exquisite sweetness
A picture of untimely sleep.

10 June 1936

KANI

We were neighbours.
At all times crossing the boundary between our houses
 Kani would go about doing as she pleased,
A bare-foot girl in a short frock ;
 Her mischievous eyes
Seemed strewn with sparks of black fire.
Slim was her body,
 Her tangled hair refused to stay in order,
In plaiting it her mother had difficulty.
 At her heels would jump about all the time
A curly-haired dog of a stunted species ;
 The two were like a couplet
 United in rhyme.

I was a good scholar,
 The showboy of the class.
This excellence of mine
 Was of no value in her eyes.
The year I got promoted two classes higher
 I ran to tell her ;
 She said, "That's nothing much,
 Isn't it so, Tamy ?"
Her dog barked out—
 "Yap"

She loved suddenly to humiliate my pride,
 To infuriate the gentle boy,

As she loved
To burst fish bladders with a bang.
Trying to curb her
Was like flinging pebbles at a spring.
The gurgling flow of her laughter
Nothing could obstruct.

I sat memorising Sanskrit declensions
Reading them aloud, nodding my head in time ;
She would suddenly come and bang her fist on my back
In a very un-Sanskritic way.
The vulgarised form of Sanskrit
Did not come out of my lips
Before she ran away with a wave of her pigtails.

The age for relishing
Laughing insults from a girl
Was still a little away from me.
So the chastiser ran in pursuit
But rarely caught his quarry ;
Her receding penetrating laughter
I heard from a distance ;
Within my reach I did not find
A responsible creature,
A being one could hurt.

Such was the first period of our acquaintance,
Much troubled by a little girl's pranks.
The untameable I wanted to punish
In my manly impatience ;

In response to my vain efforts I heard
In a sharp and sweet voice—
 “You are beaten !”, “You are beaten !”
When the number of my outward defeats
 Went on increasing
My victories then perhaps commenced
 From within.
That wireless receiver was not yet operating,
 Through proof piled up of such messages.

Meanwhile our costumes had changed
 On the stage of life.
She had taken to wearing a sārī,
 Pinned a brooch on her shoulder and
Coiled up her plait in a modern coiffure.
I had started wearing khaki shorts
 And a sports shirt
 In imitation of a football-playing Balarām.
Inside too our emotions
 Had begun to change ;
Some evidence of it was to be had.

One day Kani's father sat reading
 An English weekly.
I was much attracted by that illustrated paper.
Stealthily I was looking from behind
 At the design of an aeroplane.
Discovering this he laughed out.
He used to think, ‘That boy is very proud of his learning’.

As he too had a similar pride,
He could not stand it in others.
Holding up the paper he said,
“Can you explain these few lines, my lad ?
Let me sound your knowledge of English”.

Staring at the cruel letters
I perspired, my face red with shame.
Witness of my humiliation
Kani was playing with some cowrie shells
Sitting in a corner of the room.
The earth did not open up to hide me,
Heartless as ever the world around remained unmoved.

The next morning on waking I found
That paper on my table,
Sivarām Bābu’s illustrated paper.
Where lay the spring of rich feeling behind such supreme adventure,
What was its value,
Could not be comprehended by the foolish boy at that time.
I thought that to impress me
Kani was only showing off.

We grew older day by day
Unnoticed by us two ;
For this we were not responsible.
That growing up was an offence
Had not been noticed by me,
But it had been by Sivarām Bābu.

Kani's mother was fond of me ;
Her explanations made her husband's protests sharp and strong.
One day making pointed fun of my looks
Sivārām Bābu was saying to his wife,
Which I overheard,
"A lad beautiful like a ripe mango
Rots before long,
The inside being full of worms."

Noticing his attitude towards me
Father would often say in anger,
"Why on earth do you go to their house ?"
Feeling ashamed
I would say through clenched teeth,
"I will never go there again."
But again in a few days I had to go
Secretly through the lane by the Kool tree.
With her face turned away Kani would sit
Offended at my absence of even two days.
Suddenly she would say,
"Never, never will I play with you again."
I would say, "Who cares ?"
And look towards the sky, twisting my head.

A day came for both our families
To move house.
Sivārām Bābu, engineer, would go westwards
To join an electric lighting firm in some town.
We were for Calcutta,
The village school was not to father's liking.

Two days before going away

Kani came and said, "Come into our orchard."

I asked, "Why?"

Kani said, "We will steal together,

For we shall never again have a day like this."

I said, "But your father—"

Kani said, "Coward!"

I said twisting my head,

"Certainly not."

Sivarām Bābu's cherished orchard was full of fruit.

Kani asked, "What fruit do you like best?"

I said, "Those Muzāffarpur lichis."

Kani said, "Climb up the tree and go on plucking them,

Here I am holding the basket."

The basket was nearly full

When suddenly there was a roar—"Who is there?"

It was Sivarām Bābu himself.

He said, "You will learn nothing else, my lad,

Your only hope is in the art of stealing."

He went away taking the basket

Lest my criminal attempts might succeed.

From Kani's eyes

Tears in big drops

Fell silently.

Leaning against the trunk of a tree

She wept without a stir

As I never saw her do before.

Then there was a big interval.

Returning from England I found,

Kani was married.

The red border of a sārī adorned her head.

On her forehead a mark of koom-koom ;

There was a quiet depth in the look of her eyes,

Her voice had deepened.

In Calcutta in a chemical works

I manufactured medicines.

My days followed one another

With the harsh noise of the pitiless wheel of work.

One day a letter came from Kani

Entreating me to meet her.

