

New Indian Playwrights

A successful septuagenarian writer sets out to dictate his autobiography to a quizzical young scholar; but it remains unwritten, as he comes up against a whole area of incomprehension peopled by the women in his life, a rival writer and an illegitimate son. Different versions of the truth clash irreconcilably, and he comes to confront an ego that he had never really known.

Autobiography is a recent work by Mahesh Elkunchwar, one of the foremost contemporary Marathi playwrights, who has written such widely staged plays as *Party* and *Old Stone Mansion*.

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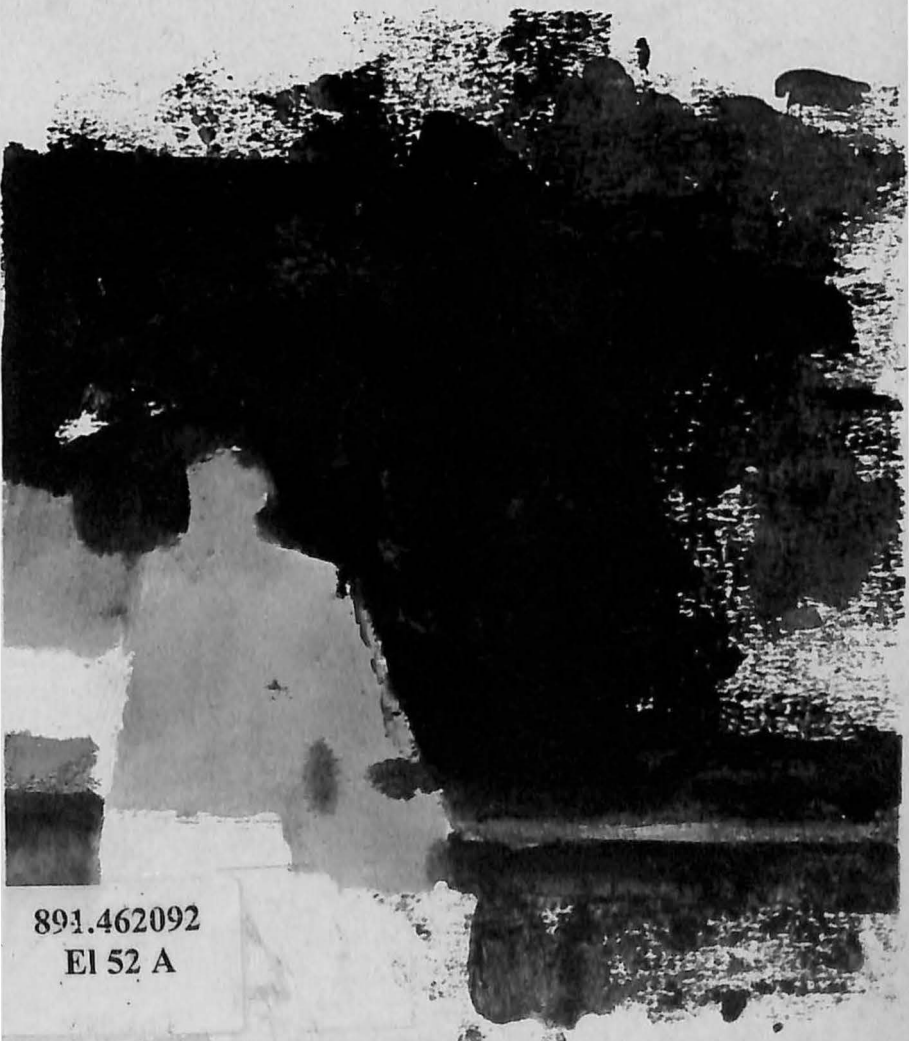
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AUTOBIOGRAPHY ĀTMAKATHĀ

Mañesh Elkunchwar



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Mahesh Elkunchwar
Autobiography

NEW INDIAN PLAYWRIGHTS

Badal Sircar, *Three Plays*

Vijay Tendulkar, *Ghashiram Kotwal*

Mahasweta Devi, *Five Plays*

Utpal Dutt, *The Great Rebellion*

Mahesh Elkunchwar, *Two Plays*

Mahesh Elkunchwar, *Party*

Mahesh Elkunchwar, *Old Stone Mansion*

Satish Alekar, *The Dread Departure*

Kavalam Narayana Panikkar,

The Right to Rule and The Domain of the Sun

Chandrasekhar Kambar, *Jokumaraswami*

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

(*Ātmakathā*)

Mañeś Elkuñchwār

Translated from the Marathi by

PRATIMA KULKARNI



Seagull Books

CALCUTTA 1989



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A Note from the Publisher

Autobiography (Ātmakathā) by Mahesh Elkunchwar forms part of Seagull Books' New Indian Playwrights series, which aims at building up a comprehensive and representative series of new Indian plays covering the period from the sixties downwards in the major languages—theatrically major—of the country. In the next four years, all the significant new Indian playwrights should be featuring on the Seagull list.

Playwrights appearing for the first time with Seagull Books will include Satish Alekar from Marathi, Chandrasekhar Kambar from Kannada, K. N. Panikkar from Malayalam, and Ratan Thiyam from Manipur; while there will be new titles by Badal Sircar, Vijay Tendulkar and Utpal Dutt who are on our list already.

Ms Kamal Sanyal has helped us in comparing the translation closely with the original. The photographs are courtesy Roop-Wedha.

Introduction

In a recent interview Mahesh Elkunchwar (b. 9 October 1939) told me:

Ātmakathā can be called a family play. But at the same time it is about writing, about creativity, the one thing that has haunted me, the relationship between the artist and his art, the reality and the art, between experience taken at the imaginative level, as a direct experience, and as experience narrated to you—you can take experience at three–four levels. So all these things have come together in *Ātmakathā*. Ultimately what remains, what is most important about *Ātmakathā*, is the relationship between the three individuals.

Three or four? For the real climax of the play is at the point where Pradnya, the bright young researcher, confesses her love for the ageing writer Rajadhyaksha, giving him at once a kind of justification in terms of human worth, something that he had come to lose by then in the face of the probing, sceptical questions of Pradnya herself and the incontrovertible evidence piled up against him of his 'use' of the women in his life and his tampering with truth in his writing whenever he was dealing with real life relationships. In the original production in Marathi, this is the one point where both Dr Lagoo (as Rajadhyaksha) and Shubhangi Sangwai (as Pradnya) come out of their role-playing in the celebrity–provocative interviewer game and expose themselves to each other. In a piece of inspired acting, Dr Lagoo registers the shocked realization of yet another difficult relationship opening up before him and his instinctive withdrawal from it. As Ms Sangwai 'hugs his knees, puts her head against his knees and cries disconsolately,' Dr Lagoo lets the genial, complacent mask slip off his face, leaving it all drained, as he makes an awkward effort to break loose of her hold. All that Rajadhyaksha can say in the play, once 'gradually he realizes what it means,' is 'Oh God!' and then after a while, 'with his hand on her head'—'Come . . . come my idiot, come . . .' But, in an interview, Mahesh elaborates :

She doesn't say it in so many words, but we realize that this twenty-three year old girl is completely involved with this eighty year old man. It comes as a big shock to this old man because he has looked upon this girl as a daughter or grand-daughter, and he says, 'My God! We never understand each other, we never understand.'¹

A play that opens with the young researcher challenging at almost every point the moral credentials of the successful writer, bringing to the surface issues like his decline from nationalist-patriotic commitments to playing safe in the risky days of the Emergency, his envious disregard/denial of the achievements of his peers, his deliberate distortion of facts in his autobiographical fiction in a single-minded endeavour to project himself as the victim with the heart of gold, reaches its natural climax when the judge herself succumbs to the magic of his personality. The more the woman exposes the man, the more she sees his vulnerability, the more she sees into him. As Elkunchwar says:

She has seen through this man and his work and literature, and she has known the phoneyess of his writing, and yet there is something of a pure core about this man, and she has fallen in love with that.²

It is the same element of mystery in human relationships that hangs over the threesome at the centre of the play, the complex of relationships that Elkunchwar breaks up into a fascinating confrontation of contradictory versions in flashbacks, taking care all the time that 'the present scenes gradually slid into the flashbacks and did not come as a big bang with a change of light or anything . . .'.³ As the versions clash, the truth recedes into mystery. But what comes through most powerfully is the individual drama of each one of these individuals finding strategies, founding them on small lies, to justify themselves and survive their private disasters. There is art in the subtle divergences between the versions, divergences that eventually amount to contradictions. For a second climax, Elkunchwar chooses the 'disclosure' that Vasanti's son is Rajadhyaksha's, with its immediate impact on Uttara. By positioning it as a second climax, and with the delicate play on Rajadhyaksha and Uttara dialling each other simultaneously and failing to connect, Elkunchwar rubs off its melodramatic edge, even as he plants doubts about the truth of Vasanti's claim.

The play ends with the walls moving away to place Rajadhyaksha, Uttara and Vasanti as puny figures against an enormously expansive backdrop of stars, offering a kind of radical violation of the little game of astronomical observation that Rajadhyaksha has been shown playing earlier. It is the reality of space/distance that takes over from the game and reduces Rajadhyaksha and his partners in life to an insignificance that reduces at once the autobiographical pretensions of the successful writer to a similar insignificance.

In an earlier version, the play ended slightly but significantly

differently with Uttara collapsing when she fails to connect—‘and the receiver remains dangling. In A Anantrao puts the phone down dejectedly and slumps into the chair. Stares out onto the sky.’ Vasanti runs to Uttara, crying ‘Tai, Tai!’ ‘Vasanti tries to lift Uttara. Uttara is dead. Vasanti gasps.’ It is only then that she rings up. ‘Phone rings in A. Anantrao does not get up. Does not move. Keeps staring at the stars. Phone keeps ringing. Lights fade out. Just a faint light remains on Rajadhyaksha. Walls of the house open out, slowly disappearing. Anantrao sitting alone under the canopy of the sky bursting with stars. Looking very small, very alone. Phone keeps ringing. Fade out.’ The difference the changed version makes is in terms of de-sentimentalization and in opening out from the narrow Rajadhyaksha experience to the larger one of the threesome set against an uncertain cosmic space.

In a troubled life with writing, that has at least once imposed a creative silence on him for eight long years, Elkunchwar obviously takes a sceptical view of the claims of authenticity that writers too often protest too much. *Ātmakathā* brings all such pretensions to doubt.

SAMIK BANDYOPADHYAY

¹ Mahesh Elkunchwar, interviewed by Pratibha Agarwal for the Natya Shodh Sansthan archives, Calcutta, recorded on 23 February 1987.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

Autobiography (Ātmakathā) was performed for the first time in the original Marathi by Roop-Wedha at the Experimental Theatre, NCPA, Bombay, on 25 September 1988, with the following cast:

RAJADHYAKSHA

Dr Shreeram Lagoo

PRADNYA

Shubhangi Sangwai

UTTARA

Jyoti Subhaschandra

VASANTI

Suhas Joshi

DIRECTION

Pratima Kulkarni

SOUND

Sandeep Kshemakalyani

SETS

Shyam Bhutkar

LIGHTING

Kumar Sohoni

The stage is divided into three sections: A, B and C; A to the left, B to the right and C in the centre. A shows the study of a wealthy, sophisticated and successful writer: lots of books, a painting or two, a plush leather sofa with a tall lamp next to it and a cane stool in front. B suggests a comfortable drawing-room; C is totally empty.

