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OCEAN in a TEACUP

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OCEAN in a TEACUP

THE STORY OF SREE SREE THAKUR ANUKUL CHANDRA

by

RAY A. HAUSERMAN, JR.

with

CONSTANCE LOVELAND

HARPER & BROTHERS
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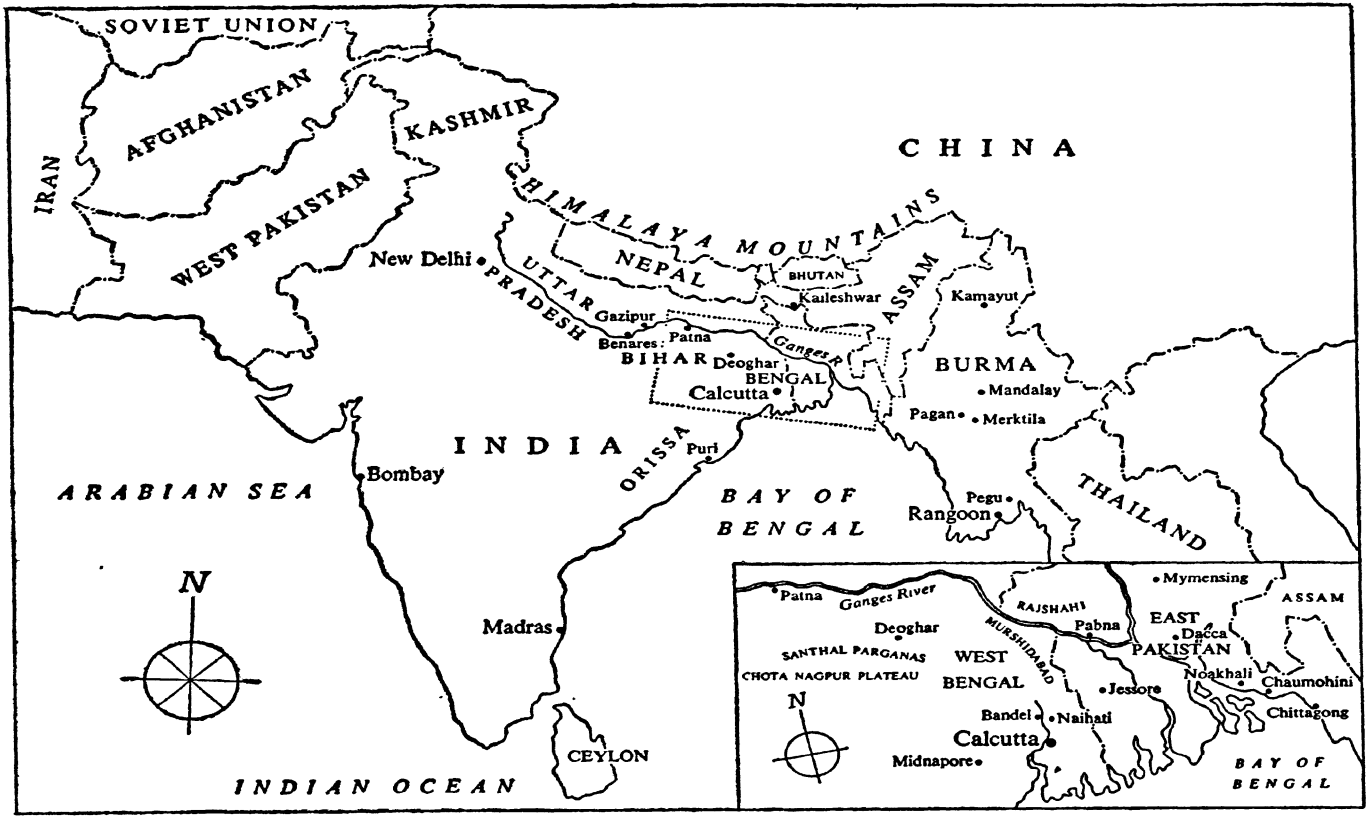
OCEAN in a TEACUP

THE STORY OF SREE SREE THAKUR ANUKUL CHANDRA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PART ONE

THE ROOTS

WORLD WAR II was over . . . officially at any rate . . . and a group of us who had been serving with the ambulance division of the American Field Service found ourselves waiting in Calcutta for passage home.

There was a great deal of discussion as to what direction the new world would take. With the emergence of the United Nations, I felt generally hopeful. Yet, even before the mass slaughter had ended, there were unmistakable rumblings of more trouble to come. Thus with growing uneasiness I witnessed and participated in the general rejoicing that the war was over.

Shortly before I was due to sail I met an AFS colleague, a brilliant young philosopher from Harvard, Ed Spencer, who had just returned from a visit to Himaitpur, in East Bengal. There he had met Anukul Chandra Chakraborty, a Saint called by his devotees "Sree Sree Thakur"—which meant, Spencer said, "Very Reverend Spiritual Teacher."

It soon developed that enthusiasm for his discovery had brought about a great change in my scholarly and conservative friend. He was glowing. There is no other word to describe it, and that glow was a wonderful thing to see.

He told us about his visit to Himaitpur and the community called Satsang Ashram. It consisted of a group of people who were singularly loving, dedicated, and happy. They had learned to live, work, plan, and worship together in an idyllic state of life with their Thakur. Ed's great excitement was unusual for one of his normally quiet and balanced nature.

"Ray, you must meet this man!" he insisted over and over again.

"But there isn't time," I protested. "If I give up my place on this boat, I may be stuck here for months."

"If you miss this opportunity, it can cost you years of fumbling in the dark . . ." Ed warned.

Since I had learned to respect Ed's insight, intelligence, and integrity, I took his warning seriously. Before the day was over, I canceled my steamship passage and set out, in the company of Ed and a few others, for Himaitpur.

With the exception of two trips back to the United States, in 1948 and 1959, I have been with Thakur ever since. I have come to know him well and to be inspired by his ideas, personality, and activities.

Increasingly, I felt that I needed to know more about his early life. My curiosity met with generous response. Too generous, as a matter of fact, for as soon as one picture became clear it was immediately upset and replaced by another. I quickly avoided the stories of the younger people, which were, I felt, hearsay and thus complicated my search. I concentrated only on the remembered experiences of those older people who had actually known Thakur since his early days.

But here again, confusion held full sway. According to the individual relating the story, Thakur could emerge as a gifted child, or the victim of an Oedipus complex . . . as understood or misunderstood . . . as a strong-willed child or an excessively humble one . . . as a scientist, or doctor, or inventor . . . as a common-sense prophet or a mystic.

In fact, the Thakur I heard about and learned to know was as vast as an ocean. This book contains but a cupful of it, just a sample, to share with others who do not enjoy my privilege of living on the shore of that ocean.

1

SLAP!

Anukul Chandra Chakraborty gazed at his mother with wide, solemn eyes as he searched himself for the cause of her displeasure.

Monmohini Devi was in no hurry to clear up the matter. She kept her attention on the boiling rice, lifting up a few grains with a wooden spoon and testing them gingerly with her fingers. When she was fully satisfied that the morning meal was progressing properly, she faced her son again.

"Your school shorts are filthy! And new two days ago! How is this possible?"

So that was it. Anukul slid an exploring hand across the seat of his shorts. "There was mud in the market place and I fell when Uncle Hem slapped me."

"So!" The dark eyes flared and pierced him with fearful intensity. "Hem had to punish you! And in public! How did you invite such disgrace?"

"I said, 'Good morning, Uncle Hem,' and he hit me."

WHACK!

"I want none of your impertinent tales! Get those shorts off immediately and wash them well!" She turned back to the soot-covered, mud-brick stove. The matter was ended. He was dismissed.

He lingered in the doorway, waiting for a possible sign that Ma might change her mind and wish to give him another opportunity to explain, but her lips were thin this morning. It was clear that her other worries were too pressing. Reluctantly, he padded across the open veranda to stare at Father who was still sleeping beneath the mosquito netting.

Father's mouth was open as if, even in the fresh air, breathing was difficult. His color had the dark, greenish tinge of sickness. A

need to be useful seized Anukul, and although it was early morning and the breeze was fresh and cool, he picked up a large fan and waved it gently back and forth beside the bed, hoping, somewhat vaguely, that Father would awaken to this act of love and need him to fetch water, or medicine . . . or Ma. Father was in deep sleep, however, and after some time the boy relinquished the fan and proceeded to the lawn where Grandma and his two aunts were sorting and cleaning the fruits and vegetables that would feed the household this day.

He squatted companionably beside Grandma and looked with pleasure at the colorful, mouth-watering little heaps. One mango was of an unusually large size and the color took Anukul's breath away. He stretched out his hand for it.

SLAP!

"I was only looking!" He nursed the smarting hand to his chest. "I wasn't going to eat it."

"Oh, no, of course not." Grandma's laugh was without mirth. "Nobody around here eats anything! They just take a peek and . . . whoops . . . accidentally, everything falls into their stomachs. I don't know how I am to keep up with such a pack of villains! And now"—the small eyes flashed belligerently toward the bedstead of her son-in-law—"now, if you please, it's special food! Special food and medicine and doctor's bills getting bigger every day . . . and not a one of his worthless relatives offering a pice!" Her eyes fastened accusingly on Anukul. "Do you think I grow rupees in my cabbage patch? Is that what you think?"

Anukul blushed guiltily and his eyes crept nervously over the bedstead. There was no motion. Fortunately, Father was still sleeping and had not heard.

Anukul's unmarried aunt sighed. "Men always seem to be so strong . . . when they're healthy."

"Healthy or unhealthy, men are weaklings!" Old Aunt spat authoritatively. "They bluster around and flex their muscles and pretend to know the all of everything; but mark my words, in the end it's always the women who have to carry the whole burden."

Anukul pondered this information. "It isn't that one is weak and one is strong," he explained seriously. "They are just two entirely different things . . . like cats and dogs."

SLAP!

"So that's our sermon for today, is it?" Old Aunt hissed. "Men and

women are like animals!" She glared at her mother. "Are you going to allow this impudence?"

Anukul lost no time in making his appeal. "I didn't say they were like animals. I said they were different . . . like animals are different."

"It would be well," Grandma intoned sternly, "to know what you're talking about before you talk. You are a loudmouth, Anukul, and loudmouths come to no good end. Beware!"

The women pointedly ignored him and continued their work in silence. Monmohini appeared on the veranda. Her color was high and she swept her husband, mother, sisters, and small son with a cold, distant glance before she crossed the courtyard in a stiff-backed, regal manner and entered the prayer room.

Old Aunt sniffed. "For all her praying, things get no better."

"Hold your tongue," Grandma commanded. "Monmohini's faith is none of your concern."

This was enough for Anukul; he placed his small hand coaxingly on Grandma's knee. "Tell it, Grandma. Tell about Hazur."

"Will you stop your everlasting pestering," Old Aunt complained. "Ma has told you that story until she's sick and tired of it . . . and so is everybody else."

Grandma bristled. "I am not in my dotage yet! When I get sick and tired of anything, I'll speak for myself!"

"Tell it once more," Anukul pleaded. "Please, Grandma."

The old woman's eyes folded inward until it seemed that only two bright pinpoints darted in and out of the crisscross wrinkles. "Only nine she was at the time. A little thing. Not yet a woman. My brother came to visit me, you see, and he opened up his suitcase and there was a picture of Hazur Maharaj. Monmohini took one look at that picture and gave out a cry . . . like a moan, you know . . . and whist . . ." Dramatically, she held aloft the leafy vegetable she was inspecting, and opening her fingers, let it fall to the ground. Anukul gazed at the wilted green with fascination, seeing once more the limp, lovely form of Ma in her first trance.

"When she opened her eyes," the old woman continued, "the first thing she said was, 'Ma, take me to him . . . I must see Hazur Maharaj.' What could I do? Are we millionaires?" She shrugged her shoulders helplessly. "But there it was, day and night, night and day . . . 'Please, Ma, I must see him. Only do this for me and I will always be dutiful and faithful and uncomplaining. Please, Ma . . .

I will take care of you all the days of your life . . . Only once, let me see Hazur Maharaj.'

"Well, so it was. We went on the journey and many a rupee it cost. Through cities and countryside. My! What a trip that was! And do you know, he knew her right off. 'Come,' he said. Just like that and looking right at her . . . 'Come.' And he initiated her in his wisdom and ways, and taught her how to meditate and what she must do . . . all those things . . . and we came home again."

"And little profit the trip was to anyone," Old Aunt snapped. "Hazur might at least have brought her a husband who could provide! Even without a trip or a Saint, I can boast that much!"

The old woman's eyes popped from their wrinkled blankets. "I am a simple village woman and I know little! But this much I can tell you. There are many things in this world for those who understand . . . and if you don't understand"—her voice dropped ominously —"beware how you speak."

Anukul shivered and lost himself in a deep inner excitement. At nine it happened! At nine! And he was already ten!

The door of the prayer room opened and Monmohini emerged and raised her eyes to the morning sun. She was radiant . . . her features soft and glowing . . . even the folds of her sari had lost their stiffness. She floated across the courtyard, passed them, and went directly to her husband's bed where she stood in an attitude of prayer.

A great joy engulfed Anukul. Father was going to get well! Quickly and softly he ran to her side, that he might bask in the radiating warmth that always surrounded her after prayer.

Four-year-old Khepu toddled across the veranda in his nightshirt, his tiny fists rubbing sleepy eyes. With a thrilling coo of pleasure, Monmohini caught him up, and laughing, held him high above her head.

Anukul gazed at the scene spellbound, his heart throbbing with wonder and yearning. How marvelous was Ma's smile when she played with the baby . . . if once—only once—he might be the cause of that special smile.

"Am I to go to the store for the mustard oil by myself?" Grandma whined shrilly. "Is it not enough that I am being impoverished? Now I must fetch and carry for everybody else as well!"

The softness left Monmohini's face and she stared at her son with impatience. "Why must Grandma always have to ask you? Do as

she says! Quickly!" She returned to her duties in the kitchen.

Anukul trotted dutifully to Grandma's side and waited in a subdued manner as she unknotted the corner of her sari to get the money.

"Here." She pressed a pice into his palm. "Don't lose this and don't spill the oil and don't loiter!"

His hand closed over the coin, but instead of going through the house and to the street, his feet, of their own accord, started for the prayer room.

"Here!" Grandma shouted excitedly. "What are you up to now, villain? Do you know the hour? Get my oil at once or there will be no food today! I will wash my hands of the lot of you!"

Although Anukul heard, he could not turn. Something stronger than her voice propelled him to the prayer room. He entered and closed the door and was at once alone and safe. For no matter what the tempers outside . . . nobody ever had, or ever would, violate the prayer room.

Palms together, he bowed respectfully before each image of the family deities, but it was in front of the stern visage of Hazur Maharaj that he sat, cross-legged upon the floor, and straightened his back and breathed deeply several times.

"Accept my regards and gratitude," he said gravely. "You have only to command me. As you wish . . . I will do." He waited in a state of expectancy for some inner or outer voice, but nothing happened. There was only stillness and the perfume of fresh flowers placed before each of the family deities.

"Your picture spoke to her," he challenged. "It can speak to me if you wish it to! I am a true devotee." Again he waited, but there was nothing. Nothing at all save the chirping of birds and the rustling of leaves in the Bel tree outside.

His chin trembled with disappointment. "Why do they all hit me?" he pleaded, and despite his efforts tears spilled over his cheeks. "How can I make Ma see that I am good?"

The rising sun reached the oval window near the roof and the first tentative rays were instantly followed by a golden, dancing cascade.

He blinked his eyes as the blossoms before the saints jumped into vivid, glowing colors. And suddenly—he was sure of it—through the dazzle and shimmer, all the pictures were smiling!

Quickly shifting position, he prostrated himself. "I am good!" sang his furiously beating heart. "They know I am good!" Almost

immediately he became conscious of the pice in his hand, and jumping to his feet, he bowed low and ran from the room.

"I am going, Grandma," he cried jubilantly. "I am on my way! Watch how fast I bring the oil! You will be happy!"

He was through the house and loping down the road in a flash, his long arms swinging rhythmically at his sides. Past the stretches of jungle grass that separated one house from another he ran, past the bamboo-woven walls and thatched roofs of the mud-floored cottages that grew closer and closer as he approached the center of their little village of Himaitpur.

"Hey, Rajah!"

He stopped as Atul, the most devoted of the group who had accepted Anukul as their leader, shouted from a cottage.

"Come along. We're going to watch the *Vulture* dock before school starts."

Anukul stopped and turned. He loved ships and the *Vulture* was the very queen of ships. Wrestling with temptation, he broke a leaf from a bhati plant and chewed it thoughtfully. His stomach cramped suddenly and his tongue became parched from the bitter leaf. He spit furiously, trying to clear his mouth.

Atul eyed him nervously. "Dilip says you're going to poison yourself, tasting everything the way you do."

Anukul chose to ignore the warning and the implied criticism of Dilip. What a strange plant the bhati was—for now his stomach felt warmly soothed and his mouth was sweeter than before. "I can't go. I'm on my way for mustard oil."

Atul sighed resignedly. "Well, I'll go with you."

For a short time the boys trotted along in silence.

"I think we ought to kick Dilip out of our group," Atul commented. "He isn't like the rest of us and he doesn't like you."

Anukul stopped short. "He does so like me."

"Then why is he always being sarcastic and making fun of you?"

"Listen," Anukul insisted. "Whom do you want to believe anyway . . . me or him?"

"You know I always believe you! . . . Ask anybody! It's always me standing up for you."

"Very well. When I tell you something you have to believe it. And I tell you Dilip likes me!"

Anukul regarded Atul sternly. "Look, Atul, you always change your plans for mine. That isn't right. Each person should complete

whatever he starts to do. You must go and watch the *Vulture* dock."

"I don't care about that . . . honest . . ."

"It doesn't matter if you care or don't care!" Anukul cried excitedly. "You have to go anyway because that's what you started to do," and leaving his friend, Anukul was off. As he sped along the miracle of the prayer room filled him once more. The remembered sunshine poured into his feet and he was dancing! The smiles of the saints put wings to his feet and he was flying! Dancing and flying, he did not see the crabby old clerk until they collided.

"Good morning, Chitto Babu," he sang as he recovered and presented the fallen umbrella. "Isn't the breeze lovely today? I trust you are in good health!"

"I'll good morning your impertinence!" the clerk burst out, flailing his dusty umbrella. Anukul agilely dodged the blow, danced out of reach, and was on his way. Strange. He had been so confident that Chitto Babu would be friendly today . . . a pity. He entered the open grocery shop.

"What do you want?" Panchu Gopal Modak demanded gruffly.

"One pice of mustard oil."

"Where's your bottle?"

Anukul gasped. How could he have forgotten the bottle! And it had never once occurred to him . . . all the way here! He blushed with shame. "I don't have any."

"No bottle, no mustard oil." Panchu turned to a thin elderly man and smiled ingratiatingly. "Hari Babu, what is it?"

Anukul was defeated. The bright, golden promise of the prayer room began to disintegrate. Nothing had changed. He had been stupid and forgetful as always and everyone would be angry.

In an effort to turn back time, he ran until he felt his lungs would burst, but as he neared home, he began to slow down and when he reached it his feet were dragging.

It was then that he first noticed how the branches of the guava tree outside the wall formed a perfect ladder to the upper-story window . . . which was the storeroom!

Unobtrusively, he crept along the wall, jumped for the first branch, and deftly made his way through the foliage to his destination. A bottle was standing just inside the window and he encountered no difficulty in snatching it up and making his descent. Nobody saw him at all! He was saved from punishment and ridicule.

This time Anukul did not fly down the road. He took the short cut

across Grandma's sprawling rice field and on through the bamboo clumps and banyan trees where snakes and wild boar and even occasional tigers roamed . . . for if the saints be pleased with you, what is there to fear?

2

THE boys sat cross-legged, each on his own mat, in the one-room schoolhouse. The rising sun was melting the mist above the river and the air shimmered before Anukul's eyes. The forbidding master, Satya Moitra, paced before the class, hitching up his dhoti from time to time as he droned out the English lesson, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." Suddenly Anukul jerked erect. Thoughts were flashing through his mind. Wonderful ideas . . . one after the other. He knew what was wrong now! He could see it clearly! Oh, how simple it was. He had believed all people were alike and he had tried to please them the same way he would please himself. But it wasn't right. People had to be known as they were before you could please them. He must put himself in their position . . . feel as they felt . . . then he would know exactly what to do. Yes, yes, this was it! There was no doubt at all.

"Anukul!"

"Sir?" He blinked his eyes rapidly, trying to bring Moitra's stringy form into focus.

"Well! Can you answer my question or not?"

"No, sir."

"I see." Moitra picked up the heavy pointer, and weighed it in a leisurely fashion. "Are you quite sure you belong in this class?"

"Oh, yes, sir. I sat for the examination."

"Perhaps there has been some mistake . . . or regression." Moitra strolled closer to him. The long, thin nose was twitching and the master's head swiveled slowly, favoring the class with its upside-down smile.

Some students tittered hesitantly.

"Yes. Yes." Moitra's tone became broadly taunting. "I think we must hold another examination. And I think we should begin at the beginning. Does the class agree?"

This time the boys knew what he wanted; they laughed with confidence and gave him a few cries of "hear . . . hear."

Moitra closed his eyes for a moment, then, in one motion, opened them wide and leaned toward Anukul. "How much is one and one?"

Anukul stared at him, dumfounded.

"ONE and ONE! Are you deaf as well as stupid?"

How strange! He was asking for the very truth that Anukul had just discovered. "One and one could only be two ones, sir."

"What?" The pointer thudded the floor ominously. "What did you say?"

Anukul was well aware that he must race to make himself understood before Moitra lost control. The words flew fast. "We've been making a terrible mistake, sir. Addition supposes that things are identical, don't you see; and this just isn't so. No two leaves are alike, or lizards, or people. From the smallest to the biggest, every single thing in the world is different from every other thing . . ."

WHACK! All the force of Moitra's rage and frustration was behind the blow and Anukul lay on the floor stunned. "Would you like to be the master, then? Or perhaps this position is too humble for you? Would the dean of the university be more to your liking?" He raised the pointer for a second blow when he became conscious of the boy's inert form.

What new game was this? The blow had not been excessive . . . had not touched his head. Nevertheless, the pointer came down peaceably and Moitra took a nervous step backward.

"Sit up!" he commanded.

There was no response. Well . . . it was enough anyway. Moitra had a frightful headache . . . it had been nagging him for two days now. He turned on his heel and strode back to the head of the class. "You have had your lesson!" he addressed the students sternly. "Memorize it!" His nervous eyes crawled over the boy once more, then, carefully, he replaced the pointer and took up his brief case.

"School is dismissed!" He marched from the room.

The boys milled curiously around Anukul.

"He's gone!" Dilip called. "You can wake up now!"

There was no response from Anukul.

"He's dead!" Atul bawled. "That brute killed him!"

Dilip flung himself down on the floor and pressed his ear to

Anukul's chest. After a moment he raised his head. "Stop whimpering, Atul! He's all right. Just passed out." He pulled Anukul's shoulder over. "Look here. That isn't much of a welt, is it?"

"Moitra should be put in jail," Atul wailed. "We ought to get the policeman."

Dilip was contemptuous. "And get yourself beaten up, stupid? You know adults stick together."

Most of the students had already fled, some in fear, others to spread the exciting news. Only Anukul's group remained squatted around him.

"Tell you what we could do." Dilip's voice was conspiratorial and the heads drew closer together. "Moitra goes to Pabna town to his family every weekend. He always comes back around Sunday midnight. We could put on masks and trip him up and give him a good thrashing!"

"No!" Anukul cried suddenly, opening his eyes and sitting up. He wriggled his shoulder gingerly, testing the injury. "Moitra only acted according to his rules. The beating was my fault." His smile felt a little foolish in its hesitant appeal for understanding.

"It made me happy to know about one and one and so I thought it would make him happy too. But that's wrong. He isn't me and I should have stopped and thought . . . 'What will make Moitra happy?' . . . then I would have said the right thing."

"Nonsense!" Dilip snorted rudely. "Maybe saints think that way; but you're no saint, Anukul Chakraborty!"

Suddenly, Anukul threw back his head and laughed loud and free. "What are we mad at Moitra for? He has given us a whole holiday!"

This realization on top of the tension was almost too much. The boys laughed uncontrollably, doubling up and rolling on the floor in their glee.

"And just see this!" Anukul chuckled, wiping the laughing tears from his eyes. "All his days he's going to believe he punished us, because that's the way life is. No two things are the same to any two people!"

Dilip jumped to his feet and rolled up his mat. "Let's get down to the docks and see how the *Vulture* is coming along."

There was a happy chorus of assent and a general business of rolling up mats.

"Make my fountain pen first," Montu begged. "I've been carrying

the stuff around for four days now and it's always one thing after another . . ."

"All right." Anukul dropped his arm over his friend's shoulder. "Let's do it outside, though."

They settled around a peepul tree and Montu spread his equipment . . . a nib, a bamboo, a cork, and a bottle of ink. Anukul deftly fitted the cork into the open end of the piece of bamboo and carefully worked the nib end of the pen point through the cork. Filling the tube with ink, he recorked it and handed it to Montu.

"Will it work?"

"Try it. Dip the nib once, to get it started."

The heads closed around Montu's copybook as they watched the pen work.

"Mine was fine for a month, but then it started leaking," Dilip observed.

Anukul nodded seriously. "Let me look at it. Do you see the little hole at the back? It has become too large. We've got to figure out a way to keep it small."

A yellow-robed monk came down the road and Anukul jumped to his feet, bowing respectfully. Several of the other boys followed suit. Not Dilip, however; he lay sprawled on the grass and winked teasingly. "Bet I know whose house he's headed for. Those babajis keep lists of those who give good handouts."

Atul moved protectively close to his Rajah. "They go there because Monmohini Devi used to have trances! She's holy."

"Maybe she's holy," Dilip said, laughing, "but it's her Ma that gets stuck with passing out all the free food."

"Grandma is pleased to feed holy men," Anukul stated firmly.

"Oh, yes, she's pleased all right. You just ought to be around our house when she visits . . . you'd hear how pleased she is!"

"Grandma talks like that but she doesn't mean anything."

"Not much!" Dilip taunted. "Just ask her what she means sometime. She's not bashful when it comes to words."

Eyes blazed. "If you want to know what a person's like, you don't pay attention to what they say! Watch what they do! Anybody who watches our house knows Grandma never turned a holy man away in her life!"

Dilip furrowed his brow. "Hey, you mad at me?"

"No. I'm not mad. But sometimes it seems like everybody talks and nobody stops to think."

"Well, what are we sitting around here for, anyway? Let's get down to the docks."

"Wait," Anukul said. "Wait." Was it right for him to go? He squeezed his eyes shut, placed his finger tips to his temples, and concentrated hard. What would please Ma? What would make her happy? A sickening wave of consternation swept over him. He clutched his seat with both hands and his heart sank. "My shorts! I didn't wash them!"

"Hey, Rajah!" Dilip shouted as the boys started off. "Come on!"

"I can't. I just remembered something." Anukul started for home.

He flew past the sweetshop . . . stopped . . . turned . . . and retraced his steps like a sleepwalker. Netai Ghose was gossiping with Hari Babu. "It was a brilliant bargain," Hari Babu was saying. "Chitto Babu is a very intelligent person indeed!"

Anukul's ears perked up. Chitto Babu? Was it possible that this wizened, crabby little clerk possessed hidden attributes?

"So." Netai Ghose turned to him. "You have come to pay your bills?"

"I have no money today. But on Saturday I will earn three pice and bring them to you. And when my father goes back to work, he will give me a whole rupee from his pay. It is promised." Anukul's smile was captivating.

"Yes, yes, yes." Netai Ghose sighed. "And when melons grow on mango trees, we'll all live like the king of England."

"Will you give me four rashaghollas?"

Netai Ghose favored him with a long, helpless stare, then, without another word, he turned and dipped four ping-pong-ball-sized sweets from an iron kettle and put them in a cone made of large sahl leaves. "No more until Saturday, now. I mean this," he warned, as he handed them over.

"No, Netai-da. Thank you, Netai-da. May the Supreme Father smile upon you."

Anukul found a shady spot and sat down to nibble a rashagholla. Slowly . . . slowly . . . to make it last . . . to savor every grain of it. How could anything in the world be so sweetly delicious as a rashagholla? His mind began to dwell on the amazing news about Chitto Babu and his unsuspected brilliance. He finished the sweet, closed his eyes, and gently licked the syrup from his fingers before placing them against his temples and concentrating on this new dimension of Chitto's. What would make the clerk smile?

After a few moments he arose and walked directly to the magistrate's office. He peered through the window and contemplated the clerk, who was sitting cross-legged before a grimy wooden table, his thin shoulders hunched up, writing his letters. Taking a deep breath, Anukul entered the office and sat down facing him.

"You!" Chitto Babu was obviously most unpleasantly surprised. "What do you want here?"

"I only came to congratulate you. I have just heard Hari Babu telling all over town what a brilliant bargain you have made."

"Hrrumph!" Chitto rumbled, but his lips twitched and his shoulders straightened. Anukul had pleased him! "What does a boy like you know of such things?"

"Only that you are a renowned and respected man, and I am sorry I knocked your umbrella into the dust this morning. I would be grateful if you would accept a rashagholla for your trouble." He proffered the precious sweets.

This time Chitto smiled broadly and Anukul was struck anew by the amazing changes that smiles brought to faces.

The little clerk peered into the cone, fingered out a sweet, and popped it down in two bites. "Very nice." He nodded, and meticulously cleaned his fingers. "Very nice, indeed."

The rashaghollas were finished by the time Anukul approached his home, and even the sahl leaves were opened and the last crumbs of sweetness licked away.

Uncle Hem came striding through the gate and stopped short upon seeing his nephew. "So there you are!" He glowered fiercely. "I have just informed your Ma and Grandma of your impertinent behavior toward your elders! It is intolerable!"

This time Anukul could not close his eyes. But there was no need to, really, for he was gazing directly into Uncle Hem's face, studying every line of nose and eye and cheek, and the luxurious fall of the full curly beard, as he sought the inner knowledge of what Uncle Hem was really like.

"Well!" The fashionable walking stick tapped the ground impatiently. "What are you gawking at? What have you to say for yourself?"

"I was thinking," Anukul said dreamily, "how very handsome you are. And I was wondering, since you are my uncle, if I might look like you when I am a man."

Hem's eyes narrowed and he peered at the boy suspiciously.

Anukul's face was innocent of guile, his admiration candid and serious.

"Handsome is as handsome does." But Hem's voice had lost its edge and his soft, well-cared-for hand stroked the flowing beard proudly and then, to his own and his nephew's amazement, began stroking Anukul's curly hair. "Be respectful," he said kindly. "You are old enough to observe traditions. Especially in public!"

Anukul dropped quickly to his knees and touched his uncle's feet, in the traditional salute to elders.

Dilip's prediction was correct. The yellow-robed monk had apparently finished his conversations with Ma and Grandma and had been left in a shady corner of the yard to eat his meal in peace. Anukul drifted over to him and studied the large brass plate piled high with rice and lentils and fried vegetables. Grandma had been generous, as he knew she would be. He sat down a polite but reasonable talking distance away. There seemed to be an unusual dignity and humility in this monk's manner, and the bright eyes cast a hypnotic spell over the boy . . . flashing, a little wildly, as if the fires in their depths were too ardent to control. He felt suddenly that this monk knew the answers to all the things which perplexed and eluded him.

He arose, walked closer to the monk, knelt and touched his feet. "Babaji, am I the son of the Supreme Father? For in truth there are times when I know I can do anything and everything."

The monk's eyes flashed over him, but he did not speak. He continued to eat in silence until the plate was clean, then he opened his sack and selected a biri (native cigarette). He placed it carefully between his lips and struck a flint to light it. He inhaled deeply, closed his mouth, and the smoke came out of his nostrils in two thin streams.

"You are evil," he said shortly.

Anukul was shocked and frightened. "Oh, no," he protested, "oh, no . . ."

"All mankind is evil, vain, and selfish. If you would know yourself, you must think at all times, every minute of the day, 'I am a sinner!' That is the only way to become humble . . . and only the humble will find salvation!" He arose, picked up his staff, swung his pack over his shoulder, and disappeared up the path, exhibiting every assurance that he knew the way to God.

Shaken by the holy man's accusation, Anukul stared at his clasped hands and fearfully examined his emotions. It was true that he was not humble. He saw that now. He was proud of inventing medicine and fountain pens that worked . . . proud of Atul's devotion . . . proud of being the Rajah of his group . . . proud, even, that the tempestuous, irresponsible, and popular Dilip had chosen to be a member of his group rather than of Anil's where it would seem that he more naturally belonged. Oh, yes, he must be a sinner all right. There was no doubt about it, and it was a terrifying thing to know.

Monmohini came to the doorway and shaded her eyes with her hand. "Anukul! Why are you dawdling away the noon hour? Eat quickly, you are already late for school."

"There isn't any school today."

"No school? How is that?"

"Master dismissed school."

"Why did he do that?"

"I was bad," Anukul stated sadly, and subconsciously his hand fingered the welt across his shoulder.

Monmohini's eyes narrowed. "Come here!"

He went to her with hanging head; she grasped him roughly and examined his back.

"What did you do?" she cried, shaking him. "Are you never going to learn to control yourself?"

"I am selfish." He sobbed. "Bad."

"I asked what you did!"

"I told him there were no two things in this world alike."

Monmohini's brow furrowed. "He hit you for that?"

"Only once. He should have thrashed me. I am vain and evil."

Monmohini placed her hand concernedly upon his forehead. There was no fever. She peered at him closely. "Eat and be quiet about it." She sighed, turning away. "Don't disturb Father."

All afternoon Anukul sat beneath Grandma's holy Bel tree beside the prayer room, his back pressed tightly against its bark in an effort to gain some comfort as he plumbed his evil depths. When Grandma returned from a visit to a neighbor, Anukul watched her waddle across the courtyard, select a spot and sink down in the "three heads position," which denoted wisdom . . . a knee, a head, a knee.

Impulsively, he broke a leaf from a low-hanging branch, and going to Grandma, he placed it on her knee, sank to the ground, and touched her feet.

She blinked at the leaf and blinked at him . . . but it was too hot for the exertion of anger. "I have told you never to violate my Bel tree!"

Anukul hung his head. "I forgot. I am bad."

"Yes you are!" she agreed. "Bad . . . bad . . . bad." She picked up the leaf, smelled it, and tucked it in her hair. It looked very gay on Grandma. She wrapped her arms around her knees again and closed her eyes for a nap.

Gently, Anukul reached forth and caressed her withered cheek with his finger tips. "You have such beautiful wrinkles, Grandma."

The eyes popped open. "Villain! How dare you!" They closed again. "You'll be old too before you know it," she grumbled, "and your wrinkles will look just like everybody else's."

"No." Anukul sighed. "I am bad and cannot ever be wise as you are. My wrinkles will be ugly."

This time the eyes opened wide and Grandma regarded him closely. "Bosh!" she said at length. "You're not that bad."

Quick tears welled up in his eyes. "Oh, I am, Grandma. I am as bad as there is. I am evil."

"Robbers and murderers are evil," Grandma said sternly. "You are just plain bad . . . boy bad!"

Tears began to spill and he wiped them away with the back of his hand.

"Sometimes," the old woman conceded grudgingly, "you are not even bad at all."

Monmohini Devi came running from the house and knelt beside her mother. "Reva Devi had a boy! Born an hour ago! And he's going to look just like her . . . they say his nose has that same flare to it. Come! Let's go see!" She helped the old woman to her feet and they hurried across the courtyard. "If Father wants me," Monmohini called back to Anukul, "I'll be at Reva's."

Anukul gazed after them with widening eyes as wonder dawned within him . . . a wonder so deep . . . so profound that all the evils and all his tears were swept aside. Reva Devi had a boy! A boy! And he would look like her!

He had never actually thought about the matter, but since each animal came from its own kind, he had assumed that boys came from men and girls from women. It had seemed so obvious . . . so reasonable.

But it wasn't true! Women were the creators! Of everybody in the

world! He jumped to his feet, flinging his arms to the sky, his smile spreading from ear to ear. He was a creation! He, himself! And of all the children in the whole world, Monmohini Devi had created him! Anukul Chandra Chakraborty!

He began to run . . . and then to jump . . . higher and higher and higher. Around the courtyard he spun, around and around, spurred by a joy so vast . . . so dizzying that it had no beginning or end but simply was . . . was . . . always was.

At length he stopped, sobered, and with the quiet dignity of well-being went to the house and got a pair of clean shorts, a rough washcloth, and a small bowl of mustard oil. With this equipment he proceeded to the river, took off his soiled shorts, and soused them carefully into the shallow water beside the rock.

Leaving them to soak, he began to cover himself thoroughly with mustard oil. He did not spare the welt across his shoulder, receiving pleasure, rather—because now all things were pleasurable—in the sharp sting as the mustard oil was rubbed in. He paused often to marvel at his hand or chest or hip . . . at the feet which carried him about from morning to night. What a wonderful creation a body was; and this one was his very own, a personal gift from his beloved Monmohini Devi. He walked into the water and scrubbed his body inch by inch until it glowed with a cleanliness befitting a woman's creation.

"Rajah!" Atul cried from the riverbank.

"Come on in," Anukul invited.

"I can't. You come out! Hurry!"

Anukul made his way to the large flat stone and looked at his shorts. It was only mud, and they were quite clean. A few good whacks on the rock would finish them. "Did you see the *Vulture*?" he called between whacks.

Atul bent over, clasped his arms across his abdomen. "I've been poisoned! Dilip had some money and we ate fried lentils at the docks. I'm dying! Make me some mint medicine, Anukul. If Ma finds out, she'll beat me! Oooooow," he moaned, falling to the ground and rocking back and forth. "Oooooow. There it is again!"

Anukul ran to his friend and knelt down concernedly. "What does it feel like? Tell me how it feels?"

"What do you think it feels like? Oooooow. It feels like dying. Hurry, Rajah, save me!" He coughed and quieted as the pain passed.

"There's no spit in my mouth," he moaned. "I can't swallow." He held out his tongue.

Like a flash, Anukul experienced again the sensations caused by the bhati leaf he chewed that morning . . . the quick cramp, the dry, bitter mouth. He closed his eyes tightly and shook his head to dislodge the thought, but the image of the bhati leaf remained firmly in his mind. "How does it taste?" he asked.

"Horrible!" Atul shuddered. "Like poison."

"All right." Quickly, Anukul pulled on his clean shorts. "You wait here, and don't worry." He ran toward the house, stopped short, then turned, and frowningly studied the hunched figure of his friend. Yes, there it was again. All he could think of was the bhati leaf. The same thing that produced a symptom might cure it. How strange!

He carefully selected a bhati leaf, and taking it into the kitchen, washed it, broke off a small piece, and dropped it into a cup. Using a pestle, he deftly pounded it into a pulp, and half filling the cup with water, took a small swallow himself, concentrating deeply. Yes, there it was. The quick cramp and the dry, bitter mouth . . . He waited a few moments and then smiled broadly. He was right! Just as he remembered, the saliva began to flow into his mouth, sweet and plenty, and the cramp was gone.

Monmohini, Grandma, Old Aunt, and Reva Devi's sister-in-law came into the house, talking excitedly about the new baby. Monmohini poured boiling water into the teapot on the stove. "Did Father awaken?"

"No, he is sleeping still."

"That's good," she murmured, reaching for the glasses. "Very good."

Anukul ran back to Atul and handed him the cup of medicine.

"Is it mint?"

"No, this is better. Drink it quickly, though; it doesn't taste good."

Atul gulped down the liquid, gasped, shuddered, and pulled a gruesome face. "What was that?"

"Bhati leaf."

Atul's eyes stretched with horror. "Bhati?" The pain came again and he doubled over, rolling on the ground. "I'm poisoned! I'm poisoned twice! Get the doctor, Rajah, hurry . . . please hurry!"

"Stop it!" Anukul said sharply. "You're all right, I tell you." He

wrestled with his writhing friend, forcing him to sit up. "You're making the pain worse! Think! Think hard as you can . . . right down to where the pain is."

"Oooooow!"

"Think!" Anukul pleaded. "Tell me where it hurts."

"Everywhere! Oooooow."

"The spot," Anukul cried. "The exact spot." He placed his hand gently on the top of Atul's abdomen. "Is it here?"

Atul's face knotted with concentration, then cleared. "It's gone," he said simply.

"You see?" Anukul cried excitedly. "You see what I told you? How's your mouth?"

"It's wet! My mouth is full of spit."

Anukul sat back on his heels, beaming. "Yes," he murmured with satisfaction. "Yes, that's right."

Suddenly Atul's face darkened. "It's there," he cried. "Ooooooow, it's there again. Get the doctor! Please get the doctor!"

"Where?" Anukul cried. "Where is it now?"

"Hurry . . . hurry . . . hurry. Ooooooow." But even before the cry ended, his face calmed. "It's gone."

"Was it the same place?"

"No . . . no, lower down."

"That's the way it should be." Anukul nodded. "Exactly. Because the bhati is going down. And it wasn't as bad, either, was it?" He got to his feet. "Now every pain you have is going to get lower and easier. Come on, we'll walk. That will help the medicine work faster."

"I can't walk!"

"Of course you can." Anukul tugged him to his feet. "Stand straight."

Dubiously, Atul eased himself erect. "It's all right now. But when it comes, I can't stand it."

"When it comes, you can bend over, if you have to. Come on now, let's walk."

"All right. But couldn't we walk in the direction of the doctor's house? Just in case . . ."

3

STRANGELY, Monmohini did not seem to be aware of the enormous significance of being a creator. But Anukul knew, and as spring changed to summer and summer to fall, the knowing made a difference. Not when he was being chastised, of course; at such times he completely forgot and life seemed to be exactly the same as always. But no matter how long he forgot, there would come the odd moment again, in the stillness just before a sunrise or sunset, or in the first wonder of an opening bud, or winging bird, the moment in which he remembered and was filled once more with joy beyond containing.

It was right after such a moment that Anukul noticed an interesting hole in the trunk of a hoary old acacia tree. Without thinking, he climbed up and reached into the cavity. Sure enough! Something was there. He grasped it and pulled out his hand and found himself face to face with a wriggling black snake . . . beady eyes staring, long red tongue flickering in and out wildly. He regarded it cautiously, then gently, gently, he replaced it.

Anukul stared for a moment, jumped down, and then fled, giving a cry of fear from time to time as he raced for the river and the road.

Wiry arms, as strong as steel, caught him, and he found himself panting in the grasp of the long-haired Rama Sahu.

"Here . . . here . . . here," Rama chortled. "What's your hurry?"

"A snake," Anukul cried, pointing behind him. "A snake in the old acacia tree!"

"Only a snake." Rama teased, "A big boy like you afraid of a snake?"

"It was right in my hand!" Anukul began to demonstrate, then broke off and regarded his stubble-faced friend quietly. "Isn't that

strange?" he puzzled. "I thought it was a rope and pulled it out and I wasn't frightened at all. Honestly! I just looked at it and let it go very carefully and there was no fear. But then I started running . . ." He stopped and frowned heavily. "That's when it happened. The exact minute I started to run I became afraid."

Rama laughed and sat down on the grass. "That's the way it is," he agreed, and pulling a biri from the corner of his disreputable dhoti and lighting up, he blew a great cloud of smoke. "I learned that lesson early, I can tell you! I was younger than you are."

Anukul sat down also, and watched the man smoke. Suddenly his face lighted up. "I am going to Dacca!" he cried. "Father is going to see the landowner about his old position and I am going too! On a boat! All the way on a boat!"

The bold eyes blinked fondly. "We're a lot alike, you and I. A lot alike."

Anukul was startled. "Oh, no," he protested seriously, "I never steal."

"You aren't dead yet, either. But I wasn't thinking of that. I meant the way you figure things out for yourself . . . like fear comes from running . . . and the way we get excited about the same things . . . like boats and water."

Such a thought had never once occurred to Anukul, and it was very disturbing.

"You mustn't steal, Rama-da. It's wicked, and besides, everybody who gets robbed suspects you. You'll go to jail!"

"Don't worry your head about me." Rama winked broadly. "They can't get me on suspicion. They have to prove something"—he confidently puffed on his biri—"and that they'll never do. Besides," he added virtuously, "I only steal from the rich. It's good for them."

"Grandma isn't rich."

The eyes narrowed suspiciously. "Who said I stole from your Grandma?"

"I didn't say you did," Anukul said uneasily. "But some robbers did. Two years ago they took her silver bowl and that was a terrible loss. It was her Ma's before her."

Rama picked up a stone and shied it neatly over the road and into the river. "Your Grandma isn't exactly a pauper."

"She has it very hard," the boy protested. "She feeds all the holy men and all this time Father couldn't contribute she fed us and bought medicine and paid doctors . . ."

Rama shrugged. "She's not so bad . . . as that sort go . . ."

They sat in a strained and somewhat embarrassed silence.

Was it possible that they were really alike? Anukul worried. He became possessed with an urgent and immediate desire to reform his friend.

"Don't steal any more . . . please, Rama-da . . ."

"You've always been a sensible boy," Rama reasoned. "Why else would I waste time on you? Now look at it this way. I have a wife and three children . . . would I be a good man to let them starve?"

"You could go to work."

Rama guffawed. "Where? Only think now, seriously, even if I were willing to start at the bottom, who would hire me to clean their house? Your grandma, maybe?"

Anukul blushed and lowered his eyes. "No," he answered sadly, realizing that Rama was right . . . that no one would have the thief in his house.

"Look," he bargained desperately. "Every Saturday I earn two pice. I will stop eating rashaghollas and bring you the money. And I'll get fruits and vegetables from the kitchen garden and rice from the store. Every day I will bring them to you and your family won't starve. I promise!"

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" Rama roared. "Who's the little thief now, eh? Ho! Ho! Ho!"

Anukul reddened and bit his lip. How complicated life was.

"No . . . no . . . no," Rama declined gently. "Eat your rashaghollas, boy . . . enjoy them. Troubles will come soon enough."

"Let me go with you, then. Only once. Just tonight."

"Are you out of your mind?"

Anukul stared helplessly. He felt he must stay near his friend. "I only want to see how it is. I want to know if it's safe."

"It's safe enough for an intelligent man. But it's no game for children."

"You'll be there to protect me. I'll just watch. I won't cause you any trouble."

The biri burned Rama's lips and he spat it out and got to his feet.

"Please, Rama-da . . . please."

"Be sensible! Shall I ask your Ma if you can walk with me in the moonlight? Do you think, perhaps, that she will say, 'Why, how kind of you to think of Anukul . . . I am always delighted to have him stroll with such fine company'? Not very likely, eh?"

Remembering the guava tree ladder to the storeroom, Anukul pleaded, "I know a way to get out. You have only to whistle softly in the road as you go by. I will join you."

Rama received this news with lively interest. "Oh, you can get out, eh? Well"—he shrugged indifferently—"it pains me to discuss my profession with a boy who can't understand. I'll make a bargain. This night I will let you see how it is, if you will never, ever again pester me with the subject. Agreed?"

That night, Anukul was crouched in the storeroom window when the soft whistle came; and although a nervous tremor ran over him, he resolutely climbed into the guava tree and worked his way down. He kept peering around the corner of the wall until he saw the shadow that was Rama disappear around the bend. Because although Rama was a friend, he was also a robber, and it was not prudent to show him the secret way into Grandma's house.

Rama gave a soft grunt when Anukul caught up with him. "So you really did it? I didn't think you'd dare."

"Where are we going?"

"Ssssh. Be quiet. Follow me." They walked quickly on down the road toward town. Suddenly Rama stopped, crooked his finger at Anukul, and indicated that they would slip along the wall of a cottage to the back. They waded through jungle grass along back walls until they came to a rather low one.

"Here," Rama said, and crouching behind the wall, pulled Anukul close to him. He leaned on the wall and peered through the branches of a banyan tree at the house. Anukul, too, raised himself on tiptoe and peered over the wall.

"Why, this is Chitto Babu's!" he cried in alarm. "He isn't rich!"

"Ssssh!" Rama gripped his shoulder roughly, then relaxed his hold. "He's been picking up a bit here and there. I keep my ears open."

"But that's for his sister's wedding. Old Aunt says if he doesn't get her married this year, she won't have a chance."

"His sister's an old crow." Rama spat contemptuously. "I'll do some man a favor to take the money."

"How will you get into the house?"

Rama sank down beside the wall and pulled Anukul down also. He laughed softly. "A man who keeps his eyes open learns things," he bragged. "For instance, every night at the same time Chitto comes through that gate"—he pointed down the wall—"to go to the

toilet. And he always stands with his back to this wall." He laughed again. "Because he's such a tidy, smug prig, he also goes a good way into the jungle grass!"

"And you sneak in while the gate's open and rob him?"

"There isn't that much time! No. But when a man is occupied that way, he isn't apt to hear a slight noise, eh? So, I creep up and blip him behind the ear and do the job while he's unconscious."

Anukul winced, feeling an actual sharp pain behind his ear. He bit down on his tongue to keep his teeth from chattering. "Did you think up this plan?" he asked, hoping that his friend had not.

"No." Rama shrugged. "It's an old trick of the trade."

"What if some other robber did the same to you?"

"Not likely!" He flexed his muscles significantly. "I don't go around with my eyes closed."

Anukul closed his own eyes and concentrated as hard as he could. Don't come out, Chitto! Don't come out tonight! Beware, Chitto!

"They could rob you when you're not home, Rama-da. Everybody suspects you hide things in your house."

"What do I have a wife for? She's been taught to lock up tight."

"Doesn't she have to go to the toilet?"

Rama frowned at him. "Why do you ask such stupid questions? Everybody goes to the toilet. You know that."

"Then a robber could catch her the same way, couldn't he, if he knows about this trick?"

"He wouldn't dare!"

"Why not? Her muscles aren't so big!"

"Will you shut up!" Rama ordered. "Do you want to give this whole show away?"

Again, Anukul tried to send his warning thoughts to Chitto. "Rama-da," he said timidly, "if somebody did blip your wife, they wouldn't harm your children, would they?"

"Nobody is going to blip my wife!" Rama hissed. "Now shut up before somebody hears us and sounds an alarm!"

Anukul considered yelling, but on second thought this seemed a very dangerous way to save his friend. "If you were the robber," he whispered, "you wouldn't harm the children, would you?"

"Of course not! Do you take me for some kind of an animal? Sh!"

"But they might cry," Anukul persisted worriedly. "Babies don't know when to keep quiet. Maybe you wouldn't be able to take the chance . . . maybe you'd have to harm them . . ."

Rama jumped to his feet and strode along the wall.

Anukul ran alongside of him. "Where are we going now?"

"Home!" Rama cried distractedly. "I cannot work with you jabbering away like an idiot! Do you think I want to land in jail?"

