

Professor M.V. Rama Sarma
Collected Plays

1982

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Collected Plays

Collected and Edited
by

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- Milton's Paradise Lost: A Study*
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The Heroic Argument : A Study of Milton's
Heroic Poetry
The Eagle and the Phoenix : A Study of Samson
Agonistes
Things Unattempted : A Study of Milton

EDITED :

- Milton's Minor Poetry*
Milton's Samson Agonistes
Heywood's A woman killed with kindness
Milton's Paradise Lost Book IX

NOVELS :

- The Stream*
The Farewell Party
Look Homeward
The Bliss of Life

For my wife

Lakshmi

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The plays of Professor Rama Sarma have been written and published at different times. Only one play, has been irretrievably lost. The chronology of the plays included in this volume is as follows: *Youth and Crabbed Age* (1942); *Like to Like* (1943, originally published in Hindu College Magazine); *Marpessa* (1944, originally published in *Triveni*, March 1944); *This Busy World* (1944, originally published in Hindu College Magazine); *Ignorance and Idiocy* (1945) and *Sakuntala* (1945). All these plays were written before the author went abroad. While in U.K., *Urvashi* was written in 1947 and *Towards Marriage* in 1949. During 1950-80, *The Carnival* was written in 1958, *Inspector Raghavan* in 1959 and *The Mahatma* in 1979 originally published in *The Indian Scholar* (1979).

This collected edition is published chiefly with the view that such an edition is necessary because, the growing recognition of Professor Rama Sarma as a creative writer calls for such an edition. Secondly, whereas his novels and critical works are available in print, many of the plays have been out of print. Thirdly, the Indo-English literature is considered to be drama poor. This edition we hope will be of use to those who read for pleasure, education, as well as for those who pursue research in the field.

We are grateful to Professor M.V. Rama Sarma who has helped us at all stages of the preparation of this volume and contributed a preface to it. We are also thankful to all those students of Professor Rama Sarma who contributed liberally to the felicitation function organised on 9th November, 1980.

The printing of this edition was made possible because of the love of his students for him. Part of the printing costs is met by the amount contributed by his students.

In making the press copy a careful study of the original manuscripts, type scripts and published versions has been made.

Publisher

INTRODUCTION TO THE COLLECTED PLAYS

These eleven plays were written over nearly four decades. Except two, *Urvashi* and *Inspector Raghavan*, all others were published. Of the six plays written before going abroad in 1946 (except *Sakuntala* and *Marpessa*) four of them deal with live social problems, the conflict between youth and age, between age old conventions and extremely modern beliefs almost in a Shavian tempo. They reveal the tremendous influence of Shaw on me both in the technique of writing and exposition of social evils. These four plays may be considered to be plays of ideas. The style in these plays is literary and often poetic mostly because of the overpowering influence of several poets on me at that time. There are echoes and re-echoes of poets in most of these plays.

Marpessa is based on the conflict between mortal and immortal love and the precedence of the former over the latter. It shows that human life with all its vicissitudes is lovable, and a life without trials and tribulations is no life at all. The play is based on the Greek myth. In a similar fashion the Greek myth is exploited to expose the complexity of modern society in *This Busy World* where Epicurus takes pride in having the largest number of votaries, both among men and women. He feels that he is the lord supreme in this modern world. The hideousness and the cupidity of the modern world are presented in this play half mockingly and half tauntingly. The play *This Busy World* is mostly a satire on the new fangled ideas of life and happiness.

In *Sakuntala* the emphasis is on domestic love, the love that is distributed over children. Domestic love, as Kalidas sees it, is more significant and sacred than romantic love. The

growth of Sakuntala from a purely physical plane to that of a spiritual exaltation, through a process of suffering, is brought out in this play. I have concentrated mostly on the chastening aspect of physical love into a spiritual one.

The plays that were written while I was in U.K. shed the poetic content. *Urvashi* is like *Marpessa* bringing out the essential grandeur in human life despite its misery, frustration and hardship. *Towards Marriage* tries to sum up the need for sympathy and understanding between partners in life. Incompatibility of temperament need not necessarily lead to disastrous consequences and disturbances in domestic life if only an attempt is made to understand each other sympathetically. The plays from *Urvashi* onwards show a marked change in style. The poetic style disappears and an approximation to the spoken language emerges. The discipline of research with its insistence on rationalistic thinking knocks out the romantic in me. The critic in me from now on takes the lead. My stay in U.K. for three years and contact with English as a spoken language helped me in evolving a dramatic style in the plays I had written from 1947.

The Carnival, written while I was in Delhi, presents the cosmopolitan life with all its gaiety, colourfulness and cheer. But underneath this jollity and joyousness there is the fundamental question whether life is a fiesta, a carnival, or a merry-go-round. *The Carnival* stresses the purposefulness of life with marked insight and vividness.

All the three plays, *Towards Marriage*, *The Carnival* and *Sakuntala*, deal with the theme of marriage in one form or the other. In fact most of the other plays also present the varied aspects of love and marital relationships for in those years my mind was mostly exercised on the theme of ideal marriage.

In those three plays marriage, whether it is an arranged one, or based on one's own choice, or of the Gandharva type is shown as a sacred one. It systematises all angularities in men and women and leads to social harmony. So varied approaches to marriage are presented in these plays with sympathy and understanding.

Inspector Raghavan was written for an occasion and it was produced by the undergraduates of the college in 1960 as part of the valedictory function. It shows humorously the laborious efforts of the teachers to please the Inspector with a veiled hint that the teacher-politician has entered the teaching profession.

The Mahatma written in 1979 was originally meant to be a full length play on the life of Gandhiji, but finally I had to satisfy myself only with the presentation of the last phase of Gandhiji's life. The play refers to the martyrdom of Gandhiji. To a large extent I have been influenced by Shaw and Eliot in their portrayal of martyrs in *Saint Joan* and *Murder in the Cathedral* respectively. *The Mahatma* insists on the theme that martyrs and mahatmas have no will of their own, they surrender to the will of God. They are sent into the world with a mission, and once that is accomplished they are withdrawn from the mundane world.

From a questioning and almost revolutionary attitude towards social laws in the formative years of my life I have moved on to a greater acceptance of life in its totality with all its good, bad and indifferent streams. The eleven plays show this marked change in me. *The Mahatma* brings this quest of life to a close and it presents man's elevation from a physical plane to a spiritual ascendancy.

Any play written in India in English has an inherent disadvantage in the sense that it is not very often staged. Stage worthiness being a basic test for a play, most of the plays written in English do not fulfil this requirement. This is true of my plays also. However these can be read and enjoyed for their thought content and for the relevance they have to the perennial problems of life, east or west.

14-3-1981

PROFESSOR M.V. RAMA SARMA

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YOUTH AND CRABBED AGE

(One Act Play)

Characters :

Ramu
Indira
Gopalam
Lakshmi

A serene, sombre evening has produced a dull, monotonous appearance. The atmosphere is chill and benumbing, forecasting a tragic gloom.

Ramu, a young man of twenty, is seen to be engaged in a 'tete-a-tete' with his wife, Indira. He is a nice, young gentleman, fully embellished with all the fashionable paraphernalia and awfully fond of decent dress. He is a robust optimist with a native inclination towards studies and a lively disposition towards conversation. He is ultra-modern, both in his appearance and views.

Opposite to him is his wife Indira, a woman of extraordinary liveliness and angelic grace. She is in the hey-day of her youth and her buoyancy of spirit is quite apparent in her expressive eyes. She is 'as chaste as ice, and as pure as snow'.

RAMU : Indira ! the wind is calm, the evening is pervaded by an alluring stillness. How charming Nature seems to be now !

INDIRA : I call you mad, Ramu, for every genius is mad, your reflective moods do not for a single moment entertain a doubt about your way of living.

RAMU : Always worldly – always materialistic in your outlook. Soar high above these mundane fetters.

INDIRA : More of philosophy than of reality. Don't try to travel in the ethereal regions of Keats and Shelley, 'the inheritors of unfulfilled renown' lest you should fall too low. Face hard facts and think of your future means of earning your livelihood.

RAMU : What does it matter if I have no living ? When the grass is green, when the day follows night, when the cuckoo sends its melodious tunes to the afflicted, when the pea-cock dances merrily and when Nature is playful and jubilant, then why should I be worried ? Is not a forest tree growing all alone without aid or human protection ? Then why should I not grow in the same way ?

INDIRA : (*Surprised*) Oh ! what's this ? If nature is fresh, then how does it fulfil your cravings and your appetites ?

RAMU : Poets are nursed by Nature and poetry is the best balm that soothes our feelings.

*I do but sing because I must,
And pipe but as the linnets sing.*

That's what Tennyson says and so does every poet feel immersed in the rapturous environment of the calm and austere Nature. To them poetry is 'inevitable' and the felicity of it makes them elated and they are oblivious of the transient joys and sorrows of the world.

INDIRA : Then does it follow that you are a poet ? What's all this tall talk of poetry and philosophy before women like me, who can't soar high into your lofty regions of imagination ? Your talk is Greek and Latin to me.

RAMU : Quite so, Indira. Poets and philosophers can't be understood as easily as the making of fine, savoury dishes.

INDIRA : Fine words, indeed ! But don't you think that the state of an unemployed graduate like you is miserable ?

RAMU : Miserable ! I don't think so. Fortune does not smile on you and open her concealed treasures to your lustrous eyes. The path of life is not strewn with roses and it is man's erroneous notion to be dreaming of a symphonious life. Be optimistic and remember that, after all, today's sorrow is but tomorrow's joy.

INDIRA : Of course (*Heaves a sigh*).

Ramu tries to console and cajole the dispirited Indira. Indira stands with down-cast eyes, tapping on the floor. Ramu looks wistfully into her face. Tears seem to swell and he wipes them with his kerchief. Just then, is to be heard a violent knock at the door. The two stand aghast.

RAMU }
INDIRA } Who's there ?

Another knock follows. The door is opened with a crackling noise. In the door-way is to be seen Gopalam, the aged father of Ramu, fretting and fuming. He is an orthodox, superstitious old man, fond of criticising the moderns and of extolling the ancients. He is the arch-enemy of modern fashions and customs. He smells every one at a distance and he enjoys the confidence of none. He is greatly fond of delivering long speeches like Polonius.

GOPALAM : (To Ramu) The world has become rotten to the core. Everywhere there is corruption and the predominance of society over individual is lessening. Eat, drink and be merry is the Epicurean philosophy of the present age. This is obnoxious and odious. Shame on the moderns !

RAMU : Father ! why do you rave and rant like that ? Should not every one have the liberty to do as he pleases ? To think originally and to express forcibly should be the motto of us all. Liberty should be the goal of humanity.

GOPALAM : (Infuriated) Talk of liberty ! Where is liberty ? Don't you know that liberty is but a licence to behave in a reckless manner, devoid of all decorum, decency and dignity ? The defect of this effect, the longing for liberty, the defiance of established principles of antiquity, are but the sequel of educating you so far. Subdue your so-called forward spirit and let it be tempered by imitation of elders and cool meditation over things. Don't be rash and intruding.

RAMU : Society is your *summum bonum*, the be-all and end-all of your life. Elderly persons like you are dogmatic in their beliefs and they cling to the age-long customs with

the dogged tenacity of mad men.

GOPALAM : I never thought that your university education would make you such an idiot. By-the-by, I heard of your atheism and your disbelief in the existence of an all-pervading Spirit. This is the way in which you are defiled by the contact of the so-called forward views. Don't you know that society speaks daggers to you ?

RAMU : I don't care for society and I would never be a slave to custom and tradition.

Gopalam becomes all the more infuriated and, in a fit of anger, wants to administer a blow on Ramu when Lakshmi, the old mother of Ramu, comes to the scene of action and begins her tirade against her daughter-in-law and chides her for her advanced views. She is an obstinate woman, void of all reason and common-sense and longs for honeyed words. She has a bitter aversion for Indira and is her irreconcilable foe.

LAKSHMI : Insensible Indira ! Don't you have manners ? Why do you stand mute and gape like that ? You modern girls do not know the way to revere the aged and hoary-headed. Your fashions, your extravagance and your fondness for aping are but a prelude to the disobedience which you want to show to your betters. A plague upon these fashions !

INDIRA : Why do you let fly a bitter tempest on me ? What makes you so mad with rage ?

LAKSHMI : Mad with rage ! Ramu, see how she speaks ! She is irreverent towards me and she is somewhat priggish in her behaviour.

GOPALAM : Quite so. Ramu. We cannot let matters drift like this. Let her behave properly.

(Ramu keeps quiet).

LAKSHMI : Oh ! an irony of fate. What a change has come. The younger are becoming aggressive and the older are pushed back. The old order has already changed, but I would never reconcile myself to the new spirit.

RAMU : There lies the fun and folly of it all. You old folk can't adjust yourselves to the spirit of the day and you cannot appreciate the original views of the moderns. You always want to be blind slaves of custom and tradition.

GOPALAM : Harping on the same point. Ramu, you are adamant and you seem to be an acknowledged hater of the ancient customs which are based upon justice and equity. Infamy, it is a heinous sin on your part to attack elders. Take your place in the phalanx of your modern society. Let not your shadows fall across my threshold.

* * * * *

Ramu and Indira advance a few steps forward and Ramu soliloquises :

Society ! what miraculous transformations do you produce ! Turn a son against a father, a father against a son. But I shall never be a slave to society, implicitly following its dictums and swallowing its nostrums.

* * * * *

Ramu and Indira go out into the wilderness of Nature, dejected and dispirited, but braced by the inscrutable hand of the Almighty. A strange optimism reconciles them to the impending affliction of their lives.

Lakshmi and Gopalam whisper to each other of the seeming foolishness and obstinacy of Ramu and Indira.

LIKE TO LIKE

(One Act Play)

Characters :

Gopalam
Swarna
Sukumar
Indira

Scene : (*A garden before a neat and tidy house*)

Time : (*Five 'O' Clock in the evening*)

It is a fine summer evening. A neat and tidy house, with its small, round garden, presents an attractive view. In the garden is to be seen a big round table, clustered around by soft cushioned chairs, fully revealing an ostentatious atmosphere. The tablecloth, with its decorative paintings and gorgeous colours adds decorum to the scene. Nature is gay and joyous, the busy butterflies, the buzzing bees, the chirping insects, all these fill the air with sylvan pomp and revelry.

It is the residence of a rich and influential man in the locality. He is a man of about forty or thereabouts, of medium height and fair complexion. He has passed the whirlwind of passion, when man stoops to woman's coaxing glances and oblique smiles. His genial outlook on life has waned into a morbid

and cynical one, as a result of which he has lost faith in every thing but money. Man pleases him not, no not even woman. His busy, ponderous brain is much excited and he finds repose in the garden, seated at ease on one of the chairs, contemplating the utter futility of earthly longings.

A gentle tap on his shoulders rouses him from his gloom and depression. He beholds before him his consort, a paragon of loveliness and an image of youth, cheer and vivacity. She is a woman of twenty, in the hey day of her youth. Her dress, her gait, her looks all indicate her pretensions to modern civilization and refinement. There is a certain charm about her and she is highly artistic.

HE : Quite pleased to meet you. Paragon of beauty ! You are a living specimen of oriental beauty, combining within yourself the gifts of nature with the charm of cosmetics.

SHE : Do not flatter me. All men are like this. They offer flattering speeches to dupe innocent women into love, marriage and perdition. 'Man is the hunter, woman is his game.....'

HE : No more of your polluted stuff. Can't you imagine the high hopes I cherish of you and the affection I bestow upon you ? My affection is pure and ethereal to a fault.

SHE : (*Sarcastically*) Affection ! The word itself is a sugar-coated pill to administer a bitter dose. You have now reached a stage when affection must have ceased to function in your veins.

HE : Swarna, don't be dreamy. What can airy nothings bring you, except displeasure and disappointment ? The

disparity in age existing between us need not make you restless and unappeased. Our forefathers had been vigorous and zestful because they married very late in life.

SWARNA : (*Slightingly*) Thereby, they have increased the number of young widows, who are left destitute even at their tender age. Mr. Gopalam, you ought not to have married me when you lost your first wife, a few months ago

GOPALAM : (*Seriously*) It is not for you to comment on that. To remarry is the inalienable birth-right of every widower. It is traditionally coming from time immemorial. None can dispute it.

SWARNA : What is right for you men, should be equally right for us women. Woman must have equal rights with man and what is sacramental to man cannot be irreligious or unholy to woman.

GOPALAM : So you advocate that women should remarry, you modern women, you are full of quixotic ideas and your only motive is to oppose anything that is established according to the strict code of morality. You cannot appreciate our old, ancient laws of Hindu marriage. You always question.

SWARNA : Surely it is the order of the day. 'Question, Examine, Test' that's what Shaw says.

GOPALAM : You seem to be a Shavian woman, fully intoxicated with all his heterodox views. Marriage is a holy institution and you are not to question its sanctity and utility after a lapse of thousands of years of fruitful marital happiness and domestic felicity.

SWARNA : At any rate, widowers must marry widows. They should not rob the pristine beauty of young women with their devilish looks and tempting offers. Woman must have economic independence and she should have equal status with man. My earnest desire is

*To lift the woman's fallen divinity
Upon an even pedestal with man.*

GOPALAM : Impossible. Woman is woman, man is man, the one cannot become the other. Each has what the other has not, 'each completes the other and is completed by the other'.

SWARNA : Mere rubbish. All antiquated, outmoded ideas. You are always hostile towards me and try to oppose my forward views. To be the wife of an aged man is a perpetual source of torment to a young woman. In the club, I am a butt of ridicule and an object of utter derision and contempt for having tolerated you so far.

GOPALAM : (*A little surprised*) Then what do you propose to do ?

SWARNA : Now put an end to your talk. Here comes Mr. Sukumar, a friend of mine in my college days. I will introduce him to you.

(Just then enter a pair, radiant, resplendent and buoyant. She is a tall, graceful woman of thirty, affable and amiable. She is a votary of love and with her 'brief is life but love is long'. And wherever love is to be sought, in old, obsolete bosoms or in fresh, enthusiastic hearts, she is the foremost person to seek it. She is leading a life of celibacy after one tragic occurrence in life.

The youth about her is an ardent admirer of hers. She is his seraph and he her earnest eremite. He is a young man of five and twenty, full of optimism and good spirits. With his ultra-modern views, he is esteemed as a social reformer. He has a fine personality, pleasing manners and winning behaviour).

SUKUMAR : (*Bows to Swarna*) Hallo ! Swarna long since I met you. I like to introduce Mrs. Indira, a woman for whom I have the greatest esteem and regard.

(Swarna and Indira shake hands)

SWARNA : I am as forward as you are and I am quite willing to introduce Mr. Gopalam, the owner of this beautiful garden and the house that faces it.

SUKUMAR : Very glad to meet you, Mr. Gopalam.

(Shakes hands with Gopalam)

GOPALAM : You have come just in time. We have been feeling our conversation dull and drab, when you have stepped into our almost tedious talk.

SWARNA : Mr. Sukumar, what heavenly bliss it used to be while studying in the college. The glory is departed. I want to be free from the fever and fret of this mundane world. In the wilderness of light I like to roam about. Observe the phenomena of nature – what a glorious sunset, what a heavenly music, what are all these beautiful birds!

SUKUMAR : Highly poetical.

SWARNA : (*Pointing to a particular bird*) See how beautiful it is. It has its sweet mate which will turn its downy neck and welcome it with fond, dear embraces.

SUKUMAR : This is highly romantic, Swarna, you have been fed on the manna of poetic thought.

GOPALAM : (*Enthusiastically*) Swarna, I admire, your rich gifts. They have been dormant hitherto, now they have become apparent. You are an angel, a sweet and lovely one.

SWARNA : (*Indifferently*) Don't try to compliment me.

INDIRA : You are too emotional and imaginative. Your buoyancy of spirit is seen even in your expressive looks. But all this will fade away. It is the law of nature. As you grow old you lose all your former spirit and courage and become a conventional type of woman.

SWARNA : No, not a rap. Never dream of my conversion. As long as nature is my guide and comforter, what need have I to fear ? As the grass is green, so will I be for ever fresh and beautiful.

INDIRA : This is sentimentalism. This is all poetic imagination. Poets are the most miserable creatures alive and they are a thorough failure in the practical world. We want practical men and women, not utopian visionaries and idle speculators.

GOPALAM : (*Energetically*) I highly commend your views, Mrs. Indira. You have expressed in simple words the most urgent and pressing need of the country. How can

idle dreamers better the state of the country ? A rich, influential man, with generous impulses is the need of the hour.

SUKUMAR : Rich men, as a rule, are not generous. Their parsimony, stringency, crookedness, all these are detestable blots. How can society be improved with these aristocrats who are too often haunted by the devil, profit and loss ? They are the pests of society. I hate the rich men.

GOPALAM : You are as misguided as Swarna with your so-called up-to-date ideas. By-the-by, are you a socialist ?

SUKUMAR : By all means. I am a socialist, a communist, an anti-capitalist. Whereas the poor man sees his children starve, the rich man pleases himself feeding his pet dogs. Is not this a luxury, an undue advantage that the rich possess over the poor ? There is no liberation for the poor man's suffering, as long as the rich man indulges in idle pursuits and worthless hobbies.

INDIRA : (*Surprised*) Mr. Sukumar, I am surprised, displeased and alarmed at your vituperation of the rich. My short acquaintance with you has not given me the opportunity to study you in all your different moods. I was enamoured of your youth, your address and grace, but never thought of your ideas.

SUKUMAR : What harm is there in knowing my views ? I have not behaved in a traitorous manner, nor have I been tempted by your rich and affluent position.

INDIRA : Harm ! You speak lightly as if it does not matter.

You have stolen my heart, my hope and cheer.

SWARNA : There will be no interruption to your unalloyed bliss. His more advanced views do not come in the way of your happiness, they do not mar it.

INDIRA : With different temperaments how can you dream of a happy life ? Do not your very poets tell us that true lovers should be of one mind, one heart, one thought and that a for is to be broken ?

SWARNA : I am now reminded of the intellectual union of the Brownings. But such cases are rare in actual life. It is an irony of fate that men and women of diverse ideas and of totally different temperaments and tastes, are joined together in wedlock. To them life is a bitter strife, an inglorious battle, and it is a woe 'too deep for tears'.

SUKUMAR : If divorce on reasonable grounds is granted, then there will be every chance of augmenting the connubial felicity.

GOPALAM : (*Shocked*) Divorce ! This is an exceptionally unfortunate evening, when I have been obliged to hear all this trash. Hindu marriage is indisputably accepted as a sacrament – an inviolable bond. According to it woman is not humiliated or subdued. She enjoys equal status with man and the responsibilities are shared equally by both. Thus they are,

*Man for the field and woman for the hearth;
Man for the sword and for the needle she;
Man with the head and woman with the heart*

like friends indispensable to each other.

INDIRA : Wisely said. It is the prerogative of women to propagate the race. Heroes, saints, savants, administrators, poets, philosophers, all these and the whole of humanity owe their origin, their existence and their good breeding to women alone. A woman who does not experience motherly love is no woman at all.

SWARNA : (*Smiles*) Away with your pathetic contentment. Don't try to console or flatter yourself. You seem to be antediluvian in your ideas, despite your polish and refinement. You should sympathise with the cause of woman and never entertain those innocent ideas, however pleasing they may be to Mr. Gopalam.

GOPALAM : I am sufficiently vexed with your meaningless talk. I would have thanked Providence, if only I had been blessed with a rational woman like Indira.

SWARNA : Most fitting it would have been, a widower marrying a widow. And what an encouragement it would have been to me, if I had been married to Mr. Sukumar, a man after my heart and a hero of my worship.

GOPALAM : So worship is a common feature with modern women also. In what way are you better than the ordinary woman who dotes lovingly upon her husband, considering him to be a perfection of masculine beauty ?

SWARNA : But our worship is altogether a different one. Their worship means obedience and servitude. Ours is admiration and appreciation of intelligence and capacities. We are enraptured and caught by the views of some forward looking men. Our admiration ripens into sympathy, harmony and love. Ours is more intellectual.

Theirs is more physical.

SUKUMAR : To err is human, not only human but also divine.
Even in matters of love human nature is prone to err.

GOPALAM : Modern brains are stuffed with all these peculiar conceptions. Lacking in originality, the moderns go in for imitation and reap its consequences. I am dissatisfied with this artificial world. This is a world for duplicity and hypocrisy. Everyone poses as a reformer, as an innovator and as an admirer and champion of woman and her cause. Married life is becoming more and more precarious, involving many complexities. I want to lead an ascetic life, renouncing all these earthly ties.

(Tries to go)

SWARNA : *(Holding him)* Never do so. Thereby you leave me as a widow and I have to go in for a widower like you.

GOPALAM : *(Irritated)* Don't take my words in a light and sportive manner as you are wont to do. I feel dispirited. Swarna, go your ways. Cast your coquettish looks on others. I feel awfully afflicted.

(Exit Gopalam)

INDIRA : Poor man, I am all affection for him. He is bereft of sympathetic company and it is my duty to instil hope, faith and courage in him. His gloomy face has endeared itself to me. I will go, catch him.

(Exit Indira in a hurry)

SWARNA : Birds of the same feather flock together. Already she has overtaken him and as she walks by his side, the pair present a good spectacle.

SUKUMAR : So do we.

SWARNA : Ours is Platonic love.

SUKUMAR : "Love is like understanding, that grows bright, Gazing on many truths".

And we are Love's disciples, wandering in ethereal regions. We will go on Love's pilgrimage, in a fairy boat and we will dwell on an enchanted island, with nothing to interrupt us, but the roaring of the waves and the blowing of the winds. There we will be monarchs of all that we survey.

(Sukumar and Swarna leave the place, hand in hand)

—————*Curtain*—————

MARPESSA

(One Act Play)

Characters :

Marpessa	—	Daughter of Evanus
Idas	—	Her lover
Apollo	—	Son of Zeus (Sun-god)
Zeus	—	The supreme God

(Based on the poem "Marpessa" by Stephen Philips)

(The sun is rising in the east, dispelling darkness from the world. The garden is full of roseate hues and jasmine smells. There is a mystic grandeur and a sublime beauty about it. The birds prepare to leave their snug, little homes and there is an inexplicable charm in their crude, shrill sounds. The cuckoo sings cheerfully, the flowers laugh and play in felicity. The bees and the insects hop from flower to flower and whisper to them the mysterious message of the Infinite.

Marpessa enters the garden with nimble steps, leaving behind traces of her dew-pearled feet. She is of phenomenal beauty and angelic grace. Nature has lavished on her all her profuse gifts. The Earth seems to love her and Heaven smiles above her. Her steps are full of 'virgin liberty' and she is roaming with morning thoughts amid the dew, all fresh from sleeping. Her

ruddy cheeks indicate the bloom of pure repose and the perfection of her feminine graces. In a jubilant tone she sings a sportive song, a song that rejuvenates the world and fills it with optimism).

MARPESSA : (sings)

*God is in His heaven
All's right with the world*

(The symphony of her tone allures every object in the garden. Young Idas enters from the other side. The song of Marpessa rouses him into activity and he rushes into the garden in the expectation of meeting the unseen singer of that thrilling song. With outstretched hands he comes out, crying, 'Marpessa, my sweet and darling angel'. He alters the last lines of the song and sings in a melancholic strain, revealing thereby the utter futility of earthly longings).

IDAS : (Sings)

*God's not in His Heaven
All's wrong with the world,*

MARPESSA : What makes you alter the song and thereby deprive it of its charm ?

IDAS : Nothing but the uncertainty of possessing your hand, of winning your smile and of diving into the depths of your heart, makes one contemplate a paradise that I may lose.

MARPESSA : I admire your innocence, sweet Idas. Human nature is such. It oscillates between hope and despair,

between cheer and gloom, between optimism and pessimism. I cannot blame you for that. At times, we are elated and dream of a symphonious life. But frail as we are, frailer are our thoughts and they make us conceive of abject misery and ignominious life in the very next moment. Our thoughts fall from heights into depths.

IDAS : What is all this talk, my blessed Marpessa ? As I gaze on your sublime beauty, I wonder how we have been too near, yet too far. Now we are only friends, but a single word from you will land me in Elysium and make me an altered being. There our hearts will beat in unison and our looks will commune with each other in an inexplicable and unutterable manner.

MARPESSA : (*Looks at him, shyly*) You speak in a sad, but delightful manner. Ask of the winds that blow on you. They reveal my intense affection for you. Who can check the blowing of the winds or the roaring of the waves ? Equally so is my heart pure and chaste, unsullied, free and joyous and no other person than you can have any claim upon it. What its smell is to the rose, what its light is to the sun, what its music is to the wind, that will I be to you, inseparable and indivisible from you. I need not frequently remind you of my pure love towards you.

IDAS : What you say is all true, but there are circumstances over which man has absolutely no control. Nature may be antagonistic or the supernatural beings may serve as an impediment to the onward progress of our love.

MARPESSA : (*Taking his hand into hers*) Now this will be my earnest promise and this serves as a covenant between us. We shall be one spirit within two frames, one passion

in twin hearts. Ours will be

*One hope within two will, one will beneath
Two overshadowing minds, one life, one death,
One heaven, one hell, one immortality,
And one annihilation.*

IDAS : Your words sound like the echoes of an antenatal dream. In the touch of your hands I experience elysian bliss and I am quite oblivious of all mundane fetters.

(Kisses her hand)

(The sun then rises up high in the sky and his red rays seem to be chiding the hasty actions of the mortals below. Apollo, the sun god, gazes on the sweetness and extraordinary beauty of Marpessa. He has long been cherishing an inextinguishable love for her. He comes clothed in white samite, mystic and wonderful. The long, loose garments come trailing behind him. With amiable looks, he approaches Marpessa).

APOLLO : Marpessa, my sweet nymph, come to me. Bathed in the freshness of the morn, you seem to be more lovely than Diana, the chaste goddess. Choose between Idas and myself – a mortal or an immortal lover. Be my spouse and enjoy elysian bliss.

(Springs to embrace her).

A sound of thunder is heard and from the Olympian heights comes Zeus with his magic wand. He steps between Apollo and Marpessa and speaks in a calm and dignified tone. He assumes paternal fondness towards Marpessa.

ZEUS : (*To Apollo*) Let her decide for herself. Don't be hasty and sully her pure and guileless heart. She should have the freedom of selecting her own lord.

APOLLO : (*Obeys in meek silence - exit God Zeus - turning to Marpessa*) Gentle lady, now is the time for you to decide. Yours is the history of a flower in the air and you are as rich as is the rose. The rose, the queen of all flowers, casts its magic spells all round, but fades away too soon. What is its history, but that of a single moment ? It is the nature of human beauty to grow pale and stale after the first intoxicating period of love is over. Human love itself is fleeting and it is as evanescent as the bubble that bursts or a foam that fades away in the twinkling of an eye. You, paragon of loveliness, you could not have been created by God thus to be an object of momentary dalliance.

MARPESSA : Immortal God, your praise of me is too magnificent and eloquent. I am a mortal, susceptible to all weaknesses and I shall be no fitting companion to you.

APOLLO : Do not disparage yourself thus. For the sake of love many great gods have taken upon themselves even the shapes of beasts. Jupiter became a bull and the green Neptune transformed himself into a ram. There is nothing unnatural or debasing about my seeking your hand. Your beauty is exceptional and for winning your love I would willingly undergo a metamorphosis and be an ordinary individual.

MARPESSA : Too generous and benign. Mighty lord, I am painfully aware of the earthly longings and their futility. I do not cherish even the glimmering notion of obtaining

and retaining eternal happiness and everlasting joy. I do not aspire for immortality, for I know that contentment leads to happiness.