Her niece was to be married at her village home,

Her husband did not get leave ;

She had come alone to her mother.

Her father had gone away to Hoshiārpur

Through spite over a difference of opinion
about the marriage.

After a long time I returned to the village,

To the home of my girl neighbour.

On the sloping bank of the tank beside the steps

Leaned down the same Hijal tree towards the water.

From the tank came

The same old sweet smell of moss ;

And from the bough of the Sisu tree hung

That swing even today.

Bending down before me in salute Kani said, "Amal-dādā,
I live far away ;
Of meeting you on Brothers' Day I have no hope.
Today out of date I wish to fulfil my heart's desire,
Whence this invitation".
In the orchard a small carpet-square was spread
On the platform at the foot of the Ashwattha tree.
The rites were performed ;
Near my feet Kani placed a basket,
It was filled with lichis.
She said, "Those lichis."
I said, "Perhaps not quite those lichis".
Kani said, "I don't know,"
And quickly walked away.

12 June 1936

THE FLUTE-PLAYER

“O flute-player,
 Play on your flute,
 Let me hear my new name”—
That is how I wrote you my first letter,
 Do you not remember ?

I am a daughter of your Bengal.
 The Creator did not spare full time
 To mould me into a human being,
 He left me half-finished.
 My inside and my outside do not fit each other,
There is no consistency between my past and my present,
 No harmony between my pains and my intelligence,
 No union of my capacity and my will.
He has not lifted me on to the ferry boat of the present ;
 Stranded, He has left me
 On sand banks beyond the current of time.
 From there I see
 The distant world hazy in fierce light.
Without cause my mendicant mind gets restless ;
 I stretch out both hands
 But cannot reach anything anywhere.

My time hangs heavy,
 I sit gazing at the tide waters ;
 Floats past the ferry boat towards the shores of deliverance,

Floats by stately barges of the rich,
Glides past the light and shade of passing time.
Then sounds your flute
Filled with the music of life.
Into the veins of the dying day
Throbbing rushes back the impulse of life.

What tune do you play ?

I know not what chord of pain it strikes in whose heart.
Perhaps you play in the Panchama Rāga
A boatman's song of the south wind's youth.
Listening to it I feel about myself as if
The heart of what was a trickling stream at the foot of a hill
Has suddenly been darkened
By a wild monsoon night of July.
Awakening in the morning one sees the banks washed away,
The wild swirl of the unbearable current
Knocking against obstinate boulders.

Your tune brings into my blood
The call of the storm, the call of floods,
The call of fire,
The call of the sea of death
Dashing against ribs,
The call of the insouciant wind rattling knockers
on the doors.
Like a highwayman the full current
Rushes with a wild call

Into the narrow channel of the incomplete
As if to snatch, to flood away.
Around my limbs
Twists the angry remonstrance of the forest
Struck by a whirling nor'wester.
God gave me no wings ;
Your song has given to my dreams
The wildness of life flying through windswept skies.

At home I drudge quietly ;
All call me good.
They see, my will has no strength,
My desires no sign of existence ;
When storms beat upon my head
I trail it in the dust.
I lack the courage to knock down with a reckless blow
The guarding wall of prohibitions ;
I know not to love intensely,
But only to weep,
To sink down at one's feet.

Flute-player,
Of a sudden sounds your flute
Calling me to the land without death ;
There in its own glory
My head stands high.
There my life is the young sun
Which tears apart the veils of mist.
There my uncontrolled eagerness
Spreads out wings of fire ;

It flies through space along unknown paths
Like Garuda desperate in his first hunger.
Awakes the rebel woman in me,
With her piercing oblique eyes she expresses disgust
At the surrounding crowd of cowards,
At the cowardice of the lean crooked world.

Flute-player,

Perhaps you have wanted to see me.

I know not the exact place where

Nor the correct time when

Nor how you would know me.

On a lonely July night vibrant with the noise of cicadas

Like a shadowy form

Has that woman gone to your tryst

Along paths hidden from the eyes.

During how many springs have you

Garlanded that unknown with rhymes

Whose flowers will never fade ?

At your call one day

Out of her dark corner

A home-keeping lifeless girl came out—

A woman unveiled.

Like Vālmiki's new-found song

She struck even you with wonder.

She will not come down from her seat of song ;

She will write to you

Sitting in the flitting shadow of your tunes.

You will not know her address.

Oh flute-player,
Let her remain at the distance of your flute's melody.

16 June 1936

THE BREAK

You came with the soft grace
Of unripe life,
You brought the first marvel into my heart,
Into my blood its first tidal bore.
Love's sweetness in imperfect acquaintance
Was like the fine gold-work
On the black veil of dawn,
The cover under which wedded eyes first meet.
In our minds till then
Distinct had not been the song of birds ;
The murmur of the forests sounded at times
And at times died away.

Midst a family of many people
Quietly began to be created
A secluded world of us two.
As birds day after day
Gather sticks and straws to build their nests
So simple were the materials that made up our world.
It was built with floating bits
Dropped off from the fleeting moments.
Its value was in its construction,
Not in richness of material.

Then one day you slipped away alone unnoticed
From the boat rowed by us two ;

I floated down with the current,
You stayed sitting on the bank across the stream.
Your hands no longer met mine
In work or in play.
The brick-work of our lives broke away at their joint.
As an island whose green picture has been freshly painted
On the canvas of playful waves of the sea
Is wiped out
By the wild storm of one tidal wave,
So vanished away our young world
With its green beauty
Wherein joys and sorrows were sprouting afresh.

