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**ON
RABINDRANATH**

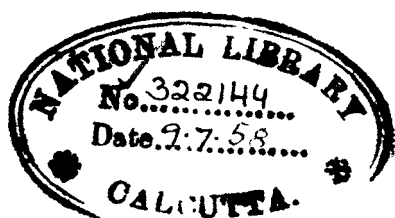
**BY
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Dalicated

To,

MY FATHER

“FOREWORD”

I have read with great interest the studies in the novels and dramas of Rabindranath by S^j. Raimohan Samanta, written in English and compiled in a small volume. The author has selected ‘Raja O Rani’, ‘Visarjana’, ‘Rakta Karavi’ and ‘Muktadhara’ among the poet’s dramas, and ‘Dui Bon’, ‘Joga-jog’ and ‘Sesher Kavita’ among his novels, while there is a short general study of Rabindranath as a poet of Nature. In all these studies the author has given evidence of a power of masterly analysis, of a subtle interpretation of the poet’s inner meaning and occasionally of a stimulating originality in his points of view. He is the master of a crisp, incisive English style which is eminently suitable for the purpose of a close and penetrating analysis. Each one of the essays provides food for reflection and bears the impress of a trained critical mind which weighs and assesses not with the crude generalising methods of an amateur, but with the judicious, almost meticulous care of a scholar alive to the

most subtle distinctions and aiming at a fastidious accuracy of impression. Where every essay is well-written, it is invidious to make distinctions. But I may make special mention of the studies on 'Shesher Kavita' and 'Muktadhara' as providing illustration of the author's insight and originality. Authorship in English is now going out of fashion, and with it we shall perhaps lose much valuable writing from the pens of those who had been accustomed to write in a foreign tongue and may not perhaps find time to switch over to the new instrument of expression. From this point of view a special, though it may be also a pathetic interest attaches to the present book, the appeal of which will be confined to a progressively smaller range of the reading public as the years go by. The intrinsic merit of the book deserved a more attractive get up than what it has been found possible to provide it with in these days of printing and paper crisis.

Sri Kumar Banerjee
Ramtanu Lahiri Professor,
Calcutta University.

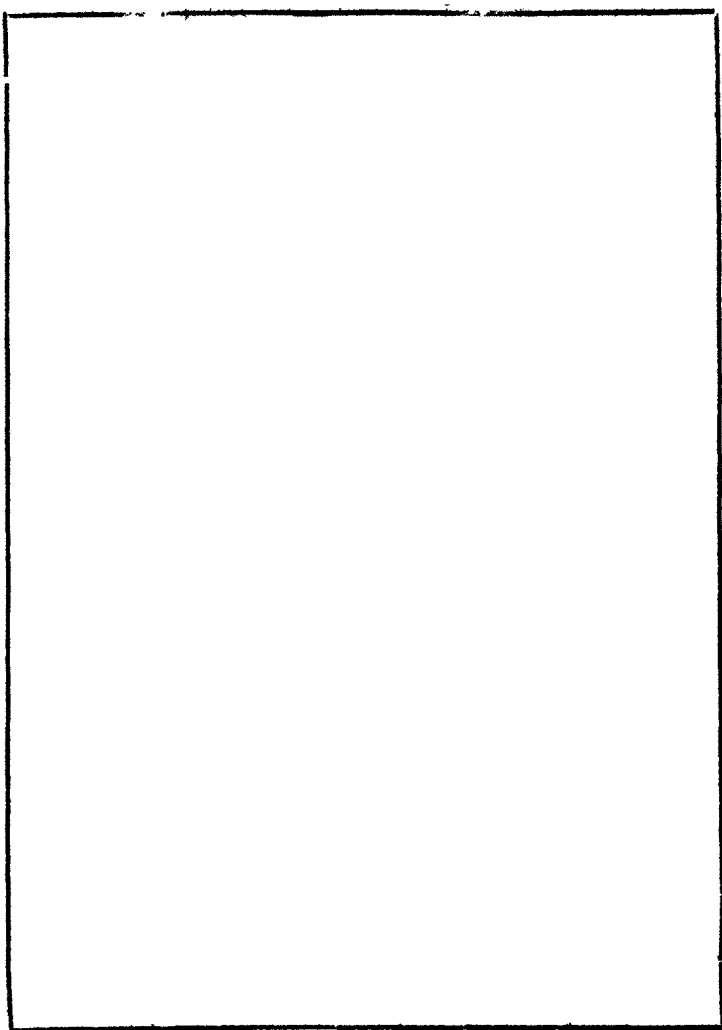
APOLOGIA

Some of the essays printed in this little book were written sixteen or seventeen years ago, when the author had just come out of his university and was therefore very young. This, I think, should explain why an alien language was adopted as the medium of expression; young people would do things which people more advanced in years would hardly approve. The author at his present age sees the folly of it all but unfortunately though perhaps naturally, has acquired a sentimental attachment for the writings of his young days, more so when they were published with some eagerness in the pages of the now defunct 'Liberty' and thinks that it is only fair that these should be given a chance to see the light so that they may stand or fall according to their worth. As the essays then written were too few to constitute sufficient matter for a book, others were written from time to time and the whole bunch is now presented before the public to praise or to condemn.

Needless to say that the author has no pretensions to have given anything like a comprehensive idea of Rabindranath in these few pages ; for this volumes would have been necessary. The author has in fact tried to understand some of Rabindranath's well-known books and he will deem his labours amply repaid if any of the readers find this book helpful in their study of Rabindranath.

The author takes the opportunity of expressing his thankfulness to Mr. Seobhagwan Bubna of the National Literature Co. for the kind interest he took for the book, as also to Dr. Sri Kumar Benerjee M. A., Ph. D. of the Calcutta University who has so kindly written an appreciative foreword for this book.

Author.



RABINDRANATH TAGORE

K. T. D. LITT,

A PEEP IN TO THE R A J A O R A N I.

Rabindranath's dramas may be broadly divided into two heads, drama with a theme which usually expresses through a symbol and drama of character. *Chitrangada*, *Muḥtadhara*, *Raḥta-ḥaravi* and others fall under the first head and *Raja O Rani* and *Bisarjan* under the second. Remembering that this division should not be made completely water-tight, as in the last named dramas one can not miss a thread of theme running through them, the reader will find this broad division helpful in appraising Rabindranath's dramas in general and the drama we are out to discuss in the present essay, in particular. As I have said, it is not difficult to find a central theme in the drama

under discussion but there is no denying that in it the main interest lies in the characters. The characters here are more or less natural, certainly living and are well differentiated. They are no types like Arjun and Chitrangada in his *Chitrangada* or Nandini in *Rakta-karavi* but are individualised figures. In the dramas of the second group Rabindranath seems to follow in the line of Shakespeare. There are characters and even passages in this book which naturally remind the reader of many famous characters and passages from immortal Shak. The writer hopes to treat this matter in a subsequent essay.

Here in this essay we are not going to make any detailed estimate of the characters of this book. In this drama, we think, Rabindranath wants to bring home to the readers the distinction between true love and passion and this he does by setting off against each other two pairs of lovers, which in composition are exactly opposite.

The king Vikramatya of Jalandhar has a queen called Sumitra whom he loves so much as to forget and totally neglect his duties as a king. This all-engrossing love or rather passion on his part is surely an evil and bring in its wake, general confusion and turmoil in the state. The king is obsessed, as it were, with his attachment to the queen and confounds love hopelessly with passion. The king has the makings of a great soul and his mind is surely not narrow; rather its spaciousness is his fault because it makes his hankering for love almost insatiable. He wants the queen completely to himself to the total exclusion of all the world. He forgets all the responsibilities that are reposed on his royal shoulders, leaves the work of the state and adopts a stay-at-the-harem attitude. He always woos the queen and no expression of love on her part is too convincing to him. His nature is highly poetic but his imagination always wheels round the queen and her beauty. The queen

on the other hand knows what it is to love and does all she can to dissuade her husband from the emasculating passion which he had mistaken for love. True love does not and should not slacken the sense of duty in man but on the other hand strengthens it. There is the family and the world which demand something from each man and the latter demands most from a king. So it was extremely selfish and no less foolish to think that there were only two figures in this wide world, he and his beloved. This kind of passion is not, as our poet would have us believe, at all auspicious and is bound to be met with a nemesis. The drama, as a matter of fact, begins when the nemesis is already at work. There is hardly any peace in the kingdom and the subjects are oppressed by greedy officials who have come down from Kashmir, the land of the queen. The watchful eyes of the king not being there, the sole power has come to rest on these ravenous forei-

gners who did their best to torture the subjects and exploit the land.

The queen when she saw that her husband could not be brought back to the true sense of duties, had to leave her husband for the good of him. This was a great sacrifice on the part of the queen, for her love for her husband was no whit less than that of her husband for her. How deeply she feels for him is revealed by her words in front of the goddess before she was going to leave her husband's palace. Most nobly does she immolate her happiness for the good of the world or rather the state. The man being carried off his feet by the impetuous tide of love, the woman must be unnaturally strong to keep the balance. It is generally for the woman to be more loving than the man, she being the weaker sex, but in this present case they changed places. The man here gives in before the intensity of love or rather sex-love and lost his true manly nature so the woman had to be unwomanly

strong, keeping within herself her heart's love and being mercilessly reticent about it. The husband has let the reins of his passion loose so the wife must hold them uncommonly fast. The king was voluminous almost to madness in his protestation of love, so the king had to be cruelly curt and meagre. The king always spoke of love and so the queen always spoke of duty and the kingdom. She actually resigns her womanly nature before the goddess. This was surely an unnatural combination and troubles crept into their personal lives as much as into the life of the state. The king wanted the queen over-much and so he had to lose her. His violent passion could not possibly have god's blessing and was met, as night follows day, with god's just retribution. Somewhere in the later stage of the drama the king argues within himself about the career of their love and tries to find out the chink through which entered god's punishment. Who was at fault, he or she ?

We think, perhaps both. If he were more restrained and less exacting and she more expressive and less reticent, all would have been well.

So much for the first pair. In the second pair of lovers, the position of the two, as we have said before, is reversed, so that between these two pairs we have two men and two women contrasted against each other in their conception of love. In the first case we have seen that the king's conception of love was at fault and hence the tie was sundered. In the love between prince Kumarsen of Kashmir and his fiance Ila, the prince is like his sister Sumitra of the first pair, giving duty a higher place than love and thus stands contrasted with Vikram. Ila again is a contrast to Sumitra, having no pretention to the strong qualities of the latter. She is as fragile as the morning flower and more effeminate than a woman. She is as it were, born to love and to be loved. The first time we see the

lovers together, we find that the prince is about to leave wooing his lady-love as he had been called by the outside world. The very first words which pass between them are highly significant, bringing the contrast at once into prominence. Ila wanted to have Kumarsen completely to herself, to the exclusion of all the world. Kumarsen's idea of love, on the other hand, is noble ; his love is not only not emasculating but it gives impetus to nobler achievements and to higher duties. His very first thoughts run after the welfare of his subjects and his deep concern for them is revealed by the first words he utters. He is always after work, eternal work, which is the only pleasure to him. Love that dulls man's energy, deviates him from the path of duty, is not the thing for him. His love excites all the more his highly enterprising nature. Both Vikramaditya and Kumarsen are poetic souls but the imagination of the former is lost in the maze of sensuous beauty but that of

the latter is of the type of the Renaissance spirit. Kumarsen is like Ulysses of Tennyson, always hearing the call of the unknown and the untraversed. Ila on the other hand, thinks jealously of this unknown, which, she thinks, always tends to take her lover away. Her conception of love is at bottom selfish ; she wants that she and her lover would live in a world where there should be no duty to intrude or no outside world to come between them and their love, But in spite of her pious (?) wish, the call of duty did come to intrude upon their love and it looked as though it was bound to be frustrated.

