

**TRANSLATING GENDER POLITICS:
A PRACTICAL TRANSLATION AND AN ANALYSIS OF SUCHITRA
BHATTACHARYA'S *UDO MEGH***

A Dissertation Submitted to the University of Hyderabad for the Degree of

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
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BY

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CERTIFICATE

Date:

This is to certify that I, Gitasri Mukherjee, have carried out the research work embodied in the present thesis entitled **“Translating Gender Politics: A Practical Translation and an Analysis of Suchitra Bhattacharya’s *Udo Megh*”**, for the full period prescribed under Ph.D. ordinances of the University.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this thesis was earlier submitted for the award of any degree, to any other institution or university.

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Preface

Opening Remarks

The title of our thesis is “Translating gender politics: A practical translation and an analysis of Suchitra Bhattacharya’s *Udo Megh*”. The thesis presents an English translation of the Bengali novel *Udo Megh* followed by a discussion of some translation problems as well as social issues raised in the novel.

It may be noted that though several works (other than *Udo Megh*) of Suchitra Bhattacharya have been translated into various Indian languages, no analysis of her writing has been done so far. We acknowledge the fact that there is no end to the level of perfection of translating something. And hence we are aware that there may remain shortcomings in our translation, especially with regard to the metaphorical expressions and source language- specific expressions that may result in too literal a translation. Our translation may need to be re-worked to acquire finesse but we have attempted to bring forth discussions which are not only relevant to the translation of the selected novel but also any such literary work.

A Brief Note on Literary Translation

A literary translation is the translation of literature such as novels, poems, plays and poems, biographies, short stories, songs etc. This has been in existence since biblical times. Literary translation opens up the door of the rich world literature and works as a bridge to explore different cultures reflected through different languages. The repertoires of other languages come just to our hand and translation appears to be the noblest of all and we feel indebted to the translator who translate the stalwart texts and make us

overcome the language barriers have a glimpse of different cultures. The American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti defines translation as “a process by which the chain of signifiers that constitutes the source-language text is replaced by a chain of signifiers in the target language which the translator provides on the strength of an interpretation” (Venuti 1995: 17). For Venuti, the aim of translation is:

“To bring back a cultural other as the same, the recognizable, even the familiar; and this aim always risks a wholesale domestication of the foreign text, often in highly self-conscious projects, where translation serves an appropriation of foreign cultures for domestic agendas, cultural, economic, and political.” (Venuti 1995: 18)

There are different types of translation like administrative translation where administrative texts are taken into account, commercial translation or business translation which covers any sort of document used in the business world such as correspondence, company accounts, tender documents, reports, etc, economic translation where documents relating to the field of economics are translated, computer translation in which translations are carried out of software materials, medical translation which cover anything from the medical field from the packaging of medicine, to manuals for medical equipment, to medical books and the list continues. But the translation of literary works is considered by many as one of the highest forms of translation because it is more than simply translating a text. A literary translator must be capable of also translating feelings, cultural nuances, humor and other subtle elements of a piece of work.

This is a challenging field where apt transfer of the cultural values of the source language to the target language is required. And hence the word problematic gets easily attached to the area of literary translation. Newmark (1998: 94) remarks that culture is “the way of life and its manifestations that are peculiar to a community that uses a particular language as its means of expression”. The translator’s in-depth knowledge of the social, historical and cultural context of the source text for accurate semantic translation becomes crucial. Because when a literary translator takes up the project of translation he knows that he is not just translating a text but translating emotions, cultural nuances, humor and other subtle elements of a literary piece and to capture those original

feelings of the source text in appropriate language in his translation is not at all an easy task. Newmark (1998: 201) writes that literary language must remain aesthetically pleasing in translation and there should be a constant tension between the informative and the aesthetic function of language. The more serious the text, morally and aesthetically, the more accurately and economically it should be translated, reflecting the thought, style, emphasis, and as far as possible, particularly in poetry, the rhythm and sound of original. He also states:

“Particular care has to be taken to bring out the connotations of polysemous words and expressions, and to preserve repeated words, which are often keywords. There is sometimes a case for adapting cultural metaphors and for transforming fictional proper names so that their meaning is translated and their source language morphology retained.” (Newmark 1998: 103)

When an author creates a literary piece he or she has some abstract images in his or her mind. These images are shaped in the paper through language. If we closely notice the matter we can call it translation too where the inner abstract images of the author are transferred into a text through language. A translator can never read the mental process of the original author in creating his text. Every language is interwoven with a particular culture. And translation simply fails to transfer those idiosyncrasies of a language, culturally deep rooted. Thus even if one easily gets equivalents he or she may fail to get the feel of the original text.

In spite of all the shortcomings literary translation has always remained a ceaseless interesting process which entices people to delve in this act though their creative effort often faces harsh criticism from the linguists, literary scholars or comparativists. There is hardly any set of universal theories which can be always applicable to sort out different problems of literary translation. But a translator who is creative hardly bothers about theories or set rules but indulges himself in the act of translation for the sake of art itself. He knows it very well that a particular language is

anchored in a specific culture and he applies various strategies in translating a text and makes it available to the target readers and enriches the treasure of knowledge.

Nida (1964:53-5) lists four basic factors which make communication possible and, therefore, make possible the translation of a message from one language and culture to another. These are:

- 1) The similarity of mental processes of all people
- 2) Similarity of somatic reactions (similar physical responses to emotional stimulus),
- 3) The range of common cultural experience, and
- 4) The capacity for adjustment to the behavioral patterns of others.

In our attempt of translating Suchitra Bhattacharya's *Udo Megh* into English we have understood this very clearly that word to word translation is impossible and simply takes the reader far away from the original text. It happens because English language is twice removed from the cultural implications of the Bengali culture, if we consider Indians other than Bengalis as once removed. To transfer the source text into the receptive language we needed to restructure or reconstitute at times to get the desired effect so that there is less loss of meaning and the target readers do not miss the flavor of the original. And we wished the readers realize that there are no equivalents for many phases and expressions of Bengali in English. It may appear an act of violence as we had to recreate, paraphrase or introduce something new in the translation to reach the meaning of the original. But this is not something deliberate but something which was done because of the restraint of the target language and the wide cultural gap between Bengali and English. We feel that those who attack a translated literary text because of any adaptation or any change done and brings in the question of ethics also consider the position of the translator whose hands are tied because of the cultural distance between the two languages.

In connection with our translation of *Udo Megh* by Suchitra Bhattacharya, a novel dealing with different dimensions of gender problems we can not but mention Gayatri Chakaravorty Spivak who in her 'The Politics of Translation'(1998:95-118) considers translation as an important strategy in pursuing the larger feminist agenda of achieving

women's 'solidarity'. She believes that 'the task of the feminist translator is to consider language as a clue to the working of gendered agency.' In our dissertation we tried to elaborately discuss how language is gendered basing on our translation of *Udo Megh*. Throughout the world women's experiences, their journey and struggle in the patriarchal system are more or less same. Women in different cultures may express their problems and sufferings in different languages. Translation can give access to a larger number of feminists working in various languages and cultures and reading these texts can help readers to be identified with the universal gender related problems throughout the world. Translation for Spivak is no mere quest for verbal equivalents but an act of understanding the other as well as the self. She advises that a translator must 'surrender' to the 'linguistic rhetoricity of the original text', as translation is the most intimate act of reading. It is an act of submission to the rhetorical dimension of the text.

Organization of the Thesis

The dissertation is organized into five chapters excluding observations and conclusions and appendix containing the entire Source Language text. The chapters are as follows:

In chapter one, we offer an overview of the SL text and its author: a short note on Suchitra Bhattacharya's position in modern Bengali literature, her main concerns, her writing career, a brief summary of *Udo Megh* followed by an account of her writing style.

The second chapter contains the entire text of the English translation of Suchitra Bhattacharya's novel *Udo Megh*. We have entitled the novel in English as *The Stray Cloud*.

Chapter 3 discusses the social issues raised in the novel and also describes how language is gendered in the prevailing social set up by picking up several examples from the source text.

Chapter 4 offers a definition of metaphor, its various classifications and its cultural implications from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics. It also discusses the problems of translating metaphors drawing examples from the text under study.

Finally, chapter 5 deals with specific problems of translation involving semantic, cultural and grammatical phenomena such as Idioms, Proverbs, Collocation, Reduplication, Onomatopoeia, Echo words, Kinship terms and so on.

CONTENTS

	Page No.
➤ Certificate	1
➤ Acknowledgements	2
➤ Preface	5
1. The Source Text and Its Author: An Overview	11
1.1 About the Author	11
1.2 <i>Udo Megh</i> : A Brief Summary	12
1.3 Suchitra Bhattacharya's Style of Writing	14
1.3.1 Sketching Characters	15
1.3.2 Cinematic Quality	16
1.3.3 Role of Nature in Echoing Human Emotions	17
1.3.4 Detailing	19
1.3.5 Element of Humor	21
1.3.6 Conversational Style	29
1.3.7 Frequent use of English Expressions	30
1.3.8 Use of Hindi Words	37
2. The Stray Cloud: The English Translation of Suchitra Bhattacharya's <i>Udo Megh</i> .	39

3.	Social Analysis of the Source Text.	254
3.1	Introduction	254
3.2	Crisis of Modern Women	256
3.3	<i>Udo Megh</i> : Reflecting Gender Relations	257
3.4	Rape: Physical Form of Male Dominance	275
3.5	Society's Stance Towards a Rape Victim	277
3.6	Sexual Coercion and the Issue of prostitution	284
3.7	Language and Gender: An Analysis of the Novel <i>Udo Megh</i>	297
3.8	Concluding Remarks	310
4.	Metaphors in the Source Text and Their Translation: A Cognitive Approach	312
4.1	Defining Metaphor	312
4.2	Classification of Metaphor	314
4.3	Language as an Index of Culture	317
4.4	Conceptual Theory of Metaphors and Its Relevance to Translation	320
4.5	Understanding Schema	322
4.6	Mapping	324
4.7	Elaborating Conceptual Metaphor	325
4.8	Conceptual Metaphor Theory: Culture and Translation	327
4.9	Issue of Untranslatability	333
4.10	Metaphor Translation: Existing Approaches	339

4.11	A Potential Application of Conceptual Metaphor in Translation	342
4.12	Metaphors in <i>Udo Megh</i> : A Discussion	346
4.13	Conclusion	356
5.	Some Specific Problems of Translation	358
5.1	Idioms and Proverbs	361
5.2	Collocation	368
5.3	Expressives	370
5.4	Compound Words	372
5.5	Compound Verbs	374
5.6	Unusual Expressions	377
5.7	Reduplication	378
5.8	Onomatopoeic Expressions	380
5.9	Echo Word Constructions	382
5.10	Cultural Items	385
5.11	Honorifics	392
5.12	Kinship Terms	393
	Observations and Conclusions: A Summary	398
	References	404
	Appendix	409

CHAPTER ONE

The Source Text and Its Author: An Overview

1.1 About the Author

Suchitra Bhattacharya is one of the important Bengali writers of recent times. She was born on January 10, 1950 in Bhagalpur on January 10, Bihar. One important thing that needs to be mentioned here is that the Bhagalpur group of writers has made a very significant contribution to Bengali literature. The Bhagalpur group of writers consists of those who were settled in Bhagalpur, Muzaffarpur and other parts of Bihar. This group can also be identified as the followers of Saratchandra Chatterjee who himself spent some years in Bhagalpur. To this group belonged some eminent writers like Surendranath Ganguli, Anurupa Devi, Nirupama Devi and others. Manikchandra Bhattacharya also belonged to this school. Banaphool literally meaning ‘the wild flower’ in Bengali is the pen name of the Bengali author, playwright and poet, Balai Chand Mukhopadhyay (1899–1979). He was born in Purnia, Bihar and holds a remarkable position in Bengali literature. And the name of our selected author Suchitra Bhattacharya can also be included in the list because of her Bhagalpur connections. Among all the above mentioned names she with her exceptional writing has created a unique place in modern Bengali literature. With keen interest in writing from a very young age, she graduated from Calcutta University. Though after marriage she took break from writing, she came up with her short stories in the late seventies and novels in the mid eighties. She was in the public service sector which she left in 2004 to devote full attention to her writing. Some of her most popular novels include *Kacher Dewal* (Glass Wall), *Gabhir Asukh* (Serious Illness), *Ami Raikishori* (I am Raikishori), *Hemonter Pakhi* (Bird of the Dewy

Season), *Palabar Path Nei* (No Way to Escape), *Rangin Prithibi* (Colorful World), *Parabas* (Foreign Land), *Aleek such* (Imaginary Happiness), *Dahan* (The Burning)etc. She has received many prestigious awards like Bhuban Mohini Medal from Calcutta University, Tarashankar award from Kolkata, Sharat Puroskar from Bhagalpur, Bharat Nirman award, Nanjanagudu Thirumalamba National award from Banglore, the Katha award from Delhi, Sahitya Setu award, Sailajananda Smriti Puroskar etc. She is a perceptive observer of the changing milieu and her writing closely examines the contemporary Bengali middle class. Crisis in human relationship and changing values of the present era along with degeneration of the moral fiber of the society in the backdrop of globalization and consumerism are well dealt in her writing. Her fiction dwells upon the dilemmas and conflicts of contemporary urban middle class women who seek to question social norms and evils. Her engrossing power of story telling, her control over language and her capability to bring forth every shade of human emotion make her one of the best writers of today.

1.2 *Udo Megh*: A Brief Summary

Udo Megh, is a story about Deya, a modern, urban, married working woman who in justifying her noble step of sheltering a girl in distress, called Sheweli, faces a lot of problems not only from the society but also from her home and puts her marriage in stake but sticks to what she thinks to be right. She works as a journalist and is married to Soumya, a software engineer. In course pf her work she happens to interview Shewli, a girl from the slums, who eloped with a man and was consequently sold in the red-light area of Mumbai. She tried to draw notice of the society to the fact how every year many girls are abducted and are forced to prostitution. Though she covered the story in her newspaper, *Nabaprabhat*, without mentioning the girl's name, the circumstances led the girl's mother to commit suicide to avoid the society's harsh and unbearable attitude towards them.

After the death of the girl's mother, Deya felt responsible to some extent for such a situation. Hence she took the bold step of sheltering the girl in her house. This creates tension between Deya and Soumya which worsens with Shewli not leaving the house. Though Deya believed that everything would be fine with the course of time the situation worsens on the day of her wedding anniversary.

During the party thrown by Deya the guests got indulged in discussion regarding prostitution on being introduced to Shewli. Instead of being sympathetic to the girl's plight it turned out that she was a food of gossip for them, who were more interested to talk about prostitution as a profession, its legal acceptance, the society's view point etc. After the guests left, the tension between the couple heightened with a heated exchange of words leading Shewli to leave the house. Deya locked herself in her room being unable to take this anymore. Shewli left the house at that day itself as she thought she was responsible for the happening.

The next day Deya searched the poor girl at every possible place but couldn't trace her anywhere. On Deya's returning home Soumya expressed his regret for the previous night's scuffle. But Deya explicitly let Soumya know her intention of not continuing her relation with him. It makes Soumya angry and he asks her to leave the house. But Deya with a firm voice asked him why a woman always has to leave her home and did not pay heed to the shouting of Soumya. When the novel ends we find Deya standing on the balcony alone. The writer doesn't draw an explicit end to the story. This is something unique to Suchitra Bhattacharya's writing that she leaves a room for her readers to interpret in their own way and thus even if the story is over the hangover remains.

In a personal correspondence (2008) with the writer we wanted to know the justification behind choosing the title of the novel as *Udo Megh*. To answer it she writes that in the stable and tranquil life of Deya and Soumya, Shewli appeared suddenly like

that piece condensed cloud which stays for a short time and passes away but casts shadow on the ground below for time being. Shewli's presence was unexpected in Deya's home and her sudden emergence made the clear and calm sky of the couple's life dark. The short and sudden blow of Shewli's existence in their life forced them to face the crude reality of life and made Deya realize that the base of an institution like marriage is not that well founded and can sustain only at the cost of mutual compromises. A sudden blow of practicality can shatter it easily.