Many days have passed since then.
On a threatening monsoon evening
When I picture you in my mind,
I see, you are
Surrounded by the charm of that same freshness of youth.
Your youth stand still.
The mango blossom of your spring of those days
Announce the same fragrance ;
That midday of yours
Is still as steeped in the melancholy of separation
Through the cooing of doves.
For me your memory has stayed
Amongst these evergreen relics of Nature.
The lines of your beauty are defined for ever,
Established you are on unchanging ground.

The current of my life

Stayed still nowhere.

Through the difficult and the profound,

Through conflicts of good and evil,

Through thought, service and desire,

Sometimes in success, sometimes in frustration,

I have drifted away far

Beyond the limits you knew ;

There I am a foreigner to you.

If the same you should on this thunder-filled evening

Come and sit before me,

You would find in my eyes

The look of one who has lost all bearings,

Gazing beyond the sea of unknown skies

At a path through the blue forest.

Will you sit by me and repeat

Left-overs of the whispered past ?

But the waves roar,

Vultures screech,

Thunder rumbles in the sky,

The dense Sāl forest sways its head.

Your words will be a toy raft

In a whirling maelstrom.

Then my entire heart

Blended with the whole of yours ;

Hence new songs found expression

In the first joy of creation.

I felt,
The longings of ages were fulfilled in you and me.
Then each morning brought
A welcome song of new light,
Like a star first opening its eye at the beginning of time.

Today my lyre
Carries hundreds of strings,
None known to you.
The tunes I practised in those days
Will feel out of place if played on these strings.
What was then writing inspired
Will today be mere calligraphy.
Still my eyes fill with tears.
On this lyre descended the first affection of your fingers,
It still retains their magic.
You gave the first push to this boat
From the green shores of adolescence ;
It still retains that impulse.
Today in midstream when I sing the boatmen's song
Unaware will your name be there
Caught up in its tune.

20 June 1936

ACCIDENTAL MEETING

In a railway compartment we met by chance,
I never thought it would be possible.

Often before I had seen her
In red sārīs
Red like pomegranate blossoms ;
Today she is in black silk,
The Sāri end raised to her head,
Draped about the champak-like beauty of her fair bright face.
Through the black colour she seemed to surround herself
With a profound remoteness,
The remoteness of the far end of mustard fields
Yielding to the blue collyrium of sāl forests.
My entire mind stopped with a jolt ;
I saw a known person in the reserve of the unknown.

.

Suddenly throwing away her newspaper
She greeted me with folded palms.
The path of social intercourse was opened ;
I started conversation—
How are you ? How goes the world ?
And so on.

She remained looking out of the window
With a look as of avoiding contact with the days of our closer
acquaintance.

She gave one or two very brief replies,
Some questions she never answered at all.
She communicated with the impatience of her hands—
Why all this talk ?
It would be far better to remain silent.

I was in another seat
With her companions.
Once she beckoned me towards her with her fingers.
Her daring seemed considerable ;
I sat on the same seat with her.
Screened by the noise of the train
She said to me in a low voice,
“Please do not mind ;
Where is there time to waste ?
I have to get down at the very next station ;
You will go far away ;
We shall never meet again.
So the answer to a question that has remained unanswered
till now
I want to hear from your lips
You will speak the truth, won't you ?”

I said, “I will.”
Still looking out towards the sky she asked,
“Are our past days
Gone for good ?
Is nothing left ?”

For a little while I remained silent ;

Then I said,

“All the stars of the night remain

Behind the depth of the light of day.”

I had doubts if I had made it up.

She said, “All right, now go to the other side.”

They all got down at the next station,

I went on alone.

24 June 1936

LAST NIGHT

Last night

In the haunted darkness of the monsoons

The pattering delirium of rain

Had drowned

The meditative hymn of the ascetic night.

I was overcome with lethargy,

I was starving ;

My strength lay limp in the dust.

Crouched on my chest

Sat the loneliness of the entire sky.

"I want", "I want", cried out my heart

At each watch of the night, like some nocturnal bird.

Mendicancy under various guises

Had driven its crooked roots of indecent lament

Into the blind layers of the heart.

It went grasping at empty space like one night-blind,

Not knowing whom it wanted.

At last in an angry roar it cried out—

"Nowhere, nowhere, he is nowhere."

Out of the cave of empty untruth

A host of snakes of black desire

Emerged and twined themselves around the mendicant,

The manacled slave of negation

Whose back is bent,

Whose head is bowed

With the load of futility.

Day dawned.
 On a July morning, shattered by a sudden gust of wind,
 The ramparts of thick-set clouds
 Fell crumbling down,
 The unshackled light of morning
 Came rushing out.
 The joyful proclamation of liberty
 Sounded from sky to sky
 In the language of fire.
 Inside the small soft bodies of birds
 Wild became the eager rhythm of life.
 The archery of their songs
 Went on from throat to throat, from bough to bough,
 Like a sitār played in quick tempo,
 Like light glittering from leaf to leaf.
 The mind stood up and said,
 "I am full".
 It was crowned,
 Washed by its own tumultuous waves.
 Its own company
 Did it surround
 As a spring encircles a rock ;
 Overflowing, it went to merge itself
 In everything all around.
 Between my consciousness and light there was no barrier left.
 Inside the morning sun
 I saw myself
 A golden spirit ;
 I climbed over the enclosure of the body,
 Went past the limits of time

And sang out, "I want nothing", "I want nothing",
As sings the ruby glow of the red lotus,
As sing the waves of the sea,
The peace of the evening star,
The solitude of mountain peaks.

23 June 1936

NECTAR

When coming away bidding her goodbye, I told her,
“A woman of India once said—

Ingredients she wanted not,

She wanted nectar.