APOLLO : (*Smiles*) Be more ambitious and extend your imagination over the ever-green fields of Paradise. You will behold there pellucid streams, an ampler ether and a diviner ear. I cannot endure the thought of your withering away into nothingness. Earthly love is frail. Man courts you for his entertainment and deems you a toy. When your face loses its freshness, its glossy surface, indicating youth, health and cheer, then will you be neglected. The beauty being sipped, the lover is disappointed and gropes in vain for the lovely looks that first fanned his desire and led him to ecstatic moments. Life on earth is dull and unprofitable and I will carry you above the world, there to partake of my joy.

IDAS : Marpessa, what Apollo says is true. But a mortal is a mortal and since it is in women to pity rather than to aspire I will lay bare my thoughts before you. I love you not because you possess a face that shows me to madness and infatuation, but because there is a sublime grandeur about you which suggests to me surprisingly mysterious thoughts. Your voice is more melodious than the unseen chorus sung by spirits. Your face is familiar, yet strange, and in this dark and ugly world you are my guiding star, the purest guide of my heart. Your looks reveal vistas of infinite thought and you are a perfect woman to warn, to comfort and command. You are more of a spirit, with something of angelic light.

MARPESSA : Beloved Idas, your words kindle in me a perpetual longing for you.

APOLLO : You seem to be incorrigible and inflexible. You are failing to conjure up before your mind's eye the felicity of immortal life. Come with me. We two will dance merrily in heaven, accompanied by gay-looking nymphs. As we run in jocund spirits, mortals will gape and gaze at you in bewilderment. You will be endowed with all supernatural powers and you will be my queen, my darling and my seraph.

MARPESSA : If you take me as your bride, I shall be deprived of one noble heritage of mortals – that is suffering. 'Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thought'. Life with no perils, no hardships and no mishaps is no life at all. Trials and tribulations bring out the best in us. They test the unflinching faith of the human beings. If life is one round of incessant joys, what thrill, what charm can it have ? Our laughter is always interspersed and interwoven with tears and that rich gift is not possessed by you, immortals.

APOLLO : I pity your ignorance and dogged contentment with human life, with its ills and sufferings.

MARPESSA : As I grow old you will still be young. It will be a displeasing phenomenon to watch you blooming and without any change from day to day. Mortal that I am, with the lapse of years, I shall grow old and lose my beauty. Then I should try to captivate you by little devices and artifices. But if I marry Idas, we two will live like two inseparable friends and in old age we will feel delight by looking at our children lisping and prattling. We stand against bitter winds and unforeseen misfortunes, linked hand in hand and leaning cheek to cheek. He will not despise me in my old age and we will wander over

hills and dales, watch the farmers reaping the harvest or idle away our time at some village festivity. So shall we live, and though the glamour of the first secret kiss I give to him be rare in later years, yet he will not forsake me. For he too grows old deprived of all his former agility and strength.

IDAS : Exquisite Marpessa, fine words. We shall live in friendship and experience the wear and tear of human life. Through sadness we will ennoble ourselves and lead a calm life.

MARPESSA : Farewell to you, mighty God. Bear with the little frailties of your children.

APOLLO : (*Coldly*) Be it so.

IDAS : Now can I dream of a millennium, a golden age. In your company time fleets away, affliction withers away and your looks will always be a source of comfort to me. If you stand by me, what do I care whether empires be ruined, or the world itself be engulfed in a deluge ?

MARPESSA : (*Holding his hand warmly*) Idas, don't extol me. I am no supernatural being endowed with extraordinary gifts. Nature will be our home. Oh, what a nice fragrance ! What lovely music, what dancing of the playful insects ! The birds are chattering. We will sing and dance, skip and play. Let us sing and sing.

MARPESSA }
IDAS } (*Sing in unison*)

*God is in His Heaven
All's right with the world*

—Curtain—

THIS BUSY WORLD

(One Act Play)

Characters :

Manohar
Rekha
Sundar
Rup Rani
Prakash
Kumar
Sneha Lata
Epicurus.

Scene : *A cosmopolitan club, attended by ladies and gentlemen.*

Time : *(Ten 'O' Clock in the night)*

PROLOGUE

Epicurus enters and speaks in a calm and dignified tone, expatiating on his own gifts of making people elated and jubilant.

EPICURUS : There was a time when I was merely an unknown philosopher, much hooted at and ridiculed for my concept of happiness. The old order has changed, yielding place

to a new one and I am now recognised as a being worthy of respect and worship. I am omniscient, omnipresent and I dwell in the inmost sanctuaries of my devotee's hearts, though temples are not raised in my name. My tenets are practicable and Epicureanism has replaced all the great religions of the past. Hinduism, Mohammedanism, Christianity, all these are sectarian religions, embracing one particular community or nation. But Epicureanism knows no distinctions of caste, creed, colour and race. Nor does it have any territorial limitations. I come from the West but the craze for Epicureanism has spread all over the world. Milton or some other quixotic poet has given a horrible description of Sin and Death and has terrified people to some extent. But my young and ardent admirers are not moral cowards such as to be worried about sin and death. They set at defiance the dictums of society, as well as the conventions of morality. They are reprobates, republicans and enthusiasts of liberty.

(Exit Epicurus)

* * * * *

(It is a fine moonlit night. In the club are assembled a motley company of lawyers, doctors, poets and politicians of both the sexes. Their cheerful looks, their blithe tones, their loud ludicrous ejaculations, all these indicate the ecstasy of their moods. In the open space are to be seen ladies and gentlemen players strolling, having just finished a set of mixed doubles in Tennis. They seem to be communing with the queen Moon, seated on her imperial throne, clustered around by her starry gays. At one end of the room is to be heard the tingling sound of the coins that are callously flung on the table by the players at cards.)

Lovers of music and maniacs of news are busily engaged in operating the radio and trying various stations. After spending a part of their time in the pursuit of their own hobbies, they flock to the big round table in the centre of the hall, there to carouse themselves for a time).

MANOHAR : Let us fill our cups with bubbling wine, sweet and old wine and we will be minions of the moon.

REKHA : We will be somnambulists and we will mimic the wild, ludicrous cries of the lunatic or the sweet pipings of amorous birds.

MANOHAR : Play on, if music be the food of love, give me excess of it. Sing that merry song, that cheerful song that keeps young men from play and old men from the chimney corner.

REKHA : (*Sings*) What is love ? 'tis not hereafter ; Present mirth hath present laughter ; what's to come is still unsure ; In delay there lies no plenty ; Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty youth's stuff will not endure.

SUNDAR : What a mellifluous voice ! Your melody is more enchanting than that of Orpheus, whose beautiful harmonies have moved rocks, trees and wild beasts.

RUP RANI : Let us drink life to the lees. "Since life fleets, all is change ; the past gone, seize to-day !" Think not of morrow ; the morrow will take care of itself.

MANOHAR : This happy moonlit night reminds me of the pomp, luxuriance and grandeur that Cleopatra used to display in the company of Antony, while indulging them-

selves in wassail.

REKHA : If life were to be a series of pleasant nights as these, it will really be charming and there will be no occasion for mortals to groan, for beauty to fade away and for new love to pine away.

RUP RANI : We can augment our felicity by spending a greater part of our time in clubs, in company and in social gatherings.

SUNDAR : Well said, Miss Rani.

RUP RANI : I really pity the ignorance of some whimsical men and women, who imagine their little dirty homes to be earthly paradises. They are too eloquent in speaking about domestic happiness, connubial felicity and all that polluted stuff.

MANOHAR : It is an irony that society is comprised of such men and women who lead a sheepish life, unable to realise the vast opportunities that are afforded by modern civilization for the betterment and happiness of humanity.

REKHA : Man creates for himself one object and one form and builds thereby a sepulchre for its eternity. Woman considers him her Apollo, her guide, philosopher and friend. She thinks every time in the contour of his person the perfection of masculine beauty, his soul the soul of a saint, his intellect that of a seer. For him she is the most bewitching woman he has ever seen and he esteems her as a fresh, virginal daughter of Nature. This is how man and woman estimate each other, worship each other, receiving thereby the so-called happiness of domestic life.

SUNDAR : Miss Rekha, they mistake their own ignorance for happiness, their erroneous notions for dictums of society.

MANOHAR : In the name of society they hamper the liberty of individuals and keep them always in subjugation.

PRAKASH : The rules of society are valid with foolish old men, not with energetic young men. We should not care for the dogmatic assertions of society.

The congregation shouts in applause.

RUP RANI : We should have liberty to think and to act and whenever there is an infringement on our freedom, we should defy it and our actions should not be sickened by the pale cast of thought.

REKHA : The old orthodox conception of woman is really ridiculous. It stipulates that woman is a necessary object for the dalliance of man. Their narrow vision has not enabled them to treat woman with respect.

RUP RANI : What do we care for the conventions of society ? The modern woman should be forward in her spirit and independent in her thought, never minding the hooting owls of society.

MANOHAR : Our forefathers have been worshippers of savage Gods and they have spent a considerable part of their precious time in contemplating over what will happen to their souls after their exit from this mundane world. They have been believers in the bliss of poverty, taking it as a means whereby an individual is tested. They have imagined bliss in ignorance and sweetness in adversity.

Contentment is a divine injunction that the President of the Immortals has offered them.

RUP RANI : Contentment is at the root of all degeneracy. Sloth and indolence are the necessary features of a vain speculator, who cannot enjoy life, but like a sinister sneers at it. He is like the greedy fox that gapes at grapes and feels a mysterious satisfaction that they are sour, simply because they are too high for it to reach.

REKHA : Failing to realise the beauty of life, they have become pessimists, stoics and sometimes bitter misanthropes. The sunny and more cheerful side of life does not exist for them.

MANOHAR : They miss it out of their own foolishness and ignorance. This busy world offers man and woman the most encouraging and prospective side of life.

SUNDAR : How lucky we are in having been born in an age when it is a virtue to be over rich, and a sin to be poor. It is foolish to be inactive.

PRAKASH : Some timid people argue that materialism leads too often to wars and other pestilences. They plead that when a man becomes too worldly minded, he does not shrink from committing sin or shedding human blood for the fulfilment of his selfish ends. This applies to nations as well as individuals and the nations become aggressive in their spirit. All this, they consider, will lead to the massacre of innocent lives, the separation of fond lovers, the demolition of stately buildings, ancient temples and cathedrals and finally the destruction of art, literature, civilization and humanity, in general.

RUP RANI : This is all verbal jugglery. Were there not wars in the past ? What is the theme of the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* except warfare ? Modern wars are not for silly causes. They are the resultants of a fiery need and dire necessity of nations to enlarge and develop, to conquer and to rule. They fight because they are obliged to fight, not for gratifying the whims and caprices of a mighty monarch as of old.

REKHA : The wars of the past left no tangible results, except the shedding of excessive blood. The modern wars reveal the intrinsic merit of an individual and the recognition of merit is evidenced by the importance he attains in the social ladder, often by being knighted. No one, either dead or living, is a loser in these modern wars, which are calculated for maintaining balance of power and for observing the decorum of the international court of justice.

KUMAR : Till now, I have been a passive listener, now I am urged to speak. There is a wild and peculiar notion that God intends wars to mitigate the burden of the earth and to solve the problem of over population.

SNEHA LATA : If there be God, that may be possible. A nation is generally inclined to wage war by the natural impulse of humanity to domineer, rather than by the high command of God.

REKHA : Our ancestors, out of their excessive faith in some supernatural being, have slavishly subordinated themselves to his prerogatives, thereby killing their own individuality. To please him and sometimes to appease his anger, they have invented sacrifices and the slaughter of

innocent animals. In the name of religion and God many irreligious and unholy acts have been committed by his blind worshippers.

RUP RANI : The poets have their own craze for the adoration of some spiritual and supernatural element in nature. There are poets who have sung in sublime verse that to them,

*the meanest flower that blooms can give
thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears*

and that nature is all in all for them.

MANOHAR : If poets are such irrational creatures, what about philosophers, who always speak of the One and Infinite Being. They are fond of mystifying, and with the aid of their sonorous phrases they speak in an unintelligible manner and thus leave men in doubt and fear about their future.

SNEHA LATA : And the domestic housewife has her own pretty God.

KUMAR : The innocent husband possesses his lovely Goddess.

PRAKASH : And we, moderns, do not believe in worship, in idolatry and in the demeaning of our own respectable selves.

SUNDAR : For the sake of individual liberty, let us defy society, let us disprove the existence of a Super Human Being.

MANOHAR : The *summum bonum* of our life is to eat, drink

and be merry. Let us drink and drink. Fill high the cup with wine and swan – like let us sing and die.

‘A land of slaves shall never be mine’.

(They take wine in bumpers and dash the empty cups on the table, jostling with each other in a lively manner, under the thrill of intoxication).

Epilogue

(Re-enters Epicurus)

My Bacchanalian followers display the ease and luxury of this busy world. They are gay and happy people, unsullied by the misery of the world. The unprofitable, fretful stir and the fever of the world do not hang heavy upon their hearts. Their facile optimism is admirable and in my materialistic world mortals need not be dispirited in attaining the bliss of paradise. To describe paradise, as a place of pellucid streams and ampler ether, deserving to be inhabited by the virtuous, is only to dupe and belie. All those imaginary pleasures of that paradise, such as drinking and dancing, I here bestow upon my aspirants, in reality. I make them indulge themselves in revelry, in riot and in merriment. It is after all your mind that is responsible for experiencing happiness or misery. You can make a hell of heaven, or a heaven of hell. Pray for me, for more things are wrought by prayer. Worship me and I will shower on you my choicest blessings, power, fame and riches. Adieu.

(Exit Epicurus)

—Curtain—

IGNORANCE AND IDIOCY

(One Act Play)

Characters :

Sundar
Swarna
Lalitha

Time : (Nine O' Clock in the night)

Place : (A well furnished room of a man of study, facing the beach)

(The distant clock strikes nine in the night. Sundar looks through the window, opening into a neat, little garden. The fine smell of the jasmynes is pervading all through the atmosphere. The fully blossomed buds of the night queen are radiating their fragrances. He is steeped in thought. Leaning back on an easy chair, he is travelling into the lands of imagination. He is traversing the rich and fertile borders of fantasy and poetic thought. With his hand under his chin, he presents the picture of a poet, contemplating the futility of earthly longings. On his serene brow is to be seen the panorama of his multifarious thoughts. In that deep mood of ecstasy he is musing to himself and music comes to him spontaneously, though he is not an adept in that art.)

Sundar is a young man of five and twenty, full of poetic zeal and fertile imagination. The room is well lit and it is facing the beach. He is in the company of the dead and departed authors. Shakespeare is with him, Shelley is enthroned by him and he always keeps a pocket edition of Browning's poems. Nature is the best comrade he possesses. The early morning with its golden mists, often kindles in him fond hopes and he is bewitched with the beautiful scenes of nature. Tranquil solitude is the chief objective of his life's pilgrimage.

He is awakened from his vision by the strange voice that blows over him.)

THE VOICE : Sundar, pursue and persevere in your search after beauty. Soar aloft on the wings of imagination.

SUNDAR : (*Looks around in bewilderment, but finds no human being*) (*To himself*) settle thy studies, Sundar, and sound the depths of thought. Live and die in the immortal works of the poets. Draw succour from their musical lines. Bid Shelley sing a song and through his lips let him sound the trumpet of a prophecy that—

If winter comes can spring be far behind ?

Or peruse those immortal lines of Browning,

*Grow old along with me !
The best is yet to be,
The last of life, for which the first was made.*

Be optimistic and feel the zest of life. Or skip and play like Wordsworth and let Nature be all in all for you.

(In a lower tone) Oh ! What are all these wild ecstasies and dizzy raptures ! Am I a magician conjuring all the poets before my vision ? I wish, I could be a magician like Faustus, for a sound magician is a mighty God. Oh ! It is magic that should ravish me.

THE VOICE : Sundar ! beware of your fickleness. From poetry to magic is an odious transformation. Acquire greater knowledge, swim with the tide of the day. Embrace the new types of literature, which are too full of orientation and innovation.

SUNDAR : *(All aghast)* Where's this voice ? Where from is this coming ? It reminds me of my limitations. But am I not with the times ? How pleasant it is to be thinking ! It is a rare pastime for mortals. It leads us on to transcendental regions, where we witness immutable figures, conversing with us in a mysterious manner. This bliss is colossal, unsurpassing and sovereign. I wish to live and die in the sweet abode of lyrics and songs and like the brook I will chant that merry song,

*".....men may come and men may go
But I go on for ever"* with my poetry.

(The sharp jingle of bracelets is heard. With nimble steps and graceful gait enters a lady from behind him. She is the image of intellectual refinement and physical beauty. In her is to be observed a certain rigidity of manners, a reserve, an ostentation, a style, which all contribute to her station 'par excellence' in society. The sleeveless blouse and the transparent silk 'sari' reflect her taste for modernism in dress. The two dimples on her ruddy cheeks display the perfection of feminine beauty. She is the devotee of Sundar's superior intellect and

poetic zeal. She has out Boswelled Boswell in her admiration for him. She stands humming a sweet tune to divert Sundar from his abstraction. The serene angel makes a shrill, soft sound.)

THE LADY : Coo ! Coo !

(Sundar is startled, but very soon casts his eye on that phantom of delight. With ecstatic merriment he jumps towards her and he is all cordiality for her. A gentle, swift glance radiates from their eyes with the rapidity of electricity or of lightning. She smiles bewitchingly showing thereby the red interior of her pretty mouth. With a meaningful look Sundar reciprocates the smile and with a convulsive start, they laugh speedily, spontaneously and automatically like two little children. They are like two parrots on a single bough. One's smile is re-echoed by the other. One is the shadow of the other. Theirs is one spirit, enclosed within two physical frames.)

SUNDAR : Sister ! Angel ! how shall I address you ?
Shall I call you Cleopatra or Helen ? No, not any one of these two, you possess Cleopatra's majesty and Helen's matchless beauty ; but you are a type by yourself, a rare woman for this crabbed world.

THE LADY : Sundar, your exuberance of thought and richness of expression run like the undisputed waves of that mighty ocean. Listen to the roaring of the waves. It is like the trumpet summoning men to war.

SUNDAR : Or summoning poets for an intellectual banquet.
Look at the moon shining with all effulgence and prime.
This scene of enchantment makes lovers mad and poets intoxicated. The moonlit nights are food for honey-suck

couples and the poets are held in thrall. You are the charm of my life and we shall be somnambulists.

SWARNA : Sundar, I feel the wrath of society. Do you not perceive its cold sniffs and sneezes ? I spurn those gaping idiots with my feet. They do not possess the finer feelings of men. They are more prompted by their animal instincts and they cannot conceive of man and woman in any other holier respect, except as husband and wife.

SUNDAR : What do they know of intellectual union or of the possibility of man and woman living together as friends and admirers, even without necessarily being the two limbs of a family. Those denizens mistake their ignorance for freedom. They live and die, marry and beget children, motivated by the instincts of passion. Custom and tradition are the watch words of their creeds and they tremble at the thought of changes.

SWARNA : Then how is man to progress, if he does not think sanely and adapt himself to the changing conditions ?

SUNDAR : In this gross, materialistic age, man is preoccupied with his own business-like habits. He ceases to think, for he is always in a hurry to gather gear and to enshrine his name with fame. They call individuals of a contemplative type utopians, speculators and dreamy thinkers, not realising the bliss in solitude.

SWARNA : Of course, daffodils do not come and dance before their mental vision. It is only the long file of rupees that floats before them. They are engulfed in the invigorating flood of wealth, not in the diverse, magnetic spells of knowledge.

SUNDAR : Our society is degenerate and requires reform.
Man is priggish and cynical in his attitude towards woman.

SWARNA : It is a pity that even educated men and women do not think of rehabilitating society on a sound basis. To avoid this rot I am urged to seek solitude in some solitary wood. There, in that utter stillness of night the birds dream on their branches. Only the shadows creep. The glow-worm gleams and we two shall recount our pleasant tales, thus leaving the world to oblivion.

SUNDAR : Sister Swarna, how glorious is your thinking ?
You are the prop of my life. I adore you for nothing in this world is single.

*The fountains mingle with the river,
And the rivers with the ocean,
The winds of heaven mix for ever
With a sweet emotion.*

SWARNA : How fine is sweet poesy. Poets are really the unacknowledged legislators of the world. In their company time fleets away and we feel the advent of a millennium, a golden age.

(Sundar listens to her with mute admiration. They are in the seventh heaven of delight and they almost look down the materialistic world of duplicity and contrivances. Sundar, in the ecstasy of that mood, shakes her by the hand enthusiastically. The door is left ajar. Lalitha, the wife of Sundar, peeps from behind and runs all in consternation and trepidation. Sundar looks at her with a cynical laugh. She is smouldering with rage. She casts furtive glances towards Swarna and with a gentle toss of her head begins an oration).

LALITHA : (*stamping on the ground*) Poet and poetess, members of the lunatic family, what do you conspire here ? Lunatic you are, for only the mad are non-chalant towards the established conventions of society. You defy society and pose as reformers. Reform should begin at home. Learn to walk before you run. Reform yourself Swarna, before you feel obliged to rectify the ills of society. Sundar, beware, it is a man of character that can make or re-make a nation.

SUNDAR : (*seriously*) Lalitha, are you mad ? Can you not appreciate our intellectual union ?

LALITHA : (*Sarcastically*) Intellectual union ! Physical union ! Trade union ! Students' union ! The word union itself is obnoxious. You have been telling me, now and then, of the adventures of Don quixote. Don't be quixotic with your so-called new fangled ideas.

SWARNA : I pity you, Lalitha, a simple, un-ideal woman.

LALITHA : (*with contempt*) I really pity you for your deplorable state of morality. Are you not ashamed of shaking hands with one, who is in no way related to you ?

SWARNA : Why, he is my brother. We belong to the same family of culture and advancement.

LALITHA : These words are really the very pernicious outgrowth of sophisticated minds. The ideal woman is within and not without. She is in her simple, unadorned home. She does not bawl out that wisdom cries out in the streets and that no man regards her.

SUNDAR : Unhappily, the majority are like you, Lalitha, grovelling in the dark. You have refused to be a convert to my philosophy.

LALITHA : (*Satirically*) Philosophy ! Too fine a word for your dogmatism ! With your philosophy, you deform and not reform society.

SUNDAR : Temperamentally we are not suited to each other. You are materialistic, whereas I am spiritual in outlook. Lalitha, I am emotional and imaginative. You are practical minded and you are too much a woman of the world. You believe too fondly in custom. But custom is after all man made. As society is elastic, custom is bound to undergo transformations from time to time and from age to age. To accept it blindly is to subjugate yourself to tyranny and slavery, to cant and hypocrisy.

LALITHA : Sundar, don't try to soothe my irritated feelings by your persuasive arguments. I can no longer tolerate this tom foolery. Choose between myself and Swarna.

SUNDAR : I wish to have the company of both of you. Swarna is my sister, whom I adore. As for you, we are wedded together and thereby linked in an eternal bondship.

SWARNA : Quite so, Lalitha.

LALITHA : (*Becoming serious*) Sundar, good bye. I kiss the waves. They are summoning me. I wish to be a martyr and I leave you for an uninterrupted intellectual union.

(Sundar tries to answer. Lalitha darts off to the desolate beach. Sundar and Swarna run in hot pursuit of her. A gust

of wild wind rises before them. A general tone of mourning is audible. Already Lalitha is one with the waves. Sundar becomes penitent and Swarna stands stunned and dazed.)

SUNDAR : (*Murmurs gently with a choking tone*)

Ignorance, Lalitha, this is all your ignornace.

(*A mighty current flows*)

(*To Himself*) Idiocy, Sundar, this is all your idiocy.

—*Curtain*—

SAKUNTALA

ACT 1 — The Maiden
ACT 2 — The Castaway
ACT 3 — The Woman

PREFACE

KALIDASA, the greatest of the Sanskrit poets, flourished probably in the fifth century A.D. in Ujjain, presumably in the court of Vikramaditya. *Sakuntala* has been translated into English by several European scholars. It is one of the world's greatest classics read and enjoyed all over the world. What Homer and Virgil have been in Greek and Latin literatures Kalidasa is in Sanskrit literature. He is well versed in rhetoric and dramatic theory. His profound knowledge of the subtle systems of philosophy and the science of grammar gives him a unique place in Sanskrit literature.

Nature in his poetry assumes vast dimensions and proportions. The association of Nature with Man is almost Wordsworthian. In matters of religion he is considered to be 'healthy-minded' and not a 'sick soul'. It is generally believed that he is the author of seven works—three dramas, two epics, one elegiac poem, and one descriptive poem. The three plays of Kalidasa, like all Sanskrit plays of his time, are written in prose, with 'a generous mingling of lyric and descriptive stanzas'.

Kalidasa's three plays are *Malavikagnimitra*, *Vikramorvasi* and *Sakuntala*. *Raghuvamsa* and *Kumarasambhava* may be classified as literary epics or *Kavyas*. These are narrative in form. *Meghaduta* or *The Cloud Messenger* is of the elegiac type. This is a new genre that Kalidasa has introduced in Sanskrit literature. The journey of the cloud involves a visit

to many of the famous spots in India. *Rutusamhara* or *The Seasons* is the descriptive poem dealing with the feelings of a pair of young lovers. In fact, it may be called 'a Lover's Calendar'.

Kalidasa's glory depends on the magnitude of his work. He is more widely read than any other scholar in Sanskrit. No other poet in any land has sung of love between man and woman as Kalidasa sang. It is happy love, blessed with children. His women characters especially have an irresistible appeal to the readers. He is a poet of refined sensibility and artistic excellence.

The story of *Sakuntala* is taken from the epic *The Mahabharata*. Kalidasa renders it into a play. His dramatic talent and creative imagination give to the play richness of content and universality of theme. Kalidasa saves the King from being blameworthy by introducing the curse of Durvasa. Dushyanta behaves rudely to Sakuntala and drives her out of the court because of the curse. The ring episode as in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* leads to complications. With the loss of the ring the one single clue to the romantic tale of Sakuntala is lost. The King cannot own her. The restoration of the ring brings back to him vivid memories of his love and marriage with Sakuntala. The curse of Durvasa is linked with the ring episode. The supernatural is made natural. The moment he sees the ring he is reminded of Sakuntala. The whole scene of love making comes back to him nostalgically as though he is waking from a deep dream or slumber. The clouds disappear and his mind is given to the restoration of, and reconciliation with Sakuntala. After having given timely help to Indra, Dushyanta comes to the hermitage of Kasyapa, more serene and austere than the first one. He sees the hermit women trying to control an unruly boy dragging a

struggling lion cub. The boy is called the All-tamer. Kalidasa introduces the scene of reconciliation with superb skill. No cuckoo song, no scenes of love making, but the noisy shouts of the boy fill the hermitage with happy love, with fruition. From a purely physical plane the love story of Sakuntala and Dushyanta attains a spiritual elevation. The last scene rises to lofty heights of rarefied sanctity and heavenly bliss.

In *Sakuntala*, as Goethe sums up, earth and heaven become one. The blossoms mature into mellow fruitfulness. The wildness of youthful intoxication is rendered pure and sublime. The two worlds harmoniously mingle together. In writing *Sakuntala* in three acts my object has been to focus the attention of the reader on the sublimity of love, on the juxtaposition of the physical and the spiritual worlds. In the first act mention is made of the budding womanhood of Sakuntala with her two maids repeatedly referring to the auspicious moment of her marriage. Mentally Sakuntala is prepared for it; Spring adds to the richness of her beauty. The colourful hermitage with the fawns moving about, with the peacocks dancing, with the lovely creepers twining round the sturdy trees—all teach Sakuntala the loveliness and the harmony in wedded life. She is innocent but not ignorant like Miranda in *The Tempest*. The episode of the bee brings Sakuntala face to face with Dushyanta. Nature seems to be rejoicing in the union of Dushyanta and Sakuntala. It is love at first sight with all its romantic idealisation. Sakuntala is nature's minion. She is like the deer, like the mountain spring, with unsullied purity. The tradition of Gandharva marriage gives her the sanction to be married to Dushyanta. The first act ends on this idyllic love. The Gods above and the winds around are the silent witnesses of her love and marriage. The love theme of the first act is made natural in its association with Spring. It has the loveliness, the freshness and the in-

toxication of Spring. It exhibits an exuberance of youthful pleasures retaining a certain restraint and grace. There is nothing morbid or sensual about it. The first act refers to the maiden, Sakuntala.

The second act brings in a chilliness and a coldness. The curse of Durvasa is referred to, not presented on the stage. It cannot altogether be ignored for it explains the strange behaviour of Dushyanta in the court. If Kalidasa is a court poet, as is generally believed, he cannot present the king as a contemptible figure. He should uphold and maintain the image of kingship with its magnanimity and magnificence. However, to tone down the supernatural element, the curse of Durvasa is only mentioned. In this play we do not see Durvasa uttering imprecations against Sakuntala. Also the change in the atmosphere of Nature is introduced to suggest in a symbolic way the agonising experience of Sakuntala in the court. The stress on domestic love is maintained. Kalidasa is keen on presenting this aspect of love, love that is distributed over children, the familial ties contributing to connubial felicity. This is reflected even in the parting scene. Sakuntala is to be sent to her lord Dushyanta. Kanwa, the foster father, despite his ascetic rigour, finds it difficult to be separated from Sakuntala. Nature is afflicted, the animals look forlorn, the peacock desists from dancing. Everything looks woebegone. Priyam and Anasuya lose all their mirth. The lovely fawn beckons Sakuntala almost suggesting that she should not leave it. This is the world to which Sakuntala belongs. She comforts herself with the thought of revisiting the hermitage. It is a fond hope. She can never come back. Even before she is cast away there is the stern voice in the court rebuking the king for leaving the old ones after a short spell of love making like the bee moving from one flower to another. Only in one scene Sakuntala does not get the benevolent influence of

Nature and that is the court scene in which she is humiliated and abandoned. She has no place in the world of artificiality, of amorous glances, of flattering words, of sham and hypocrisy. Sakuntala tries to maintain a certain reserve and dignity. She does not want to surrender herself tamely to the taunting words of the King and she hopefully looks for the ring. She is confused and perplexed in not finding the ring. The King becomes bolder in his attack levelled against her. The repudiation is complete. Sakuntala is a castaway.

Love at first sight to sustain itself has to be exposed to trials and tribulations. The separation between Dushyanta and Sakuntala becomes inevitable. Lest any blame should be heaped on the king the curse of Durvasa and the ring episode are introduced thereby saving the king from any odium of having neglected Sakuntala. To the dramatist Kalidasa it is not the intoxication of love but the sublimity of love that is valuable. The imperishable truth that physical love, however romantic and thrilling it may be, has to be metamorphosed into something ennobling and sustaining is amply illustrated in the play. In a way physical love is selfish. It has to acquire purposefulness by being widened, by spreading itself over sons and daughters. In the third act we have a glimpse of this nobler love. The moment the fisherman brings the ring to Dushyanta he is brought back to reality. He realises to his consternation that he has treated Sakuntala abominably and humiliated her in the open court. He has to atone for his foolish deed and repent of his negligence of a chaste woman. Years of penitence and a saint-like sorrow cure him of his excesses of kingly pride and haughtiness.

Sakuntala now becomes the mother of Bharata. After her unfortunate experience in the court she comes back to the comforting bosom of Nature. She comes to Kasyapa's her-

mitage, a more serene place than the first one. In this new place her son, the unruly lad Bharata, is growing. Dushyanta after having rendered invaluable service to Indra halts his chariot in the vicinity of this hermitage. Strange words referring to defiance come from hermit women. He wonders how such things can prevail in the peaceful atmosphere of a hermitage. It is Bharata with the cub that he sees. His heart is given to the boy the moment he sees him. The reconciliation between love-lorn Sakuntala and penitent Dushyanta is brought about through their son, the offspring of their love and marriage.