Evening has just fallen when the play opens, with some stars seen rising in the sky. As the play advances, more and more stars come into view, and, as the play ends, the sky dazzles with stars all over.

Curtain rises to show Rajadhyaksha (age 78) sitting on the sofa, Pradnya (22-24) on the cane stool. A tape-recorder between the two.

RAJA. . . . Though Tilak died in 1920, Gandhi had already become popular around 1915. After '20, people had already begun to forget Tilak and his politics. The entire country was coming under the spell of Gandhi's thoughts and personality. The morality inherent in his political thinking and the spiritual foundation of that thinking was fascinating to the Indian mind. Writers, too, could not stay away from that impact. I started writing around 1930, and writing anything that was not linked with the national movement I found sacrilegious at that time. The word 'commitment' has come into being only in the last one decade. In our youth, we had not heard this word. But we were committed nonetheless to our national movement, to our idealism that came so naturally that we were not even aware of it. Idealism and commitment were no fashion in those days. They flowed in our blood . . .

PRADNYA(*switching off the recorder*). Wait . . .

RAJA. Now what?

PRADNYA. Let's check if it's recording . . .

RAJA. Must you keep doing this forever? I lose my link every time.

PRADNYA. What's the great use of your link if it doesn't record?
 RAJA. A smart, modern girl like you . . . can't you even operate a simple tape-recorder?

Pradnya starts the recorder. The last two lines of Rajadhyaksha's speech are heard played back.

PRADNYA. Yeah, it's OK. (*Putting it off as his speech ends*)
 Excellent! Continue . . .

RAJA. What?

PRADNYA. Go ahead!

RAJA. What was I saying?

PRADNYA. Idealism and commitment were no fashion in those days, they flowed in our blood . . .

RAJA. Of course that's how it was.

PRADNYA. OK, OK! Go ahead!

RAJA. Not now.

PRADNYA. Why?

RAJA. No.

PRADNYA. But why?

RAJA. I've lost interest.

PRADNYA. How can you lose interest every two minutes?

RAJA. Why did you have to break my link?

PRADNYA. Keep looking for an excuse.

RAJA. Won't you ever think of my age? How can you be so cruel?

PRADNYA. Oh yes, I have thought of that. It's just the right age for someone to write one's autobiography. Don't waste time now. Or you'll be gone, leaving it half done.

RAJA. Where?

PRADNYA. What do you mean, where . . . ?

RAJA. Huh! I am just about nearing seventy.

PRADNYA. Do not conceal your age, mister! Not like women, I mean. But you men are just as vain. You completed seventy-eight this year in July. Your birth-date—July 21, 1908. Gurupurnima.

RAJA. Did you have to probe into my birth-date?

PRADNYA. It's my job! For my research on your work I have to get your bio-data all correct.

RAJA. Research, like hell! What's a stupid ass like you going to get out of it? . . . Why don't you change your name?

- Pradnya is such a misnomer for a perfect idiot like you.
- PRADNYA. OK, so I'm an idiot. Fine. But when I read your books, discerningly at that, and I had to—oh, it was such a bore, had to read in between yawns . . .
- RAJA. Some cheek!
- PRADNYA. I realized that I wasn't going to get my hands on to anything there. Just some mushy idealism. That one, flowing in your blood . . .
- RAJA. Cheek!
- PRADNYA. Only your poems are real. Specially the earliest ones. Such intense, beautiful lyric poems . . . Almost ethereal. Where's all that gone now?
- RAJA. Is this the beginning of another inquisition?
- PRADNYA. Sorry. Shall we start? I'm switching it on.
- RAJA. Why don't we have some tea? You make good tea, you know.
- PRADNYA. Go on, pamper yourself.
- RAJA. You started it. I never invited you, come, come, pamper me . . .
- PRADNYA. I had to fake all that, you see. You would never have agreed to talk otherwise.
- RAJA. Whatever, whatever . . . but now you're trapped.
- PRADNYA. Trapped? That's true. You've got me trapped with this autobiography of yours . . .
- RAJA. You lazybones! Do you realize how lucky you are? A celebrated, great writer like me is dictating his autobiography to you. To you! Do you realize what it means? Thousands will give anything for a chance like this.
- PRADNYA. I'm not one of those, in any case.
- RAJA. I'll put in a word of thanks for you in the foreword.
- PRADNYA. I won't let you go at that.
- RAJA. OK, now tell me the truth. Don't you find my narrative interesting?
- PRADNYA. Not one bit.
- RAJA. No?
- PRADNYA. Don't have such fascinating illusions.
- RAJA. Then what made you . . .
- PRADNYA. I agreed to take this on because it's going to be useful for my thesis. Purely ulterior motive, Padmabhushan

- Rajadhyaksha!
- RAJA. What a heartless generation!
- PRADNYA. But now I'm not even quite sure of its usefulness.
- RAJA. I'm filling you in on such important information!
- PRADNYA. But all that is available anywhere. What's so new about what you're saying?
- RAJA. Don't get cheeky.
- PRADNYA. Firstly, when you talk about history, you're full of vague statements.
- RAJA. Hmm.
- PRADNYA. Let me make the tea.
- RAJA. Sit down. What's vague about what I'm saying?
- PRADNYA. I did this, I thought that . . . I mean it's OK and all that, but, what I did not do; why I did not do what I did not do—you just don't discuss such things, you don't even mention them!
- RAJA. What was there I didn't mention?
- PRADNYA. Mardhekar was almost your contemporary. You never mentioned him. He gave a new sensibility to the Marathi reader, whether you like it or not. But what do you think of his contribution? Or the Mardhekar wave just came and went and left you dry and unruffled?
- RAJA. Mardhekar and I lived different kinds of lives. He was a bureaucrat. I was in the mainstream of the nationalist movement. I went to jail in '42, I gave up my job, my security . . .
- PRADNYA. Right. You speak of all these things—eloquently. Going to jail in '42 keeps appearing again and again. But why did you not go to jail in '75? How did your idealism adapt itself to the Emergency? . . . I mean, I have nothing to say if it did adapt—no value judgment—but, if we knew why you did that, we may perhaps understand you better.
- RAJA. Did any writer go to jail during the Emergency? All . . .
- PRADNYA. Durgabai did.
- RAJA. It was pointless to get holed up in a jail. You could do so much by staying out. And we did that. Travelled all over Maharashtra for the Janata Party, making speeches.
- PRADNYA. But you still held on to your Padmabhushan. Phanishwarnath Renu did not. You did not resign from

- the government committees.
- RAJA. Are you trying to find fault with . . .
- PRADNYA. No. I've said it already. No value judgment. But we must know what you did not do and why.
- RAJA. How does that matter?
- PRADNYA. It matters because if we understand you as a person, it may help my generation a little to make some sense of your writing. Perhaps!
- RAJA(*sadly*). My writing is going to end with my generation, Pradnya.
- PRADNYA. But it should not.
- RAJA. I know. But it will, all the same. I know that for your generation, my work, if they read it at all, is dated, *passee*. (*Pause.*) At times it is *passee* even for me . . . You read it today for your research. There may be some five or ten other students. But who knows, after twenty years, will I even be remembered as a writer?
- PRADNYA. Why is it so? (*Pause.*) How come you're so damned confident that you'll be forgotten? Why don't you explore this in your autobiography? You know, perhaps your success as a writer will be determined by this self-exploration? After all, isn't any autobiography meant to be self-exploration? . . . Am I talking too much? (*Pause.*) Did I hurt you? (*Pause.*) I didn't mean it that way. (*Pause.*) Please say something.
- RAJA. I'm way beyond all that now. (*A clean laugh.*) I got everything in life, you see . . . Lots of honours, foreign trips, Padmabhushan—yeah! That leaves out only the Jnanpeeth.
- PRADNYA. Four more years. You've got to be at least eighty for the Jnanpeeth. That's the main qualification.
- RAJA. Oh, I'll get that too. There isn't much competition in the above-eighty category . . . When did these irrelevant factors become more important than writing? I didn't even notice.
- PRADNYA. Then why don't you try to get at the root of these things? As a person, you are so frank and honest, but as a writer you're—
- RAJA. Vague!
- PRADNYA. Or you simplify things, steep them in imagination, at times glorify. Doesn't the truth get smothered by all

this?

RAJA. If I only knew what the truth was! Only then could I've answered your question.

PRADNYA. Uttarabai has published your letters. Do they or don't they tell the truth?

RAJA(*enraged*). You read those?

PRADNYA. I did.

RAJA. She has published them out of context. Only some at that. Not all. And only mine. Where are the letters she wrote to me?

PRADNYA. I'm sorry.

RAJA. Why should you be sorry? The damned book is available at any corner, any roadside stall. But I never thought Uttara could stoop so low.

PRADNYA. She shouldn't have published them without your consent. I mean that. (*Pause.*)

RAJA. She did ask me.

PRADNYA. And when you didn't give . . .

RAJA. I did. (*Long pause.*)

PRADNYA. But the newspapers are bursting with controversies as to . . .

RAJA. Is the recorder off?

PRADNYA(*looks at the recorder*). . . whether she was justified or not justified about publishing those letters. There's a general impression that you were not aware of any such thing.

RAJA. Uttara telephoned.

PRADNYA. She did? On her own? Herself?

RAJA. She thought that was enough.

PRADNYA. Then why don't you explain?

RAJA. She should. It's her book.

PRADNYA. But you are being wronged. And does she have your consent in writing?

RAJA. I said we talked on the phone.

PRADNYA. Which means she has nothing to prove that she has your consent.