This is as a woman should resolve.

Don't you agree ?”

Amiyā smiled faintly a cheerless smile.

She asked, “Is this advice ?”

I said pressing her hands,

“Love itself is that nectar ;

Ingredients are nothing compared to it.

You will realise this some day”.

Amiyā was annoyed ;

She said, “Why don't you rescue me from falsehood ?

Why have you no strength ?”

I said, “My self-respect stands in the way.

Until I am your equal in wealth

I will not come near you”.

Shaking her head Amiyā stood up

And started walking out of the room.

I said, “Remember this,

In exchange of your love

I will not accord you the insult of being wedded to my poverty.

This is my resolution as a man”.

Days and nights rolled on.

To my head went the intoxication of the wine of gold.

The increasing force of accumulating wealth

Went driving me on with growing speed.

I could not stop myself nor check the force of that drive.

My wealth increased and also my reputation.

My self-esteem marched on with pride.

At last doctors said, rest was essential,

The machinery of my body would soon be breaking down.

I went afar to a solitary place.

There an islet of the sea had merged.

With forests at the foot of a hill.

Tree after tree was crowded

In the colony of fisher birds.

A thin rill of water came trickling down hill

Over rocks arranged in steps.

The murmur of its crystal water

Meandering over the pebbles

Struck a basic note of solitude.

Bathing daily in the sea,

The breeze there blew, humming hymns from forest to forest.

Coconut palms gathered themselves in groups,

Some erect, others leaning down,

Restlessly swinging their fringes all day long.

Determined breakers came back to crash and foam again and again

Upon stout black rocks,

Scattering on the shore

Shells, snails and sea-weeds.

They turned my restless mind back
Into the peaceful bliss of the gentle flow of blood ;
My intoxication for work grew less intense.
The labour of all those days seemed futile.
My heart stretched out both hands
Seeking the real gold of life.

That day there were no breakers on the sea.
October sunlight trembled
On the sea's ecstatic blue.
Gusts of random wind raced down
Towards old casuarina trees beside my house
And rustled their leaves.
A purple bird with white breast
Sat on a telegraph pole swinging its tail,
Warbling in a sweet hushed voice.
The clear blue of the autumn sky was overspread
By the deep melancholy of some eternal banishment.
My heart went repeating desolately—
"I must go back".
Again and again I remembered
The light that had shone that day
From those eyes, with tears freshly wiped.

The same day boarded a ship
And came away direct on getting down at the port.
Coming to the turning of the road I looked towards the house ;
It appeared uninhabited.
I came to the front door
To find it padlocked.

My heart missed a beat.
From inside the house came a sigh of desolation
And struck my soul.

After much searching
We met at last
In a mouldy old village
Beside an ancient tank
Dating from the days of the twelve Bhuiyāns ;
After the tank the village was called Lochandighi.
There stood a ruined temple,
Its date forgotten
And inscriptions blurred.
Retaining no relic of past glory
It lay entwined in the rib-crushing embrace
Of an Ashwattha tree.
On its bank under an ancient Banyan tree
Stood a new thatched shed,
It housed the village girls' school.

I saw Amiyā
In a coarse grey sārī,
A conch shell bangle on either wrist
And feet bare ;
Her loosely bound hair hung down carelessly.
The soft duskiness of village life tinged her face.
With a small watering can she was watering
The kitchen garden of the school.
I knew not what to say.

Neither did her lips utter
Any words of greeting at this first meeting
Nor any question.

With a sidelong glance
Looking at my expensive shoes

She said coolly—

“Through excessive rain weeds have choked
The tomato plants ;

Why not come and weed them out ?”

I knew not if she spoke in jest or in earnest.

My shirt-cuffs were held by pearl-set links ;

I turned up my sleeves stealthily.

For Amiyā there was a brooch in my pocket ;

I realised, presenting it to her

Would mean mockery for the diamond on it.

Coughing a little I asked—

“Where do you stay here ?”

Putting away the watering can she said,

“Would you like to see ?”

She took me inside the school

Into a room partitioned with a rug

On the east side of the verandah.

On a wooden cot

Bedding lay rolled up.

Upon a stool a sewing machine,

A sitār in a cover of printed cloth

Was propped up against the wall,

In front of the southern door lay a rush mat ;

Upon it were scattered
Cut pieces of cloth, ribbons of many colours,
Skins of silk.
Against the wall at the northern corner
Were a hand-mirror on a small teapoy,
A comb, a bottle of hair oil,
Odds and ends in a wicker basket.
Against the wall at the southern corner
On a small table were writing materials
And in a painted earthen bowl
A pink hibiscus.
Amiyā said, "This is where I live ;
Sit down. I will be back in a minute."

Outside on a bough of the Banyan tree with hanging shoots
A kokil sang.
Beside a caladium bush
A flock of quarrelsome starlings became frightfully excited.
At the foot of the sloping bank
A strip of water with a border of Kalmi plants
Was seen sparkling
At the northern end of the tank.
On the writing table I saw the portrait
Of a man in early youth, not known to me ;
It was done in charcoal and had a celluloid frame.
His forehead was broad, hair unkempt,
The eyes held a light as of the distant future,
The lips seemed sealed in grim determination.

His father said, "Look after the family properties".

The son said, "What's the use?"

People said, the unripe fruit of his intellect had been pecked

By the ruinous Russian bat.

Amiyā's father said, "Never mind,

He is softening fast in the damp air of our land."

In two days Amiyā became his disciple.

At all times would Mahibhusan come

Unmindful of the suppressed laughter and whisperings around.

Days followed days.