Anukul was beside himself as the ribbon of water widened between the paddle-wheeled steamboat and the docks of Himaitpur village. He jumped up and down behind the rail, waving and shouting frantically to his group who seemed almost as excited as he. And there was Rama come to see him off! Rama—standing tall among the dockhands, long hair waving in the breeze, arrogant in his raggedness, with one strong arm raised in a farewell salute. Tears of happiness brightened the boy's eyes . . . Don't steal, Rama-da. His lips formed the prayer soundlessly. Be patient . . . please . . . something will happen.

Once they were out on the water and moving downstream, the motion accelerated and Himaitpur village was soon left behind. He hung on the rail for a while, limp from the excitement and exertion, and watched the vast stretches of jungle drift by. Before long, however, he turned his attention to the passengers and was particularly fascinated by the sprinkling of foreigners, and with one woman especially, who wore her sari tucked up between her legs like a man's dhoti . . . how very curious! And she seemed to be perfectly at ease . . . and to feel nothing amiss in her strange attire. With a growing sense of adventure, he left the railing and ran off on an exploratory journey of the boat.

"Father!" he cried excitedly, racing back. "Come and see!"

Shiv Chandra looked up from the document he was studying, removed his glasses, and blinked at his son. "What is it?"

"Only come and look," Anukul begged. "Please, Father. You have never seen such a thing! It's like a mechanical animal with one leg . . . marching up and down . . . up and down!"

Shiv Chandra was curious, and carefully placing the paper in his folder, he arose and accompanied the boy.

"That's a piston," he explained. "If you watch closely you will see that there are joints and elbows almost like your own, which connect the engine to the paddle wheel and make it go."

It was true! Anukul gazed with growing wonder, and although Shiv Chandra soon lost interest and returned to his paper work, Anukul remained for the rest of the trip with his eyes glued to this

fabulous arrangement of ordinary materials . . . begrudging even the few minutes he must spend eating fruit and bread with his father. He picked up a friendship with the crew members, especially with the old engineer who seemed to enjoy satisfying the not inconsiderable curiosity of the boy.

From the first step ashore, the city of Dacca was almost as glorious as the trip had been. Shiv Chandra looked the dock over carefully with obvious interest and pleasure. "There have been changes," he announced, and pointed his umbrella. "That narrow gauge railway was only talk when I fell ill."

Even as Anukul watched, an engine came puffing down the rails, and he watched breathlessly as it hooked onto a row of freight wagons.

"What makes the train move?"

His father smiled. "You should know that. You spent the whole morning looking at the boat's engine. The same thing that makes paddle wheels turn will make any wheel turn. In this case, iron ones."

They went to the home of Father's sister and Anukul made the acquaintance of his cousins . . . Tara, who was a year older and a head taller than he, and the little girl, Tina, who left, rather reluctantly, the large oil drum and the smaller barley cans with which she was playing.

While Aunt and Father had tea, the children were served sweetcakes on a real English china plate, rimmed in pure gold and covered with dainty flowers. They sat in a circle, gauging each other in self-conscious silence as they nibbled their sweets.

Shiv Chandra arose and crossed the veranda. "I am leaving you now. See that you are obedient. I will return shortly."

Conscious of his manners, Anukul went to him quickly, bowed down and touched his feet, then returned, a trifle uncertainly, to his cousins. The cakes had all been eaten and Aunt came and picked up the plate. She stared at the stiff-backed children for a moment and smiled kindly.

"You must take Anukul around to see the neighborhood," she suggested to Tara. "But if you go out . . . mind that you watch Tina closely."

Anukul sat in polite expectancy, waiting for Tara to extend this invitation. He was disappointed.

"It's too hot," Tara complained, with a quick glance to make sure

his Ma had left. "And Tina is a nuisance. It isn't worth it."

Tina arose with elaborate casualness and returned to her cans . . . rolling them about . . . clanging them together . . . and keeping close tabs on her audience reaction.

"Did you ever see a steam engine?" Anukul asked.

"Hundreds of times," Tara answered casually.

"Did you ever make one?"

"A steam engine?"

"Yes."

"Are you stupid?" Tara laughed with the assured superiority of a city child. "Engineers make steam engines!"

"A blacksmith could make one."

"He could not!"

"Yes he could." Anukul smiled engagingly, to let his cousin know that he was not quarrelsome. "He could make one out of Tina's cans. We could use the big oil drum for the boiler and the little ones for wheels, you see. The reason we need a blacksmith is to cut the vents and make some pistons out of metal strips. I know how it's done."

"Out of those old cans?" Tara stared incredulously.

"Honest. We use the smaller ones for the wheels and fix up the oil drum as a boiler and attach wires from the piston to the wheels. I tell you it will work."

Tara was silent for a while, then got up and went to the cans, and arranging the two small ones next to each other, placed the oil drum on top.

Tina knocked the big drum off. "That's mine. Leave it alone or I'll tell Ma."

"Let us have them," Tara wheedled. "Don't you want to see us build a steam engine?"

"No."

"We only want to borrow them for a minute. You can have them back."

"No."

"If we take you to Amullya's shop with us, will you? You can watch him pound the iron and see the sparks fly . . ."

Tina was tempted. "You always call me a baby," she complained. "I'm six years old!"

"We won't call you a baby . . . honest."

The little girl capitulated. "But you have to give the cans back," she warned; and happily gathering up the equipment, the children were off to the blacksmith.

"What is all this jabbering?" Amullya, behind his heavy leather apron, and with his hairy arms akimbo, looked very fierce.

"Please make a steam engine for us. It will work!" the children chorused. "Try it, Amullya-da, please."

"Look!" Tara arranged the three cans. "You see how it is?"

"The piston would be set through right here," Anukul explained urgently, "with the wires coming down to the wheels . . . like this . . ."

Amullya studied the cans thoughtfully, then scratched his head. "I just made you a windmill the other day, and here you are back so soon! I have got plenty of work to do." He paused, and then said flatly, "Moreover, it won't work."

"Oh, it will," Anukul begged. He snatched a large nail from a box and dropped to the earth floor. "See . . ." and he began rapidly to sketch an outline of the engine he had studied.

The blacksmith and his cousins squatted around him, and soon a lively discussion as to the possibilities was taking place.

"I don't know." Amullya was still dubious but intrigued. He picked up the drum and carried it to his workbench. Encouraged, the children danced around him.

His eyes squinted at Anukul from behind bushy brows. "Now where was it you wanted the piston?"

"Just here . . ." Anukul touched the drum.

The blacksmith scratched his head. "I say here." He touched a spot a few inches away from the one Anukul indicated.

"Yes," Anukul agreed, "perhaps that would be better."

An hour flew by in earnest activity as the man worked, and the children scrambled about for the bits of pipe and metal and wire that he called for. Finally, Amullya straightened up and gazed proudly at his handiwork. "There she is." He beamed, and demonstrated the pistons manually.

"They're turning!" Tina squealed. "The wheels are turning!"

A great, quiet glow suffused Anukul.

"We need water!" Tara cried excitedly, pushing a bucket at Tina. "Go out to the trough and get some water!"

The engine was primed and ready to go. With iron tongs Amullya

carefully lifted live coals from the forge and placed them under the oil drum. They stood around, sharing happy, confident smiles as they waited for the water to boil and create steam.

"Look!" Tara pointed, and they were transfixed by the hesitant motion of the piston with steam leaking from all sides. The motion became steady. The wheels were turning!

The children were beside themselves with joy and started to dance. Amullya stood with his hands on his hips and a faint smile on his lips.

Suddenly Anukul pushed his cousins. "Get away quick!" he yelled, and reaching out, grabbed Amullya's apron strings so hard that the startled blacksmith lost his balance and tumbled backward to the floor. And just in time, for with a terrifying explosion, the engine blew up.

They regarded each other stupidly until the shock wore off.

"My cans!" Tina screamed. "Look what you did to my cans!"

There was a loud hissing, for the water had splashed right into the forge. Amullya grabbed up a poker and ran to save his fire. It was too late. The sizzling coals were turning black. The damage was done.

"Will you look at this mess!" he roared at the children. "A whole afternoon wasted! Does every brat in this neighborhood think my shop is public property?"

Anukul gazed at him sadly, wondering how it was possible that he could so quickly forget the shared pleasure and excitement.

"But it did work," he sought to comfort them.

"Out!" Amullya shrilled, brandishing the poker. "Out of my shop before I thrash the bunch of you!"

It was midnight when Anukul and Shiv Nandan returned to Himaitpur a few days later. Except for Grandma, the entire household was at the dock to meet them, and the rejoicing was great when Father imparted the anxiously awaited news that the landowner desired his services again. Anukul himself felt very proud and confident among them now that Father would be contributing his full share . . .

As soon as he entered the house, Anukul saw the silver bowl, gleaming on the low wooden bench, filled with golden dates. He approached it timidly, hardly daring to believe that it had truly come back.

"It's a miracle," Grandma cried excitedly. "I went to the yard this morning and there it was, sitting on the wall as nice as you please and all polished up and shining."

"How could it happen so quickly?" Anukul marveled, touching the polished surface gently with his finger tips.

"It was my Bel tree," Grandma stated proudly. "I planted that Bel tree when I came here as a bride, and I dedicated it to Durga —the mother Goddess—so that this house, and everybody and everything within, would always be protected. Every day since my bowl was stolen, I have prayed to my tree that it would find its way back . . . and here it is! And no worse for its absence, either!" She flashed a quick, triumphant glance at Old Aunt. "I cannot say what the ways of the Supreme Father are, nor whom he will choose to work through, nor what is his purpose, nor how long it will take. But if anyone dares to doubt that honest prayer is answered"—she raised an arm and pointed dramatically—"let them behold my silver bowl!"

Anukul went to the kitchen, poured a cup of water, and carried it to Grandma's Bel tree. "Accept my gratitude," he prayed. "You have taken Rama-da's hand . . . stay with him always." And spilling the water in loving libation, he prostrated himself, then sat for a long time listening to the symphony of the leaves and the tremulous whisper of motion that was the song of growing things.

4

TIMES were very hard in Anukul's thirteenth summer. The rice crop in that year, 1901, had not been good at all, and although Father contributed his entire salary, Grandma's table showed the strain. Moreover, the whole village had tightened its belt a notch, and the ways that a boy could earn a pice were very limited.

Under these circumstances, Anukul discovered that what he had considered a great fondness for rashaghollas was, in fact, a raging and seemingly uncontrollable passion.

As his bill grew larger and payments more infrequent, his relationship with Netai Ghose deteriorated. Lately, the shopkeeper had become openly insulting, and sent him empty-handed from the shop more often than he favored him with credit. Yet, with all this, every afternoon as school let out, Anukul was impelled by a force greater than he could master, to the sweetshop and the mercy of Netai Ghose.

On such an afternoon, after bidding his companions good-by, Anukul scuffed the dust of the road and tried with all his might to turn his feet in the proper direction . . . away from the sweetshop and toward home. This was not possible, but the struggle did send him stumbling into the grass beside the road, where he sank down and pressed his forehead tightly against his knees.

"I will not go there again," he muttered. "He has turned me away four days in a row. It's no use." The sweet memory of rashaghollas rose in his throat; grew and swelled until he could have wept with pain. He clenched his fists tightly. "He yells so loud everybody knows! They wait for me . . . as if I were an amusement!"

The intolerable longing would not listen. It filled him until he ached all over, washed him with sickly perspiration.

Afterward, he could not remember getting up or walking down

the road. He knew only that he stood, abject and pleading, before an enraged Netai Ghose.

"You dare to show me your face, impudent dog! You think I have no need for the two rupees you owe me! Two rupees! You take me for a fool! Get out of here! Bring me my money!"

The scent of the rashaghollas had turned Anukul's legs to rubber. He could not move them.

In a sudden dark rage, Ghose whipped a towel from about his waist, snapped it around the culprit's neck, and began twisting. As Anukul choked and gasped, the violent man shoved him hard with one hand and pulled the towel with the other. This action sent the boy spinning from the shop and he landed, sprawling, in the dust outside.

Ghose stood in the doorway, yelling and shaking his fist; people stopped in their tracks and ran out of the adjoining shops to enjoy the spectacle.

Anukul picked himself up, bent his head, and attempted to make himself as small as possible as he scurried off.

Footsteps ran up behind him and a hand fell on his shoulder. He turned to face his friend Rama.

"Don't let them get you down, sonny. You've got more in your little finger than all those heads put together."

Rama was now a dock laborer, but employment had not changed his appearance, or manners . . . or their friendship. Anukul bit his lip and hung his head.

"Let's show the old skinflint up." Rama unknotted the end of his dhoti and extracted a pice. "Here, go back with this and see how fast he changes his tune."

Anukul shook his head, looked away, and exercised every ounce of self-control to keep from crying.

Rama sighed. "You're right," he agreed. "The hell with them." He fell into step with the boy, eying him closely. "Men are puny creatures. It doesn't take much to swell their heads. I was thinking about that only the other day."

He cast an oblique but concerned glance over his small friend, trying to determine the extent of his hurt pride.

"You know . . . last week a thin, scrawny character gets off the boat . . . come to see the magistrate, I expect, and acting for all the world like he owned the docks himself. Well, I hoist up his suitcases, and he reaches out and whacks me . . . not hard, you know,

just enough to look important in case anybody was watching . . . that's the way they are. 'Boy!' he says to me." He laughed and poked Anukul with his elbow, coaxing a smile. "Imagine that! 'Boy!' Why I could make three of him easy. 'Boy!' he says. 'Be careful with my things.' I says, 'Yes, Babu . . . of course, Babu . . . Why not?' They expect it. What does it mean?" He shrugged. "As long as they give me my two pice, that's all I care. He did that, all right, but the way he let go of them you'd think they were his own teeth."

They stopped because they had come to the parting of their ways, but Rama took Anukul's arm gently, staying him. "Now this is the story, Anukul. The very next day I'm having my noon meal at the teashop with friends and this same character comes prancing in. 'Boy!' he calls to Karmokar. 'What do you serve here?' Well, Karmokar begins telling him, and after every item the guy pinches up his mouth and says, 'How much?' And so it went until Karmokar named every damned thing in the shop. And do you know what that little swelled head orders? A cup of tea! One miserable cup of tea!" He laughed heartily, and although Anukul's spirits were too low to follow the story carefully, he managed a smile for his friend's pleasure.

"The point is, Anukul, that we porters are not rich, but we live better than that kind, because we are happy. We are, truly. We work hard and we eat simple but hearty and we don't stint ourselves or others; and that's the way it should be."

The next afternoon, promptly as school was dismissed, the pain rose in Anukul's throat and he felt as if a bright, tantalizing thread had spun itself from Ghose's rashagholla pot to the very center of his brain, so that he could not see or think of anything else.

He walked to the road with Atul and Dilip but did not hear a single word they said, and after they parted, he found himself once more rooted to the ground.

"Perhaps he will give you just one," the bright thread tempted. Shame mixed with longing made him weak, but the sweet aching did not recede. "Netai-da was your friend . . . he must be sorry for treating you so," the thread crooned.

He began walking slowly in the direction of the sweetshop. "I will only walk past," he compromised. "I won't look in, or say anything, I'll just walk past . . . and smell."

After a few steps, however, he found it as impossible to proceed against the remembered humiliations he had suffered as it was to

turn from the desire. He halted, floundering helplessly in this complex of emotions.

It was then, with a shattering impact of horror, that he realized that this yearning, which he had reluctantly admitted was passion, was more even than that. It was greed—naked, ugly greed that crawled and sprawled over and through every atom of him. He cried out sharply and fled back to the schoolhouse . . . and beyond until he reached the jungle.

In and out of the trees he ran, stumbling over roots and logs, around and around until he sank down exhausted, panting and gasping.

But no sooner had his breath calmed and his strength returned, than the greed, too, became a live thing; and the little thread that had coaxed him to the rashagholla kettle had now become a glaring magnet.

He leaped to his feet and began to run again, and almost immediately smashed blindly into a tree. He beat his fists against the rough bark until his knuckles were bleeding, and he slumped to the ground again; and was again enveloped by waves of greed.

He writhed on the ground, pulling up handfuls of grass. "Ma!" he cried desperately. "Ma! Ma! Ma!" He saw her face clearly, stern and unyielding, and heard her voice, impatient and disappointed, "Will you never learn to control yourself?"

He began to weep and after a long, long time arose, feeling strangely lightheaded, like a wraith devoid of substance; but nevertheless, he was able to direct his footsteps homeward.

Again at three o'clock the next afternoon, the bright thread attached itself to him. But the greed was weakened, and with great satisfaction at being master of himself, Anukul left his companions and started directly for home, jousting successfully along the way with the insidious temptations, the sudden tugs and pulls that the thread occasioned.

At Chitto Babu's house, a guava tree reaching high over the wall caught his attention and he paused in the road, fascinated with the charming game of hide-and-seek that the shiny luscious fruits were playing with the afternoon breeze.

It was at this unsuspecting moment that greed caught up with him, and before his startled gaze, the fruits became rashaghollas dangling seductively just beyond his reach; again the aching rose in his throat and his brain kindled to fire.

"No!" he cried, beating his head with clenched fists. "No, no, no!" He ran from the road as fast as he could go, along the side of Chitto Babu's wall, racing for the privacy of the tall jungle grass that lay behind it, preparing for the struggle that he knew was upon him.

"Thief! Thief!" Chitto ran through the gate in the back wall, brandishing a heavy stick. "I have caught you this time, robber! I have caught you!"

Surprised, Anukul stopped and turned and Chitto was upon him, grabbing him roughly by the hair. "Steal my cucumbers, will you?"

"No, no, Chitto Babu . . . what is it?" Anukul struggled free of his grasp and ran a short distance into the grass before turning. "See, I have nothing," he pleaded hastily, turning the pockets of his shorts, the only garment he wore, inside out. "I wasn't in your garden."

"Not today you weren't, because I was ready for you!" Chitto cried excitedly, and swinging the stick, charged at him again.

"You are wrong, Chitto Babu. You are making a mistake," Anukul called over his shoulder as he ran deeper into the grass. "Believe me, Chitto Babu!" When he was sure that a safe distance lay between them, he turned. A panting, winded Chitto came to a full stop and leaned heavily on his stick as he glowered at the boy. "For weeks you have been stealing my cucumbers! Robber! You didn't expect me home at this hour, did you? Well, you are in for a thrashing now! I have caught you red-handed!"

"You didn't catch me stealing," Anukul protested. "I don't steal."

"What were you sneaking down by my wall for? For my cucumbers! But this time I was too smart for you!"

"That isn't true. I wasn't sneaking. I was running."

"Yes!" Chitto yelled excitedly. "Running like the thief you are!"

"No, no, no, Chitto Babu! I was only running by your place. I only wanted to come out here into the grass."

"Hah!" Chitto shouted contemptuously, and gathering up his strength, he bore down on Anukul again.

They were at the edge of the jungle now, and not wishing to enter, Anukul led his pursuer in a wide circle. It was not long before the grass behind him stopped swishing, and Anukul stopped also.

"Please believe me, Chitto Babu," he begged earnestly, and took

several cautious steps toward his red-faced, hard-breathing adversary. "I have not been stealing from you. And just look," he reasoned. "All this time you are chasing me, the garden gate is wide open and the robber can come and help himself to more of your cucumbers!"

"A likely story!" Chitto panted, but he turned uneasily toward his house and his eyes worried the considerable distance to his wall.

He glowered testily at the boy. "If I catch you around my wall again, I will not spare you! Understand?" Whipping the grass suggestively with the stick, he strode back to his house.

That night, just as he was at the point of going to sleep, Anukul had a sudden realization that brought him bolt upright in the center of his straw mat. The rashaghollas had been completely swept out of his mind! The shock of Chitto's unjust accusation . . . the fear of the stick . . . and his urgent desire to convince Chitto had erased the rashaghollas. Not just for that particular time, but for the rest of the day!

How amazing! The brain could be strongly occupied with only one thing at a time. He sat quite still in the darkness as the wonderful possibilities of this realization unfolded within him. When he had tried not to think of rashaghollas . . . commanded himself not to think of them . . . well, that was just another way of filling his head with the same subject. He could see that now. Chitto had been a lucky accident, but a person was free to choose. The secret was that one must concentrate on something else . . . something more desirable . . .

He lay down on the mat and stretched his limbs comfortably. What a simple thing truth was! And how many questions it answered. Ma, for instance. When he was thinking how much he loved her, he was happy . . . so this was right. But if he began to worry whether she loved him, he was miserable . . . so that was wrong. Yes. That's how it was. Smiling broadly, he fell immediately into a deep and untroubled sleep.

5

IT WAS also in his thirteenth year that Satya Moitra finally passed Anukul, together with Atul and Dilip, out of the village school.

"Not that he knows anything," the sharp-featured Brahmin informed Anukul's family as they sat around Grandma's silver bowl formally sipping tea, "but because he never will learn anything from me."

Anukul smiled sadly, adding to himself . . . and because of all the vegetables Grandma sent you . . . and the medicine I make for your wife.

Monmohini took the news stoically. But Grandma nodded and beamed proudly while she pressed more tea and sweetcakes on their guest. But when the teacher had gone, it was Grandma who turned on him.

"You are no longer a child," she lectured sternly. "It is time to stop being different from the others or the high school will not pass you and nobody will trust you with their affairs. Watch the other boys. See how it is and do as they do." After a pause, she added, somewhat irrelevantly, "Only no-goods and holy men can afford to be different."

Anukul was entered in the high school at Pabna town, four miles away. He found the classrooms painfully confining, and the subjects —history, geography, mathematics, English grammar and rhetoric— tedious and often confusing. Nevertheless, he was determined to please Ma, so with perseverance and discipline, he managed the necessary concentration. He turned in his lessons promptly and was passed along from term to term.

The four-mile walk to school, however, was quite another thing; and no matter how many times he took it, and long after he had explored all possible routes, he looked forward to each morning

or evening journey with undiminished eagerness.

Especially pleasurable were the rare occasions when Atul and Dilip were either starting late or were detained in Pabna town. For on these solitary walks, everything he looked at took on new dimensions of form and color . . . became sharp and distinct . . . until it seemed that every leaf or blade of grass stood unique and apart from every other and wonder held him spellbound all along the way.

Long ago, Monmohini Devi had given him the Mantra (the Holy Word which she had received from her Spiritual Master, Hazur Maharaj), and as he grew older, he found himself more and more often meditating upon this Mantra. He also noticed that he was repeating it in new tempos and with growing intensity.

One morning, during his second year of high school, Monmohini answered a knocking at the gate to find the limp form of her son supported by Dilip and Atul.

"What happened?" she cried in alarm.

"It's nothing," Dilip assured her hastily. "We were just standing there and he passed out. The sun, I expect."

"At seven o'clock in the morning?" Monmohini reached for Anukul's wrist and counted his pulse, then placed her hand, worriedly, on his forehead. "Bring him in," she said, leading the way through the house to the back veranda, and helping them to lay him on the bed. "Ma," she called, "bring water quickly. Anukul has fainted."

Atul and Dilip hesitated beside the bed. "We must leave now," Dilip began, "but don't worry, please. He'll be all right."

"He's done this before," Atul blurted out, "lots of times."

"What?" Monmohini turned from her ministrations.

Dilip kicked Atul sharply on the shin.

"His Ma ought to know," Atul argued stubbornly, rubbing the hurt shin on the calf of his other leg. "He acts real funny when he comes out of it. Something's wrong!"

Monmohini pinned him with her close scrutiny. "What do you mean . . . funny?"

"It's really nothing at all," Dilip said, and smiled engagingly as he shouldered his friend out of the way. "He only jumps around a bit. It's the circulation," he explained importantly. "When he's passed out it stops, you see, and when it gets going again, he jumps around a bit . . . that's really all it is."

"I appreciate your bringing him home." Monmohini placed her palms together and bowed. "Please take some fruit from the front table."

The boys returned the bow.

"It is always a pleasure to be of service, Monmohini Devi," Dilip said gallantly, "and please don't worry." Nudging Atul before him, he left the veranda.

Grandma emerged with a basin of water and a towel and the two women worked in silence . . . Monmohini bathing Anukul's face and shoulders, Grandma passing the large palm-leaf fan back and forth.

At length Anukul stirred, sat up, and opened his eyes. The eyes were so startlingly luminous that both women fell back a step. He gazed wonderingly from one to the other and then around the courtyard from bush, to tree, to plant; when he reached the Bel tree, his eyes seemed to grow even wider and brighter until, with a cry of joy, he leaped from the bed and ran across the courtyard to embrace the tree with all his might.

"I told you so," Grandma accused. "For years I have warned you. Now you see for yourself." She picked up the basin and towel and shuffled toward the kitchen. "No good will come of this," she muttered darkly.

Monmohini started across the courtyard, but some distance from the Bel tree she halted to regard her son long and thoughtfully.

Anukul was running his hands gently over the bark, and as she watched, he stepped back and stretched his arms wide to the foliage. He spun around two or three times, then dropped to his knees, his arms still stretched high and wide.

She went to him and knelt down. "Why are you doing this, Anukul?"

"Tremors of light!" he cried. "Don't you see them? Beautiful, beautiful tremors of light all melting into trees and birds and people! And they are me . . . me . . . me, but I can't catch them." He jumped to his feet and began whirling about the courtyard. "Oh, beautiful," he sang, "beautiful!"

Monmohini arose, entered the prayer room, and bowed; she remained seated before Hazur Maharaj for a long time; then she sighed deeply. "I know you designated Sarkar Sahib as your successor," she murmured, "but I have never felt the same for him

. . . and I am not sure about this." She prostrated herself and tears gathered in her eyes. "If only you were here now," she cried, "if only I were sure." Hazur Maharaj had been dead for many years and she quickly regained her self-control and decided to watch and listen and obey the inner voice when it spoke to her.

When she came from the prayer room, a very subdued Anukul was waiting for her.

"How do you feel now?" she asked.

"Fine." He blinked his eyes and fell into step beside her. "It has happened before," he said shyly.

"I know. Atul informed me."

Anukul bit his lip. He had wanted so much to tell her himself, and had lain awake many nights wondering how to broach the subject. "It was difficult to explain," he apologized.

"You are going to be late for school, Anukul. Take the road and don't stop anywhere, for any reason. Do you understand?"

Impulsively, he caught her hand and kissed it twice and then gazed longingly into her face, but found himself totally unable to express a single word from his overflowing heart.

A few nights later, Anukul dreamed he saw a great ball of brilliant light. As he squinted his eyes, trying to adjust his vision, a beautiful half-naked girl stepped from the light . . . long silken hair flowing seductively—half revealing, half concealing the golden body. Dark oval eyes beckoned him. "I am for you," she whispered, swaying closer, "for you." The great light seemed to surge through his body, consuming it in waves of heat and fear. "Ma!" he shouted convulsively. "Ma! Ma! Ma!"

Monmohini sat up on her mat.

"Ma!" he cried again.

She crossed the room and knelt by his mat, shaking him brusquely. "Wake up!" she called. "Anukul, wake up!"

Opening his eyes, he clutched her hands tightly and pressed his head on her knees. Stumbling over the words because he was still frightened, he told her the story of the vision he had seen.

"If she comes again," Monmohini instructed, "don't call me. Repeat the Mantra slowly and carefully just as I have taught you. No harm will come to you."

The following day she sat down and wrote a long, detailed letter to Sarkar Sahib who resided in Gazipur. His answer was prompt and definite. She was to administer the required vows immediately

and initiate her son in the deeper types of concentrated meditation. This she did.

Sarkar Sahib died at almost the same time that Anukul was initiated, so they never met; therefore, he always considered Monmohini was his Spiritual Master. The profound devotion which he had always felt for her, combined with this new and deeper experience, expanded his feeling of love for, and of oneness with, all that he knew or sensed in his environment.

Under her stern instruction, he worked diligently at his meditation and the extraconscious experiences were soon brought under control . . . reserved for the privacy of the prayer room, the roof of Grandma's house, or the quiet glade he had discovered in the jungle. The fainting spells ceased entirely.

6

EARLY on a spring morning in 1905, a very confident seventeen-year-old Anukul started out to take the final matriculation examination from the high school at Pabna town.

At the crossroads, he was surprised to find only Dilip waiting. "Where's Atul?" he inquired anxiously.

"Backed out," Dilip grunted. "He's not going."

"He can't back out! That clerk's job in Dacca depends on his getting a diploma! He's been working night and day for this! What happened?"

"I don't know." Dilip shrugged nonchalantly. "I stopped by the cottage and his Ma came to the door and said he wasn't going."

The news was extremely disturbing. "You go on, Dilip. I'll run down and see what's up."

"You better hurry," Dilip warned. "That exam lasts only three hours, and ready or not, they take in the papers at one o'clock . . . sharp."

"I know. I'll take the short cut." Anukul sped down the road to Atul's cottage.

Atul sat on the step, idly shaking a handful of small stones.

"What's the matter?" Anukul called. "Why aren't you going?"

"Who needs a diploma anyway?" Atul flipped a pebble into the dust as Anukul drew near.

"You do!" Anukul cried. "How else can you get your job in Dacca?"

"There are other jobs . . ."

Anukul's worried gaze held his friend's eyes. "What is it, Atul? Tell me the truth."

Atul hunched his shoulders helplessly. "What is it always? Money!

Ma's run herself ragged these past few weeks. All we could raise was two rupees."

Anukul took the carefully folded five-rupee note from his own pocket and pressed it into Atul's hand. "Take this . . . and run. You need all the time there is."

Atul's eyes brightened with cautious hope. "What about you?"

"I'll go get more. You hurry!"

Atul jumped to his feet and embraced his friend wildly. "I'll pay it back," he vowed. "As soon as I get the position I'll send it back to you."

"I know!" Anukul cried impatiently. "But hurry! You'll be late as it is and you've got to pass!"

The pleasure with which he watched Atul leaping through the jungle grass was quickly mixed with a growing uneasiness. Anukul walked to the docks and to a certain spot he knew from which he could sit and watch the river and the waterfront activities while he faced the full consequences of his impulsive act.

The five rupees had been very hard to come by. Monmohini had given birth to two more children in the last few years: a boy and a girl. Although Father worked steadily, his salary was fixed, and the growing family and rising prices had become a serious problem. Anukul's five rupees represented a substantial sacrifice by the family and considerable extra labor on the part of his mother.

But could he have done otherwise? Atul had no father at all, and his widowed mother struggled to feed six children on a pittance contributed by relatives, whose own rice kettles were far from full. No. Atul was the head of a family. His responsibilities were great and his position in Dacca was not a matter for bargaining.

A vision of his mother's face, tired, perspiring from the heat of the stove while she prepared muri (puffed rice) for sale to raise the few precious extra rupees, rose before him. It twisted his heart. He shook his head to get rid of the painful picture. He got to his feet, prepared to go home and face the music.

He found Ma and Grandma on the courtyard lawn, playing with the babies.

"What are you doing back so soon?" Monmohini cried crossly. Then, as a new fear dawned, her face became slack. "You can't have failed already?"

Anukul crossed the lawn and knelt down with them. Badal was

lying on his back, pumping chubby legs into the air. Anukul plucked a blade of grass and tickled his toes, smiling broadly at his delighted chortles.

The women did not smile, however; they waited tensely, watching his every move with anxious suspicion.

"I gave the money to Atul," he said softly, unable to look at Ma, to see the hardening lines of eye and lip that were so painfully familiar to him.

She gasped and caught up Badal and fondled him nervously.

"Five rupees!" Grandma shouted incredulously. "All of it?"

He nodded miserably and his gaze went timidly pleading, begging, back and forth between the two women. "His Ma couldn't raise it and that position he was promised in Dacca requires a diploma. He has to have work. You know how much the family needs the money . . ."

Monmohini's arms tightened around the little boy. "And we don't? Is that how you feel?"

"Eeeeeeeeeee!" Grandma flung back her gray head and keened to the heavens, rocking to and fro as if seized with intense pain. After a few moments, however, she stopped as abruptly as she had begun. "Five rupees!" she hissed. "Tossed to beggars as if they were pice!"

"I'll pay it back, Grandma, and more besides! I won't be a burden! I'm going to work!"

"What can you do? Where can you work? Who would hire you without even a high school diploma?"

"I'm very strong. I'll work at the docks as a porter."

"Eeeeeeeeeee!" the old woman keened again, smiting her forehead. "Is there never to be an end to the disgrace you heap upon this house?"

"It's honest work," Anukul reasoned, "and they make much more than you'd think. Rama supports his family and his in-laws and they eat well."

"Robbers! Riffraff! Am I to be an object of ridicule in my own village? Are tongues to wag and fingers to point so that I, and my sons, and my sons-in-law, and my daughters, and even my grandchildren, cannot walk down the street for shame!"

"No one need know about it," Anukul pleaded. "The dockworkers stick by themselves . . . who knows them? Besides, I'll wear a dirty dhoti like the rest of them and tie a cloth around my head.

Nobody ever looks at dock porters. Think. You've gone down there many times to meet Father. Can you remember what a single coolie looked like? I'll keep my eyes open and dodge anyone who might know me. You won't be shamed."

She became quiet and her eyes brooded over him speculatively. "You can earn five rupees this way?"

"More." He sighed with relief. "You'll see." In deference to her age and position in the family, he touched her feet first, then timidly touched his mother's and sought her eyes. "Please speak to me, Ma. Is it all right?"

Monmohini pressed the little boy closer to her breast as if shielding him from some danger. "Why do you seek advice when your mind is already made up, Anukul?" She sighed wearily. "Do whatever you have to do!"

Anukul found the work at the docks exhilarating. His muscles responded to the heavy trunks as if they had long been hungry for such exercise, and so afforded him much pleasure as the luggage was smoothly hoisted aloft.

There was comfort also in the honesty of the crude speech and simple behavior of his co-workers as contrasted to the insidious pretensions and vanities of the village people.

Most of all, there was the unexpected joy in renewing his friendship with Rama. Their contacts had been very few since Anukul started school in Pabna town, but now they were together daily. And in those times when they were both idle and resting, Anukul marveled again at the former robber's keen insight, his uncomplicated picture of life, and his ability to go directly to the heart of man's relationship to man. The healthy tiredness with which Anukul stretched out on his mat at night and the suddenness with which he fell into a sound sleep were very good and deeply satisfying.

But this employment was only temporary. That had been decided by the family at the start. Though their opinion was unanimous that any further outlay for Anukul's education would be a sheer waste of money, they could not accept the present situation as a satisfactory alternative. As the summer wore on, the nagging of his relatives increased, fueled by their growing fear of exposure. Even Father, who came from Dacca only once a month, found the situation painful. Shiv Chandra had long been accustomed to living with shame, since of necessity his family must be domiciled

with his mother-in-law, rather than abiding in his own house. But he was very conscious of his Brahmin ancestry and felt keenly that Anukul's employment was a smudge on its dignity. When, therefore, in answer to one of his many pleas to relatives, a letter came offering a new hope, it was welcomed by one and all.

The letter was from a cousin in Naihati, who informed them that a barrister friend of his, one Ishwar Babu, was quite influential in the affairs of the new National Medical School in Calcutta. This college had been established by some patriotic and political-minded Indians to demonstrate their own ability and their independence of the British. The cousin went on to say that if, after a personal inspection, Ishwar Babu found Anukul a worthy candidate, he could, and would, make it possible for the boy to enroll for his medical studies without a high school diploma.

The entire family waited anxiously on the day that Anukul considered this proposition, and when he accepted, the sigh of relief was all-embracing.

They were quick to offer advice and instructions regarding behavior in the big city; and on these matters, Grandma was clearly the most vocal.

"Observe all renowned men closely," she counseled, "make their ways your ways and you may yet be successful. All is not lost. Beware of public eating places. They chop up cows' flesh, mix it with the lentils, and then tell you it's a foreign vegetable!" And she gave a goodly number of hair-raising accounts of unwary people who had been so ensnared.

"Beware of loose women!" was another injunction the old woman repeated many times. "They are the daughters of demons. Once they drop their evil magic potions into your tea, or touch them to your skin, you are lost forever. Deeper and deeper and deeper they will lure you, down the dark road of no returning. Beware!"

There were vague promises of financial help, too, but these were based on such unrealistic expectations of probable future income that Anukul could not take them seriously. And this was just as well.

His cousin met him at the station in Naihati, a vigorously growing city halfway between Himaitpur and Calcutta, and they proceeded directly to the home of Ishwar Babu. The whole afternoon was spent sipping tea and nibbling sweets and exchanging con-

sciously polite views on politics, economics, and religion. After this Anukul was declared to be promising material for a doctor worthy of India. Then his cousin accompanied him back to the railway station. Anukul was on his way to Calcutta and a new life in a strange world.

7

ANUKUL arrived at the red brick Sealdah station in Calcutta with material assets amounting to one and a half rupees, a small tin box with two changes of clothing, a recommendation to the National Medical School from Ishwar Babu, and the address of a distant cousin, Dr. Lahiri, who practiced homeopathic medicine. The family vaguely hoped that he might give some practical assistance to the young and struggling medical student.

The first thing Anukul noticed was that the large Sealdah station sheltered a multitude of homeless people. Whole families staked their claim by the simple act of laying down a blanket, or mat, or newspapers. On these islands of private property they ate, slept, quarreled, or amused themselves, seemingly oblivious of the hustling hordes of porters and passengers impatiently threading their precarious way through the maze.

Anukul was quick to take advantage of this free roof, and the station became his home for several months. He collected discarded but clean newspapers wherever he found them, and these served as mattress and blankets—a poor protection against the fifty-degree winter temperature which was a new and uncomfortable experience.

His cousin's estimate of Ishwar Babu's influence seemed to be well-founded, for Anukul encountered no difficulty in enrolling for his studies on presentation of the recommendation. Finding employment proved impossible, however. The burgeoning port city was a magnet for unskilled labor and for students like Anukul. It seemed there were fifty applications for every available job that would not conflict with his classes; so that without relatives or important connections in the proper places he was not even considered.

As a last and desperate hope, he presented himself to his cousin, Dr. Lahiri. All ideas of material help were quickly dashed, however, for the cramped living quarters behind the dispensary were overflowing with family and relatives who depended on the hard-working, mild-mannered doctor.

Nevertheless, the contact proved to be far more fruitful and rewarding than the fulfilling of the initial purpose would have been. The doctor was delighted with this young cousin who instinctively had been experimenting with the homeopathic system of medicine, and a companionship based on mutual interest and need developed quickly. Often, too, the doctor's mother invited Anukul to share their evening meal, and although he was fully aware of the family circumstances and careful not to impose on their generosity, it was a source of comfort when his hunger was extreme.

Anukul would hurry to the dispensary each afternoon after classes to help the older man compound ointments and medicines from the various herbal ingredients, taking great pleasure in using equipment especially designed for this work and in the knowledge he was gaining. When the supplies were adequate and the doctor was out on home visits, his considerable library was at Anukul's disposal; and in this way Anukul's homeopathic studies progressed simultaneously with his more formal lessons in allopathic medicine. He found that they were very much interrelated and interdependent and that knowledge of one was of immense value in the study of the other.

It was not long before Dr. Lahiri began discussing his patients in detail with his young cousin. He saw that the boy's thinking was unusually sound and helped to stimulate and clarify his own, and that Anukul's new medicines, in many cases, gave amazingly quick results.

Anukul became a favorite around his railroad-station home also, and the poor overwhelmed mothers welcomed him eagerly when he arrived in the evening. Their restless children clustered about him because he was never impatient. In fact, his pleasure in the children seemed to be as great as theirs in him as he tirelessly told them stories, or led them in group singing, or devised games which would occupy their attention and could be played in the limited space available. And whenever he felt faint from lack of food, he gratefully accepted one of the mothers' invitations to share their meager meals.

One night, just as he had arranged his newspapers and prepared to fall asleep, a train discharged a rush of passengers and Dilip literally stumbled over him.

"Rajah! What are you doing here in Calcutta!"

Anukul jumped to his feet and the two friends embraced warmly. "I'm going to the National Medical School."

"Bully!" Dilip said enthusiastically. "That's just bully!"

The first warmth of recognition became a little uneasy. Although it was less than a year since the friends had parted, Dilip had changed greatly. He was dressed from head to toe in English clothes and had acquired a mustache and goatee of foreign cut which gave his face a strange look.

"How are you doing at law school?"

"It's a bloody bore, old chap." Dilip pulled a wry face, then winked gaily. "However, by giving the right presents to the right people, I'll squeeze through." He became conscious of Anukul's newspaper bed, of the little tin box with books and notebooks piled neatly on top. His eyes began to flit nervously around the station in a too obvious effort to ignore these circumstances.

"I'm looking for work," Anukul explained. "Things are very hard at home."

"Don't I know it." Dilip laughed heartily. "Every month I expect my allowance to be cut . . . so far so good, though." He stared at the toes of his polished English boots in an effort to hide his embarrassment. "Look, Anukul, I've been on that bloody train for four hours. I'm starved. Come and have supper with me. There's an awfully good restaurant I know about."

"I just had supper." This was not altogether a lie, since he had accepted a slice of melon from a fellow station dweller a short time before.

"Force yourself to eat another one." Dilip laughed. "It will give us a chance to talk."

"But I have a seven o'clock class. I'd better get to sleep."

An awkward silence fell between them. Suddenly Dilip blurted, "What the hell are we doing? We know each other better than this. Tonight I'm the Rajah. I command you to eat with me!"

Anukul laughed. "I haven't got a pice."

"I know that." Dilip stooped to take the books from the tin box. "Come along."

Anukul carefully folded up his newspapers and placed them in

his box, and armed with his belongings, the two friends went to dinner.

Dilip regarded the rosy grape he was about to pop into his mouth, meditated on it for a moment, and then tossed it playfully so that it fell into the valley between Shanta's ample and mostly exposed breasts.

"Oh, you!" Shanta scolded teasingly, and plucking the grape, placed it in her mouth.

"I have a friend," Dilip mused, falling back against the cushions and clasping his fingers behind his neck, "a dear, sweet friend . . . and pure. Yes. I'd be willing to bet my last rupee he is still pure . . ."

Shanta's eyes shadowed with suspicion. "A student?"

"Yes, a poor, lonely student . . . far from home."

Beneath wary eyes, the painted smile waited with polite interest.

"He must be saved." Dilip sighed. "I lie awake nights worrying how I can save him."

"He is in danger?"

"The greatest danger. He is about to become a religious fanatic."

"That kind?"

"Not at all." Dilip sat up and hugged his knees to his chest. "That's the whole point . . . he most definitely is not that kind! But the seeds are there . . . no doubt about that. Inherited, most likely. His Ma was always a bit queer." He smiled engagingly at Shanta. "Now I've decided that there's only one way to save him. He must be shaken up a bit. Brought down to earth. Made a man among men." He winked knowingly. "And your house, I think, is the best there is."

Shanta lowered her eyes. "You know my policy regarding students. You are an exception but the rest are rude and troublesome. This is not that kind of house."

"My friend is not rude. I can promise you there will be no trouble."

"They don't know how to keep quiet. Families are forever hearing rumors and going to the authorities. Then the bribes go up. I cannot afford this."

"He has no family in Calcutta and I assure you there will be no trouble. We will simply come here for tea; and it must be a nice

one. I will pay for it. And there must be rashaghollas! Don't forget that, please. He is very fond of them. Well, then, we'll let nature . . . and the little French Jenine . . . have their way. I'll pay the regular rates for you and Jenine, of course."

"Jenine!" Shanta laughed shortly. "How little you know. Several of my other girls would be better."

"I will leave that to your judgment," Dilip demurred gallantly. "If the plan succeeds, I also offer a bonus of five rupees."

A spark of genuine interest lighted the almond eyes. "Ten rupees," she countered. "I will handle the boy myself."

Dilip was startled at the figure. "Six rupees," he bargained. "I cannot pay more."

Shanta eyed him closely, trying to determine how important this prank was to him. "Ten rupees," she said flatly. "I do this unwillingly, as a personal favor to you. I cannot take less."

Dilip considered the matter for some time, as Shanta waited calmly.

"It is understood," he capitulated, "that if the plan is not successful, there will be no bonus."

"That is understood." Shanta smiled with smug complacency.

"Why so quiet?" Dilip laughed, linking his friend's arm with his own.

"I really don't know." Anukul gazed about the untidy neighborhood, wondering to himself why the raucous cries of the inhabitants evoked such a nostalgic tug within him.

"It's not much of a street," Dilip apologized, "but the house is nice and my friend is adorable, and after all"—he nudged Anukul playfully with his elbow—"we're not snobs, are we?"

A foreign woman opened the door for them. She was dressed in a strange garment, reaching from armpits to knees, and her blonde hair fell loosely down her back. Palms together, she bowed politely. "Madame waits for you," she murmured, and led the way through a large room lavishly strewn with silken pillows of every hue of the rainbow, and on to a smaller, though no less colorfully inviting, room beyond.

Two women arose and bowed low to them. The first was an exact replica of the one they had followed, except that her hair was red. The second was a somewhat older Indian woman. "This is Jenine," Dilip said, indicating the first, then, nodding to the second, "Shanta."

The women quickly placed plump, silken pillows for the young men. Dilip seated himself and watched his friend from the corner of his eye. Anukul followed suit and regarded the women with interest. It was puzzling, he thought, how the idea of foreignness could play on one's feeling of acceptance. Jenine's scarlet lips, her rouged and powdered cheeks, seemed natural enough . . . or at least all of a piece with being foreign, while the same coloring on Shanta's pretty oval face produced a disturbing, masklike effect.

Shanta knelt beside him, proffering a brass tray which held an assortment of sweets, the centerpiece being an exciting pyramid of rashaghollas. Anukul smiled with pleasure. It had been a long time since he had enjoyed his favorite treat. But as he reached for the rashaghollas, Shanta's perfume enveloped him, pressing about him like a vise until, with a sensation of alarm, he seemed to be struggling against strangulation. "Ma!" some childhood memory cried within him, and her vision appeared instantly, stern and disapproving. He refused the sweets. Dilip's eyebrows shot up in surprise.

"You are a student, I understand?" Shanta murmured.

"Yes. National Medical School," he answered.

"You must be lonely and confused here in our big city," she sympathized, "but don't worry. You'll get used to us."

Dilip winked, and as if to give instruction, slipped his arm nonchalantly about Jenine's slim waist, drawing her close. Her long red hair spilled over his white jacket.

So that's what it was. Anukul drew a deep breath and pulled himself erect, but he was somewhat at a loss as to what to do next.

Dilip got to his feet, drawing Jenine up with him. "Enjoy yourself." He laughed. "Remember. In Calcutta, I'm the Rajah. See you soon."

Shanta sighed as the door closed behind Dilip and the French girl. "Now we can be comfortable." She laughed softly at the boy's rigid silence. "You're bashful," she teased. "Well, don't be. There's no need." She arose gracefully, and taking a wide mat from a low shelf, deftly unrolled it upon the polished floor. Anukul watched her movements, unable to move or speak, or to believe fully that things were as they seemed. The dark eyes teased him and the little painted face smiled seductively as she tossed several pillows onto the mat, and then like a dancer, arranged herself among them, supporting

herself on one elbow. "Come," she coaxed, "come and rest with me."

Anukul got to his feet with clumsy haste. "I understood that we were invited only for a cup of tea. It has been a pleasure. I have no time. I must leave now, Ma."

The painted mask convulsed and a glare of awesome rage took its place as she leaped menacingly to her feet. "You dare to insult me! To say I am old enough to be your Ma!"

Anukul took a step forward, but in the same instant, she scrambled past him and locked the door. She leaned her back against it, laughing with glee as she untied the key from the corner of her sari and dropped it down into her blouse. "Now!" she cried triumphantly. "What will you do?"

The mask she wore now was one of extreme and fascinating cunning. How many faces this woman had! "Why do you lock me in?" he asked calmly. "I wish you no harm."

She moved away from the door, head held regally high, body swaying. "It will cost you ten rupees for the key."

"I have no money." Anukul spread his hands helplessly. "There has been some dreadful misunderstanding, as you can see. I have no money at all."

For some time they stared at each other in silence. The painted face appeared again . . . soft eyes, sweet curve of lips. "You see how it is," she coaxed. "Your friend wishes you to enjoy yourself . . . for this he will pay. Be nice." She crept close, touched his arm gently. "What harm is there?"

A great sadness filled his heart. He placed his hand gently on her shoulder and pushed her away. "My friend does not understand me. I cannot stay, Ma."

Her face slackened and several masks jostled for position before one of abject supplication settled. "My son is in an orphanage. You understand how it is with such things. There must be money for an education. Otherwise what chance can such a child expect in this life? It is for his sake that I must have the rupees."

"But I have no money," Anukul reminded. "Let me go, Ma. I wish only good for yourself and your son. No loss can result from a kindness . . ."

Shanta sighed with exasperation and her face became shrewd and crafty. Dark eyes flickered over him. "If I tell your friend that

I have succeeded with you, will you contradict me?"

Anukul gazed at her with such compassionate intentness that her eyes fell uncomfortably away from him. "I need this money," she muttered defensively.

"You may say whatever you have to say . . . surely."

"It's a bargain then." Still without looking at him, Shanta unlocked the door and held it wide.

Dilip had apparently been on guard, for he appeared almost immediately after Anukul left. "Well?" he cried excitedly. "Did it work?"

Shanta placed the rolled mat on the shelf and turned on him angrily. "Why do you bring me innocent children still full of their mother's milk? What manner of person do you think I am?"

Dilip's face fell. "He refused you?"

"I refused him!" she spat. "Please pay for the tea and leave. I am sick of your stupid games."

Dilip opened his wallet, and with rather ill grace, counted out the agreed amount and tossed it on the low table. "I knew it should be Jenine," he grumbled. "I thought so from the first."

"Leave my house!" Shanta ordered. "And don't come back here."

"That suits me just fine!" Dilip glowered. "This is not the only house in this city . . . nor the best!"

With his hand on the doorknob, however, he paused for a long time, then turned and smiled at her. "Look, why must there be hard feelings? So the trick failed? It was all in good sport."

Shanta stared at him in cold silence.

Dilip fingered his wallet anxiously. "I'll split the bonus with you," he decided, and drawing out a five-rupee note, held it toward her. "What do you say to that? Are we still friends?"

Shanta made no effort to take the note. He placed it on the table beside the tea money.

"Farewell, then, until next time." He reached the door and had it open when once again he found himself hesitating, seemingly unable to continue to the front door.

"Oh, what the hell . . ." He re-entered the room, and grinning sheepishly at his extravagant and unnecessary impulse, he took out another five-rupee note and placed it with the first. "What the hell . . ."

Long after he had gone, Shanta continued to stare, with a wonder that was close to fear, at the two unexpected banknotes.

8

On the street, Anukul once more found himself experiencing a pang of nostalgia and he paused with a sense of familiar enjoyment to listen to the shouts and cries of the people, the general pervasive noisiness of the slum district. Of course! This was Rama's world—the world that had formed the background for so many of the former robber's colorful stories. Smiling with the excitement of adventure, he began to walk deeper into this area rather than heading back for the railroad station.