Shakespeare gives us scenes of recognition and reconciliation in his tragi-comedies. In *The Winter's Tale* the long lost daughter Perdita is recognised by Leontes. The supreme moment of joy is reported but the scene of reconciliation is presented on the stage. We are supposed to see the statue of Hermione done by an Italian painter. The statue comes back to life. Divine Hermione first blesses her daughter and then accepts the hand of the penitent king Leontes. It is a scene of resurrection, of earthly longings and physical love made spiritual. In all the four tragi-comedies Shakespeare repeats the themes of recognition and reunion. They seem to be particularly dear to him. In a similar manner Kalidasa introduces Bharata as the connecting link between Dushyanta and Sakuntala. In Kasyapa's hermitage Dushyanta sees Sakuntala in dusty robes, face pale with austerities, and she sees him tame and submissive. He kneels before her, she is generous, she accepts him. As Dushyanta and Sakuntala stand by the side of the brook their shadows twine with each other in the waters deep below. The pale moonlight falls on them and they look at each other unable to say a single word. They see nothing in themselves to condemn each other. Nor do they find fault with time, save that it has fled. The third

act glorifies the Indian womanhood. Sakuntala is no longer like the deer frisking about. She is stately and dignified. She is the mother of a kingly race. She is like Hermione blessing her son and accepting her lord Dushyanta. The paradise of earthly love she has lost, is regained through this paradise of spiritual ennoblement. But both Sakuntala and Dushyanta are still ignorant of the curse of Durvasa. Sage Kasyapa informs them of the curse. Their faith in themselves is replenished for now they realise that they are only victims of a cruel fate. But the curse is a blessing in disguise. It brings Sakuntala and Dushyanta into an indissoluble partnership and transforms their physical union into a spiritual one.

The three acts in this play refer to three aspects of Sakuntala's life—as the maiden, the castaway and the woman, perfect and dignified, chastened and sublimated through patient suffering. The first act presents the romantic love of Dushyanta and Sakuntala with all the intoxication of Spring and Summer. The second act starting with tempestuous winds produces the dreariness and the drabness of Winter, and ends on the repudiation of Sakuntala by Dushyanta in the open court. The third act like the mellowed fruitfulness of Autumn introduces Bharata the offspring of Dushyanta and Sakuntala. We move from the colourful hermitage of Kanwa to the hot house atmosphere of the court. Refreshingly the scene moves on to another hermitage, to the wild open spaces of Nature with its mountainous region. Sakuntala grows from the stage of youthful dreams to a state of acceptance of life in its totality with its sorrows and joys. In the first act she is the typical child of Nature with instinctive reactions and youthful enthusiasm. In the third act we find her as a devoted wife, patiently enduring suffering. She is still in the company of Nature. But she has outgrown the stage of surrendering herself to natural impulses. She leads a life of rigid spiritual

discipline and austerity. She has now learnt the lesson of blending her glad, animal instincts with a certain reserve and restraint. We see her ennobled in the last act. In *Sakuntala* we see this growth, this elevation from a purely physical plane to a spiritual plane. It is the story of love at first sight transformed and transmuted into sublime love.

Around this theme of pure love Kalidasa has woven the popular stage devices of the day. The clowning, the lady sighing for her lover, the maids trying to soothe her, the supernatural element—all these repeat themselves in the plays of his day. When we introduce a play of the past to a modern audience it will be sufficient if we try to bring out the central theme, ignoring the popular, dramatic devices of the age, which colour the play. So I have avoided the scenes of clowning. It will be difficult to appreciate the puns and conceits of the clown especially when they are presented in English. The supernatural element is toned down. The scenes of ordinary life, of fishermen and others of their type, are avoided.

As Arnold states in his Preface to *Empedocles on Etna* a modern may not be conversant with 'the externals of a past action'; 'his business is with the essentials'. So while taking the story of Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* as the basis of this play in three acts I have concentrated only on its essentials. The literary style is particularly used in order to give to the play an atmosphere of antiquity and remoteness. While the thematic content of Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* is of perennial interest, its language and the apparatus of dramaturgy are bound to be of the past. So a reconciliation is brought about in this play between the universality of the theme and the antiquity of style in using poetic prose on many occasions. Reading of *Sakuntala* whether in translation or in adaptation is a rewarding experience. It has stood the test of time, and it sustains

itself through its presentation of happy love, sublime love, transcending the limitations of earthly love. 'Truly in *Sakuntala* there is one Paradise lost and another regained'.

SAKUNTALA

“Would'st thou the young year's blossoms
and the fruits of its decline,
And all by which the soul is charmed,
enraptured, feasted and fed,
Would'st thou the Earth and Heaven itself
in one sole name combine ?
I name thee O *Shakuntala* and
all at once is said.”

...GOETHE.

Characters :

Men :

Dushyanta
Sage Kanwa
Sage Kasyapa
Hermit Boys
Bharata

Women :

Sakuntala
Priyam
Anasuya
Gautami
Hermit Girls

THE MAIDEN

Act I

Scene i

The hermitage of Kanwa is serene and blissful. The birds and animals are moving about freely, unmolested by archer or hunter. Spring has rejuvenated Nature. The sweet fragrance of the blossoming flowers pervades that quiet spot.

After his hunting expedition Dushyanta enters that enchanted grove to meet sage Kanwa and to receive his blessings. He

comes in a humble garb, relinquishing all his royal robes and jewels. The moment he enters the hermitage his right eye throbs involuntarily. He feels a mysterious sense of intoxication. He wonders within himself what good fortune is in store for him.

A gentle voice is heard.

DUSHYANTA : *(To himself)* O here are some hermit girls; how charming they are ! *(Watches them from behind a cluster of trees.)*

SAKUNTALA : *(To her maids)* Let us water the plants and finish the work soon.

PRIYAM : Why, what's the hurry ?

SAKUNTALA : No hurry; but let us observe the setting sun and the rising moon.

DUSHYANTA : *(To himself)* A true child of Nature ! Nature's darling !

PRIYAM : Sakuntala, I think your father cares more for these plants than for you; otherwise why should he make you work like this ? You are yourself as tender as a flower.

DUSHYANTA : *(To himself)* Truly she is. She has all the freshness of a flower.

SAKUNTALA : Priyam, do not talk like that. I feel an immense satisfaction in tending these plants and creepers, for they are my bosom companions. I have a sisterly feeling for them.

PRIYAM : Now let us look to those creepers whose blossoming season is over.

SAKUNTALA : By all means. (*Feeling a little uncomfortable*)
 (*To Anasuya*) Come here and please loosen this knot.
 (*Pointing to the knot at the back*) Priyam has made it too tight.

PRIYAM : (*Laughing*) Why do you blame me, you naughty girl ? Blame your own budding charms.

DUSHYANTA : (*To himself*) What she says is true. Sakuntala is now on the verge of womanhood. Even her gait indicates the heyday of her youth.

SAKUNTALA : Priyam, Anasuya, look at that mango tree. It has blossomed. This is the time for the cuckoo to sing melodiously.

PRIYAM : As you stand under that tree, you look like a creeper clinging to it.

SAKUNTALA : No more of your flattery.

DUSHYANTA : (*Musing*) Why, she is just like that. Her arms are tender shoots; her lips are blossoms.

PRIYAM : Sakuntala, here is the jasmine vine twining itself round the sturdy mango tree.

SAKUNTALA : (*Looking at it keenly*) How inseparable they seem and how fitting it is that the weaker one should find support in the stronger ! A pretty pair indeed !

PRIYAM : (*Smiling*) Anasuya, can you imagine why Sakuntala is fixing all her attention on that creeper ?

ANASUYA : No. But why ?

PRIYAM : She is soaring aloft in her imagination and is hoping to get a lover, as the vine itself has found a mate.

SAKUNTALA : Probably you yourself may be longing for a lover, not I.

PRIYAM : Sakuntala, there is that Spring-creeper that is tended by Father Kanwa with extreme care. Look at that.

SAKUNTALA : (*Goes to the creeper and jumps in all exultation*) Priyam, the creeper is full of buds, though it is rather early and out of season. Lovely !

PRIYAM : (*Running to that spot. Anasuya follows her.*) Sakuntala, this indicates a great event, your marriage.

SAKUNTALA : (*Blushing*) Don't be silly. Your thoughts are today full of love and marriage.

PRIYAM : (*A little seriously*) I am telling you the truth. I heard your father say so.

ANASUYA : That's why Sakuntala takes special care of that creeper.

SAKUNTALA : (*Justifying herself*) No, not for that. I love all creepers alike.

DUSHYANTA : *(To himself)* O what a rare specimen of beauty !
She is all innocence and sweetness. Her thoughts are
as pure and as free as the winds that blow on her. Today
is auspicious for me.

SAKUNTALA : Priyam, look ! the sun has already set. The
moon is rising. We have delayed. Let us at least watch
the rising moon. Let us run and be on the open field, so
that we may observe without any obstruction from the
trees.

*They try to run exactly in the same direction in which Dush-
yanta is hiding. He moves a little to escape their gaze, but in
that very act he faces the girls. They stop suddenly on seeing
him . They are bewildered and he is a little confused.*

PRIYAM : *(Collecting herself)* Welcome, Sir, to our hermitage.
We have to honour our guests. Anasuya, go and fetch
fruits to offer to our guest.

DUSHYANTA : *(Much amused and pleased)* Your words of
civility are enough. I fear I have intruded and put an
end to your jollity.

PRIYAM : No, no. Sakuntala is desirous of observing the
rising moon, because it is a moonlit night. So we are
running to that lawn to sit and watch.

DUSHYANTA : Then I won't detain you. Let us go and sit
there.

*They all go to the lawn. Dushyanta sits and requests the
girls to do so. They are seated opposite him on the lawn.*

(Addressing them) It's pleasant to find all of you in this beautiful garden. You must be taking great care of these creepers.

PRIYAM : That credit should go to Sakuntala. The creepers are her minions.

SAKUNTALA : *(Blushes)* Priyam, please don't try to exaggerate

DUSHYANTA : The fact is quite evident. It need not be disputed. Your very looks indicate such affection for those objects of Nature.

SAKUNTALA : *(To herself)* Now that affection is changing into love. It's peculiar. Who's this stranger that captivates my heart ?

ANASUYA : Sir, you are very courteous to us. May we ask you to what royal family you belong and what brings you here ?

SAKUNTALA : *(To herself)* That's exactly what I want to know. O heart, you have already yielded to him.

DUSHYANTA : I am interested in the hermitages. So I have come to see Sage Kanwa. I am Dushyanta.

The girls look at each other in amazement.

SAKUNTALA : *(To herself)* O he is the King !

DUSHYANTA : *(To the hermit girls)* I wish to know about your friend's parentage. Sage Kanwa is a hermit, leading a life of celibacy. Then how can she be his daughter ?

ANASUYA : She is the daughter of Kausika and Menaka. Kanwa found her as a babe, abandoned to her fate, in the woods. He brought her home and gave her all the love of a father. So she is his daughter.

DUSHYANTA : So she is the daughter of a king and a nymph. Surely she has inherited royalty and grace. She is regal in beauty, for even with her simple garments she looks as majestic as a queen. Her beauty is truly that of the nymphs. It is something angelic. (*Stops abruptly.*)

PRIYAM : Sir, you seemed to say something else.

SAKUNTALA : (*Warns her with her fingers.*)

DUSHYANTA : Yes. I have one more question to ask. Does your friend intend to be a hermit girl all her life ?

PRIYAM : Of course, we have to lead a life of austerity, renouncing all worldly pleasures. But her father wants her to be married.

DUSHYANTA : (*To himself*) How lucky I am ! Now there is hope. The rising moon promises that. (*Aloud*) I am glad to hear this.

SAKUNTALA : (*With her head bent in shyness*) Priyam, I am going. You are very talkative today.

PRIYAM : (*Holding her hand*) You must sit down. We must not insult our guest by going away abruptly.

DUSHYANTA : (*To Sakuntala*) Pray sit down for a while.

SAKUNTALA : *(To herself)* In fact I can never leave this spot.
It is enchanted.

PRIYAM : *(Sportively)* Sakuntala, now you are won over. At
my request you did not stay, but at his request you did.

SAKUNTALA : You are always like this, saucy girl.

ANASUYA : Sir, it is getting late. Mother Gautami will be
expecting us. So we take leave of you.

PRIYAM : Now let us go.

SAKUNTALA : *(Feels unwilling to go. Paces a few steps and
says)* Priyam my dress is caught on a twig. Just wait till
I get it back. *(She looks back and casts a lingering look
at the king and follows her maids, much depressed).*

DUSHYANTA : *(With a sigh)* She is gone. How can I leave
this place? This very spot is dear to me. Sakuntala
you are my sweet angel, born to be my queen.

Act I

Scene ii

The evening is fair. The Spring is in its full glory. The garden before Kanwa's hermitage is rich with flowers. The brook in the heart of the garden flows with a transparent glitter. The birds sing in chorus. The young fawns frisk about freely. The swallows twitter and the garden is steeped in celestial harmony. Sakuntala enters the garden. Lovely jasmines and exquisite Malathis welcome her. The heavens laugh with her in her jubilee. The gentle winds touch her ruddy cheeks and instil in her fond hopes. She comes clothed in simple garments, all of saffron colour. The cuckoo with mango blossoms clustered around, sends its two-fold shouts in melodious tunes. Sakuntala imitates the shouting cuckoo giving to it sound for sound. The magic of its song thrills her to the core of her heart.

SAKUNTALA : *(To herself)* O how happy is the cuckoo !
Dushyanta you have instilled in me a new hope. Before I saw you, these trees and creepers gave me immense delight. But now I feel love-lorn and I can no longer enjoy their company unless I be with you. *(She goes a few steps ahead and inhales the sweet fragrance of the flowers).*
(In a whispering tone) It's mysterious why I should long for him and pine for him. If by chance I were to meet him today also, how happy I would be ! Then the music of the birds will be more musical; the fragrance of the flowers more delightful and the whole atmosphere more

pleasant.

(Priyam and Anasuya enter from behind and behold Sakuntala rapt in meditation. Priyam stealthily goes to her and closes her eyes).

PRIYAM : Tell me who I am, tell me.....

SAKUNTALA : *(Groping with her hands)* It's Priyam.

PRIYAM : *(Looking at her inquisitively)* You seem to be enthralled. Is the cuckoo so charming as to make you forget yourself ?

SAKUNTALA : No, not the cuckoo, but its song; a song that touches every fibre of my being. The music of its song rouses in me happy feelings.

PRIYAM : Feelings. They ought to be of love.

SAKUNTALA : *(To herself)* She has sounded my heart. *(Aloud)* I know not what love is, but I feel a blind attachment to the objects of Nature.

PRIYAM : Quite so. You seek solace in woods and dells. The moon kindles in you dizzy raptures.

ANASUYA : Sakuntala, you are intoxicated with the rich wine of youth. The cup is full, it is brimming and overflowing.

PRIYAM : Truly, Anusuya, she feels the advent of youth. The cuckoo's song makes her enchanted. The wedded tendrils of these creepers reveal to her the harmony of things in the world.

SAKUNTALA : Priyam, you are making too much of my worship of Nature.

ANASUYA : Priyam, don't you remember the visit of Dushyanta the other day ? How enamoured he was of our maiden ! Surely this transformation in Sakuntala is due to his visit.

SAKUNTALA : (*Still meditating*)

PRIYAM : Anasuya, you are mistaken. Who can transgress the laws of nature ? Why should Spring follow Winter ? Change is the law of Nature. It is the heyday of her youth that makes her romantic.

ANASUYA : But fire cannot blaze forth of its own accord. More so is love. And Dushyanta has roused in her thoughts of love. How dignified he is !

SAKUNTALA : (*Instantaneously*) Truly, (*More enthusiastically*) his manners are winning, his conversation is refined.

ANASUYA : (*Eagerly*) Is not this a commendation, rather an expression of love ?

SAKUNTALA : (*To herself*) Yes of course. (*Aloud*) You attribute motives to me. I do not have any preferential attitude towards him.

ANASUYA : Him, whom ? Tell us his name, if you do not love him.

SAKUNTALA : (*Blushing*) Mentioning his name is purely voluntary.

ANASUYA : (*In a tone of endearment*) Sakuntala, as we speak of him, why should you blush ? What are those sighs if they be not of love ? Pray tell us his name in soft tones.

SAKUNTALA : (*To divert her attention*) What charm is there in uttering his name ! There is sweetness in the hum of a bee. Look at the bee, it is rushing towards me. Help me, dear maids.

PRIYAM : (*Sportively*) The bee has mistaken your lovely face for a flower. It wants to suck honey. Encourage the bee.

ANUSUYA : (*Still harping on her theme*) Tell us his name, we will help you.

PRIYAM : (*Observes Dushyanta at a distance and remarks humorously*) Pray Dushyanta, he will help you.

The bee rushes towards Sakuntala and she is slightly frightened. With her hands over her face, she tries to avert the bee, and runs a few yards. But she is accosted by Dushyanta himself. Her two maids who observe him even before from a distance, leave her and run away laughing and prattling.

She is shy and nervous. Her dark hair dangles before her face in clusters. She stands, her eyes glued to the ground. Her bosom heaves. Her lips quiver. Dushyanta looks at her spell-bound. The image of his dream is before him. Around them is the vast expanse of Nature, rejoicing in their union. Joy is sparkling in their communicative looks. It is but the reflection of their exchanging glances of affection. She is like a nymph. Now and then she takes a sly look at him.

DUSHYANTA : (*Softly and slowly*) Gentle lady, the bee is gone. Are you still afraid of the bee ?

SAKUNTALA : *(Keeps quiet)*.

DUSHYANTA : *(Coming nearer to her)* Come with me, we will go and sit near that creeper 'Malathi'.

Dushyanta conducts her to the creeper and they are seated under its shade. She is shy and silent.

(To Sakuntala) With a touch of yours I am chastened and sublimated.

SAKUNTALA : *(Blushing)* Mighty lord, no more of your praise.

DUSHYANTA : Not praise but fact.

SAKUNTALA : I know not what to say.

DUSHYANTA : *(Incidentally looking down and finding the lotus bracelet of Sakuntala)* O here is your bracelet. *(He picks it up and kisses it)*.

SAKUNTALA : *(With sly looks)* Probably I might have dropped it by mistake. Kindly give it to me.

DUSHYANTA : *(Sportively)* No, It can't be given. I have found it, so it is mine.

SAKUNTALA : But actually it belongs to me.

DUSHYANTA : I will give it to you provided you allow me to replace it in its original position.

SAKUNTALA : *(To herself)* What can I do ? *(Keeps silent)*.

DUSHYANTA : I take your silence to be consent. *(Taking*

her hand) Sakuntala, the clasp of the bracelet is not firm.
(*He delays trying to fasten it*).

SAKUNTALA : (*Thrilled by his touch*) (*To herself*) I feel as if I
am melting in his hands. (*Aloud*) Please do it quickly.

DUSHYANTA : (*Fastening it artistically*) How pretty it is ! The
dazzling white produced by this bracelet surpasses even
the moonlight.

(*A strong wind blows in their direction*).

SAKUNTALA : (*Rubbing her eyes*)

DUSHYANTA : What's the matter ?

SAKUNTALA : Owing to this wind, the pollen from this lotus
over my ear has blown into my eye.

DUSHYANTA : (*Smiling*) Shall I blow it away ?

SAKUNTALA : (*Hesitates and gives no reply*)

DUSHYANTA : (*Tries to raise her face*)

SAKUNTALA : (*Resists a little, but remains passive*)

DUSHYANTA : Don't feel shy.
*He raises her face towards his. She takes a sly look at him
and then looks down. He gently blows over her eye.*

SAKUNTALA : I am now relieved of the pain. I am grateful
to you.
Looks at him lovingly and blushes.

DUSHYANTA : Dear lady, this is no time for blushing. The birds are with us. The trees, the creepers, the flowers, the insects, all these enjoy the instinctive bliss of Spring. We shall partake of their joy.

SAKUNTALA : (*Looking at him archly*) Your words sound as music to my ears.

DUSHYANTA : There are only two objects for me in my life, a world to rule and a home with you. The first is nothing to me if I can have the second.

SAKUNTALA : (*Looks at him amused*) What you say is pleasing and delightful.

DUSHYANTA : (*In the same strain of love-making*) As the winds touch your cheeks and blow over me, they whisper to me the message of your latent love.

SAKUNTALA : (*A little loudly*) What you say is true, but yet there is a wide gulf between us.

DUSHYANTA : (*Anxiously*) Wide gulf ! Why, what's that ?

SAKUNTALA : The very fact that you are a king and I am a poor

DUSHYANTA : (*Interrupting her*) Please do not say that you are a hermit girl. Do not disparage yourself. I am bewitched with your innocence.

SAKUNTALA : But what am I, compared with the ladies of the court ?

DUSHYANTA : The court life with its artificiality and duplicity is detestable to me. In your presence I experience a new life and a richer delight in the objects of Nature.

SAKUNTALA : (*Smiling*) What a tribute to the simplicity of cottage life !

DUSHYANTA : Do not speak of cottage life. You are my queen.

SAKUNTALA : (*A little hesitantly*) I am full of misgivings and I feel the wrath of my father.

DUSHYANTA : Our marriage will be a 'Gandharva' one. This does not need the sanction of parents.

SAKUNTALA : (*Slightly cheered, but still doubting*) I should seek my father's consent.

DUSHYANTA : Dispel all doubt from your mind. Look at these creepers 'Malathi' and 'Madhavi'. Observe how they are intertwined. So shall we be in life, inseparable.

SAKUNTALA : (*Pointing to a fawn*) see how the fawn runs towards me. It is tended by me.

DUSHYANTA : (*Beckons to the fawn, but it does not respond to his call*)

SAKUNTALA : (*Laughs*) The fawn does not come to you. It gazes at you with wonder.

DUSHYANTA : (*Jokingly*) You belong to the same class. There is affinity between you.

SAKUNTALA : (*Smiles*) Perhaps it is afraid of you because you are a king, fond of hunting.

DUSHYANTA : Truly dear Sakuntala, you are an angel ministering to the needs of all these birds, fawns and flowers. Sweet maiden, accept my hand and make me happy.

(*Passes his ring on to her finger*)

SAKUNTALA : (*Observes the initials of his name engraved on it with mute admiration*) My lord, now I am happy. Listen to the cuckoo's note.

DUSHYANTA : This is the hour when the lover's vows seem sweet in every whispered world. The gentle winds and the waters near produce musical sounds. It is sweet to listen to them.

SAKUNTALA : Listen to the humming of the bees, the chirping of the insects and the songs of the birds. How sweet it is to listen to them !

DUSHYANTA : But sweeter than all these is the first and passionate love. Life can give nothing more desirable than this. Sakuntala, I perceive a harmony in our thoughts.

SAKUNTALA : Gracious lord, your words of profuse praise and intense affection leave me tongue-tied. I feel unequal to the task of expressing my thoughts clearly.

DUSHYANTA : You are simple yet generous.

SAKUNTALA : My lord, I shall share with you your sorrows as well as joys. I will be one with you.

DUSHYANTA : Your thoughts are noble. Very soon I shall take you to my palace.

SAKUNTALA : (*With surprise and enthusiasm*) Soon. When ?

DUSHYANTA : As speedily as the march of time, as the flow of stream or the twinkling of human eye.

SAKUNTALA : But tell me why you love me.

DUSHYANTA : Ask your rosy cheeks that have welcomed me. Chide your dark eyes that do not weary the onlooker but goad him to gaze. Find fault with the sportive Spring for having roused your dormant thoughts of love.

SAKUNTALA : (*Looking at him quite amused with his talk*) You are artful.

DUSHYANTA : No, not artful, but as innocent as the bee that has hovered over you a little while ago.

SAKUNTALA : You are then the pilferer of my heart.

DUSHYANTA : (*Smiles*) A grievous crime indeed.
(*Draws her nearer*)

Enter Priyam and Anasuya after watching the plants and creepers. Sakuntala is taken aback and she goes towards them with gentle steps and shy looks. Dushyanta observes the scene with interest.

PRIYAM : (*Jokingly*) Sakuntala, you are no longer ours. Why do you come and join us ? Go to your lord. (*Sakuntala hesitates*)

DUSHYANTA : I shall soon solve the riddle. She is neither yours nor mine, but ours.
(*Sakuntala stands midway*)

PRIYAM : This will be an amusing tale. I shall narrate this incident to all the flowers and explain to them how a certain king came in pomp and wooed a maiden.

SAKUNTALA : I shall inform my comrades, the flowers, how my two maids left me stealthily and thus exposed me to his winning looks.

PRIYAM : (*Gently touching Sakuntala's cheeks*) A fitting repartee ! Sakuntala, the Gods above, the earth below, the winds around are the silent witnesses of your love and marriage.

ANASUYA : Blessed is the day when our maiden has won the hand of a mighty lord.

PRIYAM : (*To the birds*) O birds, prepare the chorus hymeneal and celebrate the wedding of this lovely bride.

THE CASTAWAY

Act II

Scene i

The first grey of morning fills the east. The sun is rising. Stormy winds come howling. The cloudy sky casts a gloomy shade over the universe. But the gloom is dispersed intermittently by the flashes of sparkling light, preceding a thunder-bolt. This alternation of light and gloom seems to be indicating the joy and sorrow inherent in human life.

The dreary blasts of Winter have denuded Nature of its beauty. The garden before Kanwa's hermitage is bereft of all its former glory. The creepers shiver like miserable wretches. The cuckoo song is no longer heard. The impending departure of Sakuntala makes the peacocks leave their amorous dance.

Priyam and Anasuya come out of the hermitage with sad heavy looks.

PRIYAM : Anasuya, today Sakuntala has to leave us and go to her lord's place. Nature itself seems to be afflicted.

ANASUYA : Quite so. Priyam I am full of apprehensions. Perhaps you remember the curse of Durvasa.

PRIYAM : Of course I do. Indeed it was an unhappy moment for Sakuntala. After the departure of Dushyanta she was sad and desolate. It was in that mood that she neglected to revere the sage.

ANASUYA : She should have been more careful. But it was cruel of him to lay such a curse on her that the person on whom she was doting would forget all about her.

PRIYAM : But he relaxed his curse when we appealed to him. Didn't he say that on the production of some sign of recognition she would be accepted by her lord ?

ANASUYA : Yes, of course. But who knows what may happen. I wonder why the king has not yet taken her back to the palace.

PRIYAM : Don't be full of misgivings. After all it is customary with the kings to be preoccupied with the affairs of their court. Let us hope that everything will be all right for Sakuntala.

ANASUYA : Anyhow we are wise in not disclosing this matter to her. Ignorance is bliss. Look, here comes Sage Kanwa. *Sage Kanwa comes in the opposite direction. Even his austere face reflects the settled shadow of an inward strife.*

KANWA : *(To himself)* My heart is full. Affection bids me make Sakuntala stay here. But duty demands that I should send her away to her lord as she is big with child. The very thought of separation unnerves me.

PRIYAM : *(Whispering to Anasuya)* Sage Kanwa is extremely unhappy.

KANWA : (*Still in a dejected mood*) (*To himself*) It is an irony of fate that parents should part with their daughters after having brought them up for a number of years. It was only by a strange coincidence that I had the good fortune of treating Sakuntala as my daughter. Even then the leave-taking is too hard for me.

ANASYA : It looks as though he is weeping unable to bear the separation.

PRIYAM : (*To Anasuya in a subdued tone*) Quite likely.

KANWA : (*To himself*) I cannot imagine the plight of those parents who have to leave their begotten daughters. It should be worse for them.

Kanwa approaches the two maids and enquires about Sakuntala. Just then she comes out of the hermitage. Apparently she is serene and smiling. But inwardly a mighty tempest is surging in her bosom. With a throbbing heart she tries to bid farewell to all her dear and near objects.

SAKUNTALA : (*Approaching Kanwa*) O how can I leave you, father ?

KANWA : Be of good cheer Sakuntala. All will be well. (*To the creepers*) One who has tended you all these years is now leaving you. Convey to her messages of affection.

SAKUNTALA : (*Approaching the creeper 'Madhavi'*) 'Madhavi', the nursling of my childhood, embrace me. I'll kiss you till you be wearied and perturbed.

KANWA : What a bitter sight is this ! Sakuntala, observe

'Madhavi' . It is smitten with grief. It takes your separation keenly and withers away.

SAKUNTALA : Yes, quite so.

KANWA : The garden has a weary look. Winter has deadened its flowers. The thought of your separation makes them still more afflicted.

SAKUNTALA : By next Spring the creepers will be in full shape. They will then echo the lisping prattle of my babe. (*To the creepers*) Immersed in the frolic of the child do not cast me away.

KANWA : (*Pointing to her pets*) Behold how the pets stare at you. The pea-cock and the pea-hen are dull and inactive. The busy bee no longer seeks for honey. The pigeons desist from their sportive flights.

SAKUNTALA : I imagine them murmuring to themselves the unpleasant tale of my departure.

KANWA : Nature itself is in commotion, in an agitated condition. Even the thymy odour sends messages of affliction.

The young fawn pulls Sakuntala by the loose ends of her sari so as to attract her attention.

SAKUNTALA : Someone is pulling me back.

KANWA : It is the young fawn, your favourite.

SAKUNTALA : (*Patting it*) Lovely fawn, why do you follow

me ? I am urged to leave you. Mourn not for me, but forget me not. (*Kisses the fawn*) (*Addressing Kanwa*)
 Father, when shall I come back to this lovely spot ?

KANWA : As soon as you are blessed with a son. At the palace be meek and submissive to your lord. Revere the aged. Strive to be pure and be not a slave to ungovernable passions.

SAKUNTALA : I promise to be dutiful to my lord.

PRIYAM : (*With tears in her eyes*) Sakuntala, let not our friendship be a tale of yesterday.

ANASUYA : A passing thought or a fictitious dream.

SAKUNTALA : (*Sighing*) Do not pierce me with such words dear maids. For years we played together, watered the plants and wandered in the spacious gardens. Like the wild deer off its guard, we have been free and joyous.

PRIYAM : (*A little cheered by her words*) What bliss it used to be then ! What fun and frolic ! What playful jollity ! Those were sunny days when we laughed and played and listened to the sweet songs of the cuckoo.

ANASUYA : (*Reviving past memories*) We were here, there, everywhere in the garden. And we wished to be clouds, leaves or birds to dart into the infinite regions of bliss. Were we not as cheerful as the tender buds of Spring ?

PRIYAM : As free as the sportive winds of Spring.

SAKUNTALA : Or as cheerful as the gentle flow of streams or

the pleasant songs of birds.

PRIYAM : Were we not thrilled by the sights of Nature ?
Did we not dance with joy whenever we beheld a rainbow in the sky ?

ANASUYA : (*Sighing*) The glory is departed. Those moments of bliss are now extinct.

SAKUNTALA : The idyllic mirth of those days has left an indelible impression upon me. My memory is green with all these experiences. How I long to be back here !

KANWA : Sakuntala, the auspicious moment is drawing near. (*To the hermit boys*) Deliver this message to Dushyanta 'O King, accept Sakuntala whom you married without our knowledge as your queen. It is the message of a sage to remind you of your duty.'

HERMIT BOYS : We will carry your behests.

SAKUNTALA : (*With a choking tone*) Father, my heart beats at a rapid pace at the very thought of separation. Somehow I am full of ominous fear.

Kanwa draws her nearer and embraces her. Tears roll involuntarily from her eyes.