A text is not a text by itself or for itself. It is the individual comprehension process of each recipient that makes a text, a text. As a consequence there might be one source text but there would be multiple interpretations to that particular text. In the realm of translation each recipient tries to give the equivalence the way he or she interprets the source text. So which version of the source text we are looking for? However, we should take a prospective look towards the scope of the target text than focusing only upon the source text in search of criteria for assessing the quality of translation. In our dissertation we are more concerned with the scope for meaningful linguistic issues rather than just pointing at the words for which we did not get equivalents.

1.3 Suchitra Bhattacharya's Style of Writing

Famous Italian film director, Federico Fellini (1920 -1993) once said, "What's important is the way we say it. Art is all about craftsmanship. Others can interpret craftsmanship as style if they wish. Style is what unites memory or recollection, ideology, sentiment, nostalgia, presentiment, to the way we express all that. It's not what we say but how we say it that matters."

A style is reflective of the writer's personality or voice. Suchitra Bhattacharya's ability to create an attitude toward the subject, characters, or events in the story is very appreciable. She prefers herself to be called a womanist than a feminist and her dealing of

subject matters in her novels proves to be apt behind her such preference. She seems to be expert in catching all the inner turmoil of a woman who with her undaunted spirit faces all the storms in a patriarchal society and yet stands high. Her writing is a reflection of her gamut of experiences which can come only through keen observation of what is exactly happening around us and its impact on human lives. And to jot down what one sees, feels or believes is not an easy job. Not everyone is gifted with the craft of writing so effectively. When we read *Udo Megh* we can easily understand how she uses her language to create a specific mood, attitude or tone. Her judicious use of expressions, dialogues, her portraying of characters, the touch of humor, everything add to make her style worthy to be noticed and her style is befitting to each situation.

1.3.1 Sketching Characters

Her novel *Udo Megh* is one of her best works ever. The concept of the novel, its organization, characterization and serious dealing of the topic are enough to hold a tight grip over her readers. The novel has the tension to finish it at one go but at the same time not monotonous. It's enjoyable and also deals with serious issues of exploitation of women, their pain, power struggle and the different dimensions of women's struggle in the modern times. One thing that the readers can not fail to notice is the way the story develops. The author does not pop up often to give valuable judgment rather she allows her characters speak their minds and it is through her characters that Bhattacharya shows the different layers of human understanding of different situations and how they react to them. In fact her characters represent all shades of human existence like courage, honesty, jealousy, selfishness, indifference and so on and so forth. Her characters, Deya, Soumya, Ritam or Sharabani acts nowhere dumb. At times they are strong and at times weak. By showing a perfect blend of strength and weakness in themselves Suchitra Bhattacharya succeeded to create characters who really proved to be human and thus helped her readers to relate to them.

1.3.2 Cinematic Quality

Cinema has always been an extraordinary form of art in the late twentieth century. Today's life has become so mechanical and hectic that people hardly find time to immerse in a literary work especially if it has a fat volume. On the contrary films, which combine several arts into one whole, are readily accessible to people from different strata of the society. To appreciate a good work of literature one needs some basic education and understanding. On the other hand to watch a movie, to identify the characters or to relate to the experiences of those characters literacy never becomes an impediment. Of course the viewer has to know the language in which the movie is made. Thus the viewership of cinema is much wider than the readership of literature. Cinema, an eclectic art form, has borrowed generously from various art forms like music, poetry, painting and architecture. Celluloid adaptation from literature has always been attempted by various film makers from time to time. But this is not an easy task as the film maker faces the challenge of making his film as powerful and appealing as it is in its printed form. But there are certain pieces of literary works which when made into films are highly appreciated and touch the viewers' mind as the book does. This factor is not prominent in every literary work. Suchitra Bhattacharya's novels are film-friendly. Her novel *Dahan* was made into film by Rituparno Ghosh. The novel depicts the trauma of a young wife who is physically molested by a group of rowdies right in front of her husband. The book shows how society always blames the woman in such circumstances and how a female school teacher comes forward to help the victim whereas her own family deserts her. It was an award-winning film and was highly appreciated. And now another movie which is scheduled to hit the screens soon is actress-turned-producer Indrani Halder's *Udo Megh*, based on Suchitra Bhattacharya's novel by the same name. What makes Suchitra's novel so appropriate to be made into films? Her writing though fiction draws characters from real life situations. The incidents she depicts never seem to be unusual or imaginary. It seems it can be a story of any urban middle class educated man or woman. The joy or pain the characters go through is easy to relate as the readers feel as if their life has been portrayed by the writer. Her books when made into cinemas bring words to life through visuals, sound, music, dialogue and acting. It becomes more appealing. But at the same

time it provides the readers the scope to accept the challenge thrown by the film maker in terms of watching the movie, compare it with the original novel, criticize it, question it and so on and so forth.

1.3.3 Role of Nature in Echoing Human Emotions

Another interesting thing, which is worthy of attention, is that nature has a very effective role to play in all the stories. Suchitra makes nature to play its own role like her living characters. Personification of nature is another device that Bhattacharya applies in her stories. Natural elements are invested with the qualities of a living being. Personification, as a figure of speech may be an artistic device with the prose writers or the poets but it is deeply rooted in the human habit and comes out in any mood of excitement or exaltation. It seems as if nature takes in human action either by sympathy or by antipathy.

The day when Ritam quit the job and was returning home it was a very hot noon. There was unbearable scorching heat of the sun and no one was there on the road. The dogs were dozing in some shade. To him the ground appeared swaying like a mirage. Though he liked lonely summer noon the loneliness clouded his pain. He felt as if his heart was heavy. Having quit the job he knew how his family members would react to his state of a free bird again. It was as if the untold pain of not being sympathized by others, the pain of not getting rewarded for his writing and the pain of always forced to do what he never liked. The loneliness of the summer noon reflected his suppressed pain of isolation in the crowd of his near and dear ones.

From the window of his bedroom Ritam was listening to the small singing bird in the garden at the back of his house. The sound was very strange. He tried to find it but could not. On quitting his job Ritam was determined to devote all his time to writing. His mind was busy in sketching the plot of his story. But it was vague. It was as if like the

bird in the garden, the plot of his story was too playing the game of hide and seek in the forest of his mind.

Deya once visited her father's home to see the poor health of her grandmother. After spending quite sometime her mother went on asking many questions regarding Shewli's matter. She insisted her daughter not to get involved in the matter anymore as it could put her life in danger. The more Deya tried to convince her mother she was getting more rigid. She advised Deya not to go to the slums as she believed that Shewli was a girl of loose character and nothing good could be done for such a girl. Deya was hurt by her mother's irrational arguments. While returning home the darkness was approaching. The color of the sky was getting faded. There was no wind and it was quite suffocating. The nature seemed to reflect the pain and suffocating state of Deya's mind. It was as if the darkness outside was Deya's state of confusion which hindered her vision to do what next. She felt choked as no one tried to understand her.

Deya brought Shewli to her own house after the girl's mother committed suicide. Words of praises were written in her paper for her noble gesture. But Deya could not be happy. She was extensively searching home for destitutes to send back Shewli. But she could not manage. On the other hand she was informed by Laxmi that an unknown guy was seen in front of his flat. Deya's friends were apprehensive that any man of the kidnapping gang might attack her house. She was frightened by all these. In such a state even if someone praised her it tasted bitter to her. While coming out of the office the sky's face looked heavy. It was monsoon and often there was monotonous and tiring heavy downpour. The wind was not blowing and the weather was sultry. The clouds in the sky advanced the approach of darkness before evening. The bright streetlights appeared to be very pale to her. The nature here reflects her anxiety and fear of some unseen danger. It seems that the nature equates with the restlessness and the tumultuous sea of confusion in her mind.

1.3.4 Detailing

While reading *Udo Megh* what will definitely strike the reader is Suchitra Bhattacharya's expertise in detailed description of a place, an event or a person. This is very unique of her style. We have already discussed that there is a special cinematic quality of her novels. And detailing is one such technique which helps a person to get the visual effect of what is in print. The writer often seems to go deep in detailing and seems to draw a picture through her words.

One fine example would be the fine description of the very old building which was turned to a newspaper office of *Nabaprabhat*. She wrote about its green roof made of wood, notched green sun-shed and how the different sections of the newspaper office were arranged on both sides of the inner verandah. Its windows, staircase, ceiling everything emanated a strange smell of the Victorian period. The way Suchitra writes it seems the readers can simply imagine the building in front of their eyes.

One can notice the description of Deya's bathroom which had a glass-rack, beautiful basin, attractive towel-rod and telephone shower. There was fixed an oval rot iron framed mirror over the head of the basin.

As Deya visited the slum where Shewli stayed, a detailed description of that place is given. The houses looked like pigeonholes. The brick built houses had roofs made of tiles. Few houses had TV antennas over the roofs. Dirty and torn curtains were hanging at the doors of many houses. Pitchers were lined up at the corporation tap and the place emitted a foul odour. Such a description is enough even for a person who has never been to a slum to understand the topography slums.

The writer gives minute descriptions Shrabani's body. She wrote that even after the delivery of her baby there was not even an ounce of fat accumulated in her body. Her eyes or nose was not very sharp but her toned figure made her attractive. She had fair complexion which turned to light copper color after sun burn. With such a description one can visualize a character.

A very detailed picture is given of how Deya embellished herself on her wedding anniversary. Suchitra wrote that Deya was wearing a blue *Baluchari saree*. The battle of Kurukshetra was embroidered finely on the border and the *aanchal* of the *saaree*. She had a nice facial. Her hair was nicely arranged a garland of jasmine was wrapped around the bun. She had *bindi* on forehead and eyes were finely drawn, reddish blush on her cheeks and her lips were colored. Her neck, fingers and ears were decorated with pearl jewellery. She looked like a beautiful swan. Such detailing helps the reader to get an idea of Deya's taste and personality.

The writer describes Shewli's dressing on the occasion of Deya's wedding anniversary. She wore a bright *salwar kameez* in the combination of red and yellow. She had silver colored *bindi* on her forehead, sparkling clips on hair, hanging earrings on her ears, glass bangles in her hands and a necklace of pearl-shaped beads. She put the lipstick on her lips and pink nail polish on her nails. Such a description is quite suggestive to indicate her class and her upbringing. Deya brought those things for Shewli keeping in mind her taste.

The writer does not stop only by showing Laxmi busy in cooking delicious dishes. But she gives the details of the items she prepared like the oil of *hilsa* fish, a curry with the bones of *hilsa* and *puishaak*, *hilsa* in mustard sauce and hog-plum chutney. Such detailing helps the reader to get a glimpse of the Bengali kitchen, very integral to Bengali culture.

The writer clarifies things in such a way that the reader does not misinterpret anything. She makes comparisons to clarify ideas. Her concrete detailing is powerful enough to convince her readers that they fully inhabit the character's world. Her wonderful detailing helps the readers to understand perfectly how a character talks, the things they like or dislike, the way they see the world and so on. Her words build up a space in such a way that the reader completely believes in it and like a clear picture it is placed in front of their eyes. Thus we can say that Suchitra Bhattacharya knows how to make her characters fully realized on the page.

1.3.5 Element of Humor

Humor has a place in every day life. It is a part of our conversations, our entertainment even our personalities. Humor is used to lighten the mood, relate to others, to deal with stress and pain. Without it life would have become dull and monotonous. Medical science indicates that laughter is really medicinal. It keeps our mind healthy. Hence there is no wonder that many writers have attempted to add touch of humor in their writings.

Udo Megh deals with the harsh reality of prostitution and society's indifferent attitude towards the victims. Placing the issue of prostitution at centre Suchitra finely depicts the journey of modern women confronting the male dominance to protect her self-respect, values and ideologies. But reading the novel does not make the reader overburdened with its serious issue of concern. Suchitra Bhattacharya brings in variety in her style in a single canvas of the story to avoid monotony. Even in dealing with such gender sensitive issues she adds elements of humor and handles it with care. The touch of humor doesn't interrupt the flow of the novel but at times reduces the tension. The author at times seems to be serious and at times humorous. And the humor is brought in through the characters of the novel who with their clever banter and irony surprise the readers. The author is a close observer of human nature and the laughter element comes out of her sheer understanding of human thought and provides lightness to the readers.

The author portrays Ritam's character in a way, that it adds a touch of levity to the story, without making him appear like a buffoon. He is very strong and sensitive who has the rare quality to laugh even in facing the bleak realities of life. Ritam is always taken for good for nothing and scolded by his family members because of his carelessness but his presence is a delightful diversion that readers look forward to and such a playful character with high spirits naturally paves way to many humorous scenes to lighten the tone of even the darkest of storylines. He can crack jokes even at serious

situations. Ritam is seen engaged in light-hearted romance with his wife Shrabani or caressing his daughter which provide some comic relief and at the same time make him seem likeable and human.

Ritam is not a minor character in the story but many hilarious situations are created by him. He is jovial and knows the trick of being happy even in odd situations. In the novel we see that he constantly keeps on quitting his jobs as they do not fit in his professional ethics. For this he is quite often scolded by his family members. But he does not take them to heart. Or he might have learnt the art of smiling as a weapon to defend the harsh comments from others. When one day he suddenly came back home quitting his job he was highly scolded by his mother who was pretty unhappy with Ritam's lack of sense of responsibility towards his family. She said, "*Tor ki lajjasaram kichui nei re? Bie korechis, akta bachha hoye geche...*"

English: "Are you shameless? You are married and have a baby too..."

One can not stop laughing to the answer Ritam instantly produces in such a situation which might have hurt the male ego in others. He said, "*Aschorjo, bie kara ki lajjar kaaj? Bie to manush i kare. Tumio korechile. Aar bie korle bachha hay eo to jana katha. Unless husband wife er akjon is found to be unfit to produce a child.*"

English: "I am really surprised. Is getting married a shameful act? Only human beings get married. You did too. And everybody knows that after marriage one gets a baby, unless one among the husband and the wife is found to be unfit to produce a child."

He makes fun of how his mother cries and heaves sighs. He was quite sure that such dialogues his mother could remember because of her routine watch of Bengali TV serials in the afternoon.

Ritam's brother-in-law, Ambarda once arranged a business for Ritam. It was all about selling various snacks. But how a creative person like Ritam could continue with that for long? He was rebuked by her elder sister, Runu for quitting the business. But

Ritam brushes away all her comments saying that “*O business ta ektu risky hoye jeto re. Peter baro ta beje jeto. Chanachur aloo bhaja kato khaoa jay, tui i bal?*”

English: “The business would have been risky. It must have upset the stomach of people. How much mixture and potato chips can one consume, tell me?”

Once Runu planned for a trip to Rajasthan for the whole family and expected Ritam to accompany them as she thought that it would be quite risky for the three ladies to go to a new place without a male. To such an anxiety of Runu, Ritam passed such a comment which simply dilutes the seriousness of the situation. He said, “*Kintu tor haater kache to aar akta purush chilo...*”

— *Ke?*

— *Gudum...*

— *Ami ki dakater hath theke bachabo? No chance...sarbosyo kede nileo ami tu sabdo ti korbo na, lengti pore doudbo. Barang Shrabani jodi ektu smile tile dey dakatra galteo pare.*

English: “But you have a male next to your hand.”

“Who?”

“Gudum...”

“Do you want me to save you from dacoits? No chance. I won’t utter a single sound even if they rob you of everything. I’ll simply run in a ragged. Instead if Shrabani smiles a little at them there is a fair chance that the dacoits’ hearts may melt.”

On one occasion Ritam and Deya waited for a taxi. Deya was worried as it was tough to get a taxi at office hours. But Ritam was pretty cool and did not leave the chance of passing a funny comment and said, “*Sundari meyera mone mone chailei taxi darie jay. Chokh buje akta halde-kalo ke dhyan kar...kunti jebhabr suryake dekechilo....*”

English: “If a beautiful girl wishes something in her mind the taxi will definitely stop. Closing your eyes meditate for a yellow and black taxi...the way Kunti called Surya...”
Suchitra Bhattacharya here refers to the famous episode of the *Mahabharata* where Kunti chants Surya’s name with the desire to have a son.