He walked slowly, as did the woman ahead of him, but for obviously different reasons. The tired, raggedly clothed woman held a baby in one arm and carried a rope-tied bundle with her other hand. A heavy basket sat on her head. A second child, about eighteen months old, clutched at her sari and stumbled along after her, whimpering pitifully. "Shut up," the woman chanted automatically about every ten steps.

Anukul quickened his stride and caught up with her. Bowing politely, he asked, "Would you permit me to carry the little boy, Ma? He is tired and I am walking the same way you are."

She stopped and looked him over suspiciously, then sighed. "If you like," she answered indifferently, and began walking again.

The child went limp in Anukul's arms and he was startled to find that the small body scorched his chest. "How long has he been in fever?" he asked anxiously.

The woman stopped again. "Does he have a fever?" She frowned worriedly. "I thought he was hungry. There was no food today and we were evicted. We will be at my brother's soon." She sighed wearily and commenced walking at a slightly quicker pace.

"He is quite ill," Anukul informed her, cradling the child lower

in his arms in order to examine him more closely as they moved along.

"He'll die before he's five, that's sure," the woman stated matter-of-factly. "All my children do. Nobody knows the ways of the Supreme Father . . . but perhaps he is merciful."

After several blocks, they turned into a narrow alley that opened onto a small courtyard with a row of one-story mud-brick cottages. The yard teemed with shouting children and the woman pushed her way through them, leading Anukul to the very last cottage.

There were several women of different ages in the single room and they greeted Anukul's companion excitedly, taking a grim sort of pleasure in hearing all the details of the eviction. They filled the air with good-natured curses directed impartially at landlords, the British, and the weather. Only when the woman finally got around to telling them that her son was sick did they take notice of Anukul. They clustered around him to peer curiously at the child.

One young woman ran to the room's only piece of furniture, a narrow mat-covered bench upon which an old man slept. "Wake up, Grandpa." She shook him roughly and without ceremony. "Wake up. Rani's son is sick. We need the bed."

The old man sat up, grumbling, and rubbed his red-rimmed eyes. And the women, all speaking at once, informed him of Rani's eviction and of the sick child. He got off the bench, stood for a few moments blinking at the feverish child, and then shuffled across the room where he sat down with his back to the wall and went back to sleep.

Holding the child with one arm, Anukul turned the filthy mat over. It was not much better on the other side, but there seemed to be no alternative, so he laid the child down gently. "He needs medicine," Anukul informed the mother. "I'll get it as fast as I can, but it's some distance from here."

Rani gasped and turned to the oldest woman. "Is there any money?"

"No! No!" the old woman cried excitedly, pointing to the smoking stove and the large soot-covered rice kettle. "Everything went for supper. Everything."

Anukul made his way across the large city to the dispensary with all possible haste. Dr. Lahiri was very kind about giving him the needed medicine after listening to a description of the symptoms. He also gave him a small cotton blanket, worn but clean, to protect

the patient from the dirty mat. Anukul was deeply grateful.

He placed the medicine and blanket in his tin box, which he had left there after classes in order to have tea with Dilip's friend unencumbered, and taking up the box and his books, returned to the unhappy cottage in the heart of the slum district.

The men of the household, one thin, nervous, and sharp featured, and one squat, heavy muscled, and very dark, had arrived during Anukul's absence. Now that the men were home, the women were more retiring. Also there were only four women now, so the rest must have been neighbors, but their number had been augmented by a variety of children.

The men watched curiously as Anukul cleansed a small bowl with boiled water, and filling it about one-third full, carefully added a few drops from each of three different medicine bottles.

"Do you have a bit of sugar?" Anukul inquired of the child's mother.

She ran from the house, and standing in the center of the courtyard, bawled, "Does anyone have sugar? A tiny piece of sugar for the love of God? My baby is ill! The doctor asks for sugar!"

"Are you a doctor?" the dark man asked Anukul, looking with suspicion at his cheap rope sandals and coarse cotton dhoti.

"No. I am a student at the Medical School."

The man nodded, satisfied, and squatting down beside Anukul's tin box, displayed a bold curiosity by leafing through one book after another.

Rani returned and proudly proffered a lump of sugar. Anukul broke off a piece and dissolved it in the liquid. "He'll need more later," he said quickly, lest someone would think he was through and pop the sugar lump into his own mouth. Rani placed the rest of the sugar in a cup and set it on a shelf.

Anukul held the child in his arms and pressed the edge of the bowl to his mouth; but the little boy whimpered and turned his head aside, rejecting it. He held the small face steady and poured a bit of the liquid over the child's mouth. After a moment, the whimpering stopped and the small tongue appeared, exploring the parched lips. Anukul smiled and tried again. This time the child drank without trouble. Taking the clean blanket from his tin box, he spread it over the dirty mat, and laying the boy on one half, covered him with the other.

"Why do you wrap him up in this heat?" the dark man demanded.

"He needs to perspire. The blanket will help the medicine."

Two little girls entered with armfuls of banana leaves which had apparently been washed at the corner well, since they trailed water across the floor. The women quickly arranged the leaves on the floor . . . a row of four for the men, and with a passing nod to convention, another longer row for the women and children a slight distance away. The old man arose from the wall and shuffled to his place. The rest of the family seated themselves. Without ceremony, Anukul was instructed to sit with the men. The rice was dipped out onto each leaf and thin lentil soup was spooned over it.

When the meal was over, Anukul returned to his patient and examined him carefully. He was in deep sleep and Anukul was satisfied. "He'll need more medicine in about four hours," he instructed. "I'll mix it for you now . . . except for the sugar. Put that in just before he takes it."

"Maybe you can tell me what to do with this." The dark man held up his leg, exposing a red, dry rash on the inside of his thigh. "I keep oil on it but the damn thing won't clear up. It itches like the devil."

Anukul examined the rash closely. "No, oil won't help. It needs salve. I'll bring you some tomorrow after my classes, when I come to see the boy."

"Where do you live?" the man asked.

"At Sealdah station."

The man smiled sympathetically. "This place beats that. Why don't you stay here?"

Surprised, Anukul looked around the small room and at the rather large number of people.

"This is only for the women and children," the coolie laughed, following his gaze. "We men have the whole roof to ourselves!"

This invitation was accepted with the same simple ease with which it was presented, and a new, satisfying, and very busy life evolved for Anukul.

Word that help and medicine for the sick were available without fee spread rapidly throughout the area. Before the week was out, Anukul found himself conducting a mushrooming, and not unprofitable, medical practice. Even though his patients had very little, the handfuls of rice, the cabbages, pumpkins, and fruit which were brought in, piece by piece, became so plentiful that not only did

the household of his benefactor eat well, but there was a daily surplus to distribute in the courtyard.

The choicest of all donations were carefully set aside to trade with Dr. Lahiri for the ingredients Anukul needed to concoct his salves, ointments, and medicines. For these ingredients, he also scoured the city's parks and public gardens. As his practice grew, however, there never seemed to be enough hours in the day; Anukul began to teach the older children how to recognize the needed herbs and plants; and soon they were usefully employed in exploring the public gardens for him (and it was suspected, a number of private gardens as well).

He was appalled by the filthy living conditions in this area of the city. Patiently, he explained the dangers of bacteria to his patients and their families, and stressed the necessity for simple cleanliness. The courtyard in which he lived responded quickly to his presence and lessons and the dilapidated area took on a new appearance and dignity. The children complained, of course, at the increased number of buckets of water that must be carried from the corner well. But at the same time they constantly brought in their friends, proudly displayed their clean courtyard, and let them test the pungent limestone odor of the outdoor privy.

One evening a neighbor woman, who did laundry for English women, entered the cottage and proudly presented Anukul with two linen sheets and several snowy white bath towels, explaining that he must take them on his calls to save the ignorant from bacteria.

He smiled sadly into her flushed, enthusiastic face. "These must be returned," he explained kindly. "Stolen property cannot help anyone."

As her face crumpled with disappointment, he added, "It was a wonderful idea, Ma. And I have a feeling that if you would ask your mistress for old, worn, or torn linen, she would gladly give it to you. That would truly be a great help."

A few nights later she was back again, this time with an armful of worn but clean linen. Doctor Babu had been right, she beamed. The mistress was very nice when she knew it was for sick people. The woman bragged a bit about her accomplishment and soon washerwomen bearing such gifts were not uncommon to the cottage. The men in the neighborhood found the materials somewhere and built Anukul a fine big cabinet for his growing supplies. It

seemed that everyone in the courtyard, old and young, male and female, was busily engaged in finding things to do that would help the young student practice his way through medical college.

As in his childhood, Anukul delighted in exploring different ways to and from school, and the possibilities for this pleasure in the large city of Calcutta were endless. One evening as he was returning from the dispensary, he heard someone call from a second-story window, and looking up, saw a woman. "Please wait, Babu," she called. "I'll be right down." She disappeared before Anukul could have a good view of her, and emerged a few moments later. She was dressed in a simple cotton sari, and except for a modest beauty mark on her forehead, her face was sweet and clean.

"Imagine!" she cried exultantly. "All day long I knew you would pass today. I felt it even this morning, and about an hour ago the feeling was so strong that I just sat in the window . . . and here you are!" She noticed Anukul's bewildered look. "Can't you recognize me? I am Shanta."

Anukul smiled, and placing palms together, bowed in greeting. "How are you, Ma? Do you live here?"

"Yes," she said. "Let's walk along while I tell you. There's so much, I don't know where to begin, and truly I can't stand still."

They walked a short space in silence and then Shanta began her story more calmly.

"For ten years I have had a terrible hunger for my own son; when you spoke like my son . . . well, it unleashed the hunger, do you understand? I was miserable with longing. I thought of nothing else all day, and every night I dreamed. I even thought I would write a letter to the orphanage where I had left my son long ago. I said I was a Brahmin widow of modest means; that I was lonely and would be happy to devote my life to helping them care for the children because my own were dead. The English like that sort of person, you know. It was bound to succeed. Wasn't that a brilliant idea?"

Anukul smiled with tender affection, but he shook his head ever so slightly.

"That's just it!" she cried excitedly. "Exactly. Every time I tried to write that letter I saw your face! Shaking your head just as you did now, and I could not write the lie. When this happened day after day, I grew very angry with you. Finally I sat down and wrote a letter to the orphanage telling about me, that I wished to reform.

I said that since they were Christian ladies, they would surely wish to assist me in this endeavor by allowing me to work for them.

"Well, as soon as I posted it, my anger went away and I saw what a very foolish thing I had done. Because I'd given them my name and address, don't you see, and they would go to the authorities immediately. When the English complain, it is very serious. You know that. So, there it was, I had ended my dream. But do you know, I was not frightened. Truly! I just thought, well, there it is, and I went home and waited for them to come and lock me up. But this did not happen."

She stopped, clasping Anukul's arm to stay him. "The ladies wrote me a letter and asked me to come and see them! I did this. I cannot tell you how it was . . . the moment I stepped in the door, I felt you everywhere. I have never been so happy . . . or so afraid.

"The ladies talked to me of many things . . . of my childhood and how it was I had learned to speak and write English. They wondered if I might be able to teach this to the children. Me! And when it was over, they said there was great need for me at this home. And they welcomed me." She clasped her hands tightly and stared at the sidewalk. "Can you understand this?"

Anukul gazed at her and a great joy filled him. There was no trace here of the misused body . . . the assortment of masks. Here, in this unexpected abode, was woman as she must always be . . . behind the veils, the façades, the barricades . . . the incorruptible woman, the creator. "I understand," he answered softly.

She relaxed, smiled and sighed. "It is too much to hope, I am afraid, that I would know my son . . . or he me. He was only a little baby when I left him and I gave him no name."

"His head may not know," Anukul agreed, "but he will remember your smile, your touch, your presence, and his heart will feel you and be comforted. And you"—Anukul's eyes were luminous with a deep inner glow—"you will know him surely."

Shanta blinked her eyes rapidly and bit her lower lip. "Perhaps that would be even harder." Her voice faltered. "With so many motherless children, it would be difficult not to indulge and favor him above the rest."

Anukul smiled. "This is a foolish fear. When the shades are drawn from the window of love, the light shines fully on all who pass by."

9

On a late June day in 1906, Anukul sat on the school steps and extracted a letter from his anatomy textbook. There was no need to open it. Only two days old, it was already limp from much rereading and the astounding information was always the same. A bride had been found for him! He was to return to Himaitpur in the month of August for the wedding!

He had known, of course, that such a thing would one day happen. He was aware that for several years eligible girls from the proper Brahmin families had been considered seriously enough to reach the stage of an exchange of horoscopes. Yet the event had, somehow, always seemed vague, a matter for the future, and the fact that the right time had finally arrived simply would not penetrate to the point of reality.

The bustling, festive atmosphere of his home, when he returned early in August, was paced with an underlying melancholy. Grandma had died of a stroke shortly after he left for medical school, and though he had grown mentally accustomed to the loss, the emotional impact that her absence from the house occasioned was severe.

On the first evening after his arrival, he performed a loving libation ceremony beneath her cherished Bel tree. He remembered, and carefully observed, all the intricacies of the particular traditional rites in which she had believed and found her comfort. Afterward, far into the evening, he sat with his back to the tree trunk, and comforted by the muted night sounds, remembered her.

The twelve-year-old Khepu was very much excited about the forthcoming wedding and teased Ma constantly. "When you choose my bride she will be beautiful, won't she, Ma? The most beautiful girl in all Bengal?"

Monmohini brushed the hair from his damp forehead and patted his cheek indulgently. "She will be good, Khepu. That is more important."

"But beautiful too," the boy persisted. "Good and beautiful . . . please, Ma . . . promise."

Monmohini smiled. "We'll see . . . we'll try . . ."

"And she must be very rich and have a large dowry!" Khepu stated decisively, stroking Ma's arm. "For when I am a man all your bangles must be solid gold!"

"What a dreamer you are," she scolded gently. "As if such things mattered." But her eyes twinkled and the curve of her lips was meltingly soft.

Anukul watched the affectionate companionship between Ma and his brother with a trace of the old childhood ambivalence, marveling anew at Khepu's bold attitude with her and her easy and loving acceptance of it. He himself, even as a man about to be married, was still painfully shy in her presence and most often awkward as well.

He longed, also, to hear some information about his bride and lingered with Monmohini at every opportunity, hoping that she would ignore the old rule that the groom was the last to know anything. She did not seem inclined to do this, however, and Anukul felt it indelicate to raise the subject himself.

After the ceremony he realized that any prior information would have been meaningless. What could they have told him? That Saroshi Devi was five years his junior? That she had a sweet face? That she was accomplished in cooking, sewing, and singing . . . was reserved and soft spoken? All these qualities became insignificant beside the total awe and yearning tenderness that filled him from the very first glance. He felt both honored and fearful, as if the Supreme Father had entrusted to his personal care and safekeeping a most cherished possession.

On the morning that he must return to Calcutta, leaving his bride to be directed and trained by Monmohini, Saroshi Devi knelt and touched his feet, asking instructions for the time of his absence.

"Be sweet with Ma," he requested. "Her ways are not always clear, but know this surely, Ma seeks only the best from each one of us, and if you obey her patiently, your reward will be great."

With a new sense of responsibility, Anukul drove himself to even

greater lengths. He was meticulously careful in preparing his papers and examinations at school and worked tirelessly, sometimes throughout the night, caring for the sick of the slum community.

His world of coolies, porters, handymen, charwomen, thieves, alcoholics, and prostitutes had missed him sorely during the month's absence; and after his return he was everywhere within the district surrounded by the grateful and devoted inhabitants. They vied to carry his books if he were on his way to or from school, and his tin box, which was now a medical bag, if he were visiting patients. They sought advice on personal problems or simply wished to hear him speak to others, or to be in his presence. "A walk with Doctor Babu," they said, "makes the whole day better."

The entourage often grew into a parade, with people filling up the street for a block and others calling greetings as they waved from windows and roofs, and these parades would have continued across Calcutta to the school if Anukul had not discouraged them. "I am practicing without a license," he reminded them. "It is not prudent to attract so much attention." This they understood.

At the end of each term he returned to Himaitpur, and every time the wonder of Saroshi Devi deepened. She accepted responsibilities from Monmohini without ostentation, and an intimate and loving bond between the two women was steadily growing. This was a great joy for Anukul.

In this way five years went by and Anukul began the examinations that marked the end of this life. He was well prepared for the final tests, since his years of practice had made him very much conscious of the theories involved, and he passed all the written examinations with ease. On an autumn morning of 1911, he entered the physiology classroom where the last oral examination was to be held. The subject was midwifery.

Three professors sat in austere dignity while one of them explained, "We will each ask you one question. Indicate, please, which professor you would like to have the first question from."

Anukul stood quite still. Throughout his college years he had been keenly opposed to the manner in which the curriculum attempted to separate and isolate information; now that he was leaving, it seemed suddenly necessary to call attention to this defect.

"All matters pertaining to midwifery are closely interrelated," he explained softly. "An adequate answer to any must necessarily answer all. If you will give me all three questions now, I will demon-

strate this by answering them with only one reply."

His three examiners looked at each other in shocked surprise. Such effrontery! With one accord they rose and left the room.

With a sinking heart, Anukul knew that he had lost his diploma.

A diploma had never been a matter of consequence to the slum dwellers, however, and his farewell party began early in the morning and went on until the late evening train time. They had built a dais for him in the court and covered it with fine mats, bright shawls, and comfortable pillows; and there he sat in state while the people of the district streamed in to bid Doctor Babu godspeed. Platter after platter of the most delectable foods were presented to him. The pile of gifts was a miniature mountain.

When the gifts, which included such expensive items as jewelry, a leather suitcase, and embroidered saris for his wife and mother, first began to arrive, Anukul was deeply touched. Knowing the desperate need for every available pice among these people, his first impulse was to decline, to insist that the gifts be taken back and the many donations returned.

But at the same moment, he was conscious of a new air of confidence about them: that heads were held high and shoulders straight while their manner exuded the security of well-being. Yesterday and tomorrow's poverty had drifted away like a morning mist. At this time, these were men of substance, and Anukul knew, with his whole being and for all men, what heretofore had been only a subconscious knowledge of self: How enriching it is to give.

10

In 1911, medical needs in India were many and facilities and doctors, especially in the outlying districts, were practically nonexistent; so that when Anukul returned to Himaitpur after six years of study and began to practice medicine without a diploma, there was little comment, nor, for that matter, any enthusiasm.

Whatever disappointment Monmohini Devi must have had concerning Anukul's failure to secure a diploma, she kept to herself. She accepted his decision to practice and from the beginning cooperated, quietly and matter-of-factly, to this end. Grandma's descendants had increased, and the rice field which had been purchased with her dowry, and was a mark of great affluence at that time contributed very little to the needs of her many children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren.

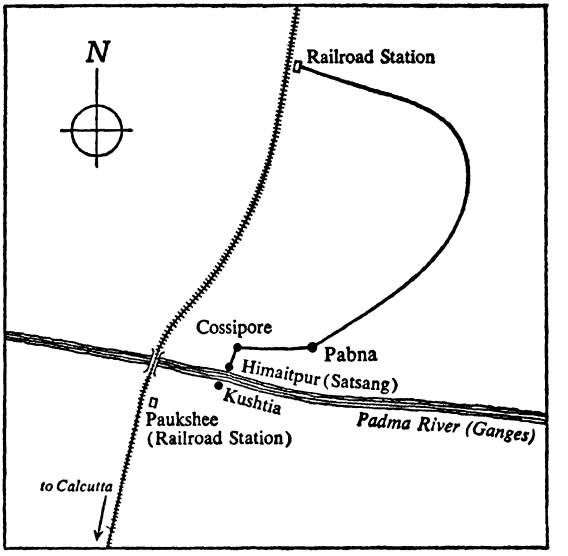
Also, Khepu was finishing high school at Pabna. He was a good, steady student, giving trouble to no one, and it was his own and the family's wish that he continue his education by studying law in Calcutta. For this, funds would be necessary.

As in his student practice, Anukul found it impossible to fix any fees; he healed upon request; and it was not unusual for him to empty his pockets of whatever annas he possessed in order that the patient's family might provide the prescribed diet. Most of his patients, after recovering, brought him food rather than money, and whatever they chose to give was warmly accepted.

In this, too, Monmohini proved compliant, doing the best she could to barter the growing supplies of rice and vegetables for the badly needed rupees; and when this was impossible, distributing the surplus food among the needy with a generous hand.

On November 19 of that year, conch shells were heard in the cottage and beneath the Bel tree, and Monmohini Devi appeared

on the veranda to announce that Saroshi Devi had given birth to a boy. Shiv Chandra's wrinkled face was wreathed in smiles as his hope for a grandson in his old age was granted. The boy was named Amarendra Nath. Joyous in this new gift from the Supreme Father, Anukul worked with renewed dedication.



In the winter of 1912, as Anukul walked along the road from Himaitpur to Cossipore, on his way to attend his patients, he met a Mohammedan of his village, Abu Mia. He was returning from the market, carrying a basket on his head and a string of fish in his hand.

As Abu Mia nodded deferentially, Anukul inquired, "How was the business today, Mia Sahib?"

"Not bad," replied Abu.

Anukul seemed to note some vague changes in the familiar features of Abu. In order to gain some time to find what they were, he picked up a conversation. "Why are you so poorly clad? Today the cold north wind is blowing. You should be more careful."

Abu's reply did not reach Anukul, for he now recognized what these changes were. His experienced eye observed a set of symptoms much like those which required the homeopathic remedy *verectrum album.* Anukul waited a moment to be sure, then he said

impulsively, "Please, don't eat those fish. I'm afraid they will make you sick."

Abu Mia shrugged. "God has created me and one day I must die." He continued walking on, the basket balanced on his head and the fish dangling behind him. Anukul watched him uneasily for several minutes until he disappeared around a bend in the road.

On his way back from Cossipore, Anukul encountered the tall, bearded, imposing doctor, Kishori Mohan Das, from the town of Paukshee.

"Good afternoon, Chakraborty Doctor." A sardonic smile accompanied this stilted formality. "I see your practice is taking you rather far afield."

"Good afternoon, Das Doctor," Anukul replied in kind. "Yes, it seems, unfortunately, that illness knows no boundaries."

"True." Kishori pursed his lips thoughtfully for a moment. "However, we doctors with diplomas have always understood that there are quite definite boundaries about one's practice . . . and also, quite definite fees, namely, four rupees per visit." He glanced significantly at the cabbage leaves protruding from Anukul's little bundle. "You must admit that if people have a choice between paying four rupees or a head of cabbage, problems are bound to arise."

Anukul smiled. "Doctors with diplomas are in no way injured, since the people who give me a cabbage do not have four rupees."

"Perhaps," Kishori conceded. "All the same, it is a matter that bears watching. Another matter which no doubt is helpful to your practice but does nothing for your popularity within the profession are the rumors. Some of your more enthusiastic patients seem to believe that no one who comes to you will die, and you know how people are . . . this nonsense is mushrooming out of all proportion to any doctor's good luck in such matters. Now in all fairness to your colleagues, I believe that you should either squelch such rumors or divulge your amazing healing secrets to them."

"Life and death are secrets which lie in the grace of the Supreme Father."

Kishori threw back his head and laughed loudly. "You are a shrewd one, Anukul Doctor. In spite of gossip to the contrary, you have all your wits about you. Tell me, is there any truth in the story that you declined the post of resident doctor for the big estate in Rajshahi?"

"Yes. That is true."

Kishori gave a low whistle. "At a monthly salary of two hundred and fifty rupees! Why did you do a thing like that? You must know that that position is the plum of the district. Everyone hopes for it. You can't possibly pick up anything better by playing hard to get . . ."

This time Anukul laughed. "I was not made for boundaries, Kishori Doctor. I feel I must be available to anyone who seeks help of any kind. I can live no other way."

Kishori's brow furrowed and his eyes grew speculative. "You are up to something, that's sure . . . but I'm damned if I can figure it out." He placed his palms together and bowed his head. "Farewell. And guard your cabbages. The jungles between the villages are becoming a honeycomb of thieves. Poaching on another doctor's territory is dangerous in more ways than one."

As he neared Himaitpur, Anukul cut down through the jungle and along the river until he reached a small, windowless, makeshift hut. He rapped softly on the door. At first there was no response, but after a second tapping, a thin, tired voice called, "Who is it?"

"It is I, Anukul . . ."

There was another pause, then a stirring inside, and the door opened. Ananta Nath Roy gazed at his friend with sorrowful dark eyes.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you, Ananta. I was returning from Cossipore and thought we might both enjoy the pleasure of a small chat."

Without a word, Ananta emerged from the shack and settled his wasted body cross-legged upon the grass. Anukul sat down facing him and gazed with concern upon the hollow cheeks and protruding ribs of his friend.

"You are fasting again, Ananta?"

"Yes." A long sigh trembled over the body. "I have mastered three days now, without difficulty, but it is not enough. Nothing happens. My sins are too great. I must double the number of fasting days. This time it will be six."

Anukul smiled sadly. "What sins, Ananta? The entire village bears testimony to your gentle and loving life among them."

Ananta's large eyes filled with sudden tears. "A man does not lose his wife and child, his love beyond all love, for no reason. Since the Supreme Father has taken them away from me, my sins in former lives must have been very great indeed."

"There is justice and reason in all that the Father does," Anukul agreed softly, "but such reason is not always immediately recognized. Sometimes it is wise to bide patiently until the Father makes known his plans."

The dark eyes flashed wildly. "Oh, no. Too many lifetimes have I sniveled for understanding. That is not the way! The reason for my suffering is clear. I am a carrier of evil seeds and I alone can burn them up! In this lifetime, do you hear! I will, I must reach enlightenment . . . in this lifetime!"

This surge of emotion seemed to exhaust Ananta and for some time he panted heavily, his eyes boring into Anukul. Anukul waited quietly for a long time until Ananta's visage became calm again and his breathing even.

"The village misses you sorely, my friend. Your house is bleak with emptiness and the children gaze at your locked gate in sorrow. They cannot understand why their friend and storyteller would leave them . . ."

"I have nothing more for them." Ananta's lips grew thin. "When I had a child, how easy it was to love all children . . . but now I find the sight and sound of them painful beyond enduring." He got hastily to his feet. "I should be meditating. I have indulged myself overlong. You understand, Anukul . . ."

Anukul arose and embraced his friend warmly. "Won't you let me help, Ananta?"

"No one can help." Ananta squirmed free of Anukul's arm. "No one . . . another time, perhaps . . . you understand . . ." He backed nervously into the hut and closed the door firmly.

Shortly after Anukul had regained the road, a bearded Mohammedan ran toward him, shouting and waving his hands. It was Abu Mia's uncle. "Come quickly, Anukul Doctor," he cried excitedly, "my nephew is mortally ill!"

"What are his symptoms?" he inquired as they hurried along.

"He returned from the market," the old man recounted, "washed his feet, and had his wife prepare a fish for him. After he ate, he got up and began to smoke his water pipe. Then he felt a gurgling in his stomach. After one bowel movement he felt dizzy and began to sweat . . ."

"Are his hands and feet collapsing?"

"Yes! Yes! It is exactly as you say."

Immediately on arrival at the small cottage he could see Abu

Mia doubled up on a thin mat at the farther corner. All the symptoms he noted earlier were quite apparent in his features now. However, in order to leave no scope for mistakes, he carefully examined his patient and finally administered a dose of *verectrum album.* He gave thorough instruction to Abu's uncle about the proper food, medicine, and treatment. Two days later, Abu Mia was back at work in the fields, proclaiming Anukul Doctor as a miracle man to all who would listen.

A new rumor flew around . . . "Doctor Babu even knows what is wrong with you before you get sick."

Thus the stories spread by word of mouth as Anukul tramped the dusty roads, across rice fields and through the jungle by day or night . . . wheedling, coaxing, and quite often affectionately chiding his patients. "Stupid fool. I told you to keep on taking the medicine!" Or looking into a kitchen, "You crazy woman. Keep the kitchen clean and don't eat with dirty hands!" And most often, "What benefit is there in being cured if you are going to throw away your health at the first opportunity?"

11

ANUKUL Doctor had a very unprofessional habit. It was the usual practice for a doctor to visit his patients only when called for. But when Anukul had the responsibility of a comparatively serious illness, he was not satisfied merely to examine the patient in the usual once-a-day routine. In the beginning he felt that such weakness was unbecoming in a doctor, but finally his reason gave way to his feelings. He would walk along the path in front of his patient's house with the medical bag in his hand, as if going on a call that way, and notice whether anybody could see him from there. After some time he would walk back that way again. If he happened to see anyone in the house or meet any of the patient's relatives on the street, he would, in all politeness, inquire about him and ultimately walk into the house. He was in difficulty if he failed to find any such excuse in three or four attempts. He would then stand at the crossroad, his hand ruffling his curly hair and his legs first taking a step this way and then that way. Ultimately, he would shout out, "Why the hell should I care what anyone thinks. If I'm worried about him, what's the harm?" He would walk straight to the house and knock at the door. Without any comment, he would stride into the sickroom and start the examination. The relatives were often astonished and embarrassed by the doctor's queer behavior. Although they had not formally called him, when he left they hastened to give him his fee or something in lieu of it.

But Anukul always refused, saying, "I just happened to pass this way and came in to be sure that the patient is progressing properly."

The doctor's polite refusal made them feel doubly embarrassed. Before they could recover enough to thank him, the tall and slim man would be walking along the narrow village path, musing over the song he had lately composed.

Such unprofessional behavior was heavily criticized by his colleagues. He was accused of using underhand means to cheat them of their patients. He silently listened to them with a smile and went his way. He then left all pretense of casualness while revisiting his patients and did it as a matter of course. His patients were pleased to accept it as an addition to the list of many other idiosyncracies of this unconventional man.

Harassment by roving bands of desperate and often degenerate characters who lived by robbery, rape, and pillage had long been an acute problem in Himaitpur and the neighboring villages.

Anukul met these men often on his trips to and from his many patients and he never missed the opportunity to try to gain news of the whereabouts of his old friend Rama, who, with his large household, had disappeared from Himaitpur as mysteriously as he had arrived in Anukul's childhood.

This quest was never to be satisfied. If the surly jungle dwellers had any information, they kept it strictly to themselves. However, since Anukul most often carried rice and vegetables, given in lieu of fees, which he always offered quickly and with courtesy to the robbers before they could take them from him, he was never molested as he tramped his way through their strongholds.

One winter night in 1913, he was called to dress the wounds of a householder who had been brutally beaten by robbers. When he stepped back into the street, his mind was sorely troubled about the emotional and mental diseases which were far more insidious and destructive to the purpose and design of the Supreme Father than were the diseases of a physical nature.

Without premeditation or any conscious plan, Anukul passed through the village and entered the jungle. After about a half-hour walk, he spotted flickering tongues of fire through the tree trunks, and made his way to the clearing.

Six men leaped to their feet as he approached, one drawing a wicked-looking knife from a sheath at his waist.

"Good evening." Anukul bowed. "Would you permit me to rest at your fire?" Without waiting for an answer, he sat down and rested his back against a tree.

"Krishna," the knife holder hissed from the corner of his mouth without taking his eyes from Anukul, "see if anyone is trailing him."

"The stars are so bright tonight," Anukul began.

"Shut up!" The dark man drew back his hand and the glittering

knife was poised for ominous flight. Anukul sat quietly as the men, taut, eyes and ears alert, waited.

In time the scout returned. "All clear," he announced. "He's alone."

There was a slight relaxation. "Why do you come here?" the dark man demanded.

"I was walking," Anukul explained. "I love the woods at night. One feels so near the truth in such a place as this."

The knife was replaced in its sheath, and as if this were a signal, the men resumed their seats around the fire.

"When a man owns a house," a voice grumbled, "it is easy to exalt nature."

"Nature's palace has discomforts for the body, that is true," Anukul conceded, "but never for the soul. It is the true home of the Spirit, in which the body, by its very nature, must ever be a handmaiden. There are more delights offered in a moment's residence here than a mere body can assimilate in its lifetime."

Impulsively, Anukul lifted his head and began to sing . . . a paean to the creator of nature. His voice was as clear and vibrant as the stars toward which it flew. Verse after verse he sang, the words and melody flowing freely from the inspiration of the moment.

An old thief began slapping his thighs in a sure and steady ryhthm, slap, slap . . . slap, slap, slap. After a while he began to hum the melody of Anukul's song to his drumming and one by one other voices blended in.

Suddenly Anukul jumped to his feet, and arms outspread, seemed to be shaking from head to foot. There was a startled silence until the men realized that he was not shivering . . . he was dancing. His entire body was alive and aquiver with a dance that rippled from his finger tips, swelled at his shoulder, left the head tossing in its wake; undulated the chest . . . a hip . . . a knee . . . a calf . . . a foot. He was leaves in a breeze . . . grass in a wind.

The old graybeard caught up a wooden bowl and spoon and began to beat a stronger rhythm, and the humming of the men rose to a note of applause and encouragement.

Then Anukul became the wind itself, leaping and swirling around them, pausing to frolic in this corner or that, and after each pause, leaping ever higher than before . . . straight up . . . reaching for the treetops . . . the sky . . . teasing a grudging gravity.

The men rose to their feet in excitement, clapping their hands to

the old man's drumbeat, their voices swelling as they urged him on and on.

For more than an hour they were caught up in this dance, and when it ended, the joyous laughter was long and spontaneous; until at last they drifted back to their places by the fire, their eyes quiet and wondering as long-forgotten moments, faces, or voices glimmered within.

"You are a musician?" Anukul inquired of the old man.

"I played around with the drums in my youth." The old man nodded, a pleased smile wreathing his wrinkled face.

"You have a sure beat. It was a great pleasure to be guided by it."

"I'm rusty," the old man complained. "Been a long time since I thought of such things and many a year longer since I saw the Kirtan danced."

"Was that the Kirtan?" Anukul asked curiously, for although he had heard of the ancient dance of Bengal he had never witnessed it.

"Of course it's the Kirtan." The old man was somewhat impatient. "Don't you even know what you are doing?"

He was quiet for a moment and then began reminiscing. "I was a boy, maybe ten or eleven, when a holy man passed through our village." His brow furrowed and he hunched his shoulders helplessly. "Who was he? Where did he come from? Where was he going? Well, I can't remember any of that, but he danced the Kirtan and that's something I can never forget. It was that dance that made me want to drum. The drums are very important, you know. The dance can't be done properly without them. The cymbals, too, of course, but the drums . . . well, that's the heartbeat. The thing that holds it all together. The cymbals, now, they're right with the dancer . . . maybe a jump ahead of him . . . and they spur him on and up and as far and wide as the drums will allow. But it's the drums that control things. Without them, a man could explode in the Kirtan."

A few nights later Anukul returned to the clearing and ceremoniously presented the old man with a set of drums and cymbals. The graybeard accepted them with formal courtesy, and as he tried them out with professional seriousness, the thin lips beneath his tangled beard worked with emotion and the pale eyes misted.

Thus, a new life began for Anukul. He compounded herbal rem-

edies and healed bodies by day, and danced and sang emotions and minds into a saner, healthier state at night.

It was soon necessary to find a larger clearing, for the number who gathered to dance the Kirtan with him grew rapidly to over a hundred. The dances grew longer, too, as if leaping and swirling together filled the men with new energies, rather than depleting those they had. When, after several months had passed in this fashion, Anukul found that the dances went on without him, he was well pleased; arming himself with new drums and cymbals, he walked in the opposite direction to organize another band.

By the summer of 1915, Anukul's sanity and sanctity were openly discussed in all the surrounding villages.

"Anukul Doctor is a Saint," his patients declared.

"He should be confined," the opposition, including rather a large number of Anukul's relatives, rejoined—adding piously, "for his own safety, of course."

"Leave him alone," said the uncommitted, who held the balance of power. "Heavenly wisdom or heathenish whim, one thing is certain: our villages are safer than they have ever been in our time. Leave him alone!"

Under the impetus of such controversy, it was only a matter of time before the more brave, or curious, of these villagers began trailing Anukul into the jungle at night; where, to their utter surprise, they quickly found themselves singing and dancing with robbers and exuding an amazing flow of fellowship.

One of the earliest and most constant attenders of these nocturnal dances, however, did not join in. Night after night, hour after hour, Kishori Doctor prowled the edges of this seemingly mad circle . . . peering closely at the dancers . . . stroking his beard meditatively, his forehead creased in a puzzled frown. At the end of the performance, he would invariably indulge in a cryptic remark, such as, "Anukul Doctor's kidneys were very full tonight," or "Good people, let us be charitable and take up a collection to build Anukul Doctor a privy. You can see how great his need is." Having relieved himself by such remarks, he would be the first to leave . . . walking alone through the jungle, whipping off the tops of the grass with his walking stick. But the next night he was there again, still peering, frowning, and satiric.

One night Anukul jumped from the circle of dancers and em-

braced the scowling Kishori warmly. "Ah, Kishori . . . Kishori . . ." He laughed joyously.

Kishori struggled free of the embrace and backed away. "Don't do that!" he cried sharply. "You are full of electricity!" He shuddered convulsively. "It is not pleasant." He turned and left the clearing hastily as if fleeing from some danger, and he never appeared at the jungle dances again.

12

On an afternoon in October, 1915, Anukul suddenly straightened up from his work in the dispensary and stood quite still for several moments. Then tossing down his pestle, he ran to the veranda. "Ma!" he called, racing past the kitchen. "Come with me! Quickly!"

"Where? What's the matter?" Monmohini looked out of the kitchen window. She could see Anukul racing across the front yard toward the street.

She ran from the house and stared for a moment at the retreating form of her son before picking up the bottom of her sari and following him across the rice field. He led her down to the river's edge and along it, jumping over obstacles. Making no attempt to explain the flight, he did not pause until he reached the crude makeshift hut of Ananta.

Anukul flung himself at the door of this shack, pounding furiously. "Ananta! Ananta! Open the door! I have come!"

No sound came from the room, and running back a few paces, Anukul lunged at the door with his shoulder just as Monmohini reached the scene.

There was a dry splintering as the door gaped open, to reveal the skeleton form of Ananta standing on an upturned ghee can, one end of his dhoti tied to the crossbeam of the roof, the other fashioned into a noose around his neck.

Anukul climbed up quickly and untied the noose and Ananta collapsed, sobbing against him. He sat down upon the ghee can, holding the wasted body of his friend in his arms as if he were a child, rocking gently back and forth, crooning, until Ananta regained his composure.

"There was no other way," Ananta explained wearily. "I was almost there, spiritually, but my body is done for. It can go no farther."

Without a word, Monmohini stepped up on the ghee can, untied the dhoti from the crossbeam, and covered him with it.

Ananta looked helplessly from one to the other, begging for understanding. "I will have to be reincarnated once more," he sighed, "get myself a new fresh body. Perhaps next time the Supreme Father will give me a guru . . ."

"Ah, Ananta, Ananta." Anukul shook his head, and rising, placed an arm about Ananta's waist to support him. "Come," he instructed gently as he propelled him from the shack. "Come. It is all over."

Back at the house, Anukul turned his friend over to Monmohini to be bathed, fed, and rested; and when this was accomplished, he asked her to instruct Ananta in the methods of worship and meditation which she had taught Anukul so many years before.

Ananta learned the ritual and took the necessary vows, which made his old friend, Anukul Chandra, his Guru. Thus the gentle, devoted, and religiously zealous Ananta became Anukul's first disciple.

The stories of the jungle dancing and the speculation as to Anukul's sanity were raging now, and many of the village people who were dancers begged Anukul to dance in Himaitpur with the whole group. "There is no way to tell people," they pleaded. "They must experience the exultation . . . see for themselves."

Anukul agreed quite willingly, since dancing now had become as natural a form of motion for him as walking. The village dances began and grew, sending stories and rumors even farther afield than had the jungle festivities.

One evening, just as the chanting which preceded the dance began, an aristocrat named Shyam elbowed his way through the crowd to Anukul's side.

"Doctor Babu," he began, bowing slightly, "I have some very important guests at my house . . . from Calcutta . . . most renowned men who have expressed a wish to see you dance. Would you honor us by coming now for dinner and the evening?"

"Of course." Anukul beamed delightedly, and rising to his feet, called to all around him. "Come! Come! Shyam-da has invited us to dinner at his house. He wishes us to dance there!"

"No . . . No . . . No . . ." Shyam protested excitedly, but the cheers and enthusiasm of the dancers drowned him out. "No . . . No . . . No . . ." he continued to cry helplessly as he jogged after

this frightening multitude—surging down the road, dancing and singing their way to his estate.

In high spirits, twirling in and out of the crowd, pausing to embrace now one and now another, Anukul invited everyone they encountered to come to the party at Shyam-da's estate.

At the home of Debendra Sanyal, a respected villager, he came to a stop, his head bent to one side as if hearing a voice. He broke away from the crowd and ran through the gate. "Come!" he sang. "You have worried too long about these debts. They have been with you always. Isn't that so? And they will be here a long time more. Don't let them master you with worry. They are robbers! Live and love! This is your true birthright!"

Debendra jumped to his feet, and stuffing the scattered papers into a drawer, locked it after them as if Anukul himself were a robber.

"How do you know about my debts?" he cried in alarm. "Who has been gossiping about me?"

"No one is talking." Anukul laughed. "Come see for yourself! Come with us and be free!" Without quite realizing that he was doing so, Debendra locked up his house and became one of the growing crowd of guests bound for Shyam's house.

Some distance ahead of them the tall, arrogant figure of Kishori Doctor, with arms folded across his chest, silently watched them approach.

"Kishori-da!" Anukul greeted him warmly. "I have missed you. Don't frown. Life is joy! It is all so simple. Come! Come with us to Shyam's!"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world," Kishori rejoined dryly, and turning, paced alongside the dancing throng until finally they arrived at the estate.

"What can I do?" Shyam stood beside Anukul, wringing his hands in frustration. "How can I feed these people? I am not prepared!"

"Don't worry." Anukul laid a kindly hand on the aristocrat's arm. "You will be the most generous of hosts, and the people will long remember it." And at that moment men, whom Anukul had quietly instructed along the way, began arriving with rice, fruit, and vegetables.

The dancing had been going on for several hours. Anukul's body seemed to have become so light, as if it were suspended in air, the

feet never touching the ground. Afterward, many people testified that a dazzling luster emanated from him. He began to sing in a voice strange and ethereal and his eyes climbed heavenward. Abruptly, Anukul fell to the ground unconscious.

Kishori, who had been watching closely from the sidelines, pushed himself through the crowd, and kneeling, placed his fingers on Anukul's wrist. His eyebrows flew up in alarm. "There's no pulse!" he cried, and then angrily shouted at the dancers who had stopped and were drawing close, "Stand back! Get away from here!" He pressed his fingers more firmly on the wrist, and tested the chest area, in an effort to hear Anukul's heartbeat; then he raised one of Anukul's eyelids. An expression of profound sorrow crossed his face. "It must have been a heart attack," he murmured.

"All is Supreme Soul!" Anukul's lips parted and their movement was barely perceptible, yet the tones were clear and vibrant.

Kishori felt for the wrist pulse again, and probed here and there as his face twisted with bewilderment.

As if answering Kishori's profound confusion, the ringing voice continued: "Though consciousness be completely immersed in another, yet individual consciousness is not lost."

He recited several scattered words in English and then something that had the rhythm of verse, but it was spoken in a language which was not known to any of them. A long silence ensued. Then Anukul's eyelids fluttered open, and with the help of Kishori, he raised himself to a sitting position. He asked for water immediately and many ran to fetch it. He revived rapidly but seemed to have no memory of, or explanation for, the words he had uttered.

The following day, as Anukul sat in his dispensary studying slides through a magnifying glass, Kishori appeared and with a slight nod seated himself before him.

"Are you in need of my services?" asked Anukul, smiling.

"In a way, perhaps. I am always curious about things I do not understand. And I cannot understand how you managed that trance last night. You don't, either. I know that. Well, I've decided to get to the bottom of these things and I hope you might be able to recommend a guru who has specialized knowledge in this field."

"I cannot think of a guru who specializes in relieving curiosity. . . ."

"Well." An embarrassed smile played with the corner of Kishori's mouth. "There's a little more to it than that, I suppose. As a matter

of fact, I've been feeling depressed lately. I have a sensation of something being locked up in me . . . something that needs expression. Do you understand?"

"Of course." Anukul closed his eyes for a moment. "In West Bengal there is a renowned guru . . . he lives in the city of Murshidabad. His most devoted disciples, I understand, are intellectual people."

"That will be fine." Kishori got to his feet quickly, very much relieved to find a painful situation over and anxious not to press his luck in the matter. "Accept my gratitude. Perhaps I shall go to see him."

The dancers soon accustomed themselves to Anukul's trances. After the first experience, he revived from them with renewed energy; the dance went on with hardly a pause, the drums and the cymbals continuing, though softly. The dancers circled around the limp body in hushed expectancy, waiting for the words and phrases, the strange languages, which although not understood, nevertheless impressed them with an electric sense of meaningfulness.

A growing number of devoted followers, from his own and surrounding villages, refused to leave him at any time. They sat waiting outside his dispensary as he worked, made the rounds of his patients with him, and slept in Monmohini's courtyard after the evening's dancing was finished.

Shiv Chandra viewed his son's devotees with a mixture of awe and concern. "How are we to feed them?" he worried. "They are guests in our house . . . they must be fed."

Anukul smiled a little hesitantly at Monmohini and Saroshi and his smile was accepted and returned by both women.

Monmohini organized the ever-changing household and accumulating responsibilities with her usual stoic efficiency . . . evincing neither surprise, nor pleasure, nor displeasure.

Saroshi Devi followed her lead. She willingly prepared the vegetables and rice, cooking and serving from early morning until late at night.

Anukul himself seemed to be on fire with the love that spontaneously expressed itself in his joyous dances and captivating music. This amazing energy was independent of the usual requirements for sleep or rest. From time to time, wherever he might be, sitting or reclining, he would drop into a sound sleep for an hour, often less,

and awaken fully rested, ready to resume the strenuous round of activities.

Several weeks after Kishori's first visit to the dispensary, he returned. "Why did you send me all the way to Murshidabad?" he demanded unceremoniously.

"Your journey was not fruitful?" Anukul inquired.

Kishori eyed him sternly for a long moment, then, with a sigh, seated himself. "I made many inquiries about this Guru. All was satisfactory and I presented myself to him and requested that he be my teacher. Do you know what happened?"

"No."

" 'Why do you come to me?' he asked. 'The man who sent you is your Thakur.' "

"Thakur?" Anukul was puzzled.

"Thakur!" Kishori repeated somewhat impatiently. "Thakur . . . a Guru of exceeding spiritual attainment."

Anukul sat for some time in silence, his brow slightly creased, his eyes steady. Suddenly he laughed. "Thakur also means a cook," he reminded Kishori.

"At any rate"—Kishori sighed again—"while I admit, frankly, that I do not understand these things, my desire to learn is sincere. I wish to become your pupil."

Monmohini initiated Kishori Mohan Das and that evening he joined the singing, dancing throng. "There's something to it," he remarked self-consciously the next morning. "The exercise is good for the system. I feel ten years younger."

Kishori thus became Anukul's second initiate and disciple. The two doctors worked side by side in the small dispensary and consulted together on the symptoms and diagnoses of their patients' ailments, ever aware of the dynamic interaction between mental and physical health and careful to administer to both simultaneously. Kishori became an enthusiastic advocate of the Kirtan and a zealous missionary into the distant villages, cities, and jungles where he organized and led group after group.

Kishori always called Anukul "Thakur," and this title was enthusiastically adopted by the large following.

Anukul watched Monmohini closely for some sign of pleasure

or displeasure toward the new, and somewhat exalted, mode of address. There was no hint of either. She accepted and used the name "Thakur" with an ease that made her seem completely unaware that a change had taken place.

13

As THE year 1915 drew to a close, Anukul's trances were attracting widespread attention. Men of science and newspapermen, ardent seekers as well as the curious, traveled to Himaitpur from cities throughout Bengal. Experiments of all kinds were conducted on him to discover the "trick"; and such crude and primitive methods as probing the flesh with pins and applying burning coals or heated metal were not excluded.

Reluctantly, the investigators were forced to an astounding conclusion. Anukul seemed to have no heartbeat, no pulse, and no nerve reaction to applied stimuli during these trances; yet the voice did issue from this seemingly dead body and the many languages in which he spoke were authentic. "There is no scientific explanation," they generally agreed, "but this is not normal and we believe it is not good."

One lawyer from the district court of Pabna, Ashutosh Adhikari, arrived from curiosity, but he was immediately overwhelmed with a belief that here new spiritual history was in the making. He left his practice and remained in constant attendance on Anukul. Armed with notebook and pencils, he faithfully recorded every word of English or Bengali that was uttered in the trances. A typical entry reads:

"All is Supreme Soul." "Illusion is the expression of Spirit." "I was latent in me." "Expand the charity of home." "The whole creation is you, no doubt, the Spirit. I am the sound of your Spirit." "First shake your heart . . . the world will shake in due time." "Love and Name can conquer I." "Give heart to heart and win hearts." "Love is Heaven and Heaven is love."

Invariably upon reviving, Anukul asked for water and drank it thirstily. But when the words he had spoken were repeated to him,

he seemed to remember nothing . . . nor did he display much curiosity concerning the messages, nor seem to attach much significance to them.

Adhikari treasured his notes, however, and was constantly mourning the fact that he was able to capture only two of the many tongues in which Anukul spoke. As the visitors to Himaitpur increased, this shortcoming was remedied to some degree and other languages were recorded and translated. Adhikari's notebooks became famous, were studied by many scholars of both religious and scientific bent, until at last they were published and widely distributed in a book entitled *Punya Puthi* (Holy Book).

Satish Chandra Goswami was a Kula-guru by reason of being a direct descendant of Adyaita, who in turn was the favorite disciple of the fourteenth-century Bengali prophet, Chaitanya. Consequently, Goswami-ji was Guru to several thousand disciples.

Since the Kirtan had originally been introduced by Chaitanya, its revival was a matter of great interest to Goswami-ji. Together with a small group of his own disciples, he set out for Himaitpur to investigate.

It was nearing midnight when the group arrived in the village. But their inquiries as to where Anukul might be found were quickly satisfied. The gathering was taking place in the courtyard of the householder Promotha.

The dance was in full swing when Goswami-ji reached the courtyard, and he stood silently on the outskirts, along with numerous other investigators, to watch the proceedings.

The Kula-guru was immediately caught up with excitement as the dancers bounced lightly past him. This was truly the Kirtan! The dancers, reacting to the cymbal's ching-ching, leaped straight for the sky, and were drawn back to earth by the drumbeat. This earth contact served to send them into ever higher and higher leaps; and their rapt faces were glowing with ecstasy. It was not necessary to have Anukul pointed out, for this dancer rose and fell with a buoyant grace that left the watchers breathless . . . and there was indeed an aura of light, a vibrating radiance, surrounding him.