KANWA : (*Convulsed with emotion*) Weep not, my daughter. Sooner or later you have to leave us and go to your lord.

A gentle tone of mourning pervades the whole garden. The Hermit boys accompanied by Sakuntala come out of the garden. Kanwa and others observe them till they are out of sight.

HERMIT BOYS : Come on Sakuntala, walk fast. We must very soon reach the palace of Dushyanta.

The Hermit boys walk fast, but Sakuntala lags behind. Her aunt Gautami keeps company with her.

Act II

Scene ii

A room in Dushyanta's palace. The room is spacious and airy. It is steeped in sweet scented odours. Its ceiling is inlaid with gold. Dushyanta is seated on soft cushions. Two young maidens standing on either side of Dushyanta fan gracefully and look at him archly. The gentle twists of their hands, the soft endearing tones, the flattering looks, all these bespeak artificiality. They seem to be practising the archery of looks.

The quasi-military figures nailed to the walls are all the pre-historic personages of the realm or rather the fore-runners of Dushyanta. With their cherished mustaches and good profiles they appear to be dignified and imposing. The large looking glasses hung in the room, reflect even the minutest contours of Dushyanta's broad masculine face. He is happy and elated.

THE VOICE : 'O honey bee ! having sucked the mango blossoms in your search for honey you have forgotten the recent loving welcome by the lotus'.

DUSHYANTA : *(Listens to the voice and abruptly rises from the seat, mortified) (To himself)* What can be the meaning of this voice? It sounds as a reprimand, intended against those, who forsake their consorts after a short spell of love-making. Is it a shaft directed against me ? No, no, it can't be, for I have never jilted anyone.

*The picture of Sakuntala is already effaced from his memory.
That little scene with all its blandishments, playfulness and the
flattering of the intoxicating sense of youth is lost.*

THE HERALD : Mighty King, Dushyanta, two hermit boys
seek your presence. They are waiting in the court hall.

Act II

Scene iii

Dushyanta is roused from his contemplation. The herald walks before him uttering his name in loud tones. Like the sun emerging from the clouds Dushyanta enters the court hall with a brilliant and cheerful countenance. His long robes come trailing behind him. With dignified looks he signifies to the hermits to be seated, he himself occupying the royal throne. Its canopy is embroidered with pearls and diamonds.

HERMIT BOYS : O Mighty King Dushyanta, blessings from Sage Kanwa.

DUSHYANTA : Young anchorites, welcome to our court. What makes you visit us ?

I. HERMIT BOY : We carry a message from Kanwa, (*Pointing to Sakuntala*) this lady, his daughter, whom you married without his knowledge is your queen. Accept her. The sage exhorts you to venerate the ascetics.

DUSHYANTA : It is our duty to defend the 'ashramas' from all disturbing elements. But Sage Kanwa imposes a strange imperative on me. How can I accept a woman whom I have not married as my queen ? Is not this strange ?

1. HERMIT BOY : We are surprised to hear such words from you. A married woman overstaying with her parents falls a victim to the uncivil talk of the world, however pure she may be. Claim her as your queen, your partner in life.

SAKUNTALA : (*To herself*) Mysterious ! What an irony of fate !

2. HERMIT BOY : O King, you administer justice. But where is justice ? Does it consist in abandoning your wife ?

DUSHYANTA : (*A little irritated*) Harsh words. Mistake me not for a vain, sensual king. Stamp not on me the detestable blot of repudiation.

2. HERMIT BOY : (*Sarcastically*) It's not your fault. It is the flaw of human nature. The bee haunts every fresh flower. Thus variety is the spice of life.

DUSHYANTA : What is all this meaningless talk ?

2. HERMIT BOY : The glittering heaps of money, the amorous looks of sportive maidens, all these account for the forgetful nature of kings. You are not to be blamed.

DUSHYANTA : (*Seriously*) In vain do you reproach me.

1. HERMIT BOY : Gautami, remove the veil of your niece so that the King may recognise her.

Gautami removes the veil and Sakuntala stands tapping on the ground. She is shaken with grief and is pale with fear at the unusual turn of events.

2. HERMIT BOY : King Dushyanta do you recognise her ?

DUSHYANTA : (*Solemnly*) Esteemed sages, I am helpless. There is not a ray of remembrance in me. I cannot accept her as my queen.

SAKUNTALA : (*To herself*) Miserable ! Terrible ! What the King says is enigmatic to me.

2. HERMIT BOY : Rare words from you, Mighty King.

DUSHYANTA : (*Seriously*) If I accept her as my queen does it not speak volumes of my waywardness ? Shall I not receive the odium of my people ? Do I not become a prey to the oblique smiles and slandering glances of the common multitude ?

SAKUNTALA : (*To herself*) O shame ! Braced by his arm and leaning on his bosom did I not dream and leave the world to forgetfulness ? But now that very hand abjures me.

2. HERMIT BOY : Mighty King, what you say is true, but you are forgetting the fact of your marriage with Sakuntala.

DUSHYANTA : I don't think I ever married this lady.

SAKUNTALA : (*To herself*) What a great disappointment ! From the heights of ecstasy I am thrown to the depths of agony.

2. HERMIT BOY : (*To Sakuntala*) You'd better try to remind the King of the past happenings.

SAKUNTALA : *(In a low tone)* Past happenings ! When love itself has become futile how can some simple enumeration of facts convince him ?

2. HERMIT BOY : *(To Sakuntala)* However try.

SAKUNTALA : *(Making bold)* Aryaputra ! *(She hesitates because that term is applied only by the queen to the king)* Mighty King, don't you remember the first occasion when by accident you stepped into the garden and spoke with us in a friendly manner ? By your bewitching looks and elegant compliments you won my heart. Now you reject me. Is it just ?

A mighty silence reigns supreme.

DUSHYANTA : *(Enraged)* Hermit woman, with your artful speeches don't try to captivate me and thereby ruin me of my kingship. Talk not of love and marriage. There are more things in our varied life than are dreamt of in your everyday life of unmitigated love.

SAKUNTALA : Mighty King, be not angry with me.

DUSHYANTA : We are here to administer justice and to uphold the rod of authority.

SAKUNTALA : *(Sarcastically)* Then you are a stern law giver ! But reclaiming your wife is a part of that duty of which you are speaking in lofty tones. In the twinkling of an eye I will unravel a mystery and clear your doubt.

Sakuntala sanguinely looks for Dushyanta's ring, but does not find it. She becomes pale and stupefied.

DUSHYANTA : (*Triumphantly and ironically*) Beauty !
Women are by nature skilful and artful.

SAKUNTALA : (*With her head bent in shame*) I am unlucky in
losing the ring.

DUSHYANTA : (*In the same mocking tone*) What a rare specimen is woman ? Did not thousands of ascetics renounce their penance just for the entrancing looks of a bashful maiden ? What are you, yourself ? Are you not a woman possessing all these guiles ?

SAKUNTALA : (*Much cowed down*) Please do not insult me. Perhaps the ring slipped out of my finger while I was crossing the stream.

DUSHYANTA : (*Sarcastically*) Any more proof for this rich wondrous tale of love ?

SAKUNTALA : Yes, do you remember the day when a young fawn neared us while you were making promises to me ? It came when I beckoned whereas it refused to come at your behest.

Sakuntala observes the facial expression of Dushyanta and stops suddenly in her narration.

DUSHYANTA : Proceed, I am listening to you.

SAKUNTALA : Do you remember those occasions when you drew sustenance from my eyes and when my very presence—as you used to say—gave you the bliss of heaven ?

DUSHYANTA : Quite poetical. But unfortunately I do not remember any one of these occasions.

2. HERMIT BOY : (*Enraged*) You talk of deceit in Sakuntala !
She is innocent, as innocent as to fall in love with the
very first person whom she has met.

DUSHYANTA : I am speaking of women in general. Deceit
is but an ornament to them. I am bound by the sweet
will of my people. Let them declare openly that I am
ever married to any woman.

SAKUNTALA : (*Convulsed with rage*) Before the estimable
court you have disparaged me. O King, I am deceived.
The glossy surface of the mountain looks attractive from
a distance. But who knows there may be declivities
behind the seemingly soft bearing ?

DUSHYANTA : (*Sarcastically*) Quite so.

SAKUNTALA : Do not mock me, O King. The skipping
animal ambling under the shades of trees never suspects
the hungry tiger, lying in wait ready to pounce upon it
and tear it to pieces. So I am duped.

*Tears roll one by one from her large lustrous eyes till they
form eventually a never ending line dropping from her bosom.*

2. HERMIT BOY : Sakuntala repine for what you have done.
Dushyanta do as you please. We are going back to the
hermitage leaving Sakuntala to her fate. .

SAKUNTALA : (*Weeping*) What a mockery of fate ! It is
conspiring against me.

2. HERMIT BOY : The King has renounced you, Sakuntala.
Let providence be your guide. We will depart.
The hermit boys followed by Gautami leave the court.

SAKUNTALA : (*Stands humiliated and dejected*).

DUSHYANTA : (*To his attendants*) Guide her into the interior of the palace and shelter her till she is delivered of a child.

SAKUNTALA : (*Sullenly*) Shame, shame indeed. This is intolerable and ignominious. Mighty King, your looks are cold. Implacable is your heart.

DUSHYANTA : (*Unperturbed*) It's no use finding fault with me.

SAKUNTALA : (*In despair*) O how treacherous is this world !
A curse upon this life ! I am a castaway, a miserable wretch. I have fallen upon the thorns of life. I have entered a house encircled by fire. Let me go out into the vast spaces of Nature. Mother Earth, take me back.

A mighty gush of wind rushes in and Sakuntala leaves the court smitten with grief and shame.

THE WOMAN

Act III

Scene i

A calm, serene evening. The setting sun is reflected in the waters of the brook, meandering from the lofty cliffs. The cluster of trees, growing side by side, display the splendour of autumn. The fruits are ripened to the core.

The environment is like an isle under the blue skies, beautiful as a speck of paradise. But for some native pastoral people there, the land itself is one of solitude. The stream flows as clear as the elemental diamond or the serene morning air. Even the minutest motion of the breeze is in unison with that deep music coming from the slumbering stream. The trees seem to be kissing their silent shadows in the listless stream and they blush like bashful brides at the excess of their own beauty.

Dushyanta sits gazing at this scene. He is drawn towards this spot of beauty after rendering invaluable services to Lord Indra. His charioteer Mathali having gone on some errand he is left to himself. He pours his afflicted heart to the waters nearby. He is seated like a recluse, rapt in meditation. He is oppressed with grief. He sits, slightly leaning on his left arm, listening to the whispered murmurs of the woodlands.

The air is heavy with perfume. The silence of the dusk is clustered by the chirping insects.

DUSHYANTA : (*Looking at his ring*) (*To himself*) O blessed ring, you have roused me from a mysterious dream. I now realise my mistake in treating Sakuntala with indifference. O how cruel I was then ? I abjured her and taunted her vilely in the court. (*Kissing the ring and still addressing it*) Blessed is the fisherman that brought the ring to me. Sakuntala did say that she might have lost it in the stream. But then I did not believe her words. Now my memory is green with all the joyous past. The curtain is removed. It was years ago that I abandoned her.

A gentle wind blows. He becomes calmer.

DUSHYANTA : (*In a sentimental vein*) Tell me, tell me, precious ring, where my bride is. How does she look now ? Is she wan with care ? O you seem to be laughing at my vain talk. How can you understand my agony when it is unfathomable ?

The sun is setting. The moon is just peeping from the sky. There is neither light nor darkness. The objects of the world are engulfed in a sea of confusion. More so is the brain of Dushyanta.

DUSHYANTA : (*To himself*) Will not the moon very soon fill the universe with light ? Similarly why can't I dream of a happy reunion with my beloved ?

Just then he hears some indistinct words. His attention is diverted. He finds a boy playing with a cub. Two girls are trying to prevent the boy from his sport.

THE HERMIT GIRLS : (*To the boy*) Unruly lad, leave the cub.
Don't pester it.

DUSHYANTA : This is the hermitage of Kasyapa. This is the
abode of nymphs. These words of remonstrance are not
in keeping with the blissful atmosphere of the hermitage.
So I shall watch this scene unobserved by them.

*The lad teases the cub, by twisting its tail in all directions.
The cub writhes in agony but is helpless. Dushyanta stands
behind a tree and observes the scene with interest.*

1. HERMIT GIRL : Dear lad, leave the cub. Do not tease it.
It pounces on you. Or if the lioness sees you it will tear
you to pieces.

THE LAD : (*Laughing*) O you want to threaten me. I am
not a coward. I am not teasing it. I am playing with it.
It's my friend. (*Looking at the cub*) Are you not my friend?

So saying he gives a pull to its ear.

DUSHYANTA : (*To himself*) What a rare specimen of courage !
I find a glow of beauty in his expressive eyes. Blessed is
the father who possesses him.

1. HERMIT GIRL : (*Fondling him*) Dear lad, if you leave this
cub I will give you a nice toy to play with. Will you leave
it ? Will you ?

THE LAD : (*Stretching his hand*) First give it. Then I shall
leave the cub.

DUSHYANTA : Some unknown influence is drawing me

towards him.

The hermit girls fail to give him the toy.

THE LAD : You haven't given me the toy. So I shall keep the cub for my amusement.

1. HERMIT GIRL : (*To the other girl*) You'd better go and bring the figure of the peacock drawn by you.

2. HERMIT GIRL : Yes, I shall.

(She goes to fetch the figure)

DUSHYANTA : (*To himself*) This boy endears himself to me. He is the man in miniature. He will become a great warrior. What a bitter fate to me ! I am deprived of all the prizes of love—all the kisses for which a father's heart may be athirst. Perhaps I may die without a heir.

The girl re-enters with the toy.

THE LAD : (*With a toss of his head*) You have unduly delayed in bringing the figure. So I will not leave this cub. I will tease it till it is cross with me. You can do anything you like.

DUSHYANTA : (*Comes out of his hiding place and approaches them*)

HERMIT GIRLS : (*Addressing Dushyanta*) Sir, try to divert the lad from his hazardous game.

Dushyanta nears the lad feeling satisfied with the opportunity of coaxing him.

DUSHYANTA : (*Looking at the boy's palm*) (*To himself*) O he ought to be a ruler, (*aloud, to the boy*) desist from your dangerous sport. It's not the characteristic feature of a hermit lad to cause any harm to any living creature.

1. HERMIT GIRL : Sir, please do not refer to him as a hermit lad.

DUSHYANTA : (*A little surprised*) The fact is quite apparent from his dignified bearing. What is his clan ?

1. HERMIT GIRL : He belongs to the 'Puru' clan. As for his stay, his mother came here in an afflicted state and gave birth to him in this hermitage.

DUSHYANTA : (*To himself*) We belong to the same family. (*To the girls*) What about his parentage ? Who's his blessed father ?

2. HERMIT GIRL : (*With contempt and aversion*) You talk of his father ! A vile fellow. He has forsaken his pure, innocent wife. We can't utter his detestable name. It's a shame for us to do so.

DUSHYANTA : (*To himself*) These words pierce me like arrows. Shall I ask them about his mother ? But it may be indecent on my part to do so.

THE LAD : (*Impulsively*) O where's my mother ? I must go to her.

2. HERMIT GIRL : (*To Dushyanta*) Poor lad, he knows no one else except his mother. His mother, Sakuntala, is extremely fond of him. Probably she may be coming

here searching for him.

The word 'Sakuntala' sounds like music to Dushyanta's ears. He wishes the name to be repeated in melodious tunes. The moon rises in the horizon. The twilight is gone. The clouds have vanished. In the pale moonlight he beholds before himself the image of his love, Sakuntala clad in a dusty robe, face pale with austerities, doing the penance of a lorn wife, tender and good. The unexpected presence of Dushyanta makes her suspect her own eyes. She feels as though she is in a dream. But there is no instinct like the hearts. Their hearts commune with each other. Dushyanta and Sakuntala are happy and tears of joy swell from their eyes. They see nothing in themselves to condemn each other. Nor do they find fault with time, save that it has fled. The last glance better understood than words, radiating from their mutual looks leaves her thrilled and fixed.

The moon and the stars gaze at their own reflections in the still waters and feel delighted. As Sakuntala and Dushyanta stand by the side of the brook their shadows twine with each other in the waters deep below. Like innocent children they gaze at each other unable to utter a single word. At length Dushyanta breaks the dull monotony and speaks with a choking tone.

DUSHYANTA : Beloved, my most beloved. . . .

His voice dies away into a whisper. Sakuntala stands as though she is sublimity itself. She slowly whispers.

SAKUNTALA : Take me, take all I am

The riddle is solved. The hurricane has passed. Heaven and earth, time and space, pleasure and pain merge together in

an unbearable ecstasy. The lad looks at Dushyanta and then at his mother unable to realise the miracle of that scene. The hermit girls run with joy to communicate this news to all inhabitants of the hermitage. The cub unaccustomed to all these scenes gapes in wonder.

THE LAD : Mother, why do you weep like this on beholding this stranger ?

SAKUNTALA : (*With a shrieking tone*) Ask him, ask your hard fate who he is that stands before you.

DUSHYANTA : (*Coming closer to her*) Sweetheart, I have committed a deplorable sin. It is horrible to think of that monstrous day when I drove you out of the court like a tyrant. I dishonoured you in the court. Pardon me. (*Kneels*)

SAKUNTALA : (*Taking him by his hand*) Aryaputra ! get up. You are not responsible for your so called treacherous behaviour. After all we are not the masters of our fate.

DUSHYANTA : (*Rising*) Sakuntala, you are too kind and generous.

SAKUNTALA : My lord, I must curse my hard fate, not you. I am indeed happy to behold your august face once again.

DUSHYANTA : Noble lady, your heroic fortitude is commendable. It is your purity that has transformed me into a saner man. I was unkind to you.

SAKUNTALA : (*In a feeble tone*) The past is past. Let us not think of it. It is the heritage of mortals to suffer and to

bear with patience the trials and tribulations of life.
(Addressing her son) Bharata, seek the blessings of your father.

Bharata advances a few steps forward and Dushyanta clasps him in his arms.

DUSHYANTA : *(Patting his son on the back)* Bharata, may God bless you, my son, my image and my successor to the throne.

SAKUNTALA : He is my son, the fruit of my ambition.

BHARATA : Of both, of you and father.

He places his hands on both of them. They kiss him fondly.

DUSHYANTA : *(With surprise and joy)* *(To Sakuntala)* O here comes Sage Kasyapa accompanied by his followers. How austere he looks !

Sage Kasyapa nears them and offers them the choicest blessings.

KASYAPA : Dushyanta and Sakuntala, you are ignorant of your own fate. It is the curse of Durvasa that has put you to this hardship. It is a fiery test you have undergone.

Dushyanta and Sakuntala look at each other in amazement for the curse is a revelation to them.

DUSHYANTA : Blessed sage, we are grateful to you for this information.

KASYAPA : (*To Dushyanta and Sakuntala*) Truly, the course of true love is never smooth. You have gone through that eddying force. Now you are chastened and sublimated. The intoxication of youth, of Spring is over. It is the mellowed Autumn with its ripened fruits that is to be found in you.

DUSHYANTA : (*Looks at Bharata as though he is the fruit and the reward of his love for Sakuntala*)

KASYAPA : (*Addressing the whole congregation*) Love of the highest type is one that is strengthened by the advent of offspring. The ties of domestic life ennoble men and women in thought and action. From the purely earthly life the ascent of spiritual life is made possible through the sobering influence of wedded love.

DUSHYANTA : Esteemed sage, your words are full of wisdom.

KASYAPA : (*To Dushyanta and Sakuntala*) May God bless you and may you live in peace and prosperity. Dushyanta, return to your palace with your wife and son. And rule your people wisely and justly.

The followers of Kasyapa utter loudly, 'Long live the king Dushyanta'.

The moon looks at them and shares their happiness. The stream beside them flows on with a soft rhythmic murmur. The celestial music coming from the winds around adds to the enchantment of the scene. Nature is joyous and glorious.

—Curtain—

URVASI
(One Act Play)

Characters :

Men :
Arjuna
The messenger of Lord Indra

Women :
Urvasi
Her Maid

A MOONLIT NIGHT. A garden before Urvasi's mansion. She is of phenomenal beauty and angelic grace. There is a certain mysterious charm about her. She has lovely locks of hair, expressive eyes, soft lips and winning smiles.

She is lying on a couch, strewn with flowers, under a bower. Against that floral background and in that bright moonlight, she appears to be a goddess. She is restless and unappeased. She gets up suddenly, sits on the couch, looks at the moon and utters words to herself.

URVASI : O, Moon ! have you no sympathy for me ? Why don't you make me happy ? How pleasant is this moonlit night ! How intoxicating ! How cool and how re-

freshing ! (*Softly*) But to what purpose ? Only to groan and fall to sleep. O' Arjuna where are you ? You have made me mad, mad with love. How I wish to be with you this night, this very moment ! To be in your arms (*Closes her eyes and murmurs*) O, what an ecstasy it would be !)

She is silent. Lies down again on the bed of flowers, dreaming of Arjuna and gazing at the moon. She hears some foot-steps and very soon her maid comes and stands by her side. The maid finds her, a little preoccupied with her own thoughts.

THE MAID : Urvasi, my dear, why are you so perturbed ?
Tell me, dear, what is troubling you ?

URVASI : (*In a composed manner*) Nothing

THE MAID : (*Looking at her inquisitively*) Surely something is worrying you. (*Smiling*) I know.

URVASI : (*Anxiously*) What do you mean ?

THE MAID : I know what's wrong with you. Your sighs, your pale cheeks speak for themselves. Who's the hero ?

URVASI : (*Pretending to be offended*) Don't be silly.

THE MAID : (*Looking into Urvasi's face with a smile*) Please tell me who he is ?

URVASI : (*Feeling helpless*) It's Arjuna !

THE MAID : Arjuna ! that hero of remarkable courage and prowess ! He is a terror to his foes.

URVASI : Yes, that very illustrious hero. He is tall, handsome and dignified. To-night while I was dancing he looked at me fixedly. His looks communicated his innermost feelings of love and affection for me.

THE MAID : (*Encouraging her*) Surely he might have been in love with you. I don't wonder, for who can resist your bewitching looks ? Even the immortals become slaves to their passion, the moment they behold you. What about a mortal like Arjuna ? He will soon be seeking your love.

URVASI : But I want to see him to-night itself. Do you think there is anyone equal to him even among the immortals ? That strength, that courage, that confident look, who else can possess ? He is a God, a God indeed.

THE MAID : I agree. But how can you approach him ?

URVASI : I'll go to him.

THE MAID : It's a good idea. He'll be pleased to have you. You can command even Gods with your winning smiles. It's no wonder that the other dancers in Indra's court envy you for your good looks.

URVASI : I pity them. But do you really think I am more beautiful than Rambha ?

THE MAID : Don't be funny. Do you think Indra is fool enough to be so very fond of you, you alone, in preference to others ?

URVASI : I don't know. However, I should win Arjuna's heart.

THE MAID : (*In a jovial mood*) It's already yours. No doubts, no fears.

URVASI : Let me prepare to go. I must go in all pomp and luxuriance. I must be enchantingly beautiful to-night. O, God of Love ! I pray you, be not unkind. I'm smitten with love and you alone can help me.

A soft wind blows and a shadow falls through the bower.

THE MAID : (*Whispers*) Some one seems to be coming. It may be Arjuna.

URVASI : (*In a low tone*) O, no, it is the messenger from Indra.

The messenger addresses Urvasi.

THE MESSENGER : Urvasi ! Lord Indra requests you to make Arjuna feel at home, as long as he is with us.

URVASI : (*To the maid*) What a strange coincidence ! What an agreeable surprise !

THE MESSENGER : May I assume that the request will be fulfilled ?

URVASI : (*Gracefully*) Yes. I'll go to Arjuna this very moment.

THE MESSENGER : I leave you now and convey the message to Indra. (*He bows and departs*).

THE MAID : (*Embracing Urvasi*) What a promising start !

Indra himself has requested you to make Arjuna happy.
This is wonderful.

URVASI : The God of Love is kind to us.

THE MAID : Yes, he is. Now make haste and fly to the
arms of Arjuna.

(They run into the mansion cheerfully)

* * * * *

*It is Arjuna's mansion. He is taking a stroll in the garden,
engrossed in thoughts. The whole atmosphere is serene and
blissful. All around, there is a lovely, sweet fragrance, emanat-
ing from the fully blossomed flowers.*

ARJUNA : *(To himself)* O, what a magnificent scenery ! These
gardens, these lakes, O what a wonderful sight ! Blessed
are those who live for ever amidst these lovely surround-
ings. No cares, no anxieties, no sense of time; nothing
doing, except dancing. O what a world is this ! What a
bliss ! Flowers are ever blooming and this whole atmos-
phere is vocal with music and song.

*He hears the jingle of bracelets and anklets. A heavy per-
fume fills the whole garden. Urvasi comes there in the best of
her spirits. Her whole body is smeared with fragrant sandal
paste. With nimble steps she approaches Arjuna.*

URVASI : Arjuna, I come for you.

ARJUNA : *(Surprised, but politely)* It's very kind of you to
come at this time of the night. Let us go and sit there.

He takes her to a bower and they are seated, with nothing but the rustling of the leaves to disturb them.

URVASI : Glad to see you ! O, I'm happy, extremely happy in your company.

ARJUNA : (*Rather embarrassed*) So am I.

URVASI : Don't you think that life here is more pleasant than it is on earth ?

ARJUNA : Definitely. No question about that. But still, there may be sweetness in all that adversity we face on earth. I feel that life with no perils is no life at all.

URVASI : But the life you lead on earth is of a lower stage. There, man is always struggling, uncertain of his future. He is like a man desperately trying to swim ashore. But this is a higher stage, when man has reached the shore safely. That's why we immortals know no cares, no disappointments.

ARJUNA : Yes, I agree. But does not life become dull if you have the same delightful experiences every day ?

URVASI : O, no. That's in fact the peculiarity with life here. You mortals become satiated with pleasures and the more you have the greater will be your longing. But with the immortals it is different. They are not wild or ungovernable in their passions. Their transports are moderate.

ARJUNA : Still, I prefer a life which is full of uncertainty, a life in which every day brings new pain or new pleasure.

Human life with all its limitations is lovable.

URVASI : *(In a soft and affectionate whisper)* Arjuna

ARJUNA : Yes

URVASI : This is a lovely night.

ARJUNA : Yes, it is.

URVASI : Everything seems to be so pleasant, so cheerful
 *(She is silent)*.

ARJUNA : *(Trying to help her to continue)* Yes, everything is
 pleasant. The moon is casting her cheerful rays.

URVASI : Arjuna, do you know why I came here ?

ARJUNA : I don't know. I am rather curious to hear.

URVASI : I am in love with you.

ARJUNA : *(Surprised and displeased)* In love with me ! What
 on earth are you talking ? You are an immortal, I
(stammering) I am a mortal.

URVASI : But it's not impossible. The immortals do not
 stand comparison with you in any respect. I am burn-
 ing with desire, desire to possess you.

ARJUNA : Please do not speak in that vein.

URVASI : Tell me, why do men wish to be virtuous.

ARJUNA : (*Baffled*) Because they are created by God for that purpose.

URVASI : Tell me, why the warriors are anxious to fight and die on the battle field.

ARJUNA : Because it is their duty.

URVASI : (*Smiling*) No, it's not for that. They want to have the bliss of heaven. They want to have our company.

ARJUNA : May be. Anyhow, it's not the reason for, but only the result of one's own piety or bravery.

URVASI : And one day you too will have the bliss.

ARJUNA : I suppose so.

URVASI : (*Looking at him archly*) I am giving it to you now, even this very moment.

She offers to be kissed, but Arjuna remains unmoved.

URVASI : (*In an altered tone*) Have you no sympathy for me ? Can't you realise that I am desperately in love with you ?

ARJUNA : I wish I could.

URVASI : Arjuna ! You are noted not merely for your valour but also for your gallantry. Now take me, take all I am.

She tries to embrace him. He gently pushes her aside. She becomes terribly angry. She stands before him, her eyes flashing.

ARJUNA : (*Bows to her*) O, celestial lady, I have great respect for you and I adore you. But I have no other feeling for you except that of a child for its mother. Please don't be angry with me.

URVASI : (*Harshly*) Arjuna ! You have insulted me by refusing my love. I curse you ! You will have to pass your time among women unregarded as a dancer and as one destitute of manhood !

Urvasi leaves him with a disdainful look.

TOWARDS MARRIAGE

PREFACE

This play deals with certain problems of marriage. Early marriages have almost disappeared in India but arranged marriages are still a common feature. In the first stage of youth, husband and wife are so much attracted towards each other physically that they seem to be quite happy. For the first few months or sometimes years, the physical part of life is so very dominating that they hardly notice any differences, intellectual, or temperamental, existing between them. But gradually they become disillusioned.

In the West this disillusionment naturally leads to divorce. The very fact that there are so many divorces in the western countries clearly indicates the breaking up of the marriage system. In India cases of divorce may not be so common, but this does not mean that we are happy in our marital relationships. Far from it.

To an average Indian, man or woman, marriage is an inviolable bond. So men and women lead a married life, though sometimes there is no real affection or understanding between them. Naturally they have children and these children grow up in homes where they do not find much of happiness.

In order to introduce greater understanding and harmony in married life the choice of partners should be left entirely to the parties concerned. In addition to this, it has to be

recognised that marriage is not an outlet for the fulfilment of our sexual instincts. It is more or less a companionship in which the physical part of life is only secondary and not primary. Moreover men and women have to make an effort to understand each other sympathetically and not critically. After all no one is perfect and it is too much to expect men and women to be gods and goddesses. In most cases an undue importance, especially in the West, is given to temperamental differences. Temperamental differences can be adjusted as well as exaggerated. As long as men and women are intelligent and willing enough to accept marriage with certain limitations, they are bound to get on well.

In this play Prakash is an idealist and Lalita, his wife, is a simple and unimaginative woman. They are two different poles altogether. But towards the close they are seen to be reconciled with each other. This is made possible because Lalita repents of her mistake and Prakash, to his great surprise, finds in her a spirit of sacrifice. Jaya bridges the gulf. Through her Lalita learns what it is to love and admire, and Prakash becomes more content with life after having experienced intellectual communion with Jaya. Jaya is no sentimentalist. When once she realises that she has no chance of marrying Prakash, she is content to be his friend. It means sacrifice, but she is prepared for that even from the first day she sees him. Perhaps she is thankful to Providence for the little happiness she has through Prakash !

TOWARDS MARRIAGE

(A Play in Three Acts)

Characters :

Men :

Prakash ... The Poet
Raja Rao ... His friends
Krishna ...
Kesava Rao ... Member of the City Club.
Waiter in the City Club
Servant in Jaya's house

Women :

Lalita ... The poet's wife.
Jaya ... His friend
Lakshmi }
Sarojini } ... Members of the City Club.
Sundari }
Suseela }

Act I

Scene i

The bridal night of Prakash and Lalita. Time: 9 O'clock in the night. A room in Lalita's house. The room is full of pomp and ceremony. Lalita and Prakash are dressed in the most

expensive clothes. Everything about them indicates youth health and vivacity.

PRAKASH : At last we are left alone. O ! what a fuss.....
(Smiling) It was funny — that old brahmin chanting verses which probably he himself didn't understand ! Then those women with their jokes – not one of them had any sympathy for us. I am glad they have left us at least now.

LALITA : *(Looks at him and smiles)* You seem to be impatient.

PRAKASH : Of course I am. It's only now that we are really married for we had to wait for a month for this auspicious moment. *(He takes her to the sofa and both of them are seated).*

LALITA : Tell me all about yourself . . . how you behaved at the university.