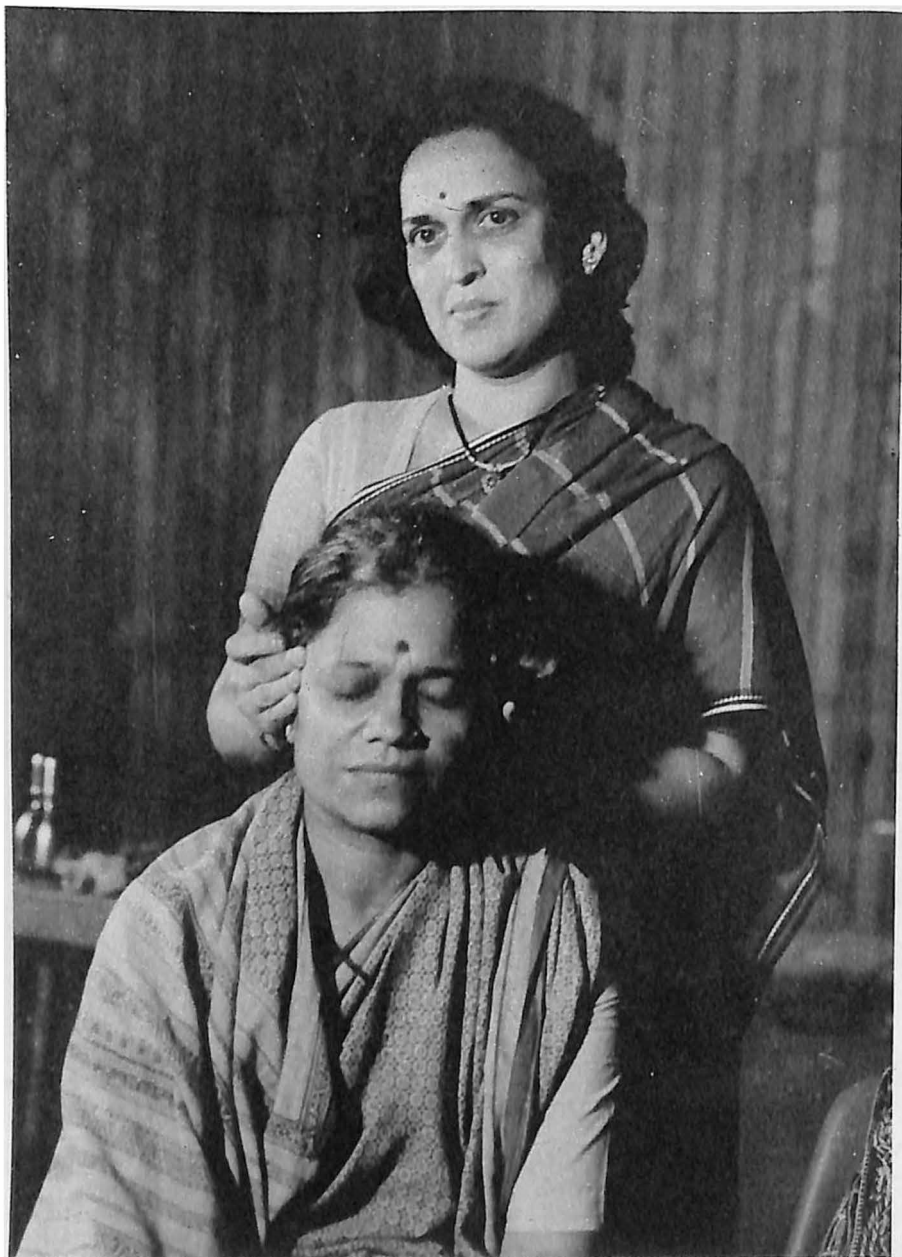
RAJA. But if she says she has it, am I going to say anything else? Am I going to lie?

Quiet. Rajadhyaksha laughs. Pradnya too.

RAJA. See how confident you are about my dishonesty! . . . I



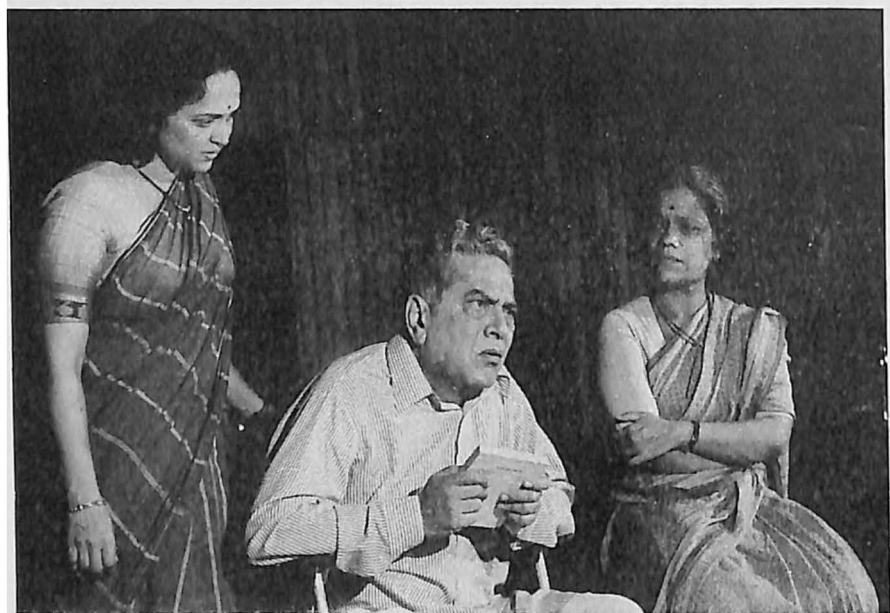
Above The young research student, Pradnya (Shubhangi Sangwai) shares a relaxed exchange with the elderly writer Rajadhyaksha (Dr Shreeram Lagoo). *Below* A tense moment between the two sisters Uttara (Jyoti Subhaschandra) and Vasanti (Suhas Joshi).



Vasanti and Uttara move from bitter resentment to a recognition of the bonds between them.



A moment of truth—Rajadhyaksha realizes how Pradnya really feels about him.



In an unusual confrontation, characters challenge their creator: Uttara/Urmila and Vasanti/Vasudha with Rajadhyaksha.

did not give the consent in writing because when she rang up . . .

Phone rings. Rajadhyaksha gets up, still talking. Light on Pradnya fades out as he walks towards the phone and fades in on Uttara in B.

- RAJA. . . . I didn't feel the necessity. Never thought there would be such a furore—such mudslinging . . . Hello!
- UTTARA. Rajadhyaksha?
- RAJA. Uttara?
- UTTARA. How did you know?
- RAJA. How? (*Trying to remain calm.*) Your voice—
- UTTARA. What's wrong with yours?
- RAJA. Age.
- UTTARA. I called because—
- RAJA. It's so long since I heard you last. Thirty years.
- UTTARA. You see . . . I . . .
- RAJA. I'm so glad.
- UTTARA. I meant to write, but—
- RAJA. So you could drop your pride at last. For years I went on writing to you and for years you never wrote back! Aren't we old enough to forget the past?
- UTTARA(*suddenly*). I'm publishing a book!
- RAJA(*happy*). Good. Oh, good!
- UTTARA. So I thought I should . . .
- RAJA. Lovely. Is it a novel or—
- UTTARA. No, not a novel.
- RAJA. I see! I told you so often—remember?—you should write, you see life more closely than I do; you're more intense—why didn't you just get up and come here? It's thirty years now. Things have changed.
- UTTARA. It's not a novel.
- RAJA. Poems? Essays?
- UTTARA. Letters.
- RAJA. Why don't we forget the past, Uttara?
- UTTARA. Who does the cooking?
- RAJA. There's a *bai*. And I have a boy called Baban. He stays here with me. And then the driver's there.
- UTTARA. Is your astronomy still on?
- RAJA. Oh yes! My stars haven't forsaken me. Every night they

- rise for me. Ever so loyally.
- UTTARA. Vasanti said you write in some journal about the stars and planets.
- RAJA. When did she start reading such stuff?
- UTTARA. She met a girl who's doing some research on your work.
- RAJA. Pradnya. She had asked me before she went. Called on Vasanti. Vasanti still has the manuscript of one of my novels. Do you meet her?
- UTTARA. Yes. Who else does she have?
- RAJA. And you?
- UTTARA (*laughs*). Well, I have my arthritis, my blood pressure—
- RAJA. Asthma?
- UTTARA. Oh yes, asthma too! It follows me everywhere. Faithfully.
- RAJA. I hope you're taking care.
- UTTARA. Oh, let that be. It's long distance from Pune. Won't waste time. So you don't mind?
- RAJA. How can I mind?
- UTTARA. They are your letters. I only received them.
- RAJA. You'll print them?
- UTTARA. Why not?
- RAJA (*sighs*). What will you get out of it?
- UTTARA. Heard you're writing your autobiography.
- RAJA. So?
- UTTARA. People should know my side of the story too.
- RAJA. You'll never change, Uttara. (*Pause.*) Give them to me. They'll come in handy for my book.
- UTTARA. Have you changed then?
- RAJA (*frustrated and angry*). Do as you like.
- UTTARA. Well, I have asked you now. I wouldn't like people to say that I didn't go to the formality of asking your permission.
- RAJA. Why don't we meet?
- UTTARA. Take care.

Both wait for the other to hang up. They put down the receivers together. Rajadhyaksha walks towards Pradnya, talking. Light on Uttara fades out and fades in on Pradnya and Rajadhyaksha.

- RAJA. . . . She wanted to meet me. I could feel that. But she didn't want to say it. There was a tremor in her voice.

Age has already set in on her. She's had to face a lot too. I said, come, let's meet—what was the point anyway—yet . . . so finally I told her to do as she liked.

PRADNYA. But that, surely, was no consent.

RAJA. She published the letters, people gorged on our lives. What did she get out of it? She had so much else to tell. She was a dancer in those days! Gave it up when we married. Went on to socialism with my socialist friends. Anyway, it doesn't matter anymore. Aren't you going home? And where's your tea?

PRADNYA. I'll get it in a minute.

RAJA. Relax. Baban will make some.

PRADNYA. God! His tea! How can you even think of drinking that stuff?

RAJA. Don't hang around for too long. That chappy of yours will curse me if you're late.

PRADNYA. Who? Pamyra?

RAJA. Prince Charming!

PRADNYA. We aren't meeting today.

RAJA. Really? Had a fight or something?

PRADNYA. Yeah.

RAJA. What else can you do anyway? You've been picking fights all day with me.

PRADNYA(*querulous*). When did I ever fight with you?

RAJA. All through the day you've been telling me that I'm a bad, mediocre writer.

PRADNYA. Sorry.

RAJA. Now, I don't mind, because it's true, a little of it anyway.

PRADNYA. I didn't pick a fight with Pramod. He did.

RAJA. Serious? Fighting can be great fun when you're in love, but then you should never stretch it beyond a—

PRADNYA. He never has the guts to hold on. I do.

RAJA. You are a marvellous idiot in any case.

PRADNYA. Now even he has learnt to talk like this from you. Hardly met you once and he's so impressed and all that. All because you ignored me and talked to him. That flattered him and he decided he likes you.

RAJA. But I liked him. That hulk of yours.

PRADNYA. Has a flat nose. And is getting fatter by the moment.

- God, how he eats! It's obscene!
- RAJA. Go, patch up with him. You'll be sorry all your life if he gets out of your clutches.
- PRADNYA. How dare he get out! Know what he'll do? He'll smoulder, and then he'll eat and eat and eat for two days and then—he'll come to me. On his knees!
- RAJA. Such fascinating ego! Sitting pretty on your nose. And are your eyes a little red?
- PRADNYA. How very imaginative! Do you or don't you want tea? I'm making some for myself.
- RAJA. OK. And don't you cry in the kitchen.

Pradnya goes into the kitchen in a huff, leaving Rajadhyaksha restless. Finally he gets up, takes a peep at Pradnya inside, goes to the phone stealthily and dials. Light on B. Phone rings. Vasanti—50—enters and picks it up.