An hour after Goswami-ji's arrival, Anukul fell into a trance and there was an immediate surge of investigators about him. Three doctors knelt at his side, moving their stethoscopes from place to place about his body. An old Indian in English attire squatted at Anukul's

head and gingerly selected one hair at a time, jerking it free of the scalp as he intently scrutinized the face for some reaction.

A younger man came running with a pan of red-hot glowing coals, and using tongs, placed one on Anukul's shoulder and two on his chest. The coals sizzled and the acrid odor of burning flesh arose, but the form of Anukul remained inert.

Goswami-ji jumped forward and pushed his way through the circle. He brushed the coals angrily from the inert body. "Are you animals!" he complained, and turning sternly to the dancers, "Why have you allowed this!"

"It doesn't harm him," they cried defensively. "You will see for yourself that nothing can harm him."

"Oh, Goshai, Goshai, you have come." Anukul's trance voice vibrated with welcome.

Goswami-ji straightened up slowly. "Goshai" was a name used only by his closest disciples.

"Deoghar is waiting," the rich voice continued. "We will make haste to Deoghar." The voice broke suddenly into song; the tempo, although foreign, was clearly a marching rhythm, but the words were chanted in a language which no one there understood.

"Deoghar is a city near Calcutta," Promotha puzzled. "Why would he leave us to go there?"

"We will go, too." Voices rose in a chorus. "Wherever Thakur goes, we will go."

Anukul's strange marching song came to a close; after a pause, he said in distinct Bengali, "My Lord, let me go now. I am quite unable to remain any longer." His chest rose and expanded, heaved for a moment or two, and then fell into the normal breathing rhythm. Anukul sat up and opened his eyes.

"Ah, Goshai." He smiled, extending his hand to the amazed Kula-guru. "Would you give me water?"

One of Goswami-ji's disciples quickly brought the water, but as he was about to proffer it, the Kula-guru intercepted him, and kneeling, put the glass to Anukul's lips with his own hand.

"Why are you going to Deoghar?" Promotha worried. "Let them come here if they wish to see you . . ."

"Deoghar?" Anukul was puzzled.

"Read to him, Adhikari," several voices cried excitedly.

Adhikari cleared his throat importantly and read the notes he had just taken. Anukul frowned ever so slightly as he shook his head.

Then jumping lightly to his feet, he began dancing once more.

Goswami-ji watched throughout the night as the ecstasy of the singing, dancing throng became his own. In the morning he retired in seclusion for several days of prayer and meditation. Then he returned to Anukul and requested initiation. This was given by Monmohini and the Kula-guru became Anukul's third disciple.

Upon the advice of Goswami-ji, many of his disciples were quick to follow his example; and so the first mass initiations took place, making Anukul, in a very short space of time, the Thakur or spiritual leader of several hundreds of devotees.

Visitors from nearby towns and villages, who had rushed to see a modern miracle, constantly pleaded with Anukul to return home with them. Their belief that contact with Thakur Anukul Chandra would reduce crime and bring about the sane spirit of well-being and brotherhood which now pervaded Himaitpur was great and Anukul agreed to accept their invitations.

He organized a group of dancers and musicians for a three-week tour which would carry them through many of the towns and villages around Himaitpur.

Among the dancers chosen for this expedition was one Beru Roy. Beru was a member of the local anarchist party which was pledged to overthrow the British Empire. Attracted by the large groups which surrounded Anukul, Beru had joined in the hope of recruiting members for his own party. As in the case of so many who were to follow him, however, it was not long before he was enveloped with Anukul's love of God and he too danced and sang for joy . . . paying less and less attention to his duties in the anarchist party.

When Anukul suggested that he join the tour group, Beru was at first elated. After a few moments, however, his face fell. "I can't do it," he mourned. "If I fail to keep my weekly parole appointment with the police, I will be arrested again."

Anukul laughed. "The Supreme Father will not reward your effort to ignite love with punishment. Come along and see if this isn't so."

Three weeks later, Beru returned in a state of spiritual intoxication, declaring loudly and repeatedly to all who would listen that "any life not absorbed in God is ridiculous!"

In that mood, he stormed the police station and insisted on explaining his new faith . . . enthusiastically exhorting them to leave

their sordid task of hounding men and save themselves by joining the Kirtan groups.

The result of this action was that the authorities closed the dossier on terrorist Beru Roy, with the comment, "No longer dangerous. Gone religiously insane . . ."

This short tour proved so successful that inquiries and requests for further trips began pouring into the village of Himaitpur. Feeling that his followers could manage without him, that indeed it might be beneficial for them to do so, Anukul Thakur with his three prime disciples, Ananta, Kishori, and Goshai, began a lengthy journey. They crossed the great northern branch of the Padma to Kushtia, dispensing medicine by day and religion by night; then moved on to another town. Everywhere they were greeted with spontaneous enthusiasm, and always they left groups of men devoted to love behind them.

Anukul sang of love . . . all kinds of love. His song began with something near at hand . . . a blossom . . . a tree . . . a bit of earth; then growing, swelling, ringing with beauty and truth, it followed the process of evolution, embracing wider and wider circles, until at length beast, bird, blossom, and man were swept together in one great rush of Love for the Infinite.

And in these times, when the men of the world had lined up against each other with the hideous intent and purpose of killing . . . or being killed . . . when the senseless monster of wanton destruction that was World War I reigned supreme, the people were hungry for love.

Although Anukul constantly pleaded with his new devotees to stay where they were . . . to cultivate the seeds they had received in themselves, so that they might blossom and spread to others . . . the numbers about him who could not bear to leave him grew daily until it seemed that he was borne over mountains and through valleys on a sea of humanity.

Onward they moved. Through the districts of Jessore and Mymensingh, to Puri in Orissa . . . to Benares in Uttar Pradesh.

One afternoon in the autumn of 1919, as Anukul and his three disciples sat gazing at what appeared to be endless wave on wave of exalted faces, lifted skyward, singing joyously of love, Kishori remarked, "It seems a miracle, truly . . . and yet, Thakur, I find myself wondering sometimes if it will last when you are gone. The inspira-

tion of your presence is a steady energy flow . . . if only you were able to go and be everywhere at once . . . and at all times."

Anukul gazed at his disciple and colleague for a long time in silence, and those who were near distinctly felt that the two men shared a profound sadness.

That evening Anukul did not dance, but spoke long and softly to the disappointed numbers who gathered around him:

"Love caught in a moment of rapture will fly away. If you would give yourself to Love . . . abide in Love . . . it must be drawn carefully through your every thought . . . shape your every word with its free flow . . . determine every act of your body.

"And this must be so whether you are at work or at ease . . . whether you deal with friend or foe. This is the only way that Love can be of service to you, and through you to all."

For three days he talked earnestly in this manner to all who came to him, and on the fourth day he quietly boarded the train, together with Ananta, Kishori, and Goshai, for the return to Himaitpur.

Physically, the village had not changed during Anukul's absence. From the train he watched, with a great sense of pleasure and comfort, the Padma River flowing serenely through the jungles and rice fields which intertwined throughout the area. But there were changes for Anukul . . . both of joy and of sorrow. Saroshi Devi had borne him a second son, Vivek Ranjan, and he eagerly anticipated the reunion with his family. His beloved Monmohini, however, was a widow now, for Shiv Chandra had died the winter before, and the thought of her suffering filled him with an aching agony.

Although he had not announced his intention to return, word had reached the village and the people turned out en masse to welcome him back.

His devotees had arranged for a mammoth dance that evening. "It will go on for days," they assured each other as they happily collected rice and delicacies for the feast that would accompany the dance.

But in this they were due for disappointment. Anukul did not dance that night . . . nor ever again. The Kirtan which had swept him to heights of fame and fortune in Bengal, and seemed about to expand and spread this fame to all of India as well, was abandoned . . . quietly . . . firmly . . . and with only this explanation:

"Oh, you who would my devotees be,
With hope for power and riches;
Don't make me your lord and master.
Beware!
If the mastery within awakens not
You have neither master nor center.
Deceiving you shall be deceived."

PART TWO

THE BRANCHES

I SAT with Thakur on a knoll overlooking the village. The last peal of the school bell was still ringing in the air when the happy cries and calls of children released from their studies reached us. These voices, muted by distance, evoked a quick nostalgia for my own childhood. Thakur sat quietly, gazing about him with a meditative air and exuding that strange and comforting peace which I loved so much to experience. I began pondering the many stories I had collected about his own childhood.

How was it possible, I puzzled, that this man, even as a small child, could have lived among people and not been recognized as a saint. How stupid people were! Blind and deaf to everything of value. Frittering away whole lifetimes with their petty, personal concerns. No wonder the world was in such a mess! If a child such as he had been, could be scolded and cuffed for the very virtues that set him apart . . . what hope was there? How could Monmohini ever have been displeased with him?

"Your mother was cruel!" I blurted out . . . immediately shocked by the sound of my voice in this stillness, and at the words that had escaped.

Thakur turned his kind, blue eyes on me; they began to widen and glow until I felt myself hopelessly floundering in their depths.

"The stories they tell me . . ." I explained miserably, trying to squirm my way out. "I mean, some people seem to think that she preferred your brother Khepu . . . that she never understood . . . when you were young, that is . . ." I gave up . . . overwhelmed with shame and confusion.

Thakur continued to hold me in his gaze for some time. When he did speak his voice was as calm and soft as always. "People may say what they like . . . or think what they like about my mother. But

know this surely. If my mother had not been what she was . . . I would not be what I am."

I caught up a small stick and began aimlessly scratching at the earth, trying desperately to think of something responsible to say that would erase my fit of childish temper.

"What is that you are scratching with?" Thakur asked.

I looked down in alarm, fearing that I had unwittingly picked up and misused something valuable. But it was only a small dry twig. I held it up so that he might see.

"Where did it come from?" he asked. "From what tree?"

I hunched my shoulders helplessly.

He smiled. "It came from the branch of a fig tree. If you would know the truth of any phenomenon, Hauserman, never overlook the source. Cut off . . . isolated, that twig doesn't seem to have much of a story, does it? But if you can broaden your vision, place it back on the branch as it were, link it up with that marvelous, miraculous, life-sustaining network . . . from earth to root to trunk to branch to twig! Then you will begin to see another story. Isn't that so?"

The idea . . . or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, the motion of the idea . . . had an expanding effect on me as if old knots—which I really had not been aware of—were loosening, allowing the peace which I always experienced in Thakur's presence to reach new levels. I nodded gratefully, unable to find any words to communicate my feelings.

"Behind the gross there is the fine," Thakur continued kindly, "and behind the fine, there is the finer. And so it goes until you reach the source that nourishes all that is with the same generous flow. This source is Love. See as much as you can, always. In this way your vision will grow."

I continued to collect and record the stories that were told of Thakur, even though my notebooks, by their growing number, were beginning to be something of a problem to me, and the object of a great deal of amusement and good-natured teasing from my roommates.

But I had been tuned to a finer key, and as I listened with my new ear, I realized that words, even at their best, would never be more than tiny twigs . . . behind and beyond them stirred the branch, the tree, the roots . . . the miracle.

14

AT FIVE o'clock on the morning after his return to Himaitpur, Thakur emerged from his room to find the courtyard full of devotees . . . seated cross-legged, patiently waiting to greet him. His large eyes studied their expectant faces.

"Why are you all here?" he asked seriously.

A happy expression swept over them. The smiles broadened.

"We are here to attend you!" an ecstatic voice cried. "We have foregone all our worldly ties in order to serve you."

"Am I so weak as to need a host of personal attendants?" He shook his head. "The Supreme Father is not pleased with idleness. If you would serve him, devote your working hours to meaningful activities."

"We want to serve with love and prayer!" a middle-aged man protested. "Do you deny the Prophets of all ages who have said, 'Believe in me and all your needs will be granted'?"

"The most fertile soil for love is labor," Thakur persisted. "Prayer without action is a rootless vanity and will never be effective."

A stocky man whose glossy beard was peppered with gray jumped to his feet.

"I owned a factory," he cried belligerently. "I have worked all my life and I have been thrifty. When I discovered you in Jessore . . . when I experienced divine love dancing the Kirtan . . . I was in a position to sell all I owned and follow you. I am beholden to no one. There is more than enough money to provide the needs of myself and those I am responsible for. I have earned the right to search for God!"

"Money is useful to men," Thakur admonished firmly as his disciples, Ananta, Kishori, and Goshai, walked through the entrance to the veranda and stood beside him. "The price of love is labor."

The stocky man spluttered helplessly for a moment, then laughed. "Be reasonable, Thakur. This is a poor village and we followers far outnumber the other residents. Would you have us take their employment, their only means of livelihood, away from them? Would the Supreme Father look kindly on such labor?"

"We will take employment from no one, for there is, everywhere and always, far more to be done than there are those willing to do it. We will labor for love and the fruits of our efforts will be increasing love and prosperity for all." Thakur called six men from his audience by name. "If you would come with me," he explained, "we will seek labor. Ananta, Kishori, and Goshai will call others. The rest, who want to work, may wait until we return for you. If you do not wish to take this path, do whatever you will."

Leading the six chosen men, Thakur proceeded along the road to town until he reached the cottage of a young widow. On this door he knocked.

"What is it?" The widow's voice was anxious as she recognized Thakur and his followers. "I have nothing to give you. I know that you are holy men, but truly I have nothing."

"We seek only the privilege of working for you."

"But I can't hire you!" She became alarmed. "Don't you understand that I am a widow? I have nothing at all except four small children and an old mother-in-law who must be fed. And how this is to be accomplished, I don't know. I worry night and day that we will starve. I have nothing!"

"We do not seek pay," Thakur assured her, "only the privilege of working."

The widow fell back a step and studied the men carefully. Everyone knew this new religion was a little crazy . . . but Thakur had always been honest and kind . . . and he did cure people for nothing. She opened the door wider. "My vegetables are choked with weeds," she complained. "I spend all the time I can with them but the weeds grow faster than I can get them out. And the back wall is a shambles so that even the little there is gets stolen."

Thakur took the arms of two of his companions and drew them forward. "Kesto and Taluqdar will build you a strong wall and see that your garden thrives."

"I can't pay," she reminded him.

"It is not necessary," he reassured her.

The two men, a former lawyer and a schoolteacher, were as be-

wildered as the widow herself, but followed her meekly into the house. With the remaining four, Thakur started on down the road. They had gone only a short distance, however, when the widow came running after them.

"My roof . . ." she began upon reaching them, then conscious of their surprise, she dropped her eyes and a blush crept over her face. "It leaks," she stammered uncomfortably. "It is miserable in bad weather and we can't use the bedroom at all so that we must spend days and nights together in the kitchen . . . which is small . . . and that leaks too . . ."

Thakur smiled at her confusion and placed a comforting hand upon her shoulder. "It will be mended. Whatever you need, it will be our pleasure to do."

And so it went, this new but welcome madness of Monmohini's eldest son, begging from door to door for labor.

The wealthy were not excluded, nor for that matter were they shy of availing themselves of such a windfall. They had long wanted running water and modern plumbing in their homes, but the village afforded no men who were skilled in such labor, and importing artisans as well as materials was considered too expensive.

A group of followers, guided by Thakur, quickly learned what was necessary for this work and were soon engaged in drilling tube wells and installing septic tanks for those landowners who were willing to supply the materials. For this labor, the owners contributed to Thakur's movement anything they wished to give.

Contributions began to pour in. With all compulsion to pay removed, gratitude rose easily to expression; and most people, taking another look, found that they were not quite so impoverished as they had thought. There was always something, however little, that one could part with.

An accounting system was established and men assigned to it in order that the flood of gifts, together with the daily offerings made to Thakur by his followers, might be used and distributed with the greatest efficiency. Tracts of jungle land, which interspersed the outlying cottages and surrounded the village, were very cheap, and these were bargained for and purchased as soon as sufficient funds were accumulated. Whenever a man had a free hour or day, he became busily and strenuously engaged in clearing this land.

Needless to say, there was a sharp dropping off among Thakur's devotees. Men who had followed him without funds—trusting that

chance, charity, or heavenly benevolence would supply their daily needs—decided, after a few days in Thakur's work brigades, that their old jobs with fixed hours and wages were not so bad after all; while disillusioned men of means set off in search of a guru nearer their heart's desire. In the first days of his return there were over three thousand devotees in the village. The largest part had followed him home; others, having heard of his return, had flocked in from the surrounding towns. But within two months there were slightly less than five hundred left.

This winnowing of the chaff from the wheat, however, had a very healthy and stimulating effect on those who remained. They embraced the new concept of "labor for love" wholeheartedly, and their enthusiasm generated its own energy so that each man accomplished the work of many.

Dreams of electricity, schools, factories, and hospitals, sprouting like spring flowers in this new and energetic climate, linked themselves to the three basic practices which each disciple had accepted on initiation and which were the basis of Thakur's faith.

The principles themselves grew more meaningful with practice and were a constant inspiration in achieving the objectives they were now aimed toward. These principles were:

Jadjon: to exalt others through active service . . . or in Thakur's words,

"To roam midst family, friend, and foe with the mission and tidings of thy Lord. To serve all in his name with every compassion to make them proficient for existence."

Istobritty: a daily love offering . . . or,

"If the offering is achieved through energetic volition and ability, it renders one abler and abler, gradually. And makes one rocky in his stand. It generates an undaunted energy within when others quiver in the blast."

Jawjon: to meditate on the Mantra every day.

"The word that vibrates in all life, within and without, is the hunger to be united from molecule to man. When that word behaves into life, blood, and flesh, the word is incarnate. It is the word with behavior that is the existence of all."

After hovering at their lowest ebb for a few months, the ranks of Thakur's following began, slowly but steadily, to grow again. Many could be found sitting in quiet corners at home or in the fields at dawn, noon, or dusk, engaged in deep meditation.

Those villagers who had remained aloof from the song-and-dance era now found themselves caught up in the dreams of progress. They marveled at the integrity and industry of Thakur's disciples, and at the wonders which these men, who had started with nothing at all, were accomplishing. One by one they too began requesting initiation.

Visitors continued to come, also, and although these were a mere trickle compared to former days, they were thoughtful and serious men and many returned later to stay.

One evening two Moslems from the village appeared at Thakur's cottage. "We have come for initiation," they announced. "We have watched what you are doing and we believe that your prophet is greater than Mohammed."

Thakur shook his head. "Don't come to me if you wish to change your faith. Your Prophet is as dear to me as every other."

"But the teaching of Mohammed has no instructions for building and doing all these things you do. We need a guru who is concerned with here and now . . . not yesterday and tomorrow . . ."

"Although prophets must fashion their words according to the age and conditions of the time in which they appear, yet they all speak the same truth which is eternal for all men of all times. How is it possible to love one above another? Ram, Krishna, Buddha, Mohammed, Christ . . . How can a name change anything? Leave the words aside if they confuse you. Meditate on the Saint himself . . . the spirit . . . the purpose and emotion of his life. Then you will understand."

The young man's lips thinned sarcastically. "You won't take us. That's what you're saying, isn't it?"

"If you seek to change your faith, I can be of no help to you." Thakur smiled suddenly. "Only look," he coaxed. "In a single day you make many appearances. You begin in a wrinkled nightshirt, with sleep-filled eyes. You work in your paddy fields and your body glistens with perspiration and your garments are streaked and spotted with earth. You bathe in the river . . . and you are naked. In the evening there is a feast . . . a wedding perhaps . . . and you array yourself from head to toe in all the finery that your wife has lovingly laid out for you. Now suppose that your child were to say quite seriously, 'I love my father only when he goes to weddings'?" He pondered the two men for several moments. "Don't be distracted by the garment, brothers. Cleave to the beloved prophet of your birth.

For he is your most precious link with the Supreme Father of us all."

The more aggressive of the young men swept Thakur with a hostile glance as he shrugged his shoulders. "They said you wouldn't take us—I was a fool to think you would."

"If a Moslem comes to me with sincere desire to love Mohammed with all his heart . . . to serve him with all his being . . . I would receive him with open and joyous heart."

The Moslems withdrew, sullenly and without ceremony. In less than six weeks they were back again, this time accompanied by three friends. The same young man who had assumed the role of spokesman on the first visit did so again.

"We have studied the teachings of Mohammed every night," he explained after bowing politely, "and we see that you were right and that he is a true Prophet. We wish to love him completely, although there are questions that disturb us. We respectfully request that you become our Guru."

Thakur jumped lightly to his feet and the startled and momentarily embarrassed young man found himself caught up in a tight and laughing embrace. Each of his companions, in turn, experienced this spontaneous, electrifying show of affection before Thakur led them to Monmohini for initiation.

They were the first of many from the Moslem community to make their way to Thakur's door. As the traffic increased and they began taking residence beside the Hindus, the walls of social and economic exclusiveness that had separated the two peoples during all the generations they had shared the same villages began to disappear.

Missionary work for Thakur's "Labor for Love" movement began early. During the days of ecstatic song and dance, when followers sought initiation by the hundreds and thousands, Thakur had selected men of exceptional ability and sensitivity, and trained them to administer the vows and rites of initiation. They were called Ritwiks and they combined the functions of teacher, preacher, apostle, and adviser for those who sought to follow Thakur's conception of life.

One such Ritwik, named Trailakya, who had attached himself to Thakur during the song-and-dance tour, followed him back to Himaitpur and remained to become a most enthusiastic devotee. When it was decided that men were needed to learn how to sink tube wells and install plumbing, Trailakya had volunteered at once,

learned quickly, and developed into one of the most skilled, energetic, and inspired workers.

On an evening as the first year of their return to Himaitpur was drawing to a close, Trailakya appeared among the group that surrounded Thakur, knelt to touch his Guru's feet, and then began hesitantly,

"I feel a restlessness that plagues me night and day. I cannot conquer it by myself. I need your help."

Thakur smiled encouragingly but remained silent, waiting for Trailakya to continue.

"I have traveled since my youth," Trailakya explained. "There was nothing to hold me in one place. Habit is strong. Here I have known more happiness than I ever dreamed possible . . . and yet, when I am working, or even taking meals with my brothers in this wonderful fellowship, I seem to see the faces of people everywhere, in factories, on plantations and farms, and in villages . . . for I have known many. And they seem to cry out with all the misery I have known and witnessed. I want to carry your message of hope to them. At night I dream that I am on a train or a boat and hungry people cluster around me; and I always have food for them . . . no matter how many come. When I awaken, I tell myself this is vanity, for I have no qualities to make me a leader of men. But every night I dream again. I know that my work is needed here, and I am proud to be a part of all that is growing . . . Yet every time the water rises in a new tube well, the desire to go on a journey rises in me. I have prayed and meditated but it is no use. I need your help to bottle up this foolish desire."

Slowly, Thakur shook his head. "My dear Trailakya, can't you see that all your difficulties arise because the desire is bottled up? Harken always to your innermost voice. It is the true guide to individual development. You must go on your journey."

Trailakya's face went blank with surprise for several moments. Then he prostrated himself before Thakur and remained in this position for nearly a half hour. When he arose, his eyes were aglow with gratitude. "When shall I plan to go?" he asked.

"Tonight," Thakur answered softly. "You have waited overlong."

The Ritwik's face grew very serious. "What shall I tell them? I am not an educated man. Perhaps if you . . . or one of the scholars . . . would write a speech for me, I could memorize it."

Thakur smiled. "Such a speech would be a pale shadow of your

desire. Have no fear that you will lack words. Only accept your desire as yourself and let it flow freely. Whatever words are needed will be with you." He arose, and raising his eyes to Heaven, invoked a blessing for Trailakya and his work; and all who were present bowed their heads. "Go in faith and peace. The Supreme Father will be with you," he said when he had finished.

Trailakya lingered. "There is pain in parting. Suddenly I am afraid, for I don't know how it will be not to see your face and hear your voice . . ."

"I will never leave you," Thakur promised. "If you have need of me, only look within. You will find me there as close as your heartbeat."

And thus Trailakya, the first missionary of Thakur's Labor for Love devotees, began a journey that took him through Mymensingh, Dacca, Noakhali, and Chittagong, leaving a trail of men initiated, instructed, and devoted to the new way of life. On into Burma he traveled, and families gathered together in Mandalay, Pagan, Merktila, and Pegu to form communities according to Thakur's teaching. Many more missionaries were to follow this trail blazer, so that as the years passed, the subgroups became stable, linked each to the other by a flow of communication to and from their Guru, Thakur.

At Himaitpur, a community kitchen with space for the stoves, bins, and tables that were necessary to prepare food in such large quantities, had been established shortly after Thakur's return. In this kitchen Monmohini worked from sunrise until late at night, organizing and supervising the work of Saroshi Devi and the village women who came daily to help. Often throughout the day she would retire to the veranda with one initiate or another who had come to her with spiritual or domestic problems. Or she would give them instruction in deeper forms of meditation . . . or perform the initiation rites for new members.

When the kitchen was tidied up after the evening meal, Saroshi and the women returned to their homes and families, but Monmohini, seemingly blessed with the same boundless energy as her son, worked alone far into the night . . . setting things up for the morning meal, making quantities of chutney or sweet jam when the fruit ripened, or spicy tomato and cucumber pickles.

Every night during these hours, Thakur found an opportunity to slip away from his own activities and spend an hour or so with her.

He recounted the progress and experiences of the day, talked over plans which had crystallized and others which were projected. He always welcomed her advice and often sought it.

They had been talking this night of the new school system and the problems of the teachers, who had mostly been university professors and who found the small children overwhelming at times. There had been a lively discussion in the community before the name Tapovan had been chosen for the new school, and this subject was mentioned also.

Monmohini pushed the dough she had been kneading aside, and rinsing off her hands, sat down on a low bench facing her son.

"It is time that we had a name also," she said quietly. "We are more than two thousand people now and we occupy more than half of the village. We are a stable community and we are growing . . . both in numbers and in territory. It is no longer proper that we be referred to simply as your people."

Thakur stared at her in amazement. With all his working, with all the planning and organizing from day to day of that which was needed and useful, the fact that he was building an intentional community had never once occurred to him. That such a community actually existed filled him with wonder.

"Yes," he murmured. "Yes, I suppose we should have a name."

Monmohini folded her hands in her lap. "The name Satsang occurred to me some time ago, and it stays with me. It reminds me of my Guru, Hazur Maharaj."

Thakur continued to gaze at her wonderingly. " 'Sat,' " he mused, "from the Sanskrit root 'sti,' meaning existence. And 'sang,' meaning a fellowship, a brotherhood . . . a company." He arose and walked slowly over to her, dropped to his knees and touched her feet. "It shall be Satsang, Ma. The company of lovers of existence, and we shall be Satsangees."

"It is a good name," Monmohini said, and rising, returned to her task of kneading dough. "You must give a great deal of attention to Taluqdar, Anukul. Men who have learned a great deal have a great deal to unlearn. It is not easy for him."

"Yes," Thakur agreed, "I know."

They fell silent, both thinking of Taluqdar's wife, who made no secret of her displeasure because she had to leave a modern home in Calcutta and a circle of friends who considered her husband a most eminent man. She had followed him unwillingly to this wil-

derness where she must raise the children without even plumbing or running water, and where her scholarly husband set off time and time again to work in rice fields or build septic tanks in company with common laborers.

"She'll be all right." Monmohini suddenly broke the silence. "For despite all her complaining, she loves Taluqdar very sincerely and this will see her through."

A radiant smile illuminated Thakur's face. These close, and wordless, communications which he often experienced with Monmohini never failed to delight him. "Yes," he agreed, "with your love, she'll be all right."

15

As THE organization of life and labor started functioning with increasing smoothness, Thakur turned his attention to the children. One evening he summoned those among his followers who had been trained for teaching.

"We must reorganize our school," he began, "for the formal system of studies as they have evolved and are presented are not always useful and are sometimes dangerous. Everywhere knowledge is fragmented . . . each bit isolated from every other, and all severed as carefully as possible from the only purpose that knowledge can serve. In order that our children might be truly educated, thought and study must be reintegrated with action, and the whole consciously directed to serve the Uphold of Existence."

"Yes, yes," several voices assented. "We must surely add classes in religion to the curriculum."

Thakur shook his head. "You see how strong is the tendency to isolate," he pointed out. "I do not speak of new studies. Religion must be infused into all studies and serve to tie them securely, each to the other."

Taluqdar frowned. "Certainly such an education is ardently desired. But the idea is very general, and frankly, I find it nebulous. There seems to be no point at which to begin . . . no clear-cut method that could embrace so much . . ."

"The beginning as well as the end of education is the Uphold of Existence," Thakur explained patiently. "It is by this Uphold that we are born, and to nourish it we live. This is a two-way flow, for the more we nourish the Uphold, the more we are in turn nourished . . . the greater our service to all, the greater our individual growth. Be ever conscious, therefore, when teaching our children, that they

grasp the purpose of knowledge and quickly translate it into loving acts."

There was a long and thoughtful interlude as the teachers pondered the new idea.

"I can see how the humanities subjects could be related in this way," Taluqdar puzzled, "but my field is mathematics. I simply cannot see how the multiplication table can be translated into an act of love . . ."

Thakur smiled broadly. "Only this afternoon I watched a number of your students busily and happily engaged in building bricks for the new schoolhouse. Is not the proportion of mud and straw which they use a matter of mathematics? Or the size and shape of the brick? Or the number which they make in an hour or a day? And when the schoolhouse is finished . . . will it not benefit all of us, as well as many more to come? Only be sure that the child is ever conscious that knowledge leads to thought, and thought to action, and that the purpose of all is to serve existence."

Taluqdar was not yet satisfied. "Many of our children are receiving the benefit of education for the first time. They are overage for their classes and there is much catching up to do. I hesitate to introduce new aspects which might be confusing."

"Only try." Thakur's voice coaxed. "You will find that it is the isolation of ideas from their purpose which breeds confusion. Integration will surely accelerate the learning process. Be ever mindful that the child understands the links that bind him to parent and teacher. Guide him to keep these links bright with thoughts and acts of love so that the road he must travel is ever clear and straight."

The teachers began through trial and error to reorganize their instruction along the lines Thakur had indicated. In the beginning there were frustrating moments, but as the idea of finding some loving expression in thought and deed for all that was learned took root, the results were quick to blossom. Love offerings of fruit and flowers by the children improved their discipline and concern for parents and teachers, and enthusiasm to learn something new became the rule rather than the exception.

16

IN THE spring of 1920 a cholera epidemic swept the area. Thakur compounded several herbs which he had been using for a number of years into a medicine called *Aza Munjit*. It proved to have phenomenal and immediately discernible curative effects; and all who could be spared became active in gathering, drying, and compounding the herbs for this medicine.

For many weeks Thakur, together with Kishori, worked round the clock. Those disciples who were not ill themselves followed the doctors on their endless rounds from cottage to cottage, nursing and comforting the patients and at the same time making a careful inspection to see that the doctors' instructions concerning treatment and sanitation were carried out.

Gradually, the benefits of Thakur's remedy were extended to Pabna and Cossipore; and soon requests were reaching Satsang from all over Bengal for this new and miraculous cure. By the time the epidemic was over, the community's first pharmaceutical laboratory was an established and going concern.

As Satsang began to recover some of its former vitality, Thakur made one of his rare visits to the Philanthropy Office. "How much money do we have?" he asked.

The accountant, Satya, beamed with pride. "Almost enough to buy the property that Promotha offered us. The way orders are coming in for medicines, we should be able to begin concrete negotiations for the land within the next two months."

Thakur shook his head sympathetically. "The land will have to wait. Find out how much equipment for putting in tube wells and septic tanks can be had for the same money and order it immediately. Continue buying more as soon as you are able. All the houses in Satsang and the rest of Himaitpur must be equipped with

sanitary plumbing as quickly as we can accomplish it."

There was a general rustle of disappointment among the men present.

"But—land values are going up!" Satya pleaded. "Those who own land see how people keep coming here and are quick to take advantage. Prices have already risen, and if we wait, they may double or triple!"

"Have patience," Thakur admonished. "When the time comes, even if the costs are doubled, be sure we will have twice as much money to pay them with." His eyes twinkled a little as he coaxed his glum followers. "If, through lack of loving concern, our wives and daughters must walk two miles for well water, can we afford to scrub our bodies with it? A healthy body is a most precious tool. Through it, the spirit can move freely to accomplish all that is needed. We must live in such conditions as will protect and nourish our health."

"Our good health is already a legend!" Satya cried. "There hasn't been a single cholera death in all Satsang. I was in Pabna last week and everyone was talking about this. You are being declared an Avatar!"

Thakur was firm. "The Supreme Father has been generous. Would you show your gratitude by ignoring his warning?"

Although there was, understandably, some reluctance at shifting plans and dreams so abruptly, there was no hesitation; the work of providing water and plumbing for the community of Satsang proceeded without delay.

Early in this new endeavor, it became apparent that an investment in machine tools to rethread pipes and repair and manufacture small parts would, in the long run, be an economy. These were bought as the work progressed and the Satsang Machine Shop, modern and well equipped, gradually came into being.

To his devotees, Thakur was a parent, a guide, and a counselor for matters domestic and economic, as well as their spiritual Guru, and they brought to his attention all the problems that troubled them. This he encouraged, giving all questions, however trivial they might seem, serious consideration.

By open and free exploration and discussion of possibilities, each devotee was trained to be ever conscious of the integration of every phase of life and to think, speak, and act to the best of his ability for the nourishment of the Uphold of Existence.

This practice was time consuming, however, especially as the growing and varied activities of Satsang made increasing demands on Thakur's attention and required his constant supervision. He pointed out to his followers that the situations confronting humankind were of a general nature and that a solution for one problem was very often an answer to many. Except for pressing needs, people were to save their problems until after the evening meal, at which time they would gather together and discuss fully with their Thakur all matters which troubled them.

The new plan proved very satisfactory. People realized, with surprise, that what they had felt to be their own private burdens were indeed borne by many others, and that the sharing of trouble made it at once easier and also increased the possibilities for adjustment and resolution. The evening hours spent under the stars—with the day's labor behind them and their beloved Thakur in their midst, serenely smoking his water pipe and emanating peace—became a shared treasure that all looked forward to.

On one such evening, an irate widow, clutching the wrist of her only child, propelled the unwilling girl through the people surrounding Thakur. When they had prostrated themselves before him, the widow, bouncing back on her heels, demanded, "Thakur, speak to this ungrateful child! Tell her that to disobey her mother is to spit on the garment of the Supreme Father!"

The girl blushed furiously, and with downcast eyes, drew her sari over her face in shame. Thakur gazed solemnly at the woman but did not speak.

"I have found her a husband!" the widow cried. "A very fortunate and unexpected match, considering our circumstances, for her dowry is very small. But she is ridden with vanity and scorns this good and steady man who is a clerk in Cossipore and who will provide for both of us. Speak to her!"

"Do you scorn him?" Thakur asked gently.

"I am afraid of him," the girl mumbled behind the shielding sari.

"It is the evil of foreign books!" the mother accused. "She attended the missionary school. I was against it at the time, but it was my husband's wish; and since we had not been blessed with a son, I allowed her to go. Now my husband is dead and I am left with the whole burden of our mistake. Her head is full of nonsense. She believes herself above her station!"

"Why are you afraid of him?" Thakur asked the girl.

"What I hold dear displeases him. He will not allow it."

"What do you hold dear?"

The sari fell away from an agitated face as the girl clasped her hands tightly together. "Poetry," she mumbled.

"Is it proper for a woman to write poetry!" the widow shrilled. "To flount the fancy and high-sounding words she has had the misfortune to learn in the face of a husband as if she were his superior? She attends to her duties as if she were half asleep! Only this morning she burned the rice! Is that proper? The husband has every right to insist that she stop this nonsense once and for all!"

"It was wrong to burn the rice," Thakur agreed.

"I am sorry," the girl apologized, drawing the sari once more over her blushing face.

"But," Thakur continued, turning his attention to the mother, "if a family is to be established in that harmony which will nourish the Uphold of Existence, then a maiden's desires concerning a husband must be carefully observed. For the admiration which she feels for her mate, for his accomplishments and his goals, is the source of the love with which she will nourish her family."

A gasp escaped from the audience. Arranged marriages were traditionally the sole concern and the prerogative of the parents. Was it possible that Thakur seriously intended to uproot the old tradition?

"Where can I find such a husband when she has only a pittance for her dowry?" the mother cried distractedly. "I have been a widow for four years! Am I to live out my old age in poverty because of the whim of an ungrateful child?"

"Woman is the creator," Thakur stated firmly. "It is her nature to reach. Since her normal desire is to serve her husband and children, it is well that such service be rendered with a full and open heart, and that they need and value all that she has to offer. For in this service lies her own growth and purpose.

"Man is the gateway through which souls enter this life. If the man has no need of all that the woman is capable of being, even so the children entering this world through him will have no need of her services. In such a family the woman finds her growth stunted, and the resulting pain and frustration will bring discord and crippling for all. A woman has an instinct regarding her need to serve. Listen to these insights, encourage her to talk of them freely; and

when it is time to choose a husband, consider her growth with every care."

"And suppose no such husband ever appears. There are always more women than men. A woman is lucky to find any kind of a husband today!"

Thakur shook his head. "A marriage bond which is not accepted with a willing heart can bless no one."

"And if there is no such husband available," the widow persisted, "what will her life be then?"

"If such a thing happens she must find those who have need of all that she is, and she must serve them with the loving-kindness and unceasing devotion that she would have bestowed upon her own husband. In this way she will nourish her individual characteristics and grow accordingly."

"And what about me?" the old woman cried. "What will happen to me?"

"Have no fear for yourself. Security which must lie in the hand of another is a beggar's mite at best and you will live in constant fear that it will be snatched away. True security, strength, and purpose lie in yourself. If you search for this, your reward will be great."

"And what of the men?" a worried youth called. "If girls are to be allowed to choose their husbands, what if I become thirty-five or forty years old and no one has chosen me?"

Thakur smiled suddenly. "Then I believe you must accept the fact that you are not yet ready to be a husband, and it would be well to examine yourself for a reason."

"And if a woman has found the true husband of her heart . . . the true and pure father for her children . . . and if this husband and father is already married to another . . . what then?"

All heads turned sharply and necks were craned to locate this disturbingly intense cry. It was Pushpa, a large, angular woman, unattractive by the standards of the area, who had worked for the government in Calcutta before joining Satsang. She was sitting at the very edge of the circle, her arms folded across her breast, dark eyes fastened on Thakur with bold challenge.

Thakur contemplated her for some time. "This would be a very serious matter. It would be necessary for the woman to meditate with long and earnest prayer to make sure that vanity in its many devious forms was not at the root of her desire."

"And if all this were done, and still the answer rings clear and untarnished throughout her being . . . what then?"

A startled and not altogether friendly murmuring arose from the gathering. Pushpa's devotion to Thakur, her strict observance of all his teachings, and her willingness to work untiringly at any labor to which she was called had won the respect of the community. Nothing in her behavior had given the slightest hint of this shocking revelation . . . that she had been coveting somebody else's husband. The anxious eyes of many wives sought their mates; and the eyes of the men cast wondering and uneasy glances at the ungainly woman.

Thakur got to his feet, stretching his hands, palms down in a gesture that called for peace. "It will be necessary to meditate. An answer to this problem, in accordance with the Uphold of Existence, must consider all who may be involved." Turning, he left the bewildered group of devotees and headed for the light that shone from Monmohini's kitchen.

An unusually large number of people were waiting when Thakur arrived the following evening. They sat close together, a compact mass. Polygamy was widely propagandized as immoral at that time, and the interest in Thakur's decision concerning it was great.

An exception to this unbroken sea of heads was the woman Pushpa. Either in deference or fear a space had been left all around her, so that she sat, stiff-backed and defiant, a little island unto herself. She arose quickly as Thakur took his seat. The crowd opened up to let her stride through. She prostrated herself before him, then arising, asked in a clear, only slightly trembling voice, "What is your answer?"

Thakur contemplated her for some time before replying, "A woman can become a second wife if—and only if—she first obtains the approval of the man's parents, if alive, and secondly, if she can secure the willing and positive approval of his present wife."

Pushpa fell to her knees and again prostrated herself as a shocked and protesting murmur ruffled the gathering. When she arose with head held high and shoulders straight, the mass parted to let her through. The anxious eyes of women followed her progress and dwelt nervously upon their husbands, for no one could know what man Pushpa had chosen.

The community had not long to speculate. The next afternoon as

Taluqdar was returning to his students after the midday meal, Pushpa stopped him. With radiant face, in proud, loud tones, she publicly declared her undying love for him and her desire and intention of serving his every need with her entire life. After the declaration she proceeded with firm, confident step toward his home.

The bystanders hesitated, torn between following her and assisting the dazed and open-mouthed Taluqdar. Most of them hurried after the woman.

Taluqdar's wife was in the courtyard, scouring the rice kettle with coarse sand, when the bevy of neighbors appeared on her veranda. Pushpa strode forward, knelt and touched the astonished wife's feet, and then declared her love for Taluqdar and begged permission to marry.

For the harassed wife, who for love of Taluqdar had left a life of gracious ease and prestige to come to this colony of hard labor and privation, it was the last straw. She stared incredulously at the glowing face before her. Suddenly, with a wild scream, she caught up the clumsy, hated, homemade broom, and brandishing it wildly, chased Pushpa through the house and through the village streets, her outraged shouts stopping all work projects along the way as the villagers came running.

Pushpa finally reached the cottage of a friend and barricaded herself behind the door. After delivering a few more threats and banging the locked door with the broom, Taluqdar's wife continued toward the river until she found her husband. He was surrounded by his group of students, collecting wild plants for the botany class. Making herself comfortable a short distance away, she sat throughout the afternoon guarding her property. And for several days thereafter, much to the amusement of the townspeople, this grim-faced, broom-armed bodyguard was always to be found a few paces behind the embarrassed schoolteacher.

That week, none of the three principals showed up at the evening meetings; and Thakur discouraged all discussion of their problem, admonishing inquisitive devotees, whether truly concerned or merely curious, to hold their peace on this subject.

Pushpa was the first to break the silence. With drooping shoulders and eyes red from crying, she approached Thakur one evening, touched his feet, and begged him to intercede in her favor.

Thakur shook his head. "The heart of Taluqdar's wife must be won by you alone."

"But this is not possible!" she cried tearfully. "The woman is hysterical. She won't even talk to me!" Her eyes pleaded with the faces of Thakur's devotees. "Everyone can tell you what a hard life Taluqdar has! He is a sincere and spiritual man but his wife has no respect for these things and nags him constantly. When I pass him on the street I could weep for his unhappiness. Every cell in my being aches to comfort and serve him. It has been so from the very first time I saw him. Is it right to allow such a woman the power to keep us apart . . . to rob me of my only happiness?"

"If your devotion, dedication, and service to that wife can win her approval to let you share her husband," Thakur answered, "then the happiness you seek is blessed. But the authority and control remain absolutely in the hand of the first wife."

"Is there no other way?" Pushpa begged bleakly.

Thakur spread his hands. "Only think, Pushpa. Is it possible to gather happiness from another's agony? Meditate on Taluqdar's wife . . . on her fears and hopes and the struggle which engages her. She has need of understanding."

"It is useless. I know that she will never share Taluqdar."

"But if your efforts can be truly free of guile . . . if they be dedicated with full heart to the Supreme Father, then I believe you can win her trust and help her toward peace and tranquillity. Would not such conditions in the home afford Taluqdar the comforts you desire for him? Can one say, 'Only under such and such conditions can I love'? No, Pushpa, if this were the case then surely you would not have loved a married man, for such conditions are not pleasing to you. Love glows and we must serve it according to its needs and not according to our own personal, limited, and confining desires. If you serve with full and unselfish heart, the growth and the happiness which ever attend love will be yours. And know surely that this is the greatest of all rewards."

Pushpa found that without Thakur's support, the conditions as they existed were beyond her ability to accept, and despite the urging of her many friends to stay with them . . . to have faith and labor for love . . . she returned to Calcutta and her former position.

The women of Satsang, seeing that no second wife, however worthy, could be foisted upon them, and further that no shame attached to Taluqdar's wife for her stand, relaxed. Thakur's conditions

for polygamy became an interesting subject to discuss . . . to test oneself or to tease another with. But it seemed to be a theory that was not likely to be practiced actively . . . the human condition being what it is.

Several weeks after Pushpa had left the community the evening gathering was once more surprised as the arrogant, stiff-backed figure of Taluqdar's wife appeared among them. The surprise grew to a sense of shock as this woman, who with a sharp and caustic tongue had kept herself aloof from Thakur for nearly two years, now prostrated herself at his feet.

"I wish to take initiation," she announced.

Thakur's radiant smile ignited a warm, holiday joyousness in all who were gathered there.

"Ma has been waiting for you," he answered simply.

17

KRISHNA PRASANNA BHATTACHARYYA laid aside his magazine, and sighing, checked his wristwatch. It was time to proceed to the Palit Laboratories of Calcutta University where he held the dual responsibilities of professor of physics and assistant to Dr. C. V. Raman (who a few years later received the 1930 Nobel Prize in physics).

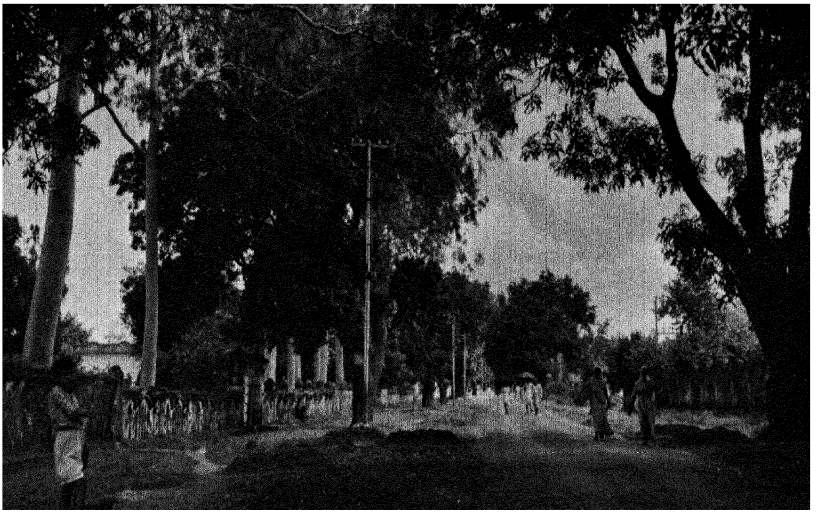
But the lethargy which had been his constant companion of late held him motionless. He was tired . . . weary of chasing shadows . . . tired of things and unbearably tired of people. He slumped back against the cushions and without purpose or expectation his mind began roving over his life.

From childhood on, he had been driven to probe every mystery to the core. Long before manhood, his relentless, dissecting mind had perceived moral dogmas as shopworn imbecility; obedience as a necessary evil; faith as blindness; and reverence as mere manifestation of an inferiority complex. Atheism was the only intelligent answer.

As a young man all his relationships were subjected to the same cruel test. Friends, enemies, and loves were analyzed out of all humanness. Life palled. It seemed as if he were encased in a smooth and glossy veil. The occasional squall of sensuous urge or whirling blast of seething passion only succeeded in throwing him ever deeper into a miry tedium of despondence.

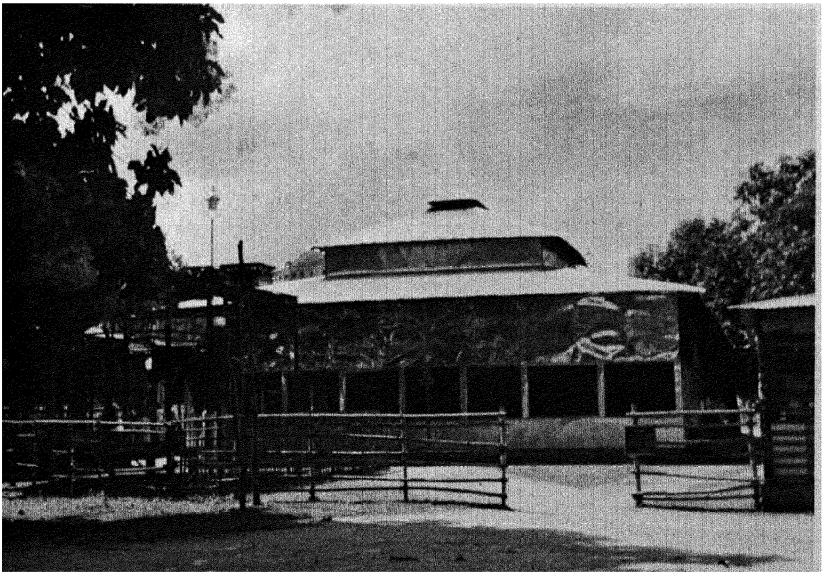
In a desperate effort to escape, he became absorbed in research, determined to fathom the depths of human ignorance. He read incessantly. All life became thinking, abstracting, imagining—a negative criticism, a positive fault-finding.

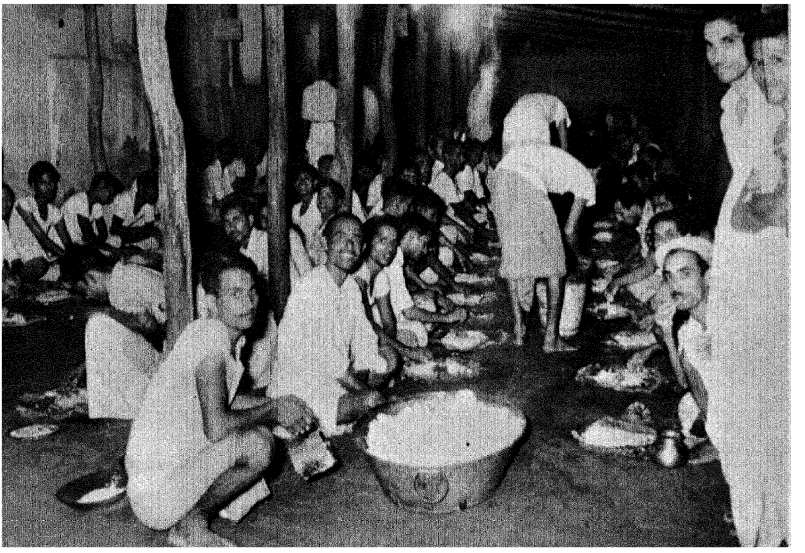
Science came to his aid and for some years electrons, protons, the quanta of Planck, and the relativity theory of Einstein afforded him



Rohini Road, the main thoroughfare linking "the new Satsang" at Boral Bungalow with nearby Deoghar City. Hindu-Moslem riots in 1946 forced Thakur and his thousands of followers into a mass exodus from Himaitpur to Deoghar. The original Satsang became a part of Pakistan after the partition in 1947.