The whole structure of the drama rests on this contrast between these two pairs of lovers. These two love episodes have been very skilfully welded, being tied, as it were by the bond of blood. Sumitra, bent on setting things right, very naturally seeks the help of a kindred soul, namely her brother Kumarsen, with the result that the two

separate groups are brought nearer. At last Kumarsen had his heart's love satisfied in the love of his sister ; Sumitra's sisterly love for her brother has no narrowing influence on Kumar as both the brother and the sister love honour, self-respect, and duty more than selfish pleasures. Thus combined, they set out to mend matters in the state of Jalandhar. But even their combined force, which was more moral than physical, proved insufficient for the mighty task in hand. Out of desperation, the violent nature of Vikramaditya turned its impetuosity from love to cruel hate. Such a nature can never be completely inert. This wild savagery on the part of the king is only the masked aspect of his wounded pride. He was plunging head over heels in the flood of devastation and ruin, in order to get rid of the thought of the queen who had not fully responded to his irresistible love. Memory of the queen was indelibly printed in his mind and this egged him on,

as it were, to the work of destruction. So the joint effort of the brother and the sister could not bring about the desired effect, the effect being on the other hand just the contrary. But what they could not do living, they very easily did, when dead. For the good of the land as well as for personal honour and self-respect, the prince resolved to destroy his own life and make a present of his severed head to the king. Sumitra was to carry the severed head to the king, a task unusually difficult for a woman to do and even at the suggestion of it, Sumitra swooned away. But the love for her brother, paradoxical though it may appear, finally prompted her on to the same terrible task, because she knew that death is to be preferred to dishonour. Being a sister, she could not bear the thought of her brother being insulted in the Court or to see him living the wretched life of an outlaw, being hunted from place to place, living an ignominious life at the perpetual risk of his beloved

subjects. She soon came to realise the high good that Kumar's death will bring and strained every nerve to this one great and sacred task. Kumarsen did sacrifice his life and the head was carried by Sumitra to the king, her husband. But the strain was too much for her and she gave in,—but only after she had done the duty. She dies before her husband saying. "Let there be peace in the state and the hell-fires be extinguished!"

We see that nemesis came to part the lovers of both the pairs but the way in which nemesis acted may seem some what puzzling to many. It may look like an absurdity that retribution should come through the persons whose idea of love was of the purest. If nemesis had to come, it might as well have come directly on the erring ones. Why should, one may ask, Kumarsen and Sumitra die? But we need not be puzzled by this seeming injustice. Any one who is only slightly acquainted with the Greek conception of Fate or

Necessity, knows that it is not at all a discriminating agency ; it falls upon the good and the bad alike. Milton's Samson, who was conceived strictly according to the Greek model had to die, not for any fault of his own but because his death was wanted by Necessity or Fate. Why should we take death always as a punishment ? Are we to think that poor Cordelia was punished because she died ? It is oftener the reverse with Shakespeare. The villain Iago was condemned to carry on his wretched existence while the divinely pure Desdemona died. So did Brutus die a most glorious death ; death is oft-times more cove- table than life. In the present case, it was demanded by the nature of things that some sacrifice should be made and who but the great will make the sacrifice ? Thus Kumar- sen sacrificed himself to effect a change in the internal situation in the kingdom and to bring about a complete change of heart. This self immolation on his part at once

ranks him with the very best of the world and can anything be more glorious than this ? He is exalted all the more by his vicarious death. Death has no painful sting here and we can not possibly lament before a death like this.

In Devadatta and Narayani, we have a third group of lovers. In their career of love, I think the poet wants to suggest the kind of love which prospers in this world. The love of Vikram failed because it was too violent for this world and that of Kumarsen failed because he was, should I say, uncommonly noble ! But Devdatta and Narayani are well-matched. They know each other's heart thoroughly well so that they never misconstrue each other. The words they speak are no true index of their hearts ; they say exactly the opposite of what they really mean. Yet the one does not misunderstand the other, for their's is the communion of the soul. Their love is not over-strung but it is pleasantly

toned down by the play of glittering humour which is not also devoid of an undercurrent of pathos. This love episode is perhaps conceived after the type of love between Henry Hotspur and his wife in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*. Be that as it may, it has surely a very important function to perform in the general effect of the drama as it affords excellent relief to the high-strung and deep-toned love of the other two pairs.

Liberty, 1930.

RAJA O RANI.

(INFLUENCE OF SHAKESPEARE)

Before I propose to write such an essay, I think I should make my position clear so that no misunderstanding may be possible. Some passages in *Raja O Rani* which seemed to me to be strikingly similar to some of Shakespeare, came to my notice and I felt the joy of a discoverer which joy I wish to share with others. My conclusion since then has been that Rabindranath read his Shakespeare thoroughly well and used his knowledge of Shakespeare to immense advantage. Without the least intention of minimising the real worth of Rabindranath (which by the way, is beyond question), I want to make a comparative study of *Raja O Rani* with Shakespeare.

This I think will be an interesting study as it gives us some idea of how a master mind imposes himself upon another master of a different age and clime.

To take something from another writer is in itself no fault ; the fault lies in not being able to stamp the whole with a new life and a different meaning. Shakespeare himself is the best instance of how absolutely original a writer can be with extensive borrowings. He, as every body knows, never cared about his sources ; he took them from here, there, and every where. He did not feel the least scruple to borrow from the obscurest books of the most unknown of writers and he stole the brightest gems, if there were any, away from their unpromising surroundings and used them to his own advantage, giving them a new orientation in a different context. Here was a most daring thief who could, inspite of his theft, be the most original of writers. Critics of Shakespeare hunt these borrowings and

unearth the sources not with a view to minimise the worth of Shakespeare but to find additional joy of peeping into the mysterious workshop of the great artist and to find, if they can, some inkling as to the genesis of his otherwise incomprehensible creations.

The current of literature is like the current of a stream; there is an unbroken link between the source and the mouth. The present is only a development of the past and the future will again evolve out of the present. There is a continual borrowing going on between the writers of one age and nationality and of another. The writer of the present day stands upon and profits by the writers of a bygone age. Upstarts are hardly to be found in the world of the living and nothing drops from the moon, as it were, in the world of letters. Rabindranath is no gift from the moon, having no connection with the age that has gone by and the age that is coming. He is, as all know, a voracious rea-

der and the credit lies in his being able to assimilate others' thoughts and transform them to his own flesh and blood.

There are, as I have said, passages and characters in the book in question which, I think, are taken from Shakespeare. Yet none of these do in any way jar in the readers' mind as something foreign and unconnected; on the contrary, they are very skilfully coordinated towards the building of a complete work of art, giving a satisfying sense of wholeness which is the real test of a genuine work of art.

With these rather long introductory remarks, I make bold to point out some of the similarities I have noticed. Similarity as to passages is difficult to be shown in an English essay but the reader with a careful knowledge of Shakespeare will not fail to detect them if he would return to the drama in question with an alert mind. As regards the structure and technique of the drama, Rabindranath works mainly in

the lines of Shakespeare. His welding of two or more episodes, his contrasting of characters by setting up foils to the main ones, his free use of dramatic irony and clever pre-monitive suggestions to prepare the reader for the ensuing catastrophe, his employment of prose for the vulgar people and comic characters, his delineation of the crowd, his blending of humour and pathos, his making feminine characters take male habits, inevitably remind the readers, of Shakespeare. But these, of course, are no sure indication of Rabindranath's being influenced by Shakespeare, for these technical tricks may after all be learnt intuitively as Shakespeare himself perhaps did.

Coming to the characters of the drama, we see that the love scenes between Devadatta and Narayani where they make a show of quarrel between themselves, feeling all the while intense love for each other, are in the main like Henry Hotspur's

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love quarrels with his winsome wife where finally he denies his love, saying, "Away you trifle ! Love, I love thee not."

The character of Vikram has close similarity with that of Antony in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Vikram is, as his prototype in Shakespeare, a great soul but his judgment and valour are clouded by his engrossing passion for his lady-love, though the object of Vikram's love is not of the type of Cleopatra, the 'serpent of the old Nile'. This obsession with passion of the type of Antony's is a loved theme of our Rabindranath. More than any other else, Rabindranath is the poet of love and he would have certainly failed in his duty if he had not clearly brought out the subtle distinction between true love and passion. This he has done fully in the present book and the same theme reappears in his *Chitrangada*. Rabindranath's famous interpretation of Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* also harps on the same theme.¹ In this connection another

characteristic feature of Rabindranath may be taken notice of. He in his time has painted some characters of kings but in each of them the human part of their life is more fully dealt with. With him kings are always men first ; if they err, they err because of their human element being in excess. Rabindranath has scarcely any sympathy with the cold, calculating king of the type of Henry V, who is said to be the ideal king in Shakespeare. Rabindranath's kings are allways impatient of the dull routine of statecraft and hence naturally, if he at all wants a model, he turns to Antony who said, 'Let Rome in Tiber melt and the wide arch of the ranged empire fall.'

The internal strife between his true manly nature and his passion is close to the mental strife of Antony to get rid of the deadening clutches of Cleopatra. The hysteric attempt on the part of Vikram to smother his love for his queen, who he

thought had not sufficiently responded to his love, by plunging headlong into the work of devastation and ruin, is akin to the mad endeavour of Antony to get away from the charmed world of Cleopatra.

In the characters of Rebati and Chandrasen we find another clear stamp of Shakespeare. This pair is, as it were, an abridged edition of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Like the formidable pair in Shakespeare, Rebati and Chandrasen are after the dastardly act of usurping the throne. Like Macbeth, Chandrasen has not that dash of character, that boldness to jump the life to come and yet has the egging on of ambition. He is as Lady Macbeth summed up her husband,

Letting I dare not wait upon I would,

Like the poor cat in the adage.

The queen on the other hand is like Lady Macbeth, made of sterner stuff, resolute and prepared to do anything to achieve her end.

I must, however, point out the difference between Rebati and Lady Macbeth. Rabin-dranath being a real master, can not but wear his rue with a difference and accordingly he has departed from Shakespeare at his will. As a result Rebati instead of being a replica of Lady Macbeth, has a personality of her own. Lady Macbeth knew how to beguile the time and look like the innocent flower though in fact she was as venomous as the serpent underneath. But Rebati can not play a part, she can not conceal her inward nature and pretend love when love there was none. As a matter of fact she failed to bring out some words of blessing to Kumarsen when he was going to fight.

Liberty 1930.

BISARJAN OF RABINDRANATH.

Of all the earlier dramatic productions of Rabindranath, Bisarjan perhaps created the most stir and even to this day, is one of the most popular of his writings.

The drama may be said to be an appeal to all that is humane in man against the social man, to humanity against tradition and custom. Rabindranath is here in the role of a social reformer and the book may be regarded as a mighty trace of the great Humanitarian Movement in Bengal. Ever since the days of Rammohan, the alleged sacredness of animal sacrifice was being doubted and Rabindranath offers in this book a direct challenge to that irrational belief.

With the question of animal sacrifice is mixed up a greater and far more interesting problem viz. the question of supremacy

between the Priest and the King or better, between the Church and the State. One who is conversant with the history of papacy in Europe, the long-drawn battle between the secular and ecclesiastical powers, will surely relish the book more. That same battle is fought in this drama between Raghupati, the priest of the country and Gobindamanikya, the king. Raghupati is a formidable creation of Rabin-dranath ; he is a typical priest and diverse motives go to form his complex character, the chief element being of course, his inordinate love for power. He has an unusual fund of insight into human characters and approaches every character through the part in which he is most vulnerable. The king, as all other kings in Rabin-dranath, is great in his greatness of soul, in his selfless idealism and most, in his love. He is weak perhaps in his excessive goodness and may be summed up in Browning's phrase as 'faultily faultless'.

Jaysinha, the foundling and foster son of Raghupati stands between the two conflicting ideals and his heart is the ground on which the deadly struggle between Reason and Belief takes place and it is through him that conciliation comes in the end. Aparna, the beggar girl, though seemingly mad, yet appears to be more reasonable and humane than all others. She may be taken to symbolise Knowledge and Reason or in other words Love which finally delivers Jaysinha from the slavery of the mind. Her appearance before Jaysinha in the first scene may be construed as the first dawning of Reason on man,—Reason prompted by Love, to free mankind from the slavish following of tradition. In the texture of the drama, Aparna is a force to count but the impact of that force has different effect on different characters. Most readily converted is the king, and he at once forbids animal sacrifice in the state and resolves to stand against falsehood he had been so

long following, in the teeth of universal opposition. Jaysinha is naturally affectionate and the songs of Aparna awaken his slumbering reason but he finds himself between two ideals,—universal love on the one hand and loyalty towards his *guru* on the other, and so he wavers and vacillates. Naskhatra Rai, Gunabati and the courtiers do not count for, as a matter of fact, they have no personality properly speaking and at best are mere tools to be used by others. Aparna's appeal does not find any response from Raghupati. Humanity and love are words unknown to his clouded head and he only senses that his supremacy is at stake. The king wants to abolish that which has the sanction of so many centuries. The *shastras* are his guide and tradition is his god and he feels that these are wronged. He at once sets out to marshal his forces. Jaysinha is the chief instrument in his hands and he has been very particular to obscure his reason altogether and has care-

fully taught him to rely on his *guru* unquestioningly. But still he fears that light may any day steal into the darkness and his disciple may come some day to question his authority and sanctions. It is this fear which makes him later appear before Jaysinha as an insulted man and tries to make capital of his devotion towards him. The priest tries his best to make Jaysinha understand the gravity of the situation for he knows that he can ill afford to lose his aid. At last he elicits from Jaysinha the promise that he will at any rate die for his cause.