- VASANTI. Hullo!
- RAJA. Uttara?
- VASANTI. No, it's Vasanti—who's—
- RAJA. Sorry.
- VASANTI. Anantrao ?
- RAJA. No, I mean—I wanted to speak to Uttara.
- VASANTI. Tai's in bed. I'll wake her up.
- RAJA. In bed? At this hour? Why, is there . . .
- VASANTI. She's a little unwell.
- RAJA. Has the doctor . . .
- VASANTI. He came. There's nothing to worry about. It's just ordinary fever. *(Pause.)*
- RAJA. OK—
- VASANTI. Is there any message ?
- RAJA. No, no. I just wanted to tell her not to be upset. A lot's being written about the book, so . . .
- VASANTI. She's not upset.
- RAJA. The foreword is very good. Very dignified.
- VASANTI. I'll tell her that. *(Pause.)*
- RAJA. How are you?
- VASANTI. I'm all right.
- RAJA. What's all right?
- VASANTI. All right! What else?
- RAJA. This is rather unexpected, isn't it? Talking to you after

- so long—
- VASANTI. Thirty years!
- RAJA. You still remember!
- VASANTI. I didn't make any particular effort to forget. It's not that significant.
- RAJA. You didn't even let me justify—
- VASANTI. I didn't want you to. I didn't want any justification from you and I wasn't going to give you any. I'll hang up.
- RAJA. Look after Uttara. *(Pause.)*
- VASANTI. She doesn't like my coming here much.
- RAJA. Hmm.
- VASANTI. She doesn't like Salim.
- RAJA. I'll hang up.
- VASANTI. Won't you ask who's Salim?
- RAJA. That painter.
- VASANTI. And my lover. Of now. We're living together. In puritan Pune.
- RAJA. Shocking people has always been your hobby.
- VASANTI. Tai wants me to leave him. I listened to her once. She wanted me to leave you, I did. Now I'm not that obedient. OK. *(Hangs up.)*

Light on Rajadhyaksha fades out. Vasanti in light in B. Uttara enters.

- VASANTI. Why did you get up? Lie down.
- UTTARA. Who was it? *(Pause.)*
- VASANTI *(trying to gauge Uttara's reaction)*. Anantrao.
- UTTARA *(unruffled)*. Hm.
- VASANTI. You don't look surprised. *(Pause.)* Does he ring often?
- UTTARA. Second time in all these years. Oh no, this leg!
- VASANTI. Let me massage it. *(She massages Uttara's leg.)*
- UTTARA. Thought he was telling you something about the book.
- VASANTI. The newspapers are in great glee over it.
- UTTARA. Vasu, why don't you dye your hair now? It's more white than black.
- VASANTI. Oh, never mind. I don't even dance any more.
- UTTARA. I shouldn't have published those letters.
- VASANTI. It's too late now.
- UTTARA. But for his phone call that day, it wouldn't have ever entered my mind to publish them.

- VASANTI. People have got good fodder to chew on. A repeat performance when his autobiography comes.
- UTTARA. Oh, he'll not write much. (*Laughs.*) Some bland, vague stuff. Don't you know him? Readers will not get at anything. And the truth, never! That has always been his style.
- VASANTI. Then why did you have to publish his letters?
- UTTARA. He thought I'd use them. He had the nerve to think that. That made me mad. Thought let people know the truth. They have such horrible misconceptions about you and me.
- VASANTI. Will they know the truth from your book?
- UTTARA. They are all his letters.
- VASANTI. That's it, only his. Where are the letters you wrote to him? (*Pause. Uttara a little restless.*)
- UTTARA. I didn't write to him much. I was never good at letter-writing. You know that. That's enough, Vasu. Don't tire yourself.
- VASANTI. Then don't call him vague.
- UTTARA. Vasu, you still feel so deeply about him, don't you?
- VASANTI. Maybe the truth is on your side. But he too should have the right to state his case. He shouldn't be made to put up with any injustice.
- UTTARA(*after a moment's pause*). You talk as if you left him only to burden me with a favour. I'll have to live with this gratitude for ever now.
- VASANTI. I felt guilty. You were his wife.
- UTTARA(*smiles*). Never.
- VASANTI. Believe me, Tai. I wasn't very happy to—
- UTTARA. Nonsense. That's not true. There have been many men who have come into your life and gone away. I was just an excuse for you. I am sure, in a year or two, you would have walked out on him in any case.
- VASANTI. You can be so cruel and yet laugh about it. (*Pause.*) He was the first man in my life. (*Pause.*)
- UTTARA. Enough is enough, Vasanti, now get married to Salim. Let Dilip have a father, a home.
- VASANTI. Oh yeah? Father and son, nearly the same age!
- UTTARA. Even Dilip should be getting married now. Tell him. He's nearing thirty.

- VASANTI. As if he listens to me! Every time I talk to him it's the same answer. Not yet!
- UTTARA. I wish Devadatta had lived. That child would have had a father then.
- VASANTI. In a sense, Dilip does belong to Devadatta. (*Lost.*) I used to feel so secure when I was with him.
- UTTARA. He did have that something in him. And he had to die young. And how his name spelt insomnia to Anant! These writers just cannot stand the existence of each other. Pass that cushion to me. Why don't you stay for dinner? Salim's not back yet.
- VASANTI. Oh no. If he gets home suddenly he won't like it at all.
- UTTARA. You're still scared of him?
- VASANTI(*putting on*). Oh! You don't know his temper. He must have me around all the time. Dilip keeps calling me to Assam, but if I go, Salim will follow me all the way, there! (*Uttara stares at her.*) Why do you stare ? .
- UTTARA. No, nothing.
- VASANTI. You think it's all a lie.
- UTTARA. Did I say that, Vasu? Don't—(*Pause.*)
- VASANTI. People think we won't last long—only because Salim's younger than me. Anantrao must have been shocked when I told him.
- UTTARA. What did he say?
- VASANTI. No, he didn't say anything, I was just thinking . . . But he did seem upset about the book. How did he know you were going to publish those letters?
- UTTARA. News must have travelled. Dandekar might have talked. What publisher will dare upset him?
- VASANTI. He must have been furious.
- UTTARA. He phoned at midnight. I was awake reading. Wondered who it could be at that hour.

Phone rings. Uttara goes to the phone. Light only on Uttara as she speaks into the phone and on Rajadhyaksha in A.

- UTTARA. I don't sleep too well these days, so I stay up with some book. Hullo . . .
- RAJA. Uttara?
- UTTARA. Yes?
- RAJA. Uttara? (*Pause.*) Know me? (*Pause.*)

- UTTARA. Rajadhyaksha?
RAJA. Know my voice? *(Pause.)*
UTTARA. One hears it on the radio, TV. *(Pause.)*
RAJA. What's wrong with your voice?
UTTARA*(laughs)*. Age!
RAJA. How are you, Uttara?
UTTARA. OK.
RAJA. I knew your voice even after so many years. Thirty.
(Pause.) Heard about your book.
UTTARA*(after a moment or two)*. Who told you?
RAJA. Is it true?
UTTARA. Why do you ask?
RAJA. Give me those letters. I'm writing my autobiography. I want to do full justice to you. *(Pause.)*
UTTARA. You have my letters. Use them. *(Pause.)*
RAJA. All right. Take care of yourself.
UTTARA. Who does the cooking?
RAJA. There's a *bai*. And a boy called Baban. He stays here with me. And then the driver's there.
UTTARA. Is your astronomy still on?
RAJA. Yes, of course. My stars still rise for me. Ever so loyally. *(Pause.)* Why don't you come here, Uttara? It's been ages now.
UTTARA. Heard you write articles for some journal. How did you turn to that? Vasanti was telling me—she met a girl who's doing some research on your work.
RAJA. Pradnya. She had asked me before she went to see Vasanti. Vasanti still has the manuscript of one of my novels. You meet her?
UTTARA. Very often. She says who else do I have but her. I say I have my arthritis, my blood pressure . . . and my faithful asthma. Vasanti really looks after me.
RAJA. Is your decision final, Uttara?
UTTARA. It wasn't until now. Till you called I had thought I won't publish them.
RAJA. You should have at least asked me, as a formality.
UTTARA. Would you have given me the permission? And are you going to stick to all these formalities when you write your book?
RAJA. My book is an AUTOBIOGRAPHY ! *(Pause. In a calmer*

voice.) Give it a thought again. (*Pause.*) Take care. Let me know if you need anything. I'll just leave everything and go there.

UTTARA. Thank you. I don't think you'll have to. Take care. I'll hang up.

Both wait for the other to hang up. They put down the receivers together. Uttara walks to Vasanti. Light now on Vasanti.

UTTARA. Weren't you surprised when he called on his own?

VASANTI. I was. (*Pause.*) Hear he's really old now. He must have needed some excuse to get in touch.

UTTARA. He's not the type. Not the type at all. He would want people to come to him. And then wait for him. For days and days. Wouldn't even talk to them till their pride, their dignity was totally crushed. He's not someone who'll ring up on some pretext.

VASANTI. You're still so bitter. He must have changed now. Don't people mellow with age?

UTTARA. He kept asking me to see him. I almost gave in for a moment. He was afraid.

VASANTI. And were you happy that he was afraid?

UTTARA. No. Really it wasn't good . . . I saw the man change in front of my eyes! A pure lyric poet, gave himself totally to the freedom movement, went to jail—became so corrupt after Independence. Wanted suddenly to grab the price for all he did, like all Gandhians. No one could rise above that corruption, not even artists.

VASANTI. Priorities change as one grows up.

UTTARA. Hollow things gained importance for him. And you know what he lost in the bargain? His sensitivity. Small little sweet but valuable things. He lost them. He was exposed so badly in the Emergency. It was sad. Such a sensitive, tender man, so like a child—went on to become so callous—

VASANTI(*looking at Uttara getting emotional*). It's been a long time, Tai. Why don't you meet?

UTTARA. He wanted to come. I said, don't.

VASANTI. And you talk about his ego.

UTTARA. All we can get out of it is torment. And he was only interested in his letters. That was what really upset me.

- He knows me, Vasu, so what if we are separated?
 VASANTI. Things could be clearer if you met.
 UTTARA. Not at all. He would pressurize me. Very very subtly.
 Without my knowing it.
 VASANTI. You shouldn't let him.
 UTTARA. I wasn't sure of myself.
 VASANTI. Is that you talking, Tai? You've been so firm, like steel
 all your life.
 UTTARA. I'm getting old now. I can't resist much. It was best to
 avoid him. And he knows my weaknesses. (*Tired.*) I'm
 exhausted now, all worn out. He shouldn't see me like
 this.
 VASANTI(*smiles*). He would look after you.
 UTTARA. That he would. Certainly. He would do that and I would
 be won over. All over again. How he cares for the sick,
 Vasu! When I couldn't sleep for my asthma, he would be
 up with me all night—now hot water, now tea—and so
 gladly . . . (*Controls herself firmly.*)
 VASANTI. Easy, Tai, I'll get you some tea.

*Vasanti exits. Fade out on B, fade in on A. Rajadhyaksha in his
 chair. Pradnya brings in the tea.*

- PRADNYA. How's the tea?
 RAJA. Not enough sugar.
 PRADNYA. It's enough. You shouldn't take too much sugar now.
 RAJA. Don't be a tyrant. You do this to him too? He'll bolt
 from you.
 PRADNYA. He dare not.
 RAJA. Why not? He'll get a hundred girls like you.
 PRADNYA. Like hell! Hides under a table when he sees a girl.
 RAJA. Get married quick! I will give you away in marriage. At
 my age one feels one has missed all these sweet little
 things in life.
 PRADNYA. My mother will be most pleased. After father's death she
 finds everything a pain.
 RAJA. Where did you meet this . . . Mr Pamyā?
 PRADNYA. Know how much I had to lead him on? For six long
 months I was literally chasing him. And then, one
 morning, he comes to me and says, know what he says
 —says, 'Hullo!' Once I saw him at the bus-stop. I

crashed in there, braked almost on his toes and asked him, 'Want a lift?' He almost swooned.