Deya once enquired about the well being of Ritam’s family members to which he replied, “*Tuski barche, Shrabani komche, ma aki ache.*”

English: “Tuski is growing, Shrabani is shrinking and *ma* is in the same state.”

Can anyone think of such a quick funny reply other than Ritam? He can cause churning out of laughter from the pit of one’s stomach with his instant unusual comments.

Ritam never called Deya’s husband by his name, Soumya. Soumya was a computer engineer by profession. Hence Ritam always referred to Soumya by calling him computer as if he was a machine and not a human. It is as if the writer assigns the task of making the readers laugh to Ritam. No one could simply predict how he was going to create an air of laughter out of a trivial matter.

One day when Deya told him that she was watching Titanic, he instantly utters a sentence in East Bengal dialect clarifying the theme of the movie. He said, “*O bajray kyajra*”.

English: “O the hanky panky around the yacht”.

Ritam was an expert in such strange and funny naming. He named the movie, *Jurassic Park*, with an East Bengal expression, “*Khaise dyno aaise*”

English: “Oh the devil dyno is back”.

Such use of East Bengal dialect is very familiar in many Bengali movies too which are introduced to bring in comic effect. Here the author also does the same thing. Suchitra Bhattacharya amuses her readers by Ritam’s sense of humor and presence of mind.

Another interesting thing to notice in *Udo Megh* is that she brings in lots of intertextual references and that too from Sukumar Ray's writings, to meet the purpose of adding humorous effect in the novel. Sukumar Ray (1887-1923) was a Bengali poet, story writer and playwright focusing on the genre of humor. He has always been compared to the celebrated English author, Lewis Carroll. His *Abol Tabol*, which can literally be translated as 'gibberish' or "weird and random", is a collection of Bengali children's poems and rhymes which was first published on 1st September 1923. It consists of 43 named and 7 unnamed short rhymes, all considered to be in the genre of literary nonsense. *Abol Tabol* introduces us to strange people, places and animals that knock us out of our strapping reality. His collection had several characters which became legendary in Bengali literature and culture. Some characters even have found idiomatic usage in the language the characters named *KumRopotash*, *Hnuko Mukho Hyangla* and *RamgoruRer chana*, have found their permanent place in Bengali lives. When we see a very fat man we compare him with *Kumropotash*. Again when we come across people with grave and serious face we tend to compare them with *RamgoruRer chana*, and anglophiles, who greatly admires or favors England and things English are described as *Tnyasgoru*. Every child of Bengal grows up reading these nonsense verses of Sukumar Ray. In poems like *RamgaruRer Chana* Ray laughs at those who are scared to laugh. Such serious intellectuals were most probably found in Bengal in those days. In his poem, '*Hnuko Mukho Hyangla*' Ray wrote *Hnuko Mukho Hyangla/ BaRi taar banglea* which means the native of all *hunkomukho hyanglas* was Bengal. With this particular term he referred to those people who with serious and gloomy face could spend the whole day even in thinking about a trick to kill flies.

Suchitra Bhattacharya brings in these typical idiomatic expressions from Bengali literary archive for rib tickling laughter of her readers. Ashesh Dattagupta, the co-editor of *Nabaprabhat*, where Dey worked, was called by various names like *Ramgarur*, *Gomratharium*, *Ragu dada*, Mr. Constipation and *Hunkomukho*. She must have used these terms without giving it a second thought as she knows that any Bengali can relate to these contextual references. However, the term '*gomratherium*' is taken from Sukumar

Ray's *Heshoram Hushiyarer Diary* ("The Diary Of Heshoram Hushiar"). It is a spoof on the genre because the writer is poking fun at the tendency of the scientists to name things, and that too in long-winded Latin words. He seems to be playing around the fact that names are arbitrarily assigned to things by humans for their own convenience, and the name of a thing may somehow be intrinsically connected to its nature. So the first creature that Heshoram meets in the course of his journey through the *Bandakush* Mountains is a "gomratharium". *Gomra* in Bengali means someone of irritable temperament, a creature that always keeps a long miserable face and an extremely cross expression. The term itself sounds like a disease.

The other two expressions, *Ragu dada* and Mr. Constipation are the author's own creations. A hot headed person can be called *Ragu dada*. With such a name Mr. Constipation we instantly can imagine the face of a person who suffers from the pain of constipation. Everybody in the office of *Nabaprabhat* thinks that Mr. Ashesh Dattagupta will smile at least on the last day of his service.

Another such intertextual reference is '*chilo rumaal hoye geche beraal*' which is taken from Sukumar Ray's novella *Ha-Ja-Ba-Ra-La* (Topsy-Turvy, 1928). It has a similarity to *Alice in Wonderland* in plot organization and the ending. The story starts with a boy suddenly waking up from sleep and finding that the handkerchief he placed just beside him before sleeping has turned into a cat. He starts talking to the cat and starts the ensuing fantasy adventure and meets with many wildly funny characters.

In describing the newspaper office of *Nabaprabhat*, which is an old two storied building of Victorian period Suchitra Bhattacharya alludes to *Ha-Ja-Ba-Ra-La's* famous line "*chilo rumaal hoye geche beraal*"

English: It was a handkerchief but turned to a cat.

The principal of the college where Shrabani worked was sarcastically called Mahaprabhu by his colleagues. His name was Nimai Chakraborty and his native place was Nabadwip. Bhattacharya here brings in a historical character Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who was a Hindu saint and social reformer of 16th century. He was a notable proponent for the Vaishnava school of Bhakti yoga and was also called Nimai in his early life.

Bhattacharya sometimes creates laughter in her selection of names. For example, the name of Deya's cousin was Chini. The Bengali word *chini* means sugar. Even the names of Chini's kids are very funny. They were Gaja and Nimki. *Gaja* is a popular sweet of Bengal while *nimki* refers to a snack.

Another device that Suchitra Bhattacharya uses for humorous effect in her novel is the use of pun. Pun is an expression that achieves emphasis or humor by contriving an ambiguity, two distinct meanings being suggested either by the same word (polysemy) or by two similar sounding words (homophone). There is a scene in section 4 the novel where Ritam talks with his friend Tamonash regarding a celebration of party as Tamonash's story was published. The conversation goes like this.

— *Tui to abaar jalpathe cholis na!*

— *To ki? Ak aadh din pansi baa jetei pare. Whisky, vodka, rum jaa khusi.*

— *Ami kintu sattwik manush. Rum Bhakto.*

— *Rum i khaoas taahole. Rum name amar i ba kiser apotti?*

These lines were translated as,

“But you don't prefer the water way, I suppose!”

“So what? Once in a while it's okay to row the boat. Whisky, vodka, rum whatever you like.”

“But I am a simple and chaste man, worshipper of rum”

“Then go for rum. Why should I object in the name of rum.”

Here the word rum has the pun. In Bengali script both Ram and rum are written in the same way. But the readers familiar to the Indian epic, *Ramayana* can easily trace the word play. In translation I have used the term ‘rum’ as I thought that reading the phrase ‘worshipper of rum’ the readers can easily get the sense intended by the author.

There is another scene in section 15 of the novel where we see the wedding anniversary celebration at Deya's home. One guest Bacchu is married to Chini. Now Chini in Bengal means sugar. Here the husband is a patient of blood sugar. When in the party he made a wish to eat *rasagolla* instead of ice cream his wife Chini yelled at him

and scolds him for such a demand when his blood sugar level is two hundred and fifty. And Bacchu very funnily answered to that and said, “*Sugar ki amar aaj theke? Bier par thekei to amar Chini r rog dhoreche.*”

We have translated it as:

“Have I suddenly caught blood sugar today? Right after my marriage I caught the *chini rog*.”

We retained the word *chini* in the second sentence as we have already translated *chini* as sugar in the first sentence and thought that most of the Indian readers are familiar with the word *chini*. But it may be unknown to people from the Dravidian language group. I think *chini rog* can easily strike the readers’ mind and one may instantly be reminded of diabetes. Bachhu here intends to say that he is facing problem not only in tackling his *chini rog* or blood sugar but his wife, Chini also causes lot of trouble to him. However, I explained the term *chini rog* in the glossary at the end of the novel. Total replacement of the word *chini* by sugar would have contained no humor in it as there would have no riddle of pun.

Shuchitra’s fine blend of humor with seriousness shows that a character does not have to be a comedian to add touch humor in the story. Even a couple of scenes that make readers laugh or at least smile in amusement will add dimension to the story. She keeps humor in harmony with the tone of her novel. Most importantly she knows that timing is everything. And one can see how skillfully she adds humor to the right places. She indicates that there is no harm in lightening up a little. Even if the book is serious, the characters do not always have to be.

1.3.6 Conversational Style

While reading *Udo Megh* the reader cannot overlook the fact that the storyline is built up through ample series of conversations amongst the characters. The conversations show their mood, temperament and also reflect their mental make up. Only factual details may spoil the taste of the stories. Perhaps that is why she has followed the device of conversation as one of her predominant styles. But the reader will not miss the writer's own voice as a story-teller where she intervenes in between the story.

These conversations resemble any of our real life conversations. For Suchitra Bhattacharya it is important to be able to relate to the reader in an informal manner, without losing credibility. The interactions amongst the characters are very spontaneous. The reader will get the feel as if he or she is a part of that conversation and thus can identify with the characters. The writer skillfully involves the readers in her novel. The conversations are built up with very simple but apt words. They involve personal accounts, talk about a character's own experiences. The writer draws all the characters as good conversationalists as we find them using various figures of speech in their conversations like simile, metaphor, hyperbole, idiomatic expressions and so on and so forth. And all the conversations are clearly connected to bring forth the gender issues, the main concern of the author. Even the climax of the novel is built up through strong arguments among many characters. The characters become the mouthpiece of the society's stance towards the problem of prostitution and each character speaks up to reflect different attitudes of people in the society. In a factual description one is not allowed to write sentence fragments. But real conversations break this rule. Even a single word can be very effective. We notice all these things in Suchitra Bhattacharya's style. There is a sentence uttered by Futku, the son of Deya's brother in section 5. The little child was playing with the spectacle of his grandfather. When Deya enquired about it he replied, "*Thilo toAmaal kaate*". If he were grown up he might have pronounced the sentence distinctly as "*Chilo to....Amaar kaache*."

We translated this as: "It was there with me", he replied indistinctly.

We can see how Suchitra pays attention to each character and captures the tone and delivery of a dialogue. Even a baby's utterance is clear in the representation of this sentence. All these show how Suchitra Bhattacharya deals with a serious issue in the novel where informal conversations of the various characters proves not to be a hindrance but a powerful tool to involve readers more deeply in her story.

1.3.7 Frequent use of English Expressions

From the very first page of the novel, *Udo Megh*, the readers would notice ample English words and sentences. Reading any of Suchitra Bhattacharya's writing can give a clear-cut idea of her intended readership, a class which is educated, modern and ready to accept positive changes in every aspect. Thus a text when composed in an urban setting is obvious to show some traits which distinguish it from the other genres of writing in the matter of choosing the subject matter, the way of handling it, portraying the characters and also the style of the brain behind it.

It is interesting to notice that Suchitra has written the novel in such a fashion which allows her educated characters to speak in the 'elite' language in different situations like office, with peer group, in serious discussions, in informal get together and so on and so forth. Now the question which peeps in the mind is whether she did it intentionally or it was something very casual. One can sit for a while to find out some possibilities which might have worked in the writer's mind behind using English words and sentences in her Bengali novel. But considering the first fact to have worked in this case opens avenues for a critical discussion. The readers know Suchitra Bhattacharya as a modern Bengali writer and modernization as an abstract term gets shape not only in the deployment of theme but also in the way she uses her language. In spite of writing in her

mother tongue she doesn't put a wall around it to cease the scope of coping it with the present day situation. Rather she is generous in using many common English words to ooze through. Bhattacharya is very much aware of the fact that English is no more considered strictly an academic language. Rather the percolation of English in our present life style is note worthy. She knows the language of the modern generation. A language is considered modern if it is able to serve as an effective vehicle of communication, both spoken and written, for all spheres of activity that characterize a modern society.

If modernization is a social process the language must undergo the process and equip itself with the functional tools of communication. Every language, in its outward manifestations, crystallizes the specific world view of its speakers. Language witnesses the change in the thought patterns of its users more than any other medium of expression or communication. Hence a change in the cultural and social patterns inevitably brings about changes in the language organization. According to R.H. Robins (1985), "A Language (is a) symbol systembased on pure or arbitrary convention.....infinitely extendable and modifiable according to the changing needs and conditions of the speakers." (As cited in Syal & Jindal, 2008). Language should not lag behind in coping with the contemporary needs for linguistic expression. Linguistic creativity can be achieved only if freedom is given to those who use their mother tongue to express their feelings and thoughts without being confined to the linguistic patterns. There has emerged a dependency upon the English language for the modern ideas especially in the educated people. Suchitra doesn't follow a stereotype or a common mechanism in employing English words frequently in her novel. Hence the way she writes can readily be acceptable to the educated readers. Her use of English words in the text doesn't alienate it from her readers, but it proves to be *their* language.

Today in the language scenario of the world English has acquired an unprecedented sociological and ideological dimension. The language has permeated in our daily life in such a way one can't avoid it especially in the cities. It has continued to be an important part of the communication matrix of urban India. One can notice the striking proliferation of English especially its vocabulary seeping through the upper sect

of the society to the middle class and further down to the grassroots level. Today the generation empowered with the English language paved the way in coining a new term 'English caste' in the already caste-ridden society. In bilingual India today code-switching between most of the Indian languages and English has become very common. Millions of urban Indians who are proficient both in their mother tongue and English are using English words and phrases even while conversing in their mother tongue. And it is claimed that they do it unintentionally and it comes to them spontaneously. In most of the cities it has become the communicative norm.

Code switching between one's mother tongue and English has become a characteristic feature of the metropolitan bourgeois which is reflected not only in their conversation but also finds its way in the regional literature. The noteworthy thing in the *modern* Bengali language is the enormous influence of English in vocabulary and in some cases idioms and expressions. When a writer like Suchitra Bhattacharya brings lots of English words, phrases or sentences in her text it paves the path to an unending debate whether a regional writer is right or wrong in doing so. Here a question arises who decides right or wrong. The ultimate motif of a writer is to reach his or her readers and for this she can take resort to any means unless and until it disturbs the aesthetic quality of the art and at the same time reflects his or her creativity. Sapir (1921) observed long ago, "the complete vocabulary of a language may indeed be looked upon as a complete inventory of all the ideas, interests, and occupations that take up the attention of a community..." (As cited in Moore 2009). . But at the same time a writer should be aware that only for the sake of drawing attention of the society he or she can not write something which reflects an outlook, parochial and irrational. In fact in our opinion when a writer brings some change in the traditional way of writing it ultimately helps a particular linguistic community because in doing so the expressive power of a given language is widened and modernization of a society demands for certain changes in both the spoken and written language.

There is another fact which we have to keep in mind. Like the speakers of any other Indian language the young generation of Bengali speakers are not at all well acquainted with the rich treasure of Bangla. Words like *ghurnibatya* (cyclone), *apaanayon*(smuggling), *protyapti* (reversion), *anugnatro* (liscence), *odhibritti* (bonus), *tattwik* (theoretical) may appear alien to the English educated Bengali youth. Rather for them the English equivalents are easier to register even when they talk or write in Bengali. It is very hard to find Bengali equivalents for words like pizza, burger, noodles, pudding, ice cream etc. which show a direct impact of English culture on India. Hence in spite of explaining these words in Bengali it is easy to use the English words as they are. One should not be mistaken that it is the case only with the food items. But the impact is well evident and no Indian is found to object to it.