PRAKASH : I had a wonderful time. Debates, discussions and all such activities.

LALITA : What about women ?

PRAKASH : Women ! Don't be silly.

LALITA : *(Teasing him)* I don't believe you.

PRAKASH : Somehow I was not interested in any of the women at the university. In fact you are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen.

LALITA : That's flattering.

PRAKASH : Of course not. (*He stands before her*) You know there is something in your beauty which is essentially romantic. You remind me of the portraits of great painters. Every feature of yours is perfect. Your slender waist

LALITA : (*Interrupting him*) I'm afraid I don't deserve your praise.

PRAKASH : Don't be funny. I have the imagination of a poet and the soul of an artist. So I dream of you as a perfect woman.

LALITA : I'm glad you like me.

Prakash sits beside her with his arm round her waist.

PRAKASH : At last I can talk to you freely without being overheard. Everytime I tried to speak to you before, your younger sisters used to peep in.

LALITA : (*Smiling*) So you had no chance to talk to me. Poor dear.

PRAKASH : Lalita, how about you ? Didn't you feel like talking to me on those occasions ?

LALITA : Of course I did. It was only natural. But you know my grandmother wouldn't have any such thing.

PRAKASH : I wish we didn't have old people trotting about the house. They are a nuisance.

LALITA : (*Smiling*) One day you too will be old.

PRAKASH : But I wouldn't meddle with the affairs of the younger people.

LALITA : That's what you say now.

PRAKASH : Have some sweets.

He goes to the table on which some sweets are left. He takes two cups of tea from the flask and comes back to Lalita. He draws a chair towards the sofa and sits on it. He puts the cups of tea and the plates of sweets on a small teapoy nearby. Lalita is on the sofa as before facing her husband, Prakash. Everytime he takes a sip of the tea she closely imitates him. After doing that once or twice they gently put the cups on the table and laugh like two innocent children. After a minute's whole-hearted laughter they resume seriousness. He takes one of the sweets and thrusts it into her mouth. She pretends to be annoyed and tries to get up. He pushes her on the sofa.

LALITA : (*Teasing him*) You have hurt me.

PRAKASH : Sorry dear I didn't mean it.

LALITA : It's all right. (*Looking at him lovingly*) Now tell me all about your likes and dislikes

PRAKASH : My likes and dislikes ?

LALITA : Yes

PRAKASH : (*Smiling*) I don't like fat women.....

LALITA : (*Smacking him*) Don't be silly

PRAKASH : (*Smiling*) I like a pretty wife and a lot of extras . . .

LALITA : (*Interrupting him*) Enough.

PRAKASH : Well, that's what you wanted to know, is it not ?

LALITA : Tell me which profession you intend to take up ?

PRAKASH : No profession.

LALITA : What ! No profession ! Come, come. be serious.

PRAKASH : I want to be a poet.

LALITA : O, I see. (*Teasing him*) You want to be a poet and I the wife of a poet . . . How wonderful ! ? . . . Mr. Poet, you will write some love poems and dedicate them to me. Won't you ?

PRAKASH : Of course, if you want to

LALITA : (*Still teasing him*) But poets are wild and crazy. You may run after women.

PRAKASH : (*Smiling*) I am a votary of beauty and I admire beautiful women only from an aesthetic point of view.

LALITA : (*Smiling*) Yes, purely from a thirst for the sublime and the beautiful.

PRAKASH : Stop teasing me. (*Seriously*) I am sure I will one day write poetry which will make me famous.

LALITA : Poetry ! Fame ! Well, what else

PRAKASH : (*Seriously*) Lalita, we will have a quiet but enjoyable time. In the evenings we will sit in the garden. I will read to you my verses and you will listen to them. The birds will come and join us. Perhaps they may wonder who we are

LALITA : (*Teasing him*) Don't you worry. I will tell them that you are a poet. They will bow to you in respect. Will that satisfy your vanity ? Do you really think you will be a successful poet ?

PRAKASH : Of course, I will. (*Lalita yawning*) Feeling sleepy?

LALITA : A little

PRAKASH : Let us go in

Exit Lalita and Prakash.

Act I

Scene ii

Months later. An evening in 1945. Time: 4 O' clock. Prakash a young man of 25, tolerably handsome, is in his private room engrossed in studies. He is rapt in a world of his own, no doubt a dream-world. His wife Lalita, a matter-of-fact woman of 22 with no concern for her husband's poetic tastes, enters the room and finds him absorbed in thought. She comes nearer to him, shakes him by his shoulder and offers him a cup of tea. He takes it mechanically, places it on his table, and still looks intently at the book. Lalita watches him for a minute and tries to divert his attention.

LALITA : *(Hemming in her throat)* The tea is getting cold

PRAKASH : *(With a startled look)* O ! I am sorry. I forgot all about it.

He empties the cup with one single draught and again begins to read. Lalita sits opposite him in another chair, determined to disturb him and make him talk.

LALITA : Don't you know I am here ?

PRAKASH : *(Still peering over his book)* Yes I know.

LALITA : Then why don't you talk to me ?

PRAKASH : I am busy. Don't disturb me.

LALITA : (*Rather offended*) I want to talk to you, immediately.

PRAKASH : (*Giving up his hope of reading and closing the book in vexation*) Well what about ?

LALITA : About my going.

PRAKASH : About your going ! Where do you want to go ?

LALITA : To my parents. . . .for a change. . . .

PRAKASH : Don't be ridiculous. You have been here only for six months. I am trying to know you...unfortunately you are too much influenced by your mother.

LALITA : (*Slightly irritated*) Just as any other mother influences any other child. Your mother probably influenced you as much.

PRAKASH : May be you are right. But with you it has been a bad influence. You have grown up to be an impudent, self-willed, arrogant woman.

LALITA : (*Rising from her seat*) I can't stand this any longer. You always criticise my parents. You are an intellectual snob, an egotist (*pausing a moment*) a beast. . . .

PRAKASH : (*Trying to convince her of his remarks*) Now listen. Please sit down and do not lose your temper. If I were to marry today I would never choose a woman of your type.

LALITA : Nor would I a man of your type ! You are cold, and nothing interests you except your poetry.

PRAKASH : (*In a more softened tone, coming nearer to her and pressing her hand warmly*) Lalita don't misunderstand me. As you are my wife it is my duty to make you happy. I can give you every material comfort. But I can't give you my heart.

LALITA : I am really fed up with you. I want to go back to my parents. There I will be free and happy. Nothing amuses me here, and your cold, austere personality repels me.

PRAKASH : Lalita I am sorry for you. I can't possibly give up my poetic career for your sake. But don't you really feel thrilled when you see a rainbow in the sky ? Don't you feel like singing when the soft wind blows and when the bright moonlight encircles the whole universe ?

LALITA : (*With a sneer*) I am not silly !

PRAKASH : (*Taken aback*) What do you mean ?

LALITA : I am an ordinary, simple girl. (*With a gesture of contempt*) What do I care for moons. . . and rainbows ? A pleasant husband and a peaceful home is all that I want !

PRAKASH : I agree. But I can never love a woman unless she has something in her that draws my admiration. Mere beauty will not suffice.

LALITA : I wish my father had married me to a more under-

standing type of man.

PRAKASH : (*A little hurt*) It's unjust of you to say that. I am trying to be as agreeable to you as possible. But there is always a barrier between us. I receive no response from you as far as my emotions and intellectual aspirations are concerned. I might as well talk to the wall.

LALITA : (*With indignation*) How horrid of you to say that !

In a fit of fury she throws the cup at him. He avoids it and the cup falls on the floor and breaks into pieces.

PRAKASH : (*Slightly irritated*) Perhaps you think I'll put up with you irrespective of your behaviour. Impossible. You must change your ways. It's no use being sulky, haughty and petulant. If you continue like this you will have to go back to your parents.

LALITA : (*Indifferently*) I may be better off with them. They wouldn't mind keeping me all my life.

PRAKASH : (*Calming down*) Well you seem to be very fond of your parents. I don't blame you. But still we have to make an effort to understand each other. It may take time.

LALITA : I think we never can. We are totally different.

PRAKASH : It's a pity that we were ever drawn together into this indissoluble bond of marriage. I think it is a defect of our marriage system that men and women of totally different tastes and temperaments are joined together in wedlock.

LALITA : I don't think so.

PRAKASH : Then why should ours fail ?

LALITA : Because you are a strange man. You are highly emotional. You live in a world of your own where you see nothing but roses and jasmynes. But I know that roses have thorns and that insects creep beneath the petals of the jasmynes.

PRAKASH : I am not unaware of the ugly side of life. But it is the beautiful things that I notice because I am essentially an admirer of beauty of all kinds. Nevertheless, I can also tolerate things which are not perfect. That's why I am able to put up with you.

LALITA : (*Frowning*) Do you mean to say that I have a lot of imperfections ? (*A little coquettishly*) At one time you told me that I was perfection itself. (*She looks into his face hopefully*)

PRAKASH : (*Unmoved by her flattering looks*) Yes physically, but not intellectually.

LALITA : Oh ! (*Pausing for a moment*) I had better leave you to your imagination since you do not consider me worthy to share it with you.

She leaves him with a haughty disdain and bangs the door behind her. Prakash shrugs his shoulders and feels relieved that she has gone. He looks at the door to make sure he is alone and takes up the book again.

Act 2

Scene i

1946. *The City Club. A large room full of sofas and chairs. In one corner of the room there is a table with some monthlies and weeklies. Members are busy coming in and going out.*

It is 5 O' clock in the evening. Prakash and Rajarao enter. Rajarao, the Secretary of the club is the friend of Prakash's boyhood days.

RAJARAO : Shall we go and watch the mixed doubles in Tennis ? It's the club tournament today.

PRAKASH : If you don't mind I would rather stay here and have a look at these journals. You'd better go and enjoy yourself.

RAJARAO : Thank you. I will come and see you later.

Rajarao leaves the room. Prakash takes a weekly and sits on one of the sofas. His attention is soon diverted by the entrance of a young woman in her twenties. She is of medium height with well proportioned bodily measurements. She is dressed in such a way that she can express her beauty and elegance to an advantage. Her hair is bobbed and she is a brunette. She enters the hall and casts a sweet look at Prakash.

PRAKASH : (*Standing*) Hallo !

SHE : (*Smiles*) Hallo ? I don't think I have seen you before.

PRAKASH : No, you haven't; I have come here only today.
The secretary is my friend.

SHE : O ! I see. So you are a guest.

PRAKASH : Yes, how about you ? Are you a member ?

SHE : Yes, but I have been here only for a week. My name
is Jaya. (*She shakes hands with Prakash and they are
seated*).

PRAKASH : My name is Prakash.

JAYA : (*With surprise*) Prakash ? You don't mean to say
you are the poet Prakash ?

PRAKASH : (*Smiling*) Yes, I am a poet all right.

JAYA : (*In a complimentary tone*) I am glad to see you. I
have read some of your poems. They show promise and
they also reveal that you have within you the makings of
a poet.

PRAKASH : Pleased to hear that. I am indeed happy to see
you. May I ask you who you are and what your profes-
sion is ?

JAYA : Yes, by all means, you can. I have taken my degree
very recently.

PRAKASH : Looking for a job I suppose ?

JAYA : Yes, a full time job.

PRAKASH : (*Anxiously*) What do you mean ?

JAYA : (*Looking at him with a complacent smile*) Marriage !

PRAKASH : (*Surprised*) Marriage ! Quite an interesting job, provided you choose the right type of person.

JAYA : (*A little dispirited*) Right type of person ! That is indeed true, Prakash. O ! I am sorry, may I call you Prakash ?

PRAKASH : Of course you can. I don't stand on formalities. There is the club tennis tournament to-day, wouldn't you like to see it ?

JAYA : No, I would rather stay with you. I don't very much like the members of this club. They are noisy and talkative. You are so very different from them. You are quiet, but your quietness is perhaps symbolic of wisdom.

PRAKASH : How nice of you to say that ! I wish my wife could say the same about me.

JAYA : (*Surprised and displeased*) Wife ! You mean to say you are married !

PRAKASH : Well.....does that surprise you ?

JAYA : Yes a little.

Jaya becomes anxious to know all about him. But there is an interruption. The members of the club come back to the hall after having witnessed the match. They are talking loudly and they seem to be in the best of spirits.

KESAVARAO : *(Entering the hall)* It has been an excellent match. Seela and Krishna, you deserve our hearty congratulations as winners.

SEELA : Thank you.
KRISHNA :

KESAVARAO : Now ladies and gentlemen ! let us celebrate this event. Have some drinks.

RAJARAO : *(Addressing the members)* I like to introduce to you the distinguished poet, Prakash, who is here with us tonight.

They all look at Prakash in an admiring manner and bow respectfully. Prakash stands up and acknowledges their bow. The members are seated. The waiter comes in and serves drinks.

THE WAITER : *(Offers a drink to Prakash).*

PRAKASH : No, thank you.

KESAVARAO : *(Surprised)* No drinks ! *(Smiling)* Teetotaller !

PRAKASH : Yes.

The other members whisper to each other, but none makes any comment.

KESAVARAO : But you don't mind our drinking.

PRAKASH : O ! No, I don't mind.

All except Prakash and Jaya drink.

KESAVARAO : I love drinking and dancing.

PRAKASH : It shows our weakness for Western civilization.

KESAVARAO : (*Smiling*) Weakness ! You never know what you are missing. Drinking and dancing are the very essence of life.

PRAKASH : Yes. . .but not with an Indian. It's a pity we copy only the vices and not the virtues of an Englishman.

JAYA : What Prakash says is true. We start at the wrong end of English life.

SAROJINI : But we must have some fun in life. We can't all be ascetics.

LAKSHMI : We come to clubs to have a pleasant time, an agreeable company, and a change from the dreariness of life.

SUSEELA : Drinks and other amusements are a necessity. Otherwise we become prematurely old.

SUNDARI : And die even in our thirties.

SUSEELA : Besides, I drink because I was used to it while in London. I have every right to do as I please.

PRAKASH : Of course you have. But that does not prove anything. If you are rich there are many other useful ways of spending.

SUSEELA : Such as.

PRAKASH : Such as educating deserving poor people.

SUSEELA : (*With contempt*) Deserving poor people ! It is a sin to be poor.

PRAKASH : People become rich only by keeping the poor poorer.

RAJARAO : I am sorry to interrupt. It is now 8 p.m. and we are having a dance in the next room. Ladies and gentlemen ! will you please join and make it a success. (*They all leave the hall, but Prakash and Jaya stay behind*) Prakash, won't you join ?

PRAKASH : Sorry Raja, I can't dance.

RAJARAO : How about you, Miss Jaya ?

JAYA : I like to talk to Prakash. If you don't mind I'll stay.

RAJARAO : That's all right. Try to make Prakash more sociable.

Rajaroo leaves them for the dance. Music is heard from the next room.

JAYA : (*Listening to the tune*) It's waltz.

PRAKASH : So you can dance.

JAYA : Yes I can. I love dancing.

PRAKASH : Then why didn't you go tonight ?

JAYA : Because I have better company !

PRAKASH : (*Smiling*) You seem to be having an ulterior motive. Take care lest you should be disappointed.

JAYA : No fear. I know where I stand. Prakash, you don't seem to be happy. Is there anything I can do for you ?

PRAKASH : No, thank you. But tell me why you are taking so much interest in me, almost a stranger ?

JAYA : Because you are a genius. A genius does not have company. Others don't understand him.

PRAKASH : (*Convinced with her words*) Jaya, you are marvelous. You have imagination and a capacity for understanding. Besides you are sympathetic.

JAYA : (*Feeling flattered*) How kind of you to say that ! I am indeed proud to be your friend. Prakash now tell me all about yourself. Probably I may be of use to you.

PRAKASH : (*Overpowered by emotion*) Thank you very much. But I don't need your help. I can be lonely. I am used to loneliness, I can talk to myself. Excuse me... I want to go.

Tries to go. Jaya runs after him and makes him sit.

She sits beside him on the sofa and holds his hand. She looks into his eyes with a deep, penetrating gaze.

JAYA : Prakash, treat me as your friend and confide in me.
I want to help you.

PRAKASH : Why ?

JAYA : You are a creative artist. You are giving something useful and beautiful to the world. Your life is precious. Every mood of yours is significant. If you are unhappy you can't possibly have a cheerful attitude towards life and your poetry will suffer thereby.

PRAKASH : Jaya, you are extraordinary. I never met a woman like you before.

JAYA : (*Smiling*) Prakash you have no reason to be unhappy. You are young, healthy and reasonably rich, I suppose. And very few can become poets. You have a brilliant future. You are exceptionally lucky, aren't you ?

PRAKASH : (*Doubtfully*) I believe I am. I have everything you mention except.

JAYA : Except what. . . .

PRAKASH : Except a woman who can understand me and give me happiness.

JAYA : I am sorry for you. I wish I could help you. Perhaps you may fall in love with someone who satisfies you intellectually.

PRAKASH : *(Smiling)* Fall in love ! I am already married, married when I was too young, when marriage was nothing more than fun.

JAYA : I know how you feel. But you can't help falling in love with someone who comes up to your expectations.

PRAKASH : May be, I don't know. Anyhow thank you for your sympathetic talk. I hope to see you now and then.

JAYA : Do by all means. I love talking to you.

PRAKASH : Good night, Jaya.

He stands up and Jaya stands facing him as though expecting to be kissed. Prakash realises that, but doesn't fulfil her wish.

JAYA : *(A little disappointed)* Good night, Prakash.
Prakash presses her hand warmly and goes out.

Act 2

Scene ii

A few months later. A fine evening. Jaya's house. Drawing room. A few chairs. The whole atmosphere simple and unostentatious.

She is at her best that day. She is humming a sweet tune. Every look of hers, every feeling of hers is indicative of her extreme happiness. A knock at the door and in comes Prakash.

JAYA : Hallo Prakash, I am glad you have come. How are you ?

PRAKASH : Quite well, thank you.

JAYA : *(Looking at some of the papers in his hand)* Some more poems !

PRAKASH : Yes my dear. Some more poems to my beautiful lady.

JAYA : *(With a sweet expression)* May I have a look at them ?

PRAKASH : Of course you can.

Jaya glances at one of the poems.

JAYA : (*Smiling*) Who's this woman in these poems ? (*Teasing him*) Don't make me jealous.

PRAKASH : (*In a poetic vein*) It is she who has inspired me to write these verses. With her inexplicable smile she has become, almost an obsession with me. I lie awake and she presents herself before me. I try to embrace her but only to find myself deluded. I see and yet I do not see her : I know and yet do not know her : she is mysterious.

JAYA : (*Smiling*) Who's this woman, tell me quick.

PRAKASH : Can't you imagine who she is ? Come my dear. .

Stretches his hands. Jaya nears him. Both of them sit on a sofa. Prakash puts his arm round Jaya and she sits leaning on his masculine shoulder. Her eyes are half closed and she seems to be enjoying every moment of her life.

Enjoying yourself.

JAYA : Yes, your very presence makes me feel happy and contented. I often say to myself 'He is too good for me'.

PRAKASH : My dear ! life with you is stimulating. There is something in you that attracts me. It is probably your intellect or perhaps your generous disposition. But one thing is certain. I am in love with you, too much in love with you.

JAYA : (*Pressing his hands warmly*) How I love to hear those words repeated as often as possible ! They sound as music to my ears. (*Looks at him coquettishly*).

PRAKASH : (*Avoiding her looks*).

JAYA : Why don't you look at me ? Am I so ugly ?

PRAKASH : (*Smiling*) Don't be silly. You are too attractive for me. If I look at you I feel like kissing you. I can't kiss you all the time, can I ?

JAYA : Of course you can.

PRAKASH : I will do anything to please you. . . .

He looks at her affectionately. They are in the height of their pleasure, oblivious of everything else in the world. Suddenly a servant enters with tea and biscuits on a tray. They feel embarrassed.

SERVANT : (*Coughing*) Madam the tea is getting cold.

Jaya blushes and Prakash becomes confused. The servant leaves the tray on the table and goes out of the room smiling.

JAYA : My dear ! we are caught. (*Teasing him*) You are responsible for this. All my reputation is gone.

PRAKASH : I am sorry for what has happened. But I don't want to possess you illegally. I mean to marry you.

JAYA : (*Caressingly*) I know that.

PRAKASH : I feel guilty in making love to you. I think I should tell my wife all about this.

JAYA : O ! that will create a row and you may be prevented

from seeing me. You mean everything to me. With you I can fight the whole world, without you I feel quite lost.

PRAKASH : (*Drawing her towards him*) How sweet of you to say that ! It makes me feel proud to be so much loved and esteemed by you. But as we are members of a society we have certain obligations to fulfil.

JAYA : You are a poet. So you are above all conventions.

PRAKASH : Not so my dear. I am a poet and as such my obligations to society are still greater.

JAYA : In what way ?

PRAKASH : A poet is expected not merely to please but to instruct his readers. And unless there is something essentially great in him he can't be an example to his fellowmen. He must be exemplary in his character.

JAYA : (*Smiling*) All right, have your own way.

PRAKASH : Anyhow I shall inform my wife and see how things develop.

JAYA : But don't forsake me.

PRAKASH : How can I ? You are as great a necessity to me as I am to you. We are indispensable to each other's happiness.

JAYA : But life is an intricate affair. It offers us happiness and promises a brilliant future and then prevents us from

enjoying. It almost tantalises us. We never know what's going to happen.

PRAKASH : Yes it's true. But that's in fact the beauty of life. It is full of expectancy and surprise. And one who accepts its pleasures and pains with moderation is indeed perfect.

JAYA : (*With admiration*) I wonder how you can be so wise and so very learned. You are a genius. O ! how I love to be with you. . . . (*Looking at him admiringly and in a soft whisper*). . . . with my lover holding me and kissing me all the time.

Act 2

Scene iii

The next evening. Prakash's house. He is moving about the room restlessly. He is agitated and a little unhappy. Now and then he takes a book from the shelf and throws it away in disgust. Lalita, his wife, enters the room silently.

LALITA : *(To Prakash)* You seem to be restless. What's the matter ?

PRAKASH : Nothing.

LALITA : Nothing ! There must be something for I saw you last night tossing on the bed restlessly. You must be worrying yourself.

PRAKASH : No I wasn't exactly worried. I was thinking.

LALITA : I told you many times not to bother yourself with those silly poems. They lead you nowhere and you haven't earned any money for the last few years. *(Appealing to him)* Listen, why don't you take up a decent job ?

PRAKASH : *(Seriously)* Thank you for your suggestion Lalita. But you know full well that it's no use talking to me in that vein. I am cut out for a poetic career and nothing will stop me from realising my ambition.

LALITA : (*With a pathetic look*) I mean nothing to you. There is no place for me in this house. (*With bitterness*) Sometimes I wish I had never married you.

PRAKASH : (*A little moved*) Lalita please do not speak in such a manner. I have tried my best to make you feel happy. But it's no use, I can't love you.

LALITA : (*With surprise*) Can't love me ! You must be mad. I have been living with you for more than a year and now you tell me that you don't love me.

PRAKASH : Yes it is true.

LALITA : Wellwell, no wonder poets are reputed to be eccentric and idiotic. You make me laugh (*laughing*) with your silly ideas. If you don't love me why do you live with me ?

PRAKASH : I live with you because I must, because it is my duty to do so. As I am married to you I am expected to give you happiness. But unfortunately there is nothing in common between us except the physical aspect of life. And the physical part of life, you know, doesn't mean much for me.

LALITA : You are crazy. Prakash you are mad. You speak of our sacred marriage system as if it is nothing but the fulfilment of the physical urge.

PRAKASH : What else it is ? You have not much sympathy for me. We are different poles altogether. Sometimes I hate myself for leading a beastly life with you.

LALITA : (*Surprised and displeased*) Beastly life ! What do you mean ?

PRAKASH : Yes beastly life—a life in which there is nothing but the satisfaction of the animal instincts. I am almost fed up with you.

LALITA : (*With disgust*) And I am almost sick of listening to you. You imagine you are an intellectual. But you are an egotist, a brute.

PRAKASH : (*Feeling a little hurt*) I am sorry to make your life miserable. But it seems as though we are both of us hastening towards an inevitable end.

LALITA : Inevitable end ! What is it ?

PRAKASH : Separation.

LALITA : (*With surprise*) Separation !

PRAKASH : Yes, separation. I am very soon getting separated from you.

LALITA : What on earth are you talking ? Have you lost your brains ?

PRAKASH : (*With a calm, unperturbed look*) No, I am quite sane; as sane as you are. To be frank, I don't love you. I have been unhappy on that account. And probably I might have ended my life in desperation had it not been for some providential help.

LALITA : Providential help ! What's that ?

PRAKASH : A few months ago I saw a woman by chance.
That's why I call it providential.

LALITA : But how does that woman come into your life ?

PRAKASH : In a natural way of course. The moment I saw
her I thought she was destined for me.

LALITA : (*With contempt*) Destined for you; you have gone
mad. She can't be in any way different from any other
woman. It's your imagination that gets you into trouble.
You must have taken her to be a goddess.

PRAKASH : No, she is not a goddess, but a woman - a woman
who can understand me and who, I am sure, will make me
happy.

LALITA : She must have flattered you. You can easily be
flattered by any woman.

PRAKASH : May be, but she is not of that type. She is edu-
cated and enlightened.

LALITA : (*With contempt*) Educated and enlightened ! These
women are a menace to society. They run after married
men and make themselves cheap. I have not much regard
for these so called enlightened women.

PRAKASH : I don't suppose you have. But it is immaterial
to me. I love her and I intend to marry her.

LALITA : (*With rage*) You beast ! how dare you say that ?
You call yourself a poet, but you are no better than an
ignorant fool.

PRAKASH : *(With a cold look)* You may say whatever you please but I know that the only sensible thing to do is to get separated from you.

LALITA : So this woman has fooled you and you are a slave to her. *(With rage)* Go, go to her. *(Throws a book at him)* I hate you.

She leaves the room in a wild temper.

Act 3

Scene i

A few months later—The City Club. Time : 6 p.m. Some members are busy playing whist; some others are seriously occupied with chess. They are all in groups, but there are two in one corner possibly enjoying in their own way. Now and then the other members look at the pair rather curiously. The group at the whist table whisper to each other.

SAROJINI : Seela, look at Prakash and Jaya. They seem to be in love with each other.

SUSEELA : Of course they are. I could guess that much even the first night I saw them.

SUNDARI : How clever of you ! But you know I never thought it would be possible.

SUSEELA : Why not ?

SUNDARI : Well . . . you see Prakash is married.

SUSEELA : That does not matter. Marriage is only a biological necessity. Whenever men and women feel the pinch of it they look for mates.

LAKSHMI : What you say is true to a certain extent. But

don't you think that there is more in it besides biological necessity? Such as companionship.

SUSEELA : Companionship ! Rubbish ! I tell you this is all poetic imagination. No man feels attracted towards a woman unless she is beautiful. A poet may speak of intellectual communion and all such ideas but it's only beautiful women who attract him. Look at Prakash. . . .

LAKSHMI : Yes, Jaya is beautiful but.

SUSEELA : But what. . . .

LAKSHMI : But she is an intellectual too.

SUSEELA : Supposing she has no beauty then do you mean to say that Prakash will run after her.

LAKSHMI : I suppose not. . . .

SAROJINI : (*A little enviously*) I think Jaya is lucky in possessing him ! Prakash is wonderful.

SUSEELA : Old girl, don't dream. Love is all right in the first stage but soon it gives you a headache. From my experience in London. . . .

Here she is interrupted by the entrance of the waiter with drinks. They take four glasses of wine and begin to drink enjoying every sip of it. The two players at chess also seem to be interested in Prakash and Jaya.

KRISHNA : (*To Kesavarao*) You are not giving the best of you. What's the matter? I dare say your minister

will be finished if you are not careful.

KESAVARAO : (*Becoming alert*) I am sorry Krishna. I was observing Prakash and Jaya.

KRISHNA : Why, what's wrong with them ? They are friends what's funny about it ?

KESAVARAO : Nothing. . . except that they are a little more than friends. . . . I mean lovers. . . .

KRISHNA : (*With surprise*) You don't mean that, do you ?

KESAVARAO : Of course I mean it. I hate gossip of any sort.

KRISHNA : I know you are reliable. But I wonder how Prakash can manage with his wife. You know he is one of my best friends and I had been to his marriage. His wife is pretty but somehow he is not getting on well with her.

KESAVARAO : I think I know the reason.

KRISHNA : (*With surprise*) How, how could you ?

KESAVARAO : You see Prakash is a poet and like all other poets he is emotional and imaginative. Probably his wife might be a simple, honest woman unable to understand the whimsicalities of a poet.

KRISHNA : I think you are right. Anyhow, my sympathies go with him. I wish he would go back to his wife and not flirt with this woman, Jaya.

KESAVARAO : We will see how things develop. Now to our game.

He becomes silent and they resume their game. Outside in the verandah Jaya and Prakash are seated together, all by themselves. They are not engaged in any particular game, but they seem to be faring better than the others. The very idea of their nearness to one another makes them happy.

JAYA : (*Smiling*) How lovely, how wonderful has been our courting ! The day I sought you out is a red letter day in my life. Sometimes I envy myself for my happiness.

PRAKASH : Jaya, you are marvellous. You make me feel happy and contented. In a way we have been lucky, haven't we ?

JAYA : Yes; Lalita has made the situation easy by going away to her parents. (*Gloomily*) At times I feel guilty.

PRAKASH : Don't be silly. You saved my life; saved me from perpetual boredom and stagnation. You have given me a new life. How can I repay your kindness ?

Jaya looks smilingly at Prakash and he looks at her with a deep, penetrative gaze. Soon a little murmur is heard. The ladies at the whist table are busy talking.

SUNDARI : Seela look, I think Prakash is kissing Jaya.

SUSEELA : (*With indifference*) For goodness sake leave them alone.

SUNDARI : So they are lovers. Well, well. . . I wish I could

get a lover.

LAKSHMI : I too wish it.

SAROJINI : I suppose I ought to give up such thoughts. In the past I had several lovers but, a curse on them all, not one of them could get my admiration.

LAKSHMI : You should be extraordinary then.

SAROJINI : May be. But somehow I haven't become fond of anyone till now.

SUSEELA : (*More seriously*) When I was in London I was in love with a handsome young man. He was brilliant and he was fond of me. But he never gave me any encouragement by way of love.

SAROJINI : Pity, he didn't fall for you.

SUSEELA : Never mind, I had others to admire me. O ! I had a wonderful time in London !

Suddenly they become silent, each occupied with her own private thoughts. Jaya and Prakash are still seated there as before.

JAYA : (*Looking at Prakash*) You have a charming face.

PRAKASH : (*Smiling*) Is that a suggestion that I should admire your beauty ? You know there is some magic in your eyes. You have soft, warm lips. . . .

JAYA : But my nose is pointed and my lips often quiver.

PRAKASH : They only add to your beauty.

JAYA : So you were attracted by my looks and not by my brains.

PRAKASH : By both. . . .The way you speak, the way you behave—all these add to your grace. You make me happy by your intellect as well as beauty.

JAYA : (*Smiling*) Then it is expecting too much from marriage.

PRAKASH : (*Smiling*) Perhaps. . . but I am lucky in possessing you. No doubt a beautiful woman easily attracts a man, but she can keep him by her looks only for a short period. When once she loses her youth and beauty, he ceases to have any interest in her, unless she has something else to offer. That something is her intellect, her refinement.

JAYA : I agree with you. Physical attraction is not an end in itself. It is only a means to an end. It should always be strengthened by harmony in thought.