RAJA. He can't have thought you a very nice girl at all!

PRADNYA. Yeah! So you know what I did? For a long time I wore only saris and all and then talked very little and then blushed and all and then told him, 'See how you've changed me!' And then, after that, he began to thaw. I mean he almost melted. Started sending me notes: 'You are my Kindly Light'; 'You are the sacred flower of God's own abode' etcetera, etcetera . . . Oh, you should have seen him, that six-footer giant, your 'hulk', writing such syrupy notes.

RAJA. So maybe he's read my novels after all.

PRADNYA. Then I had to do it. I mean I just had to. One day I sat before him and smoked. That did the trick, made him normal. Ah, falling in love is such a waste of time!

RAJA. You tell ME that! There was a time when I had rocked all Maharashtra with my celebrated affair. People still talk about it nostalgically.

PRADNYA. You've made that portion so insipid, so dead in your book. No heat, no blood . . .

RAJA. You mean, no warmth, no blood.

PRADNYA. It's frozen.

RAJA. Your diction's all wrong, darling.

PRADNYA. You should rewrite that portion in fact.

RAJA. I wanted to treat it with a lot of restraint.

PRADNYA. Restraint is not concealment.

RAJA. I didn't intend to conceal—but—

PRADNYA. Whatever may be your intention. But the reader is bound to feel: something is being withheld from me, I'm being cheated, then why do you want to tell me even this?—He's bound to feel that.

RAJA. Why should the reader lap up my life? What respect can he have for my personal anguish?

PRADNYA. He will have respect for your anguish if you respect it yourself in the first place. Depends on how you write it.

RAJA. Yeah, go on, teach me how to write now.

PRADNYA. I'm talking about the reader.

RAJA. Let the reader go to hell.

PRADNYA. Don't write then.

- RAJA. I will. Let's see who can stop me.
- PRADNYA. Who's bothering to stop you?
- RAJA. So?
- PRADNYA. You are not proving anything by being childish.
- RAJA. I'm NOT proving anything.
- PRADNYA(*trying not to laugh*). But you'll have to.
- RAJA. I won't. What do you say to that?
- PRADNYA. You have made a statement about restraint in writing. You say : 'The power, the strength in restrained writing is nowhere to be found in hysterical expression. But restraint is not stingy expression or a cover for one's limitations.'
- RAJA(*firmly*). I—have—never—said—this—anywhere.
- PRADNYA(*firmly*). You have. You have said this in Chapter III of your book of critical essays, *Sahitya Vichar*, in reference to Devadatta's poems. That's your only article on Devadatta. Your 'unfavourite' contemporary.
- RAJA. Another boomerang. You love to do this.
- PRADNYA. I am a research student.
- RAJA. You have no kindness, no compassion. You are not even civil. Get out of here.
- PRADNYA(*trying not to laugh*). Sure?
- RAJA. Oh sure! What do you think—?
- PRADNYA. Won't call me up again?
- RAJA. God! Haven't I spoilt you? (*Pause.*) There was a time when once a relationship was over, it was over for good. Snapped. And now I keep phoning you, asking you to come. Even when you are so callous about me.
- PRADNYA(*a little stunned. After a moment*). I'll give up the research, OK?
- RAJA. You're an idiot.
- PRADNYA. I'll take up some other subject.
- RAJA. Idiot. You think you'll get something as easy as this? (*Laughs.*)
- PRADNYA. Now, who's doing the—?
- RAJA. You will not change your subject.
- PRADNYA. But then you're so touchy about every little thing. In my thesis I'll write so many bad things about you. You will banish me from your life then! Won't even see my face!
- RAJA. I will, I will, OK? Write what you want. Who does even

that for us now?

PRADNYA. You're saying this now. What if you change? And whatever happens, at any cost, I don't want to lose you as a friend.

RAJA. Why? You must have friends by the dozen.

PRADNYA. I haven't.

RAJA. Pamyra?

PRADNYA. Oh Pamyra! He's the boy-friend! You know, I use your name a lot to make him jealous!

RAJA. Oh God!

PRADNYA. How he gets mad! Then I tell him that he doesn't understand me as much as you do. Then he says that I flirt with you!

RAJA. Oh no! I don't understand you all that well. Not at all in fact.

PRADNYA. Then why do you keep calling me?

RAJA. I feel good with you around. Not because I understand you. Maybe I wouldn't feel so good if I did. And then you want to be with someone because you feel good that way. Not because you understand or don't understand that person.

PRADNYA. Don't you ever feel like probing into your relationships? Analysing them—?

RAJA. Analysis means delving into complexities, getting entangled in them, means agony!

PRADNYA. And just imagine, you're known as the writer 'who plumbs the depths of human relationships!'

RAJA. Like writers, like critics. Once I used to believe that myself. And critics too need some label to tag on to you. I must have given them the idea myself to start with and they must have pounced on it.

PRADNYA. I never accepted that label.

RAJA. Your generation will not. When I look back now I feel differently. Of an iceberg you can at least see the tip. Of relationships you don't even see that much.

PRADNYA. Can I ask you something?

RAJA. Students need not observe such formalities—

PRADNYA. When you say you don't understand relationships, you mean relationships in life or the relationships characters have in your literature?

- RAJA. Both. Or rather, the relationships in my literature are attempts to understand the relationships in my life. Relationships I couldn't figure out.
- PRADNYA. Isn't it fantasizing?
- RAJA. At times, yes, when they do get mixed up.
- PRADNYA. Then where's the authenticity? And people like to think—
- RAJA. These relationships. They are valid only in the autonomous world of art. They have nothing to do with the external world—
- PRADNYA. —that this character is this person, that is that — or this character's realistic, that—
- RAJA. Why do you look for our characters in the external world?
- PRADNYA. Because you start there. Some novels are termed autobiographical!
- RAJA(*smiling*). Oh, I see!
- PRADNYA. In such novels, how much is reality, how much fantasy, how much their blend and how much absolute lies? And if we are not supposed to look for characters in the outside world, why should we call the novel autobiographical? And if we are not supposed to call it autobiographical, why are events in it taken from real life?
- RAJA. What are you trying to . . .
- PRADNYA. Give me an example . . .
- RAJA. You want me to talk about my novel! Say that!
- PRADNYA(*laughs*). *The Misty Path*. Must have been a very modern title in those days.
- RAJA. Why, even the novel was considered to be modern then! Was a great success. 'Success, in the long run, is the praise showered on you by your contemporaries. Even a Nobel Prize, if given posthumously, is useless in the ultimate analysis.' This definition is not mine. It is Devadatta's, whom your new generation has rediscovered recently.
- PRADNYA. You're talking like a real clever boy today. You deserve a prize!
- RAJA. Tea . . .
- PRADNYA. No, no.
- RAJA. . . . with lots of . . .

- PRADNYA. . . . not tea . . .
- RAJA. . . . sugar . . .
- PRADNYA. . . . no way. You'll stay awake all night.
- RAJA. That's mean.
- PRADNYA. You are trying to get out of talking about *The Misty Path*. I know you, mister!
- RAJA. You do take the cake for self-confidence, miss!
- PRADNYA. I saw the old newspaper clippings. What an uproar!
- RAJA. That was quite unexpected. Even for me.
- PRADNYA. And the similarity critics found between your life and the novel was the similarity in names! In real life it was—
- RAJA. Uttara and Vasanti, in the novel it was—
- PRADNYA. Urmila and Vasudha. And Anand for your Anant—
- RAJA. Charudatta for Devadatta—
- PRADNYA. Was the criticism in those days that juvenile?
- RAJA. Why? Weren't my names also that? I had taken enough care to remind the readers of real people all the time.
- PRADNYA. Now see? In the autobiography you hide everything under the name of restraint and in the novel—
- RAJA. Listen! On one level Urmila and Vasudha are Uttara and Vasanti, but on another, they aren't. That is only an attempt to understand them both.
- PRADNYA. One doesn't feel that. After reading the novel one feels: Poor poor hero! How he's caught between these two women and a silly rival like Charudatta! He becomes so poor-poor that all his poor-poorness becomes phoney. How can anybody get that poor-poor? I think that's where your novel fails.
- RAJA. Perhaps! But I did try to rise above personal sentiments and look at our relationships objectively, as an outsider. My only mistake was, I think, that I painted events just like they had happened in reality. Made only minor changes. Like made Vasanti a painter instead of a dancer—what she actually is.
- PRADNYA. Devadatta—Charudatta in the novel—is shown to be a puny man, a mediocre writer full of malice.
- RAJA. And he was the type, I think—
- PRADNYA. Shall we suppose then, that it is the limitation of your generation's perception?—
- RAJA. Died premature. If he had lived, maybe—

- PRADNYA. There is a renewed interest in him now. Joglekar has written three articles on him. Read those?
- RAJA. Joglekar is free to say anything.
- PRADNYA. Hmm. A lot of others have started feeling the same way. He was ahead of . . .
- RAJA. . . . But that doesn't mean . . .
- PRADNYA. . . . much ahead of his times . . .
- RAJA. . . . that I should feel the same. And time . . .
- PRADNYA. His contemporaries neglected him . . .
- RAJA. Now, that's not true. So often he was invited to various committees, seminars, conferences—but the spiteful fellow preferred to stay away. (*Pause.*)
- PRADNYA. I think we are talking about two different things. (*Pause.*) How did you feel when Vasanti went to live with him?
- RAJA. It was sad, humiliating. She left me, I could take that. But for whom? Some pauper of a writer without any talent. Why do you stare at me like that?
- PRADNYA. There are no photographs of his available.
- RAJA. He was quite OK to look at. But ridden with diseases. Alcohol.
- PRADNYA. And?
- RAJA. Why do you make me talk about him?
- PRADNYA. Because one doesn't find this in your autobiography.
- RAJA. I get a little scared of you, at times—
- PRADNYA(*smiles*). I'm not going to write about this or about you anywhere.
- RAJA. You know how small I am. And yet you come. We may start despising each other.
- PRADNYA. Who else do I have to go to? It's unbearable to sit at home. Baba's been dead for over fifteen years now, but my mother just refuses to get out of it. He was brilliant. And handsome!
- RAJA. Death is so gentle to the dead. The ones left behind have to face hell. Even this Devadatta—died with all the tensions between us intact. Leaving me to bear that pain alone till I pop off.
- PRADNYA. But were there really any tensions from his side? He's said such good things about you in one of his letters. In his last illness—
- RAJA(*with real concern*). He was in such pain! He had become an invalid.

A stubborn, obstinate fellow—a man of steel. Somewhere deep within I had great admiration for him. I didn't want him to break. I felt that strongly. Even at the end.

PRADNYA. He has written about it. What are the lines now? Yes . . . 'Mr Rajadhyaksha, like an elder brother, visits me often. I have seen the largeness of his heart. I have known how tender his feelings are. It has strengthened my love for him. I wouldn't have been able to face this illness without the help he has given me, economically, psychologically, spiritually!'

RAJA(*embarrassed*). So what? The fellow was a bit too emotional anyway.