Impatient, Amiyā's father raised the topic of her marriage.

Mahi said, "What's the use?"

Her father said in anger, "Then why do you come
every day?"

Without effort said Mahibhusan,

"I want to take Amiyā to the field of her work."

Amiyā's last words were these—

"It is his work which has brought me here.

He has rescued me from the castle of ingredients".

I asked "Where is he?"

Amiyā said, "In prison".

3 July 1936

INCOMPREHENSIBLE

As the professor tried to explain the meaning of the drama,
It became incomprehensible.

Here is the story of that drama of mine.

The title of the book is "Patralekhā",

The hero Kushalsen.

Taking leave of Nabani he went to Europe.

Four years later on his return they would be married.

Nabani cried in her bed burying her face in it ;

To her it seemed like a death sentence for four years.

Kushal needed not Nabani by way of love,

She was needed to make easy his way to Europe.

This Nabani knew ;

She had vowed to win his heart by utmost endeavour.

Kushal at times

Stumbling over taste and intelligence addressed her roughly ;

She bore this in silence,

Admitting herself as unworthy ;

Her complaint was against herself alone.

She had hoped through humility itself finally she would win
As grass day by day covers mountain sides.

It would be a work of art that her love would fashion,
Invoking beauty into the pitiless stone, breaking it up
With ceaseless blows of her aching heart.

Today that treasured object of Nabani's constant attention has
gone far away.
The plate of her sorrows had been filled with offerings wet
with her tears ;
From today her sorrows would remain but not the offerings
made of them.
Now the only line of their communication would be
Through the bridge of correspondence across the seas.
But Nabani knew not to arrange her thoughts in writing ;
She knew only to flavour her service with sincere care,
To make orchids glow in flower vases
Unseen by Kushal,
To spread in secret
A carpet-square made with her own hands
Where Kushal would place his feet.

Kushal returned home
And fixed the date of the wedding.
The ring he had brought from England
He went to slip around her finger.
He found Nabani had gone away, leaving no address behind.
In her diary was written,
“The one I loved was a different person,
He is not the one revealed in the letters.”
Now Kushal believed
His letters were a prose version of the “Cloud-Messenger”,
The eternal treasure of separated lovers.
Today he had lost his beloved,
He did not want to lose his letters ;
His Mumtāz had gone, the Tāj Mahal remained.

Anonymously he published his letters
Under the title of "The Bewildered Lover".

Nabani's character

Was much analysed and interpreted.

Some said,

The writer had been leading a Bengali girl forward
Towards Ibsen's message of deliverance ;
Others said, towards perdition.

Many came to me with questions ;

I said, "What do I know ?"

I said, "The scriptures say even the gods know it not."

My reader-friend said—

"I may keep silent about women's character,

Following the bewildered gods ;

But what about the man ?

Is his unseen life also veiled in eternal mystery ?

What magic words suddenly tamed that man ?"

I said—

"Be it man or woman, neither is clearly seen ;

All that is clear is the happiness or sorrow which they cause.

Do not question.

Read what Kushal says."

Kushal says, "For four years Nabani was out of my sight,

She seemed to go down right away from my world ;

It was her sweetness alone which remained in my mind,

All else was of little import.

Easy became writing letters to her in beautiful style.
Whenever in need I made demands.
My boundless faith in her love
Sweetened my mind, made it proud.
In every letter I let my own words fool myself.
The ornaments cast through the warmth of my writing
Bedecked the image of her memory like a goddess.
She was created anew.
This is why the Christian scripture says—
‘In the beginning was the Word.’ ”
My reader friend asked again,
“Did he speak in earnest ?
Or was it the play-acting of a hero ?”
I said, “What do I know ?”

5 July 1936

DISAPPOINTED

The moment I got back from Phuli's house
I found the post card lying right in front of the mirror ;
I never knew when it arrived.
Little time seemed left ;
Perhaps I might not catch the train.
In trying to take money out of the box
I managed to scatter small coins about ;
I picked up some, the others remained where they were,
I could not count the coins.
Where was the time to change one's clothes ?
I tied the blue silk scarf round my head,
Pinning it in place.
I coiled my hair up anyhow.
From a pot plant I plucked
A yellow chrysanthemum.

I reached the station but the train seemed never to come ;
I know not how long I waited,
Five minutes or may be twenty-five.
Getting into the train I saw a bride in red silk with a full party.
Nothing seemed to strike my eyes,
It was a piece of red mist, a blurred picture.

The train went jolting along, the whistle blew at times,
Coal dust came flying in,
I kept wiping my face with a handkerchief.

At one station

A group of milkmen came with baskets of curds swung
from poles.

The train was being detained for nothing.

The whistle blew at last ;

The wheels responded, the train started moving again.

Trees, houses, ponds covered with green

Rushed backwards past the windows on both sides.

The earth seemed to have left something somewhere by mistake,
Which it might or might not recover.

The train went on jolting.

Out of way for nothing it stopped a long time,
Like food choking the throat in the middle of a meal.

Again the whistle blew,

Again went the train jolting along.

At long last did Howrah station appear.

I did not look out of the window ;

I was confident

Someone would look for me and seek me out.

Then we would both laugh.

The young bride, her relations and friends

With the bridegroom's ceremonial cap in hand

All went away.

A porter came and looked at my face ;

He put his head inside the compartment and found

There was nothing there.

Those who had come to receive the bride went away.

The stream of people which had been coming this way
 Turned towards the gate.
 Striding with firm quick steps
The guard glanced at my window
 Wondering why the girl did not get down.
 So the girl had to.