PRAKASH : For years and years I looked for an educated woman like you. But how strange and how casual was our meeting !

JAYA : Yes, it was strange. We had to introduce ourselves.

PRAKASH : (*Smiling*) Your beauty is itself an introduction to any young man's heart.

JAYA : (*Smiling*) I suppose poets have honeyed tongues.

PRAKASH : And women have tempting faces.

Jaya and Prakash laugh and look at each other affectionately.

JAYA : (*Looking at her watch*) O, it's getting late. We had better go now.

PRAKASH : Yes, We will meet to-morrow at my house; half past seven in the night.

Jaya and Prakash go out in a happy mood.

Act 3

Scene ii

The next day - Time: 7 O' Clock in the night—Prakash is in his drawing room. He is extremely happy. It looks as though he is expecting some one. Every half minute he looks at his watch and he is startled even by the gentle rustling of the leaves near by.

PRAKASH : *(Sitting at ease on a sofa and musing)* Jaya, my beloved Jaya, to-night I will be happy. It will be the best moment in my life. *(A little dreamy)*

The door is left ajar and in comes Lalita his wife. She stands behind him and gently touches him. Prakash is startled and half opening his eyes he murmurs.

So you have come.

He is still sleepy; takes the hand of Lalita and presses it warmly.

LALITA : *(In a low tone)* Yes, I have come back.

PRAKASH : Jaya, tonight nothing will stop us from our bliss. We will drink happiness to our hearts' content. O how I love you !

LALITA : (*A little hesitantly*) I am Lalita your wife.

PRAKASH : (*Stands in bewilderment*) My wife ! *Feels a little ashamed of himself for talking of Jaya before her.*

LALITA : (*In a sad tone*) Yes, your wife. I have come back to stay with you.

PRAKASH : What on earth are you talking ! Only a few months ago you left me for good and now you say you have come back. Incredible !

LALITA : I am sorry for what has happened.

PRAKASH : (*Harshly*) Now what do you want ?

LALITA : I want to live here with you.

PRAKASH : Be with me ! I told you I wasn't in love with you. I love someone else. How can I ever accept you as my wife ?

LALITA : (*Humbly*) You need not treat me as your wife. You may love any one you like, but let me live in your house, if not as your wife at least as a servant.

PRAKASH : (*Annoyed*) Don't talk like that. (*With surprise*) But why do you humiliate yourself ? Where is your pride, your arrogance and haughtiness ?

LALITA : (*Sadly*) Nothing is left in me of my former self. Hitherto I used to be a little indifferent towards you. Within these few months I have grown old. I now understand how I plagued your life. I am ashamed of myself.

PRAKASH : (*With intense surprise*) I wonder what has brought this change in you. It's indeed a miracle.

LALITA : It's no miracle.

PRAKASH : Then how, how could it be possible - you who were always quarrelsome before, now meek and submissive.

LALITA : I was proud of my beauty. So I thought you would be always faithful to me. But when you told me you were in love with someone else it shook my pride. I couldn't put up with it. So I left you. But now. . .

PRAKASH : (*Anxiously*) But now what has happened. . . .

LALITA : I now realise my mistake. I accept my defeat and I am prepared to serve you. I can't stay away from you. I can live at least by your looks.

PRAKASH : You told me once that you would be better off with your parents. Probably you are committing a mistake by coming back to me.

LALITA : (*With tears*) Do not remind me of the past. I was an ignorant fool; I couldn't understand you. Now I realise that a woman's place is with her husband and not with her parents.

PRAKASH : (*In a sympathetic manner*) Lalita. . . .

LALITA : (*Looks at him hopefully*)

PRAKASH : (*Takes her hand into his and she is seated on the*

sofa) Lalita I am really happy to see you so very changed. I never expected things would alter so much with you. But I am also sorry for you because it is too late.

LALITA : Too late ! Why do you say that ?

PRAKASH : Because I promised to marry Jaya.

LALITA : That doesn't matter. I want you to be happy and I won't stand in your way.

PRAKASH : How is that possible ? I don't think it is. . . .

LALITA : Yes, it is possible. You can marry Jaya; I have no objection to it. I too will stay with you but you need not treat me as your wife. Let me watch you two; that will give me happiness. It will be a great satisfaction to me if only I can live under the same roof with you.

PRAKASH : (*Contemplating*) It's rather an awkward situation to have two women living with me.

LALITA : Only one is living with you; the other is staying. That makes the situation easy enough for all of us. I promise to be friendly with Jaya.

PRAKASH : I cannot but admire you. I never thought you were capable of showing such a spirit of sacrifice. I fancied you were selfish; but now I realise that I am selfish, not you. Look at me, I wish to marry Jaya so that I may be happy, whereas you are giving up your happiness for the sake of others. If only I understood you. . . .

He touches her hand affectionately. Suddenly Jaya enters,

looks at the couple and becomes stunned. Her whole body shakes and she is on the point of going away when Prakash stands up and catches hold of her hand. Lalita stands in one corner with a pale and sad face.

PRAKASH : Jaya come in, please come in and do sit down.
I hope you are not angry.

JAYA : (*Pretending to be polite*) Of course not. I only thought I was disturbing you.

PRAKASH : No, you were not. In fact you have come in the nick of time.

JAYA : (*Still with that mock politeness*) I'm glad I have come in time.

PRAKASH : Yes in time to save the situation.

JAYA : I don't understand what you mean. I think (*Looking at Lalita rather curiously*) I am no longer needed here.

PRAKASH : (*Guessing what she means*) This is Lalita my wife who has come back to stay with us.

JAYA : (*With surprise*) Stay with us !

PRAKASH : Yes. I explained our position but she wishes to be allowed to remain with us.

JAYA : I don't think I am justified in ruining her happiness. Better take her back and leave me alone.

PRAKASH : (*A little afraid to lose her*) I hope you are not try-

ing to get rid of me.

JAYA : (*In a sentimental tone*) Prakash how can you say that after all that has happened ?

PRAKASH : (*Satisfied with her reply*) Yes, I know how you feel.

LALITA : (*Coming nearer to Jaya*) Jaya I like you very much. I don't hate you. On the other hand, I am grateful to you for making Prakash happy. I couldn't understand him; I made his life miserable. You have given him happiness. So you deserve to be his wife.

JAYA : (*Moved by Lalita's words*) Lalita you are pure and simple. I think Prakash wants a little more of sophistication in you. He is imaginative and he wants someone like me to rouse his imagination. So I will be his friend.

LALITA : No, it can't be that way.

JAYA : (*In a determined tone*) Prakash I promise to be your friend all my life. I want you to accept Lalita as your wife and treat her kindly. Come down from your ethereal plane and be more of a human being.

PRAKASH : I love you and not Lalita.

JAYA : Yes, I know. But tell me why you can't love me even if Lalita comes back to you. We are both of us intellectuals and our attraction for each other is not based upon pure and simple physical needs. No doubt the culmination of all earthly love is physical union. But we can't be so debased as that. Ours will be a sublimation

THE CARNIVAL

77 — 12

PREFACE

Man is often interested in knowing himself and the peculiar atmosphere that prevails over him during his short stay in this world. At times he feels that there is no possible explanation for the enigma of life. But surely life is not undefinable. In the earlier, formative years Man is drawn towards beautiful objects, but as he grows into youth and manhood he gets entangled in the strong current of love. This is a stage of passionate longings, but gradually the storm and stress is overcome. He becomes an intellectual and looks at things dispassionately from a sense of justice. This gradual development from a sensuous existence to an intellectual one, with the intermediate physical life, is no doubt the heritage of Man. But this heredity is to a certain extent modified by the environment in which he is placed. Hence the abnormal developments. But such deviations come and go, leaving behind the permanent and beautiful composition of Man. So Man may be corrupted but can never be made totally vicious. He in his own way influences the external world (environment) and is influenced by it also. This interaction of one man's life on another may sometimes bring out the negative qualities in Man – ugliness, hatred and injustice. But these are transitory phases, whereas the real and lasting one in Man's life is the gradual annihilation of animal instincts through the preponderance of justice. This being the real make-up of Man, it is meaningless to talk in terms of injustice and hatred in this world.

To some, life is a glorious holiday whereas to some others it is a great fight. Whether it is taken as a holiday or as a fight, one need not be under the illusion that money alone makes life worth living. Most people labour under this misconception and make themselves miserable. If life is to be glorious, one can never satisfy oneself with pleasures and pleasures alone. A life that is worth living is one that has made an unceasing effort to justify its existence. The spark of ambition, the urge to serve mankind, the courage to withstand the ills of life – these constitute life in its real sense. Any other way of living is parasitic and a negation of existence. Life is not meant for fun and frolic. It has a mission and it has to be fulfilled.

Another peculiar misleading notion connected with life is that some are lucky, whereas some others are not. The truth is something different. We get what we deserve and human effort is never wasted. Even things unfinished have their own reward. Any sincere act or at least the feeling to do it is rewarded in some form or other. To some, emoluments seem to be coming in quick succession. But to some others they come rather through struggle. This need not discourage anyone. The due reward is bound to come and the ultimate analysis in every success is desert and nothing else.

Life understood in the proper perspective is bound to be exciting, interesting and glorious. We can make it or mar it according to our attitudes towards life. This play has presented different approaches to life, but the stress is on the idealistic attitude, not on the purely mercenary one. The title is indeed an interrogation – is life a Carnival ?

THE CARNIVAL

(A Play in Three Acts)

Characters :

Men :

SURESH ... Secretary to Shiv Lal
RAMESH ... His friend
SHIV LAL ... The industrialist
MANOHAR ... His friend and flatterer
RAVINDER ... The capitalist

Women :

PREM ... Suresh's friend
SOBHA ... Shiv Lal's daughter
ASHA ... Her companion
REKHA ... Ramesh's friend
PRATIMA ... A rich widow
... Servants

Act 1

Scene i

Constitution Club, New Delhi :

The first anniversary of the Progressive Youth Association is just over. Suresh, the President of the Association is standing opposite Ramesh, the Secretary. Suresh is indeed the brain

behind the party. He is in his late twenties, full of life and spirit. He gives one the impression of a born leader. He is rather shy and reserved but full of confidence in himself. He is employed by the industrialist Shiv Lal as his Secretary.

Ramesh is almost of Suresh's age, but he exhibits more of animal spirits. He is youthful and energetic with a Byronic pose. He is wearing a flamboyant slack shirt, one of the American types, presenting almost the whole world. Suresh is rather tallish with a broad forehead. He is refined and cultured.

They are near the rostrum watching the crowd slowly moving. They are in the best of their spirits.

RAMESH : I am glad, the meeting is over. It meant a lot of strain, making all sorts of arrangements...

SURESH : I know it's a tiring job. Anyhow we have done our duty.

RAMESH : (*Enthusiastically*) We have done more than that. We have created a terrific stir in the minds of our listeners. I am sure, the Association will get more recognition now.

SURESH : I suppose so...

RAMESH : Don't be so modest. Well, look, Rekha is coming to see us.

Rekha nears them. She is the friend of Ramesh. Her hair is bobbed and she has a good complexion. Her nails are painted; her eyebrows are pencilled; she wears lipstick; she uses a lot of make-up. In one word she is sophistication itself. She walks.

with a certain, confident air, exposing much of her delicate bosom to an advantage. She shakes hands with Suresh.

SURESH : I hope you liked the function.

REKHA : O! it was wonderful. A grand performance.

She beckons to her friend Prem.

Suresh, I like to introduce to you my friend Prem. This is Prem.

Prem bows and Suresh acknowledges the bow. Prem is rather slim and tallish. She has a rich, golden complexion and expressive eyes. In her is found the delicacy of an elegant woman, highly educated and cultured. She has more or less the artistic form which is so often praised by the poets and the visionaries. She is simple and unsophisticated. There is an awkward silence for a minute or two.

RAMESH : Why shouldn't we sit and talk for a while ?

SURESH : I suppose we could... provided the ladies are in no great hurry.

He casts a significant look at Prem. She gets the hint and replies.

PREM : I am all right. I don't mind staying.

REKHA : I would rather love to stay.

RAMESH : Let me go and see whether we can get some drinks.

They are seated on the sofas of the front row, meant for the distinguished guests. Ramesh goes out for the drinks.

I suppose you are employed. (*Looking at Prem*)

PREM : Yes, I am a teacher.

SURESH : Do you like teaching ?

REKHA : O she loves it. She is very fond of children.

PREM : (*Smiling*) Rekha, don't be funny. (*To Suresh*) In a way I like teaching. It gives me a lot of leisure. Besides, one always feels happy in the company of children.

SURESH : Yes I agree. The innocent faces of the little kids will always kindle in you zest for life.

REKHA : (*Smiling*) Suresh, you are a great dreamer. You are an idealist. I am sure you will have many a disillusionment to face.

SURESH : Don't you worry, madam.

Ramesh enters.

RAMESH : We will soon have some drinks. The bearer is bringing them. Well, Prem what did you think of our meeting ? Did you like it ?

PREM : Yes I did. On the whole it was a grand show. I liked the speeches immensely.

RAMESH : (*In a matter of fact manner*) We are used to such

speeches. Nothing wonderful about them. But you know our Suresh is a funny fellow.

PREM : (*Anxiously*) Why, what is wrong with him ?

RAMESH : Nothing wrong.but

PREM : But what.

RAMESH : He always talks of ideals. You can't have any ideals when you are starving, can you ?

SURESH : Perhaps not. But you can't talk of bread and butter all the time.

The bearer brings some cool drinks, holding them on a tray. He offers them the drinks and leaves the hall.

RAMESH : (*Teasing Suresh*) Prem, Suresh is an antifeminist.

REKHA : (*Surprised*) Is he ? Really ?

SURESH : (*Smiling*) Ramesh, don't try to mislead her. (*To Prem*) To tell you quite frankly I am not a woman's man.

PREM : Who tells you, you are not ? You are sociable.
(*pausing*) and charming.

REKHA : (*Teasing him*) Prem, be careful. I note what you say. Suresh is sociable and charming; that is what you think, don't you ?

PREM : Of course. . . .He is a pleasant type of man.

REKHA : Well, what else.

PREM : Stop teasing me.....I know what you are trying to get at.

RAMESH : (*Sportively*) Suresh, my dear Suresh, your jolly days are over. I am indeed sorry for you. A woman is after you. The trap is set.

SURESH : (*Smiling*) Don't be silly. You are always like this.. . . .playful and mischievous.

RAMESH : Surely you don't want me to be a philosopher.

SURESH : Of course not, but be a gentleman.

RAMESH : (*Pretending to be offended*) Rekha, you see, I am not a gentleman. You'd better avoid me.

SURESH : O stop it. Miss Prem may have a poor opinion of us if we go on being silly like this. (*To Prem*) Hope you'll excuse us for having been a little informal.

PREM : (*Gesticulating*) Don't you bother. . . I like the way you all get on. I don't have much respect for cold formalities.

SURESH : I am glad to hear that.

REKHA : Prem, you are in the good books of the President. So you are now a member of our Association.

PREM : (*Smiling*) Thank you.

REKHA : Don't thank me. Thank the President and also
thank your stars.

SURESH : (*Smiling*) Rekha, we really want women like you
who are friendly. You'll make everyone feel at home.
I should say it is a rare gift.

REKHA : (*Blushing slightly*) Thank you Suresh.

RAMESH : (*Teasing Suresh*) Suresh, mind you, you are talk-
ing to my girl-friend. You have no business to praise
her. You see, she is already bloated. That's the whole
trouble with you people, who call themselves idealists.
You look through coloured glasses. And women appear
to be beautiful, charming, wonderful. . . .

SURESH : (*Amused*) What else ?

RAMESH : You consider women to be roses and jasmynes.
But of what earthly use are these lilies and roses ? After
all what is beauty ? Lipstick and powder, plus the lover's
dream of his lady-love's supernatural beauty !

SURESH : (*Smiling*) So you suggest that women should not
be praised.

RAMESH : By all means praise them if they deserve. But
for goodness sake don't say that they are angelic, pheno-
menal and ethereal.

SURESH : Rekha, I wonder how you get on with him. Does
he pay any compliments at least to you ?

REKHA : Of course, he does. But he does not like to admit

to himself that he has within him the finer elements of Man. As a devotee of industrialisation he refuses to pay homage to the aesthetic aspect of life. But we all of us have an eye for beauty. That he does not realise. . . .

SURESH : True, true indeed. Beauty in its manifold aspects is bound to have a strong influence on us. We can't help it.

PREM : Beauty in fact stands for ultimate perfection. And that perfection is synonymous with God. By admiring anything beautiful we admire God's workmanship. This workmanship is often reflected in the physical appearance of a woman, in a landscape or sometimes in a man's attitude towards others. But surely we all of us admire harmony in life.

RAMESH : You are all in the land of beauty. I see no such exhilarating picture. To me the busy call of the factory, the bustle and activity of the worker, the thrill of production—these, these alone will be the objects of attraction.

SURESH : In different ways we all aspire for the same thing and struggle to achieve the same object. We all believe in enriching man's noble heritage.

PREM : (*Smiles*) Shall we go now ?

SURESH : (*Looking at his watch*) It's pretty late now. Let us get along.

They leave the hall in a happy, cheerful mood.

Act 1 -

Scene ii

A few months later —

Suresh and Prem walk side by side in the Moghul Gardens. It is late February. The gardens are in their resplendent glory. Men and women move about the place with intense satisfaction and pleasure. Sweet fragrance emanates from the beautiful flowers. The rich foliage of the Gardens is suggestive of early Spring. Prem and Suresh stand and look admiringly at a rose creeper.

PREM : Look Suresh, look at this creeper. It has multi-coloured roses. Lovely. . . .

SURESH : It's indeed beautiful. In fact this happy mingling of colours is a symbol of the essential peace and harmony in this world.

PREM : (*Looking at him mischievously*) You know, you have a clever way of generalising everything. You never tell me anything about yourself. That's indeed funny.

SURESH : Prem, we have been friendly for the last six months. And we are good friends too. Aren't you satisfied with this ?

PREM : Of course I am, But.

SURESH : But what. . . .

PREM : I wish to hear certain details relating to you.

SURESH : You know everything about me. I have no secrets from you. My attitude towards life is pretty well known to you. What else do you want ?

PREM : Tell me something about your plans for your future.

SURESH : I wish to serve my country. . . .

PREM : Don't be ridiculous. . . .

They move a few steps forward. Prem observes a slender creeper supporting itself against a strong tree. She looks purposely at Suresh and observes.

I wonder whether you don't feel lonely.

SURESH : Why should I ? Are you not with me ?

PREM : I know I am with you. But I feel that we cannot possibly go on like this. Nothing in this world is single. Look at that creeper twining itself round that sturdy tree. Is not this an expression of companionship ?

SURESH : *(Still pretending to be indifferent)* Yes it is.

PREM : Don't just say 'Yes it is'. Surely you can say something more.

SURESH : (*Surprised*) Prem, you seem to be in an awful mood to-day. What's wrong with you ? I hope, you are not trying to quarrel with me.

PREM : Of course not. What makes you think like that ?

SURESH : Well, you are not satisfied with anything I say. What can I do for you ?

PREM : Nothing.

SURESH : Then let us sit and talk something about our Association.

PREM : (*A little irritated*) You and your Association all the time. Can't you feel the warmth of a woman ? Don't you understand the language of love ? Are you not human ?

SURESH : Prem, don't be silly.

He leads her to the nearest bench and they are seated on it. Nearby the fountain is producing a melodious sound with its waters shooting up and falling. The whole place is a lovely paradise, intoxicating to the lovers and inspiring to the poets. No wonder Prem waxes eloquent and perspires a little due to her animated talk with Suresh. But he watches her closely and smilingly. Outwardly he is unperturbed. After a minute or so, Prem gets up preparing herself to leave that spot. But he urges her to be seated.

Now my dear, listen to me. I know what you want. I am no doubt fond of you. But I am wondering whether I can give you happiness.

PREM : (*Anxiously*) Why, why do you say that ?

SURESH : I am rather fastidious. I expect everything to be faultless. With me marriage is no gamble.

PREM : I am glad you say that. . . .

SURESH : When I think of marriage, the picture of partnership inevitably suggests itself to me. Marriage is companionship – I mean it. It's no tall talk.

PREM : I know how you feel about it. (*Smiling*) But may I know the qualifications of your future bride ?

SURESH : (*Seriously*) Prem, don't try to pooh-pooh my ideas. I am quite sincere in what I say. I want my wife to have her own individuality. I hate to see her helpless and dependent on me.

PREM : You mean to say she should take up a job.

SURESH : No, not exactly that. But what I mean is that she should be educated, enlightened and sympathetic.

PREM : (*Looking at him mischievously*) Have you found any blessed woman like this ?

She looks fixedly at him. Suresh avoids her gaze.

SURESH : (*Casting a look at the sky*) Look at that sun-set. Isn't it lovely ?

PREM : (*Angrily*) Suresh answer my question or else I leave you now, immediately.

Prem gets up preparing herself to leave.

SURESH : *(With mock politeness)* Please sit down.

He pulls her by her hand and she is seated. He looks at her with an amused smile.

Prem what's all this fuss about ?

PREM : Suresh it is your duty to answer my question. You think I am a child.

SURESH : No, you are not a child. I know that. But you are behaving like a child.

PREM : I again ask you, tell me who this bride is.

SURESH : *(In a deliberate slow manner)* Six months ago a beautiful woman came to me. The very first day she saw me she said I was charming. The woman pursued me most relentlessly and now I am a captive in her hands.

PREM : *(Laughing)* No, you are not a captive. You are sitting quite at a distance from me. I haven't even taken you in my arms and you feel you are already a captive.

SURESH : O, no, don't embrace me here in these Gardens.

PREM : No fear, I won't do that.

SURESH : *(Earnestly)* Prem, I loved you even the first day I saw you. But I wanted to be pretty sure of myself, my own emotions and feelings.

PREM : Now, are you sure ?

SURESH : As sure as anything. (*In an affectionate manner*)
I love you and promise to be faithful to you all my life.

Prem moves a little nearer to him and takes his hand into hers.

PREM : (*With half-shut eyes*) You have indeed made me the happiest woman in the world. Suresh, I love you to madness. O what a torture it was all those months !

SURESH : (*In a gentle tone*) I am indeed sorry for that. But all that is over now. This very moment we are married. Marriage doesn't necessarily mean ceremony. It is enough if two persons sincerely love and promise to be true to each other. I will always stand by you.

PREM : Suresh, my heart is full. I cannot express my happiness. . . .

SURESH : I look forward to a happy, peaceful life with you.

PREM : We will indeed be happy. . . Sincere love always ennoble its subjects. It makes them develop within them a spirit of sacrifice and nobility.

SURESH : Let us try and do our best in serving humanity.

PREM : Yes, we will. Suresh, to-day I was bent upon getting a proposal from you.

SURESH : How clever of you ! But you have not forced it from me. I myself would have proposed.

PREM : Anyway I am glad that the period of suspense is over. Now you are mine, my own dear Suresh.

SURESH : And you my sweet little Prem.

PREM : What a glorious feeling it is... to know that someone loves you, cares for you and longs for you.

SURESH : Indeed it's a glorious feeling. I suppose the attraction of men and women is not solely based on sex. There is something more in it than this simple, biological factor.

PREM : Yes, there is. I feel as if I have entered upon a new life, a life in which I always feel the nearness and comradeship of someone else.

SURESH : Love motivates all our actions. I am indeed happy to have met you. I find the sublimation of all my desires.

PREM : (*Smiling*) Now I believe you are really in love with me. (*Casually looking at the surroundings*) You see, almost all the people have left. I feel as if we have been sitting here for ages.

SURESH : My dear, we have been in a different world altogether..

Act II

Scene i

A few days later —

Garden Party in Shiv Lal's house on the occasion of his only daughter's twenty-third birthday.

A soft tune is being played. Suresh, the Secretary to the industrialist Lal, is busy looking after the guests. The elite of the city seem to be there. There are quite a few persons in immaculate white caps also. Women are parading in all sorts of fantastic costumes. Some have come in transparent silk saris; some others in the typical Punjabi style. Here and there some women are to be seen in Western clothes too. There are others who have come with wide, open necks, perhaps too forbidding a sight for a moralist! Hair styles are numerous — oriental as well as occidental. On the whole a grand sight indeed!

Tables with fine cloths are arranged lengthwise and breadthwise in the garden. The tables are filled with sweets and tasty delicacies. At one end of the table the industrialist is standing, surrounded by a circle of admirers. He is quite an imposing person, tall, fine and bald-headed. He is in his fifties, but very active and strong. He is a widower and a great worshipper of wealth and power. It is rumoured that he is fabulously rich. He is popularly known as the Millionaire.

Beside him is his daughter Sobha, a frail, thin figure. Her hair is wavy and bobbed. She is wearing high heeled shoes and they add a little to her stature. She has a slender waist and thin, long hands. Her nose is pointed and her lips are artistic. She has with her, Asha, her friend. Asha is one of the gay types. She is talkative and showy. Nature unfortunately hasn't been very kind to her, but she makes it up by rouge and lip-stick.

Two other important persons in that small circle are Ravinder and Manohar. Ravinder is in his thirties and he is a capitalist. He comes from a family of money lenders and he is quite rich. He is not unimposing. But Manohar is a man about the town with no definite job or avocation. He is in his late thirties, showing signs of baldness. He comes from a respectable, bankrupt middle class family. So his only solemn aim in life is to be a veritable devotee of the industrialist and the capitalist.

LAL : Sobha, my darling, many happy returns. . .

RAVINDER : Wish you lots of luck. . . .

MANOHAR : Good luck and speedy marriage. . . .

ASHA : Happy birthday.

SOBHA : Thank you all. I am indeed happy to receive your good wishes.

LAL : *(In a grand, dignified manner)* Ravinder, what do you think of the party? Are the arrangements satisfactory?

RAVINDER : Satisfactory ! More than satisfactory !

MANOHAR : I have never seen such a party in my life. Such

a combination of the pick of society ! Grand ! Splendid !

LAL : The credit goes to my Secretary. He spent nearly a fortnight on these arrangements.

RAVINDER : He is earnest and sincere in what he does.

LAL : Yes he is. Look at him, how he conducts himself with all types of people ! He is all courtesy and politeness.

He points to Suresh at the other end, busy moving about, looking to the needs of the guests.

MANOHAR : But he is an echo of his master.

LAL : *(A little tickled by that compliment)* True, true indeed. But it requires initiative on his part also.

Sobha and Asha whisper to each other.

SOBHA : Asha, I like the way Suresh has conducted the whole affair.

ASHA : Perhaps a poor service to a lady like you. Sobha, your beauty is unrivalled. I feel Suresh is in . . .

SOBHA : *(Interrupting her)* Don't be silly. Asha, who is that girl near Suresh ? She is rather pretty.

ASHA : She is Prem his friend.

SOBHA : *(Surprised)* His friend ! You mean to say he is in

love with her.

ASHA : I don't think so. But for the last few months I have seen her running after him.

They take a few sweets and eat them in a very leisurely manner.

LAL : Sobha, have some sweets. Ravinder, don't feel shy. Manohar, please get some tea for us.

Manohar leans over the table and fills four cups with tea and gives them to the industrialist and others in that circle.

MANOHAR : I am very fond of tea. Somehow I don't like coffee. It has a very bitter taste.

LAL : I don't mind coffee for a change, but very occasionally, mind you.

SOBHA : In the South, coffee is very popular.

ASHA : Over here tea is a common drink.

The industrialist suddenly recognises some familiar face at a distance.

LAL : Ravinder, you see that lady there. She is Mrs. Pratima. She is the most sociable and charming woman I have ever seen. I should go and see her. Excuse me. . . .

He leaves them.

ASHA : *(To Ravinder)* Tonight there is a dance performance.

RAVINDER : Oriental.

ASHA : Yes oriental. A performance by a great artist. She is an exponent of classical dance. Are you interested ?

RAVINDER : (*In a jovial mood*) Not particularly. . but we have to oblige ladies like you.

ASHA : Thank you. . I am happy to hear that.

RAVINDER : You know I am not much interested in women. But somehow I find in you the type of woman I admire. You have a flair for clothes. Exquisite taste.

ASHA : You have a bewitching way of talking. Very few men have this gift. Most often they are dull and conceited. They are never likeable. Men like you are exceptional.

RAVINDER : Thank you.

ASHA : I wonder why men are so prosaic and bald in their talk. You know, I often curse myself when I am in such company. But you are different. You are delightful.

RAVINDER : Asha, my dear Asha, you are sweet. I am indeed fond of you.

ASHA : (*Beaming with expression*) I am glad to hear it.

RAVINDER : My dear Asha, you are uniformly charming.

The industrialist Lal talks to Mrs. Pratima and Suresh. Pratima is a fat lady in her early forties. She is a widow but she is

still having quite a few admirers about her. Her riches are a source of comfort to her.

LAL : Hallo Pratima, I am glad you have come. Suresh I am proud of you. You have done everything splendidly.

SURESH : Thank you. I shall go and look to the needs of others. May I ?

LAL : Sure; surely you can go. I shall make Pratima feel quite at home.

Suresh leaves the spot.

PRATIMA : Come, let us join that group over there.

(He conducts Mrs. Pratima to his daughter.)

Sobha, this is Pratima my old friend. Asha, meet Pratima
Pratima, these are my friends Ravinder and Manohar.

They bow to her.

Pratima, I hope you like this party.

PRATIMA : Of course I do. It is indeed a success.

MANOHAR : What else can it be when it is given by a millionaire like him ? And when the occasion is graced by ladies like you ?

PRATIMA : *(Looking at him sweetly)* I dare say you are quite interesting.

MANOHAR : *(Making an elaborate bow in the grand old fashion of knights)* Thank you madam, much obliged.

LAL : *(Smiling)* Pratima, Manohar is quite a sociable person. He is the universal friend. For everyone he has a ready smile and a nice word.

PRATIMA : *(To Lal)* I am happy to meet him. *(To Manohar)* I hope we will be more and more acquainted in course of time.

MANOHAR : Surely we will. . . I am always at your service.

PRATIMA : You are the most dashing young man I have ever met.

At the other end Suresh is in the company of his friends Ramesh, Prem and Rekha.

RAMESH : *(In a light vein)* Suresh, you'd better go and join your boss. You'll have better company.

SURESH : I am all right here. I have no intention of joining that group.

RAMESH : But mind you, Sobha is watching you. Perhaps she is having an eye on you.

SURESH : Don't be silly.

REKHA : To-day Sobha looks more than beautiful.

PREM : It's only natural. She is a millionaire's daughter and she has all the beauty specialists at her command.

REKHA : Surely there must be some natural grace also.

PREM : Well, artificiality to a large extent can cover up the natural deficiency.

Pratima and Manohar are busy talking.

PRATIMA : I am glad we have met. Life is always like this bringing together unfamiliar faces.

MANOHAR : Perhaps we were friends in our past lives. The moment I saw you I liked you.

PRATIMA : I felt the same way.

MANOHAR : Perhaps destiny has brought us together.

PRATIMA : I hope you have no encumbrances in life.

MANOHAR : None. . . . Absolutely free.

PRATIMA : Easy enough for both of us. You can as well come and stay with me as the manager of my estate.

MANOHAR : Very kind of you, sweet lady. You are my patroness and I am your humble servant.

The industrialist who has been moving about and talking to his various guests comes back to his little group.

SOBHA : Dad, we'd better go in. I feel rather tired.

LAL : (*All affection*) Darling we will go.

The industrialist goes out arm in arm with Sobha.

RAVINDER : (*Admiring Sobha*) Such a sweet little creature !

ASHA : (*Looks at him seriously*) Hope you haven't forgotten me.