PRADNYA. About your writing—

RAJA(*smiling*). Never said a word. Not a word. I wanted him to say good things about my writing. But he didn't do that even when he was dying. That was all right too. (*Pause.*) Vasanti went to him. He gave her a baby without any thought and went on to die. Lived a pauper and made her addicted to that kind of living . . . And what did Vasanti get out of all her adventures? Drilled as a C-grade dancer for a while and now runs 'dancing classes' for school-girls! And a new boy-friend every two-three years . . . the poor child must be going crazy with all the men in her life.

PRADNYA. But in the novel—

RAJA. Reality was too hard for me.

PRADNYA. So? In the novel, Vasaṅti, that is Vasudha, carries the hero's child. But Vasudha is left desolate and lonely, when the hero is thrown into prison for participation in the freedom movement. In her helplessness she turns to Charudatta, who in a sentimental moment of magnanimity agrees to be the child's father.

RAJA. All this is what you call my mushy idealism. Hero in jail, heroine in distress, a generous-hearted rival who forgets everything magnanimously.

PRADNYA. Exactly. Everything glorified, simplified . . .

RAJA(*sentimental*). Tell you something? (*Pause. Then in a husky voice.*) I wanted that to be true in real life. I was so fond of babies. (*Clears his throat.*)

Silence.

PRADNYA. He lives in Assam now.

RAJA. Who?

PRADNYA. Dilip. Remember, I went to get that manuscript from Vasanti? That Salim was ragging her at that time. Seems Dilip hasn't written her a word in the last eight years. Salim was being so cruel!

RAJA. What else can the poor boy do? That Salim is thirty-five and he is thirty. She's thrown everything to the winds. I feel worried for the boy. And I haven't even seen him. That I should care for Devadatta's child is another big irony! But now I can't bear to see lives being wasted away like that. We did that to our lives, that was bad enough. And that is why I'm worried about you, you idiot.

PRADNYA. One doesn't decide to ruin one's life. It happens.

RAJA. Uttara used to say, you deliberately ruined our lives. Hers and Vasanti's. She could never accept the fact that things 'happened'. Otherwise how could a quiet, dignified Uttara become hysteric when she saw things getting out of her control? It was baffling. Was that the real Uttara? Or the other one?

*Rajadhyaksha walks into C as he speaks the last lines. Fade out.
As lights fade in, Rajadhyaksha and Uttara are seen in C.*

UTTARA. What did you gain—ruining our lives? Tell me.

RAJA. I don't know myself.

UTTARA. Tell me . . . tell me . . .

RAJA. Quiet, Uttara . . .

UTTARA. A great writer, aren't you? Master of my life! And now you want to be the master of my sister's life too.

RAJA. I'm ashamed of what happened, Uttara.

UTTARA. She came to this house with such trust! Younger than you by twenty-five years! Where's all your morality and idealism vanished now?

RAJA. Uttara—please!

UTTARA. Could be our daughter! We had no children. And when she came I was so happy, so relieved to think that she could be our own daughter. But without the least

compunction you have destroyed us both. Where will she go now?

RAJA. Why should she go anywhere?

UTTARA. Have you no shame at all? Vasanti will not stay here.

RAJA. I am just as responsible as she is in all that happened.

UTTARA. Don't you dare have anything to do with her. I'll burn myself alive in front of your eyes.

RAJA. I'll not desert her.

UTTARA. What did you see in her? Beauty? Youth? To seduce—

RAJA. Don't use those ugly words. You were keen to bring her into the house when I was saying no. When she came you ill-treated her—

UTTARA. I only asked her to help around the house. Don't I do the chores myself? What's wrong if—

RAJA. You constantly tried to find fault with her. Because you were afraid, weren't you? Or jealous? . . . I knew it . . . she was lonely in this house.

UTTARA. You want to destroy me. Because I couldn't bear your child.

RAJA. I told you. Told you often. Let's adopt some orphan child.

UTTARA. Kill me! Kill me! That will make you happy.

As Uttara cries, lights fade out. Fade in on A. Rajadhyaksha and Pradnya in A.

RAJA. She was all hysterical. The grief of childlessness buried deep inside her suddenly burst out. It had erupted sometimes even before that. And then it was hell—she didn't care who she was talking to, what she was saying—

PRADNYA. In the novel Utta—Urmila is extremely high-strung, the exact opposite of Vasudha. How did Uttara-bai react when she heard?

RAJA. I can't bear to imagine the scene between those two! I didn't even see Vasanti after that fight with Uttara. She left the house that same night. (*Pause.*) Uttara too.

PRADNYA. You never met Vasanti again?

RAJA. When I went to see Devadatta in his illness, she was always around, but never came near me—only the shuffle of her feet, the clinking of her bangles—I think she did

- not have enough confidence in herself. She was madly in love with me.
- PRADNYA. So that terrible scene between Urmila and Vasudha—it's all imagination?
- RAJA. Imagination. But I didn't have to try too hard. It must've been exactly like that—word by word. I'm positive. I still don't know how Uttara got to know about us but I'm sure Vasanti told her. She was hardly twenty, younger than Uttara by twenty years. And she was so unexposed, naive, lonely . . . the tension of a secret affair must have been too much for her. Remember how it happens in the novel? It's a rude shock to Urmila.
- PRADNYA. But if Urmila had some faint suspicion, she would have been more subtle, more real as a character. What woman will be so . . . so unwary? Now it's all so silly. Vasudha is cleaning the closet, saying some meaningless things, and suddenly: 'Tai, I want to tell you something.'

Fade out. Lights now in C. Urmila and Vasudha.

- VASUDHA. Urmila-tai—
- URMILA. Not again! Must you talk so much? I've almost got a headache.
- VASUDHA. I must talk to you.
- UTTARA. OK then. I can't stop you.
- VASUDHA. I . . . I . . .
- UTTARA. What is it? *(Pause.)*
- VASUDHA. Anandrao and I . . . *(Pause.)* . . . have fallen in love.
- URMILA *(stands up)*. What?
- VASUDHA *(muffled sobs)*.
- URMILA. What did you say? *(Vasu sobs.)* Are you in your senses? *(Grabs Vasudha's hair.)* What . . . *(Vasudha sobs uncontrollably.)* Since when is this going on? Vasu? Vasu—
- VASUDHA. Last year . . . When you went to the camp for two weeks—
- URMILA. You did this to your own sister?
- VASUDHA. Tai, I was so lonely . . . We didn't realize what happened—we—he made me feel so secure.
- URMILA. You cast some dirty spell on him, and how brazenly you talk about it. Shameless! How far have you gone?

(Vasudha cries.) How close are you? *(Vasudha cries.)*
Hm. *(Vasu cannot control her sobs.)* I hope you have not
done something foolish. *(Shocked, she touches*
Vasudha's stomach.) Tell me, tell me.

VASUDHA*(absolutely silent)*.

URMILA*(sighs)*. My fate! *(Pause.)* Get out. Get out of here. This
moment. Or I'll set you on fire.

VASUDHA. Where can I go, Tai?

URMILA. Anywhere. What's that to someone like you? Oh God!
Thank God Aai-Baba are not alive to see all this—get
out.

VASUDHA. I cannot live without Anandrao.

URMILA. He's sitting in jail, gazing at his stars. God knows when
he'll come home. You get going.

VASUDHA. Let me meet him . . . just once! For the last time!

URMILA. Are you going? Or shall I burn myself ? *(Lights a*
match.) Vasudha!

VASUDHA*(scared)*. Don't Tai, oh don't! I'll go.

Vasudha leaves. Urmila drops the match and weeps. Then comes
into B, weeping. Vasanti near her. Lights in C fade out and fade
in on B.

VASANTI. Uttara-tai—

UTTARA. Sorry, Vasu—

VASANTI. You'll be ill again.

UTTARA. It's his phone call. That has upset me. He says he wants
to meet me—

VASANTI. You must meet him, Tai. All misunderstandings—

UTTARA. There ARE no misunderstandings, Vasu, because there's
no love. You just happened to be the cause.

VASANTI. Who knows!

UTTARA. It could've been any other girl in your place.

VASANTI. Why? Because he could never be in love with me?

UTTARA. It's not that.

VASANTI. It is.

UTTARA. Vasu—

VASANTI. For the last thirty years you've been trying to tell me
this. That there was nothing in me for him to love—

UTTARA. No, Vasanti—

VASANTI. Didn't you ever see anything worthwhile in me?

UTTARA. You still get so worked up. (*Pause.*) We never talked about this before, we had lost touch for so long, but I'll tell you something now, had thought of telling you long ago. I talked to him the night you told me about it. I said I'll go, you live with Vasu. (*Pause.*) But he wouldn't listen. He wanted to possess us both. And while we were talking, you just packed and without a word left us to go to Devadatta. By then, for me it was all over in that house anyway. I left too, that same night.

VASANTI. I'll never know what you said to each other.

UTTARA. I still remember every word of it.

Dark. Light on C fades in. Uttara walks from B to C, talking. In the following scene Uttara talks sadly, not in anger.

UTTARA. I asked him. Why did you do this? Why this act of indiscretion?

RAJA(*has entered in C*). Things happen, Uttara.

UTTARA. God! What a mess! No one's going to gain anything out of it.

RAJA. Don't make me feel more wretched now.

UTTARA. She came here with such trust! Younger than you by twenty-five years. How could you? With all your ideas of morality, your idealism?

RAJA. Uttara, please—see—

UTTARA. I was so happy—thought—this is my child now.

RAJA. I won't abandon her. We'll send her somewhere. She can continue in college.

UTTARA. How can you even say this? She will not go anywhere. This will be her home now.

RAJA. You go to such extremes!

UTTARA. You are saying that to me! Don't you dare desert her. What did you see in her? Beauty? Youth?

RAJA. You brought her into the house when I was against it. When she came you ill-treated her.

UTTARA. I only asked her to help around the house. Don't I do the chores? I wanted her to be occupied. (*Pause.*) Anyway, I won't stay here anymore. It's best that way. (*From here on, starts walking into B.*) And, after all, what right did I have to stay there? I couldn't even give him a child.

C dark. Lights fade in on B.

- VASANTI. Anyway, Tai, it doesn't matter anymore. There's your side to it and there's his. I'll never know his side.
- UTTARA. Must you be so silly and obstinate? Even now?
- VASANTI. I'm not obstinate, Tai. Maybe I'm not like that Vasudha of his novel, but—silly, obstinate . . .
- UTTARA. Then am I like that Urmila? It's all a hoax. You are the ever-suffering epitome of sacrifice. And me—a hysterical, fighting shrew. We are stuck with these images now. People will always believe him, a famous writer! That's one reason why I published his letters. Let people know the truth.
- VASANTI. About that I am not so sure! Forget others, but are you very happy to tell the people the truth? Isn't it a torment? You lived alone all your life.
- UTTARA. How he has made out that scene between us! Did I ever talk about fires and burnings?
- VASANTI. That's a writer's imagination. How was he to know what really happened between us? (*Vasanti reads.*)
- UTTARA. Such poor imagination! That man did not understand me and he did not understand you. Remember how it happened? You were reading calmly. Just like this. You were always so dangerously calm in those days. I kept staring at you. You turned round, looked me in the eye and said—

Lights change. Vasanti turns and looks Uttara in the eye.