When we read *Udo Megh* we find that the flow of the story is not at all disturbed by the writer's frequent usage of English. Rather such usage makes the novel more acceptable to the modern readers. Bhattacharya is much aware with the present trend and she chooses her own way to satisfy her target readers. Her pivotal character Deya is an educated woman who works in a newspaper office. Her English knowing friends, colleagues or husband not only use English language but also flaunt such status. We find Suchitra's characters using English words very often. We have cited here some Bengali terms whose English equivalents are easier to use and the Bengali words for them though not completely forgotten have become restricted only to those who have a very sound knowledge about Bengali language. The interesting thing to notice here is that Suchitra uses many English words whose Bengali equivalents are also quite popular and frequently used in everyday life for example, 'polygamist' (*bohugaami*), 'guts' (*saahos*), 'normal' (*saabhaabik*), 'exact' (*sathik*), 'story' (*galpo*), 'colour' (*rang*), 'business' (*byabsaa*), 'duty' (*kartobyoy*), 'situation' (*poristhiti*), 'agreement' (*chukti*), 'dress' (*poshaak*), 'vagabond' (*bhaboghure*), 'collection' (*sangkolan*), 'culprit' (*aporaadhi*), 'straight' (*sojaasuji*), 'night' (*raatri*), 'gang' (*dal*), 'advantage' (*subidha*), 'environment' (*poribesh*), 'result' (*falaafal*), 'happy' (*sukhi*), 'fixed' (*sthir*), 'family' (*poribaar*), 'conscience' (*bibek*), 'headstrong' (*uddhoto*), 'investigation' (*tadonto*) 'illegal' (*beaaini*), 'topic' (*bishoy*), 'discussion' (*alochanaa*), 'sentence' (*baakyo*), 'present' (*upohaar*),

‘university’ (*bishwabidyaaaloy*), ‘use’ (*byabohaar*), ‘tiredness’ (*klaanti*), ‘lose’ (*haaraano*), ‘hypocrite’ (*mukhoshdhari*), ‘relation’ (*samporko*), ‘serious’ (*gombhir*), ‘weakness’ (*durbolataa*), ‘virgin’ (*kumaari*), ‘thanks’ (*dhonyobaad*), ‘opportunity’ (*sujog*) etc.

There are many English words in the text which co-exist with their Bengali equivalents and they are so familiar that nobody recognizes them as foreign for example gown, jury, principal, ceiling, cold drinks, mutton, chicken, installment, sandwich, bank etc. The advancement in science and technology has introduced many technical terms for which Bengali equivalents are not easy to get and even if one attempts to do so the listener may take it as something alien to him. One is more familiar with the term ‘computer’ than its Bengali equivalent ‘*ganokjantro*’. There are many such words scattered in the text like ‘monitor’, ‘key board’, ‘internet’, ‘print-out’, ‘lay-out’, ‘telephone’, ‘teleprinter’, ‘fax’, ‘dilated heart’, ‘protocol’, ‘software business’, etc. There are many English phrases used by the characters in the novel quite often. For example, ‘evening shift’, ‘day off’, ‘compact apartment’, ‘privileged class’, ‘literary event’, ‘heart fail’, ‘joint family’, ‘golden neutral’, ‘traffic sergeant’, ‘next Sunday’, ‘four figure’, ‘private bus’, ‘time devote’, ‘specific solution’, ‘well and good’, ‘voluntary retirement’, ‘no trace’, ‘traumatic experience’, ‘attached kitchen’, ‘middle age’, ‘any day’, ‘biological concept’, ‘pressure check’, ‘odd situation’, ‘shock treatment’, ‘popular teacher’, ‘day college’, ‘main contribution’, ‘total rest’, ‘social responsibility’, ‘routine job’, ‘of course with no hazards’, ‘talking doll’, ‘last warning’, ‘wish fulfillment’, ‘ego satisfied’, ‘genetic factor’, ‘half soul’, ‘carry out’, ‘chapter closed’, ‘grand news’, ‘second course of action’, ‘helping hand’, ‘social gathering’, ‘the land of forts’, ‘public opinion’, ‘government duty’, ‘cross connection’, ‘sex worker’, ‘bad investment’, ‘bad example’, ‘middleclass mentality’, ‘noble gesture’, ‘hot news’, ‘vulgar topic’, ‘continuous rape’, ‘great tragedy’, ‘angry young man’, ‘dominating power’, ‘face cutting’ etc. On many occasions the characters indulge in English conversation for the purpose of questioning, apologizing, highlighting their point or justifying their convictions for example, ‘What about Tup Tap?’, ‘I am planning something’ ‘Come to the point’, ‘I am getting late’, ‘Don’t call it lake’, ‘why should I waste my fun, buddy?’, ‘Soumya Sinha Roy doesn’t

believe in second hand', 'They shall have to be virgin', 'Let's enjoy life, sweetie', 'But I have to meet someone', 'I don't care', 'No earthly force can change my schedule', 'It's matter of wilforce', 'She has devil's luck', 'I know', 'I bet', 'I am sorry', 'I'm fed up', 'You were his fiancé, I presume', 'Is it?' 'Behave yourself', 'I shall face the music', 'Can you imagine?', 'What do you mean?', 'May be he earns less than you', 'It's only seven fifteen, man', 'But I have to meet someone', 'Twenty years is a hell of a time', 'Mind it', 'Somebody is waiting for you', 'Face the truth', 'I was not in my senses', 'How dare you?', 'They know nothing of Bengal, not even of Ravi Thakur', 'Don't bore us, papa', 'Face the truth', 'This is too much of expectation', 'Sex is never a work. It's an act'.

Again the text brings forth some typical English use by the modern educated people which are mostly in fashion in the metropolitan cities. This shows how casually the youth uses English today without little care for other's understandability. Such uses may appear to the old people who may not be aware of the so called e-mail language. These are typical abbreviations or precisely can be termed shortening of a word which does not follow any rule as such. Suchitra's characters who are placed in Kolkata are found to be using such words for example 'cali'(original word, caliber), 'enthu' (original word enthusiasm)

We have already discussed how the English language seeps through the upper class to the middle and then to the lower class. There are many such instances in the text which adds to this statement. Laxmi who is an illiterate maid servant in Deya's house makes attempts of using English on many occasions though with phonological modification or to say correctly with phonological distortion and it happens because of her ignorance about the language. In this case her use of English proves as a class marker. Laxmi uses words like *chilim* (distortion from the word 'slim'), *felat* (distortion from the word 'flat'). Laxmi's son-in-law wrongly uses the word *retunmen* to mean retirement.

A writer when attempts to throw out the foreign words from his or her writing and insists on finding indigenous substitutes from the language limits the scope of reaching all his readers. But Suchitra Bhattacharya knows it very well that language is

intimately related to the perception of the outer world and the sensitivity of the inner thinking of the speech community. It is reflexive of the social and cultural roles assigned to it by the history of the society. Modernization is a social process and as the society advances its language should also keep pace with the progress and help the society in acquiring 'communication efficiency'. In *Udo Megh* the language used by her characters which is a combination of Bengali and English show the current trend and how English words are assimilated in our day to day life. It also shows the inclination of the modern generation of using English often beyond the academic boundary. The code mixing used by Suchitra Bhattacharya clearly points out that there is an inter-relationship between language and culture and her handling of the language in the text shows how our native culture is influenced by the global tongue which can no more be termed as the language of the White rather brought some sort of linguistic empowerment to the speakers of the Indian languages.

At this point we would like to draw attention to a very interesting thing that the writer who has made abundant use of English words suddenly seems to use some tough Bengali words which make us pause for a while and think why this word is here. A very common word appears to be very uncommon because of such application. For example, we can take the word '*kanthalenguti*'. Very few of the present generation of Bengalis are familiar with this Bengali word. A simple word 'tie' becomes very complicated with such usage. She uses phrase like '*anshik somoyer adhyapak*'. When she incessantly uses uncountable English words what would have worked in her mind behind not using the simple phrase 'part time lecturer' for the above expression. Can we also consider this as one of her stylistic device?

1.3.8 Use of Hindi Words

The constitution of India (Article 343) recognizes Hindi as the official language of India. Hindi is also the main language in many states of India such as Haryana, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhatisgarh etc. As a national language, Hindi is used in our country as a link language or a language of wider communication. Hindi has been consolidating its position as India's national language and no one can deny the fact that Doordarshan and many other Hindi TV channels have extensively contributed to the spread Hindi throughout India. In India, known for multilingualism, Hindi may not be very popular down south compared to the north. But there is change in this scenario. In today's age of rapid urbanization each metropolis attracts numerous linguistic communities. Hence it makes linguistic and cultural assimilation possible. Hindi, thus in a certain limited sense, has become common man's language.

Contacts between two languages often raise interesting linguistic aspects. The change may be slow but over a period of a time it takes a different shape altogether. Because of code-switching the language boundaries get blurred. The bilingual speakers feel a lexical gap on many occasions and tend to switch to the other. Such mixed codes are more acceptable to the young generation than the old generation or to those who really believe in correctness of language. And such usages are common in informal situations like offices, public places, malls etc. And the users of such mixed codes hardly bother for the grammatical constraints. Today's youth uses many Hindi words in their verbal repertoire without hesitation. It is very much acceptable to them but obviously such inclinations are avoided while writing. Generally the assimilation of Hindi words in one's mother tongue happens while speaking and that too with the friend circle, in parties and in other informal situations. The movie magazines and the page 3 gossips are also the domains of such usage. Words like *bindaas*, *jhakkas*, and *mast* are very frequently used these days by youth. One can not keep a blind eye on the media's impact on the mass regarding this and people do not hesitate to use Hindi words in between their language for the identity of a fashionable and well informed individual. At times it becomes one's

style marker. Now if one is asked about the correctness or acceptability of such usage one may become judgmental and his reply may be no but the fact remains that today's youth seems to be proficient in bringing in many Hindi words while conversing and they often do it unconsciously. It is a fashionable trend. They want to convey their emotions and feelings when they talk and they take resort to any means. Mixing up of the official language with English or with one's mother tongue is a good evidence of this. The city-bred modern youth take such code-mixing as 'cool' and effortless. Such experimentations are like a linguistic laboratory where new constructions or coining of words are done. It is not that such attempts always get acceptance from the society but there are possibilities too when such usage becomes very common and frequent.

This novel of Suchitra Bhattacharya is written in the urban setting of Kolkata. Her text incorporates many Hindi words other than the English words. She might have been conscious in using such words as she is aware how the young generation of India especially in the metropolitan cities. People may not write in such a mixed language but while conversing, they hardly care. Thus we find that in *Udo Megh* her characters bring in many Hindi words when they converse. It may be a stylistic device on the part of the author but it also shows how the writer is a keen observant of a change in the language use which is a mirror of the society. Here are some of the Hindi words and sentence which one comes across in the text: *baalbachha* (children), *galti* (fault), *khuda*(God), *dil* (Heart), *harami*(scoundrel), *talab*(summon), *chachi* (aunt), *dhoka* (betray), *wada*(promise), *ziddi* (arrogant), *napasand*(disliking), *kursi*(chair), *nanga* (naked), *badia* (great), *khatta* (sour), *saaf* (clear), *andar*(inside), *dupatta* (kind of scarf used by women in India with *salwar kameez*), *sehensa* (king), *kitab* (bookish), *yaar* (friend), *fokat* (without any charge), *latelatif* (latecomer) and *bilkul sahi baat* (rightly said). The influence of Hindi may be less than that of English on the Indian languages but its impact can not be under estimated.

CHAPTER TWO

The Stray Cloud

1

Thomas Green, the self-proclaimed polygamist was happily enjoying his conjugal life with not one or two but with his five wives! But it faced opposition from the court of the state of *Utah*. Green was accused of polygamy. During the time of the verdict from the juries two of Green's wives were personally present in the court. Both of them were sobbing. Both of them let the court know that they were satisfied with their polygamist husband and were devoted to that husband. Tom Green, the father of twenty-nine children felt very distressed at the decision of the juries. He was thinking of appealing to the higher court. In this connection it is to be mentioned here that polygamy is banned in the state of *Utah* since 1890. And in the last fifty years this was the first instance of filing a suit against polygamy

While preparing the copy of the catchy and spicy news, sent by Reuters according to its measurement Deya was simpering within herself. She was trying to visualize the scene with her mind's eyes. Wearing gowns two voluptuous middle-aged *memsahibs* (Yes, must be middle-aged. When the *sahib* is the father of twenty-nine children his wives would certainly not be little girls. But each of the wives would have given birth to five to six children on an average. There was a chance that they might be a bit young. But the scene would become apt if the wives were middle-aged or fatty.) Both were seen embarrassed, resting their heads on the shoulder of each other, wiping tears of each other with handkerchief, and tapping the back to console each other. Seeing this, did the juries sit wonderstruck? Or did they fly up in jealousy? Or were they uttering 'bravo bravo' within themselves seeing the great courage of Mr. Tom?

Sukanya, standing in front of the table said, “Hey, how far?”

Deya didn’t wear the watch on her wrist. With the winter departing Deya can not wear a watch. She gets rashes on her skin even at the accumulation of thin layer of sweat around her wrist.

Lifting her eyes she asked, “Is it already six?”

“Long back. It’s six forty.”

“Wait a bit. Let me give it to Asheshda.

She took out the print out of the news from the computer.

“Have a look at the news.”

Sukanya frowned. Pouting her lips in contempt she said, “Stupids. The wives should have been kept in the prison before everything else.”

“Yes! If the lady wishes to stay with the co-wife...”

“Shit. If I had a grip over him I would have ejected the venom of that Tom Green within two days.”

“Whatever you say. The *sahib* has guts. Look at his gall. Most guys are polygamists at their hearts. How many of them can make an open declaration of it boldly? Think of his caliber. Handling five wives at a time...”

“Is this a hard nut to crack? He must have followed the divide and rule policy. He must have played the idiots against each other and sat idle stroking his mustache.”

“Don’t speak rubbish. Then why did they cry in the court hugging each other? The man must be a clever lover, I bet. The heart of the man must be very big, five times bigger than the normal size.”

“Are you talking about a dilated heart? *Ha! Ha!* But that’s a disease.”

“A man leading a family life with five wives is a kind of a sick person.”

“I have no idea dear. You have a husband, you will understand better than me.”

“Do you think so? Deya ogled taking the printed copy from Sukanya’s hand. While getting up she said, “Wait, I will catch hold of Soumya on reaching home. Let me see how he reacts at the news.”

It was the end of the afternoon and the beginning of the evening. The newspaper office was buzzing with activity, especially the news section. Around twelve newspaper

employees were working with focused attention. Most of them were young and three of them were aged. Some eyes were on the computer-monitor, some were writing making a kind of rustling sound. The layout was running in the computer, the dummy was getting ready, in the air-conditioned room, there were various sounds heard. Clattering sound of the fax, teleprinter, telephone and the keyboard of the computer were there. All useful conversations. News were being received from the internet continuously. The *Nabaprabhat* was getting ready for the next day morning.

Deya went to the table of Ashesh Dattagupta, the co-editor. Ashesh was fifty years old with a dry and experienced look with disheveled curly hair on his head. One could see a thick silt of seriousness on his triangular shaped face. Many of the colleagues expected that on the last day of his service span Ashesh would give his first smile.

Print outs were piled up on Ashesh's table. Ashesh was preparing dummy for the sixth page. Though he was about to keep the paper given by Deya in the pile, he ran his eyes over the paper loosely.

"What is this? Why didn't you give heading?"

In a soft tone Deya said, "I am wondering as what to give! Should I choose 'Hail the love of a husband!'"

"No, it will be light." With his eyes closed and with a bitter expression in his face Ashesh said, "Choose 'the price of polygamy'."

Deya mumbled, "No wonder that people call you the sour faced person."

Outwardly Deya said, "But Ashesh *da* the news was very funny."

Ashesh did not pay heed to her words. Putting down the spectacle on the table from his eyes he said, "Don't you have evening shift from tomorrow?"

"Not tomorrow, day after tomorrow."

"Why?"

"Tomorrow is my day-off."

"I see... I am telling you something. Listen carefully. In the evening shift don't be eager to escape. It can drag on to eleven in the place of nine. Don't whine then."

"Do I ever complain? Last April there were elections in six states. Then I had stayed everyday up to 8.30. Did I ever say anything?"

"You may not have said anything."

“Then why are you telling me harshly?”