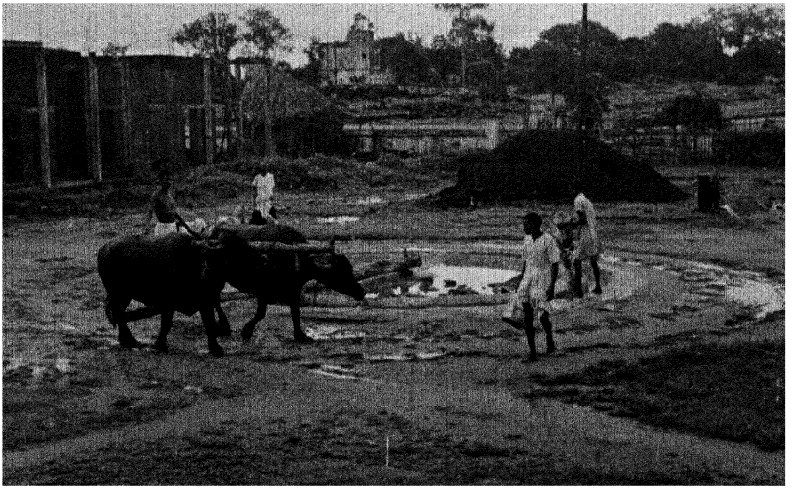
Thakur's living quarters at Boral Bungalow, an aluminum-roofed, canvas-walled frame structure on a cement foundation. Here he eats and sleeps, meets visitors, directs community affairs, and teaches.





Although most permanent residents cook in their own homes, the community kitchen serves hundreds of meals daily to transients, visitors, single men and women. Normal fare for the vegetarian community is an ample serving of rice with lentil soup.

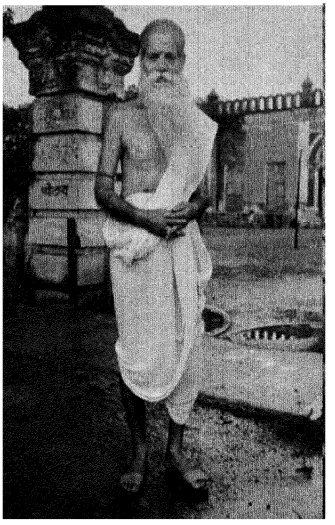
A huge millstone drawn through a circular trough by this team of water buffalo grinds mortar for Satsang's endless building program.



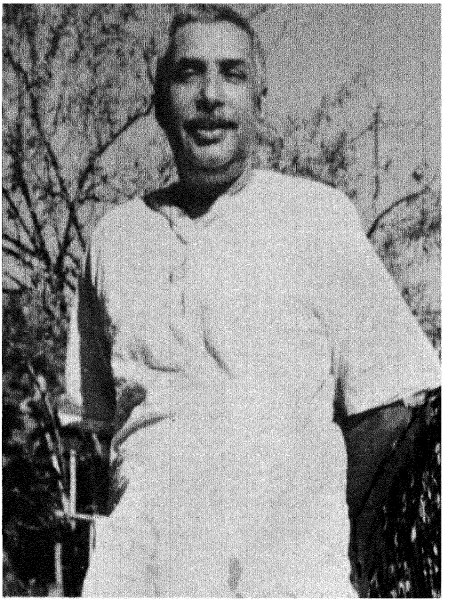
The carpentry shop turns out building material and furniture to meet community needs and for sale in Deoghar market.

Kazal, Thakur's youngest son, after completing medical studies at Calcutta University, will return to work in Satsang.

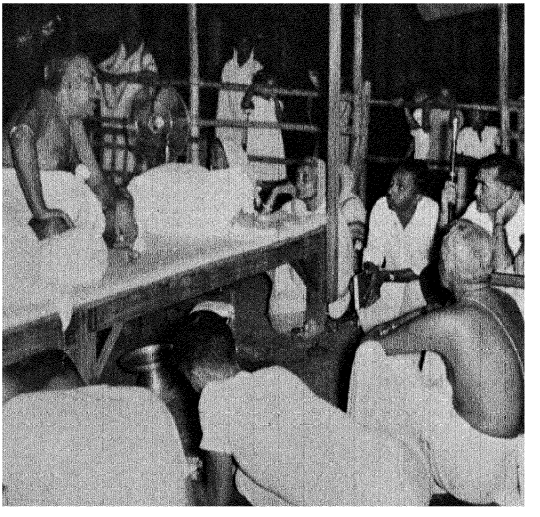
Goswami, Thakur's third disciple and oldest living follower, is 95. Revered and beloved throughout Satsang, he assumes responsibility for much of the practical administration.



The director of Satsang's medical research laboratory, Birendra Nath Bhattacharya, a distinguished scientist. Medicine produced in early Satsang stemmed a cholera epidemic; today Bhattacharya experiments with a cure for cancer.

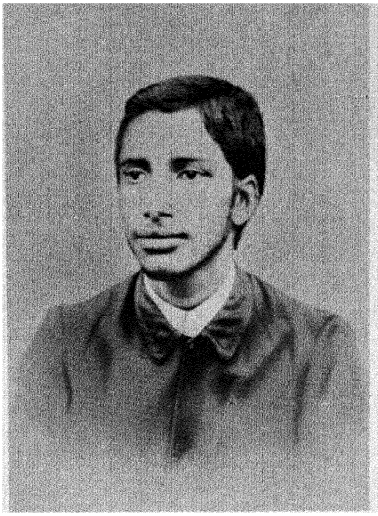


Thakur in 1954.



As Thakur talks with his followers, secretaries (foreground) record the conversation verbatim. At right is Sarat Halder, a former university professor, whose white thread identifies him as a high-caste Hindu; above him is the author, Ray Hauserman.

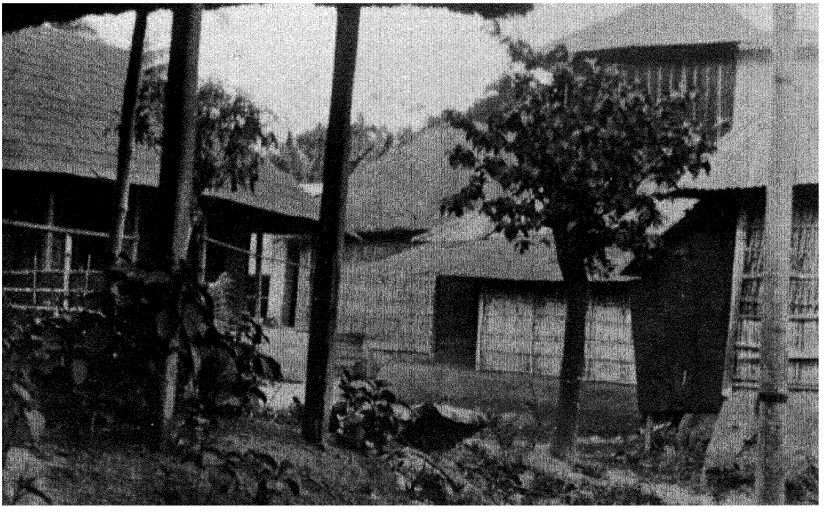
This photograph, and those on the preceding three pages, are by Bimal Sarkar.

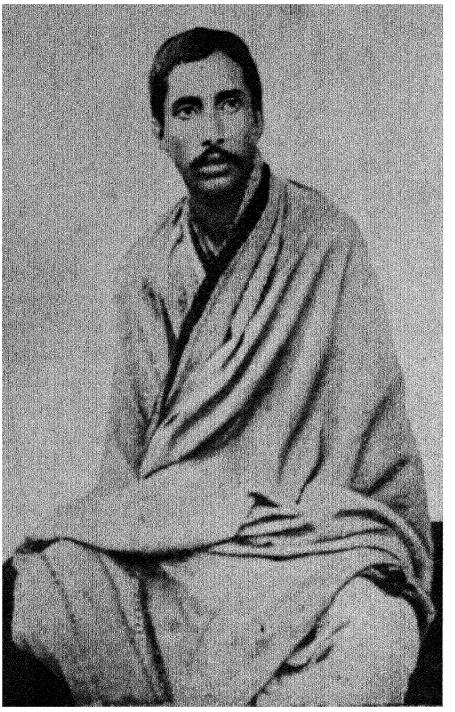


Anukul Chandra at the age of 15. A vigorous, independent youngster, he had already shown signs of an extraordinary spiritual awareness.

The strongest influence throughout Anukul's life was that of his mother, Monmohini Devi. Here she meditates at the shrine of Hazur Maharaj, her *guru* or spiritual guide.

Anukul's birthplace and childhood home in Himaitpur, as it appeared in 1919 when he returned here with his followers to found the first ashram, named Satsang ("company of lovers of existence").

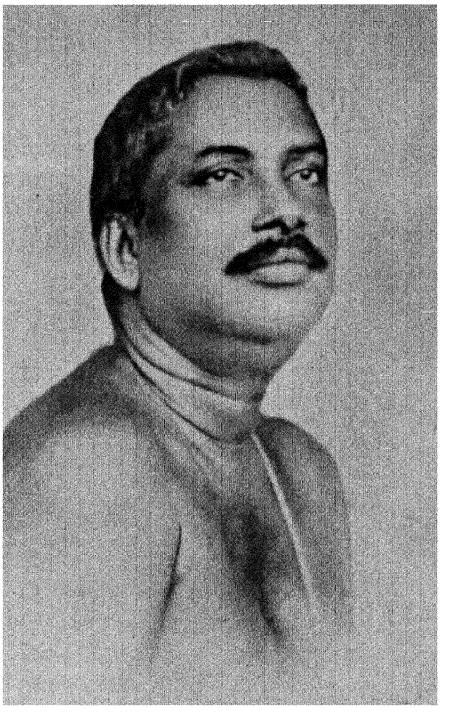




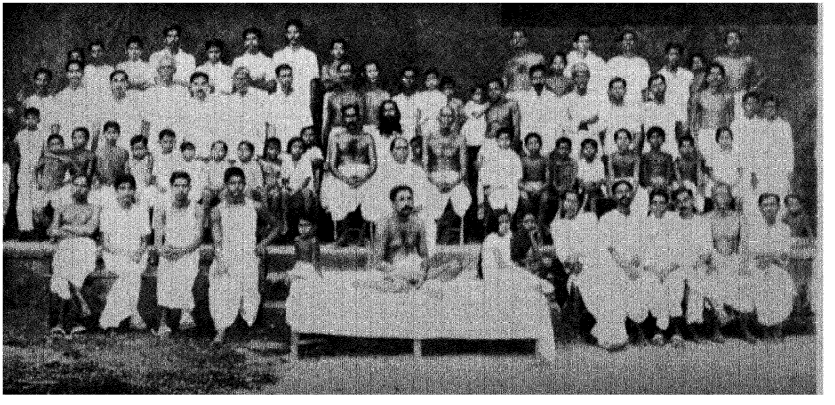
Anukul as a young and impoverished medical student in Calcutta, where he first encountered the desperate human needs of destitute and lawless slum dwellers.

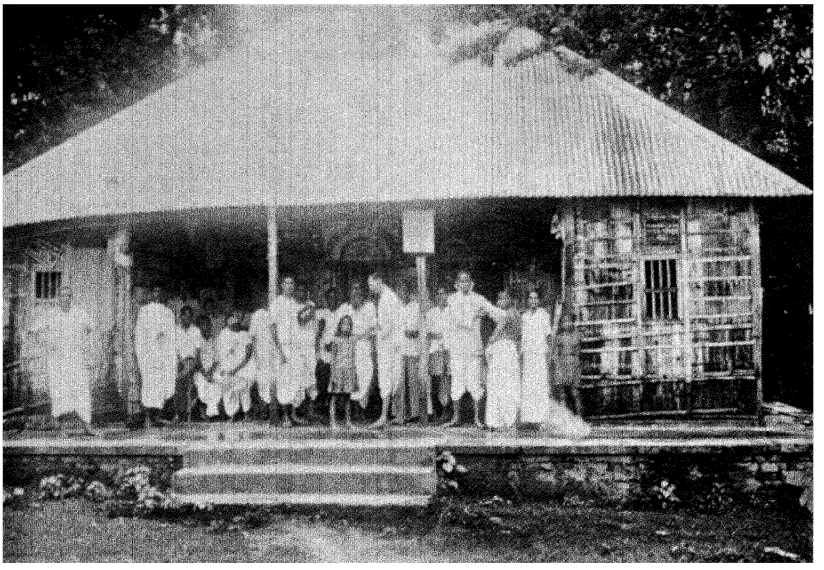
Saroshi Devi was five years younger than Anukul when they married in 1907. In addition to raising her own family, she took responsibility for meeting many of the practical needs of the fast-growing community.

By the time Anukul was 35 he had become Thakur—"spiritual teacher"—to more than 10,000 devoted followers, most of whom lived and worked in the ashram at Satsang.



Thakur has always preferred to lead or teach others from one of a number of square wooden platforms posted strategically throughout the ashram. Among those posing with him for this early group photograph were (left foreground, from left) his brothers Khepu and Badal, his sons Amarendrenath and Vivekranjan. Directly behind Thakur is his mother; behind her (from left), his first two disciples, Ananta and the bearded Kishori.





In 1923, the medical dispensary at Satsang served Thakur's followers and many others in the surrounding area. Additional projects were being built or planned: a school, an electrical supply station, a mechanical workshop, a research laboratory (the World Science Center), and others.

A retaining wall was built to shield Satsang from the floodwaters of the Padma (Ganges) River during the monsoon season. Thakur slept in the small enclosure (center) at night, spoke with his followers or rested in the frame structure (right) by day.

glimpses of the ultimates of existence in a noncausal nothingness of whizzing ultra-atoms. Sankara, Hegel, and Kant were his constant companions.

Yet he was living and life was real. In time, the separation between him and the world he had pronounced insignificant . . . the loneliness and isolation of his middle years . . . became as intolerable as the iconoclastic boredom of his youth had been. He made efforts to come back, to be one among those around him. He emerged from his retreats in the laboratory and library, gave and attended parties, and became a sympathetic listener to all who showed any inclination to share their hopes and cares with him. But the gulf remained. His reactions—whether of joy, sorrow, or anxiety—were surface postures and fleeting. He felt nothing and in the emptiness his soul wept in agony. He turned back to religion, but the old stories caught on the barbs of his mind and were reduced to tatters.

A servant entered the room, hesitated uncertainly before the brooding man, and then bowed.

"Bhattacharyya Babu, the laboratory is on the phone. They wish to know what delays you . . ."

Bhattacharyya came to with a start. "So late?" he murmured incredulously as he checked his watch. "Tell them I leave at once."

The servant retired and Bhattacharyya rose quickly to his feet, buttoning up his English vest and jacket. His eyes played over the magazine he had laid aside earlier, and picking it up, he riffled the pages until he found the article which had started him off on this self-analysis. Yes, there it was . . . a column attributed to a young yogi in Himaitpur.

The corners of his smile twisted wryly. Bhattacharyya had known the best of them . . . had traveled great distances to spend time with Rabindranath, Gandhi, Dayanand, Aurobindo, and many others. There had been many hopeful moments, but in the end, the peace and tranquillity that surrounded these great saints only served to increase his consciousness of separateness.

His eyes roamed down the column of short paragraphs until he found the one that had given him pause. "Dharma invites science in its wake, for to discover the soul one must first perceive those things which cover it. One begins with the gross—all that occupies space and is called matter, and which is in constant process of combining and separating from other matter. From the gross one proceeds to

the fine. Behind the fine lies the finer and beyond the finer is the finest. Thus, science is ever the handmaiden to Dharma."

On an impulse, Bhattacharyya opened a penknife and carefully cut the paragraph from the magazine.

For several weeks this bit of paper remained in his vest pocket. From time to time he would draw it out and present it to one or another of his colleagues, scrutinizing the other's face intently as he read. But when the puzzled face lifted with the words "Where did you get this?" or "Well . . . I wouldn't say that . . ." or "Who said this?" he quickly retrieved the paragraph and made his excuses. Strangely, he did not want these words subjected to discussion or debate. Finally, he made arrangements to be away from work for a week and wrote a short, rather stilted note to the young Sree Sree Thakur, stating that he had read the column, found the postulations interesting, and announcing the day he would arrive for a visit.

As Bhattacharyya stepped ashore at Himaitpur an intense sense of familiarity with these surroundings engulfed him. Oblivious of the hubbub of greetings and farewells that swirled around him as the ferry prepared for its return trip, he stood transfixed, staring at the vast glassy sheet of water that was the Padma River, and trying to recall where he had experienced just such a scene in the past.

There was a sudden clack of wooden-soled slippers on the dock boards and an arm fell gently over his shoulder. He could not afterward remember whether there had been any introductions. The electric presence of this man, together with the welling sensation within him of being reunited with a dear friend after a long separation, instantaneously established his friend as the Saint, Sree Sree Thakur.

He found himself partaking of a midday meal and then following after Thakur and the group surrounding him on a tour of the ashram through what seemed like a never-ending sea of smiling faces. Was it possible for so many people of all ages and conditions of life to be so happy at one time? He inquired of a doctor walking beside him whether this was a special day and was told that it was not. They looked over the foundations of the schoolhouse and watched the children and their teachers at their brickmaking labors. They paused to see the sinking of a tube well and then made extended tours of the chemical works and the machine shop. Everywhere Thakur encouraged, praised, and corrected; often he gave a

hand to the effort . . . sometimes to demonstrate a point he was attempting to make, but more often, it seemed to Bhattacharyya, simply for the joy of being part of the work.

Bhattacharyya's sense of unreality and puzzlement deepened as the afternoon lengthened. Never had he seen a man accorded such absolute adulation, on the one hand, and treated with such easy familiarity on the other. Even the little children would approach Thakur solemnly, kneel and touch his feet; then jumping up with all the high spirits, giggles, and coaxing of the very young, they would clasp his hand and tug him off to see their latest achievement.

It was late afternoon when Bhattacharyya finally found himself alone with this amazing young man. They were returning through a wooded area after watching the rather exciting business of felling a tree.

"You must be tired," Thakur said kindly.

Bhattacharyya suddenly realized that they had been on the go without pause since noon and that he was very tired indeed.

"The guesthouse is not far." Thakur smiled. "I will walk you there and you can rest before dinner."

Bhattacharyya found himself resisting this idea, with an almost childish reluctance at leaving this man. Looking around, he saw a low bamboo platform built around the trunk of a tree. "If you have the time, perhaps we could rest here for a bit first . . ."

Thakur seemed genuinely delighted with this suggestion and for a while the two men sat in silence, immersed in the rustling of leaves and the chirruping of birds.

"Brother, don't you ever like to bow down your head?" Thakur asked softly.

The spell was broken. Bhattacharyya's mind was instantly keen and alert, ready for the debate he knew so well.

"Why should I bow before another man?"

Thakur did not rise to the argument; instead, rather surprisingly he stretched out on the platform and rested his head in Bhattacharyya's lap. "I have a pain," he said. "A blank here in the region of my heart."

"Why?"

"From the aftereffects of the cinchona injection I had to take during a fever."

So here it was. Bhattacharyya laughed softly to hide his disappointment. "This afternoon I have been told that you are the Lord

. . . the redeemer of the world . . . the world teacher. How can there be need of injections? Can't you cure yourself?"

Again Thakur seemed disinclined to pursue this subject. After a space of silence he pointed. "That tree in front of you. Just see . . . it has a scar on it but it grows, and grows upward, with the scar on its bosom."

Bhattacharyya stared at the tree and miraculously the spell returned. It seemed, strangely, that he had been answered and that the answer resolved all the turmoil within him so that he was filled with contentment.

That night, however, when he tried to analyze Thakur's answer, his doubts returned and he twisted and turned upon his bed, unable to sleep. Was it possible that he had been hypnotized? He got up and sat at the window, smoking his English cigarettes far into the night. Thakur had, he concluded, an extraordinarily magnetic personality . . . and he, Bhattacharyya, had been extremely tired and therefore overwhelmed with first impressions. Well, tomorrow was another day and this time he would be ready.

As they met again on the following morning, Bhattacharyya remarked pointedly, "It is something of a shock to find so much worldly activity in an ashram . . . one always expects a more dharmic atmosphere . . ."

Thakur smiled. "Dharma, as I understand, is the science that elevates our being and becoming. Without activity a man cannot have dharma."

Bhattacharyya smiled also, albeit a bit wryly. "Dharma and science are mutually contradictory. The essence of every religion is a declaration of war against the material world."

Thakur was unperturbed. "The essence of every religion, as I understand it, is that man shall not live by bread *alone* . . . not that he must deny bread. No . . . the material world is an integral part of the experience we are engaged in. To expand consciousness, a man need break only those chains that bind him to one part of the whole."

Fortunately, because Bhattacharyya could think of no rebuttal offhand, their conversation was interrupted, and the busy life of the day commenced.

Before midday Thakur's aura of intimacy, his easy sympathy, and his glowing smile . . . the unique harmony and freedom in everything he did, together with the indisputable happiness that his

devotees found in their labors, had once more overcome Bhattacharyya's misgivings.

And so it went; each night the doubts returned to nag at him and each morning they were swept away. He had meant to spend only a few days here, but he quickly made arrangements with the laboratory at Calcutta to delegate his duties for an additional two weeks. At the end of this time he was sleeping deeply and peacefully every night, engaging in the ashram activities by day, and experiencing all those human emotions that he had so long felt were no part of his life. He received initiation from Monmohini, and returned to Calcutta as a man reborn.

His enthusiasm was contagious. He repeated for his students and colleagues the many conversations he had had with Thakur on atoms and electrons, radium and X-rays . . . of the living and nonliving . . . of heaven and earth and the integration of all things.

Many physicists and students found their way to Satsang that year. Most of them came because they could not believe that Thakur, not being formally educated in the sciences, could have the knowledge which Bhattacharyya attributed to him. They returned amazed that Bhattacharyya had not overstated the case, and many of them became active devotees.

At the end of the school year, Bhattacharyya decided to change all his previous plans and to join Thakur at Satsang as a permanent member.

His colleagues were dismayed . . . "You'll have no equipment! A scientist without a laboratory is useless! What can you do?"

He did not himself know exactly what he would do, but he did know that he wished to share his life with the amazing people of Satsang and to learn from the one whom they felt to be the greatest of all teachers . . . beyond this, the will of the Supreme Father would decide.

On arrival at Satsang he found two young university students working with Thakur: Gopal Mukherji, a short, light-skinned youth, a graduate student in physical chemistry, and Bankim Roy, a physicist with a strongly built body and sparkling eyes.

A week after Bhattacharyya had returned to Satsang, another disciple of Thakur, Baidyanath, an industrialist from Calcutta, came to consult the Saint concerning a complex of personal problems.

That evening as everyone gathered around Thakur, he spoke to

Bhattacharyya. "Baidyanath can help us to build and equip your laboratory."

Baidyanath was clearly startled. "I will do what I can, surely." He bowed with some confusion to the beaming scientist. "But this is not the most opportune time, for I am in the process of expanding . . . And you know that expansion calls for all the capital being invested at once with only the hope that it will bear fruit later." He sighed heavily. "But what can one do? The competition of our day demands expansion in order to stay in existence at all . . ."

Thakur laughed delightedly. "Baidyanath . . . Baidyanath," he chided. "When will you overcome your fear of competition? Only last year you told me that if you met the demands of your workers, competition would put you out of business . . . but you did meet the demands and already you are expanding . . . isn't that so?"

"I will do what I can, of course," Baidyanath mumbled. "I only wanted to explain that I shall not be able to do as much at this time as I would wish to do."

"Only do what you can with full heart," Thakur agreed. "Bhattacharyya, you and Mukherji and Roy draw up a list of what is necessary so that Baidyanath can take it back with him tomorrow."

The three men left in eager and animated discussion and returned within the hour to present the list. Baidyanath's face fell as his eyes ran over the catalogue of technical and expensive-sounding equipment.

"There is time," Thakur said kindly. "We must build the laboratory first . . . and perhaps some of your Calcutta friends might be inclined to help with this need."

The site for the laboratory was picked out and Thakur entered into all details of planning and building with such energy and boyish enthusiasm that everyone in the community desired to take part. Devotees who worked in Himaitpur or Pabna by day even insisted on erecting flares so that they might make bricks and otherwise contribute to the effort by night. The air vibrated with talk of electricity and solar heat . . . of new equipment and machinery that were soon to make higher level scientific research possible.

Baidyanath tried his best to materialize his Guru's desire. He spread the idea among his friends. The plans were received with more enthusiasm and active support than he expected. Equipment began to arrive, and by the time the laboratory building was finished, almost all the items on Bhattacharyya's list had been secured.

The laboratory was named Viswa Bignan Kendra (World Science Center).

On the day the laboratory was formally opened, Baidyanath took a few days off from his pressing affairs in Calcutta to return to Satsang, and to share in the projected plans for using this new and marvelous addition to the community.

18

THE knocker sounded a second time, and frowning slightly, the Reverend Fred Hawkyard, director of the British Christian Mission at Pabna, paused in his work and waited, pen in hand, for his wife's footsteps to cross the lower hall. But there were no footsteps and after a few moments the knocker sounded again. He arose, and going into the hall, leaned over the banister and called "Emily! Emily!" There was no answer and he hurried down the stairway, reaching the door just as the knocker sounded a fourth time.

He opened the door to two barefoot Indian boys, clad in khaki shorts. "Yes?" he inquired somewhat sternly.

The boys quickly placed their palms together and bowed very low before him.

"Please, sir," the taller of the two began, "would you be so kind as to tell us the story of Jesus Christ?"

Hawkyard, having suspected that they were beggars, was very much taken aback. "Why, that's a very commendable request," he said heartily, "but the story of Jesus is quite a long one and cannot be told all in one day . . . and today I am very busy. Suppose you come to church here at ten o'clock Sunday morning . . . that's the meetinghouse right next door . . . the teachers will be very happy to enroll you in our Sunday School and teach you all about Jesus . . ."

The children's faces fell. "Couldn't you tell us a tiny, short story today?" they pleaded anxiously. "You see, we go to Tapovan School . . . and we wish to put on a Christmas play . . . and all the students chose us to come and hear the story, so it would be done right . . . and the teachers let us out of school to come here . . . and Satsang is a long distance to walk from . . ."

Hawkyard was surprised. "You don't live here in Pabna?"

"Oh, no, sir. We live in Satsang."

The man's brow puckered. "I thought I knew all the hamlets in this area . . . but I must confess that I cannot place Satsang . . ."

"Satsang is in Himaitpur," the taller boy explained. "It's an ashram."

"Himaitpur!" Hawkyard exclaimed, swinging the door wide. "Why, that's four or five miles . . . and you walked all the way? Do come in. Come here, right into the parlor, sit down and rest. You must be tired. Mrs. Hawkyard seems to have stepped out but I'm sure I can find some milk and biscuits. You walked all that way to see me?"

After serving the boys, he settled down in an armchair and eyed them closely. He had placed Satsang now . . . a fanatic group of people who concocted medicines that were supposed to have magic healing properties.

"Tell me"—his voice was curious—"what made your school decide to produce a Christmas play?"

"We want to do it for our Thakur," the short boy responded eagerly.

"Thakur is our Guru," the taller one explained. "And he loves Jesus Christ very dearly . . ."

"But if he loves Jesus he must know Jesus . . . won't he help you with the play?"

"Oh, no!" the boys cried in unison. "We want to make a surprise for him on the birthday of Jesus . . ."

"How nice." Hawkyard smiled approvingly. "Very nice indeed. Very thoughtful . . ." His face became perplexed and he spread his hands helplessly. "I do wish I could help you. Really I do. But a thing like this needs a great deal of planning . . . I simply wouldn't know where to begin." His face brightened. "You boys speak English fairly well. Can you translate English into Bengali?"

"A little . . ."

"Well, I do have an English nativity play for school children. Only last year we talked about doing a Bengali version, but somehow we never got around to it. Now I see it would be very useful. However, if the English text would be of any use to you, you would be very welcome to it."

"Oh, that would be splendid!" The boys jumped to their feet. "Our teachers translate English very good! They will help us."

With many low bows and happy smiles the boys received their treasure and departed for the long walk back to Himaitpur.

A week after this event, the clergyman entered the parlor to find his wife busily dusting and polishing the ornaments on the mantel.

"Why don't you let the girl do that?" he asked, slipping his arm affectionately about her waist.

"The natives are not very good at housekeeping," the good woman said with a sigh. "They mean well, but they simply won't take the trouble that nice things require . . ."

"How about chucking it and having a holiday with me?"

"You can't be serious, Fred!"

"But I am! We'll take the river boat to Himaitpur. I understand it's a beautiful little trip . . . and there's a school there that I simply must see."

"Sometimes you are as impulsive as a schoolboy," Mrs. Hawkyard scolded. "The Ladies' Aid Society meets here at two o'clock . . . and good gracious! If you don't stop pestering me, I shan't be ready to receive them."

"You don't mind if I make the trip alone, then?"

"Of course not. Only do be back in time for dinner. The Reverend Mr. Butler is bringing that nice young American couple. I think they're writing a book or something. Anyway, they're most awfully anxious to talk with you about India."

He found no trouble locating Tapovan School once he arrived at Himaitpur. There were many willing guides, and indeed, someone had run ahead to announce the visitor, for Taluqdar was waiting on the veranda to greet him.

"I am Reverend Fred Hawkyard from the Christian Mission at Pabna," he began.

"Of course, of course." Taluqdar's lean features broke into a wide smile. "We are most appreciative of your help. The play is doing splendidly. Do come in."

School came to an abrupt halt as the children scampered into their places to rehearse the play for their honored guest . . . explaining that the costumes and scenery, which their parents were making, were not yet ready.

Hawkyard was entranced as the play proceeded. The strictly literal translation did not detract, but seemed rather to add to the

charm of the earnest young wise men, Joseph and Mary, shepherds and angels, who enacted the birth of Christ. As a finale, the entire audience joined the thespians in a Bengali version of "Silent Night." Deeply moved, Hawkyard found himself singing with the rest. He praised the actors and congratulated the teachers, marveling that the children had been rehearsing for less than a week.

"You must be anxious to meet our Thakur," Taluqdar murmured. "Come, I will take you to him."

Hawkyard felt an urgent tugging at his jacket and looked down into the shining dark eyes of the youngster who had visited him in Pabna.

"Don't talk of the play," the boy reminded. "It is a deep secret."

"Trust me," Hawkyard laughed, ruffling the lad's hair affectionately. "My lips are sealed."

They found Thakur in the machine shop, and after this strange Saint had cleansed oil smudges from his hands, he walked with them to a shaded bench.

For more than an hour they discussed theology. Hawkyard was amazed and strangely affected to hear this dhoti-clad Indian speak of Christ as the Son of God with a depth and feeling seldom encountered among Christians—and with a conviction, he was forced to admit, that was often lacking in his own carefully prepared sermons.

When he took his leave, Thakur invited him to return soon and suggested that he might teach the children more about Christ whenever this might be convenient. Monmohini, who had approached unobtrusively and had been listening quietly, a little apart, extended the invitation to Mrs. Hawkyard. The clergyman parted from them in a warm glow of friendly fellowship.

As Hawkyard took his seat on the river boat he felt a parcel crumple beneath his weight. He jumped up hurriedly. "I am most awfully sorry," he apologized, handing the flattened parcel to his seatmate, an impressive-looking Moslem with a long luxuriant beard. "I do hope I haven't damaged anything."

"Not at all," the man responded courteously. "It was careless of me to leave it there."

"The fault was entirely mine," Hawkyard insisted. "I'm afraid I'm going about in a bit of a daze." He laughed, indicating his clerical collar. "I've just had the most amazing lesson in Christianity from a Hindu."

The Moslem's eyes twinkled merrily. "You have been with Sree Sree Thakur?"

"Yes! Do you know him?"

"Very well indeed."

"A most amazing man!"

"Yes."

They were silent for a time.

"You have known this Thakur a long time, you say?"

"Not long," the Moslem said, stroking his beard, "but well."

"Oh, yes. I see. An amazing man!"

"Yes."

Again a silence fell over them.

"Allow me to introduce myself. I am Fred Hawkyard, director of the Christian Mission at Pabna."

The Moslem bowed his head in acknowledgment. "I am Syed Khaliluddin, Mouluvi of the Islamic community at Pabna."

"You don't say!" Hawkyard cried, and the two men exchanged the understanding smiles of one clergyman to another.

"A truly amazing man," Hawkyard reiterated after a pause. "You know, I would go so far as to say Thakur is one of the few true Christians!"

The Mouluvi's eyes sparkled. "And I would say that he is one of the few true Mohammedans . . ."

Hawkyard regarded his new friend with open surprise. The tension between Moslems and Hindus was certainly no secret in India; the fear and threat of a holy war was ever present. Once more the silence fell and lengthened until Hawkyard's curiosity could bear no more.

"How did you happen to meet this Thakur?" he inquired bluntly.

The Mouluvi again stroked his beard thoughtfully. "Unknown to me, my nephews, who live in Himaitpur, had enrolled in Tapovan School. When my only son visited there for a few days he was taken with them to their classes. He returned home on fire with enthusiasm and began agitating at once to be allowed to attend that wonderful school. Well, you can understand what my position was in such a matter . . ."

"Yes. I certainly can . . . a Mouluvi . . ."

"I came to Himaitpur at once . . . to protest . . . to lecture some sense into the Islamic community . . . to do battle if necessary . . ."

His voice trailed off, and seemingly lost in thought, he stared pensively at the waters of the Padma River.

"What happened?" Hawkyard urged. "How did it go?"

The Mouluvi turned to him. "What happened? But you have just been with Thakur! Above all things I want my only son to be a true and devoted disciple of Mohammed. Could I deny him such a teacher?" His voice dropped back to a conversational tone. "My son has been at Tapovan for four months now and is doing very well. His health has always been delicate, but under Thakur's guidance it is greatly improved. Why, this morning when I arrived I found him playing ball . . . running and jumping about just like all the others. Four months ago such a thing would have been impossible!"

This time it was Hawkyard's turn to contemplate the river. What a strange land India was! Could he ever grasp the secrets of the mysterious East?

The trip was only the beginning of a long and close friendship with Thakur and the devotees of Satsang. Mrs. Hawkyard, having heard an account of the day from her husband, was as eager as he to explore the dynamics of this amazing community. They accepted the invitation to teach the Christian doctrine and history and soon were making regular weekly trips, for they found the children inspiring to work with. Also, this new experience of honoring all religions gave them new insights which enriched and broadened their own work at the mission.

19

In 1923, the first group of students were deemed ready to take the required examinations for high school studies. Taluqdar's dark, sharp features grew gaunt with worry as he drilled the students by day and by night without letup.

"Why do you drive yourself and the children this way?" Thakur chided. "There is no need."

"No need?" cried the distracted teacher. "These children will be competing with students who have had six years of formal education! Most of ours have only had three! What if they fail? All of them?"

"Then they will take the exams again next year."

"They cannot afford to fail!" Taluqdar moaned desperately. "This is the first test of our experiment with your new system of education. Everything depends on it."

"Have no fear, Taluqdar." Thakur placed his arm across the unhappy teacher's shoulders and squeezed gently. "You have done your work well. The children have recited for me and I have quizzed them. I find their knowledge consciously integrated with their experience and aimed firmly at the Uphold of Existence. Such knowledge will never desert them . . ."

"But the educational system doesn't care anything about integration and the Uphold! I know it well! The examinations are a bag of tricks! The questions will be deliberately and cleverly designed to mislead. Every trap and snare is set for them. Students educated within the system are prepared for these tricks . . . ours are not."

"You have done your work well," Thakur repeated. "Whatever the fruits of your labor . . . know that they are good."

"Even if they fail?"

Thakur laughed gently. "What are these examinations? Can the

students' failure reduce by one iota the treasure they possess . . . this gift that you have contributed so much to? Only think, Taluqdar."

Early on the morning that the students were to go to Pabna for the examinations, Taluqdar stalked grimly through the village and entered the jungle. He was not seen again all day.

Late that afternoon the children returned and clustered excitedly about Thakur. They were in good humor, assuring him that they were certain they had passed . . . that the examinations had not been nearly so hard as they expected, and that some of the questions were downright childish for people of their age.

Thakur smiled at them. "The examinations were made easier because your teacher spent every minute with you, placing all his love, strength, and knowledge at your disposal. He is waiting for you now . . . beyond the clearing, where we cut the trees for Mitra's cottage . . . northward toward the clump of bamboo."

The children were surprised and somewhat awed to find their strict, taciturn teacher in a strangely gentle mood. Their surprise became delight as this reserved man, whose very bearing precluded any idea of a public show of affection, fondled their bobbing heads and patted their bare shoulders as they gave an account of the examinations.

"You have done very well," he agreed. "And if for any reason any of you did not pass . . . the fault is mine for sending you too soon. If this should happen do not feel too concerned . . . because next year we will be ready for them."

A month later, there was a day of rejoicing for the members of Satsang, and Tapovan was strung with garlands, for all nine students had passed the examinations with flying colors.

It was also in the year 1923, while Thakur was staying in Calcutta for a while, that C. R. Das, President of the Indian National Congress, came to see him for the first time. With the prominent leaders of that time, Chittaranjan Das was engaged in the struggle for liquidation of the British rule in India. He was a close friend of Gandhi and placed great hopes in the non-co-operation movement which was gaining a foothold.

Thakur's name, and his genius for organization, had come to the attention of Das on several occasions. He decided to investigate. He

visited a group of Thakur's devotees in Delhi, attended one or two of their meetings, and made discreet inquiries in the neighborhoods where they lived. He was very well impressed. The unusual energy and discipline of these people, coupled with a sincere concern for and desire to help others, gave them an influence which far exceeded their numbers. If Thakur—as well as people of this caliber—could be persuaded to lend his remarkable talents to the non-co-operation movement, the independence of India would be assured.

Their first meeting was extremely frustrating for Das.

"Political freedom does not mean to me any hatred of the British," Thakur stated firmly. "My work, and the work of those who chose to make me their Guru, is to establish the integration of each individual so that he may realize his own unique potential, strive for his own full development, and thus bless all with the fruit of his labors."

"What good will such men do if we are denied the God-given right to have our own government?" Das cried.

Thakur shook his head. "What good would your government be if there were not a dedicated group of such men to guard its integrity? Would you drive away the lion to bring in the jackals? We must recoup our social health. For this it is necessary to establish schools, industry, and the social reforms that elevate our activity and push our evolution."

"We are fully aware of these shortcomings," Das retorted impatiently. "But only after we get rid of the British will programs for self-betterment be possible . . ."

Thakur spread his hands. "Only look about you . . . everywhere. There is no end to the work that is possible now. All that is needed is men with the vision and clear purpose to accomplish it."

The renowned barrister, whose eloquence at the bar saved Sri Aurobindo when he was charged with treason against the British Government, always enjoyed ardent discussion. He changed his tactics. He spoke long and with fervor about man's desire for freedom . . . of the crippling, spiritual as well as economic, that ensued from subjugation. "The non-co-operation movement is not based on hatred for the British," he pointed out again and again. "Quite the contrary. It is the system that is hated. Non-co-operation is compatible in every way with all that you are doing . . ."

Although Thakur listened carefully and with great sympathy, he remained firm. "Non-co-operation, I feel, is a disease. It can spread quickly to war against all authority . . . lead to the disintegration of

the nation and family . . . to anarchy, where man becomes alien even to himself. No, no . . . my work is the integration of man with all that he can encompass."

On the next day, the people around Thakur were amazed to witness an abrupt change of behavior in their eminent visitor. Chittaranjan Das began to question Thakur on a variety of subjects, and he listened to all the answers thoughtfully without pressing his own opinion. Whereas before this he had been oblivious to his surroundings, he now became energetically interested in everything. He stopped people constantly to question them as to what their life had been before, and what exactly had induced them to follow Thakur. He was even overheard asking very small children why they loved their Thakur so.

Late that evening Das approached Thakur. "It is necessary for me to leave now. I have been greatly interested by all that I have discussed with you . . . although I must confess that I do not quite understand . . ."

"Perhaps if you could come to Satsang and stay a few days . . ." Thakur suggested.

"I can't do that. There is no one to run things while I'm away."

Thakur laughed. "If you are ready to run the country, surely there is someone you can trust for a few days."

Das joined in the laughter, then grew serious. "I have been amazed at what I have seen here, and am desirous of learning more. Will you consent to be my Guru?"

Thakur smiled at him. "Speak to Ma about this."

Das felt rebuffed. He did not expect such reaction to his announcement. After all, it was quite a victory for Thakur to have won over, in so short a time, a man of his status. He strolled moodily across the schoolyard to the community kitchen where he had the good fortune to find Monmohini alone.

"I have decided to become a follower, Ma," he announced after the traditional greetings. "Thakur tells me that you take care of the initiations."

Monmohini gazed at him for such a long period of silence that Das became acutely discomfited.

"I haven't much time." He glanced nervously at his watch. "I must leave within the hour and there are several things I would like to do . . ."

"Why do you wish to take the vows?" Monmohini asked sternly.

"Why?" Das's eyes widened in amazement. "Why . . . because I have found the man that I can truly regard as my spiritual teacher . . ."

"If you seek to flatter my son by this action, don't do it. Any wishes you harbor that you might, by one means or another, bend him to your bidding are vain."

"Why do you accuse me of such things?" Das found his voice shaking.

"Because you are a politician and politicians are inclined toward power. Power misused is the greatest enemy of the spiritual achievement."

Das looked fully and steadily into Monmohini's eyes. "All my life," he said quietly, "I have wanted only the welfare of my countrymen. Here I have found something more vital and enduring than I had ever thought possible. I do not comprehend fully, but I see the possibilities, and want to be a part of it. I am a proud man and do not bow my head easily, but once bowed, I do not raise it again. I say I want initiation!"

Monmohini directed him to a seat, quietly explained the necessary ritual, and listened as he responded with the required vows.

Thakur's ideology, which so drastically shifted the emphasis away from immediate emancipation, brought Das into severe conflict with his colleagues. For two years he struggled to convince his followers and friends . . . urged that they begin immediately—on however small a scale—to establish schools and health centers and industries, but the energies of his co-workers were concentrated on achieving freedom from the British and they had neither money nor time to spare for Das's experiments. The spirit of India embraced the non-co-operation movement which was growing steadily.

In 1925, C. R. Das resigned from the Congress Party, and he and some friends who stayed with him founded the Swaraj (Freedom) Party which was dedicated to work within the framework of the law, and take the fullest advantage of the limited legislative means the British Government provided.

The bitter struggle with so many old friends and the breaking of close ties had taken its toll, however, and Das was a very ill man. As soon as the new party was organized, he left for a much-needed vacation in Darjeeling. En route he stopped to visit Thakur. He arrived with high hopes and enthusiastic plans for the new party.

"Thakur," he declared happily, "I'm going to make this village the brain center of India. I'll bring all the leaders here to meet with you!"

"Das, Das." Thakur shook his head sadly. "Will such attention make us more than we are? Come. Stay with us a while. Rest and regain your health. You are exhausted . . ."

But Das was infused with a nervous tension that would not let him rest. After a few days he insisted that he must be on his way, promising that he would come back for a longer stay in the near future.

He was never to return. Ten days later the Satsangees were saddened by the news that their eminent brother, C. R. Das, had died. With his death, many of the followers who had felt that Thakur was on the threshold of wide acceptance and acclaim sighed. Thakur's warnings that there were no short cuts to emergence of the integrated man in a peaceful, integrated world were all too true.

Shortly thereafter, the news that Mahatma Gandhi was coming to Satsang filled the ashram and the surrounding villages to overflowing. For days before his arrival, people camped on every available spot of grass, and the huge rice pots in the community kitchen were kept boiling night and day.

Gandhi wished to meet the Guru whose influence had so profoundly changed the course of his friend C. R. Das's life.

He remained at Satsang for two days, and the conversation of these two great Saints was followed with breathless attention. The listeners marveled that while each man spoke with deep conviction on all the matters of the day, including non-co-operation, neither attempted by any slightest pressure to sway the other.

When Gandhi left, many of the young men from the district, including some devotees, followed him, and Thakur made no move to dissuade them. Nor was it unusual, in the years that followed, for Gandhi to advise erring workers to go to Thakur for a period of adjustment.

20

SWARIN settled her two little girls in their beds. They had been fretful and trying all day, and she was thankful that the long, miserable week had come to a close. Khogen would be back from worshiping at the feet of his great Guru tomorrow, and perhaps . . . just perhaps, the household might settle down.

"I want Amah," whined the six-year-old.

"Amah is sick," Swarin stated crossly. "You know that. She has to sleep in the kitchen tonight."

"I want to kiss her good-night."

Swarin stiffened. "And get a sore throat yourself? Come now, give Ma a kiss and go to sleep like a good girl." She leaned forward, but the child, in a fit of temper, struggled against her.

"I want Amah to tell me a story!"

"Stop that, do you hear me?" Swarin pushed the child roughly back against the pillow and jerked the sheet over her. "I've had enough of your shameful behavior! Your father is going to hear of this tomorrow!" She strode to the door, slamming it against the muffled sobs.

How her head ached! And where was Bhulu? After seven o'clock . . . and he was not home . . . again. Twice in one week! How dared he disobey her in this fashion! Anything could happen to a thirteen-year-old boy roaming the streets at night! She paced nervously about the upstairs sitting room . . . went to the window and peered at the street below. There was no sign of him.

It was a clean, pretty street with neat rows of English-style houses facing each other. For a moment her ill humor left her and she sat cross-legged upon the wooden chest by the window, gazing at the street.

How happy she had been ten years ago when Khogen got his first important promotion at the Tata Iron and Steel Company. They had felt secure enough to invest her dowry in this house which would give them prestige among friends and business associates, and where Bhulu could grow up safely . . . belonging to, and associating with, the very best people. Her lips curved downward. And now, just when such a neighborhood could be important to him, the miserable child used every possible ruse to spend as much time as possible away from it.

She sighed deeply. How pretty she was in those days. Everyone had remarked on it! Well, that was over now. At thirty the lines were fast deepening around her eyes and mouth, the skin of her neck was becoming slack and unsightly. It was the children, of course. One couldn't expect to have three children and still look like a maiden. You'd think men would understand this . . . that they would love you all the more for sacrificing your beauty for their children. What beasts they were! How selfish!

Khogen was bored with her before their third child was born. Even now the pain of those unendurably long nights when she had lain sleepless and weeping, waiting for his return from the endless card parties, had not healed. Swarin was no fool! A lot more than cards took place in those days!

She had been suspicious when Khogen first began to talk of a new religion . . . and with good reason, because joking about old traditions and superstitions was one of the few pleasures they shared. But when she realized he was quite serious, she had, with great will power, adjusted her own attitudes to his and encouraged him in every way . . . for surely a religious man would not be unfaithful to her. When the time came, she herself had received initiation in order to please Khogen. But although she had tried very hard she was never able to share her husband's conviction or enthusiasm for the new life. In the beginning she had attended the Satsang gatherings, but the everlasting subject of Sree Sree Thakur soon grew boring. Morever, it seemed to her that the paradise of Satsang was always hungering . . . equipment for this and equipment for that . . . there was no end to the taking up of collections. Khogen's generous contributions on these occasions had not been pleasant for her and she stopped going to the meetings, keeping herself as far away as possible from Thakur's overenergetic devotees.

Swarin was a responsible woman, however, and having taken the

vows, she daily performed the exercises of Jadjon, Istobritty, and Jawjon, even though she had little hope that any rewards would be gained by this austerity. Of late she had found herself wondering more and more whether there was really any significant difference between religion and the card games . . . in either case she was always alone.

There was a clatter on the stairway and Swarin jumped to her feet as Bhulu entered the room, his jacket slung across one shoulder, the school cap pushed back from his broad forehead.

"Where have you been!" she cried. "It's nearly eight o'clock!"

Bhulu's eyes widened innocently. "To the soccer game. Last week you said it would be all right."

Swarin clenched her hands. "That was last week, Bhulu. Couldn't you have reminded me of it this morning? You know how I worry about you. Does it mean nothing that I have been absolutely sick with dread these past two hours? And all so unnecessary! Only a little consideration on your part could make my life so happy . . ."

"You said it was all right to go," Bhulu mumbled.

Swarin's lips grew thin. "Your dinner was sent back to the kitchen and Amah is ill. You wash up. I'll bring it to you myself."

"I'm not hungry . . ."

"Not hungry? How can that be possible at this late hour?"

"We ate dates and rashaghollas all afternoon. I'm stuffed."

"I have told you over and over again not to eat such things between meals!" Swarin cried sharply. "Isn't it enough that you ruin my health with worry over you . . . now you must destroy your own as well?"

"I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I'm sorry!" Bhulu shouted, stamping his feet peevishly.

The unexpected outburst sobered them both and they stared at each other a little breathlessly.

"May I please go to my room now?" Bhulu requested uncomfortably.

"Yes, go! I cannot bear to look at you in such an ugly mood!" She turned quickly back to the window, biting her lip as tears spilled over her cheeks. Bhulu, her firstborn! They had always been so close. From the moment of his birth he had been her own true love. Through the lonely years he had been her support and comfort. How was it possible that such a loving child could simply vanish

. . . desert her and leave a stranger in his place . . . No! No! Such a thing was not possible. Bhulu did love her. He must!

At length she ceased weeping, dried her eyes, and went softly to his room. She found him sprawled on a divan, an open book on his lap.

"Bhulu," she began timidly, "couldn't we have a nice long talk the way we used to? You never talk to me any more . . . not really . . . and I've been so lonesome . . ."

Bhulu eyed her suspiciously. "Sure, Ma, what do you want to talk about?"

"Why, anything that you'd like to talk about. I am always happy to talk about you . . ."

Bhulu became silent and ill at ease. He laid the book aside and shifted about on the divan. "I don't know anything to talk about."

"Of course you do, darling." Swarin laughed nervously, fingering the top of his dresser and fondling the silver backs of the English brushes she had given him recently. "Why, the other day when you brought your little friend home you spent the whole afternoon with your heads together talking a mile a minute . . . What did you talk about then?"

"Oh, that—" Bhulu shrugged. "It was nothing. You wouldn't be interested in school things . . ."

"How can you say that? Don't you realize that you are my son? That your tiniest thought is of great importance to me? That I love you a thousand times more than any of those boys ever possibly could . . . ?" Impulsively, she rushed to him, and kneeling, wrapped her arms about him in a close embrace. She felt his body stiffen . . . and she noticed something else . . . Abruptly, she stood up, towering over him. "You have been smoking!" she accused in horrified tones.

"Me? Smoking?" Bhulu flustered guiltily. "Oh, I know what it is. The man next to me at the soccor game was smoking cigars . . . that must be what made you think that. His smoke got all over me . . ."

"Do you take me for a fool?" Swarin glared at him scornfully. "Is that the reason you dare behave so shamelessly toward me? I have kept silent about your disobedience. I have tried to protect you. But it is no use. Every day you become worse! Now I will have to tell your father everything!"

"I'm not a baby!" Bhulu stormed passionately. "Tell him! Do anything you want! I would rather be beaten than have you hanging on me all the time . . . spying on me! I am not a child!"

Stunned, Swarin backed away from Bhulu, her breaking heart shutting out his voice and contorted features. It was true. He hated her. Why? Why? What had she ever done to deserve such punishment? What was the matter with her? Other women gave far less of themselves to the service of their families . . . yet they were loved. Other women were often selfish tyrants who kept their families dancing to whatever tune they wished to play . . . and yet they were respected. What had she ever done that everyone should scorn her . . . turn away from her . . . as if she were a servant to be tolerated? It wasn't fair!