RAVINDER : (*Becoming alert*) O no, I haven't. How can I, my dear, dear Asha. . . . Come, let us go.

Ravinder and Asha leave the place.

MANOHAR : Madam, shall we go ?

PRATIMA : Yes, we go.

They leave the spot in a happy mood. The whole congregation then breaks up and the party comes to a successful close. Suresh is the last person to leave.

Act II

Scene ii

A few days after the Garden Party —

Sobha's drawing room —

Everything about the room indicates a certain luxury and profusion. It is heavily furnished and decorated. Large, silk curtains with beautiful patterns on them are conspicuously displayed near the windows and the doorway. The floor is thickly carpeted. Sobha is gracefully reclined on a sofa. She is meditative and expectant. In that graceful pose she is alluring, if not seductive. Her bosom heaves and falls and with that movement the curves are fascinatingly exposed. Suresh gently knocks at the door and enters. She is unmoved, but casts a bewitching look at him.

SOBHA : Suresh, do take a seat.

He sits on the settee. He is a little confused by the whole situation. Sobha looks at him fixedly and smiles. Suresh is all the more puzzled.

Suresh, how is life ?

SURESH : O it's all right. Not much of a change. Well, we pull on.

SOBHA : Why, you don't sound very energetic. What's the matter ?

SURESH : Nothing. . . .*(After a pause)* Your friend Asha told me I should come and see you.

SOBHA : *(Smiles)* Yes, that's right. I did want you to see me. I thought of thanking you in person for all the trouble you took in arranging my birthday party. I am indeed grateful to you, Suresh.

SURESH : *(Smiles)* That's my duty. I don't think I deserve any thanks. I am paid for it, am I not ?

SOBHA : Suresh, I strongly suspect that you didn't do all that just for the sake of money.

SURESH : That's true. I have some sort of respect for you. So I thought it should be a success.

SOBHA : *(With an air of gratification)* I am pleased, most pleased to hear that. It makes me feel honoured to be liked by you. That day I was observing you all the time. I liked the way you moved about with an air of confidence. Dad is proud of you. So am I.

SURESH : You make me feel embarrassed with your rich praise.

SOBHA : *(Tactfully)* Suresh, I saw some good looking woman by your side. I hope she isn't. . . .

SURESH : *(Smiles)* She is Prem, my friend.

SOBHA : Only a friend. . .

SURESH : Well, of course. . . .

SOBHA : (*Looking at him sweetly*) Wouldn't you like to have a rich woman as your wife ?

SURESH : Wife ! I never thought of it. I don't have the time to bother about women.

SOBHA : (*With a mischievous look*) Don't tell me you are a saint. . . .

SURESH : No, not a saint, but I have a definite attitude towards life. We have all come here with a purpose in life. We are expected to fulfil our mission. I refuse to take life as a fiesta or a holiday. A life full of ambition - that is what is needed for me.

SOBHA : What is your ambition then ?

SURESH : It's difficult to answer. I wish to explain to myself the riddle of life and then interpret it for others. To many, life is a big gamble. To others it is just a matter of 'cursed fate'. And all these persons accept life in a blind, unthinking manner. To me it's plain that life is based upon a system - a great plan of Beauty, Love and Justice. In other words it is a synthesis of these three dynamic forces that keeps men and women balanced and righteous.

SOBHA : How do you account for ugliness, hatred and injustice - the three negative forces that move human beings ?

SURESH : Truly speaking, these do not exist. Disruption of Beauty, Love or Justice leads to these negative qualities. But these are only circumstantial; they do not form a part of man's original nature. His noble heritage is often muddled once it gets involved in the environmental lures of the world. But his original nature asserts itself soon. For accidental lapses never govern man completely. That's why a criminal even after escaping the rigour of law is seen committing suicide. Surely it is a proof of the sense of justice that is fundamentally alive in him.

SOBHA : Do you really think that there is justice in the world ? I don't know much about the ways of the world, but I hear people doubting it.

SURESH : Yes, people more often talk of injustice. But that's once again a popular fallacy. We have to pay for all that we have done. None of us can go scot-free. It is a question of time. Out of desperation and even impatience we often remark bitterly that there is no justice in this blind and indifferent world. Surely the man who deceives you will be deceived in his own turn. So the best way to accept defeat or deceit is to take it philosophically, for your betrayer is not at all safe from harm.

SOBHA : What you say is true. But one doesn't have that sort of patience, and if I may call it, heroic martyrdom.

SURESH : There is no martyrdom; it is a healthy, logical way of looking at life's problems.

SOBHA : (*Sweetly*) Suresh you are very different from other men. The moment I go out with them they don't think of anything else except my physical charm. I am fed up

with them. I wish I had been your disciple.

SURESH : (*Sportively*) It's never too late.

SOBHA : (*Cheerfully*) You mean I could be your disciple even now. How wonderful ! You know, as you talked to me of life I felt a mysterious elevation—from a purely physical existence to an ethereal one. (*Highly emotional*) Men are such stupid creatures that they never conceive of women in any other respect except as toys meant for their sport. Isn't it disgraceful to take women as dolls, pretty dolls ? Like a peevish child you throw them away once you are satiated.

SURESH : (*Smiles*) I quite understand your point. You sound very like the emancipated woman.

SOBHA : Suresh, did you ever imagine I was fond of you ?
(*Looks at him hopefully and anxiously*)

SURESH : (*Calm and unperturbed*) No, I never imagined it was possible.

SOBHA : (*A little depressed*) Why, why do you say that ?
Am I not beautiful enough for you ?

SURESH : O, no, I don't mean that. I am not unaware of your good looks. But you see, you are a millionairess. So you have a world of admirers at your feet.

SOBHA : (*Slightly pleased*) That's true. But somehow not one of them stirs in me the deeper feeling of love. I have no respect for them. I am no doubt amused by their flattering words. It always gives me an indescribable

pride to see them running after me. That's all. I never take them seriously. It feeds my feminine vanity to be the darling of so many. But never, never have I met a man like you.

SURESH : *(Trying to be nice)* My dear Sobha, you are kind, awfully kind to me.

SOBHA : But do you intend to be kind to me ?

SURESH : *(Looking at her doubtfully)* Yes, of course. But why do you put that question ? You can be sure of my service.

SOBHA : Supposing I make you rich.

SURESH : I am not much interested in being rich, when the whole country is poor.

SOBHA : But do you think it is sensible to despise riches ? The best way of solving the economic ills is to make the poor richer, not the rich poorer.

SURESH : That's true, but somehow money is not a great attraction for me.

SOBHA : Suresh, I think I have detained you for a long time.
(Keeps silent)

SURESH : Yes, Miss Sobha. Please tell me if there is anything I can do for you.

SOBHA : *(Feels a little shy and murmurs)* I wish to. . . *(Stops abruptly)*.

SURESH : (*Looks at her baffled*) Please go on. . . .

SOBHA : (*Mustering up courage*) I wish to marry you.

SURESH : (*Surprised*) Sobha, I feel honoured, but you see. . . .

SOBHA : (*Gesticulating*) Please don't say 'no'.

SURESH : I am afraid I can't quite satisfy you on this score.
I intend marrying. . . .

SOBHA : (*Interrupts him*) I know you wish to marry Prem.
But no one loves the way I love you. You have been with
us for two years. All along I had an eye on you. The
other day when I saw you with Prem I decided to let you
know my mind. I know Dad will be enraged if I tell
him of my choice. But I am not worried about it; I am
determined to have you or remain unmarried.

SURESH : Sobha, you are highly emotional. Perhaps this
is a fancy; it is bound to pass off.

SOBHA : (*A little enraged*) Suresh, don't despise me and my
affection. I know you don't have much respect for the
rich, but you fail to understand that we too are human.
It's not impossible for a rich woman to love as sincerely
as a poor one. It's a foolish notion entertained and
encouraged by poets and philosophers that only the poor
have character, with a capital 'C'. In fact, poverty is a
crime, it's a disease. It paralyses a person physically,
mentally and even spiritually.

*She stands up and walks with dignified rage. She is restless.
Suresh too stands and faces her.*

SURESH : (*Apologetically*) Sobha, I am sorry for what I have said. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but if I did it unknowingly I apologise for it. Please forgive me. I now understand you. I know you are so very different from women of your class. You are independent; you despise traditions and meaningless customs. I have nothing but admiration for you. But on the question of marriage, I am afraid, I have to disappoint you. I am fond of Prem.

SOBHA : (*A little annoyed*) Don't talk to me of your fondness for Prem. I know, men are polygamous by nature. I am sure you can change your mind if you wish to. (*Nearing him*) Look at this beautiful mansion, all this wealth. Don't be silly. Of course I don't wish to tempt you with these material comforts. I love you. Nothing matters to me except this ennobling desire of possessing the person I love.

SURESH : Sobha, you are eloquent. I feel tongue-tied before you. I am indeed grateful to you for this proposal, even though I am helpless to accept it.

SOBHA : Promise you will consider.

SURESH : Of course I shall.

Sobha beams radiantly. She casts one cheerful look at Suresh and he takes leave of her, rather puzzled and distracted by the unusual turn of events that day. Sobha heaves a sigh of relief immediately after the exit of Suresh.

SOBHA : (*Dropping on the sofa lazily*) Thank God, I have got him.

Act II

Scene iii

Sobha's drawing room —

Time 4 p.m. Sobha and Asha converse. They are seated on a settee and seem to be enjoying each other's company.

SOBHA : Asha, you know that last time I saw Suresh I think I made some impression on him.

ASHA : (*Enthusiastically*) Some impression ! Don't try to be modest. I am sure he will marry you and leave Prem to her fate.

SOBHA : Let us see

ASHA : But my love for Ravinder is something marvellous. I saw him at your party and immediately I fell in love with him.

SOBHA : You are indeed lucky in getting him.

ASHA : Indeed I am lucky. He is extremely rich. I will have a fine time. Life will be a perpetual holiday. O, how I love to be with him ! I wonder what will happen to me.

A knock at the door and in comes the industrialist.

LAL : I hope I am not intruding.

SOBHA : No, not at all.

ASHA : Sobha I'll see you later. Bye-bye. . . .

Asha leaves the room. The industrialist sits opposite Sobha on a sofa.

SOBHA : Dad, I have good news.

LAL : What's it ?

SOBHA : Asha is getting married to Ravinder.

LAL : (*Shocked*) Getting married to Ravinder ! my goodness !

SOBHA : (*Surprised*) Why, what's wrong with that ?

LAL : Marriage between Asha and Ravinder – Impossible. Absolutely impossible.

SOBHA : (*Puzzled*) Dad, I don't understand you.

LAL : (*Affectionately*) No, you won't. You are a child, my dear, you are a child. You have to know much before you can ever think of depending on yourself. Dear, you are so lovely and gentle that you can't understand the ways of the world.

SOBHA : (*Bewildered*) I know I am ignorant of the ways of

the world, I quite agree with you. But in this particular instance I don't see why you should be horribly upset.

LAL : (*Interrupts her*) No, not upset. Shocked is the right word for it. I am indeed dazed. (*Emotionally*) Upstart pretensions of Asha for the hand of Ravinder. . . No, no, this can't be tolerated.

SOBHA : Why, what's wrong with it ?

LAL : Of course, there is everything wrong about it. We, the rich have our own traditions, our own culture and our own attitude towards life. We can't possibly think of demeaning ourselves by all sorts of alliances with persons far below us in status.

SOBHA : (*Smiles*) Ridiculous ! Dad, you are funny.

LAL : (*Seriously*) No Sobha, I am not. It is our duty to uphold our traditions. In almost all the countries we find differences of caste or class. But the underlying idea behind these differences is always the same. It is to preserve and cherish one's own culture. It's not for nothing that these differences are introduced. .

SOBHA : I quite appreciate the system. But why should it come in the way of two persons loving each other ?

LAL : (*With contempt*) Love ! There is no such thing as love. It's a mad man's job, an idle man's devilish thought. Nothing more than that. It's a delusion. For goodness sake, please do not allow yourself to be deceived by this fascinating, but hypocritical term.

SOBHA : Dad, you seem to be in an awfully cynical mood.
You are not your usual self today.

LAL : Sobha, marriage is a great institution. It is intended for the well being and safety of races and communities. In the interest of these groups all sorts of undesirable unions are best avoided. Asha can never be happy with Ravinder; nor can she expect Ravinder to be faithful to her all her life.

SOBHA : Dad, their marriage will not be a conventional one. It is based on love.

LAL : O! no, Sobha, you are misled. Men and women get together purely because of a simple, physical urge. Idealism is tall talk. In everyday life there is no place for visionary longings.

SOBHA : I know, but you see, love is something ennobling. We, moderns, we want something new. We want a re-orientation of the past.

LAL : Well, well. . . . I see my own child revolting against me.

SOBHA : (*Appeals to him*) Please do not misunderstand me. I just expressed how I felt about certain things in life; that's all. Peculiarly enough Suresh feels the same way about marriage.

LAL : (*A little perplexed*) But what is Suresh to you ? Nothing.

SOBHA : Dad, he is wonderful. I have never seen a man like

him. Others bore me to distraction but he leaves me spell-bound.

LAL : No doubt he is clever, but surely he has no business to come and talk to you. He is after all our Secretary. I hate to see my Secretary making love to my daughter.

SOBHA : (*Teasing him*) How about your daughter making love to your Secretary ?

LAL : (*Worried*) You don't mean that, do you ?

SOBHA : (*Seriously*) Dad, I mean it. I am very fond of him.

LAL : (*Walks in an agitated mood*) Fond of him ! You are mad; Sobha, you are mad. O what a shame ! (*Comes back to her and stands before her*) My dear, be reasonable. What sort of life you expect to have with Suresh ? Can he afford you the luxuries you have had all your life ?

SOBHA : I don't mind leading a simple life with Suresh. What is needed is mutual understanding and sympathy. And that I will have from Suresh.

LAL : (*Interrupts her*) Don't be silly. My dear, life is a blessed carnival. It is a grand picnic, a glorious holiday. We, the rich, we are destined to enjoy life with its pleasant round of joys. Our riches are our sole comfort.

The industrialist goes and sits by her side on the settee.

(*Affectionately*) Sobha, you are all the world to me. I hate to see you ruined. Yes, it will certainly be your ruin if you involve yourself in an unfortunate alliance with

Suresh. You won't be happy.

SOBHA : But Suresh is such a good soul that he will surely make me happy.

LAL : I know Suresh is good. But it's no use being poor. Everything goes by riches. In this busy, modern world who cares for spiritual values or for lofty ideals ? As a matter of fact no one likes to be poor. Even the communists who are supposed to be the champions of the poor do not like a life of poverty. No, certainly not. My dear Sobha, don't be silly. Do not dream of Suresh. Think of Ravinder, a man suited to you in all respects.

SOBHA : But he is in love with Asha.

LAL : (*Gently pats her on her back*) In love. . . Never believe a man to be in love, more so a rich man. Ravinder may like to take her as his mistress but not as his wife.

SOBHA : Dad, you are strange today.

LAL : I am not strange, but the ways of the world are strange. No one can escape the lure of money. Ravinder will jump at the idea of getting you, a millionairess.

SOBHA : (*Smiles*) So he will love my riches not me.

LAL : (*Rather puzzled*) No, not exactly that. Still your large inheritance is bound to be a deciding factor with anyone.

SOBHA : Not with Suresh. He flatly refused to marry me. But I am still hoping to get him.

LAL : Leave him alone. He will be all right with a woman of his class. And I shall soon get rid of him.

SOBHA : But I can't marry Ravinder. He is very dull and unimposing.

LAL : Now, now be careful. Darling, be nice to him. Won't you comfort your poor old Dad ?

SOBHA : I love to. . . .But this is an impossible situation.

LAL : No, it's not. From my experience I tell you, you will never be happy with Suresh. After all there is nothing like experience. We learn so much from our lives that we like to warn others.

SOBHA : I take your warning. But let me have my own experience.

LAL : No Sobha, I hate to see you going through a process of ups and downs. Let your life be a fiesta.

SOBHA : Leave me alone for a couple of days.

LAL : By all means I will. But don't disappoint me.

SOBHA : I shall try, not to.

Act III

Scene i

A few days later —

A pleasant morning —

The industrialist is in his room. He is moving about restlessly. He is smoking a cigar. With every puff of it he gets more and more intoxicated. At times he looks at the ceiling, watching the circular undulations of the smoke. Evidently he is puzzled by a knotty problem.

Manohar comes to see him. The former, who is in Mrs. Pratima's service, is in the best of his moods. He enters the room quite enthusiastically and receives a warm reception.

LAL : Hallo Manohar, how are you ? How is Pratima ?

MANOHAR : O she is quite all right. She is wonderful. I am quite happy in her service. The moment she talks of you she goes into raptures.

LAL : (*Pleased*) I am glad to hear that. You know Pratima is a sweet lady.

MANOHAR : How is Sobha ? I hear you are a little worried about her. Pratima is much concerned about it. In

fact she intends paying a visit to you.

LAL : I will be honoured; it will indeed be a pleasure to see her. But as regards Sobha's infatuation for Suresh there is no fear. I think I can manage her. I am very near success in convincing her to my way of thinking.

MANOHAR : Hope you will succeed and be done with it. You may believe me, Ravinder doesn't care a pin for Asha.

LAL : (*Fvincing great interest*) What ! What did you say ? Please take a seat.

They are seated on two sofas facing each other.

MANOHAR : (*Settling down*) You see Ravinder has no particular fancy for Asha.

LAL : Then what the hell does she mean in giving us these stories of love.

MANOHAR : (*Chuckling*) You ought to know women better than I do. Anyway Ravinder is coming here to talk to you. He may be here any minute.

LAL : Wonderful. Manohar you are remarkable. You always bring good news. But tell me one thing - how can I dispose of Asha ? She is Sobha's dear friend, you know that, don't you ?

MANOHAR : Of course I do. But it is very easy to manage Asha. What she wants in life is fun. It is immaterial whether it comes from Ravinder or from you.

LAL : (*Surprised*) From me ! What do you mean ?

MANOHAR : I mean you can as well marry her.

LAL : (*Laughing*) Marry her ! Manohar, you are funny.

MANOHAR : I don't see why you shouldn't . Any woman would run mad for you. Don't you know that Asha's first, perhaps the only consideration for Ravinder's hand, is his wealth ?

LAL : Yes I believe it is. Still it doesn't look nice for me to marry at this age. (*Pausing for a while*) I've got an idea. Manohar, why can't you yourself marry her ?

MANOHAR : (*Nonplussed*) I would love to, but she wouldn't. .

LAL : You mean you don't have sufficient wealth to attract her.

MANOHAR : In a way that will be her great objection.

LAL : I will make sufficient provision for both of you. After all, money is everything in this world. Let us see how things develop.

A knock at the door and Ravinder enters. Lal is all kindness to him.

Hallo Ravinder, you are the very person whom I have been dying to see. Glad you came. Be seated. Make yourself comfortable.

Ravinder feels rather shy and embarrassed. He is seated on

a sofa and the industrialist stands before him. Manohar watches Ravinder carefully.

MANOHAR : *(With a mischievous smile)* How is your Asha ?

RAVINDER : *(Almost stammering)* My A. . . . Asha. . . .

MANOHAR : Yes, your Asha. . . .

RAVINDER : What do you mean ?

MANOHAR : It seems you have proposed to her.

The industrialist waits for the reply anxiously.

LAL : Yes that's what Asha has been telling us.

RAVINDER : She must be awfully silly. How could it be possible ? I am sorry I gave that impression to her. I suppose I ought to explain.

LAL : *(In a grand, imperious tone)* You'd better. You see, the whole thing is complicated. I am personally much grieved to hear of your indiscretion in this matter.

RAVINDER : Please listen to me. You know, the first time I saw her was at Sobha's birthday party. I was in a jolly good mood. She complimented me profusely. I responded quite warmly, more from a sense of chivalry than from love. I don't suppose she is so simple as to take my words deadly seriously.

LAL : I dare say there is some mistake somewhere. It's rather unfortunate. Anyway you are sure, you don't

love her.

RAVINDER : (*Vehemently*) Love her ! Impossible. I am no fool to be caught in her trap. Money is her chief attraction.

LAL : It's the attraction of everyone. It is no vice. In a way I sympathise with Asha's aspirations. I shall make her rich.

RAVINDER : By all means you do. But you see that she doesn't pester me. I wonder what my dear Sobha is thinking of me. She may have been misled by Asha's words.

LAL : Of course she is annoyed with you. She has an eye on Suresh.

RAVINDER : Suresh ! How can she demean herself ?

LAL : Ravinder, you need not entertain any doubts about Sobha. She is a dutiful child. She will marry you all right, provided you promise to be faithful.

RAVINDER : I am indeed sorry for my foolish prank with Asha. How can I ever leave my beautiful Sobha ? What's Asha before Sobha ? Nothing. Manohar, you come to my rescue and be done with Asha. I shall reward you. We have been good friends; I hope you will not disappoint me.

MANOHAR : (*Laughing*) How lucky I am. I seem to be doubly blessed. Everywhere there is money for me. Pratima throws money on me, the millionaire promises

to settle a good annuity on me and now you have made a gesture of a huge fortune. What are those lines of Shakespeare ? (*Scratching his head*) Yes, I get them. 'Some are born great, some achieve greatness and on some others greatness is thrust'. I come of the last category. Never mind, I shall be rich and great.

LAL : (*Roaring with laughter*) You Machiavelli, you are indeed a subtle rogue.

RAVINDER : Manohar, my hearty congratulations. Surely Asha will be a fitting companion to you.

LAL : Manohar, please go and tell Sobha and Asha to come and see me immediately.

Manohar leaves the room with an elaborate bow.

Ravinder, don't you think that Manohar is quite invaluable to our families ? My desire is to get him married to Asha. Thereby Sobha can have Asha as her companion and we can have Manohar to ourselves.

RAVINDER : (*Feeling happy*) Quite a good proposal. You are terribly clever.

LAL : (*Feeling flattered*) Of course I am. How else do you think I can get on in this world ? You are pretty inexperienced. You have to learn much more before you can ever get to the real problem of being rich.

RAVINDER : Your wisdom will be an asset to me. But what do you think of your Secretary Suresh ? Don't you think, he ought to be dismissed ?

LAL : Don't you worry, I have already done that.

Sobha and Asha enter, accompanied by Manohar. Sobha casts a sly look at Ravinder. Asha turns a little pale due to Ravinder's presence.

Darling Sobha, come, come to your Dad. Here is your fiance Ravinder.

(Asha looks annoyingly at Ravinder.)

SOBHA : I don't know what you mean.

LAL : You will very soon be married to Ravinder.

SOBHA : *(Frowning)* Without my consent I suppose.

LAL : Now, now, be kind and sweet. How can I ever see you with that frown ? It'll kill me.

ASHA : *(To the industrialist)* Ravinder loves me. How can he marry Sobha ?

LAL : Dear lady, you are mistaken. We, the rich, take life in a realistic manner. We are not carried away by meaningless words like love and romance. Ravinder was never in love with you.

ASHA : *(With a contemptuous look at Ravinder, addresses the industrialist)* How can you express the feelings of others ? Let Ravinder speak for himself. I will be content with his reply.

RAVINDER : *(Rather apologetically)* Madam, I am sorry for

your unfortunate mistake. What was fun for me was an act of faith with you. I never expected you would take me so seriously. I am.

ASHA : (*Interrupting him*) Enough. . . I had enough of your wonderful love. You mistook me for a gay, frivolous type. I may look gay, but my emotions are always steady.

LAL : Asha don't get disheartened. You love Sobha and you know that she is meant for Ravinder. Be generous to your friend.

ASHA : (*A little touched and softened*) By all means I will. Surely I will do anything for my Sobha. But she doesn't love Ravinder.

LAL : (*Promptly*) My dear little children, listen to me. You don't know what you are talking. Sobha talks of love, you think you are in love. You are all moon-struck. What is real in this world is money and all the comforts it gives.

ASHA : (*A little convinced*) Of course it is true to a certain extent.

LAL : (*Emphatically*) It is completely true; no question of partial truth. Now a word about your problem. You can marry Manohar. A legacy will be yours and Ravinder will give a huge fortune to Manohar. You two can live in comparative opulence and be with us.

MANOHAR : Asha, you need not doubt my sincere devotion to you. But for my poverty, I would have proposed to you years ago. Now we can lead a comfortable life.

ASHA : I suppose so. But it takes time before I can get used to liking you.

LAL : (*Satisfied and pleased with himself*) O it will work out very well in the long run. That is in fact the beauty of the Hindu marriage system. Men and women – quite strangers, mind you – are joined in wedlock. The little angularities disappear in time and they make fine couples.

ASHA : (*Rather doubtfully*) Or perhaps they get into the rut !

LAL : Now what says my pretty Sobha ?

SOBHA : (*Still indifferent and sulky*) Nothing. Dad no doubt you are clever. Your wealth can attract only certain types, not all.

LAL : Don't be sullen and sulky. Be a dutiful child and marry Ravinder.

SOBHA : Dad, I have no respect for your strange views on love and marriage. You think you are an all-seeing God. Don't be ridiculous, Dad. How can you ever pair off men and women ? Don't you think they have their own emotions and feelings ? (*With contempt*) You and your money ! (*Pausing*) fortunately the world is not so poor as you imagine.

LAL : (*Taken aback*) Mine own daughter talking to me ! Is this true or am I dreaming ? You little Miss. Impudent, it is only for your sake that I have been a widower all these years. Your dear mother was soft as a lamb. Wherefrom did you get this imperious attitude ?

SOBHA : From my own father who is so very domineering and proud.

LAL : (*Angrily*) Enough. No more of your rudeness. You should marry Ravinder or else you have to leave my house at once.

SOBHA : I won't mind.

LAL : (*With threatening looks*) You won't mind !

He marches towards her and shakes her violently by her shoulders.

SOBHA : (*In a dignified manner*) You dare not touch me. Take off your hands.

MANOHAR : Sobha, please be kind to your Dad.

RAVINDER : (*Coming forward*) Sobha, I am awfully sorry for this. I have no intention to marry you by force. I am no brute. Dear Sobha, give me time to woo you. I shall try my best to deserve you. I know how you feel about marriage and my sympathies are for you. Your Dad loves you to madness. So he is over anxious to see his only child happy. In a way I am responsible for this unpleasant strife. I apologise to you. I realise I do not deserve you at present. But I shall patiently wait till I can get you by desert and not by wealth.

SOBHA : (*Surprised*) Ravinder, I am glad you have taken a human approach to the problem. I promise to encourage you in your efforts and for the present we'd better remain as friends.

RAVINDER : (*Enthusiastically*) I quite agree with you Sobha.
 (*To Manohar and Asha*) You two try and make an effort to understand each other, before you start leading a married life.

The industrialist is standing apart, still feeling wounded in his pride. Sobha, cooled by now, notices her disconsolate father. She goes to him.

SOBHA : (*Taking her father's hand*) Dad, I am awfully sorry. Please forgive me for what I have said.

LAL : (*Again bubbling up with cheer*) My dear Sobha, (*He looks at her sweetly holding her at an arm's distance*) how sweet and angelic you are ! Now you remind me of your dear mother. (*With a smile*) Dad is a bad fellow. Don't imitate him. (*To others*) How about celebrating this event.

MANOHAR : Fine. I shall get some drinks.

He leaves the room in high spirits.

ASHA : (*Whispers to Sobha*) Isn't he a fine fellow ?

SOBHA : (*Smiles*) Already in love with him ! My goodness ! Let the pace be moderate.

A liveried servant brings wine. Manohar enters. They offer the first toast to Sobha.

ALL : To the good health of Sobha.

Act III

Scene ii

A few hours later — Evening 4 —

Suresh is in his drawing room with Prem.

There is a gentle knock at the door. Rekha and Ramesh enter in a happy, cheerful mood. Rekha runs to Prem and embraces her. Suresh shakes hands with Ramesh. They are all seated.

RAMESH : How are you ?

SURESH : Fine !

REKHA : (*Whispers to Prem*) I am getting married to Ramesh next week.

PREM : (*Exultantly*) Wonderful ! I am indeed glad to hear that. Suresh, Rekha and Ramesh are getting married. Isn't it nice ?

SURESH : Of course nice. My hearty congratulations to you (*To Rekha and Ramesh*).

RAMESH : (*Looking at Prem and Suresh*) How about you two? When is your marriage ?

PREM : (*A little depressed*) We are in a pretty mess.

RAMESH : I hope you haven't quarrelled.

PREM : O no, nothing of that sort. Nothing wrong with us.

RAMESH : Then.

PREM : You see, just now Suresh received a letter of dismissal from his boss.

RAMESH : (*With surprise*) Really !

PREM : Yes.

RAMESH : Prem, I am sorry. I am awfully sorry. But why is he dismissed ?

PREM : His boss suspects Suresh to be influencing his daughter.

RAMESH : What a shame ! Why should he think like that ?

SURESH : Let us not bother. How about having tea. Prem, please look to the arrangements.

. Prem leaves the room to instruct the servant.

RAMESH : Sure, you are mild. It's no use being just in an unjust world.

SURESH : No, please don't say that. There is justice in the world. We can't ignore it. The balance is always struck between good and evil.

RAMESH : Then how do you explain the present injustice done to you ?

Prem reenters the room.

SURESH : I am not at all bothered about it. If today someone cheats me, tomorrow some other person will cheat him. We all of us condemn ugliness. We can't possibly tolerate injustice.

REKHA : Then why should there be criminality at all ?

SURESH : Even a criminal has a sense of justice. From your standpoint it may be a false one, but he does care for justice. He feels he is wronged by society or by someone dear to him. In a mood of bitterness he does something horrible.

RAMESH : Sometimes his crime may go unpunished.

SURESH : Just possible. But the sense of justice which is ever present in Man, makes him hate himself for his wicked deeds. Even a criminal is under this great influence. So he condemns himself by committing suicide.

PREM : (*Smiles*) I know you always justify everything.

RAMESH : (*To Prem*) No wonder he is a dreamer. How funny ! He believes that even a criminal is a normal man.

SURESH : (*Emphatically*) Of course, he is normal. He is just an ordinary man; nothing strange about him.

The servant enters with a tray full of cups and saucers. He arranges tea for them on a small table nearby and leaves the room.

PREM : Let us have tea.

They take their seats near the small table and begin taking tea and biscuits. Prem and Rekha help the others.

REKHA : (*Sipping tea*) I know it is easy to argue. But Suresh, what will happen to you now ? Don't you think you should hate the millionaire for giving you the sack ?

SURESH : (*Almost obstinately*) Why should I ? I shall soon get some other job. If one has merit one is bound to succeed.

REKHA : (*Impatiently*) I can't possibly appreciate your detached attitude towards life. Why don't you admit that there is injustice, corruption and rottenness in the world ?

SURESH : I don't. . . .I can't.

RAMESH : But tell me why the millionaire suspected you ?

SURESH : (*Looks at Prem and smiles*) The other day Sobha proposed to me. She did her best to get my consent.

RAMESH : (*Teasing him*) And you refused. How silly ! A millionairess proposes to you and you refuse. O help me. Shame on humanity ! Why are people like you born, people who can't enjoy life ?

SURESH : Don't be funny.

RAMESH : No, I am not. I am quite serious. You are a blessed fool.

PREM : (*Anxiously*) You mean to say that Suresh should have accepted Sobha's proposal.

RAMESH : (*In a light humoured tone*) Of course yes. What else do we want ? Give me a millionairess. I'll be the first person to marry.

REKHA : Ramesh, be careful. You are talking nonsense. You can't leave me for a millionairess.