Deya was laughing in her sleeve, “Don’t I know when the boys of the evening shift are in or out?”

“You should know. It is you whose interest to work in the evening shift was the highest. Your wish is fulfilled. Now concentrate on your work. In his garrulity the tone of sarcasm was vivid. If Ranen Samaddar would have spoken in this tone one could accept. He was the one who ran *Nabaprabhat*. Isn’t Asheshda happy with the new regulation?”

Coming back to her seat Deya composed the heading quickly and gave it to Asheshda. She picked up the huge vanity bag that was hanged on her chair. Sukanya was also ready. Standing near the door she was talking to Tathagata, nodding her head forcefully. Beside the six feet one inch tall Tathagata, the very sweet Sukanya with her chubby cheeks and four feet eleven inch height appeared like a talking doll. Today moreover Sukanya is wearing jeans and a *kurta* shirt. She looks very tiny in that. One shouldn’t be misled by her size, she was of high spirit. She is very outspoken; in fact the whole office was scared of her.

Coming from the toilet in quick steps Deya stood between Gulliver and Lilliput. She made Sukanya move quickly, “Are you not going home?”

“One second”, saying this, turning her head, she looked at sky-scraping Tathagata.

“So? Then there is no scope left for you to grumble?”

“What grumbling?”

“Incidentally it is remarked that we are the privileged class! We don’t have to work at night, no evening shift also; we come at twelve and slip off at six.”

Tathagata had slight similarity with the film star Sanjay Dutt in his looks. And Tathagata was also quite conscious about that. As usual in a fashionable way he suddenly flicked his hair. It is just the beginning of your evening shift and immediately you have started rattling dialogues? Let some days pass and slowly let it move towards night then...”

“So? If I am allotted night shift I will do. Am I scared? Girls are doing nightshifts in so many newspaper houses.” “Okay, okay. So far you have got the discount. This is a fact. Think why you have got. Slip off while thinking about it. Now I have appointment with the *tunnel*-faced person.”

Deya simpered. The poor Ashesh Duttagupta! Mr. Glumtherium, Mr. Hotheaded, Mr. Constipation, so many names are attributed to *Asheshda*! What a pity! If *Asheshda* could know!

Outside the air-conditioned hall there was a long wide passage. It was as if the unbelievable metamorphosis of a handkerchief to a cat. The inner verandah of the second floor of a reputed huge two-storied building changed its look and took such name. On one side of the passage were newsrooms, the office of the supplement, drawing section. On the other side were accounts, cash, administration, circulation....On one division sat the editor and on the other was the owner. On the first floor were advertising section and press. The two divisions were connected through culvert shaped over-bridge, above it was green roof made of wood and notched green sun-shed. The owner Mohit Mallik had a good taste. There were not many changes done than the minimum requirement for the newspaper office. Or one could say that there was no fool's interference in a wise man's act. The high ceiling, huge windows, even the artistically decorated railing and the fickle wooden staircase remained unaffected. The house with its thick walls still now has retained the smell of the Victorian period.

Deya and Sukanya got down through the staircase with low sound. Once they crossed the gate and stepped on the footpath they could feel that it was very hot outside. Sitting inside the *Nabaprabhat* office one can not guess. Even though it was a misty evening outside it was very hot! There was no wind and the level of humidity was extreme. Within a second they started sweating.

Jaistha has already set in, yet there is no trace of *Kalbaishakhi*. On this side of the Elgin road there was not enough light. For some reason the streetlights went out. Her eyes became glazed as the vehicles drove with its headlights dim in the twilight.

While walking Deya said, "Could you see how Tathagata had scurried away with his tail between his legs? Today I have cut the guy down to his size."

Deya was wiping her throat and neck with her *dupatta*. She smiled a little, "Even I have taught *Asheshda* a lesson. Though lightly.

"Why? What was he telling?"

“He was scaring me by telling that it could be eleven instead nine. And I couldn’t complaint then. I told him on his face not to tell me such things.”

“Ah, I wish he had told it to me.”

“Actually he was teaching the guilty a lesson by railing the innocent.”

“What do you mean?”

“You mean Jayashree.” Deya frowned, “I am afraid if Jayashree would let us down. The poor girl is very nervous.”

“Why?”

“Regarding the time of leaving the office. If it becomes quite late.”

“So? If it is late the office will provide a pull car.”

“Transport is not the problem. The problem is her in-laws. Mainly her mother-in-law. It seems if the daughter-in-law returns in the midnight she will get heart attack. First of all, that is a conservative house and moreover a joint family.”

“Leave the matter of the joint family. Main problem is her husband. Is he also opposing?”

“It seems his is the condition of Switzerland. Neither has he supported the allies’ power nor the axis. In the misunderstanding between the mother and the wife he is golden neutral.”

“So he is a perfect mamma’s boy. What can be done? Let her quit the job. Let her keep her masters degree in amulet and tie it on her hand, sit in the house pulling veil and teach her child twinkle twinkle little star.”

“In our profession Jayashree is a real misfit.”

“Absolutely. Girls of this type should choose school teaching.” A pedestrian crossed Sukanya in hurry. Perhaps he had a slight collision with Sukanya. In the semi-darkness of the twilight she tried to see the man at a glance. Again turning her face she said, “Actually the weakness is in Jayashree’s mind. Her in-laws are mere excuse.”

Gossiping in a light mood the two friends came in the crossing of Elgin road. Sukanya would go Tallygunj. Diagonally crossing the road she went down to catch the metro rail. Deya’s destination was Santoshpur. To get the mini bus she would have to walk little more.

Even after starting, Deya waited for a minute. It is only seven or quarter past seven. Can't she visit Gopalnagar today? Even today morning *ma* was telling that *baba's* health was not very sound. He had become peevish. Poor *ma*! Already she was troubled with *thakuma* and now *baba*. *Dada* and *boudi* were also not around. After visiting Dehradun, Musouri and Hardwar they might take ten days more to return. The lonely mother is under much stress. Even if Deya goes today she won't be able to sit for long. Tomorrow there would be no office, let it be tomorrow.

Coming in front of the Lower Circular Road fortunately she got a mini bus headed for Santoshpur within five minutes. It was very crowded. Pushing others Deya managed to get into the bus. Behind the driver's seat she managed some space. Next to her, touching her body was standing a man above fifty. Holding a briefcase in hand his looks and dressing were quite cultured. Deya wasn't too conscious about her body. Yet smartly she moved a little. In buses and trams she usually prefers to avoid the middle-aged persons.

The mini bus speeded. Quite an odd speed. It switched intermittently from the movement of a snail to that of a mad ox. The driver was shaking the vehicle like a tin full of puffed rice. The passengers by the window were cowered with fear. Some protested as usual and the conductor and the driver were also as indifferent as a matter of routine. Coming near Bekbaagaan the bus braked dangerously. The people in the bus fell over each other. The traffic sergeant swore in an indecent way, while the driver did not take any notice of it. With all his teeth out he laughed. All of it was routine. Deya is used to it. But today the goddess of fortune is pleased with her; she luckily got a seat at Minto Park. The familiar city was faded away behind her; she was not focusing on anything. Haphazard thoughts regarding the office moved in her head. The news section of their *Nabaprabhat* had three women altogether. Theirs was almost a routine work. Coming at twelve and leaving in the evening. Barring the incidents of war, flood, election, earthquake or death of an eminent person, the women's jobs were only to prepare few copies of news or to sit and create puzzle words, entertainment, daily horoscope, weather forecast, diary and write about some trivial and page-filling news regarding meetings and

associations. For the last four years it has been the same monotonous job of putting old wine into new bottle. Anyway this time the situation has changed its color. Then why is the grumpy boss angry on her? Certainly *Asheshda* does not prefer evening shift for girls. And he thought that it was Deya who had brought in the rule.

However, Deya herself had let the editor know about the pattern of the work and its monotony. Ranen Samaddar had drunk water from many rivers. He had a heart laugh on hearing the agony of the new sub-editor. He said, “Does the job of newspaper mean only adventure, eh? Remember that newspaper is actually a big family. There are so many trivial nitty-gritties in a big family! Women are inborn homemakers; they can handle these particulars well. Do you know how many letters the newspaper has to handle even if there is little mistake in the daily column!”

Was *Ranenda* trying to console her? No matter whatever he said *Ranenda* specially asked for Deya and assigned her a lot of work other than her routine work. Taking an interview of the governor, *tête-à-tête* with Girija Devi, visiting the hospital to question the superintendent about the issue of the stealing of a baby- all these she did herself. Moreover, last year the job of observing the parliament election in the district of Howrah was given to Deya.

However, Soumya said that the works were thrust on Deya, not seeing her enthusiasm but because of a lack of reporters. Right at that moment there was no male next to hand. Might be. Quite possible. The manpower in *Nabaprabhat* was less. Four years ago when Deya had joined *Nabaprabhat* the paper was in its initial stage, circulation was only twenty to twenty-five thousand. Then there were not sufficient employees in the news desk - Deya, Kanad, Sukanya, Tathagata, the four trainee sub-editors. With them were three sub-editors, assistant editor and the news editor. The number of permanent employees in the reporting section was very less. After appointing Ranen Samaddar as the editor, replacing Deepak Sen, *Nabaprabhat* flourished in quick pace. Now the circulation had touched almost 1.5 lacs. But in comparison with the increase of circulation did the number of employees in the news section increase? Including the news editor and the sub-editor now they are nineteen permanent employees

in total. It was the plan of Mohit mallik, the owner, not to let increase the number of permanent employees. Mohit was a shrewd businessman. The Malliks had their iron business from three generations. Mohit himself had expanded his family business. Including export house and generator manufacturing there were many other things. In the business community of Kolkata, Mohit was a shining star. Who knows why he had suddenly stepped into the world of newspaper! Perhaps it was with the hope of increasing the social and political influence. Yet the sense of profit was in Mohit's blood. He understood it well how to get the maximum work out of minimum manpower. Perhaps to some extent, with this intention he introduced the evening shift for women. No, not to some extent but to a large extent. In the newspaper office the work pressure increases from afternoon and evening. Till now the males had shouldered the responsibility at night. The burden can be lessened if the duty is rotated among the staff. Today *Nabaprabhat* possesses a good reputation. Perhaps the doubt has dawned in Mohit's mind that agitation may burst if people are made to work with less payment and the efficient males also may fly to the big houses spreading their wings. But Ranenda was behind their plan. No matter what Mohit might have thought nothing is going to be implemented in *Nabaprabhat* until Ranenda wants it.

Whatever it might be there is no doubt that a change has come. By rendering responsibility to Deya, Ranenda also must have understood that there is no point in neglecting and side tracking them. Deya had proved that. Though Sukanya might babble nonstop but she was not the girl to go ahead and take on responsibilities. If she were sent to jungle she would go, given an evening shift she would do with a smiling face and even in the night shift she would not protest. But voluntarily? No! The girl was as if too much of matter of fact. As an unmarried she should show some more enthusiasm but no...

The very thought, that Deya herself had made a contribution, however little it might be, behind the sudden decision of the authority, refreshed her mind. On other days after her work she feels quite tired but on today getting down from the bus she went for some shopping with a pretty light mind. It was Deya's duty to do the regular shopping for the household. Did Soumya have time for that? He would run to office gulping his breakfast by eight-thirty and often he wouldn't return home before nine. And on holidays he

behaved like a prince. He would furnish with all kinds of odd excuses even if asked to go to the nearby shop. Deya bought a big loaf of bread with half-a-dozen of eggs from the shop near the crossing of her house. Soumya was not addicted to tea or coffee. He preferred milk with cornflakes. The cornflakes were about to get over. She bought a packet of a reputed brand. These days the shop kept a variety of frozen items. She took some ham, as she wanted to prepare sandwich for Soumya the next morning.

The house was not very far from the main road. As soon as she went up to the third floor and rang the bell, Laxmi opened the door. She was an old maid servant. She was in Deya's father's house for a long time. After marriage Deya kept her in her house. Deya handed her the packets in her hand and hanged her vanity bag on Laxmi's shoulder. While putting her slippers she danced her eyeballs, "Has *sahib* returned"?

"No."

"Give me quickly a glass of water. My throat is dry as a wood."

"No wonder. It's so hot."

Laxmi treaded slowly while talking. Hers was a loose and free gait. She was pretty aged. These days she was suffered from knee and hip pain. She was unable to work fast now. Deya did not go inside the room straight. Switching on the fan she lounged on the sofa, drying the sweat. She was feeling relaxed. Lifting her feet up on the center table she danced them slowly. She yawned opening her mouth little.

Laxmi bought water. As she touched the glass Deya shrank her nose like a little girl, "Oh no! Why are you giving this ordinary water? Give me from the fridge."

"Drink this without fuss." Laxmi sounded like a guardian.

"You have entered bathing in sweat. You need not drink anything cool right now. You catch a cold."

"Nothing will happen. Just give me, please."

"You disobedient girl! You just don't listen to anyone." Grumbling as usual Laxmi brought the bottle of cold water from fridge. Being displeased she said, "Drink. Drink it to your heart's content. You will face the music when are down with fever."

“Are you cursing me?” Deya stooped in between gulping water. She gave a fake expression of sorrow, “I just returned after a day- long toil. You should be giving me a plateful of hot *luchi* on my hand and you are scolding me instead.”

“Would you really like to have *luchi*?” Right at the moment Laxmi’s tobacco-stained teeth were wide open. I have already kneaded dough.

“No, leave it. If I eat *luchi* now, the dinner won’t be any fun. Rather give me a cup of tea. By the by, why did you suddenly knead the dough?”

“I thought of preparing *parota* tonight. Meat is there. The other day *dada* was telling that *parota* goes better with meat than rice.”

“Aha, only careful about *dada*’s taste, huh! Don’t I exist?”

“Oh, as if you eat so much! You are on a diet, eh!”

“What?”

“Slim. You are working hard to be bone thin. I really don’t understand how you work the whole day eating so little!”

“Me, and slim?” Quickly Deya sat straight. Pinching her tummy over her *kameez* she said, “See how much has accumulated here!”

“Married girls look better with that much of fat. They look a little rounded and filled.”

“Oh really?”

“Then? Don’t you see the married lady of the first floor? Her collarbones have become prominent. The jaw line is pushing out... Malina was telling that her *boudi* does not eat rice at noon these days. She mixes some powder in water and drinks that. How long will a husband stick to such a vulture?”

“Why? Why will the relation not last long?”

“Guys like a bit plump girls.”

Deya was trying very hard to control her laugh, now she burst out. She was seeing Laxmi from childhood. Laxmidi was always little plump. It did not seem that Laxmidi was any less plump when her husband had gone missing deserting her!

Probably Laxmi was embarrassed a bit seeing Deya’s laugh. She took the bottle from the table and while entering the kitchen she constantly looked back. Switching on the TV Deya again sat on the sofa with the remote in her hand. Her body was sweating profusely.

She must take a bath. Yet she did not want to get up without drinking tea. She started surfing channels. Her eyes got fixed on a Bengali channel. The news was being broadcasted. Again a new-born girl child had been rescued from a dustbin. This morning, in Shyambazar. Didn't *Nabaprabhat* get the news? At least up to six o'clock the news had not reached the office. If it had come early she would have heard. It might be late but certainly somebody would cover the news in brief. The readers digest this kind of thrilling news very well. What a horrible news it is! Perhaps including this at least four children were found out in the last six months. Strange, all of them were girls! Was the society progressing or regressing?

Laxmi was telling something from kitchen, "You got a phone call. Just sometime back."

Pressing the button Deya decreased the volume, "Who? What is the name?"

"That very friend of yours from college. Sujit..."

Deya dropped from the blue, "Sujit? But I don't have any of friends with that name, Sujit?"

"Oh is it? Then it must be Tapan."

"What are you saying? Try to remember please."

"That boy who whenever comes, opens the fridge to check what food is inside.... very jolly."

"Ritam?"

"Yes, yes, Ritam."

"Strange! You have been seeing him for such a long time. Why can't you remember his name?"

"Sometimes I forget", Laxmi smiled shyly. "He was saying that he has some urgent work with you."