Khogen returned the following afternoon and Swarin sat in tightly controlled passivity, listening to his enthusiastic recital of all that the great Thakur was saying and doing and all the new things that were happening or about to happen at Satsang. When he had quite worn himself out, she reported all of her difficulties with Bhulu.

"Why didn't you tell me of this before now?" Khogen paced the floor.

"It is not easy for a mother to admit failure. I have been sick with worry and I have tried in every possible way to win him back with my love . . . but he has fallen in with bad company. His ears are deaf to my pleas."

Khogen stopped pacing. "He must go to Satsang. A few months with Thakur and all this will be forgotten. Oh, you should see the children there! How polite and considerate they are. How intelligent and loving . . ."

Color flooded back into Swarin's pale cheeks. "Is that your only answer to me? The one and only answer for everything in life?" she cried derisively. "If the house were burning down I believe you'd have to run and ask Thakur whether to pour water on it!"

Khogen was taken aback. "Will you never try to understand me? What did you want me to suggest?"

"If I knew that, do you think I would humiliate myself by coming to you? I am desperate. I don't know what to do."

"Then it must be Satsang. When you see how he develops you will understand why I wish it. Until then, please try to trust me.

He is my son, too, you know. I can take him tomorrow, since I am not expected at the office until Monday. There now, smile for me. Several of the boys here have gone to Satsang. Come out with me tonight and talk to their parents. When you hear what they say, you will be at ease."

"It is not easy to get a boy ready to leave home on such short notice," Swarin complained coldly. "Clothes will have to be washed and mended. There is no time to spare for gossip."

She received her first letter from Bhulu a week after his arrival at Satsang and others continued to come at regular intervals. They were happy letters, bubbling about his new school and friends, tenderly concerned about his mother's health and happiness. They would have been a great joy . . . except that his eulogies of Thakur became longer and more glowing with each writing. Thakur had saved Bhulu from bad company as he had saved Khogen . . . but not for her, only for himself. Swarin's loneliness increased and her heart felt like a painful leaden lump.

A few months later, Khogen entered his house in high good spirits. "You are looking at a free man," he greeted Swarin. "I have just quit my job."

"You have what?"

"Resigned from Tata's. Severed all ties. Finished. From now on I work only for Thakur."

"Have you lost your mind completely?" Swarin was aghast.

Khogen laughed. "No, my dearest wife, I have just discovered it. Look how it is with us. I am not happy in my work. You are not happy away from Bhulu. Well, all this is over. In Satsang love is everywhere and there is joy in one's work. Life is very short. We have wasted too much of our time already. I made arrangements with your sister to manage the babies and the house for a few days while we go and find a place to settle down in. It is all taken care of. We will take the early morning train. I have wired Thakur that we are coming."

"You are mad. What could you do in a place like that?"

"I will do whatever needs doing. Whatever Thakur wishes me to do. Over two thousand families are living like that . . . in peace and harmony with each other. When you see Satsang for yourself, you will know what I say is true."

"I will never see that place," Swarin answered coldly. "If you insist on behaving like a schoolboy I cannot prevent it. But I will never go there."

Khogen sobered. "You don't seem to understand, Swarin. I have resigned from Tata's. There will be no more income. At Satsang we work only for our needs . . . not for money . . . You will have to come with me."

Swarin left the room without answering. Nor did she speak to him once during the long train ride to Pabna. She sat woodenly, her drooping sari drawn over her forehead, her hostile eyes staring at the passing landscape.

Several people had come to the railroad station to meet them but only one caught Swarin's attention . . . caught her attention and melted her heart, for Bhulu stood there, healthy and scrubbed, his sparkling eyes eagerly scanning the train windows. He rushed toward them as they alighted, but stopped short just as he reached her and gravely dropped to the platform and touched her feet. Then he arose and handed her the bouquet of flowers he was carrying . . . and gave her an ecstatic hug. How beautiful he was! How lonely she had been! Her eyes devoured him hungrily, as his words tumbled over each other in his eagerness to share all his adventures with her. And no longer did he resist her caresses, but seemed actually to delight in them as he leaned comfortably against her on the oxcart ride to Satsang.

When they arrived he hugged her quickly again. "I must go now, Ma. We're in a brickmaking contest with the fifth grade and they're catching up on us, but I'll see you tonight. Be sure to visit the laboratory. We do experiments there. Bhattacharyya-dada will let you look through the microscope. Ask him! What you see will amaze you!"

And then the great man was with them. Swarin could feel the electric impact of his approach. She kept her eyes glued to the ground, dreading to see in the flesh this man who had stolen her husband, her son, and her home.

She was aware that Khogen had prostrated himself, and then had risen and was speaking. "This is Bhulu's Ma, Thakur. As I said in my wire, we have come to live here permanently. Tell me what to do, for I am a free man now and desire only to serve you for the rest of my life."

There was a very long silence and Swarin held her breath as she

waited for the final sentence to be passed on her life.

"You have stopped working at Tata's for yourself," Thakur spoke quietly. "Now go back there and work for me."

Swarin's eyes opened wide, dwelt for a moment on the amazingly calm man before them, and then swept to the perplexed countenance of her husband.

"Are you serious, Thakur?" Khogen stammered helplessly.

"Very serious, Khogen. Your greatest contribution can best be achieved among the people you know. In your position, there are many opportunities for you to enlighten the working men. Teach them to love their labor. To experience it as an integral part of their own being. To contribute it with free heart to the Supreme Father and to the blessing of all. You must return immediately before the confusion over your resignation deepens. Bhulu's Ma can stay here with Boro Bou if she would like to. I know that Bhulu has been lonesome for her. Come back in a month, then your wife can return with you." (Boro Bou, "Great Wife," was Thakur's endearing name for Saroshi.)

As in a dream, Swarin allowed herself to be guided to the cottage where Thakur's wife was busy washing a stack of banana leaves that would serve as plates for the evening meal. Her greeting was warm and sisterly as she praised Bhulu and indirectly Swarin herself for Bhulu's virtues. She spoke of how happy the entire ashram was that Swarin had at last found it possible to favor them with a visit. And how, even now, the women were preparing delicacies for the tea they would have shortly and where Swarin would meet many of the mothers of Bhulu's friends.

"I'm afraid you people may attribute more understanding to me than I possess," Swarin broke in guiltily, conscious of her hostility toward Thakur and Satsang and of her great relief that this was not to be her home after all. "I try to be a good woman and to meditate on the sacred word . . . but I'm afraid I fail in the holy life far more often than I succeed. For me such things are very difficult."

"But what can be so difficult?" Boro Ma's face was a study of candid innocence. "You only need to love one person. After that everything flows of itself and all becomes very clear."

Swarin sighed. "Yes, I know. Everyone who loves Thakur bears the same testimony. But you see . . . I feel I must be honest about these things . . . I am not able to love Thakur. I've tried. I simply

don't feel it. Sometimes," she added hollowly, "I'm not too sure that I even know what love is . . ."

"No, no, no," Boro Ma cut in excitedly, "not Thakur, not the others. It is yourself you must love to begin with."

"Myself?" Swarin cried, feeling that she must have misunderstood.

"Yes, yes . . . you." Boro Ma's round face bobbed happily. "That is what Thakur works for always. It is the key."

"Myself?" Swarin repeated incredulously.

"Yes. You see how it is. If you don't love someone, you feel that others should not do so either. If that one is yourself, then you push all love away from you. You do not feel worthy."

"Myself?" Swarin murmured dazedly.

"But if you love yourself . . . Ah, then the door is open wide. All the love in the world can fly in and out of your heart."

"Myself?" Swarin gazed long and searchingly into the happy, peaceful features of Thakur's wife.

When Khogen came for her a month later, he was met by a happy, vivacious, and amazingly beautiful wife, anxious to share with him all the new experiences of herself and their son. Khogen, too, had many and exciting things to tell. He felt that he was, after all these years, just beginning to know the working men at the company. They had always been there, of course, but he had never really experienced them as individuals before. He had found them very responsive to learning about Thakur and there were, in fact, thirty new adherents who now met regularly to discuss the principles and counsels of Thakur and to follow them actively. Several of them were planning visits to Satsang. Swarin and Khogen talked the night away, sitting before the window, arms about each other, excited by their wonderful new plans for their future.

"How fortunate that we have such a big house." Swarin nestled her head on Khogen's shoulder. His arm tightened about her. "It will be so much more convenient for meetings and gatherings than most of the other houses have been. And it is fortunate, too, that you make a good salary, because refreshments for such large gatherings will take money. You will have to give me more."

"Whatever I make is yours." Khogen ended this old domestic feud contentedly. "You shall decide how it is to be used."

Early the following morning, Swarin and Khogen went to Thakur to say good-by.

"Khogen looks happy." Thakur smiled.

"Now I understand what you meant when you spoke of the ideal marriage." Khogen's face radiated a joy that dissolved all inhibitions. "Swarin has borne me three children, but I tell you truly that last night I knew her for the first time. Today she is my bride."

21

In the spring of 1930, Boro Ma's younger sister Sarba Mangala, who was studying at King Edward College, arrived to spend her vacation at Satsang. She was a pretty girl, with a lively inquiring mind, who quickly captured the hearts of the devotees.

One morning shortly after Mangala's arrival, Boro Ma's two younger children carried the spices, grinders, and bottles to the roof of the community kitchen so that the women could watch and enjoy the activity of the ashram without interrupting their work.

"Would you like something else to make you comfortable?" the older child asked.

"No, no." Boro Ma laughed. "You must hurry to school now. It is getting late."

The children went through the ceremony of farewell . . . a solemn touching of the women's feet and then an ecstatic, laughing hug . . . beginning with Monmohini, in deference to her age and position in the household, proceeding to Boro Ma, and ending with Mangala.

Mangala was charmed with the grace and ease of the performance. "What wonderful children you have, sister. I can't understand it. They are the pets of the whole village . . . everyone favors them and yet they don't seem to be aware of their position at all. They are completely unspoiled."

Boro Ma flushed with pleasure.

"They form the chain that Anukul strives for," Monmohini explained. "Each adores the next oldest and accepts him as adviser, and so it goes, right up the line to Boro Ma, who in turn adores Anukul as both Guru and husband. The nourishment from such a chain is constant and the fruit healthy . . ."

"And Thakur adores his Ma," the beaming Boro Ma deferred modestly.

Monmohini gazed thoughtfully over the village. "My son is a vessel for love. He is filled by the Supreme Father and in his turn pours love over us all. Those who are thirsty refresh themselves."

Boro Ma was startled, and then slowly, her face was wreathed by a happy, surprised smile. Never before had she heard Monmohini publicly praise, or even allude to, those attributes of Thakur which made him so beloved and revered by others.

For a space of time there was only the crunch-crunch of the little machines as the women ground their spices.

"Everything here is so strange," Mangala puzzled at length. "I always got high grades and everybody, including myself, thought I was very bright . . . but now, after discussing things with Thakur, I realize that I am just beginning to understand all those things that I thought I had already learned. It's not altogether comfortable." She laughed uneasily. "A month ago I thought, 'In four years I'll have my master's degree and in five, or six at the latest, my doctorate. Then all my learning years will be over.' But now it seems there isn't any end at all. The more I learn, the more conscious I am of what a tiny little bit I know . . ." She stared into the sun for a few moments and then blinked her eyes rapidly.

A disciple emerged from the cottage. He had a plump pillow tucked under his arm and was carrying Thakur's water pipe.

"Oh, look!" Mangala jumped to her feet, shading her eyes with her hand. "Thakur must be sitting down someplace. I have to go!" She ran to Boro Ma and threw her arms around her sister's neck. "We're talking about biology and I have a hundred questions to ask. I'll work twice as hard this afternoon to make up . . ."

"No need." Boro Ma laughed. "This is your vacation. You must do what pleases you."

The work came to a stop as the two women watched Mangala's lithe figure sail across the open field in pursuit of the disciple, and they exchanged tender, rather wistful smiles at the sight of so much youth and beauty.

For Mangala, the summer passed in a joyous whirl of learning and doing. But as it neared its end she suddenly grew listless, her laughter ceased, and she spent long hours in the courtyard staring into space. Even the antics of the children failed to distract her.

"You are not well," Boro Ma worried. "Why don't you go to Thakur? He will have some medicine made for you . . ."

"Nothing can help me."

"Whatever it is, Thakur will cure it," Boro Ma persisted anxiously. "You have seen for yourself how it is with the others."

Mangala burst into tears. "This has been the happiest time of my whole life," she sobbed. "I cannot bear to have it end. My heart is breaking."

"Is that all it is?" Boro Ma circled her sister's waist and hugged the girl close. "Come now." She dried Mangala's tears as gently as she would one of the children's. "Let us have tea. And then you must find Thakur and have a long talk. Only think, Mangala, the college is not at the end of the world and we will always be here. Vacation will come again . . . I am happy that you love us so well, and my home will be your home always."

Mangala found Thakur with a group of men behind the machine shop, discussing some blueprints which were spread out on the ground. She was about to turn away when he spied her.

She approached hesitantly until she stood before him. Something in her manner brought the activity to a halt and the men watched her curiously.

"Thakur"—her voice was barely audible—"am I such a woman as would recognize the true husband of her heart when he comes?"

Thakur smiled. "You are such a woman."

"And if I find him, it is my right and duty to win him?"

Thakur studied her closely for some time. "Yes," he answered slowly.

Mangala drew a long, faltering breath. "Thakur, I beg you with all my heart to become my husband."

The atmosphere became electric. There was an ominous movement among the men, as if to rush this mad woman from the Saint's presence.

Thakur stared at her silently for a while. "You know this decision is not mine to make," he answered gravely. "But if you can win the true consent of Ma and Boro Ma, then I will be honored to be your husband."

Mangala dropped quickly to the ground, pressed her burning forehead on Thakur's foot for a moment, and then sped away from the astonished group.

"What nonsense!" Monmohini laughed sharply. "This is a delusion, a schoolgirl caprice. You will return to the college and regain your sanity!"

"This is no caprice," Mangala stated grimly. "As long as I live I will try to win him. If I cannot bear his child there will be no children for me." But as she turned toward her stricken sister, Mangala's eyes filled with tears and her chin trembled. "Can you still love me?" she begged.

Boro Ma embraced her. "How can you doubt my love?" The sisters clung to each other, weeping helplessly.

By common consent the women did not return to the subject in the days that followed, but there was no mistaking Mangala's determination. In the face of the rising hostility from the villagers, often expressing itself in open taunt or insult, she remained sweet-tempered. She served Monmohini and Boro Ma from early morning until late at night . . . cooking and cleaning, scouring the enormous iron pots, and betweentimes searching for new ways to please.

The news spread quickly from Satsang to the far-reaching groups of devotees, and before the week was out, worried followers were arriving at the ashram in an attempt to put a stop to the disturbing proceedings.

Thakur was firm. He himself remained aloof from the women and their problem.

"But, Thakur," pleaded the distracted devotees, "suppose your Ma and wife accept this girl! We can't take that chance!"

"If they give their wholehearted consent, the marriage will take place."

"You can't be serious! India is in no mood for polygamy! There is great agitation that the practice be legally outlawed. Let us concern ourselves with individual development, spiritual realization, scientific research, and education. We cannot afford such a pointless controversy now."

"I have expressed my beliefs on the principles governing marriage and children on many occasions and for many years. They are well known to all. How is it, since these teachings are so distasteful to you, that you still follow me?"

In desperation, and against Thakur's injunctions, the devotees sought out Monmohini in the community kitchen.

"Everything depends on you, Ma. This marriage will ruin Thakur and sweep away overnight all that we have labored to build up. You must not allow it to happen. Your little world of Satsang is sheltered and secluded. You don't understand what the outside world is like. We have already incurred the enmity of powerful

forces because of our stand on the non-co-operation movement. If Thakur takes a second wife we will be destroyed . . . absolutely. Our people will not stand for this."

Monmohini heard them out, frowning slightly, her arms folded across her breast. "My son's ideas on these matters are well known, yet the people choose to follow him . . ."

"Theory is one thing," they argued, "but action of this sort at this time is suicide! Thakur has half a million followers: people from all walks of life and political persuasions. It is not possible for most of them to discuss matters with Thakur personally. They rely on what they hear . . ."

"Is Satsang a political party, then?" Monmohini enunciated coldly. "Are my son's teachings to be reduced to opportunistic slogans? What manner of people seek a guru whose words are meaningless? It is better if they look elsewhere!"

"But you do not understand the present attitudes in India . . ."

"Leave my kitchen at once!" Monmohini ordered. "And do not return. I find your presence unhealthy!"

Monmohini sent for Boro Ma and turned the kitchen and the supervision of the evening meal over to her. "I am going to meditate," she explained. "I shall not want any dinner."

It was early morning when she emerged from the prayer room and the air shimmered with predawn silver. Monmohini leaned against the Bel tree, caressing its bark and remembering her own mother. How had that domineering, sharp-tongued woman, anxious for her possessions and family prestige, felt when Monmohini, as a child of nine, begged to be taken halfway across India just to see a saint? Surely, this must have seemed the most extravagant of childish whims . . . and yet, her mother had parted with the precious rupees . . . endured the hardships of travel. What had prompted her? Monmohini sighed. How often the knowledge of the heart proved a mystery to the intellect!

She left the tree and went directly to the chamber where Mangala slept with the children. Gently she shook the girl awake. "You have my permission, Mangala."

Mangala stared at her for several moments, unable to comprehend; then, in a mad rush, she threw her arms around the older woman. "Do you mean this?" she said. "Is it true? I'm not dreaming?"

Monmohini pushed the fine hair from the flushed face and kissed the damp eyelids. "You are awake, my daughter."

"Oh, I can't bear this. I shall die of happiness. But my sister . . . will she?"

"I cannot tell you that . . . and you must not pressure her. She loves you very much and the decision is not easy for her . . . only put yourself in her place . . ."

"I know. Oh, I do know. If only I could make her understand that her happiness is dear to me also. I will never rob her of what is hers . . ."

"Boro Ma understands. Only be patient. You are young. Time is not so important."

But although Boro Ma was affectionate and smiling as always, the precious last days of Mangala's vacation slipped by and she did not speak. With heavy heart Mangala began packing for her return to the university. She was nearly finished when Boro Ma entered the room.

"How pretty!" Boro Ma smoothed the folds of a blue silk sari. "We must plan your wedding dress. Taluqdar's wife does beautiful embroidery and is very artistic in design. Shall we consult her this afternoon?"

On the night of November 17, 1930, the wedding of Thakur and Sarba Mangala was celebrated. As the worried devotees had predicted, the event gave rise to sharp controversy, and in Satsang ashram as well as in the outside communities, there was a substantial drop in membership. As in that earlier day, however, when Thakur brought the dancing period to a close, those who remained were imbued with new strength and energy and the work of integration proceeded.

After her marriage Mangala continued her attendance at the college and completed her scientific studies. She found her own place in the work and the life of the ashram; her quiet dignity and devotion quickly earned for her the appellation "Chotto Ma" (Little Mother) among the villagers.

Nine years later she gave birth to her only child, a son who was named Kazal. From the beginning, the contrast of this child's deep, serious eyes and merry smile enchanted everyone. As he grew older, teachers and townspeople alike were astounded at his ability

to grasp and assimilate knowledge far beyond his years . . . at the loving and patient ingenuity with which he unraveled and settled the disputes of his playfellows . . . at the way children gathered about him for advice and leadership. And the devotees blessed the union of Thakur and Sarba Mangala which had given them yet another saint.

22

THE schoolhouse had been enlarged three times by 1932 and its four long buildings enclosed a pleasantly landscaped courtyard. Now that several Tapovan students were doing exceptionally well in the universities, plans for a high school were beginning to materialize. Hovering over these plans was the wondrous dream of a university where people from all lands might someday assemble, and under Thakur's guidance, bring to flower the buds of a bright new world.

The Satsangees pooled all their resources in their effort to realize their dream. The experience gained in sinking tube wells helped them to obtain contracts for similar work all over Bengal. From the profits the workers took just as much as they needed; with the rest they furnished the mechanical, chemical, and pharmaceutical works with better and modern equipment. This enabled them to secure contracts from the railroad companies, which were expanding. Ultimately Satsang had its own printing press, and imported two Ipswich generators, which provided the electrical power required by the research laboratories in Viswa Bignan Kendra, and also supplied electricity to the homes and streets in Satsang. The Ipswich generators were expensive, however, and did not long meet the growing need for electricity.

One evening as various ways of generating power were under discussion, Thakur suggested that a high-voltage discharge passed through an atomized potassium permanganate solution might cause an explosion. If this were true, and could be controlled, it might provide a cheap source of power.

Bankim and Gopal lost no time in setting up and trying this experiment. They carefully constructed a 30 KV transformer which stepped up the voltage of the Ipswich generators from 220 to 30,000.

Then they took a foot-length segment of jointed bamboo, closed at both ends, wrapped it heavily with wire, and inserted an electrode at either end. Arrangements were also made to spray the potassium permanganate solution into the cylinder through a duct in the center. Then they closed the circuit that was supposed to make the spark jump across the gap. Nothing happened. They began anew, for several days repeating the procedure with subtle variations, but without success.

They decided to consult Thakur again. He listened intently to a step-by-step recital of all their endeavors. "Perhaps," he responded, "you should try to make the discharge and the spray come simultaneously."

The first trial following this suggestion produced an explosion that blew the homemade tube to bits. There was great excitement in the laboratory, but Thakur viewed the results with a grave face.

"We need a cylinder of extraordinary strength to serve our purpose," he stated thoughtfully. "It should also be fitted with a piston."

Gopal left at once for Calcutta, and after a week returned with a pipe. The scientists gathered around eagerly as he presented his find to Thakur.

"I could not find any chamber with piston such as you described, in Calcutta, but this one is made of gun metal. I'm sure it will be able to stand the blast without breaking. It is the best that they were able to cast with the equipment available."

Thakur took the foot-long, inch-thick cylinder in his hands, weighing it thoughtfully. "I think we must wait," he said at length. "I'm afraid this might not do."

There was a chorus of protest as the men passed the pipe from hand to hand, assuring themselves and Thakur that it was quite adequate . . . explaining the composition and characteristics of gun metal.

"There is nothing to lose by trying" was their general decision.

Thakur shook his head. "If you are determined to go ahead, then wind it carefully with several layers of wire. It is not strong enough."

The men hurried to the laboratory, but a search of the machine shop revealed no wire that would serve as adequate reinforcement. They discussed sending someone to Calcutta for it; but the journey was long and they were eager to proceed with the experiment which they felt must surely succeed. They decided that the pipe would hold, and quieted their doubts by taking extra safety measures in

setting up conditions for controlling the execution of their project.

They worked all night, and by the following afternoon the electrodes were fixed in either end, the atomizer made ready to spray the potassium permanganate solution, and each man went to his assigned station in the yard of the science laboratory. Bankim was located some forty yards distant at the transformer control switch. Gopal, about twenty feet from the pipe, was prepared to operate the atomizer. On signal they simultaneously closed the circuit and started the spray.

There was a blinding flash accompanied by an explosion that shook the entire community and brought people tumbling from their homes, crying "Earthquake!"

Thakur came running and the people after him. They found Bankim sitting in the dust, stunned and temporarily blinded. Gopal lay on the ground unconscious. His clothes had disintegrated and his body was completely blackened by burns. Thakur sent men running to collect the leaves of a certain wild herb and gave instructions for grinding it into an emollient salve.

Gopal was carried to the dispensary; for several days Thakur did not leave his side, except for periods of prayer and meditation.

When Gopal regained consciousness he smiled apologetically. "Germany might have the kind of pipe we need."

Thakur smiled sadly. "Success has made us impatient. For the present time we will give thanks for the Ipswich generators."

The ointment was applied to Gopal's body constantly for several months. When the healing was completed there were no visible scars at all.

Gopal spent the last weeks of his recuperation in Calcutta with his mother. Not wishing to interrupt the work of his colleagues at Satsang, he had not informed them of his day of return, so there was no one to meet him when he reached Pabna. It had been raining and the streets were wet and muddy. Since he was wearing English clothes, Gopal sat on a bench to roll up his trouser legs and remove his shoes and stockings for the walk to Satsang.

A woman approached him with extended palm, begging. He found several coins in his pocket and gave them to her with a blessing. Her palm closed over the money but she did not pass on, and looking up, Gopal saw that she seemed dazed, as if not quite aware of her surroundings.

"What is it, Ma?" he asked kindly. "Are you in trouble?"

"My son died last week," she chanted in a flat monotone. "He is cremated. Gone forever."

Gopal got to his feet. He noticed that the woman was old and that she was not accustomed to begging. Her sari was wet and draggling about her body. "Come, Ma." He took her arm. "You have been in the rain and you are tired. Let me walk you to your home so that you can rest."

"There is no home," the emotionless voice droned. "I could not pay rent and so I left."

"But where do you sleep?" Gopal cried in alarm.

"What does it matter. My son died last week. He is gone."

"Come home with me," Gopal urged. "I live in an ashram and there are many there who will love and care for you."

"It's useless. There will be no work for one as old as I."

Gopal laughed. "At Satsang there is work for everyone. Come now, we'll find some tea, for it is a long walk."

The rutted four-mile road to Himaitpur had long been a sore spot for Thakur's devotees. A trying experience at best, in weather like this it was almost impossible to keep one's footing. Despite all his efforts to help the woman avoid puddles and support her on the slippery stretches, she had twice fallen. The Satsangees were more than willing to build a proper road, since this was their only connection with the railroad station; but the authorities would not allow such public work to be done by just anybody . . . and neither would they attend to it themselves.

When they arrived at Satsang, Gopal took the woman directly to Thakur. "She has no one," he explained. "Her only son died last week."

At the mention of her son, the woman was overcome with grief and could not speak.

Thakur jumped up from the stool on which he was sitting and threw his arms around her. "Why do you weep, Ma? I am your son." He held her close until her sobbing stopped. "Go and bathe." He urged her gently toward Boro Ma. "Then come back here by me. I need you."

The woman dried her eyes and she smiled. Gopal was struck anew at how swiftly Thakur's touch healed the suffering. Often orphans were brought to Satsang and in each case Thakur had caught the lonely child into his arms, crooning, "You're not alone, I tell you. I am here and I shall always be with you." Every time

Gopal had witnessed this, the crying stopped and that same wondrous expression of consolation and peace smoothed away the lines of fear and grief.

Bankim Roy joined Gopal. The two friends, having many things to discuss after their separation, walked through the village and on toward the river. Suddenly Gopal halted. "Who can that be?" he cried, pointing to a sleek, white, luxurious-looking ship lying in the Padma.

"Oh, that's the Governor of Bengal, Sir John Anderson," Bankim informed him. "He's making an official tour of the state."

The men stood for a few moments admiring the ship, then Gopal broke away and ran through the stretch of jungle down to the riverbank, where he began jumping up and down and waving frantically. People on the ship waved back to him, but he did not stop. If anything, his actions became even more energetic each time he was noticed. Cupping his hands to his mouth, he yelled, "I wish to speak with the Governor!"

"What on earth are you doing?" Bankim ran to his side.

"I'm going to get us a new road to Pabna!" Gopal replied.

Bankim laughed aloud. "It won't work. Sir John will turn you over to a flunky and he'll turn you back to the local authorities. You know what the situation is there."

Gopal had attracted curiosity on the ship by this time and the rail was lined with people. A small launch was put over the side, a sailor jumped into it, and rowed across to them.

"What is the trouble?" he asked, stepping ashore and mooring the launch.

"I would like to speak to Sir John," Gopal answered.

The sailor eyed the neatly dressed native quizzically as he drew a notebook and pencil from his pocket. "The Governor is very busy right now, but if you'll tell me what your complaint is, I'll see that it reaches the proper authorities."

Gopal stared at the notebook helplessly, then caught Bankim's badly suppressed smile of amusement.

"Tell Sir John," he stated firmly, "that I should like to discuss with him some problems we are having with our photochemical reactivity experiments."

The sailor's eyes flew open and he stared at the men and the jungle which surrounded them. "You're some kind of a scientist?"

"I am." Gopal tried a long shot. "I believe Sir John was educated

in the sciences. I have a great admiration for him."

The sailor hesitated. "Would you mind writing down that thing you wanted to talk to him about? I can't promise anything, you understand. If I wave to you from the ship, it means that the Governor is too busy to talk to you."

The friends watched the launch return to the ship and noticed with satisfaction that it was left in the water after the sailor had gone aboard. In a few minutes the sailor was back; he climbed over the side again and began rowing to shore.

"Good Lord, you've got an audience!" Bankim marveled.

"You'll come with me?"

"Not I." Bankim laughed. "You don't need anybody. And frankly, I feel a bit underdressed for a chat with the Governor."

Sir John greeted Gopal with every courtesy. "I cannot give you any help with your photochemical reactivity problems," he said, smiling, "but I was curious to meet you. Are you truly a scientist?"

"I received my graduate training in physical chemistry at Calcutta University," Gopal replied modestly.

"Really! Whatever are you doing in this jungle? Vacationing?"

"Oh, no, sir, I live here." And Gopal briefly described the purpose, organization, and dynamics of Satsang, ending with a very eloquent account of how contact with Thakur had turned his own interests from terroristic, anti-British activity into constructive pursuits.

Sir John was amazed. "What in the world can a saint have to do with science?"

"Oh, our Guru is very interested in science. There are several of us who have chosen to work under Thakur's personal guidance . . . Doctor Krishna Bhattacharyya is one of us." Gopal dropped the name carefully. "Perhaps you know him?"

"Krishna Bhattacharyya? The physicist?"

Gopal smiled happily. "Yes, that's the one . . ."

Sir John's eyes narrowed skeptically. "You say you have a laboratory out in that jungle. Would it be possible for two of my aides who have scientific backgrounds to visit it now?"

"Of course." Gopal seemed delighted. "Thakur would be most pleased to welcome them, and my friend is waiting on the riverbank. He will guide them."

Sir John summoned his aides and gave directions, watching Gopal

closely as he did so. The intrepid young Indian gave not the slightest sign of uneasiness at having his fantastic story verified. The Governor was perplexed. What game was this fellow playing? Well, one thing was sure, he wanted something. All Indians did.

Despite his skepticism, Sir John became absorbed in Gopal's lively stories of Thakur and the ashram. He was very much surprised, when his aides returned, to realize that he had been in animated discussion with the jungle scientist for nearly two hours.

The aides were enthusiastic. "We've never seen such a concentration of technical skill and experience. They have a completely equipped laboratory with power-driven machinery as good as any we have seen in Calcutta! We even found a class in differential calculus being held under a banyan tree!"

Sir John pursed his lips as he studied Gopal.

"And, Your Excellency," the excited aides continued, "you will never believe this, but Krishna Bhattacharyya . . . you're familiar with some of his work . . . well, this is where he lives!"

"I suppose," the Governor addressed Gopal, "that such a laboratory must take a great amount of money to maintain . . . personnel, power, equipment, et cetera."

"Yes, sir, a very great sum of money is invested there."

Sir John leaned back in his chair, feeling keenly disappointed that this amazingly interesting young man had come on such a trite and ordinary quest. "Why do you feel that the Crown should concern itself with your monetary problems?"

Gopal frowned. "I beg your pardon?"

"You are asking for financial assistance, aren't you?" Sir John rejoined testily.

"But no! Money has never been a problem at Satsang. Whenever we are ready for equipment . . . or land . . . or anything . . . the money is always there. If it is not, then we find ways to get it. That is one of the practices here, you see—"

"What is it you want, then?" the exasperated Governor cut in. "You must have come here for something?"

"Oh, yes, sir. The road from Pabna to our ashram is a disgrace. During the monsoon it is a river of mud, and in the dry season it is a sea of dust. Visitors have great trouble reaching Thakur. We would like very much to build a proper road, but the officials won't permit it. Neither will they repair it themselves. Perhaps, since you

are here, it would be possible for you to secure permission for us to build the road . . ."

Sir John was amazed. This, surely, was the most unbelievable of all the strange requests that had reached him during the inspection tour. "That is all you want? Permission to build a road without any expense to the government?"

"If you could make this possible, we at Satsang would be most grateful."

"I'll see that you get your road," Sir John said quietly, "and the government will build it and bear the expense."

He was as good as his word. Six months later a fine, all-purpose road ran from Pabna to Himaitpur; and the astonished Governor found himself showered with letters of praise and with handcrafted gifts from the grateful devotees of Thakur.

Satsang had a new friend. From Government House in Calcutta, Sir John assisted and encouraged the work of Thakur and the ashram for the duration of his administration.

23

In 1934 it was necessary for Thakur to spend several days in Calcutta for treatment of an infection in his anklebone.

During this time, Baidyanath begged him to see, and to save, a dear friend. The friend, Hem Mukherji, was a famous singer-poet, who early in life had shown great genius in composing poetry. Hem had taken to drink, however, and this condition had become so acute that for several years past, he worked only when the money for liquor ran out. Moreover, his talent had progressively degenerated until much of his poetry was meaningless, sophisticated doggerel—since the clubs offering this type of entertainment paid better.

His friends were heartsick. They had tried in every possible way to encourage him to seek medical or spiritual help, but it was useless. All efforts were greeted with an insulting ditty or a scornful laugh. Hem rationalized that if there were a God, he was a prankster and life was his joke. He declared that he, personally, intended to spend the rest of his time dead drunk and advised his friends to do likewise.

Thakur suggested that Baidyanath bring Hem to see him whenever it was convenient.

It was obvious, when Hem arrived on the following afternoon, that he was in a drinking period. His eyes were bloodshot, there was an untidy stubble on his face, and his dhoti was soiled. "I am not fooled!" he announced even before introductions could be made. "I know there is some trick afoot to reform me. But I was bored and curious, so I came anyway." Whereupon he sat down with a thump, crossed his legs and winked mockingly at the unsmiling audience.

"I, too, was curious." Thakur smiled. "I have heard a great deal of

praise for your singing and have been hoping that you would favor us with your talent."

Hem scowled. "I am not in the mood today. An artist can't go around creating at the drop of a hat, you understand . . ."

"That is true." Thakur turned to a disciple and requested that the refreshments be served.

The man returned shortly with a large tray on which stood glasses of fruit juice for the company generally and an opened bottle of whiskey for the guest. Hem's eyes widened with surprise and a grin spread across his face.

"I do hope the brand is to your taste?" Thakur asked.

"Scotch is fine! Fine!" Hem said, pouring himself a glass and quaffing it off in two gulps. "Really fine!" He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, poured another drink, and set the bottle on the floor beside him.

He drank several glasses in a very short time; and with a thickening tongue, he rambled on disjointedly about that jaded harlot whose name is life.

When his language became abusive, the worried Baidyanath insisted that they must leave and dragged his unwilling friend to his feet.

Thakur had the cork brought for the bottle and begged Hem to do him the favor of accepting what was left.

"Thakur, I like you!" Hem clutched the bottle to his breast. "Do you know that? I really like you! You are the first person I've met who did not give me a sermon on the evils of drinking . . ."

"Oh! Why should you stop? But then perhaps you could come again tomorrow?" Thakur invited. "Since I am confined to this room, it would be very pleasant for me to have your company."

"I'll do it!" Hem shouted. "You can count on me." It took the combined efforts of several men to propel the unsteady poet through the door and down the stairs.

Thakur's outraged disciples lost no time in seeking out the unhappy Baidyanath and upbraiding him for bringing such a disgusting person into Thakur's presence. They advised him strongly to keep his obnoxious friend out of sight in the future.

But the next afternoon Hem arrived by himself. Although there was no doubt that he had been drinking again, his face was shaved and he wore a clean dhoti. He was in a gay and facetious mood and began at once to caper about the room. "I have a song for you," he

announced, and he clapped his hands and hummed softly until he was satisfied with the tune:

"Oh, the man who can feel his brother's thirst,
I say is a saint through and through.
If a roll is called, this man will be first . . .
Down the hatch, Thakur; here's to you!"

The group stared at him with horrified disgust, but Thakur clapped his hands with pleasure and called for refreshments, which again included the bottle of whiskey for Hem.

On the days that remained, Hem showed up every afternoon. He seemed to take great delight in the displeasure his presence caused the devotees and disciples and he teased them constantly, losing no opportunity to ridicule them in the songs he composed. And each afternoon he received his bottle of whiskey with exaggerated pomp and thanks.

When Thakur bid him farewell he was visibly downcast. "I'll miss you, Thakur." The poet laughed self-consciously. "You know, it's been a hell of a long time since I gave a damn whether anybody came or went . . ."

"Why don't you visit us at Satsang," Thakur invited. "Our friends would be delighted to hear such an artist and I believe you would enjoy them."

"I might just do that." Hem leered mockingly at the assembled devotees. "Don't be surprised if you see me there."

Shortly after Thakur and his party returned to Satsang, Hem arrived. Thakur responded with joy, arranged for the poet's accommodation, and resumed the afternoon visits with the daily gift of a bottle of whiskey.

Those nearest to Thakur were alarmed at the poet's arrogance and deeply disturbed by his complete lack of respect for their Guru.

The villagers generally were displeased when he composed songs about a "saint with a bottle of grog"; but these occurred only in the first days and were soon forgotten. Mostly he built his songs around incidents that occurred during their daily activities, and although they were lampooned, it was done with grace and good humor and they enjoyed a good laugh at themselves.

The children adored him, tagging along wherever he went and

pleading for a funny song about their pet dog, or the monkeys, or the King of England trying to find his way out of Buckingham Palace. Time passed swiftly and Hem's visit lengthened into several weeks.

Early one morning the Satsangees arrived to find their Guru seated quietly on the veranda, his usually immaculate clothes covered with vomit.

He quickly soothed their agitation, assured them that he was not ill, and that he did not wish to bathe and change but would remain exactly as he was for a while longer.

The worried disciples seated themselves around him and continued wondering about the strange situation.

Just before lunchtime the poet, bathed and looking fresh, arrived on the scene.

He stared at the Saint in horror and then turned angrily on the disciples. "What are you fools sitting there for? Are you so busy worshiping Thakur that you can't see he is desperately ill? Send for the doctor! Get some water immediately! Get clean clothes!"

No one moved. All eyes stared straight ahead. Hem became uneasy in the stern and forbidding silence, and moved hesitantly toward Thakur. "Are you all right?" he faltered.

"I am fine," Thakur assured him. "But you, my friend, are you all right now?"

Hem's lips moved stiffly. "Why wouldn't I be all right?" He stared hypnotically at the soiled clothes.

"You were very, very ill. Don't you remember? You came to me shortly after I had retired. Are you sure the medicine I gave you was enough? Shall I mix another dose?"

"I did that?" Hem whispered.

"All this will wash away. It is not important. If you are well again . . . that is the main thing."

With an anguished sob, Hem stumbled blindly away from the company.

That afternoon he did not appear for his usual visit and Thakur sent Ananta to fetch him. He came reluctantly, his feet dragging, his eyes clinging to the ground.

"You must speak to Taluqdar." Thakur greeted him cheerfully. "The children wish to add a theater to their school and your professional knowledge would be most valuable."

"If they would allow me," Hem mumbled miserably, "I would be

grateful for the opportunity to help them build a theater."

"They will be happy with your answer. They also wished me to ask if perhaps you would write down some of their favorite songs. They are learning to use the printing press and wish to make a book of them."

"If they will allow me . . ." Hem's voice broke suddenly and he dropped to the floor, prostrating himself for the first time.

When he arose, however, there was still a trace of the old arrogance and his eyes swept belligerently over the disciples he had taunted. Their faces were serene. He met no single expression of triumph or gloating. No one seemed to be aware that his action was the slightest degree out of the ordinary. Thakur called for refreshments.

Hem averted his eyes from the bottle. "I don't feel like a drink today. I think I'll go and talk to Taluqdar about that theater."

"As you like," Thakur agreed pleasantly. "Take the bottle with you, however. Perhaps you will enjoy it later."

Woodenly, the poet accepted the gift and left. He walked swiftly down the road and then cut through a piece of jungle until he reached the river. Making quite sure that there was no one to witness his action, he threw the hateful bottle as far out in the river as his strength allowed.

The next afternoon Hem arrived promptly, knelt and touched Thakur's feet with no sign of embarrassment. "I cannot stay today," he announced. "We are drafting plans for the theater. But I wanted to come and tell you not to waste any more of your money on liquor for me. I have finished with drinking."

"You have been ill." Thakur took the bottle from the tray and extended it toward him. "When you have recovered you will probably feel differently. Save it."

"I will never feel differently," Hem cried. "If I have to take that bottle, I will smash it."

"Take it," Thakur spoke quietly. "It is yours to do with as you will."

Hem took the bottle, walked a short distance away, and broke it neatly on a rock. He carefully picked up the pieces of glass and deposited them in the ghee can that served as a refuse bin; then he returned and knelt before the disciple Ananta. "Give me initiation," he requested. "I shall try to be worthy of it."

That evening he joined the villagers as they settled around Thakur

to seek guidance for their problems. During one of the silences, which were common to these evenings as the people stopped to ponder the words of their Guru, the poet's voice, hauntingly tender, arose in song.

"Oh, friend beloved, knower of my true desire,
Dweller in the secret regions of my heart.
See how my emptiness is filled with blossoms.
Palpitating every joyous hue,
Breathing a fragrance that sweetens my tears,
Soothing with a lullaby of knowing you,
Pulsing with desire to serve life . . . to serve you."

This was the first of many songs of devotion that poured from Hem's heart to find their merited place in the growing literature of the Satsang movement.

24

THE once dreary and backward village of Himaitpur had become a thriving community as laboratories, workshops, industries, homes, and schools replaced the jungle, and as dirt and disease gave way to dedication and purpose.

When the high school had been successfully functioning for several years, Monmohini, who had long cherished plans for a university to preserve forever the teachings of her son, now felt that the time had come when this dream might be realized.

The rapid expansion of the community had made great inroads on the available land. The only cleared area, large enough for such a project as the university, belonged to an absentee owner, Ganesh Dalal, who wintered on an estate near Pabna. Monmohini approached him personally with the intention of buying this property.

Dalal was a smug greedy man who had already extracted exorbitant profits from the Satsangees by selling his land a small parcel at a time when their need was so urgent that they would meet his price. It was clear from the beginning of his talk with Monmohini that he had no intention of giving up such a gold mine. When all the amenities and courtesies had been exchanged and Monmohini asked him bluntly for a price, he calmly gave her a figure that was one hundred times the property's appraised value.

Monmohini was aghast, unable for a while to believe that he could be serious, but further discussion and repeated attempts to bargain proved fruitless. Dalal was determined to let his land go at his own excessive valuation.

Monmohini was outraged. She consulted those Satsangees who were versed in law and had them conduct for her a search of all relevant laws pertaining to such matters.

At length, their efforts yielded a little known ruling whereby, if

the Crown were convinced that the acquisition of certain property was necessary for the public welfare, it could force the owner of such property to sell at a fair and reasonable price. With a group of devotees, who felt as intensely about the university as she herself did, Monmohini instituted the required legal proceedings in order to acquire the desired land.

Dalal was not without influence, however, and he knew how to use money well. The proceedings dragged on and on. Files were delayed and misplaced. Clerks were dilatory and strangely uncommunicative. Satsangees seeking information about the case were shuttled from one office to another and then from one department to another . . . again and again.

But Monmohini refused to concede defeat, and after more than two years, her patient persistence was rewarded by a notice that Mr. A. D. Weston, Director of Industries for Bengal, would visit Himaitpur to investigate the land acquisition complaint.

He arrived promptly, and after visiting the site and observing with interest the varied and busy industries of the ashram, was taken to Monmohini.

She was ready for him. To Weston's surprise, because in his experience Indian women remained quietly in the background, she extended her hand for the Western handshake. With calm assurance, she graciously led him into the room where detailed blueprints for the university were spread out for his inspection. Here he also found carefully prepared lists of the costs to be incurred, together with a summary of the ashram's assets and projected proposals for meeting these costs. There were engineers and architects and teachers on hand to supplement the documentary information and to answer any questions the director might care to ask.

Weston was overwhelmed by the amount of intelligence and co-ordinated effort that had gone into preparing this project . . . and by the enthusiasm with which it was presented.

He left them with a very warm promise that he would strongly recommend that the land be acquired for Satsang.

It was not long before Dalal was informed of Weston's report. In panic, he adopted new devices and resorted to terroristic methods of continuing the struggle.

The homes of two of the Satsangees, who had helped instigate the suit, mysteriously caught fire in the dead of night and burned

to the ground. It was a miracle that no one was personally harmed. Three others, who were also connected with the legal proceedings, were waylaid by masked goondas and severely beaten.

Monmohini's lips grew thin. "Dalal could find no one in Himaitpur or the jungles around here to do this work," she stated grimly. "He has hired thugs who do not know us . . . men from across the river."

Calling her teen-age grandson to her side and swearing him to secrecy, she arranged that they would, by turns, keep an all-night watch from the roof of the two-story house which afforded a view of the riverbank.

On the third night their vigil paid off. The grandson rattled the wooden slats at Monmohini's window excitedly. "Wake up, Grandma! They've come! A whole boatload full . . . and they've got knives and clubs too!"

Monmohini appeared at once, still adjusting her sari.

"I'll go wake the others," the boy cried.

Monmohini grabbed his arm roughly. "You'll do nothing of the sort. If you wake the village there'll be a fight and many will get hurt. You and I can take care of this."

"They'll kill us! They've got great big knives! Honest, I saw them."

"Why do you talk such nonsense!" Monmohini whispered impatiently. "Who would bother to kill an old woman and a little boy? They only want to scare us. And if you go around alarming the whole village, their mission will be taken care of for them. Now, take me to them and just do exactly what I tell you. You'll see. There will be no trouble."

Reluctantly, the boy padded alongside her until they reached the thick grove near the river. Monmohini hunted about until she found two good-sized stones.

"After I've talked to them for a few minutes, you must throw one of these rocks as far as you can in one direction, then count to ten slowly and throw the other one in the opposite direction."

The boy took the stones obediently and the two confederates crept stealthily forward until they were very close to the riverbank. They heard six men heatedly discussing strategy . . . whether a certain house should be burned, or whether they should only break in and give the inmates a sound thrashing.

Monmohini, her white sari floating about her, appeared suddenly in their midst.

"What is it?" a hoarse voice cried in alarm. "Who are you?"

"Put all your knives here," Monmohini pointed dramatically to the ground beside her.

"What is it you want with us?" the voice growled again. "Who sent you here?"

Monmohini did not answer, but stood still as a statue, pointing to the ground. Suddenly there was a disturbance to the east . . . a crackling of underbrush. All heads jerked in that direction. The atmosphere became tense.

"Throw down your knives and you will not be harmed!"

Someone breathed heavily. "It's only an animal moving in the brush. This woman is crazy."

There was another thud and a noisy rustling of underbrush to the west.

"My God, we're ambushed," someone whispered, and unsheathing a kind of machete, he tossed the knife at the woman's feet. Monmohini did not start or speak. There was a general stir and other knives of various types dropped onto the first.

"Is that all?" Monmohini questioned sternly. "Because when I do call out, it will be too late to change your minds . . ."

After some hesitation one more knife was produced. "All right," Monmohini directed, "stand back, and together . . . in a group." As they obeyed meekly, Monmohini placed herself firmly between the men and the knives. Then she called her grandson, who scurried to her side, and bid him place the knives in their boat.

When the child came running back, one of the stunned men began to laugh loudly. "Is that the ambush?" he cried. "Is that skinny boy your only protection?"

"I am my own protection," Monmohini answered with dignity. "Now, I want to talk to you, gentlemen, and it is cold and damp down here. Come to the kitchen and have some warm food while you hear what I have to say to you."

"Is this a trap?" one of the men challenged her threateningly.

"I do not set traps," Monmohini declared virtuously. "If you care to hear what I have to say, it will profit you." She turned, and taking her grandson's hand, led the way through the woods. The puzzled men followed them.

In the kitchen, Monmohini prepared a generous quantity of food and served these wild and uncouth men with every grace and courtesy that she habitually extended to the men of her own family.

Only when they had finished eating and started lighting up their biris, did she begin her lecture.

"Did Dalal explain why he wished you to harass us?"

"We don't ask any questions . . . and nobody says we work for Dalal."

"How shameful!" she scolded. "To burn houses and beat up people and not even know why you're doing it! It is certainly time that you learn. We are trying to build a university here so that anyone who truly desires knowledge can receive it . . . regardless of his station in life. What opportunities are there in India for men like you to earn a better living . . . a higher way of life?"

"There are no opportunities," they agreed bitterly.

"And if you go about helping men like Dalal frustrate all our efforts, what opportunities will there be for your children?"

Monmohini began to talk about the Satsang movement . . . how the people had willingly pooled their energies and resources to build a better environment for themselves and their community so that they might use and develop all the talents with which they were endowed. Dawn was breaking when the men, armed with a large burlap sack of food, returned to their boat. They left with many expressions of gratitude for her hospitality and assurances that they would enlighten the other jungle dwellers across the river as to the true state of things in Satsang . . . and that Monmohini need not worry any further about trouble from their quarter.

Monmohini charged her grandson not to tell Thakur of this incident; and in this he obeyed her. But he did tell a few of his friends . . . the adventure was much too exciting to bottle up altogether. Soon Thakur heard the news and asked Monmohini if the boy's story was true.

"That boy is a devil." She sighed. "The only thing to do was to try and reach their hearts. Thank heaven I seem to have done this."

There were no more forays from across the river, but Monmohini was not destined to resolve her struggle with Dalal. A few months later she fell ill and neither Thakur's prayers nor medicines, nor the specialists brought from Calcutta, were able to help. Day by day the fever-wracked body grew weaker.

On the evening of May 23, 1937, Thakur came from his mother's room and stood disconsolately on the veranda.

"You are able to cure everybody else," a woman devotee said tearfully. "It isn't fair that it should be this way . . ."

"I cure no one," Thakur murmured. "The Supreme Father is always gracious. Let his will be fulfilled through us." He stumbled as he turned from her, walked dazedly across the courtyard to Grandma's old Bel tree, and slumped down with his back resting against its trunk.

For hours the grieving devotees watched him from a distance. He sat as still as a statue, face lifted to the sky, tears running down his cheeks.

About midnight, Ananta gently touched his shoulder. "Ma is calling for you, Thakur."

Thakur arose without speaking and followed Ananta to his mother's side. He sat down on the floor at the head of her bed and laid his cheek close to her own. She placed her hand on his head, the weak fingers gently caressing him. "Anukul, I am happy. You have fulfilled all my hopes." For a long time they remained motionless, then the thin fingers slid from his hair. Monmohini was dead.

For a time it appeared that this tragedy might be greater than the Saint could bear. He walked about the village aimlessly, seeming neither to see nor hear, and spent long hours beside the river or beneath the Bel tree. Disciples and devotees who tried to console him met his eyes and were stabbed with such excruciating agony that they became dumb in his presence.