In this crowd of people who were coming
I alone was out of place
 The platform seemed
From one end to the other to question me ;
 I replied in silence—
 “It were better not to have come.”
Once more I read the post card
 Lest I had made a mistake.

No early return train was there.
 Even if there were one, would even then—?
Within my mind were twisting about
 So many “perhapses”
 All equally terrible
Coming out I kept on staring at the bridge.
 I do not know what people thought.
 Finding a bus in front I got in
 And threw away the chrysanthemum.

THE OTHER PARTY

There is no time at all
 Where are the red velvet pumps ?
 They were found under the bed.
 While buttoning up my collar I had gone up to the door
 When suddenly appeared father
 And started a leisurely conversation ;
 He had received information about two suitors for Mini.
 His mind leaned now towards one and now towards the other.
 I was looking at the watch and perspiring.

I went out into the road ;
 Twelve minutes left for the train to reach Howrah.
 Within my heart the swift blood stream was pushing against
 slow-moving time.
 The taxi speeded defying the laws.
 Harrison Road, Chitpore Road,
 Howrah Bridge, nine minutes left.
 When misfortune and bullock carts come,
 They come in crowds.
 The road was all a lump with jute-laden carts.
 A constable yelled, called and brought about a collision,
 A solid nuisance with no gaps.
 I got down from the taxi
 And set out fast on foot.
 I reached Howrah station.

Perhaps my wrist watch was fifteen minutes too fast.

Perhaps from today in the time table

The time had been put back.

I went inside.

There stood an empty train

Like the skeleton of a prehistoric giant reptile,

Like a long string of words in a lexicon.

Held together by the same monotonous meaning.

Like a fool I went and peeped into the women's compartments.

I called her by name ;

There was no explanation for that madness

Except that "If by chance—"

My shattered hopes lay along the entire empty platform in the dust.

I came out,

Not knowing which way to go.

I missed being run over by a bus, by mere accident.

For this little mercy I have no desire

To thank the gods.

SYĀMALI

Oh green earth,
On this rainy day the look of your dark eyes collyrium-touched
 Reminds me of thoughts expressed
 On the wet lashes of a silent Bengali girl.
Your earth writes verses on grass in letters of green
 In reply to the skies' rainy words.
Your forest of Jām darkens with its cloud of leaves.
 They say to the flying clouds with arms raised,
 "Wait, wait,
 Wait, you riders of the east wind."

Your home is under the trees by the roadside, Oh green beauty,
 You are a gipsy girl in the land of the gods ;
You move house again and again and set out on the roads
 empty-handed.
 In one moment you become utterly poor, devoid of care.
You tie not down one who has loved you
 With the eternal knot of wedded love ;
When the door of the bridal chamber opens at the end of night
 He never turns to look back.

To sit face to face with you I had put up a mud hut
 In your yard with its green hedge.
 That day the birds sang,
 They have no fixed cage ;
 They break their nests as they build them.
Their time to sing here is in spring, in winter in the woods
 beyond.

That morning

The leaves of the trees clapped in time with the breeze.

Today they dance in the forest.

Tomorrow they will trail in the dust ;

For this they neither lament nor complain.

Ushers of the royal court of Spring are they,

On duty in the morning, in the evening dismissed.

These few days we have whispered to each other ;

Today you whisper to me —

“No more, break now your home”.

I laid no solid foundation,

Made no supplication to you, blocking your door with stone.

I built my home of loose earth,

The moving earth that comes floating down the river,

The earth that will melt in the showers of Srāvan.

I will go.

The day you part from me with no pain

The Doyel will sing swinging its tail on my forsaken homestead.

There is but one tune of Sāhānā that plays on your flute,

Oh green beauty,

On the day I come and the day I go away,

6 August 1936

NOTES

Meant principally for readers who are not well acquainted with India.

TO RANI MAHALANABIS

JAMRUL — Tree producing sweet succulent white fruit. The blossoms look like earrings of fine silver filigree work.

LICHI — Tree originally Chinese but now found everywhere in Northern India, producing small acidulous juicy fruit with a red knobby skin.

NETRA-KONA — A town in East-Bengal. (lit. corner of the eye, from *Netra*, eye and *Kona*, corner).

ORAON — An aboriginal Kolarian tribe akin to the Santhals, living mostly in Chota Nagpur to the West of Bengal.

SANTINIKETAN — Name given by the poet's father, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, to the Asram he set up near Bolpur in West Bengal. Now seat of the Visva-Bharati University. (lit. abode of peace, from *Santi*, peace and *Niketan*, abode).

BHADRA — Bengali month corresponding to the period from the middle of August to the middle of September.

DUALITY

SAL — Large Indian gregarious forest tree known for the straightness of the trunks and the hardness and lasting quality of the timber. It has large round brownish green leaves which are furry on the under side.

AN ADDRESS

CHARU — Name of a girl in Bengali. (lit. beautiful).

AVANTI — The western portion of Malwa situated on the north of the river Nerbudda (Narmada). Avanti formed a kingdom in ancient India from the third century onwards.

UJJAYINI — Capital of the kingdom of Avanti, made famous by the Sanskrit poet, Kalidasa, and his patron, King Vikramaditya.

AVANTIKA — Name of a girl in Sanskrit. (from *Avanti*).

AMARU-SATAKA—A Sanskrit poem in 100 stanzas composed by the Indian classical poet, Amaru. (*Sataka*, hundred).

SIKHARINI—Sanskrit metre, each line containing 17 syllables.

SRAGDHARA — Sanskrit metre, each line containing 21 syllables.

CHARUPRABHA — Name of a girl. (lit. of shining beauty, from *Charu*, beautiful and *Prabha*, ray of light).