The priest has another formidable ally in the queen Gunabati, who is the representative of the entire womenfolk, who in this country are generally uneducated and hence are superstitious in the extreme. Thus the struggle of the outer world is brought in to the family life of the king and queen; a part of the mighty whirlpool reaches to the very hearth of the king. The struggle

now takes a new turn, it is no longer a state affair merely. The king as the champion of truth is no longer placed in opposition to falsehood alone but against hatred in general and also against love for the wife. A clever man as he is, Raghupati knows that the queen is the weakest in her superstitious fear for the unseen powers and he tells her that God's inevitable wrath and thunder are sure to fall on the king if he dares to come in His way, which is, by the way, Raghupati's way. The queen's desire to have a son and her belief that the gods may help her in that matter if they can be propitiated by animal sacrifice and her natural jealousy for Dhruba the foster son of her husband,—Raghupati is shrewd enough to take the help of all these facts to widen the gulf between the husband and the wife.

Poor Naskhatrasinha is Raghupati's third acquisition. Raghupati notices in the yet unformed character of Naskhatrasingha the sleeping desire for the throne and he takes

hold of that handle to move him to action in his favour. Very solemnly he urges the murder of the king by Naskhatrasingha, his brother. This suggestion completely disturbs his quick-silver brain and he is absolutely unmanned. But the suggestion has some serious effect on the cause for which Raghupati stands, in so far as Jaysinha's belief in it is deeply shaken. Now he comes to see that it is not so much the Goddess who is wronged as his *guru* who is wronged. He is actuated more by personal motives than by any noble idea. Jaysinha's kind heart can not accede to the suggestion of murder of the king by his brother. He doubts some unfair game but the implicit faith on the *guru* and his words stands in the way of the final triumph of truth in his soul. He is easily won over by a bit of sophistry on the part of the priest. But the struggle takes a sudden turn when he volunteers to murder the king himself, for Raghupati would not allow Jaysinha to go to

such a risky affair for he loves him, as he says himself. We are thus introduced to a brighter and more human element in Raghupati's character and we find that he is after all a man, and is moved by passions and affections just as others. Thus the conflict which was so long of single issue for him, suddenly became two pronged and we find him confronted with love of power on the one side and love for Jaysinha on the other.

Raghupati has by exposition of his real self been estranged from the heart of Jaysinha ; the link which now holds Jaysinha to his master is the link of duty or loyalty. A further shock is given to his belief by another cunning move on the part of Raghupati. To incite the vulgar people against the king he turns the face of the Idol and says that the goddess is grown angry and has averted her face. This trick reminds us of similar ones such as the liquefaction of the saints' blood practised by the Popes in Rome to impose on the ignorant

masses and the trick in question had the desired effect. But Jaysinha sees through the game and becomes greatly dissatisfied with the *guru*. Jaysinha's condition becomes far from being enviable ; the belief in the *guru* as well as in the Idol has been a thing of the past with him but still they have some charm due to long association. His heart yearns after truth yet he can not forego habit.

After this trick played on the ignorant masses i. e. from the middle of the third act, we trace the gradual climbing down of Raghupati's fortune. Jaysinha, his chief ally has lost all his faith in the movement and if he is still in his camp, it is because of an unusual sense of loyalty towards the man who has reared him from infancy. The first visible failure of Raghupati is in his being caught with Naskhatrasinha in their joint attempt to stab innocent Dhruba, the the beloved foster child of the king. In the fourth act Raghupati is brought before the

king to be judged by him for his attempted murder but the manner in which he behaves himself is really majestic. He is a colossal figure and his fall, though a deserved one, has some tragic effect. He does not ask for mercy, nor does he try to disown his guilt, he only says that he can not accept the king's allegiance and supremacy. Unbending even in his folly, majestic even in his defeat, he rests his last hope on the last day of Sravan and he asks of the king to let him remain in the kingdom till then. The man who thought himself above kings, is now bereft of all power and glory and asks of Jaysinha the life of the king. He wears no mask now and does not say that the Goddess wants it ; he asks that as a gift from Jaysinha for the love and care he had taken to bring him up. Jaysinha promises to bring him the blood of 'a' king but Raghupati did not suspect that Jaysinha had meant to keep the promise in a different sense.

In the last night of the month of Sravan we see the flaming up of a devilish mirth in Raghupati for it is in this night that he is expecting to be revenged on the king but he is sadly deceived when Jaysinha stabs himself and offers to him the promised royal blood that flowed through his own veins.

The intense love for Jaysinha is the redeeming feature of this otherwise wicked character and we almost love him for his love for Jaysinha. It is also through this love that he is punished for his misdeeds because the stroke of the dagger that kills Jaysinha falls practically on the very vitals of Raghupati. His love for power, his god and his *shastras*, everything goes with the death of Jaysinha. At the end of the drama we see Raghupati and the king both as ordinary men with common joys and aspirations. Rabindranath always shows the worthlessness of any status which is extraneous to our natural status as man.

The king as a king is nothing ; he is worth for what is there of man in him. Divested of priestly pride, we see Raghupati a man weeping over the dead body of Jaysinha ; divested of the throne which Gobindamanikya abdicated in favour of his brother, Naskhatra, the king perhaps gets back the love of his estranged wife Gunabati. With the death of Jaysinha Raghupati is touched in his love and thus comes to understand the folly of his belief and takes the guidance of Aparna, i. e., Truth and Love.

Liberty—1931.

Rabindranath, the poet of Nature.

Nature and man, these are the two main themes in the hands of all poets. The distinction is often made between poets or even poetic ages, according as the stress is given to the one or the other. In English literature we earmark Pope as a classicist as he relegated nature to the background, if not altogether banished her, taking man to be his prime and chief theme. We also know the sudden resurgence of nature in English literature in what is called the Romantic era which culminated in the wonderful nature-worship of Wordsworth. After Wordsworth Dame Nature has secured a firm footing in the poetic world ; she is now generally believed to have a throbbing heart and a distinct personality and even a soul of her own.

In Bengali literature, nature though always having a more or less subordinate position, was never completely ousted from her place which she deserves in literature. With the advent of English influence on Bengali literature, the poets of the new era seemed however to have forgotten the tradition of their land and began to give more and more stress on man and his aspirations. It is funny to note that though Bengali poets of the new era followed in the main the romantic poets of England, yet there were in their poems a large percentage of classic element. We do not take in to account Iswar Chandra and his immediate circle for they are avowedly Popian but the so called bigs in our literature such as Michael, Hem and Nabin have in their literary baggage scarcely any passage on nature which may be unhesitatingly called romantic. True they wrote about this or the other objects of nature but this was not because they were compelled

by her fascinating beauty to write on nature or because of any love for her own sake but because they thought that a bit of nature would embellish their work. Nature attracted them only to arouse human thoughts in them by way of analogy. Hem Chandra's *Padmer Mrinal* or Nabin Chandra's *Kirtinasa* are cases in point. In these two poems objects of nature (a flower in the first and a river in the second) are introduced by the poets only to rest their personal thoughts upon,—thoughts on the flux of human fate. There has been no attempt on the part of the poets to give any details about the picture which might particularise the exact scenes which roused the thoughts the poets wanted to express. The descriptions are given in fact without the poets' eye on the objects and are more or less conventional and typical. We know that the scenes helped only to direct the predisposed mind of the poet along the channel destined before.

From these poets, if we come directly to the pages of Rabindranath, we are naturally aware of a great change, a change not of degree alone but of kind also. It is in Rabindranath that we first find the real Romantic poetry in Bengali literature, according to any meaning that we may possibly give to the word Romantic. In the present essay we are concerned with only one phase of Romanticism, namely in its aspect of the treatment of nature and here Rabindranath is out and out a romantic

Rabindranath is well-read in English literature and to say that in his capacity as a nature-poet he has been partially guided by Wordsworth may not be far wrong but one has to remember that Wordsworth's was not his only inspiration. Bengali literature in its purest native form is an open air literature and uncontaminated Bengali poems such as *Kabikankan*, the *Ramayan*, the *Mahabharat*, the *Vaisnav* literature as also the Sanscrit literature

which afforded the first inspiration to the Bengali poets, especially Kalidasa's great books which are Rabindranath's most favourite books, should be taken into account before any such statement is made. Moreover, if anybody reads the poet's Reminiscences, he will see how from his early boyhood Rabindranath had an inherent love for Nature, which love was duly fed and nurtured by the environments and the mode of training in which he was brought up. To this natural bend of the poet, one must add the congenial influence of the poet Biharilal Chakraverty whose open-eyed admiration and full-throated praise of the phenomena of nature is well-known. Rabindranath came to Wordsworth and for the matter of that, to the later Romantics such as Shelley and Keats, not before his personal predilection for nature was definitely formed. So Rabindranath in his capacity as a poet-priest of Nature, may be said to have vindicated the old tradition of his own literature and

in his efforts, he has been copiously helped by others whose mission happened to be the same. As he proceeded in his own channel, he was met by the poetic stream of Wordsworth and others and this only widened his course, strengthened the current or in other words made his belief in the personality of nature all the more pronounced. The last link in the long chain of influences is the influence of his most intimate friend, Sir Jagadish, whose epochmaking discoveries in the domain of plant life gave an additional confirmation to the poet's belief in the life of nature. Rabindranath's outbursts on nature should never be taken to be the outcome of a fashionable liking of the theory that Nature has a life of her own. Rabindranath at least in this matter, is no mere doctrinaire ; it is his firm conviction, almost his second self.

Despite the many poems where he tries to plumb the depths of human destiny and which ring with a certain note of sorrow,

Rabindranath is in the main, a poet of hope and joy. And the most throbbing joy he has been able to find, is in the company of nature and love. These are the two major themes which have stirred Rabindranath most to poetic activity. With him nature is not a metaphysical term which can be described in a general way. Nature to him is a personality which is infinite in her forms,—almost chameleon-like. Rabindranath's nature is always true to the minutest detail and has always a local habitation and a name. Moreover, Rabindranath generally presents nature in a particular mood ; he never fails to bring out the spirit of the particular season in which he happens to observe the landscape he is describing, so much so that very often his landscape poems read like the personification of a particular season. This change of nature with the change of season is a phenomenon worth noting and none is more sensible to the change than Rabindra-

nath. In these days of crass materialism, our lives have drifted far from the life of nature. The seasons come and go without our noticing the change ; we feel practically the same throughout the year. But it is different with poets like Rabindranath. They are still the darlings of nature. Their hearts retain the original simplicity and they are not yet sophisticated by the so-called civilisation of the modern world. They are, so to say, the children among these grown-ups ; they are primitive in this advanced age. They are the lost link between us and nature ; their life is like a harp on which nature raises a tune. The slightest stir in nature makes a corresponding stir on their heart-strings and these poets sing out in heaven-moving melody. And such a poet is our Rabindranath ; he is a lyre in the hands of nature ; it is nature which brings out different tunes in him according as it lists.

To Rabindranath all this visible world

is the result of a rhythmic dance of the supreme dancer, i. e. Shiva or the Nataraj. That the whole cosmic world is the direct outcome of the beautiful dance of the creator, is a conception purely Indian and very ancient. Indians believed that the creator is the greatest dancer, the Arch dancer, and all kinds of beauty,—beauty of form, smell, sound,—all these are mere variations and developments of the beauty of movement ; dancing in fact is the origin of all other arts. Rabindranath has completely assimilated this thought and his conception of creation is nothing if not this that the universe is the outcome of the dance of Shiva. The face or aspect of nature varies according as the cadence in the dance varies. When a man allows himself to be moved by this cosmic dance, it is all very well with him. But man in his petulant egotism has wilfully but foolishly come out of this dance and produces a discordant note and is never happy. Rabindranath

has been able (at least in his poetic life) to identify himself as one with the universe, and dances with the varying measure of Nataraj. His prayer is that the six seasons may come into his heart in their natural cadence.