But the love that had guided his life had not deserted him. Slowly, it pushed the numbness aside and the heart of Satsang throbbed once more.

In Monmohini's room he placed a plaque:

"Mother, my teacher and my guide,
All that I create is yours."

25

THE 1930's were tumultuous years for India. Mahatma Gandhi's non-co-operation program, which had captured the imagination of people all over the world, was firmly founded in the heart of India, and it grew into an ever-expanding mass movement. There were many, however, who felt that this method was too slow, and violence, both independent and organized, constantly flared. Terror and counterterror seemed to be spreading everywhere.

One night in January, 1938, a heavily bearded, yellow-robed monk came to the teashop that stood at the gateway to the Satsang ashram.

"Can you tell me where to find Sree Sree Thakur?" he inquired of Ashu, the shopkeeper.

"Oh, you can find him anywhere, tomorrow morning," Ashu responded. "But you can stay in the guesthouse tonight. It's up the road about a quarter of a mile."

"How do I get permission to stay there?" The monk seemed nervous.

"Oh, there's no permission. The hall lights will be on. So, wherever a door is open and the room vacant, just make yourself comfortable."

The monk purchased a cup of tea but resisted all Ashu's efforts to draw him into conversation.

On his veranda, seventy yards from the guesthouse, Thakur sat quietly smoking his water pipe.

A short, stocky devotee, Bholanath Sircar, sat nearby. This former insurance clerk had embraced the Satsang movement with a passion and a devotion that were rare, even among dedicated followers. His joy in serving Thakur was so obvious that by common consent

the other disciples always left a few minutes earlier, thereby allowing their zealous brother the privilege of being alone with Thakur and of tucking in the mosquito netting when Thakur had retired.

"You have many talents, Bholanath." Thakur puffed thoughtfully on his pipe.

Bholanath became rosy with pleasure.

"But I am afraid that you do not give them all proper exercise. Your faith and integrity could accomplish a great deal for your fellow men. Yet you are a very silent fellow. I believe you should speak more often in your brothers' behalf."

"But what am I to say?" the confused man murmured. "I only feel these things, others put such feelings into beautiful words . . . if I spoke to them, they wouldn't even understand what it is that I truly feel."

"You are wrong." Thakur smiled. "A heart as full as yours will convince, no matter what words you use. Perhaps you should go to Calcutta along with legal councilors and plead our land acquisition cause . . . "

"I have only a high school diploma," Bholanath said. "I am not capable . . . I would fail you . . ."

Suddenly Thakur became taut, and cocked his head to one side as if he were listening to something outside. "Go over to the guesthouse and see if anyone new has come."

Bholanath got to his feet quickly, smiling with the pleasure of being useful. It was not in his nature to be curious as to why Thakur should make such a strange request at this hour of the night. At the guesthouse he found the yellow-robed monk on the veranda, nervously smoking a biri.

"Do you know where I can find Thakur?" the monk called out, even before Bholanath had reached him. "I must speak to him! Immediately!"

There were many such discourteous demands made on Thakur's time by impatient visitors. Whenever it was possible Bholanath tried to protect his Guru from them.

"Yes, yes. Of course you'll be able to talk with him. Everyone can. But it's too late now. You go inside and get some sleep. In the morning you can talk to him." He waited to see how this suggestion would be taken, but the monk turned his face away and refused to reply. Bholanath shrugged and returned to Thakur.

"Who has come?" Thakur asked eagerly.

"Just a traveling monk. I told him to go to bed. That he could see you in the morning."

"Did he say who he was? Where he came from?"

"No, only that he wanted to see you immediately, as they all do. He is very intense. I'm afraid he wants to argue his own ideas about God."

Thakur frowned for a moment. "Go back. If he's still awake, tell him I'll talk to him now."

Bholanath found the monk exactly as he had left him. With the news that Thakur would speak to him this night, he jumped to his feet and followed quickly.

"When did you arrive?" Thakur greeted him warmly, as if he had been awaiting this visit.

The monk was visibly disturbed. He peered at Thakur nervously, but obeying custom, knelt and touched his feet. "I must speak to you"—his eyes shifted meaningfully over to Bholanath—"alone."

Thakur smiled. "Will you leave us, Bholanath? Get some rest. I will need nothing more tonight."

Bholanath's features immediately registered keen disappointment, and although he bowed politely to the monk, his eyes were dark and disapproving.

"Do you know who I am, then?" The voice was agitated.

"You're a Rajput . . . from the warrior clan, aren't you?"

The monk's eyes clouded with fear. "You do know! The authorities have been here, too!"

"But why would the authorities be interested in a holy man?"

The monk eyed Thakur suspiciously, but the Saint's face radiated warmth and interest and was free of guile.

"I am Rama Shankar," he said evenly. "The government has posted a twenty-thousand-rupee reward for my capture . . . dead or alive. That is why I am disguised." He dropped his face into his hands and his voice dragged with weariness. "I have been running and running. There is nowhere left to go . . ."

Thakur nodded impassively. "What have you done?"

"I belonged to a group of patriots . . . pledged to drive the British from India."

There was a silence. "Was that all?"

"Do you think the British need more than that to hang a man? Don't you know the times we live in? Help me! You must help me!"

Thakur waited silently and patiently until Shankar became anxious.

"Look, Thakur, you must know how it is with India. The British aren't going to leave just because we politely ask them to. We will have to force them . . . drive them out! Sure, we break their laws! How else can we operate?"

"How did you operate?"

"We did things . . . robbed when we needed money . . ." There was a long pause as Shankar wrung his hands nervously. "We used dynamite . . ."

"People were killed?" Thakur asked softly.

"Yes, there were British officials on that train!" Shankar's voice rose defensively. "Important ones! We had no choice, I tell you. It was a patriotic mission . . . for India!"

"There must have been others on the train also . . ."

"I can't talk about that any more." Shankar pressed his hands to his forehead. "Anyway, that's all over now. They know all about me. I'm finished. Help me! I swear to you that you can trust me. You're my last chance. I'll do anything . . . anything."

Thakur seemed lost in deep thought.

"I took initiation from your Ritwik, Promotha . . . in Calcutta . . . before coming here. You are my Guru." Shankar blackmailed shamelessly.

Thakur sighed deeply. "Perhaps I can save you, but it will take a great deal of courage and faith on your part."

"I will do anything you say."

Thakur was thoughtful. "You say you took initiation. Do you know and practice the three principles . . . Jadjon, Jawjon, and Istobritty?"

Shankar nodded hastily and his lips parted for reply, but as his eyes met Thakur's, they fell away. "No," he whispered. "I just took initiation on the night I left . . . because someone said you could save me. Promotha knew me as a student. He didn't know about all the other things I—"

"Very well. Begin practicing the principles immediately. Tonight. If there is anything at all you don't understand, go to Kesto-da tomorrow. And mind you practice what you learn carefully with a faithful heart. Now go and rest. Tomorrow I'll tell you what to do next."

Shankar bowed and returned to the guesthouse, his eyes bright with tears of relief and gratitude.

When he appeared the following morning, his yellow robe seemed even dirtier in the sunlight and his hair and beard more unkempt. Thakur asked everyone to leave so that he could speak to the stranger privately. Shankar knelt submissively at his feet.

"Did you meditate?"

"Yes. I meditated most of the night. I have just come from Kesto-da . . . and now I understand why the principles are so important. But I was unable to make a love gift. I have no money . . . nothing."

"You must find at least a flower in the jungle, then, and offer that. All three principles must be strictly adhered to if my efforts are to help you. Are you ready to do what I say?"

Shankar leaned forward and touched his Guru's feet in acquiescence.

"Then go and take a bath. Shave off your beard. Get a haircut, and ask Kesto the councilor to give you money for new clothes."

"But I'll be recognized!" he cried in alarm.

Thakur did not speak, and after a moment, Shankar touched his feet once more. "Forgive me. Be patient, please. It is difficult to learn to obey so quickly." He arose immediately and left to carry out Thakur's orders.

It was afternoon when he next appeared and it would have been difficult indeed to recognize him as the monk. There was a clear-cut impression of strength and courage in his intelligent eyes, square jaw, and broad forehead.

Thakur greeted him. "Have you eaten?"

Shankar nodded.

"Then go directly, and alone, to the police station in Pabna and surrender. Give them a full and detailed confession. Don't change, omit, or ignore anything . . . right up to the present. Do you understand?"

Shankar was dismayed. His tongue seemed to cleave to the roof of his mouth; yet he found himself dumbly nodding his head in assent.

"It is the only way I can help you." Thakur's voice was tender with sympathy. "Whatever happens, practice the principles regularly. Meditate, offer whatever love gift you can find each morning, and miss no opportunity to serve all you meet. Others will feel the Supreme Father through you. And no harm will come to you."

Shankar searched his Guru's face carefully, then turned dazedly, and stumbled down the road.

Ananta approached and his gaze followed Thakur's. "Will he go?" he pondered.

"He will go," Thakur said firmly.

Thakur was right. The political terrorist walked directly from the ashram to the police station, four miles away, and calmly gave himself up.

Central Intelligence received word of the surrender with skepticism, however. Shankar was a dangerous and shrewd terrorist who had eluded every well-laid plan for his capture. It was hardly likely that he would behave as the telephoned report described this young man to be doing. It took several days to confirm his identity. And when that was done, he was taken by a squad of ten armed police, with a deputy superintendent in charge, to the state prison in Patna, Bihar. His confession was filed and preparations were made for a speedy trial and execution.

Meanwhile, Thakur had immediately gathered for discussion of the matter those devotees who had legal experience. These men, on hearing the details, shook their heads. Their authoritatively expressed opinion was that hope for mercy was ridiculously unrealistic, and owing to the seriousness of the charges, any interference on their part would surely invoke an unpleasant aftermath. Those who tried to help such a proven enemy of the Crown would have plainclothes policemen and intelligence people descending on them, as well as on the ashram, like vultures.

When all comments had subsided, Thakur's eyes dwelt on the devoted Bholanath, who, not being an integral part of this legal gathering, sat a little aside . . . ever alert to serve in case there was something needed.

"Bholanath, you can get Rama Shankar out of jail."

"Me? Me?" cried the startled man. "How could I do that? Why, I wet my pants if a policeman even looks at me."

"Still I say you can do it. The lawyers are right. It is too late for legal argument, but it is never too late for a pure heart. The Supreme Father will guide and aid you, for Shankar is truly repentant."

It was too much for Bholanath. Silently, he left the distinguished group, and for the first night in many months he was not on hand to arrange Thakur's mosquito netting when he retired.

When he appeared in the morning his face was very pale, yet

there was about him an air of serenity. "Do you still say that I can do this thing, Thakur?"

The Saint's voice soared with conviction. "I say you can do it a thousand times! Only begin and you shall see how it is. Write to Rama Shankar that you are working in his behalf and then proceed to Bihar. The seed of the Supreme Father is within you and I shall be at your side constantly . . . as close as your heartbeat. You will succeed."

Bholanath's repeated onslaughts against British officialdom ultimately brought him to the exalted office of Mr. Bruce, Deputy Inspector General of the Criminal Investigation Department of the province of Bihar.

Using Christian and Hindu examples, he pleaded his mission of salvation with such fervent conviction that the officer was puzzled. Bruce was a self-made man. He had reached this important position through intelligence and efficiency. He was not a man to be fooled. He knew how to handle situations and judge people.

"But what is your interest?" he asked. "You are a Bengalee, and Rama Shankar is a Bihari. You are a good and religious man, while Rama Shankar is a criminal. What can such a man be to you?"

"Are we not all sons of the Supreme Father?" Bholanath answered with candid innocence. "He is something to me because he is something to my Thakur. Shankar is our younger brother. The temper of the times has led him onto evil paths, which you must agree are everywhere present. But Shankar has changed. He is enlightened. His only wish is to atone for his past by serving the highest ideal in the future." With refreshing sincerity Bholanath went on to enumerate many homely little incidents that gave him absolute faith in the British sense of justice and mercy.

Bruce was deeply impressed and promised Bholanath to investigate the case. He visited the prison and spoke to the guards and officials who had personal contact with Rama Shankar. Their reports were propitious. Shankar's humility, the serene yet concerned manner in which he sought to serve everyone, guards and fellow prisoners alike, had made a very favorable impression. Other prisoners seemed drawn to him like a magnet, and they became more tractable, losing their surly hostility under his influence. Bholanath seemed to be right. This prisoner, whom everyone praised, in no way

resembled the terrorist of record. Shankar had changed . . . radically . . . into a new man.

Each afternoon Bholanath appeared in the outer offices of the CID. He was repeatedly told that Mr. Bruce could not see him without an appointment, and that his calendar had no openings in the near future. Yet the persistent devotee sat quietly and unobtrusively on a bench in the outer office throughout each afternoon, waiting on the inspector's pleasure.

At length he was called into the inner sanctum. Bruce arose and seated his guest with every courtesy. "I do believe you, Mr. Sircar. I have conducted an investigation into Shankar's case and made a very favorable report of my findings. If it were up to me alone, I would be strongly inclined to mercy. Unfortunately, I know that my colleagues would never agree to such a flagrant violation of the penal code."

"Sir, let me talk to your colleagues." Bholanath's voice trembled with urgency. "I must convince them!"

Bruce smiled sadly. "You won't find them as sympathetic and open-minded as I am . . ."

"Only let me speak to them! Just once!"

"All right," Bruce agreed, fingering the report thoughtfully. "Come to the Criminal Investigation Club tomorrow evening at seven-thirty."

Clad in dhoti, collarless shirt, and sandals, Bholanath was at first refused admittance to the CID Club. After insisting that he did have an appointment with Mr. Bruce, however, and after the appointment had been confirmed, an attendant disdainfully conducted him through the building until they reached a small, heavily carpeted room where half a dozen men sat around in easy chairs conversing and drinking.

Bruce came forward immediately, and taking Bholanath's arm companionably, presented him to each man in the room. Only one of the assembled men was an Indian, introduced as a criminal psychologist; and Bholanath was surprised to find that he seemed even less inclined than the Englishmen to be friendly.

"We are all ready to hear you," Bruce said as the formalities ended, and with no more ceremony seated himself, leaving Bholanath on his own.

For a moment Bholanath felt he must be drowning. "I come to plead for Rama Shankar . . ." He was amazed that the voice he

heard was his own, for he seemed to be completely detached from it. "At this moment you are all greater criminals than he is!"

"Do you realize where you are?" the Indian psychologist hissed.

"Yes, I know where I am. And I shall prove my accusation . . . inch by inch." Beginning with the man nearest him, he inquired of each in turn as to his length of service with the police. The replies varied . . . eight, twelve, six, fifteen, and two years of service.

"And over all these years," the disembodied voice continued, "your brains have been absorbed in murders, robberies, rapes, kidnapings, spyings, and so on . . . They are filled with the despicable deeds of thousands of criminals." He turned to the Indian psychologist. "Do you know what effect all this has had upon your mind?"

The Indian glared at him in disapproving silence.

"No, I see that you do not. But any twelve-year-old boy in Tapovan School knows the answer. Every single thing you see, feel, hear, and think makes an indelible impression on your brain." His voice dropped to an easy tone of intimacy. "Before I found Sree Sree Thakur, I worked as an insurance agent. One day while I was making a deposit in the bank, I noticed a girl beside me whose low-cut dress displayed too much of her breasts. I only glanced at her and then looked away in embarrassment. But do you know the effect that glance had on me? Six months later I had a nocturnal emission while dreaming that this same girl was in my arms." He drew a long, deep breath. "Now all of you have been dealing with ugly matters day after day, month after month, for all of these years; and these criminal acts of others are therefore imprinted on your brain. How could it be otherwise? But Rama Shankar has confessed, with repentance, to his spiritual guide, every deed, thought, and evil word. His mind and soul are washed clean! His heart is emptied of all those things."

He backed away, breathing heavily, and swinging his eyes from face to face like a tiger at bay. "I don't ask you to release him outright, sirs. But when he is trying to reform himself so ardently, prison cannot help him and he cannot help you. Thakur has reformed many men of his background. Such cases are a matter of record in the official files of Bengal . . . and Rama Shankar did surrender voluntarily . . . and Mr. Bruce's report must convince you that he is a changed man. Sirs, in the interest of Christian mercy . . . in the interest of justice—British justice—I plead that you place Shankar in the hands of his spiritual guide!"

He broke off helplessly and stared at the faces before him. They were noncommittal. A portly Englishman shook his head ever so slightly. "I must say that this is a most novel appeal . . . But the miraculous changes you claim this Thakur can bring about are a bit farfetched . . ."

"Only inquire, sir. Consult your own official records. You will find that everything I have told you is true. India needs men of courage and high ideals. This action would be to your interest also. Although Shankar used his best qualities for wrong causes . . . still, you must see that he has them. And now that he is a changed man he will act constructively. Can't you see what a valuable person he could be? If you would remand him to us, many people would realize that you are not vindictive; and they would bless you and work for you. Only let it be tried for a short time. This is my prayer."

Bholanath pressed his palms together and bowed his head . . . waiting through a long silence for their reply.

"Have you finished your appeal?" Bruce asked kindly.

"Yes, sir, that is all I have to say."

"Then perhaps you would not mind waiting outside while we discuss what action might be possible under the law."

Bholanath left the room, closing the door softly behind him. His body was drenched with perspiration and his legs trembled. "Thakur," he prayed earnestly, "you have carried me to such heights that I am dizzy with wonder. But now I can do no more. Leave me. Go to them with all your strength. Enter their minds and hearts, touch their tongues with your presence so that they will speak with mercy."

It was nearly an hour later, and Bholanath's prayers were still continuing, when a weary-looking Mr. Bruce opened the door and beckoned him inside.

"My colleagues have agreed that we try this experiment for a short time," Bruce announced crisply. "Arrangements will be made to deliver Rama Shankar to Satsang Ashram in Himaitpur. He will be confined to the area of the ashram and will report each Monday, in your company, to the authorities at Pabna. Six weeks after his return, a review of the case will be made to determine future action."

"Oh, thank you, sir!" Bholanath's face was wreathed in smiles. "I shall pray every day for your long life and prosperity in this material world! The blessings of Thakur will be with you all!"

"Now mind," Bruce cautioned, "you will be held responsible for Shankar's presence. I must warn you that if he escapes, the full weight of the law will fall on you."

"I accept gladly. Have no fears on this matter. Thakur would not have sent me to plead for him unless Shankar were truly repentant."

Bruce accompanied him to the door. "I wish I could inspire my men to work for me as devotedly and eloquently as you work for your Thakur." He smiled.

"Let them love you, sir. That's the most powerful force there is. No money can buy it from you, no obstacles can block its course." The dark eyes flashed and a smile played over the thick lips. "Not even the penal code!"

When Bholanath returned to Satsang, Thakur embraced and kissed him enthusiastically. "You see how it is, Bholanath?" He gazed deeply into the eyes of his loyal devotee. "What talents you have!"

Three weeks later a thinner, joyous Shankar was delivered into Satsang's custody. After four successive extensions of his parole, the authorities were convinced that he had no further need of supervision and he was unconditionally released.

Under Thakur's guidance he found a consuming interest and exceptional aptitude for labor-management problems and became an active and highly regarded consultant on these matters.

In 1951, the International Labor Organization meeting in London was surprised and impressed by this strangely poetical but powerful speech from delegate Rama Shankar of India:

"Where capitalists are not laborious to serve the laborers to make them efficient, Mammon turns money into mud with sighful glance. Where labor deceives the capitalists and is not profitable to them, but negligently usurps the maintenance that makes them fit in life . . . then Satan with embezzling laughter presents them with a black necklace and a steel rope to pull them toward vanity."

26

TWENTY years after Satsang came into being it had a permanent population of eight thousand residents. Five hundred Ritwiks were daily preaching Thakur's message of Being and Becoming throughout Bengal. The records in the Philanthropy Office listed more than a quarter million names of those who had taken initiation.

Satsang maintained its own post office, for the incoming mail from Thakur's vast following averaged several hundred pieces a day. A staff of five secretaries were kept busy reading these letters, checking the answers with Thakur, and sending his replies.

Devotees sought advice concerning the proper education of their children, a change of job, business investments, illnesses both chronic and acute, and a host of other personal problems and needs. All queries received careful attention and were promptly answered.

Nine pharmacists worked ceaselessly in the large whitewashed dispensary, compounding the medicines that Thakur ordered to be sent to his ailing disciples.

One afternoon in April, 1940, Thakur followed, in an absent-minded manner, the talk around him which concerned the war in Europe. Suddenly he called Prafulla, head of the secretarial staff, and instructed him to send a message to all initiates in Burma that they come to India as soon as possible.

Prafulla wrote the brief notes and then waited, pencil poised, for some time until he noticed that Thakur had apparently forgotten the subject.

"Was there something else to tell the Burmese devotees?" he inquired politely.

"No. No. That is all. Only waste no time. Send it at once."

The puzzled Prafulla began the work of addressing hundreds of postcards inscribed with Thakur's strange and unexplained message.

The postcards caused consternation among the Burmese initiates. Meetings were called hastily and nightlong conferences were held in every family. The vast majority had implicit faith in Thakur; they accepted the warning and obeyed without question. Within two months the devotees in Burma had dwindled to a few hundred. These sent long and detailed letters to Satsang of the hardships involved and requested further information.

The explanation, when it arrived, was as cryptic as the original message had been. "Thakur said what he understands. Now, he says, 'You do what you think is best.' "

P. R. Bannerjee was one of the men who received the second message. He was a prominent lawyer in the High Court and had, over many years, built up a lucrative legal practice. He lived comfortably, with his wife and four children, in a twelve-room home in Pegu. He had carefully avoided political controversy and had many Burmese friends of all persuasions. Thakur's warning, he reasoned, must surely be proper for initiates whose lives were quite different from his own . . . but certainly he, Bannerjee, had nothing to fear from the Burmese.

He was devoted to Thakur, since eight years earlier the Saint's medicine had cured his daughter of nephritis . . . after the foremost physicians of Rangoon had given up hope. A man who could perform miracles of this nature was not likely to make mistakes . . . Yet, the second message had said, "You do what you think is best." As a precautionary measure, Bannerjee sold some property and placed the ready cash in the bank where it would be available . . . just in case.

When the Satsang rice crop, which the community cultivated, was ready for harvest that fall, Thakur suggested that no contracts of sale were to be negotiated. All rice must be stored for ashram use. He also advised those devotees in the community and throughout India who held private plots of rice land, not to sell, but to store their new crop.

A wave of controversy followed this order. The European war had skyrocketed the price of rice. Already the speculators were offering the peasants two and three times its former value.

Many of his followers who owned private land could not resist sharing in their neighbors' prosperity. Even devoted Satsangees felt that a golden opportunity was slipping through their fingers and

pressured Thakur to let them consider selling at least part of their abundant crop. "Just see," they pointed out. "We would be able to buy Dalal's land at his own price, since it is clear that nothing will ever come out of the legal proceedings. Then Ma's dream of a university will be realized." But Thakur was firm. Big granaries, looking like giant beehives, continued to spring up in Satsang.

The visions of untold wealth for the landlords and peasants of Bengal were short lived. By November of the following year, rice was selling at one hundred rupees a maund (approximately eighty-one pounds), and the price was rising daily. The new wealth disappeared faster than it came when they tried to buy food to keep their families alive. By January, 1942, the Bengalees were selling furniture, jewelry, and even their children in order to eat.

Faulty distribution and the inflated needs of war had brought famine to Bengal. Thousands of village people migrated to Calcutta in the vain hope of finding food. Leaves were eaten along the way and many trees were stripped bare of bark. In the city men fought with dogs, cats, and rats for the miserable contents of garbage cans. Each morning, the carts of the Calcutta Corporation went about the grim business of gathering dead bodies from streets and doorways.

To the Satsang community in Himaitpur, inhabitants from ten miles' distance came to join the daily rice line. The storerooms, which had seemed so extravagantly large a few months ago, were emptied one by one. Rationing was strict and just. But the supplies did hold out until the next crop was ready for harvest; and no death from starvation was reported in that area.

"Fight death to death . . ." "Live and help live . . ." "Fulfill and be fulfilled . . ." These and similar slogans had been shouted at Satsang meetings for many years, but never with such strength of purpose, conviction, and understanding as during the horrible famine years.

On January 6, 1942, P. R. Bannerjee slept restlessly. Japan had rapidly overrun Saigon and Singapore. There were rumors, stoutly denied by the uneasy authorities but pervasive none the less, that Burma was in danger.

"Get out! Get out, Bannerjee!" a voice shouted in his ear.

He sat up in bed, wide awake, and turned on the light. His wife was sleeping soundly beside him. The house was quiet. He crossed to the open window and peered into the courtyard. All was calm.

Only the soft night rustlings . . . He had been dreaming! He returned to bed and was about to pull the sheet over him when the cry came again. "Get out of here! Get out immediately!"

Bannerjee began to tremble. He had never met Thakur, but at this moment he knew, beyond any shadow of doubt, that the voice in his ear was that of his spiritual Guru.

Roughly, he shook his wife awake. "Get up! Quickly! Call the servants, and run to the orchard!"

"What is it?" his wife cried distractedly. "Are we on fire?"

"Do what I say!" he ordered sharply. "And hurry!" He rushed from the room to the children's quarters, tumbling the older ones to their feet and bidding them to run to the orchard. He picked the sleeping four-year-old Kamala up in his arms, and with the excited children at his heels, ran from the house.

"Follow me!" he cried to his wife and the servants who were huddled anxiously on the veranda. "Hurry! Hurry! There is no time!" The group stumbled in haste through the considerable area of the orchard, the children crying out from time to time as their tender bare feet met with sticks and stones. At the far side of the orchard he brought the bewildered company to a halt. "This will do," he decided, sinking down on the ground and soothing the whimpering Kamala.

"What is it?" His wife panted. "What is happening?"

"I don't know." Bannerjee mopped his sweating face on his daughter's nightshirt. "Thakur spoke to me."

"In a dream? You had a dream?"

"It wasn't a dream!" Bannerjee cried impatiently. "I tell you I was wide awake! He told me to get out . . . get out immediately."

The frightened children complained of cold and their mother soothed and reassured them.

"He meant get out of Burma," she reasoned in a matter-of-fact voice. "And he meant tomorrow . . . or soon, perhaps . . . He didn't mean for you to jump up that very minute and get the whole house out of bed . . ."

"I'll go for some blankets," twelve-year-old Soilen offered, getting to his feet.

Bannerjee grabbed his son's arm roughly. "You'll stay right where you are!" he commanded.

A few moments later the still night was shaken with the thunderous roar of airplanes and shortly afterward the ground beneath

them shuddered, over and over again, as explosions occurred.

They watched with fascinated horror the weird designs streaking across the sky as the antiaircraft guns answered the attack. And suddenly . . . so unbelievable that they saw but could not understand . . . an incendiary bomb scored a direct hit on their house and the flames shot into the sky.

The attack was brief and bitter. Before morning only the sirens of fire engines and ambulances were to be heard, along with the rumblings of tanks and trucks as Burma prepared to defend herself.

Nothing was to be salvaged from the house. The servants were sent off in search of clothing and returned shortly with ill-fitting but clean garments and a blanket for Kamala. Bannerjee led his family through the chaotic streets of Kamayut until they reached the docks, where the lines of weeping and cursing refugees already stretched for blocks. Instructing his wife and Soilen to keep the family together and hold their place in line, he proceeded to the bank to withdraw all that was left of their family fortune.

When he returned his face was bleak, his manner agitated. The banks were not open. There was little hope that they would ever open. The money was most probably being shipped away for safekeeping.

Fortunately, Bannerjee's wife wore the traditional ornaments . . . bangles, gold coins, and gems, the family safeguard against such crises. The precious bracelets were now to serve an important vital purpose. Yet, neither the bracelets nor Bannerjee's eloquence was able to get them passage. Every boat in the harbor was loaded to capacity, and under the circumstances, no one could predict when or if another ship would arrive.

"We should have gone when the Ghose family did," Soilen complained sullenly. "They took everything . . . even the children's bicycles!"

"Hush!" Bannerjee's face was stern. "Thakur saved us last night and he will see us safely out of Burma. Be grateful! It's good to be alive."

The family managed to crowd onto a train for Merktila. When they arrived they encountered several dozen Satsangees who, in one form or another, asleep or awake, had received telepathic messages. The entire company proceeded to Mandalay where their numbers were increased with many more in the same plight.

Pooling their money, they purchased oxen and carts, as much food

as they could carry, and joined the thousands of other refugees on the long route to the Chindwin River.

Daily, the weary columns were strafed and the casualties were many. Yet, the Satsangees seemed truly to lead a charmed life, for not one was killed as stories of providential coincidence accumulated.

The refugees had stopped to rest, and Soilen, with a group of boys, had been sent to wait beneath a bridge which seemed to be a safe shelter. As he was dropping off to sleep, he saw a grove of mango trees about fifty yards away and the fruit, although it was not the season, was rosy and ripe. He pointed this miracle out to the other boys and together they rushed toward the trees. The fruit was hard and green . . . the color a trick of reflected sunlight . . . but before they could return, a plane passed over and a bomb reduced their recent shelter to rubble.

The refugees suffered constantly from dysentery and beriberi; and almost daily a grieving family would drop out of line in order to bury their dead beside the road. Yet, although Thakur's followers fell ill in large numbers, no grave of theirs marked that long, arduous, heartbreaking trail.

In May, 1942, they crossed the Chindwin River and arrived safely in Imphal. Three weeks later a bedraggled, emaciated, joyous P. R. Bannerjee led one hundred and forty-one families into Pabna.

27

AGITATION for Independence intensified during the war years, as did the British resistance. Leaders of the Indian National Congress, for one reason or another, languished in jails, and without their inspired leadership fanatic and irresponsible elements flourished. When in 1945 an act of amnesty set them free, they found that the flames of religious hatred had been fanned to uncontrollable heights.

Many responsible leaders charged that the British Government maintained paid agitators to keep these fires burning, and in their efforts to bring the situation back to normal, they did expose a few of this ilk. But the groups of extremists on both sides were far too numerous to be laid to any one cause. The situation continued to worsen. Ugly rumors began to spread that the Muslim League in Calcutta had proclaimed August 16, 1946, as Direct Action Day . . . to overpower the Hindus and claim India as a Moslem country.

Dr. Subodh Chakraborty, a Hindu follower of Thakur, lived above his small dispensary on Mirzapur Street in Calcutta, an area largely inhabited by Moslems. On the morning of August 16, three Satsangees came to urge the doctor to accompany them to the relative safety of the Hindu area. Subodh hesitated to do so. He had practiced here for many years, and because he knew the people so well, he could not believe that they were capable of senseless violence. As he was trying to decide, the communal riots began.

Within an hour there was a banging on the door of the dispensary and peering cautiously out of the upstairs window, Subodh saw a group of Moslems dressed in lungis (men's sarongs). They were supporting several wounded men.

Quickly handing white aprons to his three visitors, the doctor ran downstairs and opened the door. The first batch of wounded rioters

was shortly followed by others. The three men worked efficiently, laying the bleeding men on floor mats and washing the wounds in preparation for treatment by Subodh. The early arrivals were anxious that their compatriots receive medical care and did not question the three helping strangers.

About noon, however, thugs marched into the dispensary and eyed the operations suspiciously. "Who are they?" Subodh was challenged.

"Who do you mean?" The doctor did not look up from the six-inch gash he was sewing up on the leg of a rioter.

"The men working with you." The leader of the group pointed a nasty-looking, bloodstained knife.

"They're my assistants," Subodh commented casually. "Without them I couldn't manage. Please step back. I can't see to sew up this wound."

The rough men hung around for some time, glowering at Subodh and his helpers, who worked steadily, dispatching the bandaged men who were able to walk and receiving the newcomers with quiet efficiency. They seemed unaware of the Moslems, and at length the thugs must have decided that these Hindus were necessary, at least for the time being, for they went on their way to find new victims.

The men labored silently, a constant prayer to Thakur running through their minds. Around midnight there was a lull. The last casualty had been carried away by friends and for the moment the four Hindus were alone. Hastily, they disguised themselves as Moslem beggars and made their way cautiously across Amherst Street and through alleys until they reached the Hindu area of Calcutta.

Throughout that horror-ridden day it had seemed that, to a Moslem, the only good Hindu was a dead one. Now, on reaching the other side, it was even more horrifying to learn that the reverse scene had been enacted. Moslems in this area, except for four families whom the followers of Thakur had sheltered, had been ruthlessly and systematically slaughtered.

A week later, when the military had restored some semblance of law and order, it was learned that about one hundred and twenty-five thousand persons had lost their lives in this senseless fight.

The fuse which coiled around India like a many-headed serpent was ignited. Direct action led to reaction, and then to reprisals to

that reaction. The disturbances spread from cities to villages to jungles as communities separated from one another along religious lines.

The area around Pabna was predominantly Mohammedan, and as isolated incidents heightened the tension, many Moslem devotees carried messages of warning to Thakur. "Our influence is waning. Men from Calcutta are constantly passing through our villages, exciting our people with rumors and distorted accounts of the riots," they complained. "We are doing what we can, but we are afraid for you. Passions make reason impossible."

Despite a violent thunder shower the night before, the morning of September 10, 1946, dawned bright and clear. As was the custom, the leaders of the Satsang community had gathered around Thakur's bedstead to join him in sunrise meditation. When he relaxed, and his doctor disciple, Piari, had drawn the mosquito netting aside, Sarat Haldar, supervisor of Tapovan School, approached Thakur. After prostrating himself, he began, "Thakur, many of the older students come from outside and we find many problems arising because they lack the background of the ashram children. We have been wondering if it would be possible for you to talk to them so that they might understand the Satsang principles of motivation and study as quickly as possible . . ."

He broke off, for Thakur had risen and did not appear to have heard him. In a manner of deep, almost trancelike preoccupation, the Saint made his way through the surprised gathering and proceeded down the road. The devotees arose quickly to follow, but there was a strangeness in his gait that kept them at a distance.

In a seemingly aimless rambling, Thakur strolled through the entire community, stopping often to gaze for a long time at one achievement after another . . . the school, the pharmaceutical laboratory, the printing press, the hospital. Occasionally, his hand reached out to caress a wall, a machine, or a piece of planed wood as if it were a small child.

The walk brought him at length to the gate of his grandmother's house, now occupied by his eldest son and family. The devotees noticed that he hesitated for several minutes, and when his hand did reach for the latch, there was a dragging reluctance in the movement.

On the lawn inside the compound his twelve-year-old grandson,

Asoke, knelt with his inseparable friend, Saidu, their young, fresh faces close together as they pored over a book.

Thakur's eyes glistened with sudden tears as they dwelt on the boys . . . Hindu and Moslem, innocent of the worldly conflict that might tear them apart and make them mortal enemies. How was it possible for this dark, blighting shadow of ignorance, this monstrosity without substance, to shroud the bright, life-loving souls of men?

"What are you studying?" he asked.

At the sound of his voice the boys jumped to their feet.

"Anatomy." Asoke caught his grandfather's hand and pressed it to his cheek. "We're going to be doctors just like you."

"Yes," Saidu said, dropping his arms across Asoke's shoulder. "When we grow up we will be working in your hospital and everybody will be cured."

Thakur fondled their heads for a moment before proceeding through the house to the courtyard.

Excruciating agony of heart distorted his vision. Grandma's Bel tree, the protection of all that was hers, forever and ever, lay twisted in ruin, the charred branches strewn in helpless confusion before the prayer-room door.

"It was struck by lightning last night." His daughter-in-law approached softly.

"So it has come . . ." Thakur murmured.

"Perhaps it will grow again." The young woman sought to comfort him. "We have sent for the gardener."

Thakur left the veranda and made his way to Monmohini's room. He looked back and found Piari following him. "Find Sushil Bose," he instructed. "Bring him here. I need to see him immediately."

When Sushil Chandra Bose, vice-president of Satsang, arrived, the message was very brief. "We are no longer safe. Go to Deoghar immediately and rent the largest building that is available. Say nothing of this to anyone."

Deoghar! The name of the town set Bose's nerves tingling. He hurried to the ashram library where all the teachings of Thakur were compiled in bulky volumes. Finding the earliest of these works, *Punya Puthi,* which held the sketchy recordings of the song-and-dance days, Bose dropped to the floor and began a hasty search. Yes. There it was. "We will go to Deoghar" repeated several times

during trance at the estate of Prometha . . . and again several pages later . . . "Make all haste to Deoghar."

Bose tucked the volume under his arm and went to make arrangements for the journey.

28

THROUGHOUT the long trip, Sushil Bose studied all of Thakur's sayings. There were twelve incidents when some reference to Deoghar had been made . . . always during the trance state. On two occasions Thakur had been questioned on this matter when the trance ended. He replied that he had never been to Deoghar nor did he know what could have been meant by the messages.

Deoghar! Sushil's mind began a search for all that he had ever learned or heard about this city. It was situated in the Santhal Parganas district of Bihar state, lying on the Chota Nagpur Plateau hundreds of feet above the rich Gangetic plain. An ancient temple city, its name meaning "The Home of God," Deoghar was a site of pilgrimage for orthodox Hindus. Its history extended back to the prehistoric times of Ram Chandra.

High up in the surrounding hills the original inhabitants, called Paharis, still lived in almost primitive nakedness. They had been driven to the hills by the more puissant Santhalis, who in their turn had been crowded into the less habitable regions by the conquering Aryans many generations earlier. The three groups which comprised the district of Santhal Parganas were said to live in a state of isolated amnesty with one another.

At Calcutta it was necessary to change to a different line for the two-hundred-mile trip west to Deoghar, and on this last leg of Sushil's journey, the excitement he had felt earlier progressively gave way to anxiety. The land became more hilly and eroded, the villages more poverty ridden. The city itself, when finally reached, did little to relieve his concern. It was overcrowded, as were all Indian cities, and although some streets bustled with life and commerce, the mood was predominantly one of apathy and hope-

lessness. With a heavy heart he started his search for Thakur's accommodations.

On the outskirts of the city, in the southeast corner, he found a large rambling two-storied structure. The agent told him it was one hundred years old, and that its original owner was said to have been a queen of Nepal who maintained this estate to accommodate her entourage when she came to worship at the Temple of Shiva in Deoghar.

The estate was now called Boral Bungalow. Its present owner, a wealthy Bengali, took little interest in it, for the ravages of neglect and disuse were everywhere evident. The walls were cracked, the wooden window frames broken, and the surrounding five acres overgrown with weeds and wild grass on which goats and cows from neighboring poverty-ridden villages grazed. But it was, without doubt, the largest vacant building in the area and Sushil rented it at once.

On September 15, Thakur received word from Sushil that Boral Bungalow had been leased. He immediately called a meeting of the ashram leadership and asked them to prepare for evacuation.

"But . . . we have more than five million rupees invested here and twenty-six years of labor!" Sudhir Das, who operated the powerhouse, voiced the general consternation. "Surely, when Independence comes, times will be different. Let some of us remain, no matter what the risk, to guard what we have so that it will still be here when these terrible days are over. If we don't, the Moslems will destroy everything in their irrational passion."

There were many similar pleas, and after much discussion and meditation, it was decided that enough men might remain to operate the community kitchen, the hospital, powerhouse, post office, and printing office. They would be cautious of the temper around them and ready to escape at the first sign of danger. The high school would also continue operating for such boys as chose to stay with their fathers and for the benefit of the Moslem students. Except for this skeleton crew, the Hindu Satsangees, including all women and small children, would proceed to Deoghar.

Word was carried quickly from house to house. Women were instructed to prepare themselves and their children for the journey. They were given strict orders to keep their bedding and clothing bundles small, for there would be very little room for baggage.

Many women were delegated to begin cooking at once enough food to feed this large company on the way.

Taluqdar was dispatched to Pabna to make discreet arrangements to charter six buses to be at the ashram at five o'clock the following morning.

Thirty-five men and older boys were organized to supervise all activities, to keep Thakur informed of progress at every stage, and to see that the entire community was advised of all Thakur's desires and orders.

Long before sunrise the next morning, the men and high school boys who were to remain at Satsang were gathered around Thakur to go over last-minute instructions. They asked him how to conduct themselves in this tense situation. And Thakur gave each, in turn, a special message and blessing for his activity and safety.

While the mist still hung over the river, the first contingent of mothers, sleepy children, baskets of food, and small rolls of bedding were bundled into the buses and driven to the railway station. Quickly and quietly the buses made trip after trip, until all the people were assembled safely at the station. There were many tears among the devotees that morning and Thakur seemed to be everywhere at once . . . comforting and cajoling, directing and organizing. His serene authority kept the vast migration moving smoothly and calmly. When the eleven-thirty Amnura passenger train arrived, the miracle of getting everyone aboard was accomplished. Most of them had to remain standing and packed in the aisles until they reached Naihati Junction at six-thirty that evening.

While they disembarked Thakur supervised the distribution of food, but there was little time to eat or rest, for at seven-thirty they were shepherded onto a shuttle train to Bandel and another transfer.

On September 17, Thakur led his travel-weary devotees through the rusted, wrought-iron gates that guarded the estate of Boral Bungalow.

Although Thakur was now fifty-eight years old, he attacked the problem of settling his exhausted and downcast followers with such confidence and enthusiasm that all were infused with new hope and energy. Within twenty-four hours, the community kitchen was organized and in operation. Children and adults were busily clearing the property, and making arrangements for shelter under the trees at

night. In a week the small guardhouse at the gate was scrubbed, whitewashed, and hung with the first lovingly hand-painted sign to appear . . . SATSANG DISPENSARY.

As the days went by, other vacant houses on Rohini Road—which connected Boral Bungalow with the more populous outskirts of Deoghar—were rented and filled with families. Students scoured the hills for plants, herbs, and mosses which the doctors and scientists analyzed for possible use.

Progress was slow, however, for the religious tension and riots continued to increase and each day brought its quota of destitute refugees seeking a sanctuary. Some of these were followers of Thakur . . . most of them had only heard that here they would not be turned away. People slept in the open, and rice pots were kept boiling constantly. All available funds were needed to keep them filled.

The devotees found what work they could. Teachers, scientists, and doctors—together with their laboring brothers—pulled rickshas, sold peanuts, and did odd jobs around the city. Disciples begged from door to door and shop to shop in order to provide food for the ever-growing legion of hungry refugees.

In October, 1946, rioting broke out in Noakhali, a district one hundred and twenty miles south of Himaitpur, and the Hindu community found itself completely cordoned off by Moslems. Nolini Mitra, a resident and devotee of Thakur, managed to slip out through the rice fields one night and was hidden in a friendly Moslem's house. Disguised as a Mohammedan peasant, he ultimately reached the predominantly Hindu town of Chaumohini where rescue operations for the destitute Hindus were quickly initiated and successfully carried out. By the end of October, he arrived at Boral Bungalow, dirty, unshaven, and accompanied by nearly two thousand thankful and hungry fellow villagers.

Thakur had also sent an urgent message to Himaitpur that the students were not to remain any longer and that it would be prudent for all Hindus to quit the area. The students obeyed the message promptly. All but a few of Thakur's followers, as well as large numbers from the surrounding areas, also took his advice, thus increasing the burgeoning population centered on Boral Bungalow.

When Independence was declared on August 15, 1947, dividing the country into Pakistan and India, only a few hundred Hindus

remained in the Himaitpur area. For most, that day was one of ecstatic rejoicing. But for the people on the wrong sides of the partition, it was one of desolate grief. All that they possessed . . . the rice fields, orchards, businesses, and homes . . . which had spelled family security for many generations . . . was now lost forever. Himaitpur—including the Satsang Ashram—was declared a part of Pakistan, while Deoghar was in India. A company of Pakistani soldiers arrived at Satsang to take over all facilities and equipment . . . and at least two Satsangees. Sudhir Das was immediately locked up in the powerhouse and kept under constant guard—not because he was dangerous, but because there was no one else who knew how to keep the electric power going, and they could take no chance of his getting away.

Amullya Ghosh, manager of the printing press, was given the heartbreaking task, under close watch, of supervising the dismantling and packing of the press for shipment to Dacca, the capital of East Pakistan. When this unhappy work was completed, Ghosh, together with a band of reluctant recruits who had been dismantling other ashram equipment, were escorted to the nearest railroad station and sent to Deoghar.

Sudhir Das, still locked in the powerhouse, placed his life and trust in Thakur. He practiced meditation religiously, and kept himself alert and in readiness to seize any opportunity of escape. Nearly two months passed before he finally caught both his guards asleep at one time. He climbed out the window and made his way with stealthy haste through the sleeping village to the river. He swam across it, and for several days walked by night and hid himself in the jungles in the daytime. Exercising extreme caution for several more days, he eventually eased himself out of enemy territory and begged his way to Deoghar.

He lost thirty pounds on the journey and arrived there as a scrawny beggar with a beard so thick and long that his former friends and colleagues had difficulty recognizing him.

Not Thakur, however. "You have finally come!" he shouted joyfully as Das approached, and ran to meet him with a warm embrace. "You are the last! Now we are all well and accounted for!" His eyes became misty as he stepped back to observe the pitiful condition of this old friend. "Were you frightened?"

Das's eyes sparkled happily as the massive beard broke apart

to reveal a wide grin. "No, Thakur. You knew I was there so I knew you'd get me out."

"Well, now you are a shopkeeper," Thakur teased. "Just go and see what an enterprising family you have." And linking Das's arm in his own, he led him to the newly erected teashop just outside the bungalow. There was a wild cry of thanksgiving as they entered, and Das found himself wrapped in the arms of his wife and son.

PART THREE

THE FOLIAGE

OF THE two dozen Americans who visited Thakur in Himaitpur shortly after World War II, only two of us remained there permanently, Ed Spencer and I. Ed was especially interested in Thakur's educational ideas as manifested in Tapovan School. I too became involved with various ashram projects and problems and with the propagation of the Satsang movement. Quickly, we became familiar with the local customs and language—Bengali. We were readily accepted by the community and soon felt that Satsang was our own family. We witnessed the great massacres during the riots in 1946. We had our share of pain and frustration during the exodus to Deoghar, and until the new crops could be reaped the greatest problem was securing sufficient food for the few thousand refugees who had sought Thakur's protection.

It was an unbearably hot day in Deoghar and a number of things had gone wrong. I was in a particularly bad mood when I entered the room I shared with Ed Spencer and three bachelor Indians. Ed sat at the window, a book on his lap, a notebook on the window sill, drafting lessons in English literature for Tapovan School which had managed to make the transition from Himaitpur to Deoghar with scarcely an interruption.

I walked to the window, glowering over his shoulder. "Just look at them! There is hardly room to walk around and still they keep coming! And what makes it so disgusting is that half of that mob never said a good word for Thakur in their lives! All they're interested in is the free food and whatever else they can get out of us!"

As usual, Ed ignored my tantrum, calmly making his notes as if I had not spoken. This, I found, was even more irritating than

the never-ending flood of freeloaders. I unbuttoned my sweat-soaked shirt, jerked it from my body, and wadding it into a ball, threw it across the room. It missed my bunk, hit the wall, and plopped to the floor.

"There's a limit to how much water you can put in soup, and how far you can stretch a handful of rice!" I muttered darkly. "I told that to Thakur too!"

Ed cocked an interested eyebrow, a grin playing with the corner of his mouth. "You did? What did he say?"

I felt like a small boy caught with his fingers in the jam. "You know damned well what he said." I crossed the room and stretched my aching bones out on the hard bed. "No one must be turned away. Whatever we have, we will share with full heart."

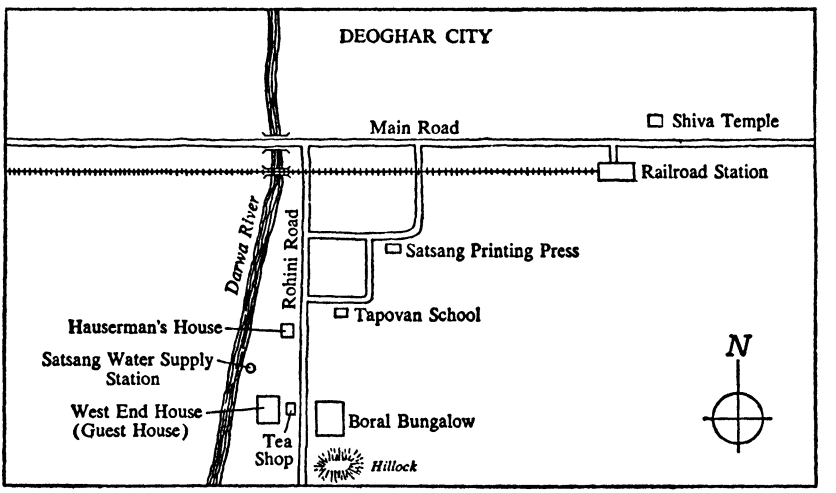
Ed turned to face me. "Cheer up, fellow. Everything passes. It's only the foliage."

"The what?" I sat up in bed.

"Foliage. That's us. All of us." He made a broad gesture that included our room with the milling multitudes outside. "I got the idea watching Thakur. Did you ever notice that wherever he is, we come swirling around him, and drift to the ground like leaves in autumn? The foliage changes with the seasons, Ray. Sometimes it's heavy, sometimes light, now one color, now another . . . teased by breezes . . . swept away by winds." He sighed and his eyes smiled deeply into mine. "But what a privilege, eh? To be a leaf on such a tree, for however short a time and no matter what the season."

29

In the two years following Independence, the population of the transplanted Satsang community gradually fell to a manageable five thousand, since many of the dislocated people found employment and homes throughout India.



Rohini Road had about fifty homes built along the one-mile stretch from the railroad crossing to Boral Bungalow. These homes belonged to wealthy Bengalees who had used them only for winter vacations; during the rest of the year they remained vacant. The owners seemed delighted to rent them year-round for the substantial sums they would receive from Satsang's permanent tenancy. For us they were a godsend. The rooms were large and most of the pleasant yards were planted with eucalyptus and mango trees. One

by one we acquired them, and re-established our printing press, machine shop, rice mill, Tapovan School, and a variety of small industries. In one of them, West End House, the community kitchen was located in the rear, while the remainder of the rooms were available for guests. The large yard was used as a playground for little children. A row of small shops sprang up along the street front: a grocery, a bakery, a confectionery, a handicraft salesroom, and a teashop. The latter establishment became the evening gathering place for devotees as well as an attraction for the sight-seers and pilgrims who visited Deoghar.

The estate of Boral Bungalow changed its appearance as building after building was erected along its enclosing five-foot wall. The northern area was filled rapidly. The gatehouse dispensary was extended; next, a garage, a photographic studio, a workshop, and a long dormitory for the senior Ritwiks. The southern area, which rose toward a stony hillock, was left untouched, for it offered a natural sanctuary for solitary meditation. A community vegetable garden was being cultivated in the eastern section, between the house and wall.

We also planned to build a small pharmaceutical laboratory, as well as housing facilities for the doctors and their families. Our powerhouse was in operation, and electric lights throughout the five-acre area were planned.