- VASANTI. Why do you look at me like that?
- UTTARA. No, nothing.
- VASANTI. Want to ask me something? Go ahead.
- UTTARA. No, no.
- VASANTI. You want to ask.
- UTTARA. I don't want to ask you anything. (*Long pause.*)
- VASANTI(*same calm voice*). It's true. (*Pause.*)
- UTTARA. Don't be stupid.
- VASANTI. Yes, Tai. It's true. (*Uttara restlessly takes up her knitting.*) Anantrao and I are very close.
- UTTARA. I don't want to hear it.
- VASANTI. But I want to tell you.

UTTARA. Why? . . . Why?

VASANTI. I want to be free of this. *(Pause.)*

UTTARA(*in a trembling voice*). You didn't think even once of what'll become of Tai?

VASANTI. We didn't have the time. And nothing will happen to you.

UTTARA. I had my fears, of course. But now you've bared it all. *(Suddenly, horrified.)* I hope nothing awful has happened to you. I mean—

VASANTI. Don't panic. We have taken care.

UTTARA(*broken*). Vasu! *(Pause.)*

VASANTI. I'm leaving this house today. For good.

UTTARA. Where can you go? And it's not just you. Wait a while. Let me talk to him.

VASANTI. No. I want to go.

UTTARA. You stay here. I'll go.

VASANTI. You won't leave him. You have your nails dug tight into him. *(Pause.)* And it's over between him and me now. *(Pause.)*

UTTARA. Why did you do it?

VASANTI. Don't you understand? Really? . . . Tell me truly, don't you really know why this happened? *(Uttara nods to say no.)* I couldn't stand your overweening ego. Your ego, which would not let you even look at anyone else. You're so immersed in your self, always, always revolving around your self. If you do lift your eye it's only to look at someone with contempt. And then you can cut anyone to size, humiliate him, with such flair, with a smile on your face. Well, you can cut a person to pieces without a drop of blood oozing. That's you.

UTTARA(*wounded*). When did I do that to you, my child?

VASANTI(*hurt*). Every bloody moment you show me how small I am, how I cannot rise to your level. If ever I have a dance show, you applaud me with all the guests and then: 'You got this mudra wrong, baby, it's like this . . . ' You say that right there, in front of them. And then you go on to show me how, with your graceful fingers! That would be enough to wipe out all the effect of my dance. You put me in front of people, order me around in a tender voice . . . Oh, I'm fed up of being treated like an

orphan.

UTTARA. This is horrible.

VASANTI. Aai-Baba always said marriage has changed you. Whenever you came home, you came like a visiting queen. Even to my poor Aai-Baba you were a queen, not their child. I didn't dare talk to you. *(Pause.)* And all that only because you had him. What was your worth—just that you had hooked a rich, clever, famous husband—*(Pause.)* you have made me so small, so insignificant.

UTTARA. You'd come to Bombay from a small town. That was all. I didn't want you to look any different from me.

VASANTI. Was I ever in the running with you? For no reason you put on the airs of a winner, and then I made up my mind. I was determined to win Anantrao over from you. He was the source of all your airs, your strength after all.

UTTARA. Why didn't you tell me? . . . Why didn't you tell me when you knew I was wrong?

VASANTI. It all piled up. One humiliation on another . . . one insult on another.

UTTARA. Perhaps I was wrong. But him?

VASANTI. He had nothing but that in his eyes. From the first moment. *(Pause.)*

UTTARA. Vasu, you stay with him. I'll go away.

VASANTI. I won't stay here. I don't love him. *(Pause.)*

UTTARA(*quietly*). I won't stay here. I love him.

Light changes to original.

VASANTI. I thought I had won. I went to Devadatta leaving you to reign over the ruins of that house. But you won again. You left the house too. That same night.

UTTARA. You had Devadatta. Who did I have?

VASANTI. Tai!

UTTARA. For two years after I came here, he wrote letters to me. *(Pause.)* Forget it, all that's past. Let's not fret over it, Vasu—

VASANTI. What a mess we've made of our lives!

UTTARA. Vasu, how did you get so close to him? Tell me. He's not the type at all. No harm telling me now.

VASANTI. He used to take me to the terrace at night. Because I was so alone. He always talked about the stars and showed me

the stars—and one day—right there . . .

UTTARA(*laughing loudly*). You showed ME the stars all right. At noon—
(*Vasanti has tears in her eyes.*) What is it, Vasu ?

VASANTI. You laughed just now! You reminded me of my old Tai,
before her marriage. My Tai who made my hair, who
draped her new sari round me—who kissed me every
morning when I went to school—

UTTARA. And now we are together again. You and me. We meet.
He doesn't have anyone . . . When he saw someone ill,
he had the tenderness of a mother! The same tender hands.
Could not believe it was the same man!

VASANTI. Remember Dr Sane? Who visited you in jail during the
Emergency? Anantrao had sent him.

UTTARA. Must have been from his sense of guilt about managing
to stay out. And he had been a freedom fighter once.
Faced lathis and gone to jail more than once. He had
written in a letter: 'You are far above me—I couldn't
give you anything.' He loved children. We were thinking
of adopting some child and then this—we are talking so
much about him today.

Fade out on B. Light on A.

RAJA. Uttara, Uttara . . . we are talking so much about her
today.

PRADNYA. You still think of her!

RAJA. Don't you? Of your . . . your Pramod must be waiting
for you!

PRADNYA(*furious*). Pramod! Is he my boy-friend or yours?

RAJA. What's your problem? Can't I even mention his name?
Something must be terribly wrong. What is it?

PRADNYA. Never mind. That's my personal problem.

RAJA. Is that so? And is it all right your digging into my
personal life? . . . OK then. Get going. I've had enough.

PRADNYA. I'm sorry if I've hurt you.

RAJA. Hurt? Nonsense! You better go now.

PRADNYA. Don't behave like a spoilt child.

RAJA. It's time for my drink.

PRADNYA. So drink!

RAJA. You get going.

PRADNYA. Shall I get everything?

- RAJA. Baban will.
 PRADNYA. But can't I stay here when you drink?
 RAJA. I get violent when I'm drunk.
 PRADNYA. Come on!
 RAJA. I may or may not. But I do not want you to stay here.
 PRADNYA. You are almost driving me out! Where can I go ?
 RAJA. Don't ask me!
 PRADNYA. I don't have anywhere to go. And Pramod is not meeting me today. Why today—tomorrow, the day after, for days we aren't meeting. (*Pause.*) We've had a real fight. (*Checks a sob.*)
 RAJA(*worried*). That serious? (*Pradnya shakes her head.*) Tell him I have called him. (*She nods to say no.*) Won't even say that much to him? (*Pradnya is silent.*) Fine. Give me his address.
 PRADNYA. You'll not do any such thing. Why should you kneel before him?
 RAJA. I've lost a lot in my life by not doing just that. I'll not make that mistake again, at this age. I shall kneel, even if it hurts.
 PRADNYA. You do what you want for your own sake. But I don't want you to stoop for me.
 RAJA. This is dictatorship!
 PRADNYA. I'll get your drink.
 RAJA. Give me his address.
 PRADNYA. Don't be stubborn.
 RAJA. Give me his address. ~
 PRADNYA. If you do this I'll not come here from tomorrow.
 RAJA. Why tomorrow? Go now, right now and never come back.

Pradnya squats down, checking a sob.

- PRADNYA. How shall I explain? He'll insult you.
 RAJA. We'll see.
 PRADNYA. But why? You don't even know why we quarrelled.
 RAJA. Tell me. (*Pause.*)
 PRADNYA. He is against my carrying on with this research.
 RAJA(*laughs*). Indeed! Is that all?
 PRADNYA. Why do you laugh?
 RAJA. You children! What a stupid thing to fight over. Just

- give it up.
- PRADNYA. You think it very funny, don't you?
- RAJA. Honest. Give it up. Edward the Eighth gave up his kingdom and you—
- PRADNYA. It's not that simple. *(Pause.)* He doesn't really mind the research—
- RAJA. What are you trying to say? Now this, now that—
- PRADNYA. I can't really explain. *(Pause.)* What he objects to is carrying out research on your works.
- RAJA. Good heavens! Never thought there could be anyone so much against my writings.
- PRADNYA. Who the hell is he to tell me what I should do and what I shouldn't?
- RAJA. Whenever did he read my books? You say he doesn't read the newspaper.
- PRADNYA *(pause)*. He is jealous. He feels you are more precious to me than him. He gets upset because I give all my time to you. He feels— *(breaks off.)*
- RAJA. Go on.
- PRADNYA *(in a faint voice)*. I'm getting involved with you. *(Pause.)*
- RAJA. He IS rather stupid!
- PRADNYA. It's pointless explaining to him—
- RAJA. But this is serious, Pradnya!
- PRADNYA. I'll not let him rule over my life.
- RAJA. Don't be rash—
- PRADNYA. Each day I'm going farther away from him. Because of his attitude. What does he think I am? Anyway, forget it.

Pradnya goes inside. Rajadhyaksha upset. Paces up and down. Goes into C without noticing it. C in light. A dark. Urmila and Vasudha in C.

- URMILA. Isn't he looking lonely, Vasudha!
- VASUDHA. His face looks all haggard. He's become so aged, Urmila-tai!
- URMILA. Could be that he is lonely.
- VASUDHA. Isn't this funny? Wrote about lonely people all his life without knowing what loneliness is. And now when he knows what it is, he's stopped writing.
- URMILA. That's exactly why!
- VASUDHA. Why do such people bother writing at all?

- URMILA. You can't use that word. 'Creative' is what they are called. They are into 'creating'!
- VASUDHA. How terrible for us!
- URMILA. They create a whole new universe!
- VASUDHA. Who's asked them to? They have to create us, have to decide how we look, what we like—and we have to feel happy, unhappy as they like—they take our entire lives into their hands! How mean of them!
- URMILA. That's our destiny.
- VASUDHA. But that destiny too is decided by them! He dictates to me on what page I should laugh, on what page I should cry. I'm not allowed to budge an inch on my own. He'll know what it's like when someone does that to him.
- URMILA. But of course someone does that to them! Someone does decide their destiny without bothering to ask them. They too have their problems, their grievances.
- VASUDHA. Oh, Tai! Must you always be so understanding? (*Giggles.*) How will he feel if he hears you talk like this? He's made you such a cold-hearted shrew.
- URMILA. So I'll be that! Can't be helped.
- VASUDHA. And me? Innocent as a babe, buried under suffering and injustice, for ever and ever—God! I want to rebel!
- URMILA. You talk like him!
- VASUDHA. And the silly gestures he's given me!
- URMILA. You're supposed to be Vasanti, you see.
- VASUDHA. But my gestures are not the same as hers! She used to play with her pigtails—I wonder if she does that now, but it looked so cute!—and what do I do! Chew my nails. Oh God!
- URMILA. That is supposed to show that you are uneasy, shy . . .
- VASUDHA. Same old tricks.
- URMILA. But then he is a writer!
- VASUDHA. Now don't you side with him all the time. He's ditched you in the novel. Better remember that.
- URMILA. Readers don't mind if husbands ditch shrews. He should appear pitiable. That's all.
- VASUDHA. I'm fed up with this decided destiny. Stupid joys and stupid sorrows! I want to live differently, more intensely, . . . passionately! I want to get out of this prison!
- URMILA. But writers ARE like that!