Such being his conception of nature, there can hardly be any difference between his nature and his God. We all say that Rabindranath is a mystic poet without caring to know how. True that Rabindranath is highly devotional but the question is how he approaches God. He approaches God through nature and man. It is in the beauty of nature and love for mankind that we meet God; the Infinite touches the finite in these two points. Nature with all her treasure of beauty, both of form and of spirit, is the manifestation of the Divine, —the Infinite expressed in the finite form. Thus we find that Rabindranath's worship of Nature is another name for his worship of God. Though there are traces in his poetry

showing a purely sensuous enjoyment in the many sights and sounds of nature but generally we find that these sights and sounds of nature are loveable to Rabindranath for the Idea they express, for the Maker whom they suggest. Thus when he is with Nature he has the feeling that he is in the company of God and this thought makes him glad. Rabindranath's God is a benevolent loving Being in whom every kind of perfection meets. Ugliness has no meaning for him, it is another kind of beauty. Nature is always beautiful to him, the ugly spots of nature he overlooks. The dry, dreadful summer and the colourful, fragrant spring are equally beautiful in his eyes. The difference is only one of kind and not fundamental and is due to the difference in the form of the dance, the one being the violent dance (*rudra*) signifying strength and the other the mild dance signifying love and contentment. This philosophy has made our poet the most opti-

mistic and hopeful of all others. He is never a petulant fault-finder and accepts all things as good and beautiful and gazes amazingly at God's good handiwork.

Liberty, 1931

DUI BON OR THE TWO SISTERS.

Dui Bon or the Two Sisters is perhaps the shortest of Rabindranath's novels. As every body knows there are two kinds of novels, one depicting characters through incidents and the other giving expression to some idea. I hope I shall not be far wrong if I say that ideas have always a greater appeal to Rabindranath than characters as such and towards the end of his life, this appeal was all the more pronounced. Whether in his novel *Seser Kavita* or in his many symbolical dramas such as *Muktadhara*, *Rakta Karavi*, there is in each case a clearly noticeable theme which the author wants to give shape to. Dui Bon is also a novel of this sort and there is no attempt on the part of the author to conceal its central

theme. As a matter of fact the clue to the theme is to be found in the very first few sentences of the novel, wherein Rabindranath says that there are two kinds of women, the first being the motherly kind and the second the amorous kind (I do not find any other better word for Rabindranath's *priyar jati*). The first kind makes for success in life and the second kind makes for joy and happiness. Neither the one nor the other is complete in herself and so does not constitute by herself an ideal partner for man. An ideal wife would be she who combines the qualities of both the kinds. As in most other things, the best is to be found in a happy synthesis of the two opposite types. All this however, has not been said by Rabindranath in so many words but the story as stated, clearly suggests these deductions.

This truth appears to have been long recognised by our forebears according to whom an ideal wife is a good house-keeper,

a trusted friend, an intelligent adviser and a dear disciple, all rolled in one. Rabindranath has however passed by the rather minor qualities of an ideal wife and instead, has stressed on her more essential virtues. To be a worthy wife, according to him, a woman must be as solicitous as a mother for the comfort and general well-being of the husband and at the same time, should be capable of giving that undefinable joy which a man expects only from his wife.

This is in short the central idea of the novel under review. Let us see how this theme has been worked out in the story. There are four characters that really count in this story, and they are Sasanka, his wife Sarmila, Nirode and Urmila. All these four characters, being designed to be more or less types, are one sided and are contrasted with each other. Sarmila the elder sister is introduced to the reader as one belonging to the motherly type and is seen attending her husband with perhaps more

than motherly care and tenderness. So far as physical comfort goes, Sasanka should have nothing to complain against her but he misses manifestly something in Sarmila, a something which is difficult to define and give a name to. He at times gets bored and even annoyed by his wife's over-solicitousness and asks her, though half in jest, to divert at least a portion of her attention to some deity. It is difficult to find fault with Sasanka's mild resentment because no full-grown man wants to be treated as a big child by his wife.

To forget this undefinable hunger of the soul, Sasanka began to pay more and more attention to his work and success in the shape of riches and consequent social position came to him in evergrowing proportion. Slowly but surely a gulf was widening between the man and the wife, but Sarmila never guessed that she was responsible for the widening gulf. She was feeling sorry for this no doubt but tried to console herself

by thinking that a man expresses himself by his work and a wife should not put difficulties in his way. Thus, inspite of there being no ill-will between the two, there grew an estrangement which threatened to be deep and permanent, nevertheless. Within a short time the man and the wife were worshipping two different gods, the man his work and the wife an impersonal husband. Each nursed his or her grief silently till Sarmila fell ill and called in Urmila in her family.

This appearance of Urmila marks a turning point in the life of Sasanka as well as in the story itself. Urmila is a complete opposite to her sister. It is clear that she is intended to represent the *priya* type of woman. She is full of life and extremely mirthful. Wherever she moves, she spreads a radiant charm that pleases every body. Thus she had in abundance that particular capacity which her sister lacked and for which Sasanka inwardly pined and longed.

Society appears to take delight in mixing up incompatibles and Urmila, the playful, happened to be betrothed to Nirod, the owl-like prig who never laughed in his life. It was on this Nirod (curiously enough) that the responsibility of training up Urmila fell and he tried to reduce the living Urmila into a robot turning out so much duty per day. Urmila tried her best to live up to the dictates of Nirod but it was evidently impossible for her to forego her basic nature. She was making frantic efforts to shun all pleasures and to concentrate on joyless duty as Nirod understood it but her heart was all along yearning for an escape from that dull drudgery. She wanted to enjoy life but to Nirod it was a sin. If Nirod were less uncompromising and less exacting, Urmila might have been able to strike a balance but Nirod in whom there was hardly any spark of youthful life, could not understand the essential nature of Urmila. When, however Urmila met Sasanka, she

found that he could appreciate her real self. It was as it were, a meeting of two persons in their repressed sides, more keen because of the repression. Each found in the other that which each had been so long missing and no wonder if both were swept off their feet by the force of their new-found happiness. Sasanka was drawn nearer and nearer to Urmila and withdrew little by little his attention from his work. He found joy with Urmila but uncontrolled joy alone can not give real happiness to man. He was swiftly losing his money and all on a sudden he found himself on the brink of ruin if not in the midst of ruin itself. Then he woke up from his folly and promised to rebuild his fortune. Sarmila meanwhile had recovered from her serious illness and had perhaps become a changed woman. At least she had learnt the limitations of her nature and had promised to mend her ways. Urmila had therefore served a useful purpose in pointing out to her sister her

serious limitations as an ideal partner for man and she had in her turn perhaps got a lesson from Sarmila that she had her own limitations too. Neither Sarmila nor her sister appears to know that life is neither all work nor all joy but a happy combination of both. With Sarmila, Sasanka was sure about his work and with Urmila he was sure about his joy of soul but with neither he was sure about life in its entirety. This brings us to a problem as to whether man may take two wives to be safe in both. But the author has indicated that a man can very well be happy with one wife if the wife would try to avoid being one sided. She will then be an ideal wife. It is perhaps to show this that Urmila when every thing was settled for her marriage with Sasanka, is made to disappear. It is difficult to accuse Urmila for bringing some sort of disorder in the family of her sister because her appearance was a necessity and as later events showed,

she did in effect a good turn to her sister by showing her the way about which she was blind. We can only hope that Urmila would reform her ways outside the pages of this novel and would settle down to a happy life.

1939

JOGAJOG, A NOVEL OF CONFLICT.

Jogajog is a novel of Rabindranath which began first to appear in the pages of the now defunct Bengali monthly called *Bichitra*. It was first christened as *Tin Purus* or the Three Generations but soon the name of the book was changed to its present one. While announcing the change, Rabindranath wrote a rather long dissertation on the naming of books, in which he appeared to say that the name of a literary creation may not define the subject too closely. I do not think that the change of the name was called for only to make it less definite but really to make the name more appropriate for the story as it was ultimately taking shape. Rabindranath's intention, on his own admission, was in the first

instance to carry the story through three generations. We do not however, presume to know what he wanted to emphasise thereby. In any event, to justify the name *Tin Purus* the story should have been spread more or less evenly over three generations and that was possibly Rabindranath's first idea. But as the story progressed, the original idea somehow appears to have been abandoned and in the story as we have it now, the emphasis is clearly not on the passage of time through the three generations but on the relations between Madhusudan and Kumudini, brought freakishly together by the tie of marriage. Thus the name was abandoned because it would not have been strictly appropriate to the story in the present form and the present name *Jogajog* is infinitely more suited for it. Thus with all respect for the great master, I should say that the long apologia for the change of the name was uncalled for and the arguments put forward are not also

sound. A man's name may not mean anything but the name of a novel must have some sort of a relation with the subject, if however, it is not named after the chief character. *Bis-Briskha* in this sense is just as good a name for a novel as *Krisna-Kanter Will*. The difference is only of kind and not of any quality. If *Bis-Briskha* did not find favour with Rabindranath for the author's unwarranted projection of his own moral judgment, that is another matter but that is not the stated reason for not liking the name. Rabindranath says that *Krisna-Kanter Will* as a name for a book is better than *Bis-Briskha* because the former does not explain the story while the latter does. I must confess that I do not understand the distinction. *Krisna-Kanter Will* in a way does explain the story just as *Bis-Briskha* does. And what is more, it is difficult to see how *Jogajog* is a better name than *Tin Purus* only on this score. *Tin Purus* may be just as good a name for

a novel as *Jogajog*. For the present book however, *Tin Purus* is clearly inappropriate not because there is any inherent defect in the name itself but because it does not indicate the point on which the stress has been given. The book opens on the thirty-second birth day of Abinash Ghosal manifestly the son of Madhusudan and Kumudini. The author has not spared more than two sentences for Abinash, the representative of the third generation. Then the book turns back to history and slowly moves forward until it comes to the life of Madhusudan and Kumudini, presumably the parents of Abinash. The book however ends with the promise of Abinash's coming to this world but this scanty reference to the third generation would of itself make the name *Tin Purus*, inappropriate for the book as we have it now. Rabindranath has himself said that the story refused to follow the name *Tin Purus*, evidently chosen in advance, as closely as it should and so the name had to

be abandoned. This is the real reason for the change of the name and this, if it proves anything, proves that naming of a book before it is completed is extremely difficult. But in these days of serial publication of novels, in the pages of monthly journals such a venture has to be made because the editors of journals would not allow writers to finish their novels before they are published.

Now let us return to the novel itself. As I have said already, the present name Jogajog fits the novel well. One of the meanings of the word is 'union' or 'combination'. The other meaning is 'agreement' or 'unity'. The name evidently refers to the union of Madhu and Kumu, an union which is just external, caused by an external wedlock. Beyond this there is no tie of union between the parties and it is their many differences that the book emphasises. Thus the name is justified more in irony than in reality. If it is a union, it is one of irreconcilables, it is a combination of two entirely different

natures. If I have to suggest an English name for the English rendering of this novel, I would suggest Misalliance. Rabindranath in this book has taken pains to stress that the union between Madhu and Kumu was a misalliance in every sense of the term. It is the subtle differences between these two characters that the author has described with superb power and dexterity.

The first few chapters of the novel are devoted to preparing the ground-work of the story. We find that the difference between the two characters is not of temperament only but has its roots in the distant past. We are given to know that the two characters spring from two separate families which have quarrelled bitterly and for long, in the past and what is more to the point is that the family of the man had more of the defeat in the quarrel and Madhusudan never forgot the past. As a matter of fact, Madhusudan wanted to marry Kumu the daughter of the other family not out of

any love but in a spirit of revenge. After generations of poverty, he has amassed great wealth through trade, built up a palace and even got the title of 'Raja'. He could never forget the humiliation his family had in the hands of the family to which Kumudini belongs and has been only happy to be able to lend heaps of money to Bipradas, the brother of Kumudini, at the time of his declining fortune. Once Madhusudan had established a sort of supremacy over Bipradas, a member of the other family, he wanted next to confirm this supremacy by marrying Kumudini the daughter of that family. Thus Madhusudan's decision to marry Kumu was not the result of any love felt for the latter whom he had never seen but hate and contempt for her family, and a marriage effected on this background surely portends evil. It is not as a Romeo driven irresistibly to a Juliet by the sheer force of love but as a Shylock wanting to feed fat some ancient grudge Rabinranath

has taken care to stress this aspect of the matter and he caps the decision of Madhusudan to marry Kumu by remarking that an wounded family is as dangerous as an wounded leopard. Little good is expected from a union like this.