But it was an agonizing step-by-step climb, and it was a common sight to see a peasant squatting beside the road, sifting the dry brown earth of Deoghar through his fingers as tears streamed down his face. He was remembering the rich, fertile, well-watered land of his ancestors . . . the abundant greenery of Himaitpur. Variations of this scene could be found in the machine and woodworking shops, in laboratory, dispensary, and factory; for everywhere people worked with makeshift and inadequate equipment.

Dreams for the future had been founded on the solid base of accomplishment at Himaitpur; now those visions must be set aside. A new base must be constructed stone by stone; and for those older Satsangees who had spent more than twenty years in the ashram, there seemed little chance that these dreams would be materialized in their lifetime.

I understood, at least in small part, what they felt. Although I had only recently found Thakur, my own tears of frustration, bit-

terness, and sheer hatred were never far below the surface.

Thakur himself gave no sign nor did he evince the slightest expression of this sense of loss. From five o'clock in the morning until well past midnight, he was engaged in planning, instructing, supervising, and counseling. Over and over again, we could hear his ringing injunction to a despairing disciple: "We have lost nothing, I tell you! All that we had—homes, land, machinery, and buildings —were created by your efficiency and ability. We still have that. With it we shall build again. And this time it will go faster, for we have the benefit of our past experience to guide and aid us!"

One afternoon when we had just failed in our fourth attempt to sink a tube well in the hard, rocky, impossible ground, someone brought Thakur to view the disaster. After giving thoughtful attention to an account of our efforts . . . and to a barrage of complaints . . . he suggested that a pump might be attached to the main well temporarily and water piped from that source to wherever it was needed. The suggestion was eagerly accepted, and the men moved off in a body to examine the main well.

I stayed where I sat, mud-smeared and sweating, as visions of arrogant Pakistanis seized my mind. How dare they make themselves comfortable in our Himaitpur homes . . . equipped with running water, plumbing, and electricity . . . gorge themselves on our rice and fruit and vegetables . . . mess around with our equipment . . . hold their hate-spewing rallies in the flower-bordered courtyard of Tapovan School! In the beginning there had been talk of reparations, but these hopes had long since faded. The Pakistanis seemed to feel that whatever they had lost on one side of the partition was balanced by the things they had gained on the other. The matter was closed.

Being alone, I wept unashamedly until I saw that Asoke, his schoolbooks under his arm, was making his way toward me. Hastily, I wiped my face with my dirty hands.

The boy peered into the ugly hole of our wasted efforts. "It didn't work again?"

"No. It won't work here," I answered shortly.

He squatted down on his heels. "I received a letter from Saidu yesterday."

Despite all Thakur's teachings, any Moslem name produced a quick and adverse effect on me.

"What did he want?" I asked.

Asoke proffered the open letter, painstakingly written in English.

Dear Asoke,

A long time has passed and I have no news of you and all the people. I hope, by the grace of the Supreme Father, that you are well. The empty Ashram is mourning and it seems as if she has lost a priceless jewel. Our Motherland has become restless, losing her children. It seems as if she is calling to her children, "Oh, my sons, come back to my bosom!" For she cannot bear the kicks of the foreigners any longer.

But let me not talk about this. What is the use of being sentimental about what we can't understand? I hope you have not forgotten us. Though you may forget, but because I cannot forget, I am writing this letter to you. I hope you will make me happy by giving reply.

How is S. S. Thakur and all the Satsangees? Give my love to them and to your younger brothers and to all my friends. Let me hear the news of that country and its people. What more can I write? My heart is sad.

Your friend,
Saidu.

As I finished reading, Asoke exchanged the letter for another. "This is my answer. Perhaps you would see if the English is all right."

His letter gave a detailed description of the new Satsang, of the city of Deoghar, and of customs that were different and therefore humorous. It listed the health and activity of Saidu's former friends and ended with a boyish vow: "We may be apart, yet we are brothers, and when we grow up we can make things together and live in peace. The Supreme Father meant us to be together. If we love and follow him, we will become like that again."

"Is it all right?" Asoke questioned anxiously as I silently handed it back.

"It's perfect."

His eyes widened in happy surprise. "Not a single mistake?"

"No mistakes." I got to my feet.

"Your face is dirty." He giggled.

"I know it. I'm going for a good scrubbing . . . inside and out!"

Asoke trotted along beside me. "Nature takes care of the inside, Ray-da." Seriously, he explained the circulatory system and assured me that a healthy body could not collect impurities.

I laughed. "Can I make that work for hatred as well?"

"You don't hate anybody!"

He was so candid and confident that I felt a twinge of shame. "I know I don't, really . . . but sometimes it seems that I do."

"That's only ignorance," the precocious boy comforted me. "Learn a little more and it will go away."

30

TOWARD the end of 1948 I received word that my mother was coming to India. I must admit that my joy at the prospect of seeing her again was mixed with a good deal of anxiety. Mother was a small and energetic woman who had graduated from Johns Hopkins School of Nursing and served overseas in World War I. After becoming widowed, she had returned to college and earned the master's degree in science which marriage and the raising of four children had interrupted.

At present, her driving ambition was to see all of her children safely and securely settled in life. My brothers had finished their education and were well embarked on promising marriages and careers. I was the only obstacle to her peace of mind.

Springing from a middle-class Midwestern background, she found it difficult to understand why I should choose to remain among foreigners, frittering away my life on odd jobs which she felt could be handled by any high school boy. Her concern for me was evident in every letter.

Her letters were not easy to answer. I had given detailed descriptions of my efforts to obtain desperately needed medicines, find employment for the hopeless refugees, and aid the senior disciples with the administration of the large community. But it was far more difficult to explain how each of these activities, to which Thakur had directed me, inevitably seemed to expose a knot or flaw in my own attitude or action, thereby creating the opportunity for self-adjustment. And I did not feel that I had succeeded.

She came by way of New Delhi and lost no opportunity to see every temple she could manage en route, feeling, I am sure, that it was the religion of this country which had ensnared me. Many of

the temples she visited were in bad repair . . . dirty and strewn with rubbish. Her own religious convictions were outraged, and as a nurse she was revolted by such unhygienic conditions.

The cleanliness, order, and industry of Satsang, therefore, were a welcome relief to her, and her first contacts with Thakur further eased her anxiety on my behalf. Still, the dirty temples rankled, and for the first few days we found ourselves bickering about them.

"No honest, respectable religion could endure such filth!" she challenged.

"Mother, you don't understand!" I cried with exasperation. "This is not Ohio, for Pete's sake. Indians are not always concerned about these material matters. You have got to get your mind above all that!"

That evening I found myself blushing to the roots of my hair as Mother attacked Thakur before the assembled devotees.

"Thakur, are the temples allowed to go dirty so that minds will soar above dirt?"

Thakur flashed a quick and somewhat amused glance at me. "The gross ever reflects the fine." His voice was cryptic. "A slovenly temple exposes slovenly minds."

"Thank you, Thakur." Mother sat down, satisfied. I got up and went for a walk.

Just before five o'clock the next morning, I was surprised to find her up and dressed.

"What on earth did you get up at this hour for?" I asked.

"I am going with you to see Thakur."

"But you'll be cold!" I protested. "Besides, we'll only be meditating and then discussing our program for the day . . . these things won't interest you."

"I want to see exactly how you spend your days." Mother drew on a heavy sweater and we started off.

The predawn air was crisp as we crossed Rohini Road and entered the ashram. Elongated banana leaves dripped with dew, and the scent of the eucalyptus trees was invigorating. Carts with creaking wheels, pulled by plodding, bony oxen, moved toward the rice fields near the Darwa River, where newly cut paddy was waiting to be carried to the outdoor threshing floors. The men sat in the carts with sickles across their laps and shawls wrapped tightly about their heads. The village women in bright-colored saris walked in stately procession toward the town market, woven baskets filled

with cow-dung patties balanced delicately on their heads.

Other silent figures, like Mother and me, converged from all directions on the veranda of Boral Bungalow. We could see through the heavy netting the vague outline of Thakur seated in meditation on his wooden bedstead.

Disciples waited, still as statues, beside his bed until Thakur moved, then, with quiet efficiency, drew the net aside.

The people, en masse, prostrated themselves, then resumed their seats and waited, absorbed in the peaceful radiance that emanated from their Saint's presence.

"Hey, who is that? Satyen-da?" Thakur cried suddenly as he looked over the heads of the group toward a thin, white-haired, and very old man. "Come over here by me. And wrap your shawl tightly. It's really beginning to get cold."

"Thakur, they've come!" A woman jumped excitedly to her feet, waving two large aluminum pans.

"Oh, fine! Let me see them!"

The woman bustled importantly through the assemblage and presented the gleaming pans to Thakur.

His eyes glowed with admiration. "Good. Good. Now you can make parothas that will melt in our mouths!"

Flushed with pleasure and giggling like a girl, the woman triumphantly took the pans away to prepare the butter-toasted bread.

Secretaries arrived and the work of reading letters to Thakur and transcribing his answers commenced, interrupted from time to time as Thakur summoned one devotee or another to him, studied the blueprints, records, or accounts, and gave instructions.

During one pause between letters, his eyes rested on a meditating youth who was frowning in deep thought. "What is it, Sahay?"

The youth showed no surprise at being addressed. "If God is good, and the purpose of life is to be good . . . then why did he create us with the freedom to be otherwise?"

"Because love can never grow out of coercion. It is through the conflict of good and evil . . . the adjustment, and the ability to place things in proper relation . . . that evolution takes place. The thrill of divine purpose can emerge only from such a situation."

The boy nodded, lapsed back into his concentrated meditation, and Thakur's attention was once more taken up by the letters.

A disciple leaned toward Thakur. "It's seven o'clock," he announced.

The secretaries closed their notebooks as Thakur arose and prepared to enter his room. Just then a widow named Prithi rushed to his side in great agitation. "Thakur, Bhola has stolen my cabbages again! This time I have proof! He did it in broad daylight, while I was at the market yesterday! Am I to be impoverished while that no-good loafer and his whole family grow fat on my labors?"

Thakur turned to a devotee. "Tell Bhola to come here after I have eaten my breakfast." He faced the aggrieved woman. "Prithima, go home and eat and get over your anger. Then come back to see me."

From a prayer hall across Rohini Road came the sound of a disciple calling the people to prayer. The crowd dispersed . . . the doctors toward the dispensary where the veranda was already filling with patients. Mother and I walked slowly back home for our own breakfast.

She was unusually quiet, and I waited anxiously while she ate and read the news, for some reaction to the morning meeting.

Finally, she laid aside the English edition of the Calcutta newspaper which a thoughtful devotee had brought her each morning since her arrival. "Who is this cabbage thief?"

I was disappointed that such a trivial matter had been the one to get her attention. "Bhola? Oh, he's a hanger-on from Deoghar. He's always causing trouble. He isn't one of us."

"Then why don't you notify the police and have him kept away if he doesn't belong here?"

"Mother, you simply don't understand. Satsang is an open city. Anyone is free to come and go as he wishes. Thakur wouldn't have it any other way."

"Open to thieves?"

"Open to everybody! Bhola isn't the only one who helps himself. But Thakur takes care of these things when they come up."

"But how? If this man doesn't belong here, he could simply refuse to come and answer the charges."

"Oh, he'll come all right."

"Why should he?"

"I don't know why, Mother, but they do. And don't underestimate Thakur. I've seen plenty of men worse than Bhola . . . real criminals . . . who come here thinking they're getting away with something and end up being so respectable that even you would accept them socially."

"Finish your breakfast," Mother instructed. "I'd like to see this trial."

"Now, Mother, don't laugh at these people," I protested nervously.

"Why would I do a thing like that?"

"Well, Prithi and Bhola are not educated . . . they're very poor and they're not sophisticated."

"Oh, for pity's sake." Mother was impatient. "I'm a small-town girl myself. You know that."

The contestants were waiting beneath the banyan tree in two large and separate groups. Prithi, a sharp-eyed woman of forty, had assembled her witnesses on one side, and Bhola, dirty and bedraggled, but very shrewd in his expression and manner, had lined up his on the other.

When Thakur arrived, the chorus of accusations and recriminations grew deafening and unintelligible. He seemed not to notice, calmly smoked his water pipe, until one by one the adversaries lapsed into silence.

"Prithi-ma," he instructed when the silence was complete, "go and get six of your biggest cabbages and bring them here."

Prithi's face became slack as she stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"Go on. Get them quickly," Thakur insisted. Reluctantly, she turned to do his bidding.

The surprised Bhola grinned slyly at this unexpected and favorable turn of events.

Thakur shook his head reproachfully. "You foolish man. Why do you create so much trouble?"

"But I did nothing." Bhola simpered ingratiatingly. "Prithi lies about me all the time. She has a grudge."

"If you are in difficulty, if your family is hungry, come to me," Thakur said softly.

"I tell you I didn't touch those cabbages!" Bhola pointed excitedly at his witnesses. "They can tell you where I was . . . every minute of the day."

"Ah, what a liar he is," the returning Prithi screamed, thumping a heavy basket of cabbages at Thakur's feet. "My own mother saw him from the kitchen! He came here empty-handed and he left with a burlap bag bulging with cabbages! Everybody saw him!" She

turned dramatically to her witnesses. "Tell him! Tell Thakur just what you saw!"

Thakur had leaned over the basket and was admiring the cabbages with a great show of amazement. "How beautiful, Prithi-ma. Why, your expert touch and loving care have made the seeds outdo themselves! Hey, Bhola! Come here and see! Who else besides Prithi could grow such vegetables?"

Bhola took a few cautious steps toward the basket and nodded his head.

"Come closer! Just pick one up. Did you ever see any as big as this before?"

Gingerly, Bhola weighed a cabbage in one hand. "It's the biggest I ever saw," he admitted. Prithi's sharp little features softened grudgingly.

"You know the people of Deoghar, Bhola," Thakur deferred. "What do you say? How much would such a cabbage sell for?"

Bhola's manner became very businesslike. "Oh, I could get twenty pice for this one," he bragged. "I got seventeen yesterday and they were not nearly so good . . ." He broke off abruptly, an expression of terror writhing his face as he realized that he had been trapped.

"Twenty pice! Where could you get such a price!" Prithi's eyes grew bright as she calculated her profits.

Thakur began to laugh heartily and the witnesses and onlookers joined him. After darting several uneasy glances at the Saint, Bhola joined the chorus, laughing louder than all the rest and slapping his bare thighs in a clownish manifestation of extreme glee.

Prithi leaped at the thief, shaking him excitedly. "Tell me where you sold them! Tell me!"

"You see how you need each other!" Thakur cried, his wide smile embracing them both. "Prithi-ma is much too busy growing vegetables and raising children. She doesn't have time for selling and she doesn't know Deoghar and the best places to sell as you do, Bhola. But if you came every morning and carried off all that was ready for the market, what a partnership that would be! In no time at all you could invest in a cart and be regular business people!" His eyes dwelt on the widow and his voice coaxed, "What do you say, Prithi-ma? Give Bhola these cabbages and seal the bargain."

She stared sternly at the sheepish Bhola for several moments. "Well, pick them up!" she snapped impatiently. "You don't expect me to carry them home for you, do you?"

That evening as Mother prepared to retire, I suddenly obeyed an impulse to embrace and kiss her good-night. She was as surprised as I at this long-forgotten childhood habit and for a short time we were enveloped by an awkward but pleasant shyness.

"All the same, he's going to go on cheating her," Mother said, breaking the silence.

"What? Who?"

"That thief Bhola," she explained.

I laughed. "For a while, maybe, but don't worry about it. Thakur's in control and it will all work out to everybody's satisfaction . . . and prosperity. It always does."

In the days that followed, Mother was everywhere, talking to everyone from early morning until late at night. Her questions and arguments covered all aspects of her very deep faith in Christ and God. Mostly she was enthusiastically impressed, but there were times when she was skeptical and her eyes rested on me with the old worry.

One evening as we sat with the group around Thakur, she arose, and without preliminaries, asked, "Thakur, a great many of your followers claim that you are God. Now I want to know what *you* say you are?"

The group stirred restlessly, clearly resenting what sounded to them like an attack upon their Saint. An elderly disciple arose at once. "I can explain this . . ."

"No, no," Mother cut him off rather rudely, "I've already heard what all of you had to say. Now I want to know what Thakur says!"

Thakur's face glowed with a wide, boyish smile. Obviously, he enjoyed both the discomfiture of the group and this American mother's determination.

"Ma, if they call me God, will it make me more than I am? And if they call me devil, will it make me any less? As you see me, so I am."

Mother nodded, satisfied, and sat down. Apparently, she chose to see him as a son, for in the months that followed, she advised and questioned this elderly Guru in much the same manner and tone that she used with my brothers and me. Thakur responded with a demonstration of filial devotion and affection that exposed my own inadequate attempts to please, to understand . . . and be understood . . . as superficial.

In this three-way relationship, Mother and I grew very close, and

our new understanding pervaded every aspect of our lives together.

When her visit was over, she said, "He can't be God. No man can. But Thakur has loved God so deeply that he has gained many qualities of God. He's become godlike."

As the final good-bys were said she wept unashamedly. So did Thakur. So did I.

After she had returned to America, I received a letter from my elder brother, a Protestant minister. In it he wrote,

"Mother has grown in understanding and depth during the past months with you. It is hard to believe. The regard she has for your Thakur is of such a high order, that someday, if I get the opportunity, I'll come and talk with him myself."

In the postwar years many Westerners, and particularly Americans, came to India . . . searching for peace, a new way of life, something of value that would keep them steady through this chaotic period of history. Many of these people found their way to Thakur, and volumes of letters, expressing their gratitude and bearing testimony to the change which spiritual awareness had made in their lives, were added to the Satsang library.

Fred Neff, a rising young American executive, had been sent to Calcutta by an oil company. His future seemed settled and secure, but, as he later explained, without much purpose or meaning. He found Thakur through a friend and began to make regular weekend visits. At the end of a year, he resigned his position and returned to New York to enter Union Theological Seminary. His letters speak eloquently of the peace, satisfaction, and purpose he has found in his new life.

A Philadelphia bachelor, who had spent most of his adult life squandering inherited wealth, also found the ashram. At forty he complained of being empty, life had become tasteless, and a succession of psychoanalysts had failed to relieve the condition. He came with the intention of staying for a few days, and spent several months. As we awaited the plane that would take him back to America, he turned to me and said thoughtfully, "You know, this is the first time in my life I'm not afraid . . . the first time I ever believed that love existed . . . outside of a lot of fancy words and trumped-up acrobatics."

A diplomat's wife returned to Washington, D.C., and wrote Thakur, "Everyone here is taking Miltown. I am constantly advising

them to go and see you . . . the living tranquilizer!"

A basketball coach from a Midwestern junior college wrote that after practicing meditation under Thakur's guidance an unsuspected intuition had developed. His apparently unerring ability to substitute a man when he was "hot" was giving him a reputation for being psychic.

And so the letters go. Whereas his Indian followers relate their thoughts, words, and deeds to the Uphold of Existence, Thakur explains these theories to Americans in relation to a life lived in Christ. And many of us have been actually stunned to realize, for the first time, how feasible, practical, reasonable, and scientific Christ's pattern for living actually is.

31

My first meeting with Janardan Mookerjee was far from promising. He was an extremely handsome Brahmin and a fire-eating Communist. The Communists were a dynamic political force in Calcutta and they played an active and dominating role in the student body of the university. They were constantly arguing and debating with Thakur's followers, whose numbers, while not nearly so large, were none the less impressive. During one such argument, the Satsangees were challenged to allow a Communist to confront Thakur in open debate. The challenge was eagerly accepted and the Communists had chosen Janardan, a brilliant, dedicated student organizer, to meet and conquer the Saint.

On meeting me at Deoghar, he inquired, "Well, how do you feel now that you have traded Christianity for Hinduism?"

"I have traded nothing," I answered shortly. "I was born a Christian and I'm trying to become a better one. It's as simple as that, and it feels fine."

He smiled condescendingly. "How many lynchings have you watched?"

"None."

"Do you deny that they happen?"

I drew a deep breath. "My experience, both at home and abroad, has shown me that men are capable of horrible cruelty to one another. I hope that someday I will be able, in however small a way, to help overcome this ignorance."

"What do you think of the Rosenberg executions?"

"And what do you think of the Oates trial in Czechoslovakia?" I countered hotly, then caught myself. Thakur was constantly pointing out that no one had the right to criticize another unless he could first love him; and love for Janardan was certainly not a mat-

ter for the immediate future. "What benefit is there in this fault-finding?" I asked as calmly as I could.

"You're right." His answer was cheerful. It was obvious that he accepted my tone as capitulation. Turning to his fellow students, he expressed a wish to tour this ashram, which they had told him so much about, and the group moved off.

Later that afternoon, after meeting Thakur, he came straight to the point of argument. "Thakur, I have heard a lot of things about you, both good and bad. I accepted none of them, but came personally to make up my own mind."

"That was very wise," Thakur commended.

"I must warn you that I am dedicated to bringing a new and more equitable society into being and mean to sweep away all the age-old, prejudiced traditions that are strangling us. Religion is high on the list of these evils, for it makes a virtue of poverty and suffering and in this way keeps the masses in subjugation to the exploiters. I hope that I have not wounded your sentiments; but in these times, I believe the good of humanity demands that we be completely, and even cruelly, frank."

"Yes, yes," Thakur agreed, "honesty is an absolute requisite for any fruitful exchange. If you can give me assurances that you will search out and fight every evil, I will be much relieved. For I am old and it would be a comfort to see the world in such capable and loving hands. I assure you that I have no other thought than this: Let you live and be the cause for others to live. Let you grow more and more and help others to do so also, and with this joy move on forever."

I left to attend to my administrative duties, feeling a good deal of satisfaction, I must admit, at the attitude of total, floundering bewilderment which the young Communist had exhibited. These were busy days at Satsang and I was not able to follow the rest of their dialogues closely. It was clear, however, from firsthand reports I received, that things were going exactly as we knew they would. Janardan was losing ground . . . rapidly.

On the fourth day of his visit, I happened to listen in on this interesting bit:

"Your ideas are completely materialistic," Janardan shouted. "The religion you speak of has no relation to the organized groups that cause all the trouble. Why don't you just blot out the word 'religion'? Then you'll see that there is little difference between us."

"There are quite a number of Communist parties, isn't that so?" Thakur asked innocently. "Do you know all of them?"

"Well, there's the Communist Party of India," Janardan began, counting off on his fingers, "the Trotskyites, the Bolsheviks, the Revolutionary Communist Party." He spread his hands helplessly. "I can't think of all of them."

"And do you all agree with each other?"

"Of course not! If we did there would be only one party."

"What do you disagree about?"

"The other parties are full of distortions and misrepresentations. You know how men are! Greedy for power! They take half-truths and twist them around to serve their own private interests!"

"Then why don't you change the name of your party, lest it be confused with the others?"

"Why should we do that? We have the true right to the name because we will establish the true society . . . 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.' "

Thakur shook his head slowly and sadly, and expectant smiles began to spread from face to face throughout the group.

"How can you understand this and yet blindly sacrifice the word 'religion'? Religion has been the food which nourished the evolution of man in an unbroken line since the first generation. Ignorance, error, and distortion . . . such things cannot soil nor change the truth. Treasure the word that embodies our reason for being . . . keep it close to you, always."

Janardan made many trips to Satsang throughout that winter. I continued to avoid him as much as possible because our personalities clashed at the drop of a pin. I had not been very interested in his particular case and its development; therefore, when he arrived at the beginning of vacation and announced that he was spending the summer with us, to make bricks and help with the construction of some buildings we were working on, I was very much surprised.

About a week later, I was wandering over the low hill in the corner of the Boral Bungalow estate when I came across him, sitting on top of a flat rock in the cross-legged lotus position and gazing out over the ashram. I was about to pass quietly by, since we never disturb each other during meditation, when he spoke.

"Isn't it strange how all that energy down there generates a great feeling of peace? All the activity I've known before only created

nervous tension and a feeling of impatience at getting so little done."

I gazed at the various activities. The people, from this distance, looked like animated dolls. There was a rhythmic pattern, though, a sort of pictured song. "They're all conscious of what they're doing," I explained, "and they are working with love."

Janardan sighed. "Life is full of surprises, isn't it. One knows so much and is yet so blind. All the time I was working for a world of love and brotherhood, it never once occurred to me to be a brother . . . or to love. All that is only possible later, I thought, when Utopia comes. 'By their deeds shall you know them' . . . didn't your Saint, Christ, say that?"

"All the prophets said it in one way or another."

"And by their governments you shall know the people," Janardan paraphrased. "How simple it all is. Governments grow out of the people. If enough people truly desired brotherhood, if what you have here could be expanded far enough . . . then the government would change of its own accord to accommodate their needs and wishes. Does that make any sense?"

"It does to me, Janardan." I dropped down beside him and we meditated in silence for more than an hour.

Janardan took initiation and gave up his schooling and political affiliations in order to devote all his time to converting people, by example, to the true and enduring brotherhood he had found. We became fast friends.

32

MANY of Thakur's followers were seized, for various periods of time, with missionary zeal. Small groups were always forming to carry his teachings throughout India. They preached his principles with passion and conviction to whatever audience they found, urging as many as they could convince to apply this higher standard to all phases of their lives.

Janardan and I together with Ajoy Ganguly, an engineer, and Chandreshwar Sharma, a schoolteacher, formed one such group for several years.

Ajoy explained Thakur as one whose technical know-how was directed with clear understanding of know-why. Chandreshwar, an orthodox Hindu, spoke of him in the terms of the Vedic tradition. Janardan usually built his talks around his favorite subject, "The materialistic interpretation of spirit," and I pointed out the co-relation of Thakur's teachings with those of Christ.

We traveled constantly by train, bullock cart, automobile, or elephant. No village was too small and no opposition too threatening. We were going to conquer, and time was short.

We were amazingly successful and before long found that large audiences were assembled and waiting for us whenever we arrived. This was due in part to the fact that we complemented each other, for in speaking from our individual convictions, we painted a broad and varied picture.

Ajoy and Chandreshwar had a great deal of experience in facing mammoth gatherings, and their talks were rendered with vividness and polish. Janardan's innate eloquence, now enriched by a deep and positive faith, inevitably left an audience in a state of emotional fervor, and what I lacked of these talents was compensated for by my being an American disciple who spoke to them in colloquial

Bengali or Hindi. We are supremely confident that Heaven on Earth would arrive on schedule. In fact, the growing and enthusiastic crowds caused us to revise our estimate of the arrival of the Kingdom from decades to a matter of years.

Revival meetings are inspiring. They can also easily beguile one into believing that temporary exaltation is permanent.

I particularly remember a visit we paid to Kaileshwar, a city situated in Assam on the border of Pakistan, and at that time accessible from India only by plane or elephant.

Arrangements had been made for us to lodge with a wealthy lumber man, and he proceeded to entertain us in a regal fashion that included placing six elephants, along with attendants, at our disposal for transportation.

Tens of thousands of eager people, many of whom had journeyed six days, were on hand for the three-day conference. After each meeting, the numbers seeking initiation were so large that it was necessary to perform this ceremony in groups.

We were elated with the response, and so busy with the meetings and initiations that it was not until the last day that we understood what we had been hearing, in one form or another since our arrival: these people were members of the Communist Party . . . and also of the American Baptist Mission!

When we asked how they had achieved this unusual synthesis, their answer was charmingly candid. "In these days, who can tell what will happen? We want to be on the winning side."

While such incidents served the useful purpose of jolting us back to earth, they did not daunt our enthusiasm. We returned to Deoghar in high and confident spirits to celebrate Thakur's sixty-fifth birthday anniversary.

Bengali New Year in March-April and Thakur's birthday in September are the two major holidays of Satsang. Lasting for several days, they include a program of seminars, lectures, dramas, and exhibitions and enable Thakur's followers from all areas of India to come in contact with each other. They also serve to clarify and develop individual conceptions of Thakur's ideology, and to find new ways to apply them practically.

These congregations had continued uninterruptedly through famine, riot, and the transplantation from Himaitpur. By 1953, they had grown so large that all available housing facilities in the city of Deoghar were filled to overflowing.

Small entrepeneurs, ricksha proprietors and coolies, retailers and souvenir shop owners, as well as the priests of the Shiva temple, looked forward eagerly to these biannual meetings. The influx of from fifty to one hundred thousand people was a new and welcome source of revenue to them.

Since we had arrived at Deoghar the day before the formal opening of the birthday celebration, there was no immediate opportunity for us to discuss the details of our latest trip with Thakur. We did, however, give him a glowing account of the highlights, and assured him with great fervor that India was on the verge of becoming a true brotherhood of love that would shortly command the attention—and conversion—of the entire world.

As always he listened with thoughtful attention to our recital, but when we had finished he made no comment on the trip. "Mrinal Basu, an excellent singer, has joined our family in your absence," he said. "I believe that such a trip would give him pleasure. Why don't you keep him with you?"

We assented readily, for although we considered our battalion to be quite perfect as it was, we were anxious to please Thakur and a good singer was always useful.

"Go and get settled in, then," Thakur instructed, "and take Basu with you. You will be able to tell him about your activities during the conference."

Basu proved to be a handsome young man with a beautiful voice, and we welcomed him warmly. Before long, however, the favorable first impression had faded away. We found that he had taking as well as winning ways.

The rush of visitors and the varied program during the days of celebration gave us little opportunity to meet as a group. When we did, we discovered that Sharma's pen and Janardan's watch had both disappeared, and all of us had missed small change which we were in the habit of leaving on a table.

Using some diplomacy, we confronted Basu with these losses; of course he denied taking the articles, and immediately thereafter professed to have missed things of his own.

We watched him closely for a few days and found to our consternation that he was not only a sneak thief, but also lied constantly . . . even about the most trivial things.

Janardan and I decided that this young man did not exhibit the necessary qualities to be part of our elite army for heaven, and we

suggested, not too subtly I'm afraid, that he return to the guesthouse forthwith.

The following morning I returned from my daily trip to the Deoghar market and was slowly nosing the jeep through the hordes of people, temporary shops, and rickshas that filled Rohini Road, when I was hailed by Janardan.

"Hey, Ray! Thakur just told me to go and get Basu and take him back to our room."

"Basu?" I cried in dismay. "Wait a minute! Don't go yet! I'll talk with Thakur!"

I parked the jeep beside the teashop, then pushed my way through the crowds to the veranda of Boral Bungalow. I waited restlessly for a break in the incessant conversations going on with Thakur, and when it came, called impetuously, "Thakur, you don't understand about Basu! He's nothing but a thief and an inveterate liar! What he needs is a good thrashing and to be sent flying out of here!"

Thakur's eyes burned at me over the heads of the gathering around him. "Beat him if you like." His voice was clear and steady. "But when you do, know you are beating me."

I was drowning in shame and confusion. "I'm sorry, Thakur," I mumbled miserably. "I'll get him now."

Janardan was waiting for me at the edge of the crowd. "Did you fix it? What did he say?"

"You better go get Basu and bring him back. I have to get the jeep and unload it."

We settled Basu comfortably in our room, and saw that our few valuables were carefully placed under lock and key. Beyond that we had little inclination to be friendly. Fortunately, the rush of arranging lodgings and transportation, and of furnishing information to our many visitors, allowed us to go our separate ways without seeming too rude.

The next day I received word that Thakur wished to see me. Janardan had received a similar message, and we met on the way there. Together, we climbed over the bamboo barricade that devotees had erected around Thakur to furnish a breathing space between the Saint and his overeager visitors. We sat quietly, feeling rather important in this privileged enclosure, until Thakur ended his discussion with a Pandit from Benares.

"Where is Basu?" he asked, turning to us.

We shrugged helplessly, making vague gestures toward the milling crowds.

"When you returned a few days ago you told me how earnestly you had been preaching to transform the world into a family of brotherhood and love." He spoke very softly, to give us some privacy from the people outside the bamboo fence. "Yet you are not able to tolerate or adjust to one single Basu . . . don't you feel that is strange?"

"We took him back to our room," Janardan explained quickly.

"There's a limit," I protested. "A certain amount of the survival of the fittest comes into this."

"Make the unfit fit. Then we will all survive. Each man is a living universe. You cannot win worlds by losing so much. Any plan, program, or movement is a failure to the extent that it ignores or rejects a single individual." He smiled suddenly . . . a wonderfully warm, radiant, all-embracing smile. "Go now; find Basu and keep him safe."

Basu was with us for nearly a year, and when he left to accept a professional singing job, Janardan and I were genuinely sorry. Not because our efforts had effected much change in his unfortunate habits . . . incidents constantly came to our attention . . . but because this was our first conscious attempt to recognize the essential worth of a man despite his outer conditioning. It was a valuable lesson and a warmly remembered experience.

33

One afternoon, several of us who were sitting on the veranda of Boral Bungalow watched Pandit Binoda Jha park his Land Rover, climb out, and start up the curving road toward us. To look at this unassuming man, dressed in a collarless white shirt, dhoti, and straw sandals, one would never guess that this senior member of the State Cabinet in Bihar and the most popular politician in the area was shortly to become the chief minister of the state.

Thakur immediately dispatched a disciple for tea and sweetcakes, and then arose and walked down the path to meet the statesman with an embrace.

The two men had become fast friends shortly after our arrival in Deoghar, for Jha, too, was a man of the people and he had watched our progress with an active and sympathetic interest.

As it had been some time since his last visit, we eagerly described our latest projects and outlined the various works that we were presently engaged in. A very pleasant afternoon was enjoyed by all.

"What miracles you create," Jha complimented Thakur as the afternoon came to a close. "And with such ease! I have been working for weeks, and getting nowhere, on a single very small one."

Thakur's face registered quick concern. "What is your trouble, Jha?"

"Money," Jha replied cryptically, but after a moment he amended this. "Not money in itself . . . but the people who have it. The government has agreed to match any funds we can raise locally for education, and by using existing facilities we could get a modest science college started for one hundred thousand rupees. We need that college! Deoghar has a population of over one hundred thousand people now. It is shameful to have no opportunities for higher education for the majority of our children. And India needs scientifically trained men. Now that we are independent there is a lot of

catching up to do. Yet I have spent the entire day visiting our wealthy citizens and all I gained for my trouble was a lot of far-fetched, pointless, meandering arguments. They have no need for the college themselves, of course, since their children are sent to Calcutta or abroad. But it isn't the money, as such, that makes them so miserly. It is clear that they are deathly afraid of progress . . . of the threat that mass education will pose for their petty, privileged positions. It is hopeless to look to them for help." He arose with an apologetic smile and made ready to leave. "There. I shouldn't burden you with my problems. You have far more than your fair share already."

That evening as we settled down for the gathering, Thakur suddenly addressed his accountant, Noni. "How many sixes go into fifty thousand?"

Noni took a stone and performed the division on the soft earth. "Eight thousand, three hundred and thirty-three."

Thakur appealed to his disciples. "Aren't there that many among us who can give six rupees each so that the talented children of Deoghar might have a science college?"

Before the evening was over, the machinery of the far-flung Satsang family was set in motion. Within days, Ritwiks throughout Bengal received detailed letters explaining the purpose of the college, the need for additional financing, and suggesting a quota for each area.

Meetings were hastily organized for the fund raising. In the flower garden of Jageshwar Sumanta of Mindapore, a photograph of Thakur was placed on a chair that had been covered with a white cloth, and a hundred and fifty people gathered informally about it. After prayers and a few songs, Jageshwar arose and read the letter from Satsang. One by one, men, women, and even children announced their readiness to give, or pledge, a six-rupee unit.

The moneylender, Hariban Gourwala, did not rise, however. He had recently become a member of this group. Several months earlier his married daughter had been seriously injured in giving birth to her first child and had been given up by the family doctor. Jageshwar, whose grocery store was lodged in the same building as Hariban's pawnshop, had immediately written to Thakur for advice and medicine and had himself spent several nights at the young woman's bedside, praying. Recovery was effected, and Hariban, in a rush of gratitude, begged for initiation. But the daily love

offering had been a great struggle for his parsimonious nature; and since he made this offering of twenty pice each morning, he felt it to be more than sufficient.

"Why doesn't your Thakur create a miracle when he needs money?" he complained loudly.

Jageshwar stared at him for some time. "Do you remember when your house was robbed ten years ago . . . eight thousand and sixty rupees, I think it was?"

"Of course I remember it! That isn't something a man is likely to forget!"

"Well"—Jageshwar took a deep breath—"I am the man who helped organize that robbery."

"You?" Hariban jumped to his feet, his face slowly turning a dark purple. "You, a thief!"

The eyes of the two men locked, and for some time they faced each other in frozen silence. Hariban's eyes dropped first and he thawed quickly, easing himself back into the camp chair which groaned under his considerable weight.

"Well"—he spread his hand magnanimously—"let the past go. You saved my daughter and I won't press charges. I owe you that."

"Any debt you owe is to Thakur," Jageshwar scolded. "I am an example of the kind of miracle that he creates . . . and if he did not, I would have been robbing you instead of praying for your family's health."

Hariban peeled six rupees from his compact and sizable roll.

On that same evening in a garment factory on Bow Bazaar Street in Calcutta, a workbench was covered with a white sheet and Thakur's photograph leaned against two vases of freshly cut flowers. Satyen Mittra, a dignified and very old man, led the congregation of workers in a prayer which Monmohini had taught him many, many years ago when they were both children. Afterward he quietly explained the need for a college in Deoghar, and these people, who earned only fifty rupees a month, were unanimous in their affirmative response.

On the Benares estate belonging to Deben Choudhury, a painting of Thakur, ornately framed, hung above a finely carved altar, and the fragrance of incense wafted over the well-dressed men and women gathered there.

Deben chanted the traditional Vedic prayers and then read the letter from Satsang.

"No. I won't do it," Monmotha Mullick stated firmly. "Whatever Thakur wants for himself or for Satsang, I will give willingly, but this is too much. Last year it was a T.B. sanatorium in Calcutta, and a few months ago that public library for the Deoghar municipality. We cannot be expected to provide for all of India. It is time to have an understanding."

This speech obviously distressed his wife. "What would have happened to our relatives at the time of partition if Thakur hadn't taken them in? We were not Satsangees then!"

"I sent a check to express my gratitude for that," Monmotha explained virtuously.

"But he didn't ask for the check. He helped everyone who came . . . without question."

"Yes," Monmotha conceded. "That's the way Thakur works."

"Then why do you question the way he works now?" his wife implored. "Whether the people he helps belong to us or not, it's always people that the money goes for . . ."

With some reluctance Monmotha pledged twelve rupees for himself and his wife.

Several weeks later, Thakur sent a message to Jha to come and see him when it was convenient. He arrived that afternoon, and as he sat sipping tea, Bor'da, Thakur's eldest son, presented Jha with a check for fifty thousand, four hundred and nineteen rupees.

Surprise that such activity had been going on . . . the knowledge of what a vast number of people must have been involved . . . and astonishment at the size of the check, rendered Jha speechless. He could only gaze at his benefactor, his eyes brimming with gratitude.

"All our people wanted to see your wish fulfilled," Thakur said simply.

Within the year the Deoghar Science College was conducting classes.

Some time after this I was chatting with Thakur and Taluqdar and happened to mention the efforts that the American Field Service had been making to increase international understanding by student exchanges.

"Walk together, talk together, thus have peace," Thakur quoted

a Sanskrit aphorism. "Taluqdar, won't your students give something to this cause?"

"No, no," I cried, floundering in embarrassment. "I didn't mean anything like that. The students here are so poor nobody would expect them to make such a sacrifice!"

"Hauserman . . . Hauserman . . ." Thakur shook his head sadly. "Haven't you learned yet that giving and evolving go hand in hand . . . a far more precious gift than receiving? This is a matter that involves students. We must give our students a chance to grow."

Stephen Galatti, Director of the AFS, began his thank-you letter for the two-hundred-and-fifty-rupee check from Satsang students and teachers as follows: "I have never received so moving a gift."

34

In May, 1956, laughter stopped in Satsang, and hearts were seized with such trembling that the painful pulsations were felt by followers throughout India. Thakur had suffered a stroke. His right side was partially paralyzed.

True, he had had high blood pressure for many years, and there had been periodic stomach trouble. Also, with the coming of Asian influenza to India, he was inevitably attacked by it after each conference. But he had always laughingly accepted these conditions as such minor nuisances that the devotees had continued in their dream that Thakur was indestructible.

The stroke was different. With an emotion akin to horror, followers were brought face to face with the realization that their Saint was encased in a mortal body, and that this body was nearly sixty-eight years old and subject to all the laws which governed such things . . . including death itself.

Boro Ma and Bor'da along with the senior disciples and followers kept the organization running, all work, both in the Satsang Ashram and in the city of Deoghar, began and ended with a fervent prayer that Thakur might be spared.

After the first two agonizing weeks, the slender flame of hope that had been so prayerfully attended began to glow brighter. The paralysis was leaving . . . he was regaining the use of his arm!

The devotees replaced the wooden gate in the inner wall with an open frame of bamboo so that the people might at least see Thakur. The gate was forty yards away, so they could not speak to him. Day after day throughout that long summer, a procession of devotees prostrated themselves before the gate and children held up bright flowers that might please him. Thakur gazed back at these

constant demonstrations of devotion with longing, and oftentimes tearful, eyes.

As Thakur's recovery progressed, he was allowed to have a few selected visitors each day.

The period of enforced leisure revived in Thakur his mother's dream of an international residential university so long unrealized. It was to be modeled after the ancient center of learning, Nalanda, at Bihar, and would be named Sandilya University.

In careful detail, Thakur planned for fifty contiguous villages which would be integrated with, and a part of, the university administration. The home of each professor would be built to accommodate seven students, so that each student would have the opportunity to live with, and absorb through close association the more intimate knowledge of, the professors. This was basic to Thakur's idea of what he called "teacher-centric education." There would be sections for every branch of science and art, geared toward establishing the relation of each branch with every other, and all of them consciously aimed at maintaining the Uphold of Existence. This scheme would practically demonstrate his definition, "Where varieties arrive with meaning toward unity . . . that is a university."

The idea of establishing such a university had never actually been relinquished, but the 100 million rupees which Monmohini's carefully laid plans had called for, had, with the change of locale and the times, tripled itself. With the great and pressing needs of the present, the plans had to be set aside for some future, and rather nebulous, date.

Although the cost now seemed astronomical, there was no word of dissent. So joyous were the devotees over Thakur's recovery, that had he suggested that a stairway to the moon might be useful, they would have begun to lay the foundation without question.

Several miles north of Deoghar there was a vast area of unused land . . . idle because of its advanced state of erosion and because it was literally covered with rocks and boulders. The price was reasonable, however, and fifty contiguous villages would require considerable territory. Thakur urged that plans be made to begin purchase of this area. A hasty, preliminary fund-raising campaign took place and the first parcel of this land became the property of the future Sandilya University.

So glowing and vivid were Thakur's descriptions of the garden

that was to rise from this wilderness, that the devotees were fired with energy and enthusiasm. Every hour that one could spare without interrupting the regular activities was spent clearing the new land and gathering rocks of comparable size into neat piles for future use in building. A fund was set up with special contributions, and a tithe from all activities went into it at regular intervals so that the purchase of land could continue in an orderly manner until title for the entire project was acquired.

By late fall the bamboo fencing was taken away and Thakur was again moving freely from one area of the compound to another, advising, instructing, and supervising his large and active family. The only concession he made to his illness was to begin the day a little later and to take longer naps in the afternoon.

"Even with this shortened day," the secretaries pointed out proudly, "his energy is inexhaustible. It still takes five of us to keep up with his dictation!"

35

IN THE spring of 1958, my mother returned to Satsang. "I was homesick," she stated simply, "and when I thought of how badly needed every pair of hands is here, my life at home seemed wasted. This time I have come to help, and I plan to stay indefinitely."

Ed Spencer and I had rented a house on Rohini Road, and to our delight, Mother quickly settled in, assuming responsibility for all the frustrating details of housekeeping.

She was warmly welcomed home by the Satsangees, and with her nursing experience, scientific education, and gregarious nature, she integrated smoothly into a busy and satisfying routine.

I was not able to see a great deal of Mother in the year that followed, for we were busy raising money for the Sandilya University land and I was usually on tour, making the rounds to keep the various communities of followers up-to-date on our progress and acquainted with future needs. Whenever I was at the ashram, however, I always found Mother busy, happy, and overflowing with enthusiasm for Thakur himself, and for the many ashram activities.

Therefore, when I returned for Thakur's seventieth birthday anniversary and found that Mother had made arrangements to return to the States, I was aghast.

She had not been feeling well, she explained. She tired easily and there were various pains.

"But tell Thakur about this!" I cried. "He can fix you up in no time!"

"Thakur has too many troubles already," she stated firmly. "I came here to help . . . not to be a burden."

"For heaven's sake, Mother, you talk as if you expected to be an invalid! This isn't like you at all!"

But Mother had made up her mind. She felt that she was long

overdue for a thorough checkup and she was going back home.

Perhaps it was anxiety over Mother's sudden, and what seemed to me arbitrary, decision. At any rate, that night at the meeting as we listened to Baldev Sahay give a stirring testimony of his life with Thakur, I suddenly noticed that Thakur's eyes rested first on one disciple and then another with a very strange expression. He's lonely, I thought. But how could this be? Surely there was never a man so widely loved . . . and presented with such constant demonstrations of that love.

I closed my eyes for a moment and then watched him again. Yes. There it was. That strange look was no trick of light. Thakur's eyes were hungering from face to face. He was searching.

As I was trying to get my mind settled, I could hear Baldev's musical voice climb a tone. "If you want Thakur's philosophy, you can find it in the many volumes in our publishing house here. If you want to hear stories of miracles and inexplicable accounts of psychic phenomena, ask any of the people here. They'll tell you many strange stories. Some may be exaggerated, some lacking in detail, but there are enough of them to fill a library which can be checked and cross-checked.

"Most people are lonely today, even in the midst of crowds or in the security of their homes. All are conscious that every love they have is conditional. Homes for the aged and public institutions are full of parents and grandparents who can no longer meet the conditions of these unwritten contracts. But the people you see here . . . coolies, clerks, teachers, lawyers, doctors, and others . . . they have caught a glimpse of Thakur . . . of a love that has no conditions, no demands, no desires . . . except that it just be. Whether they are well or ill, whether they ignore or follow, they know Thakur will never turn his back on them. Some of you may see this as weakness, but there it is. It is the reason why I, and many who were lonely as I was lonely, have come to him."

Once more my attention wandered from Baldev and sought Thakur some twenty yards away, and again I noted the flicker of loneliness as he anxiously searched the faces around him. What could it be? What was so rare that Thakur must search for it? For some time I sat entranced, lost in a complex of wondering.

"A loving man?" Baldev was now engaged in dialogue with those around him. "Yes, I think so. But what man can read the heart of another unless he loves him first? And once a man loves, must not

his reading be that of a lover? Then what has he found but his own love?"

A strange thing happened to me. Baldev's melodious voice faded away and in its place came an answer from some long distant racial memory to my urgent inner question . . . "Thakur seeks to find a heart like his . . . a love like his . . . a soul into which he can pour his all and be understood. He waits for a love that can endure suffering and heartache, injustice and neglect, but never, never sever its bond. A love that can serve without hope of return, that can joyfully give to others the credit for its own achievement . . . accept the blame for others' faults. Yes, he seeks for a love like his that can give and give and give . . . and drink the pain and wine of ever-growing."

I must have been in trance for several minutes, for when I once more became conscious of my surroundings, Baldev had finished speaking and the song of praise to all the Prophets floated in the clear, star-spangled September sky.

I looked back toward Thakur. His eyes were closed in prayer and his face was boyish and serene. I closed my eyes as the voices of many thousands mingled together in a rolling, peaceful, vibrant prayer.

As the prayer ended I felt Mother shiver beside me and I turned to her. "Are you cold?" I was surprised because the night was very warm.

"A little," she admitted.

"I'll go get your sweater."

"No." Mother peered closely at the large face of her wristwatch. "It's nearly midnight. I think I'll call it a day. You stay."

I insisted on walking her home. When we arrived she expressed a wish for a cup of hot tea, so I made it for her while she found a warm shawl. Although we were accommodating twelve people during the conference, no one was at home and the house seemed strangely quiet and empty. Mother and I sat on our veranda and watched the milling crowds on Rohini Road as we sipped our tea.

"Where do they all come from?" she marveled. "Unless you see such a conference, it's difficult to understand how wide and deep Thakur's influence goes."

As we sat in silence with our own thoughts, we noticed Goswami, Thakur's oldest living disciple, pass by our low wall. Since we were at leisure, he came in to join us. He was an amazing man, over

ninety now, yet still spry and active in all the affairs of Satsang. He declined tea with a chuckle, saying that he was literally awash with it.

"Is this the sea of humanity that used to gather around Thakur in the early days?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No, there aren't many here who believe in the short-cut to Heaven as most of us did in the days of song and dance, forty years ago. These people have been tested by suffering. They've grown in numbers slowly and steadily . . . through hardship and persecution. Some have faltered and fallen, but most have steadily stretched and opened their hearts to follow Thakur truly. Their lives are slowly adjusting. Their children are farther along the road, and just as Thakur promised them, they see new generations begin right where they leave off."

"It's a mass movement, though," I commented. "Just as it was in the beginning."

"Yes," he agreed, "but now it's made up of people who are really learning to love, to give and do out of love and feel blessed"—he spread his arms eloquently—"Hindus, Moslems, Buddhists, Christians, and Animists . . . all have renewed devotion and understanding of the faith of their fathers . . . and a positive acceptance of their brothers' creeds."

He left us to take care of his numerous guests.

We were silent for a while and then Mother spoke again. "Thakur is getting old. If you want him to found your university and imbue it with his spirit, you'll all have to double your efforts."

I felt this to be a personal rebuke. "We're working as hard as we can!" I protested.

"Nonsense!" Mother sighed. "No healthy man ever works as hard as he can. Unfortunately, this wisdom always seems to come too late."

Mother left for the States a week later. I believe now that she must have had a strong intuition concerning her illness, for in December, 1959, I received word that she had only a few months to live.

With a grieving heart I returned to America to spend these last days with her. Before leaving Satsang I asked Thakur for his blessing. His great dark eyes held me firmly in a warm embrace. He spoke slowly and in English:

"Standing in the whirlpool of necessity
That seeks to serve the life of man today,
My prayer, my appeal to the Supreme Father, is
May you be blessed and make all blessed,
Ever stretching your steps toward eternal becoming.

This beggar's naked plea is not for you alone
But for every single being in the world.
O, Father the Supreme!
May none in the world of man be deprived
Nor be the cause for others' deprivation.

I have answered to your quest
What I see, what I think, what I know
Is beneficial to our life and growth,
With every blazing outspoken reply,
As far as I conceive.

Do what you think good
For yourself, your family, and your country.
May you be anointed with bliss.
And always do remember:
Wherever good in all respects
Is invoked and imbibed
There, bliss blazed with God resides
With a soothing shower of smile."

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