Ritam is absolutely crazy. He is always in his fancy world. He starts talking gibberish whenever suddenly he goes nuts. Once in a while he emerges like a comet and visits her house. On the day of Deya's wedding he came with a huge bouquet. It was so huge that the door was literally small for taking it inside. "There are as many roses as the days of our friendship in it. Count them!" Who else could be called crazy other than him! He was off his head because of his excessive craze for literature.

What could be Ritam's urgency? Forget it! Who would listen to the useless talk of this crazy fellow!

Drinking her tea Deya entered the bathroom attached to her bedroom. Their two roomed flat was well arranged. The rooms were of moderate size, the drawing cum dining hall was also not bad and the kitchen was also pretty good. There was a balcony beside the bedroom, narrow and west facing. Though the other toilet was bigger in size the bathroom was better arranged and decorated. After taking this flat in rent, Deya, according to her choice, got a glass-rack, beautiful basin, attractive towel-rod and telephone shower fixed there. She also fixed an oval rot iron framed mirror over the head of the basin. Deya was very luxurious about her bathroom. Had she got a bit more space, she would have fixed a complete bathtub. A decorated veiled small tube light made the mirror brighter. A bathing Deya was reflected in that mirror. Before she was lanky, after marriage her figure had become quite full. Her complexion was not fair, rather a bit dusky. Yet that dusky complexion suited her. Though she was not a dazzling beauty she was quite charming. Her face had a glow untainted innocence. It was because of that innocence that her age stood still. It was hard to take her more than twenty-five even in twenty-nine.

After bath Deya wore a light nightgown. Now there is no chance of outsider coming in. This nightdress would give her the best comfort. Running the comb loosely on her hair she switched on the TV again. On the colorful screen, came up a big deck of a ship. The gloomy heroine was looking at the blue sea. The hero came and stood by the heroine. The hero was applying the ointment of happiness on the sorrow of the sad heroine. Deya had seen the movie in theatre. She liked it very much. She did not change the channel and was immersed in the movie with fresh mood.

Laxmi came and sat near her feet. On the carpet. She was not addicted to TV. She never switches on the machine when she is alone. If Soumya or Deya turns on the TV she sits sometime. Perhaps now Laxmi did not like the English movie. She was feeling uneasy. Suddenly she said, "I forgot to tell you something. Today my younger son-in-law came. "Suddenly?"

“Nothing sudden. He needs money. He will buy a rickshaw.”

“Why does he suddenly need to buy a rickshaw?”

“He was saying that nothing is left after giving the rent amount to the owner everyday...Tell me what should I do? Should I give?”

Laxmi had two daughters. Both of the sons-in-law have an emperor attitude. The elder son-in-law is a carpenter and the younger son-in-law pulled rickshaw in Sonarpur. Both of them used to squeeze their mother-in-law to their hearts' content. Laxmi had no scope of saving her salary in the bank. Due to the favor of her sons-in-law money vanishes within a blink of eye.

Deya uttered in her mind, “You will give irrespective of whether I say yes or no. You are not able to overcome your weakness towards them.”

But outwardly she said, “How much does he want?”

“Around twelve hundred.”

“Oh my God, that much?”

Laxmi was to tell something in reply but the phone rang before that. Stretching her arm Deya lifted the handset, “Hello?”

“What's up, what happened to you? At 7.30 in the evening also one can't catch you over phone, and even at 10.30 in the morning you are not available...Did *Nabaprabhat* buy you?”

Ritam talked nonstop, deliriously.

Deya mildly scolded him, “Hey why do you bluff? When did you call me in the morning? Up to eleven fifteen I was at home.”

“I see. Didn't I call in the morning? Then perhaps I thought of doing so. Leave it...What are you doing now?”

“Just killing time. Watching TV.”

“Idiot box?”

“They are showing a good movie in cable. Titanic.”

“Oh, the hanky panky around the yacht!”

Laughter churned out from the pit of her stomach. What a naming of such film! Really only Ritam could do it.

What was the name that he gave for Jurassic Park? Oh the devil dyno is back!

He gave a strange name to Arnold Shoergenegar, the big Demon.

She replied while laughing, "Yes exactly. What's happening at home?"

"Home front is silent like a graveyard. Peace prevails."

"Have you abandoned story writing and started with poetry? Do you tend to speak in rhyme?"

"You don't read even poetry, do you?"

"Why?"

"Had you read, you would have known that those rhymes had been discarded from the eighteenth century. Now the rhymes are strict prose."

"Okay understood. What's new with Shrabani? How is the little one?"

"Why do you hurl so many questions at a time? There is nothing to tell about anybody."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean they are fine, as usual. Tuski is growing, Shrabani is shrinking and *ma* is in the same state.

"What a mean way of talking! By the way what is your urgent matter?"

"Financial. How much does your paper pay for a story to be published?"

"Is your story going to appear in *Nabaprabhat*?"

"Don't you take any interest in literature? It is such a big literary event. Ritam Sengupata's writing is going to be published..."

"Tell me, how I will come to know about Sunday's page. It is completely in a different room. When is it coming out?"

"This Sunday or next Sunday. It has already been composed. I have information."

"Do you often visit our office? But you don't meet me."

"I went only once. To submit the story. Two months ago. You weren't there that day. Don't speak rubbish. Come to the point. How much will they pay?"

"Can't say. May be three or four hundred. I have heard that they generally pay this much."

"Only this much? Don't they pay even a four figure amount?" Ritam sounded disheartened. "Yours Mallik fellow is a big miser, I must say."

"Not miser, frugal. You people will cook story and expect him to squander money after you? Being a new newspaper they pay enough." Deya wanted to make fun of him.

“Tell, tell, it’s your time. Let me get the Nobel. Then you will come to know whom you are teasing.”

“Are you only running after literature? What about of your job?”

“I have it till now. At least till today.”

“Come one day. It’s a long time since you came.”

“I will. Now I have become a bit free. In between I was undergoing so much of trouble!”

“Trouble?”

“Don’t ask me. There was a big trouble. The daughter of maidservant, Kanan, who works in my elder aunt’s place, was missing suddenly. Kanan fell down at my aunt’s feet, ‘Please search my daughter’. Why does my aunt think that only I can handle all the odd jobs of the world? So get that fellow.”

“Didn’t you inform the police?”

“Everything was done...police station, police, hospital, morgue, grave yard... Like a detective I searched her. With whom she had friendship or if she had any illicit relationship. I heard a rumor and ran to Deegha. Again I received another information and landed in Burdwan. The sixteen-year-old girl has put me in lot of trouble.”

“Then? Could you find her?”

“She came back herself. To be exact, she had escaped.”

“From where?”

“That is a filthy place. Some red-light area in Mumbai. Perhaps Forkland Road. The hero promised to keep the girl in his heart like Karishma and took her across the Arab sea. And then threw the girl in that gutter.”

“Could you catch the man?”

“Are you crazy? He had fled long back. How the girl came back is another thrilling story. Your *Nabaprabhat* will just grab it.”

“Are you serious?” Deya was moved a bit. “Can we make a story of it?”

“Will you make?”

“It can be easily done if the material is available. Such a story... The life of a girl got ruined....If the matter is written in a proper way the police will be forced to search for the hero.”

“Hmm. It will be really good if the fellow can be caught. The fellow is a real scoundrel.”

Ritam put down the receiver after discussing a few trivial matters. Keeping the handset on her lap Deya started thinking. One must write, it should be written. She has to talk to Ranenda directly. Should she tell Ranenda or the news editor, Tirthankarda.

The flow of her thought got torn. It was the calling bell.

Soumya had returned.

2

In the scorching heat of the noon Ritam got down from the bus. Even a busy road like Prince Anwar Shah Road was entirely vacant. Having found some shade even the street dogs were dozing. The tar of the road melted, the slippers were getting stuck. A private bus emitted smoke profusely and poisoned the already heated air. The ground out there was swaying like a desert. No, not like a desert but a mirage. His eyes got blazed. Standing still for a while Ritam looked at the sway. He likes the summer very much. Especially the lonely noons. A feeling of loneliness clouded his mind; the brain became very light. So many condensed pains revolved round his heart.

Forget it! What pain? Ritam is very happy now. Ritam ran to cross the road. From today he is again a free bird. He took out the cigarette packet from his pocket. There were only three left. Should he light one? Then only two would be left. That means there is every possibility of getting it over. Problem, real problem. Kalida would not open the shop before five. So if he intended to buy he would have to rush to Naveena cinema hall. But when the desire is strong and vigorous desire one can be lighted. The little desires of the heart should not be suppressed without any reason. Ritam smiled to himself, 'Smoke, smoke to your heart's content.' Again the days of rationing cigarettes are knocking at the doors. How is it to shift to *bidi* now? He needs to smoke while writing.

Puffing the cigarette Ritam entered his locality in a pleasant mood. The cigarette was not yet over when he reached the doorstep of his house. He didn't feel like throwing it. This is not time to waste. Carefully extinguishing it he kept the half-burnt cigarette in his pocket.

At the advent of her son in an odd time Atasi got shocked as if she had seen some ghost, "What happened? You? Now?"

"I just came." Ritam shrugged.

"Isn't your health okay?"

"Do you think so looking at me?" He carefully evaded his mother and entered the room quickly.

Atasi too followed her son, "Is office duty over today?"

"What's the sad occasion to be so? The office runs as usual."

The cloud of doubt in Atasi's eyes condensed. Such airs of Ritam are not unfamiliar to Atasi. Indistinctly she asked, "Did you leave this job too?" "Yes, I quit."

"Woe is me!"

"Why? What happened?"

Without changing his clothes Ritam lied down on the bed stretching his hand and feet. Twisting his body he said, "*Ma*, I was unable to adjust."

Atasi stood for sometime as if thunderstruck, the way she does every time. The next moment she rudely snubbed, "No wonder that you can't adjust to any job."

"Really *ma*, the job was not good. So many currents and cross currents..."

"Tell me which is a good job according to you? Now should I appoint you as the governor or the president?"

"Please *ma*, don't give me that job. My life will be a hell in all kind of protocols."

"What are you made of? Tell me." Atasi almost was in tears. She sat on the corner of the bed of her son and daughter-in-law with a thud. The eight-month-year old Tuski was sleeping on bed. She shifted her granddaughter a bit along with the oilcloth. She wiped her eyes with the corner of her *anchal*, "How will I show my face to Ambar? Even Runu will feel very bad."

“Then don’t show your face,” quick reply from Ritam. “When *didi* and *jamaibabu* will turn up, hide yourself under the bed or behind the cupboard. I will tell them that *ma* is not at home.”

“You wretch, I’ll give you a tight slap. Are you shameless? You are married and have a baby too...”

“I am really surprised. Is getting married a shameful act? Only human beings get married. You also did. And everybody knows that after marriage one gets a baby, unless one among the husband and the wife is found to be unfit to produce a child.”

“Hey just shut up, no witty remark”. Atasi slapped tightly on the dancing knees of Ritam with anger, “Don’t you feel sad even after seeing the little flower-like baby.”

“Sad and that too looking at Tuski? I feel overwhelmed with joy looking at her”. Just saying this Ritam turned towards his daughter. He stooped and rubbed his nose gently against his daughter’s. He tickled her cheeks with his fingers, “*Suntu Muntu Runtu Tuntu... Tuski Fuski Khuski Rushki*. Darling why are you sleeping still now? It’s four. Get up. After eating won’t you go out with your grandma?

“Hey, don’t wake her up. With a lot of trouble I put her sleep. Now if her sleep is ruined she will go on whining.”

“Then leave now. Let me enjoy properly the happiness of quitting the job at least for ten minutes. Otherwise I will really wake her up. Then she will play the clarinet with the *po po* sound next to your ears.”

Atasi was silent. She pulled down her face. Ritam smiled within and pretended to close his eyes. From the corner of his eyes he could see whether Atasi got up or not. No, is *ma* the person to move so easily! Now he has to bear with the sighs that will spring out from the bosom of her heart. *Fonch fonch, fonsh fonsh, fyatch fyatch....!* Is this his fault to return home directly? Perhaps it would have been better if he had returned home after completing his tuition after evening and could have announced the news at the dining table dramatically. Then the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law would have sat face to face and none of the two could get the real chance to attack him in front of each other! Ritam covered his eyes crossing his hands. Ambarda was the actual culprit. Why is he firmly determined to spare no pains to demean Ritam? It’s like a game! Competition! Just

to see who ultimately loses the game! To see whether the son-in-law could arrange more jobs or the brother-in-law could quit more! O God! What connections he has! He made him join many places. He joined the sales section in not less than three companies. He had to lie so much about the products that even after coming back home the tongue remained numb. Then he was in the accounts section of a cosmetic company. Ritam never did the work of calculation in his whole life. He has never been a student of commerce but was unfortunate to prepare balance sheets in spite of being an M.A. in Political Science. ‘Keep it up, stick to it, you will definitely learn!’ Of course in six months he learnt good lessons. There were too much of manipulation in the accounts. His palms were hardened in preparing the false vouchers. Whenever he looked into the mirror he could see the face of a sinner in him. What else is left if one’s gets stained? Then Amabarda pushed him to his friend’s farm. ‘You need not do anything, just give company to Shyamal.’ Oh God! That company itself was so dangerous! The whole day he had to run to the sales tax, income tax and excise offices. In the morning he has to go the *tension villa*, while *trouble villa* awaits in the evening. How softly and sweetly he had to talk to those fat crooks. Shame! He was very fortunate that there was no need to resign from there. Shyamal Majumder’s business was at a low ebb. His elder sister could not taunt him at least regarding quitting this job. With pain in heart she again played Ambarda against him. And the result was the punishment of being the store manager. He had to take out two kilograms of grease, count six bolts, keep record of each item from a pin to rearing, and what not. From the back door loads of things were getting misplaced but outwardly everything looked just perfect. Even after seeing that one can not speak, one has to just sit blindfold. How much can one tolerate?

While thinking these things Ritam could sense that Atasi’s vocal cords got back to form again, “Ambar told, ‘Ma, this time Babua has secured job in a big farm. If he can stick to this he will progress fast. But it’s my bad luck.’”

Depression was very prominent in Atasi’s tone. Ritam felt little bad for her. Why *ma* is so simple? Why *ma* can not understand that Ritam lacks all those traits that help one to progress speedily in today’s market.

Closing his eyes Ritam told, “Why does Ambarda do so much? All the people from politics have no sense of limit. Ask him to stop at least now.”

“Do I sit idle? Don’t I do anything?”

“He does because he loves you. He does as he feels bad to see you jobless.”

“What do you do? You just sit idle and go on writing some nonsense and work for others without remuneration.” Atasi heaved a kilometer long sigh, “It’s only me who is in all the trouble. It is nothing but my bad luck. I had so many dreams in life. Have any of them come true? That man happily left for the ultimate abode. Only I am left to endure all the sufferings in this world. When my husband had left I thought what is in my hand. At least my son is there. What the son is giving his poor mother in return? When will death favor me?”

Very raw dialogues. It was just the result of gulping the Bengali TV serials in TV sitting idle in the entire afternoon. Even to reply to these regressions, drenched in tears, would be a useless effort. Without making the least noise Ritam pretended to sleep.

Atasi was not a person to give up. She was pushing her son, “What happened? Why are you silent? Why did you quit the job? What is your problem?”

“You can not understand that.”

“I hope your wife will understand. Let Sharavani return from college. She will teach you a lesson. The poor wife will do all the hard work to earn money and feed us and the man will simply lie down and dance his feet.”

“So what’s wrong in that *ma*?” Ritam opened his eyes. With a cheerful smile he said, “Time has changed. Always men will earn and feed and women will simply sit idle and wag their tails. No way.”

“Tell this to your wife.”

“We have already settled that agreement.”

“Great! What a mode of talking! My heart is chilled with fear thinking what trouble Shrabani will create once she comes back.”

Now the real cat has come out of the wallet. Surpassing regret, sadness and despondency it is actually the sense of terror, which is reining Atasi’s mind. She was feeling sad but all of it was not for quitting his job. Actually the mother was overcome by the grief apprehending how Shrabani would grind and crush her dearest Babua after returning from college.