It may be asked how a marriage could be possible in these circumstances because Madhusudan's decision to marry might not of itself have brought about the unfortunate union, unless the other contracting party also agreed. Why, one would like to ask, should Bipradas agree to this marriage? By trying to meet this obvious question Rabindranath has brought out a subtle side in the character of Kumudini. Kumdini was nurtured in a family where old-world beliefs (I am loth to call these superstitions) played a great part in her life. Her horoscope indicated a marriage with a Raja and when an offer of marriage came from Madhu, who has been a Raja, she could not help thinking that it was her inev-

itable destiny that was moving to its fulfilment, and it would be foolish not to accept the offer. Other signs confirmed this her belief and she was sure that God desired the marriage. She knew that the problem of her marriage was causing deep worries to Bipradas, her brother, whom she loved so dearly and her anxiety to relieve the brother of the worries might also have contributed to her coming to a hasty decision. Bipradas knew Kumu thoroughly well and he knew Madhusudan no less and he was doubtful if the union could ever be happy, because, first and foremost there was the great disparity of age between the two. But Kumu's decision was formed ; she considered this difference of age as no barrier because with a girl of her training, she thought, love for the husband should be absolutely impersonal and irrespective of what the husband is like. It is a thing to be taken for granted. Her mother did not choose her husband but she had never failed to

love the latter and Kumu never doubted that she would be able to love her husband, never mind how he turns out to be.

It was here that Kumudini misjudged her own powers. She failed in the first instance to take into account the difference that existed between herself and other Hindu girls who are given away in marriage in very early years before a distinct personality is allowed to grow. Kumudini was already nineteen when she was married to Madhu and by that time her personality had been well formed, and an obliteration of personality which is the ideal of womanhood in this country was, as future events proved, not easy. Secondly she could never guess how wide may be the divergence between the actual husband and husband of her dreams. She had her ideas about what an ideal husband should be. She read Kalidasa's great books with her brother and the purity in the love between the Lord Shiva and Mother Parvati made a deep

impression on her. To her the ideal husband should be as loving but as austere and pure as Shiva. She heard mythical stories where kings dared everything for the lady of their liking. Coming down to practical life, she had seen the relation between her own father and mother. The father had his draw backs no doubt but inspite of occasional differences, there was an underlying unity between them both, and an inward acceptance of each other which had roots in real love.

It was this inward acceptance, this inner agreement what was lacking in the case of Madhusudan and Kumudini. Madhusudan's behaviour from the very start revealed that he was just a tinsel king and not even remotely resembled the king of Kumu's dreams, large in heart and noble in deeds. He is just a Galsworthian Man of Property, who would assess everything in terms of money and for whom there are no other values in life than cash. Even wife

to him was just a possession and no more. In Madhusudan's world, the wife can have no individuality of her own ; She is just a maid of the man and no partner. This outlook of life was alien to Kumudini and was jarring to her inner nature. In deep disgust she decided to play the maid and love that is to cement the pair remained as distant as ever. The difference between Kumudini and Madhusudan is the wide difference between the old aristocracy and the new rich. Rabindranath in this novel has just suggested this difference but in his *Russiar Chithi* he has given a pointed expression of this difference between these two classes and a reference to this will, I think, be helpful for a better understanding of this novel. In *Russiar Chithi* he says that in his earlier days between the different grades of Bengali society there was not much of disparity so far as standard of living in the economic sense was concerned. The difference was mainly of culture ; the

aristocracy was characterised not by any superior kind of living but by its taste in music, love for education and by superior manners and dealings. Measuring difference by the yardstick of wealth is an import from the west. At the advent of the British, a class of people got money as a result of contact with British merchants and they adopted the European kind of display of wealth. Since then, aristocracy in this country has come to be measured by external possessions and internal equipments have gone into discount.

Kumudini with her taste and culture is the daughter of the real aristocracy. She is the product of long ages ; she traces many of her traits from a long past. She is distinctive without her being aware of it. Her distinction is something innate and not external. Madhusudan on the other hand is a typical new rich. It is true that his family also belonged to the landowning class to begin with, but that tradition had

somehow got lost and we are told that the father of Madhu had been a petty clerk in a shop and Madhu worked up to a life of wealth by dint of labour and luck. Madhu, true to the tradition of a member of this class of the new rich wanted, by display of his wealth, to establish his supremacy over all others and was mean enough to wound the susceptibilities of all whom Kumudini loved so dearly. The marriage ceremony which is to be an auspicious ceremony intended to cement two families, turned out to be a battle ground and the inevitable reaction to all these in the mind of Kumu was fear and aversion. The marriage ceremony has been compared by the author to a cyclone and a cyclone it was spelling ruin and disaster. Kumu got shocks after shocks and inspite of her earnest efforts and prayers her love could not grow. Madhusudan in his middle age was not worthy of a girl so fair as Kumudini but the latter was capable of loving any husband provided there was

no direct obstacle created on the part of the husband against the growth of love. But Madhusudan by her rude and no less mean behaviour shattered the chances of growth of love in Kumu who makes a confession of faith when she says that she could have loved Madhu because love had dawned in her heart and she would have crowned any husband with that but Madhusudan by his tactless handling at the very start marred everything. Madhusudan did not know that one has to deserve love before he gets it, or that the love of the wife has also to be earned. Madhusudan who considered wife as just a maid thought that he could claim love as a matter of right and he claimed love from Kumu as he claimed obedience and work from his clerks and dependents. Kumu unfortunately, in spite of all her efforts, failed to oblige him in this and Madhusudan's tactless method of approach made the chasm wider and wider. The essential vulgarity of Madhusudan's nature comes out in its naked ugliness when he

starts his mad revelling with Shyama, a near kin. While going through the pages narrating this episode one feels as if he is reading another version of the proverbial story of the Beauty and the Beast. Though I do not say that this episode has no reason of its existence in the texture of the story but I certainly wish that Rabindrananath had given us a less ugly picture of Madhusudan's bestiality.

That Madhusudan had a sense of fascination for Kumu goes without saying but his idea of love is rather coarse and hardly transcended the body. His desire for the body of Kumudini was great but he was not subtle enough to know that union of the body does not constitute the union that a successful marriage stands for. He could not therefore appreciate Kumu's searching of the heart when she was called on to surrender the body before love could be allowed to dawn. Before the bullying of Madhusudan Kumudini had to submit to

his embraces but the gulf of difference remained as wide as it ever was. Rabin-dranath has remarked that the wood-cutter gets the timber but the gardener gets fruits and flowers. Madhusudan with his idea of love may have a wife and even a son but may not have the heart of a woman. In a society as it is constituted now, a man can compel the surrender of his wife but unless womenfolk are given equal rights and are treated with a sense of respect the surrender may not be complete. Total surrender, the author says, is like a fruit, ripening in free light and air. In the present society Madhusudan has definite rights on Kumudini and more so on his boy but is this the only thread of union between the pair !

From what I have written above it would clearly appear that I hold Madhusudan solely responsible for the frustration of the marriage tie. It is better however, to state that the judgment of

Rabindranath is not as plain and obvious as that. As a correction to this one-sided judgment of mine, if I am deemed to have passed such a judgment already, I should in fairness assure the reader that there may be people who would go so far as to give the verdict of guilt on Kumudini. As a matter of fact quite an intelligent friend of mine told me once that he thought that the author's chief intention was to show the discomfiture of Kumudini which is to say that Rabindranath had more sympathies on Madhu than on Kumudini. I do not presume to know how many people would understand the novel as my friend understood it. But this at any rate shows that apportionment of blame is not easy. At any rate Kumudini has to share a portion of the blame. If Madhusudan by birth and training was a little too matter-of-fact and even course, Kumudini was also by birth and training too other-worldly and etherial.

Her ideas about a husband was perhaps too high for any man to conform to. She is conceived somewhat after Mira Bai whom no earthly love could please. If Madhusudan was incapable of understanding a nature so subtle as Kumudini's, Kumudini, it must also be said, failed to understand Madhu with sufficient sympathy and kindness. And happiness in marriage lies in mutual understanding and sympathy.

This mutual understanding and sympathy we find in abundance between Nabin, a brother of Madhusudan and his wife. There is a certain charm in the peaceful conjugal life of this pair but the life of this pair can not be considered as an effective foil to the life of Madhusudan and Kumu. Nabin, after all is a docile protege of his thundering brother and his wife is devoid of any memorable individuality, so much so that the author has not condescended to give her a name

even. She is not her own self but only somebody's mother. In this she may be typical of the Hindu idea of wifehood but can not certainly be considered as an ideal. The life of this pair, depicted with a lighter brush serves the purpose of giving the needed relief after the deep toned life of the other pair.

SESER KABITA

Seser Kabita or The Poem At The End is the name of a rather curious novel of Rabindranath. I call the novel curious because the author has written it in a playful mood and the characters, especially Amit the hero appears to stand on the border-line of caricature. Rabindranath as I have said on many occasions, loved themes better than men and women and towards the end of his career this love for theme became all the more pronounced. To give shape to a preconceived theme, what you need are types and not men and women as we find them in actual life. In *Jogajog*, poor Madhusudan has to play consistently the rôle of a typical man of property and in doing

so he has to act at times in a manner which makes him ludicrous. If he were free to act as he pleased, I doubt if he had made such a fuss over a coloured paper-weight which Kumu had given to a nephew of his, or over the telegram sent by Kumu through Nabin to her brother without Madhusudan's permission. The reader who carefully goes through the pages of *Jogojog* can not but feel that the writer has taken the help of exaggeration to rub the theme into the head of his readers. A writer who wants to set up a type can not but take resort to exaggeration and Madhusudan manifestly has been the victim of the writer's intention to exaggerate. In spite of this, neither Madhusudan nor Kumudini has been an unredeemed caricature and that is because the author has deep sympathies for the characters in spite of their foibles and his intention is not to ridicule in the sense that a Ben Jonson ridicules his characters.

In *Seser Kabita* the author has gone a step forward and has planned it most studiously to bring out a theme. The theme discussed in it is a subtle one and the writer in naming the book has clearly referred the reader to the poem at the end as holding within it the core of the novel. Curiously enough the poem is signed by Labanya, though the author did not inform his readers earlier that Labanya also had poetic abilities like Amit the hero. It may be argued that Labanya has only quoted Rabindranath as she quoted him before but in reply one may ask how Rabindranath could write a poem to suit exactly the occasion unless it was written to order. In any other novel such incongruities would have been dangerous, destroying in effect the illusion of reality but in the novel under discussion, the reader does not mind them. The chief interest of the novel lies in the exegesis of the theme and the reader follows with spell-bound interest the

nature of the theme and its gradual unfolding.

Now let us try to understand the import of this poem at the end. In it Labanya is reminding Amit of the inevitable flight of time. Nothing, she says, is static in this world of eternal flux. Our life is in a sense nothing but a string of numberless deaths, as we have to continually move forward to new life and experience, leaving irrevocably our past behind. As one, subject to this immutable law of our being, Labanya has also to move forward leaving those moments of her existence which had been so pleasantly associated with Amit. Labanya of those moments has been a thing of the past and Labanya of the present has seldom any resemblance with her. Amit wanted those moments to stay unchanged for all time to come so that the intense love he felt for Labanya may not lose anything of its intensity. Those

moments of intense love can remain unchanged only as memory and Labanya tells Amit that in order to save those moments of love from the frosty touch of time, she prefers to step out from his life so that he may be able to nurse the love he once felt for her in his heart, dissociated from Labanya herself, a Labanya who changes by the changeless law of nature. It is only as a memory that Labanya can hope to be the same for all time to come and unless she drops out from the life of Amit she can not be a pure memory in the mind of the latter.

Amit not only wanted the object of his love to be immutable but also perfect and flawless. But by the very condition of our being, both these ideals are unattainable in actual life. Labanya, his object of love, cannot in the first instance, be the same always,—she must change and grow even to old age, and unless Amit is capa-

ble of accepting this position, it is difficult for Labanya to leave herself in his hands. Labanya on her part, knows her various limitations and is conscious of the fact that she cannot even remotely satisfy Amit's limitless expectations. By coming in daily contact with him she will without doubt frustrate his dreams. Labanya in the mind of Amit is something subjective, being the creation of Amit's own mind. There is no bar to this Labanya having all perfections to her credit but objective Labanya, the Labanya of flesh and blood has her own limitations and none is aware of this more than Labanya herself. Amit on the other hand is so much preoccupied with the subjective Labanya, the Labanya of his own creation, that the latter fears that Amt will not be able to and the shock a personal contact will bring. It was possible for a Wordsworth, though a poet of great eminence, to bear with perfect equanimity the slow transformation of the object of his love

from 'a phantom of delight' to 'human nature's daily food' But Labanya guesses and perhaps guesses aright that Amit will not be able to bear such a degeneration of his lady-love. That is why she decides to leave Amit with his dreams. She will not destroy his dreams by too intimate a contact which a marriage will certainly imply. Labanya will rather give herself away to one who will not expect from her more than she is really capable of and who is ready to accept her as she is, with all her failings and foibles, and not as an idealised something. This may not mean a severance of the tie between Labanya and Amit. Even though Labanya may drop out from the life of Amit, the dreams the latter wove round the former will be ever with him. No body can deprive Amit of the Labanya whom he himself created.