- VASUDHA. He's so damned unfair to you. To Uttara too! Such a dignified lady, so self-respecting—wonder how she felt when she read us.
- URMILA. She must have hated me!
- VASUDHA. We must confront him.
- URMILA(*smiles*). Do that.
- VASUDHA. Of course we must.
- URMILA. So do that. Who's stopping you?
- VASUDHA. Sure? Don't blame me later.
- URMILA. I won't . . . What will you tell him?
- VASUDHA. I'll be frank and forthright. I'll say, 'You have no right to treat those two and us two like this. Spoils their name and ours too. And this confinement on top of it!'
- URMILA. They will be free in another few years, but we are immortal! Whether anyone reads his book or not.
- VASUDHA. Then shall we do this? You do the talking.
- URMILA. Is there any sense in this, Vasu? Is anything at all going to change? We'll remain just what we are, where we are.
- VASUDHA. But at least he'll know where he went wrong.
- URMILA. OK, if you wish.

Both approach Rajadhyaksha.

- RAJA. Uttara! Vasanti!
- URMILA. I'm not Uttara, I'm Urmila!
- VASUDHA. I'm not Vasanti, I'm Vasudha!
- RAJA. Who?
- VASUDHA. Oh, God!
- URMILA. What's the matter? Don't you know us?
- RAJA. Uttara, Vasanti . . .
- VASUDHA. Will they ever set foot here now? Lucky ladies!
- RAJA. Then why did you?
- VASUDHA. Where else could we go?
- RAJA. What can I do for you?
- VASUDHA. You cannot do anything. That's exactly what we came to tell you. You should've thought before.
- URMILA. Vasu is a little upset, you see, because you made both of us so puny.
- VASUDHA. Why did you do that?
- URMILA. You should have let us behave like us. Your novel would have been so much better that way. You cannot make

- your characters dance to your wish.
- RAJA. The way I understood YOU—
- URMILA. Or Uttara and Vasanti?
- RAJA. Yeah . . . I mean . . . they too—
- URMILA. You understood no one. Not them, not us.
- VASUDHA. He didn't want to, in the first place. He just wanted to play 'I-am-suffering; I-am-suffering.' And all the suffering masked all so artistically. He never bothered about us, about our souls, our desires.
- RAJA. You see, objectively . . .
- URMILA. Not one bit. You styled us according to your own likes and dislikes. I am a shrew because you're cut up with Uttara; Charudatta is a bad writer because you're jealous of Devadatta. And you love Vasanti, so she's the innocent babe.
- VASUDHA. But above all, poor helpless me, and so miserable, helpless Anand the hero! Why didn't you ever try to understand your own self? There was no need for you to show that I turned to Charudatta only from helplessness. Shall I tell you the truth? If I had a choice I would have gone to him gladly. Happily. He was a genius.
- URMILA. Enough, Vasu.
- RAJA. Let her. It's quite important! (*Pause.*) What can I do for you now?
- VASUDHA. I told you. It's too late.
- RAJA. I . . . am quite aware that I've been unfair to you. Charudatta gave you Pradeep. I've shown in the novel that Pradeep is my child, Charudatta only brings him up. But honestly, I wanted a son. Devadatta gave you a baby and that shattered me. I know I'm wrong. I can see that. I've changed considerably in the last thirty years.
- URMILA. Yes, it's quite commendable, but it's of no use to us any more. We have to remain what we are.
- RAJA. Is it too late you think for things to change? Can't one correct even a single mistake? Has life just slipped by?
- URMILA. But you will still escape, Rajadhyaksha. You are not doomed to immortality as we are.
- RAJA. Nor are you. In a short time, everything that was mine will be dead. One by one.
- URMILA. So your books are going to be tombs and we are going

to lie there, buried alive. Waiting for death which will never come. If at all some errant reader digs us up, we'll have to live over the same predestined pages again. (*Vasudha sobs.*) Knowingly, unknowingly, you are sowing such untruths here. You think writers should do this?

RAJA. Forgive me. I really could not fathom human relations then—

URMILA. What is your definition of 'fathoming', Rajadhyaksha? Add up all previous experience, base some calculations on that and decide—this man is this and this; his intention—this and this. Why can't you look at people without any calculations, prejudices—you know—with absolute transparency? People change by the moment. Even you are changing with each passing moment. So why can't each moment bring its own new, unclouded, clean relationship? Life will be so much simpler for you then. So much less of anguish and torment.

VASUDHA. Really! Not this horrible existence for us then. We are so unreal and yet so terribly real!

URMILA. All of the writer's prejudices bear fruit in his writing. His writing suffers much more than him. If only you had had an unclouded vision—love, compassion—

VASUDHA. Come on, Tai, let's go.

RAJA. Wait.

URMILA. Sorry, we must go. We have to.

Exit Urmila and Vasudha. Pradnya enters with drinks which nobody touches. Light on A.

PRADNYA. Why do you stand there near the books? Are you talking with them or what?

Rajadhyaksha comes back into A. C dark.

RAJA. Much as I would like to do that, do you think they would let me?

PRADNYA. Such self-indulgence!

RAJA. Now I don't have the courage to talk to them! Will I be dishonest still? I'm afraid I may be. (*Pause.*) Are you ever dishonest, young lady? To yourself? Others?

PRADNYA. Why do you ask?

- RAJA. Very often I am. That's why.
- PRADNYA. Perhaps we all are.
- RAJA. Why are we dishonest? We live by gilding lies with truth. I've made the story of our lives—mine, Vasanti's and Uttara's—into a lie. To cover all that up, I took shelter behind a truth that was nothing but fantasy. Or do you think there is no truth in the world? Could it be that when one does not understand the truth it turns into a lie?
(Pause.)
- PRADNYA(*gets up suddenly*). I'm going.
- RAJA. Wait . . .
- PRADNYA. It's late.
- RAJA. Want to go home and cry? Instead, why don't you . . .
(*She sobs.*) Pradnya! (*Shakes her head to say no, trying to control her sobs.*) Are you a little girl now? Come . . . (*Pradnya quietens down with a lot of effort.*
Pause.)
- PRADNYA. I was lying to you. (*Pause.*) We have not fought. (*Pause.*) Pramod is ready still. He thinks this is some crazy trip of mine. (*Pause.*) I told him to forget about me. We'll not meet again. (*Pause.*) He's upset. He's not jealous of you. (*Pause.*)
- RAJA. What is it then? (*Pause.*) What's the problem?
*Pradnya breaks down completely. Goes up to Rajadhyaksha, hugs his knees, puts her head on his knees and cries disconsolately. Gradually he realizes what it means. **
- RAJA. Oh God! (*He doesn't know what to do. For a moment he wants to break away. Finally he puts his hand on her head with infinite gentleness.*) Come . . . come my idiot, come . . .
Pradnya stops crying. Pulls away from him.
- PRADNYA. I'll go now.
- RAJA. Hm . . . Take care.
- PRADNYA. Yeah.
- RAJA. Let's take an off tomorrow. No dictation.
- PRADNYA(*clearing her nose*). Think I'll make a scene again tomorrow?
Don't worry. (*Pause.*) I didn't notice when and how I got involved. I wasn't ever going to tell you and I won't talk

about it again. Never. But I'll not be able to go back to Pramod.

RAJA. That's madness.

PRADNYA. I know. But that's it.

RAJA(*sad, tired*). This too, had to happen. (*Pause.*) Don't ever break ties, Pradnya. Bind yourself anew with each new moment. There's nothing as transient as the bonds between people. Every moment has its truth. Face it. Don't relate it to the moment that has gone. (*He goes to the window. The sky is bursting with stars.*) Come here. See this. A skyful of stars. There's nothing to bind them to us. That is the Deveyani Galaxy. It takes two million years for that light to come here to our Earth. The light we see now is the light of two million years ago. The Galaxy may not even be there anymore—who knows? We only think it is. (*Pause.*) Between man and man the distance is even greater, Pradnya. And the light each gives to the other just as transient.

PRADNYA. What does one do then? How does one bridge the gap?

RAJA. You can't. Never. That's the absolute truth.

PRADNYA. It's frightening.

RAJA. Yes, it is. Sometimes, maybe very seldom one gets the light of reassurance from someone. Maybe only for a moment. Maybe thousands of years old. That's about enough. (*Pause.*)

PRADNYA. I'll go now.

RAJA. Come again. (*Pause.*) But I'm giving up the idea of my autobiography now.

PRADNYA. Why should I come then?

RAJA(*smiles*). And now even if I write, I'll have to write about you too.

PRADNYA(*smiles*). Some more vague and dishonest stuff? That will do. I'll go.

RAJA(*gently*). See you.

Pradnya goes out. Rajadhyaksha disturbed. Light on B.

VASANTI. We dug up the whole past today.

UTTARA. There IS only past. Nothing to look forward to. At times I wonder. What did we get out of all this? And what did he get after all ? But you were the worst sufferer.

VASANTI. No, Tai.

- UTTARA. I may have left him. But I left him with my dignity and pride intact. The world still knows me as his wife. No one dared to point a finger at me. He may not have given me anything, but I brought with me what rightfully belonged to me. You didn't get anything. He deserted you.
- VASANTI. No, Tai.
- UTTARA. What did he give you? *(Pause.)*
- VASANTI*(looks at Uttara. It's not clear whether she's lying or not).* Dilip. *(Uttara crushed.)* Dilip is his.
- UTTARA*(shrieks like some animal in pain).* It's not true. *(Vasanti nods to say no.)* Want to hurt me? You still won't forgive me? I'm tired . . . exhausted . . . say it's not true.
- VASANTI*(sadly).* It is, Tai.
- UTTARA. You were not faithful to Devadatta?
- VASANTI. Devadatta knew Dilip was Anantrao's child.
- UTTARA. And he accepted it?
- VASANTI. He gave me only security, Tai. There was nothing more between us.
- UTTARA. It's not true.
- VASANTI. Tai, it's a fact.
- UTTARA. Do you mean to say Anant used to have clandestine meetings with you?
- VASANTI. He came to see Devadatta. He never talked to me. Ignored me totally. I couldn't take that. It was an offence. I wasn't going to take that insult . . . So . . . once, just once . . . I went to him . . . forget it, Tai. I wanted to see if I still had the power. I knew I had and I didn't look at him again. *(Pause.)*
- UTTARA. He knows?
- VASANTI. No.
- UTTARA. Vasanti . . .
- VASANTI. I didn't want to tell him. I didn't want to give over the reins of my life to him.

Uttara in pieces. Staggeres to the phone. Dials. The same moment Rajadhyaksha dials from A. Both get busy signals. Happens again. Then again. And again. Both of them are in deep turmoil. Both of them finally give up and replace the receivers at the same time. Both of them walk back to their chairs.

VASANTI. Tai!

UTTARA. None of us has ever seen the face of happiness. Let him see it. At least him, Vasu. (Pause.) Let us put our fingers in this wheel and stop it.

Vasanti keeps looking at Uttara for a long time. Then goes to the phone and dials. Phone rings in A. Rajadhyaksha does not get up. Does not move. Keeps staring at the stars. Phone keeps ringing. Lights fade out very, very gradually. Three faint spots on Rajadhyaksha, Uttara and Vasanti standing apart from each other. The walls of the house open out and slowly disappear. The sky is bursting with stars. The three of them look very small, extremely alone under the canopy of the brilliant sky.

Curtain.

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