AJITKUMAR — Name of a man. (lit. the unconquered youth, from *Ajit* or *Ajita*, unconquered and *Kumar*, youth).

DREAM

JACKFRUIT — Indian fruit tree with heavy foliage of glossy dark green, bearing giant-sized sweet fruit containing a number of golden yellow segment, each a fruit in itself, with a peculiar strong smell and thick thorny skin, allied to breadfruit.

THE THUNDER RUMBLED DEEP ON A DARK JULY NIGHT... THEN I HAD A DREAM —The quotation is from a well-known Vaishnava lyrical poem of the seventeenth century about the love of Radhika and Krishna.

RADHIKA — Heroine of the famous Gitagovinda and numerous other Vaishnava lyrical poems. The beloved of Krishna, an incarnation of Vishnu, the second deity of the Hindu trinity.

WRINGING WATER—Quoted from a Vaishnava lyrical poem by Chandidas describing Radhika on her way home from the bathing ghat. Krishna felt that she was wringing out his heart along with the water from her wet blue sari.

THE SAP OF LIFE

KASA — Long Indian grass with abundant white flaxen hairy flowers which grow in tufts at the top just after the rainy season.

GANGA (Ganges) — The holy river of India which rises in the Himalayas and falls into the Bay of Bengal. At its confluence with the Yamuna (Jumna) at Allahabad, the water of the Ganga is of a pale beige colour while that of the Yamuna appears to be greenish blue.

FAREWELL GREETING

PALAS — Gregarious North Indian forest tree which produces in the hot weather an abundance of scarlet flowers with thick shiny tapering petals.

THE TAMARIND BLOSSOM

TAMARIND — Beautiful spreading Indian tree, its long bean-like pods filled with an acidulous sweet reddish-black pulp in which the seeds are embedded. (lit. date of India, from Arabic 'tamar-ul-Hind').

CHAMPAK — Well known Indian tree producing a profusion of sweet-scented flowers with thick creamy petals, like the magnolia.

KURCHI — Indian tree producing numerous small white flowers in the hot weather months.

ASOK — Indian tree producing bunches of spiky orange-red flowers. Asok trees are traditionally believed to flower when touched by the dainty feet of a beautiful woman.

BAKUL — Indian evergreen tree with tiny cream-coloured flowers brown at the edges which are serrated, with a sharply sweet and slightly intoxicating smell. The flowers drop of themselves on the ground.

GANDHARVA — A mythical order of semi-celestial beings with long equine faces, supposed to be masters of music.

CHITRARATHA — A famous Gandharva who defeated in battle Arjuna, the great hero of the Indian epic, the Mahabharata. (lit. one riding in a multicoloured chariot, from *Chitra*, multicoloured and *Ratha*, chariot).

NANDAN — The celestial garden of Indra, the thunder-god and head of the Hindu pantheon. (lit. abode of bliss).

UNTIMELY SLEEP

SARI — The traditional principal garment of Indian women consisting of a piece of silk or cotton cloth 5 to 8 yards long and about 1½ yards wide which is draped round the body, one of the ends covering sometimes even the head like a veil.

SARANG — One of the six Ragas or traditional melody forms of Indian music.

AJAY — A river in West Bengal, almost dry during the greater part of the year, but a violent raging torrent during the Monsoons. (lit. unconquerable).

CHALTA — Indian tree producing large sour globular fruit.

KANI

KANI — Name of a girl in Bengali. (prob. from *Kanika*, a small particle).

SANSKRIT — Famous Aryan oriental classical language belonging to the Indo-Germanic family, (lit. refined, polished).

UN-SANSKRITIC — Unrefined. Sanskrit was the language of the educated people in India, the rest of the population and especially women using Prakrit, a popular and vulgarized form of the language. The play of words here in the original is on the nature of Sanskrit (refined) as distinguished from Prakrit (unrefined or crude), there being no trace of refinement in the manner in which Kani landed a blow with her little fist on the back of the unsuspecting Amal, busy with his study of Sanskrit grammar.

BALARAM (Balarama) — Elder brother of Krishna, believed to be an incarnation of Vishnu. Balarama was famous for his prowess. Hence an athlete.

THE EARTH DID NOT OPEN UP TO HIDE ME — The allusion is to the story in the Sanskrit epic, the Ramayana, of the earth-goddess opening up and hiding her daughter, Sita, wife of Rama, King of Ayodhya, in response to the latter's prayer to save her from shame.

SIVARAM BABU — Name of a Bengali gentleman. 'Babu' is an honorific title like 'Mr.', but it follows instead of preceding the first or Christian name. (*Siva*, the third deity of the Hindu trinity and *Ram* or *Rama*, the ideal Hindu King of Ayodhya worshipped as an incarnation of Vishnu).

KOOL — Thorny Indian tree which produces medium-sized round berries with an acidulous taste.

MUZAFFARPUR — Town in Tirhut (North Bihar) famous for its lichis. (*Muzaffar*, name of a person and *Pur*, town).

THE RED BORDER OF A SARI ADORNED HER HEAD — In Bengal women go about bareheaded until they are married. After marriage they generally lift the loose end of their saris to their heads, especially in the presence of their husbands' people or when in their husbands' house or village. Red is considered auspicious by Indian married women, and brides wear red saris.

KOOM KOOM — A red glue-like liquid used for decorating the foreheads of Indian women with a round beauty mark. Also a sign of married state.

HIJAL — Indian tree which grows wild near the edges of river or 'tanks.'

SISU—Large Indian tree much valued for the solidity, hardness and lasting quality of the timber.