If this is the significance of the poem given at the end of the novel, it is as has already been said, the significance of the

novel itself and the interest of the novel lies in the author's beautiful though perhaps overelaborate presentation of this significance.

Now from the end the book let us turn to the beginning and see how the theme has developed. Amit Roy the hero of the novel comes of an extremely rich and fashionable family, belonging to a class which live a highly sophisticated life patterned largely after a servile imitation of the European well-to-do class. Amit has seen British social life at close quarters as he had been in England for seven long years and no wonder that he will have a great aversion to the ways of life prevailing in his own society, by way of reaction. To him his society appears to be sickeningly stereotyped allowing hardly any scope for the play of individuality. Amit on the other hand is nothing if not individual *,—his individuality often bordering on the ludicrous. He has another name for

individuality ; he calls it style and style is an obsession to him. Rabindranath has given an exaggerated picture of what curious dress he wears to appear unique and possibly to ridicule the stereotyped dress his class wore. Amit is unique not only in dress but in every fibre of his being. He, like a Bernard Shaw, would want to be unique even at the peril of being grotesque. Anything which has a vogue in his society is to him an anathema and therefore according to Amit, Rabindranath has got more than his meed in this country and should yield to something new, if not to something better. Fashion according to Amit is a mask one wears to hide the face while the style

*In the beginning of the essay, I have suggested as though Amit is a type and the reader may question if I am not here contradicting. There is in fact no contradiction even when I say that Amit is both typical and individual. What I mean is that Amit is a type of a highly individualised person.

is the face itself. Amit claims to be a stylist in this sense but one wonders if by wanting to be too original, he has not trod into a fashion of another kind. If Amit has thrown off in disgust the mask commonly worn by the people of his class, he has not himself appeared before the reader with his face uncovered, but with a different mask, because his fad for originality sounds itself like an attitudinisation. His obsession for style has gone so deep into his being that he does not seem to care what he says so long he says it well. His carefully chiselled epigrams show that he is too conscious an artist to be natural and unaffected.

Amit is a poet, though not in his own name but under the pseudonym of Nibaran Chakravarty. In the first poem of his, he claims to be in possession of a new message, a new thought for the world of the stereotype and the common place. He knows it will meet with the grimmest of opposition but is hopeful of its ultimate win. The reader is

inclined to treat this boasting with an indulgent smile and would like to remind Amit that everything that has been in vogue may not be considered as falsehood and that novelty is not synonymous with truth. It is true that in most matters truth is a relative term and has validity only with reference to certain conditions, but at the same time it has to be remembered that there are certain facts of life which hardly admit of easy change, far less reversal and one has to hold fast to these moorings or else one may lose one's sanity. Amit in his over-zeal, consequent on a reaction against over-sophistication, mistakes novelty for truth and thinks he would improve even on the eternal relation between man and woman. Sick of sophisticated men and women around him in Calcutta, Amit goes to Shillong where few people of his class go. While in Calcutta, Amit moved in the company of women but somehow never felt the love that transmutes the life of a man. Not that

he was essentially a woman-hater but women around him appeared to him to be cast in the same mould, each swearing by the same social code, and so his love did not descend from the general to the particular. Extremely individual himself, he must have a woman as individual as he is.

This he gets in Labanya at Shillong. The circumstances in which the meeting takes place are extraordinary. Their cars collide and Labanya as a result is very nearly killed, though surprisingly enough, escapes unhurt. This external collision symbolises a mental landslide in respect of both the parties concerned. Love dawns on both in a flashlight suddenness and brilliance. Amit's love for the unconventional is satisfied in finding Labanya, a lady who is manifestly outside the fashionable group. Love for books which so long kept the source of love ice-bound in Labanya also thaws. It looks as though a well-matched union is inevitable. But no, there is just a snag.

Amit with his irresistible thirst for the ever-new, has a different conception of love. In the second chapter of the book Amit likens their union to the union between the earth and the moon, an analogy which portends more of separation than of union. In his second poem also he takes up this thread and admits that with him ideal love is one that will tie but bind not i. e., a union of spirit and not of body. Amit is impatient of staying fixed at a place, both literally and metaphorically. He wants to move on continually and would accept no moorings. Impelled as he is by an inherent wanderlust he can not settle down to the ordinary humdrum life of conjugal felicity and thus allow his love to stagnate. Amit, in Bengali means immeasurable and immeasurable are his expectations in everything especially in love.

Labanya from the very start doubted the feasibility of realising Amit's conception of love in life. She is practical enough to

know that his idealisation of love may be all very well in the world of the Idea, but cannot be attained in actual life. She is therefore hesitant and that with good reasons. In a poem he recites, Amit confesses that he feels interested in a thing as long as he has not known it. Once it is known, he would want to move ahead, as it were, to pastures new. From a man with this make-up, constancy in love is hardly to be expected. So long Labanya is not attained Amit will feel interested in her, and would keep on crooning about her but when she is attained, what interest would then Amit have ! In spite of Amit's protestation that he would show the world that getting does not always bring in satiety but eggs on the desire, Jogmaya in whose family Labanya stayed and who was capable of assessing the situation correctly also feared that the marriage if effected between the two may end as a fun. Labanya is no less apprehensive and asks Amit in bewilderment,—"I fail to

make out what exactly you want from me and how little of that I can give you”.

Amit however has his own ideas of love. He wants to experiment on love and as an ambitious explorer he desires in the domain of the relation between man and woman, to go far beyond where anybody ever ventured to go,—

“For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared to go.”

Earlier in the novel he likened the union he desires with Labanya to the union between the earth and the moon, a union independent of any physical contact. Amit does not want his love to end in marriage in the ordinary sense, marriage which is considered by many as the death of love. His love would be a communion of spirit, which will not lose any of its piquancy by marriage. Just as a poet makes his verses by introducing voluntary restraint on the free flow of language, so he would make their union beautiful by imposing voluntary separation.

In a poem called the *Streamlet*, Amit compares his lady love to a dancing mountain stream and says he would be satisfied if she would dance and sing with his shadow on her waters, which is to say that he would be satisfied if she would only lovingly caress his thoughts. All these show that Amit's love was for an abstraction, and this perhaps explains his renaming Labanya as Banya. He does not dare to take Labanya in her entirety, in her own objective self. Labanya on the other hand wants something more than mere thought and says almost with an air of finality that a shadow is a shadow all the same and she will not be able to play with the shadow all her life. Labanya obviously wants some thing more tangible ; an abstraction will not satisfy the needs of her being. She has no fancy for the ever-new, but would like to settle down to a static life. She knows that this will not be possible with Amit and that is why she wants the ring which Amit desires to give

her, set with pearl which in Bengali is called মুক্তা (mukto). This perhaps distantly suggests that the contemplated union will leave the partners free from any responsibility. When Labanya is called on to suggest a name for Amit, she chooses মিতা, (mita) which is also suggestive. মিতা in Bengali means a friend and in selecting this word Labanya perhaps suggests that Amit cannot be more than a close friend to her.

Labanya all along knew that union with Amit will not be happy for her, as this will not satisfy her whole being. When Amit came to announce his intention to marry Labanya, the latter did not say anything but 'threw a broken walnut towards a barren peach-tree'. This little touch has the wonderful effect of preparing the reader for the finale of the novel. The reader knows that the frustration is not far. The difference between Amit and Labanya is wide and fundamental. Not that Amit does not know the difference that exists between him and Labanya. The

realisation comes to him with all its pathos at the end of chapter seven when he suspects if by his too much emphasis on creation, he has been missing life. Just as the river, he muses, continually glides past the banks, should he ever recede from life following the ever moving current of creation. This difference that exists between Labanya and Amit is in a way the difference between man and woman in general. A man fulfils his being in creation, and creation forgets the created to push itself forward to further creation. A woman on the other hand employs all her being in protecting and to protect the created she resists further creation. Amit and Labanya therefore are not just two individuals, but typify in their lives the subtle difference between man and woman. It is this which gives the book a general interest.

Amit in his relation to Labanya is not the total man and therefore his idea of love fails to comprehend love in its totality but

touches only an aspect of it. Towards the end of the novel Amit realised and admitted that his idea of love apropos Labanya is at best one-sided. It is as it were the love of the poet in him *i.e.* of Nibaran Chakraverty. But there is Amit Roy, his other self to cater to and for him he has to take Ketaki as his wife. This dual personality of Amit should not be lost sight of, if the meaning of the novel has to be grasped. Rabindranath wants to suggest that a man is composed of both imagination and matter-of-fact. The poet in man would want an idealised object of love but the matter-of-fact in him would want a woman of flesh and blood. It is the reconciliation of these two distinct needs of our being that is difficult. Every man has the desire for both aspects of love but in the life of most men the first aspect gradually merges in the second and the love to which they finally settle down is a composite experience in which the component elements lose their outlines. It

is as it were the white ray of the sun in which the seven colours of the rainbow lie mixed up, undetected. Just as with the help of a spectrometer you separate in clear outlines the seven hues of the sun's rays which to the ordinary eye are white, so in this novel Rabindranath has separated in distinct outlines the two aspects of love which in ordinary life are found mixed up. 1945.

RAKTA-KARAVI OR THE RED OLEANDERS.

Rabindranath in an address which now forms the preface to *Rakta-Karavi*, cautions the reader against any attempt towards an exhaustive analysis of the meaning underlying this drama. Just as the heart, he says, functions properly so long as it is allowed to remain in peace deep below the physical exterior of man, so the symbolism of this drama must, if it has to fulfil its purpose, be left undisturbed and not taken out for dissection. I do not think that this caution need be taken seriously ; for Rabindranath has himself suggested a novel interpretation of the great epic *Ramayana* which most Indians accept as a faithful narration of incidents in the life of Rama and not as an allegorical story woven skilfully to express a moral idea. Rama and Sita, so Rabindranath tells us, symbolise the pastoral and

agricultural life while Ravana with his ten heads typifies the acquisitive life of greed for wealth and power. His golden Lanka is the city of accumulated wealth and his wicked designs against Sita are explained as the forced alienation of labour from land. To Rabindranath, the 'maya mriga' or the shadow deer is the lure of gold which could tempt Sita temporarily. The ultimate ruin of Ravana is the logical working out of the machine system of production ending in its inevitable collapse, due partly to the uprising of the *banaras* i.e. the ill-fed, ill-clad dispossessed class and partly to the contradictions inherent in the system itself, as symbolised by Bibhisana's working against his own brother Ravana.

This is an intelligent and plausible interpretation of the *Ramayana* which it is not possible, however, either to prove or to disprove. Rabindranath goes on to say that in so far as Balmiki wanted to posit this conflict between the peaceful agrarian

economy and the uproarious machine system of production, he forestalled Rabindranath, the poet of our age. In his own inimitable jesting manner he adds that the conflict was certainly not acute in the days of Balmiki and so it is Balmiki who may rightly be accused of having lifted the theme from the age of Rabindranath who, and not Balmiki, can legitimately lay claim to it. We are not concerned here with the question whether the *Ramayana* can bear this ingenious interpretation of Rabindranath but it certainly provides a justification if any justification was needed, for treating his own Rakta-Karavi as a drama, the main theme of which is the exploitation of the many by the few, of the toiling multitude by those who command wealth and power; or in more general terms, we may say that it is intended as the poet's commentary on the mechanistic organisation of life in the present day world. To this view of the [matter Rabindranath can hardly object,

If the central motif of the drama is easily discernible, all the characters of the play and what they say and do are, however not so easily explainable with reference to that motif. The reader is intrigued as to what exactly the Raja behind the meshes of a net stands for and what precisely are represented by Nandini, Kishore, Ranjan and Bishu. At one point he feels that he has succeeded in equating these characters with certain ideas but perplexities soon re-appear and the equation does not remain valid throughout. Rabindranath's salutary caution with which this essay opens is meant for those readers who would seek a close parallelism between the characters and the ideas. In allegories the pattern is obvious and rigid to which every detail in them conforms strictly but in symbolical writings this rigidity must be avoided if for nothing else than to allow free play to the readers' imagination. *Rakta-Karavi* is not an allegory but a symbolical drama and if we feel that

we can see the play of ideas behind the clash of personalities, we must not demand a too rigid conformity if we want not to miss the core of the thing. In the present essay I intend only to suggest to the reader in barest outline what I feel I can see through the veil. It is quite likely that other people will claim to have seen differently through the same veil.