Poor *ma*. She suffered from so much of insecurity. Earlier *ma* had a better personality. She had coped with many unfavorable tides of the family with a smiling face. Actually the sudden demise of the father has turned the mother to that, somewhat bent and coward type. It is really surprising that this *ma* once strongly had fought with the elder and younger brothers of *baba* regarding the division of property. She did not let *baba* become weak when it came to the question of demanding his due portion. To say the truth *baba* was more of helpless nature. He could not forcefully establish his views; whether it was at home or at office, he did not have the power to shout and proclaim his desires. Even *baba* was helpless when he met his death. He went to Bhubaneswar for official work. And he collapsed by sudden heart attack at midnight. In the morning, breaking the door, people discovered that he was lying dead. Struggling with the pain of cardiac arrest perhaps he tried to open the door or call someone but could not. The healthy and strong man had gone out of the house with smile. Can anyone easily accept his sudden demise? At least the family members? Ritam was then in the second year of his graduation and his elder sister's marriage was just finalized. Ritam felt as if the sky over his head suddenly had disappeared and his elder sister was under depression for long. But they too came out of the grief. Only *ma* could not. It was not that *ma* was in dire need of money. A good amount was drawn from *baba*'s office. Even *baba* had life insurance and things of that sort. After collecting the amount there was never a situation to starve. There was no problem in continuing Ritam's studies; even the elder sister's marriage was performed smoothly. Only the superfluities were cut down. Yet the feeling of the ground slipping under her feet did not die in *ma* in any way.

But presently *ma* is suffering from another type of distress. Her son is not earning much and the family is run by the income of her daughter-in-law. And for this *ma* is cowered with fear. But why is it so? Does *ma* feel that with her son, earning more, her position, as the head of the family, will be secured more? Does *ma* think like that? But there is no reason to think so. Shrabani sometime tries to put her views in practice but she does not have any intention to take away *ma*'s position. However, in some matters she loves to depend on her mother-in-law. Ritam knows that.

Atasi was sitting with a dull face. Ritam just turned over and gently stroked her cheek, “Why are you so tensed? Let me deal with Shrabani regarding this. I shall face the music. You just see...”

“What?” Atasi blew her nose.

“You just don’t play the same tune with Shrabani. Please go and supply some fuel to me.”

“Tea?”

“Please. One cup, strong.”

Piercing Ritam with a very disheartened look Atasi got up. Ritam too got up immediately. With the matchbox and cigarette in hand he came slowly to the window. The rooms of this house built at the time of his grandfather were quite big. Even the size of the windows and doors were not very small. Hope the lungs of Tuski would not be affected if he would smoke standing near the window! This is too prohibited when Shrabani is at home. Smoking in this room is strictly prohibited.

Lighting the half burnt cigarette Ritam threw the matchstick outside the window, in the garden behind. Though it is called a garden it is actually a bush full of weeds. In a house of four co-sharers the upper floor is for his uncles and the ground floor is for Ritam’s family. One portion of the ground floor is for his two aunts. But their portion remains closed throughout the whole year. In fact the aunts did not demand as such. Though *kaku* slightly had objected *baba* and *jethu* forcefully gave that portion to their sisters. The garden is a joint property, so nobody has much obligation to look after it. Still in a thickly populated area of South Kolkata there is some greenery and this is enough. But the windows facing this side must be closed before evening. Otherwise the mosquitoes from the bushes and the weeds attack vigorously.

A bird was singing in the garden. A strange sound. *Pik pik piiiik*. Releasing the smoke Ritam looked for the bird in the garden. It couldn’t be seen. While returning home a plot of a good story had struck his head. What was that? What was that? Like the bird it was playing the hide and seek game in the forest of his brain. As of now it is difficult to find it.

Tea was ready and Shrabani had returned by the time he finished the cigarette. Seeing Ritam at home she was not at all surprised. She hanged her vanity bag on the side ring of the dress-stand and put on her slippers. She leant to see her daughter. Shrabani usually doesn't touch Tuski whenever she comes from outside.

Atasi was standing at door. Her eyeballs were moving from one court to another. Softly she asked, "Shrabani, would you like tea?"

"Sure. Since how long she has been sleeping?"

"Since three. In my lap she has her eyes closed but once you keep her on the bed she starts crying. I think she will get up now."

"Did she finish the Cerelac completely?"

"Almost. Around two o'clock I have given her fruit juice too. She likes the juice of *mosambi* very much." Atasi went away. Shrabani was changing her *saree*. Ritam looked sidewise. Even after child birth, Shrabani hadn't let even an ounce of fat to accumulate in her body. Soon she was back in her slim look. Presently her fair complexion after the sunburn has turned to light copper color. Shrabani's eyes, face or nose are not that sharp. Yet for her toned figure she looks quite attractive.

Clearing his throat by coughing Ritam said, "Why are you with such a long face?"

There was no answer.

"Did the principal scold you?"

Again no reply.

"Why have you kept mum?"

Yet she didn't utter a sound. Folding the *saree* she placed it on the dressing stand.

Ritam broadened his smile; "There is a news for you."

"I know." Shrabani opened her mouth.

"You can't know." Shrabani's voice was cool. "You have quit the job."

"Wow! Great! How did you come to know? By smelling?"

"*Didi* had called me up in college."

"*Didi*?" Ritam was surprised. "How did *didi* come to know?"

"From *Ambarda*."

"*Ambarda*?"

"I can't say. Perhaps your boss Mr. Debashish..."

“This is called the age of information technology. What a network! Quick phoning and the news spreads from one house to another like the speed of a current. Before giving the news to *ma* why did *didi* call Shrabani in college? Didi has the very bad habit of backbiting. She must have incited Shrabani.”

Ritam retained the smile on his face, “I see. This is the reason why you are so heated up?”

“Why should I be? You will live according to your wish. Why should I be angry?”

“Thanks. I am tension free. Now I can devote all my time to writing.”

“Hmm”.

“I really don’t enjoy the game of job again and again.”

“Hmm”.

“Before marriage I had already made an agreement with you. Hadn’t I? I will pursue literature and you will run the family...”

“Yes.”

With that the single word reply *hmm*, Shrabani went out of the room. Ritam’s eyes got cringed. Today Shrabani is very angry. No, he must please her. He must had to. Again the bird was singing in the garden. *Pik pik piiik*. Ritam quickly came to the window. No, he could not see it. Was it playing hide and seek game with Ritam? After searching it for a while Ritam went back. Changing his clothes he came directly to his room. This small room was once the storeroom of the joint family but now decked out with chair, table and rack it is being used as Ritam’s space to cultivate literature. Shrabani’s books of college were also kept there. She too used the space occasionally.

The table was disorderly. Books, papers and newspapers were piled up. After extensive search Ritam took out some written papers tied by a clip. A story was left half-finished. He loosely ran his eyes over the pages. No, no, it was not done. The structure appeared to be loose. It seemed to be too schematic. It would be fine to write again from the beginning. But would it stand if the skeleton was radically changed? Would the readers feel it to be imposed, as there was an attempt to draw a comparison between the broken table made of marble and the present face of India? Would they understand the

allegory in it? Last Sunday the organizers of the story-reading meeting of Anita Memorial Library at Belgharia had sent a letter to invite Ritam. Shubhankar, Dilip and Tamonash will also read their stories; Asit Sanyal will be the president. *Asitda* is a busy writer. These days one can not find him in any conference of story reading. He really wishes to read his story in front of *Asitda*. Okay leave it, no need to hurry. If the writing is not up to the mark Ritam does not feel like sending it anywhere, even he does not feel like reading that.

The phone was ringing in the outside room. Ritam was absentminded for a while. Was it *didi*? What if she again starts nagging? Leave it! Better not to be bothered.

Again Ritam concentrated his eyes on the story. He immersed in the writing and started sucking his pen making his lips pointed. Restlessly he ran his pen and cut down a whole paragraph. He changed some words. He was very fussy about using words. No, still nothing seems to be okay. He must re-arrange the whole thing. His hands groped for cigarette over the table. It was not there. He searched the pockets of his *kurta*. No, it was not there too. Ritam became restless. When the cigarettes are not next to his hands his thirst for it naturally increases more.

He was about to bring the packet from the next room. Shrabani was at the door. In a cold tone she said, "Your phone."

"Who?"

"Your confidante."

"Who is that?"

"She is the only one. Deya."

Ritam laughed out, "Darling, you are my confidante."

Shrabani still did not cool down. She did not melt. Roughly she said, "Deya wanted your office number. She believes that you are still in the same office!"

Ritam shrugged. Though he wanted to make witty remarks, he managed to control himself. He picked up the phone, "What's the matter princess? What's the reason for summoning me?"

"I could not really expect that you would be at home. Have you bunked your office? "

Didn't Shrabani give the good news? Strange! Then perhaps it'll be better if Ritam also

doesn't reveal the news. At least today. At this moment.

In a humorous tone Ritam said, "The efficient people need not stay at office for long. Your eight hours are equivalent to one hour for me."

"Yes, very true... Leave it and listen to me. There is something important for which I have made this call to you." Deya sounded excited, "Just now I have talked with my editor. Ranenda has agreed. He asked me to go first for an interview."

"Interview? Whom?"

"How strange! Didn't I tell you about that day before yesterday? You were talking about that girl in your aunt's home... in that red light area of Mumbai... I want to meet that girl."

Ritam stumbled. Casually he had told something and Deya took the matter seriously. Oh God what a problem! Why Ritam did not develop the habit of tying his tongue!

With much hesitation Ritam said, "Forget about it, is it a subject of making a news?"

"Strange, but the other day it was you who insisted. After hearing this even Ranenda was highly moved. He even showed a nice track. Every year so many girls go missing in Kolkata. It'll be fine if it is possible to prepare a statistics of them along with their economic condition, an account of how many of them have returned, how many of them have no trace and amongst them the girl's story. If a story is there the feature will not be uninteresting."

"But..." Ritam gulped. "Hey Deya, listen to me. Will it be right to make fuss over the issue of that girl further?"

"Why won't it be right? This is not at all an isolated case. Do you remember, after *Puja*, a big news came in our paper regarding the rescue of the three Bengali girls from Jalgaon, Maharashtra? They were also misled and forced to plunge into the business of blue films. Presently in Kolkata a big racket of smuggling girls is active. If the case of this girl can be focused the matter will be strong."

"Yet..."

"Why are you opposing so much?" Deya gave a bright smile. "Are you thinking that in the smuggling racket of those girls you will also be...?"

"No, no. Actually it's only for you that..." Ritam quickly arranged the logic, "I mean there is no such proof of the matter. Even the police was not informed anything further."

What is the proof that the girl is telling the truth now?”

“That I will find out after talking to her. It is not so easy to cheat women’s eyes. Besides, can a girl lie about her stay in a red light area?”

“Yes, you are right.” Ritam took some time. “Deya, still what is the need? What was to happen had already happened. She is a young girl. I have seen her. She is fifteen or sixteen at the most. And in such a tender age such an accident has taken place.”

“Actually such weak-minded attitude of you people is bad. It is for this reason that the vicious sharks take too much advantage. How will it be possible to unearth these people unless one does not come forward? The police should also be shaken a bit. Shouldn’t we, the people from newspaper carry out our social responsibility?”

“Perhaps the girl may have to face trouble if the news soon gains currency.”

“I will smartly write that. The name and address of that girl will not be mentioned. And if something happens further all of us will be there.” Saying this Deya’s excited voice suddenly got lowered, “Hey, Ritam please don’t change your mind. I myself told Ranenda and he also had showed interest. Now how can I tell him that the girl is out of reach? Try to understand that it has now become a matter of prestige. After this can I ever ask for any assignment? Would you now put me in an awkward situation?”

Ritam sighed. He talked to himself, “If you say like that how I can say no to you, Deya?”

“Tell me. Tomorrow, day after tomorrow or three days hence. Oh, I forgot to tell you that now I am working in the evening shift. I am free up to two in the afternoon. Can you manage one day in your office?”

A smile appeared in the corner of Ritam’s lips. Keeping his tone normal he said, “Come tomorrow at 10am. I’ll be at home.”

Putting down the telephone Ritam came back with a quite tensed face.

As soon as he sat on the chair Shrabani told, “Why are you with a long face? What did your girlfriend say?”

Ritam nodded his head in a gesture of negation.

Shrabani cast side glance towards him, “Can’t you tell me?”

In spite of his suppressed uneasiness looking at Shrabani's face, Ritam burst into laughter. All her emotions of sorrow, anger, pain vanished instantly. There was a suppressed jealousy in Shrabani's eyes. While pursuing his masters Ritam had a kind of infatuation towards his classmate, Deya. To say the truth Ritam actually fell in love with Deya. But everything was one sided. Deya did not know about it and Ritam too did not tell her anything. There was no question of expressing. Before stepping into the premises of the university Deya developed deep love for Soumya. Shrabani knew everything. She heard everything from Ritam himself. Before marriage one day Ritam told her this amusingly. After that they had started family together. Tuski came in their life. But still now Shrabani remembers this matter. Still now with the slight meeting between Ritam and Deya the Shrabani's face gets shadowed.

Crazy girl. Why does Shrabani love him madly still now?

Ritam pulled his wife towards him. He told the reason of Deya's phone call in brief. He asked, "Tell me dear, what you feel. Will this initiative be right? Deya is pressurizing me obstinately about this."

"It's your matter. Your Deya is forcing you."

"Oh! Why Deya will be mine? Mine is Shrabani. Ritam loosely encircled Shrabani's waist with his hands. Putting his mouth on Shrabani's smooth naval point he softly told, '*Shrabani, Tuntuni, Jhunjhuni, Sonamani.*'"

"Hey leave. It's tickling."

"I will not leave. First kiss me."

"What is this? Tuski has woken up. I have to feed her milk." Shrabani ran her fingers through Ritam's head "Leave me please."

"*Umm umm..*"

"*Ma* will call me right now."

"Let her come."

"Tuski will cry."

"Let her cry. *Ma* will see Tuski."

The bird was again singing in the garden. *Pik pik piik*. The afternoon was turning magical. He was getting a smell. Wild. From Shrabani's body."

3

There were pigeonhole like houses around a huge mud courtyard. They were brick-built houses but the roofs were made of tiles. Half-naked children shouted in the courtyard; buckets, pitchers and water-pots were lined up at the corporation tap where water came only at a particular time. The place emitted a foul odor. It could not be called exactly a slum but semi-slum. It could be considered that a common courtyard for thirty six houses. Deya noticed that there were TV antennas over the roofs of quite a few houses, even cable cords entered few places. Though dirty and torn, there were curtains hanging at the doors of many houses. Coming in front of the partly opened door Ritam called out, “Shewli?”

There was no response.

Ritam cleared his throat through coughing, “Shewli...Are you at home?”

Couple of faces peeped from the neighboring houses. Especially that of women. A bare bodied man with a checked *lungi* came out scratching his under arm and stood behind him. Frowning, he inspected Deya and Ritam.

Deya whispered, “Is there no one at home dear?”

The man with the checkered *lungi* heard that. In an indifferent tone he said, “Call her loudly. She is inside.”

But Ritam did not need to call her again. Somebody slightly opened the door, which was kept ajar. “Who is it?”

“Kanandi, it’s me. What are you doing?”

After long she gave audience. There was surprise in the eyes of the prematurely aged Kanan’s face, who was slim, clear complexioned and wore green colored cotton *saree*.

“What a surprise! Babuada, is it you? How did you suddenly come here? Now?”

“I have some urgent work. Didn’t you go out for work today?”

“Why? I have already finished work at your aunt’s house. There is no energy in the body. So I was lying down.” Kanan gave a side-glance to Deya. She moved from the entrance giving them way, “Come. Come inside.”

Deya entered the hut following Ritam. Yes, it was really a hut. It would be probably a little larger than Deya's kitchen. The furniture in the room included a bedstead with a thin mattress; a dress stand made of mango-wood with clothes piled untidily and two almost blackish trunks. Amongst all these on one side of it was arrangement for cooking and eating. There were pots for cooking food, frying pan, spud, dishes, glasses and kerosene stove. Moreover in one side there was a seat for God. On the faded wall were a calendar with a photograph of the goddess Kali and the Bengali words for live happily were colorfully embroidered.