AMAL DADA — Amal (lit. pure) is the name of a Bengali boy (Kani's friend). 'Dada' means elder brother or cousin (male) and is put after a person's name. Sometimes persons not related by blood are also addressed as 'Dada' to show affection or familiarity.

BROTHERS' DAY—The day following the new moon in November when Indian girls and women anoint the foreheads of their brothers and male cousins with sandal-wood paste, chant a short prayer invoking their long life and offer them food specially prepared for the occasion as well as presents of clothes.

ASWATTHA — Famous evergreen giant Indian tree (*Ficus Indica*) with heart-shaped leaves, planted by the side of roads or in open spaces for shade.

THE FLUTE PLAYER

PANCHAMA — One of the six principal Ragas or melody forms of Indian Music. Also known as Vasanta. (lit. the fifth *i. e.*, the fifth note, G, of the diatonic scale of C major).

NOR'WESTER — A sudden and violent tropical storm which takes place usually late in the afternoon in March, April and May, following a very warm day.

GARUDA — The mythological king of birds who flies through space, carrying the god Vishnu on his shoulders. Aruna, a brother of Garuda, was born deformed through premature hatching of the egg. So Garuda was left in the egg for hundreds of years before it was hatched. That is why he was desperately hungry when he was born.

VALMIKI — Author of the world famous Sanskrit epic, the Ramayana, the life of Rama. Originally Valmiki was a robber. One day the sight of the suffering of a crane whose mate was shot dead by a fowler with an arrow moved him so much that he recited the first verse known in history. The words in metre and rhyme came out of his lips without any effort. Later through divine grace he turned into a saint and a sage.

THE BREAK

THE COVER UNDER WHICH WEDDED EYES FIRST MEET — This refers to the Indian custom of *Subha-Dristi* or auspicious seeing. The eyes of Indian brides are supposed to meet those of their bridegrooms for the first time during the marriage ceremony under a piece of cloth held above their heads as a cover, shutting out all others.

LAST NIGHT

SITAR — Large Indian string instrument with fretted finger board and a gourd at the lower end. Originally it carried only three strings. Most sitars now have five strings while the larger models have also a number of ancillary, strings. (lit. three strings from *Si*, three and *Tar*, strings).

NECTAR

NECTAR — (*Amrita*, lit. the deathless), what makes one immortal.

AMIYA — Name of a girl in Bengali (lit. sweet as nectar, from *Amrita*, nectar).

BHUIYANS — In the fifteenth century Bengal was ruled by twelve chiefs who were like the barons of mediaeval England. They were practically independent of the Emperors against whom they used to combine at times. (lit. landlord, from *Bhumi*, land).

LOCHANDIGHI — Name of tank or large reservoir of water. (*Lochan*, eye and *Dighi*, a large oblong sheet of water like an artificial lake).

KOKIL — The Indian cuckoo.

KALMI — An aquatic plant with shiny green leaves.

KUNJAKISHORE — A man's name in Bengali. (*Kunja*, bower or garden and *Kishore*, a young lad).

RAI.BAHADUR — A title of honour bestowed previously on Hindu landlords and government servants. (*Rai*, prince and *Bahadur*, valiant).

MADHOPARA — Name of village. (*Para*, a neighbourhood or a village).

MAHIBHUSHAN — A man's name in Bengali. (lit. ornament of the world, from *Mahi*, the world and *Bhushan*, ornament).

INCOMPREHENSIBLE

PATRALEKHA — Name of a book. (lit. letter-writing, from *Patra*, letter and *Lekha*, writing).

KUSALSEN — A man's name in Bengali. (*Kusal*, clever and *Sen*, chief or knight).

NABANI — A girl's name in Bengali. (lit. butter freshly made from cream or curds. Hence soft and pliable).

MUMTAZ — Wife of Emperor Shah Jahan who built at Agra the world famous white marble mausoleum over her remains known as the Taj Mahal. (*Taj*, crown and *Mahal*, palace).

THE SCRIPTURES SAY EVEN THE GODS KNOW IT NOT — The reference is to a Sanskrit saying that, not to speak of mere men, even the gods do not know about a woman's character.

DISAPPOINTED

PHULI — A girl's name in Bengali.

HOWRAH—Industrial town on the west bank of the Hooghly opposite Calcutta, famous for its railway terminus.

HOWRAH BRIDGE — The Road bridge connecting Calcutta with Howrah.

SYAMALI

SYAMALI — Possessing soft green beauty (from *Syama*, green).

JAM — Indian tree with thick dark foliage, producing dark purple fruit which look like black grapes, except that they are slightly longer in shape. The fruit is sour or sour-sweet.

SRAVAN — The Bengali month corresponding to the period from the middle of July to the middle of August when the rainfall in Bengal is extremely heavy.

DOYEL — Indian song-bird with two white stripes on either side of its black body.

SAHANA — One of the Raginis or subsidiary melody forms of Indian music, there being six Raginis under each of the six Ragas.

INDEX OF FIRST LINES

As the professor tried to explain	63
Every day I call you by your name	9
I came unasked	29
In a railway compartment we met by chance	49
In my life I have missed many riches	24
Last night	52
Let me listen	14
My consciousness has coloured the emerald green	6
Oh flute-player	40
Oh green earth	72
Pity, in place of love	3
Since the first daybreak of human age	19
The moment I got back from Phuli's house	67
The night is pitch dark	12
There is no time at all	70
We were neighbours	32
When coming away bidding her goodbye	55
With the heavy wind soaked by nightlong rain	22
You came with the soft grace	45
You stand outside	17
You were then between darkness and light	1