RAMESH : (*Teasing her*) Of course I will. My dear, I am not a cuckoo like Suresh. For me, money is everything. If I have money I shall have the best of life. Go for a holiday and all the year enjoy the sunny spots of the world. That is life for me, not this dull routine.

SURESH : (*Laughs*) Ramesh, I never knew you were such a good orator. Fine sentiments though ! But let me tell you that life is not a holiday. It has a purpose, a mission and everyone of us is expected to fulfil that mission. We can't take life easy. We have to fight and struggle even to the last day of our lives. It's rather dull to have the same unbroken chain of thrills and joys. We have to accept life with its shortcomings and make the best of it through our individual efforts.

PREM : I quite agree with you Suresh. Besides one can't marry for money alone.

SURESH : What else is there in marriage ? It is just a bargain and woman coupled with money becomes good enough

material for man.

REKHA : How horrid of you !

SURESH : Ramesh, I know your feelings pretty well. I have sympathy for you.

RAMESH : Sympathy for me ! I should rather sympathise with you for your childish attitude towards life.

SURESH : Ramesh, perhaps you are justified in saying that most men marry for the sake of money. But the inevitable urge in man – to love someone, to annihilate selfishness – is bound to come out even after marriage, perhaps in the shape of children ! No one is free from that great quality, love. This is found even in a robber.

RAMESH : Ridiculous. If he has that feeling of love, why should he rob ?

SURESH : He robs because he is poor. He feels that injustice is done to him by others in society. But surely he too has a soft corner for someone. It may not be for some other human being. It may be for his dog or for some other pet.

PREM : We'd better leave Suresh to his thoughts. It is difficult to argue with him. Let us move on to the sofas.

They move to the sofas and they are seated on them.

REKHA : We have had quite an interesting evening.

PREM : Yes the talk was quite stimulating. But the whole

trouble with Suresh is that he is too dreamy and unrealistic.

REKHA : And the difficulty with Ramesh is that he is downright practical-minded.

PREM : (*Smiles*) Well, let us try to strike a mean. We can't possibly live in a dreamland.

REKHA : Nor can we shut our eyes to the higher aspects of life like Beauty, Love and Justice. Money is not everything in this world. A world solely dominated by money is bound to be sordid.

Suresh and Ramesh smile.

SURESH : I think we need women like you to guide us.

RAMESH : (*Still in that mock-serious vein*) But I shall not budge an inch. For me there is only one thing precious. That is money and all the material comforts it brings. I don't have much patience for theoretical assumptions. For instance I can't possibly reconcile myself with the idea that someone who has done me injustice will pay for it some day. It is rather silly to leave him unpunished

SURESH : No you are mistaken. You haven't understood my arguments. No one escapes punishment for his cruel deeds. Justice roots out everything effete and ugly.

RAMESH : Well, what else ? (*Smiles sarcastically*)

They hear a knock outside. To their great surprise they find Asha dashing into the room.

SURESH : Hallo Asha, glad to see you.

ASHA : I have some good news for you.

SURESH : (*Surprised*) Good news from the millionaire's house ! Incredible !

PREM : (*Sarcastically*) We had enough of it a few hours ago.

ASHA : You will have a pleasant surprise now.

REKHA : Sounds hopeful.

ASHA : Yes, it is. Suresh, Sobha came to know of your dismissal. She became annoyed with her father and she refused to see him unless he called you back to his service. He was helpless. So he agreed to take you back.

RAMESH : Suresh, you are lucky.

ASHA : Sobha was so very pleased with the news that she wanted me to communicate it to you immediately.

SURESH : Very kind of her. Thank you.

He almost dances with joy. He looks triumphantly at Ramesh, and Prem watches Suresh, pleased and happy.

—CURTAIN—

INSPECTOR RAGHAVAN

(One Act Play)

Characters

Headmaster
Ramesam
Sundaram
Officer
Raghavan
Students

(Headmaster's room in a High School —

The Headmaster is busy signing a few papers put before him by his clerk. He is fairly old with a year more for retirement. He wears glasses for reading and they obstinately refuse to remain on the ridge of his nose. He looks funny and comical as he looks through them. He is fat and burly, but with all that he seems to be a nervous type. Ramesam an assistant comes in. He is obviously puzzled for the Headmaster has called him.)

RAMESAM : *(In a shaky manner)* Sir, it seems you wanted me.

HEADMASTER : *(Looks at him through the slipping glasses)* Yes, wait a minute.

He signs a few papers more and the clerk leaves the room.

Yes, Ramesam, do you know that next week we'll have the inspection of the school ?

RAMESAM : *(Still standing)* Yes, Sir, I know.

HEADMASTER : Have you trained your class well ?

RAMESAM : Yes, Sir.

HEADMASTER : *(Scornfully)* Ramesam do you know that you are dead ?

RAMESAM : *(As though coming out of a dream)* Dead ! Not that I know of. *(Feeling his body)* I am all right. I am talking to you.

HEADMASTER : Yes, I know, but you see, your boys have written on the board, 'Ramesam dead; holiday to-day'. Haven't you seen it ?

RAMESAM : *(Shivering)* No, no.

HEADMASTER : Be more intelligent Ramesam. Don't look so stupid.

RAMESAM : Poverty, grinding poverty. Too many children. What can I do ?

HEADMASTER : *(With curiosity)* How many children have you ?

RAMESAM : Six, the seventh is shortly expected.

HEADMASTER : *(Looking at him closely)* You are thirty-five and already you are a father of six children. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You have no business to produce children when you can't support them.

RAMESAM : We are helpless. It's God's will.

HEADMASTER : *(Sarcastically)* Everything is God's will. Why do you bring in God into your own foolishness ? Anyway behave well when Inspector Raghavan comes. He is a shrewd fellow. He knows what is what; you can't dupe him.

RAMESAM : That's what everyone says about him.

HEADMASTER : *(With a wave of his hand)* Go to your room and rub off that scribbling on the board. Have greater control over the boys. Let them not monkey with you. By-the-by do you ever look at them ?

RAMESAM : No, I don't like to look at their impish faces. I allow sleeping dogs to sleep.

HEADMASTER : *(Contemptuously)* A wise policy, but do look at them from now on. You may go now.

(Ramesam leaves the room very much relieved. He looks to his right and left wondering whether anyone else has heard the Headmaster giving a bit of his mind to him. Fortunately no one is there. So he walks briskly as though nothing has happened. The Headmaster rises from his seat. He takes a few steps towards the door when Sundaram comes in. Sundaram is popularly known as the Assistant-Headmaster. He is the right hand man of the Headmaster. But the management often gives

him the cold shoulder as he does not belong to their community. So he is a disgruntled soul, but very clever and shrewd.)

SUNDARAM : Good morning Sir.

HEADMASTER : Sundram (*He can't pronounce the name properly*) I am just coming to you and you yourself have come. That's good. Next week we have the inspection.

(They stand facing each other)

SUNDARAM : Yes, I know.

HEADMASTER : Have you made arrangements ?

SUNDARAM : Why, we have made all the arrangements necessary. The walls have been white-washed leaving no traces of our students' mischief. The garden is kept neat and tidy. Floral decorations are made. In fact the school has a new look.

HEADMASTER : I am glad to hear that. But how about the quality ?

SUNDARAM : Quality is the same. We can't make dull boys intelligent all of a sudden. Mischievous boys remain mischievous. Poor teachers continue to be poor, materially as well as mentally. So things go on as usual.

HEADMASTER : But can't you do something about it ? Let not our school get a bad report.

SUNDARAM : Good report or bad report depends on the treatment we give to the Education Officer and his Ins-

pectors.

HEADMASTER : But there is Raghavan, you see. No dilly-dallying with him : everything must be 'pucca'.

SUNDARAM : (*Smiles*) We needn't be worried about him as long as the Officer is there. He is noted for his liberality. He is fond of drinks, of course soft drinks. Well, all officers can be flattered. No one is immune to flattery. And some can be bought also; it is a question of price. If the underlings are unduly strict, they get the sack. That's the reward for their scrupulosity.

HEADMASTER : (*Impressed by his arguments*) So you see no harm in Inspector Raghavan's strictness.

SUNDARAM : (*Emphatically*) Absolutely no harm.

HEADMASTER : (*Getting a novel idea*) Sundram have you enquired about the tastes of our Officer ? You'd better do that.

SUNDARAM : I have already got all the details from the neighbouring school he has inspected recently.

HEADMASTER : Tell the teachers that they have to keep up appearances. And they have to contribute towards the expenses. Be tactful in putting it to them.

SUNDARAM : Yes I shall.

HEADMASTER : Anyhow Inspector Raghavan is a terror to me. Believe me when I say, I didn't have a wink of sleep for the last one week.

SUNDARAM : (*Laughs*) Don't make me laugh. Headmaster. What funny fears ! What ridiculous notions !

HEADMASTER : I know you are quite capable of managing the whole show. But I have done my duty in briefing you for the occasion.

SUNDARAM : Don't you worry. If Raghavan is too fussy, we will report against him. Thank God we are living in a democratic country and we have our popular ministers to listen to us. Don't forget the fundamental rights of our constitution.

HEADMASTER : (*A little confused and perplexed*) Sundram what are you talking ! You talk as though ministers are your friends.

SUNDARAM : Ministers consider themselves to be the servants of the public, and they are humane in their outlook. But what I mean is this. If the worst comes to the worst we'll frame charges against the Inspector. Now-a-days people talk freely of bribery and corruption. And no one is spared, all get this odium. God only knows whether they are so bad as all that. So we will say that the Inspector has given a bad report of our school as the sum demanded by him is not given by us.

HEADMASTER : I hope such a state will not arise. You are far too clever. But who will believe us even if we impute motives to the Inspector ?

SUNDARAM : That's not our point. Credible or incredible, we'll go ahead, and it will take a hell of time for the Inspector to get clear of it.

HEADMASTER : Let us see how things develop.

* * * * *

(The Inspection week - Ramesam's class -

He has carefully arranged the seating of the boys. He has distributed a few intelligent boys over the whole class by making them sit in odd corners. He is dressed well, unlike his usual shabby dress. He is shaky; all the same he is trying to be brave. Every now and then he is looking at the door expecting the Inspector any moment. The little boys whisper; he gets panicky and looks at them frowningly. Raghavan enters; Ramesam bows to him. Raghavan is seated, Ramesam is standing).

RAGHAVAN : Yes, Ramesam is this your class ?

RAMESAM : Yes, Sir.

RAGHAVAN : Put a few questions, Ramesam. We'll see how the boys fare.

RAMESAM : *(Spotting out one student)* What's your name ?

1st STUDENT : My name is Rajarao, Sir.

RAMESAM : Rajarao what do you do when you go home ?

1st STUDENT : I play games.

RAMESAM : That's good. *(To another student in another corner)* What's your father ?

2nd STUDENT : My father is a Sub-Inspector, Sir.

RAMESAM : Good. (*Looks at Raghavan gleefully*)

(*Raghavan, shrewd as he is, suspects that Ramesam has played a trick on him. So he stands up and starts putting questions*).

RAGHAVAN : Ramesam you say you have done this poem, 'Casbianca'.

RAMESAM : Yes, Sir.

RAGHAVAN : (*Looking at another student*) Who has written this poem ?

3rd STUDENT : (*Looks blankly at him and murmurs*) I don't know. (*Looks helplessly at his teacher*).

RAGHAVAN : You don't know ? Hasn't your teacher told you ?

3rd STUDENT : No, Sir.

(*Raghavan looks at Ramesam and the latter writhes under his look*).

RAGHAVAN : Ramesam you say you have taught grammar.

RAMESAM : Yes, Sir.

RAGHAVAN : (*Looking at another student*) What's the plural of 'man' ?

4th STUDENT : (*Cheerfully*) Women, Sir.

RAGHAVAN : (*To Ramesam*) Is it correct ?

(Ramesam who is almost frightened and paralysed by the poor performance of the 3rd student, mechanically replies).

RAMESAM : Yes, Sir.

RAGHAVAN : *(Sarcastically)* O I see. You ought to write a new grammar indeed ! Well, thank you. That's enough.

RAMESAM : O ! I have bungled. What a shame ! I think I'll be dismissed.

(Raghavan goes out. Ramesam realises that he has bungled, despite all his precautions. The inevitable has happened. Fates have been unkind to him, that's all. The boys look at him pityingly.

The Inspection is over. The Officer is addressing the school. A function is got up. The Headmaster rises. There is clapping.)

HEADMASTER : *(Addresses the gathering, looking at the District Educational Officer in particular)* Sir, I shall be failing in my duty if I do not express my deep sense of gratitude to you for your kind and sympathetic treatment. Officers like you are rare. You are kind as well as stern. In you we find a happy blending of rigour and relaxation. Administration does not mean ruthlessness.

(The Officer rises and says a few words by way of replying).

THE OFFICER : Headmaster, what you say is correct. One need not necessarily take on oneself superior wisdom and godhead. As human beings we have our own frailties. But we must do our best in the task assigned to us. Teachers have a greater role to play in the development of the

country. We need dedicated teachers, who besides being scholars, should be good men. I hope the teachers in this school will be a source of emulation to their students and will instil in them national spirit and patriotic fervour.

(Ramesam wonders whether the Officer is having him in mind as a poor example of a teacher. Perhaps that is based on his lack of confidence in himself).

SUNDARAM : It is now my proud privilege to offer a vote of thanks to the enlightened Educational Officer and his colleagues. Our school always gets a good name from our officers and in years to come we hope to establish a better record of ourselves.

(There is applause. Ramesam heaves a sigh of relief)

—CURTAIN—

THE MAHATMA

PREFACE

In writing this play, *The Mahatma*, my purpose is to highlight the martyrdom of Gandhiji. In Gandhiji's life we find the gradual process of annihilation of physical passion and the sublimation of desires. Through his individual efforts he attains the heights of divinity. Gandhiji's life is a concrete example of the ennobling force in man that can transcend human limitations. It starts with follies and failures, of eccentricities and uncommon experiences and ends finally on a note of saintliness and martyrdom. The greatness in Gandhiji lies in laying bare the innermost recesses of his thought in a simple, unassuming and disarming way. Only a Mahatma could have done it for he has neither self nor ego.

Gandhiji's experiments with truth and philosophy of non-violence will definitely be valued and esteemed in their proper perspective in years to come, and it is indeed gratifying to feel that we have lived in an age when the Mahatma strode like a Colossus on the world scene.

THE MAHATMA

(One Act Play)

Characters

The Mahatma
Nathuram
Three Youths
Manohar
Lalitha
Shankar
Mukherji
Hari Lal
Paul Sundaram
Ahmed Ali
Sarala
Gopal
Sarkar

Scene i

January 20, 1948. Evening 4–30. The Scene takes place in Delhi. The disciples of the Mahatma are assembled in the open space near Birla's house. Men and women have come in large numbers to have darshan of Gandhiji and to listen to him.

In one corner four young men get busy. Nathuram Godse is one of them. They are engaged in a serious talk. They are full of religious fervour. Their looks indicate firm resolution. Like the four knights murdering Thomas Becket under a misguided idea of ridding the king and his kingdom of an unruly archbishop, these four young men have a crusading spirit for saving India from Gandhiji's influence. They represent and reflect the views of a section of the people who have resented Gandhiji's conciliatory methods to bring about unity between the Hindus and the Moslems. The talk mostly in whispers.

FIRST YOUTH : Brother, Hinduism is in danger. The Hindus in Pakistan have no peace, no security. Their lives are at stake.

NATHURAM : Yes, it is true. But our leaders do not realise this. They are blind to facts.

SECOND YOUTH : Not exactly so. They know what is happening, but they believe or at least pretend to believe in a Hindu-Moslem unity.

NATHURAM : (*Contemptuously*) Unity ! It's impossible. The East and the West may come together one day but not the Hindus and the Moslems.

FIRST YOUTH : Yes, I agree. Our differences are irreconcilable. India is for the Hindus, and we should try to revive our culture and traditions.

NATHURAM : But as long as this old man lives it is not possible to achieve our goal. What about the recent fast ? Whom has it benefited – The Hindus or the Moslems ?

THIRD YOUTH : The Moslems, of course.

NATHURAM : When the old man makes an appeal, the Hindus follow, the Moslems do not. So we are the losers and the sufferers.

FIRST YOUTH : We can't tolerate this state of affairs. We must establish a Hindu Raj.

NATHURAM : But we must first get rid of this old man. He is a stumbling block in the way of our progress. We will mix with the audience and wait for an opportunity to shoot him. You go ahead and talk to him.

FIRST YOUTH : Yes, I will.

The four young men disperse, distributing themselves among the assembled gathering. A passage is made to allow Gandhiji to go to the platform wherefrom he generally speaks. The Mahatma nears the platform and addresses the congregation.

THE MAHATMA : Brothers and sisters, we must try to forget our differences of caste, creed and religion. We must live like members of a large family.

FIRST YOUTH : (*Coming to the front*) How is it possible ? When a man hates me how can I love him ? When a man gives me a blow how can I tolerate that ?

THE MAHATMA : (*Smiling*) Yes, you can. If you repay your foe in the same coin, you are not giving him an opportunity to repent of his mistake. Man becomes ennobled only through penitence and through an awareness of his wrong doing. Goodness lies in doing good against evil. . .

FIRST YOUTH : (*With emotion*) Ridiculous !

THE MAHATMA : We should show kindness to all, to foes as well as friends. If your friends betray you it only shows their weakness. If your foes ill-treat you they will repent ultimately. We should love our enemies and pray even for those who persecute us.

FIRST YOUTH : But why should I suffer ? When I have the strength and courage to attack you why should I be a coward ?

THE MAHATMA : Courage and heroism do not lie in brutally assaulting and murdering people. On the other hand heroism lies in tolerance and magnanimity. One who can forgive his foes is indeed a hero. In fact truth and non-violence are as old as the hills.

(Applause from the audience)

FIRST YOUTH : I know all this, but it is cowardice to allow your foe to kill you when you can as well resist him by force.

THE MAHATMA : Violence should not be met by violence. Violence is nothing but brute force. Any victory won through bloodshed, we all know, is only transitory. But by non-violent methods you appeal to the hearts of the people so that a tangible effect is left on them.

FIRST YOUTH : But how can you resist an aggressor by purely non-violent methods ?

THE MAHATMA : By appealing to his heart, by showing him

that he has within him human instincts, not merely brute force.

FIRST YOUTH : Supposing he is stubborn, and he has no heart.

THE MAHATMA : Every human being has sympathy for his fellow beings. But sometimes, motivated by gree ambition and fanaticism, one may kill one's own brethren. Even he will realise his folly one day or other.

FIRST YOUTH : What do you think of the partition of India ?

THE MAHATMA : I was never in favour of a divided India. But now that the division is made, the Hindus and the Moslems should live together amicably.

FIRST YOUTH : That is simply a dream.

THE MAHATMA : But we must prove our friendship and sincerity even towards our foes. Mind you, the Moslems are not our foes. So all the more reason why we should be friendly with them. Love begets love.

(Applause from the audience)

FIRST YOUTH : I don't think it is possible. As human beings we have our own loves and hates. We can't help it.

THE MAHATMA ; But you must realise that India belongs to all, to the Hindus, the Moslems, the Sikhs, the Christians and various other sects who have made India their home. This is greater India.

FIRST YOUTH : (*Vehemently*) India is only for the Hindus.

THE MAHATMA : That shows only your weakness. You must control your emotions and think reasonably. If the younger brother is rude to you, in what way are you better if you also behave in the same way ? I tell you, and I repeat it, the Hindus and the Moslems should get to know each other properly. There will come a day when the Hindus and the Moslems will forget all their differences and sit for a glorious banquet as brothers and friends. That is my dream of a greater India, of a golden age when men and women will be motivated by principles of equity and justice.

The whole congregation is moved by the Mahatma's words. They are thrilled, and in unison they say 'Mahatma ki jai'. As though mocking this sentimental ovation for Gandhiji a few yards away a time bomb bursts with frightening fury. A column of smoke rises. There is confusion all over the place. Gandhiji asks the congregation to be calm. The prayer meeting continues. One of the four young men responsible for the explosion of the bomb is caught by the police. The other three move fast and run away.

The audience is full of grateful prayers for the miraculous escape of Gandhiji. But the Mahatma is serene and unperturbed.

THE MAHATMA : (*Smiling*) Do not hate or condemn the man who has thrown the bomb. We have no right to punish a person whom we consider wicked. If my people do not want me to live I am prepared to die. I am not afraid of death. I surrender myself to the will of God, I have no will of my own. I am in the hands of God. I have

faced many a storm with faith in God. He knows full well when to call me back for I will not outlive my usefulness to the nation. But my request to all of you, Hindus, Sikhs, and Moslems, is that we live as friends and brothers. We may live separately but we are the leaves of the same tree.

A silent prayer is offered by the assembly and initially they all feel numbed and later get exhilarated by the sudden turn of events — from an attempted murder to a providential escape. The Mahatma gets ready to leave the place.

His admirers and disciples flock to him.

MANOHAR : The miraculous escape of Gandhiji this evening only shows that God wants him to do some more good work in this world.

LALITHA : His survival after the fast is itself a great manifestation of the Divine Providence that Gandhiji is meant for a greater and nobler end.

THE MAHATMA : *(Listening to them and slowly commenting)*
Yes, I think I should take my philosophy of non-violence to other countries.

LALITHA : Yes, Bapuji, you should go to Pakistan.

THE MAHATMA : Even though I am still not physically fit I would like to walk across the country and go on a pilgrimage, on a mission of peace and love to bind the two countries India and Pakistan, together.

MANOHAR : That will be wonderful. God's work has yet

to be done by you, or else He wouldn't have saved you from the fast or from the bomb explosion today.

THE MAHATMA : (*Half tempted*) I also think like that. I shall visit Pakistan on 2nd February. Lalitha, you go ahead and make arrangements for my visit to Pakistan.

The Mahatma's face is full of animated glow. He pauses for a minute and then he adds cautiously.

THE MAHATMA : God may have other designs for me. God's ways are mysterious and inscrutable.

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Scene ii

January 30, 1948. Evening 4-30. Gandhiji has not yet come for the prayer meeting. Men and women of all ages are congregated there. They are waiting for the Mahatma. They visualise the vast panorama of the Freedom movement with all its dynamic spirit. Like the Chorus in a Greek play they come in groups and talk of the great deeds of the Mahatma.

SHANKAR : (*Leading the first group*) We are indebted to the Mahatma for his tremendous sacrifice. He is the father of the nation, the liberator, the light of India. He is a mighty craftsman, an artist, an undisputed leader of three movements – boycott of British goods, Salt Satyagraha and Quit India. Besides he has done a lot of constructive work by way of village uplift and amelioration of the masses, especially the Harijans. To him we owe everything. Long live Gandhiji !

MUKHERJI : (*Leading the second group*) The Mahatma is a saint among politicians. He brings ethics to politics and everything he does is full of moral sensitiveness. He is full of the spirit of forgiveness. He is loved by all. His philosophy of non-violence and Ahimsa is his gospel to the strife-torn world. We have in him the Buddha and the Christ. Long live Gandhiji !

HARI LAL : (*Leader of the third group*) The Mahatma is the Karma yogi doing Nishkama karma, disinterested work.

His humanism, his abundant love for the Harijans, for the oppressed and the depressed, make him the world's first socialist. One who has no ego, one who has accepted life with detachment and surrendered oneself to the will of God is a Jnāni, a Mahatma. That is what Gandhiji is. Long live the Mahatma !

PAUL SUNDARAM : Gandhiji is the world's most Christ-like person. The Sermon on the Mount is practised by him most scrupulously much to the amazement of Christians professing Christian faith. Perhaps Christ has come back to the world to preach his message of love. The Hindu saint is the Christ figure in our age.

AHMED ALI : The Moslem cause is espoused by the Mahatma. He is always fair to them. He is a living example of tolerance. We have heard of great prophets and saints before, but to practise what one preaches, especially in an age of unbelief and scepticism, is something unique about the Mahatma. In him we find the essence of all religions, the best in all faiths.

SARALA : (*Leading the women*) Mahatma, the emancipator of women, long live the Mahatma. He has given to Indian women the pride of place in the Freedom movement. He has liberated the women from the rigid customs and shackles of society. But who knows what is in store for him. The Hindu-Moslem riots have torn the country to pieces. Fanatics on both sides do not like his plea for unity. Only ten days ago God had saved him. But the threat is still there. No doubt the Mahatma has fulfilled his mission. He had brought Independence to India. It is for us to deserve it and to be worthy of his great sacrifice.

From another corner some lone voices come questioning the validity of these statements.

GOPAL : How can you say that Gandhiji has done much for India ? All that he has done is mostly negative. The Hindu dharma is completely ruined by him. We have lost faith in everything that has been sacred to us.

SHANKAR : That's not true. On the other hand Gandhiji is responsible for establishing an integrated India. The three movements he has led have been accepted all over the country. If the first movement of 1920, the boycott of British goods, had stirred the intellectuals and the upper classes, the Salt Satyagraha movement of 1930-31 was of the masses.

MUKHERJI : The third movement, Quit India of 1942; was a potential threat to the British. Even though it has not come up to the expectations of Gandhiji, for it has taken a violent turn, it has served its purpose in telling the British in unequivocal terms that the time has come for them to pack up and go.

GOPAL : All that may be true, but

MUKHERJI : Not may be true, but it is true.

GOPAL : All right, you have your own way. But what is the use of creating an India that is devoid of Hindu dharma ? An India that has no moral fibre is no India, according to me.

SHANKAR : That's true. The whole trouble with us is that we worship everything blindly. So we idolize Gandhiji.

HARI LAL : Nothing wrong in worshipping Gandhiji for he is a saint, one who has renounced worldly pleasures.

SARKAR : (*Laughing*) Don't make me laugh. Gandhi is in the thick of worldly entanglements. Even his much boosted Brahmacharya is of the worldly type.

MUKHERJI : Yes, worldly entanglements, not for any gain for himself, but for the country. Gandhiji has effaced himself. He has no personal ambition. He belongs to the country, he is with the masses. As regards his experiments in Brahmacharya it is not uncommon among Hindu saints to expose themselves to such fiery tests for achieving perfection. Gandhi, being a lover of truth, hides nothing from the public. So we know all about him even though we may not know much about the other saints. His personal life is one of renunciation. He identifies him with the poor man, and gladly chooses to live with the Harijans in their homes.

SARKAR : (*Sarcastically*) But he has capitalists also to support him.

MUKHERJI : That's a different thing. He loves all, the rich and the poor. But he needs nothing for himself. That is why even while attending the conference in London he has been averse to pomp and show. Gandhiji has conquered his ego, his five senses. His fasts are monumental examples of his supreme will power. Or else how could this 'man of straw', as his opponents used to call him, survive and baffle the medical experts in every fast that he undertook ?

SARKAR : That is past history. Now he cannot do all those

so called miracles. His time is up.

SHANKAR : It does not matter, for martyrs do not die like ordinary persons. They die for others. If Gandhiji has to pay for all our cussedness and spite, he will gladly do so. Even if some criticise him he is unruffled, for a mountain remains a mountain even though the waves come and dash against it. When he is congratulated by almost all the leading persons in the world on his miraculous escape a few days ago, he says that there is nothing wonderful about it. On the other hand, if someone shoots him and he dies uttering the name of Rama, he says he will consider that to be a great and heroic deed.

SARALA : Yes, Gandhiji seems to be aware of some such end for himself. He has a prophetic vision and it looks as though he is anticipating his death. With him, now-a-days, readiness is all, for what does it matter to a saint like him if millions adore and a few indulge in vilification of him ? He is one with the great saints, with this difference that he is still with us, fighting for the cause of truth and working for the good of the country.

GOPAL : Whatever you may say, we are not convinced about Gandhiji's contribution to India. Political freedom does not mean freedom of the soul. The soul lies embittered while the body perhaps may flourish in times to come. That's all we see, and can see. We don't have a bloated vision because our eyesight is normal.

SARALA : Don't be sarcastic. If you don't have a bloated vision you have a blurred vision, which is equally bad, if not worse.

SHANKAR : We only pray that India may have the wise counsel of Gandhiji for some more years.

GOPAL : Perhaps a dream, or a wishful thinking. But reality is totally different, for he will be more a hindrance than a help to the country.

MUKHERJI : May God bless him. May Gandhiji serve the country for years and years.

The assembled see the Mahatma coming, his hands resting on the shoulders of his 'walking sticks', his nieces. The air is rent with shouts of 'Gandhi ki jai'. Gandhiji is a little late that evening and he is annoyed with his nieces for not keeping time. He tells them that they are his watches and he does not like going late for a meeting.

Gandhiji reaches the prayer ground, keeps his palms together and greets the crowd. Nathuram, a young man in his thirties, dressed in khaki dress, rushes forward furiously. He pushes one of the nieces away from the Mahatma and makes obeisance to Gandhiji saying, 'Namaste Gandhiji'. He takes his pistol from his pocket and passes it between his palms. Then he pulls the trigger three times and shoots Gandhiji in the chest. Gandhiji with his hands still clasped in greeting moves to the platform and sinks to the ground uttering the name of God.

THE MAHATMA : *(In a feeble tone)* He Rām ! O God !

(A few minutes later a voice is heard on the air)

THE VOICE : The sun has set. The light that has illumined the whole world has gone. History repeats itself. Christs are born and reborn only to be murdered by their own people who fail to understand the significance of their

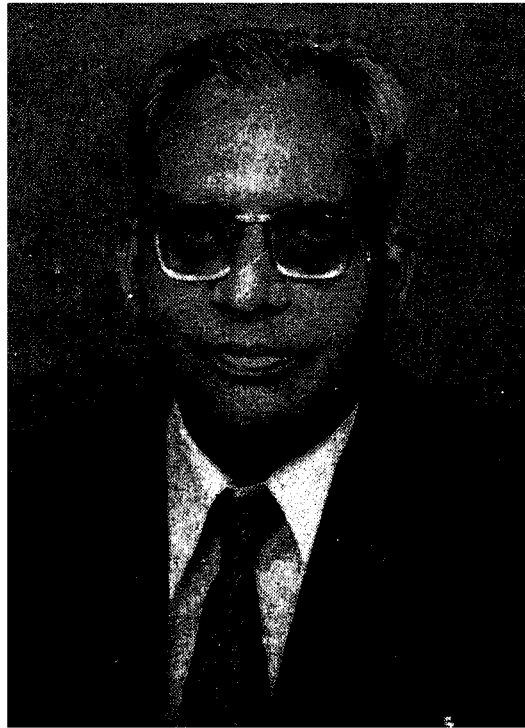
philosophies. Gandhiji is born ahead of his times. The tenets of his creed may sound utopian, not because there is anything wrong with them, but because it is difficult for men with limited vision and bigoted views to transcend their limitations. Gandhiji's teaching will be understood only when mankind has had its fill of war, violence and slaughter.

From time to time God sends His saints and prophets for alleviating the misery and suffering of the humanity. In a world of darkness, chaos and strife these chosen few shine as luminaries and offer benediction to the lost and erring humanity. Once their mission is over they relinquish their mortal coil and become one with God. Gandhiji is one of these great saints whose mission has been only to release India from slavery. These saints and martyrs may be physically extinct, but their spirit endures.

Gandhiji's teachings, his philosophy of non-violence and truth, his love of humanity, his ethical idealism - all have an imperishable significance to mankind. The second crucifixion in the history of the world also takes place on a Friday, a curious coincidence indeed. Gandhiji is one with the saints and martyrs of the world.

— CURTAIN —

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Professor Rama Sarma has been a successful teacher and educationalist. He is given the state award for meritorious teachers twice. He is regarded as a distinguished Miltonist and the honorary member of the Milton Society of America. He is now the vice-chancellor of Sri Venkateswara University.