The little drama was originally intended to be named as Jakshapuri i. e. the City of Jaksha, the mythical arch-hoarder of wealth. It would have been a more revealing title, for the reader would then have at once grasped the intention of the author. *Rakta-Karavi*, which is the name of a red flower found in Bengal, lends a poetic flavour to the book and one is apt to wonder if the influence of the Red Revolution on Rabindranath has had anything to do with the change.

If the earlier name emphasised the evil inherent in modern society, the new name perhaps suggests the direction in which the

remedy is to be sought. The remedy suggested by the author is, however, not the Soviet one through blood and revolution. If blood is spilt in the drama, it is spilt not in violence but in sacrifice which effects a change of heart in the oppressor. Thus if Rakta-Karavi is Red, it is Red with a vital difference.

Briefly, the story is this. The King of the City of Gold is behind a netted curtain. A large number of workers are engaged in getting gold from the bowels of the earth. Nandini a girl of infinite grace moves about in the city spreading sweetness and light wherever she goes. Kishore, the young boy adores her, Bishu sings her praise openly and even the Professor and the Historian who are in the pay of the King betray a hidden liking for her. The King himself has a certain yearning for her and is jealous of Ranjan who is nearest her heart and with whom she awaits a vibrant communion. As the hour of the inevitable union appra-

ches, the King in rage sends Bishu to prison and kills Ranjan and Kishore. Then suddenly he realises the folly of it all and sets out, a rebel against the existing order, with Nandini as guide in quest of a new life.

When I say that *Rākṭa Karāvī* is a symbolical drama I do not mean that the drama has no relation to actual life. So far as the existing social order is concerned, Rabindranath has given us a highly realistic picture. The glaring disparities of the social order all the world over, the extremes of luxury and poverty, the abject degeneration of the toiling classes, all these evil effects of the present system have been faithfully and forcefully brought out in scraps of dialogue spread all over the book and specially in the characters of Fagulal, Chandra, Gokul, Bishu and others. The dispossessed labourers with their miserable lives are the leavings from the dishes of the King ; they are the one extreme of the same social order in which the King with his absolute power is the other

extreme ; they are the debit side against the credit side provided by the king with his untold possessions, in the cash account of the present system of production. These touches give this symbolical drama a complexion of realism and the reader feels as if he is reading a book on the vital problems of the day.

One may not be wrong in surmising that Rabindranath at the time of writing this drama was partially influenced by socialistic literature. The idea of labour being exploited by the capitalist, the unbridgeable chasm between the two classes, all these socialistic ways of thinking are to be found in abundance in the drama. Science, history and even religion are shown to be in the pay of the kingly order and therefore furthering the interests of that order. This is in exact keeping with the Marxist postulate that the governing ideas of each period are always the ideas of its governing class ; in the present capitalistic regime all

our ways of life are in the last analysis found to be dictated by the capitalists who are the governing class to-day. §

The book, in so far as it is a commentary on the existing social order, thus appears to betray a communistic way of

§ I would refer the reader here to the very ably written monograph on Communism by Harold J. Laski. At pages 128-29 of this book we read, "The schools, a communist thinks, serve as deliberate training grounds of obedience and order. The children of the workers are taught there the wickedness of rebellion, the splendour of kingship, the duty of worshipping as heroes the soldiers of the nation..... The churches, according to him, enforce a similar lesson. By insisting that all power come from God, they seek to make rebellion identical with blasphemy. They teach men to accept their lot without repining instead of calling upon them to throw off their chains. And the press is always at hand to distort the facts, to insist upon the inevitability and justice of the present regime, to fasten still tighter the chains upon its victims." The sayings of the Professor, the Historian and above all of Kenaram Gosain bear unmistakable impress of this line of thinking.

thinking. Our poet has examined the system of production prevailing at the present day and found it wanting. But when it comes to the question as to how the present state of affairs can be changed for the better, vagueness inevitably appears. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to see that the method of change suggested by Rabindranath is not what is advocated by a communist who believes that his ideal can be attained only by means of a armed revolution. He would not mind the spilling of human blood. But Rabindranath the poet, cannot countenance the idea of mass slaughter which Russia had to indulge in before it could realise its objective. At one time, before he went to Russia in 1930, Rabindranath expressed his doubts if material advancement achieved in Russia had compensated for the enormous amount of blood which had had to flow before the Revolution was an accomplished fact. By birth and training Rabindranath cannot be

a thorough going communist. In his *Letters from Russia* he admits his belief in the necessity of a division of society into classes. "In the history of man's civilisation," he wrote, "there has always been a class of men who live unseen and unknown and constitute the greater part of society. It is they who carry civilisation on their back. They have not the time to grow as full men ; they live on the crumbs from the wealth of society. They are the lamp-stand of civilisation ; they stand patiently with the lamp on their head ; while those on top get the light, only grease treacles down their bodies." Not that his moral sense approved of this but he somehow considered this as inevitable. He continues, "I have pondered over them for long and thought there was no way out. Unless there be a class below there cannot be a class on top but there is need for a class on top...All the best crop of civilisation has been the yield

from the field of leisure. There is need for maintaining leisure in one section of man's civilisation." Though on his own admission he revised his views considerably when he saw the progress achieved in all directions in Soviet Russia, Rabindranath constituted as he was, could never turn a complete convert. If *Rakta Karavi* is Red, it is, I repeat, Red with a difference. As I have already said, it very ably narrates the short-comings of the soul-killing capitalistic civilisation and sordid life of the working class but in it we do not find the militant communism of a Marx or a Lenin, far less of a Trotsky § who advocated the overthrow of capitalistic organisation by organised violence and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat.

§ Compare, "There is in history no other way of breaking the class will of the enemy except by the systematic and energetic use of violence. By violence he seizes power and by violence he defends himself from attack."..... Trotsky.

It is true that Rabindranath in this drama has also suggested a working class uprising but if any blood is shed it is shed by the King who kills Ranjan and Kishore. Thus the King is overpowered not by the superior force of the working class in revolt but by the awakened conscience in him. It is a Gandhian change of heart, a change of heart effected in the oppressor, by the sacrifice of the oppressed. The champions of the working class, if Ranjan and Kishore may be so described, spill blood, not of their enemy but of their own and by sacrifice brings about a change in the enemy. Stated thus, it has striking resemblance with the doctrine of non-violence as preached by Gandhi. The similarity may be accidental but no less real. Gandhi's disgust with the present industrial civilisation is well known and his deep sympathy for the poor is proverbial. He wants to put an end to this system but not by violence. "I do not believe," he says, "in short-violent cuts to

success...! However much I may sympathise with and admire worthy motives, I am an uncompromising opponent of violent methods even to serve the noblest of causes." On another occasion he said, "I must confess that I have not yet been able to fully understand the meaning of Boeshevism. All that I know is that it aims at the abolition of the institution of private property. This is only an application of the ethical ideal of non-possession in the realm of economics and *if the people adopted this ideal of their own accord or could be made to accept it by means of peaceful persuasion there would be nothing like it.*" The italics are mine but they are important. Gandhi very earnestly desires a change but he wants the change not through coercion but by peaceful persuasion. If the King in Rakta-Karavi represents the evil of accumulated private property the change effected in him may not be ascribed to any

violent external pressure but to a transformation, a change of heart.

I understand Nandini as the spirit of delight in man, the delight which does not depend on any extraneous excitement but arises from the inner depths of man. Nandini is joy and happiness incarnate. She has always been the ideal of mankind. Modern civilisation served by science has been able to produce all sorts of goods in abundance but happiness is as distant as ever. In the drama Bishu is the eternal poet who gets a glimpse of Nandini from far and heralds her coming, the advent of the New Age. If Nandini is the New Idea, Ranjan is its acceptance. As long as the proletariat does not realise its own destiny the coming of the New Age is held back. Ranjan is the awakening, the tingeing, of the mind with the idea of a new life and happiness. Nandini's conviction of ultimate victory is absolute notwithstanding what the king might do and even though Ranjan

is killed. The king yearns for Nandini but she eludes his grasp. Nandini is not intrinsically hostile to the King; she admires his great powers but pities him, a prisoner behind the net of his own creation. Rabindranath is not an uncompromising enemy of capitalism; he thinks capitalism must be rescued from its own meshes for the general good. § Capital as such is not evil; if applied properly it may conduce to

§ It is rather interesting to note that nowhere in this drama Rabindranath indicated that most of the evils of capitalism flow from private ownership of means of production and that the remedy lies in its common or state ownership. It appears as though he has considered capitalism and industrialism as synonymous and therefore painted both with the same brush. Russia is now as much industrialised as any other country in Europe but the Soviet economic system in Russia is fundamentally different and many of the evils of large scale industrialisation do not appear there,

genuine human happiness. This distinction is perhaps sought to be expressed when Nandini asks the king if the ingots of gold respond as readily to his touch as do the golden fields respond out of of a judicious application of capital and labour. This spirit of humanism coupled with the idea of a reformism is certainly not shared by a communist. A communist will also never believe that a class in power will ever of its own accord liquidate itself for well-being of the community at large. The emancipation of the working class must be attained by the workers themselves. They must not be misled by minor reforms nor must they put their trust in the sense of justice displayed by the bourgeois who are also unhappy at the existence of misery and want. Rabindranath's King is not impervious to new light ; he comes to realise his own limitations. He kills Ranjan and Kishore in a fit of rage but soon recoils, and sets out with Nandini to bring about the dissolution

of the system of which he himself was the product.

The King assures Nandini that the fight has already begun. These are significant words. The communists believe that the world progresses through the interplay of two conflicting forces and their final synthesis. This is called the dialectic process. Capitalistic organisation was born out of the ashes of feudalism but with its expansion it has developed the inherent inconsistencies to such an extent that a fundamental transformation of the system is necessary for the general good. Rabindranath appears to have discovered that the germ of dissolution is present in the institution itself, but he does not accept that desirable change has to be effected by a class struggle. He cannot accept the necessity of the process described in the following lines. "There then develops the decisive struggle with the master class, which to retain its own power will stop

at no means however foul. The workers must retort in kind...to effect transition from capitalist to communist society. The period will inevitably be marked by bloody conflict since a class does not peacefully acquiesce in its own suppression. Masters can not be persuaded into surrender ; to effect any vital change, revolution is inevitable." Rabindranath's prescription is one of converting your enemy through suffering and sacrifice. The King does not cling to his privileges ; instead, he is liberated and works for the liberation of others. This is Gandhian if you like, but this is in no sense, communism. In *Rakta-Karavi* the integument does burst asunder but it bursts harmlessly without any violent knocks. It bursts, as it were, of its own excessive internal pressure. The shape of things evolving out of the change is never known except for the feeling that in the new world about to be born man and woman perhaps get back their lost souls.

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MUKTA-DHARA OR THE WATERFALL

Rabindranath's *Muktadhara* was written during the first half of January, 1922. To understand the drama the reader should remember that the poet had returned on July 16, 1921 from an extensive tour in the European countries and America. This visit to the west was undertaken explicitly with the object of knowing at first hand the condition of Europe after World War No I and what reactions it had brought in the minds of great thinkers of the west. Though during this tour he met some thinkers who betrayed in a vague and distant way, a sense of horror for the rapid growth of the machine and for exclusive nationalism, people in general appeared to him to be quite complacent and unconscious of the dangers that lay ahead. Earlier in 1916 when the

war was actually going on, he had gone to Japan and America and had read his famous essays about Nationalism and its evil effects. Neither Japan nor America could relish the poet's caustic comments on the aggressive nationalism which had plunged the world into the horrors of the war. During the tour in 1921, Rabindranath read to his European and American audiences his message of the forest which was in effect his appeal to mankind to abandon the over-mechanisation of life and to take to the natural life the Aryan *rishis* used to live in the *tapobans*. Though his appeal for natural life found a vibrant chord in the minds of such persons as a Romain Rolland, a Sylvain Levy, a Gilbert Murray and others, he returned to India with the impression that Europe and for the matter of that America were too far engrossed with machines and progress dependent thereon to pay any sincere heed to his caution,

His journey to the west came however to be fruitful in this that he could see from very close quarters the true picture of mechanised life and international jealousies.

Muktadhara resulting as it did from this tour, is Rabindranath's commentary on the modern civilisation based on over-mechanisation of life in one part of the world and general impoverishment and hardship in other parts politically and economically subservient to the former. *Muktadhara* differs from *Rakta-Karavi* written a little more than a year later in this that whereas in *Rakta-Karavi* the baneful effect of the modern industrial life is shown on the nationals of the country adopting it, in *Muktadhara* the effect of the development of machine is shown on a country politically dependent.

The story is this. Bibhuti the state engineer of Uttarkut has after years of patient labour succeeded in constructing a monstrous machine to arrest the free

flow of a waterfall called Mukta-dhara which had been the chief source of water supply of Shibtarai, a country politically dependent to Uttarkut. The machine has been the result of untold sacrifices of thousands of conscripted labour and the ostensible object of the machine is to punish the trouble-making citizens of Shibtarai to a docile acceptance of the rule of Uttarkut. The machine in other words is an effective means of oppression of the people of Shibtarai. Abhijit who later turns out to be a foundling is the heir-apparent of Uttarkut who had been sent to Shibtarai to govern. His was an extremely benevolent rule and by his policy of conciliation he was able to win the hearts of the people of Shibtarai. His conciliatory rule, however, did not find favour with the king and the people of Uttarkut and his generous opening of the gate at Nandi Sankat which had so long been closed against

the escape of wool from Shibtarai to other states was highly resented by the people of Uttarkut because much of the prosperity of the latter depended on the wool of Shibtarai. Abhijit is therefore withdrawn, put into prison and Chandapal a brother-in-law of King Ranajit is sent to govern Shibtarai instead. Under the leadership of Dhananjay, the people of Shibtarai rise in revolt against the iron rule of Chandapal. Their protest takes the shape of passive resistance mixed with a refusal to pay rent and to counteract this, Dhananjay is also sent to prison. In the meantime the people of Uttarkut get exasperated with the prince for doing an act which had gone against the general interest of their country. The prison is set on fire and the prince is rescued through the instrumentality of Biswajit, an uncle of the king. Bibhuti sets out to reconstruct the fort at the pass of Nandisankat and thus redeem the mistake

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done by the prince, being more or less sure of the impeccability of the machine he had constructed to chain the waterfall. Then all on a sudden comes the news that Abhijit had struck at the vulnerable point of the great machine and has been able to liberate the waterfall, sacrificing himself in the act.

The outline of the story as given above will not certainly reveal the beauty of the drama as a work of art. For this the reader has to return to the drama itself with reference to the contemporary happenings in India and abroad. The Jallianwallabag excesses occurred in April, 1919, consequent on the country's protest against the Rowlatt Act. Rabindranath sent his memorable letter to Lord Chelmsford on 30th May 1919 renouncing his Knighthood as a personal protest against the excesses. Gandhiji had started his country-wide non-violent non-cooperation as a recipe to free India. The entire country was

at the time in terrible ferment under the leadership of Gandhiji with whose political ideas, it is well to remember, Rabindranath was not at that moment in complete agreement, though he had always a great admiration for the man. Rabindranath's chief objection to Gandhiji's mass movement is reflected in his following two sentences :

"Let us forget the Punjab affairs but let us never forget that we shall go on deserving such humiliation over and over again until we set our house in order."

"It is criminal to turn moral force into a blind force."

In the episode of Dhananjay Bairagi and the movement started by him in Sibtarai, Rabindranath has stressed the line of thinking as revealed in the above two sentences possibly in criticism of the movement started by Gandhiji. It may be said in reply that these criticisms have little point as against Gandhij in as much as Gandhiji has

always himself written in similar strain. None has striven more than Gandhiji to set our house in order. His efforts for the uplift of the *harijans* are a case in point. Times without number he has said that the non-violence he desires in his followers is not the non-violence of the weak but the non-violence of the strong which is to say that he wants his followers to be self-thinking beings and not automats. That is why at many stages of the struggle he cried halt much to the disgust of his followers as soon as he felt that his followers had lost grip of their conscious thinking self and were impelled by blind impulse. This aspect of Gandhiji came to be revealed later and Rabindranath had no means to know of this in 1919 or even in 1921 when *Muktadhara* was written. The above remarks of Rabindranath therefore should be taken as his friendly caution against the movement launched by Gandhiji. Rabindranath all along his life inculcated a

spirit of inquiry and self-help in his countrymen because he believed that without these a nation can not rise to a noble stature however able a leader it may find. No good worth its name can be achieved without strength from within. The same line of thinking runs through the drama as a whole and particularly through the episode of Dhananjay Bairagi of the drama. If the people of Uttarkut is wrong in deifying the machine and in placing science above God, the people of Sibtarai are no less mistaken in deifying their leader and in placing blind faith above self-help and self-thinking. If the one erred on the side of excess of *raja*, the other erred on the side of excess of *tama*. It is obvious that when Rabindranath wrote of Uttarkut and Shibtarai he really thought of the west and the east. That the Great War No I had not changed the mind of Europe in its mad lust for land and power pained Rabindranath who had observed earlier by way of criticism

of the efforts of the Peace Conference, "Everyday it is being clear that the last rites of the *Kalijug* could not be done to a finish even with so much of fire. The throne of *Kalijug* is installed on greed. We want to get and to cling to what we have got ; none of us would part with the tiniest of what we possess. Even the mightiest has the fear lest it suffers the least loss either now or in the future. The appeal of the law or of religion is futile where the least loss will not be tolerated." He had started his Santiniketan the chief purpose of which was to educate the people of the world to think in terms of internationalism. Nationalism according to him is a daemon which has been shaking the world with fear. He was wanting to exorcise the ghost by taking the name of of internationalism through his *Biswavarati*.

All this has to be remembered when reading Rabindranath's *Muktadhara* which records in fact Rabindranath's reactions to

the various incidents happening in his country and outside during the time when it was written. Rabindranath's credit lies in the fact that through the medium of a story of a conflict between the two apparently primitive countries of Uttarkut and Shibtarai he has been able to focus the salient features of modern civilisation. For Uttarkut in the drama you can substitute any dominion-owning country in Europe, England, France Belgium or Holland for instance. Shib-tarai would represent any dependent country of the east, our own country India for example, with its too much emphasis on religion. It is as it were Shiva's own country ; we call our India, *deva-bhumi*.

The drama opens with a hymn of the Lord Shiva, who is particularly the god of non-possession. Though He is the fountain head of all powers, He himself is perfectly un-attached to them as He knows that these are transitory and therefore worthless. Though Uttarkut accepts the Godhead of

Lord Shiva yet it has evidently missed the true significance of the Lord and in the name of offering worship to him, is really worshipping Bibhuti, the state engineer. Somehow I refuse to believe that it was just by an accident that Rabindranath chose Bibhuti as the name of the engineer. Bibhuti is power as distinguished from God and Rabindranath had this specialised meaning in mind when he wrote his drama. People of Uttarkut become mad with the new-found power achieved through the instrumentality of Bibhuti to worship whom they gather in their thousands. God is relegated to the back-ground, the hymn sung in his praise is drowned and those in praise of the machine, representing power reverberate the sky. The unreality and folly of the whole situation should clearly appear to any impartial observer and the Traveller in the drama expresses his grave doubts as to the sanity of it all. The reader feels that the Traveller is none else than the

poet himself going about in the western countries dismayed at the undue exaltation of power born of machines. He feels that Bhairab, the god of destruction will take up the challenge and put vainglorious men in their place. Finally the machine does go to pieces and the drama ends with the hymn of the Lord Shiva.

This sense of the approaching nemesis deepens in the reader when Amba enters the stage and keeps on wailing for her son who never returned from work. The literal meaning of Amba is mother and the poet perhaps intends her to represent the mother of the world bewailing her lost son, Suman which again is nothing but good sense. Good sense has departed the world and mankind is treading a path which does not surely make for good. The picture of Amba reminds me of Sanscrit stories where we so often find that on the eve of a calamity or a crisis, the presiding deity of the affected town or state in the shape of a

lady is bewailing the impending catastrophe. I understand Amba as the presiding deity of Uttarkut and for the matter of that, of the highly industrialised present day world bewailing the disappearance of good sense. Throughout the drama Amba keeps on lamenting that her son who had gone out for work did not return. This is as it were the burden of Rabindranath's song ; the feeling that Suman or good sense has departed from the world leaving its care in the hands of misguided intellect is successfully induced in such reader as would only care to go a little deep. ¶

Bibhuti as we have already indicated is this misguided intellect ; he is power born of what we call science in our days and in thus far he is more an idea than an individual. Except for one or two characters such as Amba above mentioned and Batu who makes alarming prophecies, all other people of Uttarkut are solidly behind Bibhuti, shouts in whose praise rise to the skies,

The power of Bibhuti in this drama finds expression in the machine contrived to checkmate the flow of Mukta-dhara, a waterfall. The reader is likely to wonder why Rabindranath should choose such a machine if it is his intention to symbolise the monstrosity of the same. For aught we know, no very elaborate machine system is required to arrest the current of a waterfall and therefore such a machine is a poor symbol for the world's biggest factories with machines of monster sizes. Moreover machines applied to rivers and waterfalls are associated with doing real good to people at large in as much as by them the cause of agriculture is furthered or electricity is generated. It is therefore difficult to attach odium to such machines. Rabindranath who has travelled so widely in Europe was not surely in want of knowledge of the right kind of machine which would have more faithfully symbolised the machines of the modern world. The selection therefore must

have been made on purpose and what is this purpose ?

To my mind the machines did not enter the emotive experience of the poet when he wrote this drama, in their individual existence but did so in their general effect on the life of man. The machines, according to Rabindranath, fetter the free flow of man's life which according to him again is one of the major tragedies of our life. This unfettered natural life of man is conceived by the poet as *mukṭadhara* which means free current. It is this free tenor of our life and not an external waterfall that Bibhuti's machine arrests and checkmates. When Rabindranath writes *mukṭadhara*, he really means *jibandhara*. It is only when we understand the drama this way, we allow it the importance it deserves. Life considered as a current is not an unusual imagery at least in India. The upshot of the whole drama is Abhijit's liberating the life mechanised and therefore fettered by Bibhuti.

Abhijit is the protagonist of man's greater freedom. He wants to free mankind from slavery of the mind ; he is not satisfied with the present state of affairs. He is a visionary planning great conquests not of territories but of hearts of men. Ranajit-his father, is the traditional king whose victories are all of the battlefield but he is Abhijit, a conqueror of a higher order, a conqueror in the realm of the mind. He desires to win for mankind paths it has never trod, reaches of thought it has never attained. He is shown in the drama to have been found near the source of the waterfall and some critics have questioned the necessity of giving him such a birth. A Budha, an Asoke, they say, were what they were inspite of being born in the royal family. In a way the question may be pertinent but when one remembers that *Mukta-dhara* is a symbolical drama and while writing it the poet was more concerned with the inner meaning than the

story on the surface, the intention of the poet will be revealed. We have seen that *mukṭadhara* is the unfettered, unsophisticated tenor of our life. At the time of our birth we are all equally unsophisticated and it is only as we grow old that shades of the prison house close in upon us, environments begin to leave impress on our lives. Abhijit as all other child was born unshackled, and untrammelled by palace traditions. It was perhaps to suggest this that the little episode about the birth of Abhijit was introduced in the drama. Abhijit is an Idea just as Bibhuti is an Idea ; the one is the idea of free, natural life, the other of life manacled by machines. King Ranajit blesses Bibhuti because one can not live without the other. Industrial progress of one country largely depends on expansion of its dependencies. Abhijit likewise has Dhananjay as his ally in as much as they both strive for the same goal, i.e. the liberation of mankind. One works from the inside,

the other from outside. Abhijit strikes the machine, Dhananjay strikes at Imperialism. The machine breaks down but we do not know how Dhananjay fares in his struggle against imperialism. The naming of Dhananjay again is not without significance. The derivative meaning of Dhanajay is one who has conquered the desire for possession and therefore he has rightly been pitted against Ranajit and Bibhuti both of whom represent conquests and possession.

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