A lot of new blouses were scattered on the bedstead. Beside that were a scissor, thread and a casket full of hooks. And wearing a printed nighty, there was timid Shewli, with huge dark circles under her eyes. The girl was fixing hooks on a blouse. She got up in a hurry.

Ritam smiled, "Why have you got up? Sit down. What are you doing? Stitching?"

Kanan replied on behalf of her daughter, "Actually I used to do that. Now I have handed over to her. I do the hem and fix hooks."

"Good, very good. How much do you get from a single blouse?"

"One rupee to one rupee twenty five paisa. If it is a georgette blouse I take one rupee fifty paisa."

"From where do you get the work?"

"There is a shop in Sealdah."

"To get it do you go all the way from Belegkata to Sealdah?"

Kanan did not give a straightforward reply. She gave a dry smile. "Dada, it's all for the stomach. I cook in your aunt's house twice a day and in another house once. I get around nine hundred and fifty. The rent of this house is one hundred and eighty."

"Hmm, problem." Ritam nodded, "Even the kerosene oil is eighteen rupees per liter."

Would Ritam talk rubbish everywhere? It was already quarter to twelve. Deya would have to go to office from here. Deya was getting impatient. In a low voice she said, "Come to the point. I am getting late."

"Oh yes." Ritam showed all his teeth. "I did not introduce my friend till now. She is Deya. A very nice girl. She wants to talk to Shewli."

Quickly like a mother bird Kanan became alert. In a careful tone she said, “Talk to Shewli? Why?”

“Just like that.” Deya quickly spoke out, “Actually I have heard a lot about you from Ritam, I mean from your Babua.”

“She is right Kanandi. Deya works in a newspaper office. They have immense power. If she says the police will.... that man...what was his name? Yes Shyam. They will dig out that Shyam fellow from underground.”

Kanan’s face turned pale. Her voice became dull, “Babuada what will be the outcome of all these things now? My daughter has succumbed to utter ruin which she was destined to.”

“So for this will you let that man go free? Don’t you want him punished?”

“*Didi*, what is the use? Even if the scoundrel is forced to put to suffer rigorous imprisonment, my daughter’s former state can’t be restored.”

“Who said that she would not get back to her earlier state? Today there are so many rehabilitation centers and homes. There she can learn to make handicrafts. They will help your daughter to *stand on her own feet*. If she wants she can pursue her studies too. The lives of so many girls are taking a new direction.”

Kanan looked with suspect, “Will they accept my daughter?”

“Why won’t they accept? We are there, we will arrange.”

Shewli was still standing curled up. Kanan looked at Shewli once and the next moment looked at Deya. Then she said. “*Didi*, why are you standing? Please take seat.”

Ritam said, “Deya, sit down. You carry on with your conversation. I will wait in the junction. How much time will you take?”

“Not much. I think twenty to twenty five minutes.”

Kanan was stretching the ragged bed sheet over the mattress. She kept the blouses, scissor and threads aside. After Ritam’s departure Deya took her place. After sitting she felt a bit relieved. Still she was feeling very hot. In this scorching heat how could these poor people survive?

Perhaps Kanan could read Deya’s mind. She told Shewli, “Why don’t you fan *didi* with the hand fan?”

“No, no, I don’t need anything.” Deya pulled Shewli’s hand towards her. “Come dear. Sit by me.”

It seemed that Shewli became a little comfortable. She sat by Deya lowering her head. The girl was really quite young. She had a very tender face. Her body was yet to bloom into youth. Those who had dragged this little girl in this dirty business misleading her were heartless fellows.

Kanan sat on the floor folding her knees. There was a small window on the backside of the hut. On the other side the sun was blazing with its scorching heat. But only that heat, and not the light, was entering the room. In that dull light Kanan seemed gloomier. Did Kanan suffer from anemia? Why was her complexion so pale?

To boost both mother and daughter Deya suddenly repeated some clichéd lines, “Listen, don’t think at all about whatever has happened. It is not easy to make one’s body impure. The body is never unholy unless the mind becomes impure.”

God knew what Kanan had understood but she wiped her eyes with the corner of her *saree*. She said, “*Didi*, you people are so educated and from a good family. By the way we are also Brahmins by caste. My village is in Fulia. My father was a priest. We were poor, very poor. He couldn’t afford to educate us for long. Yet my two elder sisters studied up to class eight and I studied up to class six. Expecting a son my father got seven daughters. I was the sixth one. So in getting us married our father.... My in-laws are Chakraborties.

Ritam was not wrong. Deya easily understood that Kanan was from a lower middle class family by the style of her talking. She was bored listening to Kanan’s story. But it was good to record it. It would bring color to the story.

Kanan was continuing in the same tone, “Shewli’s father was a school pass-out. He used to sell incense sticks in trains collecting them from a factory situated in that *Avinash Mittir* road. He was run over by a train in Durganagar when my daughter was six years old. The railway company didn’t give a single paisa as compensation. None of my husband’s brother gave me shelter. From then I had brought that girl up with my own. I wished to educate and make her stand on her feet. Kanan suddenly burst into tears, “*Didi*,

how will I come to know that the girl who was born to push her father to death had been lying to me in the name of going to school and was absolutely dull in studies and had illicit love affair with bad people! Even cinematically they exchanged garlands in the temple of Kaalighat too! I feel like putting fire on her face. I was also young once. Even I could go astray. Did I go? That wretch has brought disgrace to our family.

Shewli looked down. Deya patted on Shewli's face, "Ah, why are you saying like that? Did she know that there were so many plans being cooked in his stomach? Isn't it Shewli, tell me."

Shewli lifted her face. There was gratitude in her eyes. She nodded her head. "Tell me from the beginning what exactly had happened." Deya took out the small tape recorder from her vanity bag.

Right at the moment the expressions of Kanan's face changed, "*Didi* why is this?"

"Don't you think that I should tell the people what horrible torture Shewli had gone through? Let Shewli tell her story herself."

"But *didi* the neighbors know something else. I told them that the man took her with a promise to marry but eloped leaving her. Babuada has done so many things for me. So only they...."

"Why are you unnecessarily scared? Your daughter's name will not come out in the paper. Your name will not appear either. Do I look having intention of creating troubles for you?"

"Yet *didi*.... Now it's one kind of scandal but then..."

"I am telling that nothing will happen. I am there." Deya turned towards Shewli. "Shewli, won't you open up and tell me everything? How did it happen and how did the man abduct you to the place?"

Kanan had a strong hesitation in her face. But Shewli got confidence. In a clear tone she told, "Yes, I will."

On the second day of the evening shift it was eleven at night when she came back home. Quite a lot of important news reached in the beginning of the evening. The militants in Kashmir forced twenty-two to death and the radio station was bombed. The

income tax department raided the houses of seven reputed film producers at the same time in Mumbai. The renowned *sarod* player Rahim Khan breathed his last in a hospital in Agra. The lay out had to be changed. The two pages were being arranged nicely. Two employees were absent during night shift. Facing a lot of problem Deya herself had to finish all those works. It seemed as if whenever there are less people they are always flooded with news. The office van dropped her home. Deya was still not tired. The excitement of the work still kept her spirits fresh. From below she could see Laxmi standing on the dark balcony.

Laxmi sounded like a guardian. "Are you aware how late it is at night?"

Deya shrugged, "It's just the beginning. Hereafter it can get all the more late. Has your *dada* had his meal?"

"Is *dada* like you? He always takes food in time."

While going to bed Deya smiled pressing her lips. It was the trend of Soumya's house to sit for dinner right at nine thirty keeping a sharp eye on the clock. Even after marriage Soumya could not change the habit created by his mother. Right after coming home, changing the dress he would sit in the dining table. In the beginning Deya used to face a lot of problems as in her house they used to eating quite late. Now she had somewhat adapted. If both of them were at home there was no exception of the rule. Was this change of the girls called marriage?

Today it rained in the afternoon. After a stretch of hot days the city seemed to be relieved. Perhaps today was the last *kalbaishakhi* of the year. Stars glittered in the sky. Still there was the remnant of the storm. The temperature had lowered down quite a bit.

Deya did not take a bath. It was cool in the office but outside the atmosphere was hot. She got little cold due to all these. Changing her dress she sprinkled some water on her hand and face. Laxmi arranged the food on the table. Before sitting for dinner she peeped in the next room. Deya hadn't kept her bedroom clumsy but this room was stuffed with furniture. There were two cupboards, an ironing table, a divan, three short chairs, a bookcase and a computer. In the divan clothes were lying piled up. There was a heap of books and magazines on the top of the bookcase.

Soumya was sitting in front of the computer. He could feel Deya's presence. Turning his head, he said, "How come so late today?"

"Today I was rubbed badly. Rahim Khan troubled a lot."

"Who is that Rahim Khan?"

"Ustad Rahim Khan."

"Which Ustad you are talking about?"

"Strange! Haven't you heard the name of the *Sarod* maestro Rahim Khan? He is from the Indore *gharana*."

"I see, *piring piring*"

"We got the news late in the evening that Rahim Khan had breathed his last. And that was it. So there was no escape from interviewing one after the other. If one was available, the other was not. Yet I got hold of four, *Pundit* Bimalendu Bhattacharya, Ustad Nisar Ali, Bishnu Bandopadhyay, Harikishan Shashtri. And Bishnu Bandopadhyay, who does not usually stops quickly after he starts. He went on narrating thousands of stories and thousands of anecdotes from concerts. Then those things were to be arranged properly and composed. The mourning messages of the president, prime minister and the chief minister were to be summarized. Tirthankarda is addicted to classical music. He himself wrote the obituary, quite long, 60-cm. There was new make up for the third page. The main news should appear in the front page. Everything, I did. Read it and see."

"It seems you are very happy. Then why are you saying that they have rubbed you?"

Deya grinned.

"Go and quickly have your dinner. Laxmidevi is dozing."

Ignoring the frowns of Laxmi Deya got up quickly and gulped two *rotis*. Again she came back to Soumya. Soumya was still deeply immersed in the computer. In the chat mode he was continuing his mechanical conversation with someone. Soumya was a software engineer. His profession demands to sit in front of the computer throughout the day. He would cure himself of headaches that he got in the office by sitting in front of the system at home. He searches for mutual friends in the computer. Soumya could easily set up mechanical-friendships with the unknown strangers. For Soumya it was a kind of game. Deya also sometimes indulges in this game but it doesn't appeal to her. Could

anyone make friends with the alphabets that pop on the gray screen?

Deya asked, "Will you not come to bed?"

Soumya yawned, "I just got up. You too are very tired."

"No. Once you get up I will sit in front of the computer."

"Now?"

"Yes sir. I have some work."

"Are you going to open your e-mail?"

"No sir. Office work."

"The level of enthusiasm has increased, I suppose! Now again you will sit for work?"

"Can you guess what work it is?" Deya had a mysterious smile on her face. "Tell me. Guess. Guess." Deya spoke out without waiting, "Today I went to interview the girl Ritam told about."

"Oh really? Then today you people had an expedition. Did you actually succeed?"

"It wasn't easy to get her open her mouth. I had to tempt her a lot to convince.... Wait. One second." Running Deya brought out the tape recorder from her vanity bag. "Just listen what a pathetic case it is!"

"Please, not today." Soumya got up switching off the monitor. Bending his tall and handsome body he touched his lips against Deya's cheeks, "It's time to bed, honey."

"Oh no. Till now you were nicely continuing with your chat. When it's my work you always... Deya pouted, "Please sit for a while. Tomorrow is Sunday. You will anyway sleep for long."

"Let's talk lying on the bed."

"Yeah, you will snore in a minute! Why are you doing like that? Please listen. You can't imagine how dangerous the man is. He moved forward with a solid plan. He met the girl in a cinema hall at Belegkata. He gave her cold drinks and took her to a restaurant. He told her that he worked in Mumbai and had come to Kolkata for two months. He also let her know that his parents had arranged his marriage but he did not like that girl and he could not live without Shewli. After marrying Shewli he would take her to Mumbai. He forbade her to let her mother know anything, otherwise she might enquire. And the girl was out and out a fool who melted like anything being mesmerized

by the flute of Shyam! His name also was in keeping with his nature... Shyam! He was number one in cheating in the name of love. Then one day at an auspicious moment marrying her with the holy vermilion he eloped. First he took her to Dharavi. That was a very shabby place. It seemed that it was an endless slum. There along with her he stayed with a family for seven days. The aunt of that family was the king- pin. One day Shyam went out saying that he was going for work and then he was without any trace. Obviously the girl got very upset and cried a lot. And then that aunt ended up in taking her straight to the brothel lying that she would take her to the house of Shyam's aunt. According to the girl, she initially didn't agree to do this kind of work. And they literally whipped her. She still has those scars, which she showed me. Then they pushed all kinds of lecherous people in her room. In a single night two, three, four, five...the girl could not move, yet... You can say that it was a continuous rape. She stayed there for around two weeks. A Nepali girl helped her to escape from that place. Perhaps she had pity on her. She might have thought that if it continued one day she would be found dead. In fact, while she was there it seemed another girl died. A girl of her age. It seemed that when they came to know that she had run away two men chased her all the way to the station. As if they smelt her all along the way.... The don and mafias of Mumbai. What a network! The girl hid herself in the bathroom of a train for a long time. Imagine what a traumatic experience it is!

Till now Soumya listened to the long description, without making the least noise or asking a single question. After a long time he nodded, "Hmm. It is highly pathetic. Great tragedy."

"Would you like to listen to it from the girl's mouth? Would you?"

Deya was about to turn to the tape but Soumya stretching his arm stopped her, "Tell me, what new I will listen to? You have just created a remake of the whole episode."

"No, I mean the way the girl wept while telling that."

"Will you make me listen to sobs in the midnight? Leave it and listen to something useful." Turning the small chair and embracing its back Soumya sat. Stretching his two legs more on the two sides he said, "Today Indrajeetbabu called me in the office."

"Why?" Deya was immersed in the story of Shewli. The question came out of her mouth unconsciously as she was absent minded.

“Do you remember last month while taking the rent he was telling that perhaps his elder brother would not return to the country? It seems his elder brother will ultimately sell the flat.”

Deya now came back to her family affairs. Nodding her head she said, “Yes, that’s what he said.”

“Today he revealed what’s actually there in his mind. He was asking if we are interested. He is giving us first preference. If we don’t take he will see any other party.”

“What kind of price does he want?”

“He was asking seven lacs. For us he can cut it down up to 6.5.”

“Total eight hundred and how much square feet?”

“Eight hundred and ten. Per square feet it will come up to eight hundred rupees.”

“On the whole the price is reasonable. Prices are higher in this locality.”

“Will the second hand flat cost like the rate of the new one? No depreciation?”

“But it looks like the new. We can buy. I suppose, we can buy it. It is such a beautiful compact apartment with the lake adjacent to it.”

“Don’t call it lake. It was a pond and when its banks were constructed by cement the pond turned to a lake?”

“Ok okay dear let it remain a pond. At least the wind blows. I think, you will get loan from the office and there is bank too.”

Now Soumya simpered, “I let him know the decision.”

“Are you going to take? Will you?”

“No. Soumya Sinha Roy doesn’t believe in second hand. Car, home, wife, gadget computer, whatever come to my possession has to be virgin.”

“What?” Deya cast angry glances on him, “Am I your possession?”

“It was just to give an example.”

“How do you come to know if your wife was a virgin when you married her?”

“Are you joking?” Soumya did not pay to attention to Deya’s false anger. In an emotionless tone he said, “I don’t want to buy a second-hand car and hence still riding the two-wheeler. And regarding the house I have to have a long term thought. If I buy a house of eight hundred square feet today, I may feel tomorrow that it is small. No...I have to keep in mind two things? I will buy a flat once in life. A flat cannot be extended

or cut to small. So thousand square feet plus should be minimum. My target is fourteen hundred. There will be three rooms, living hall, at least three bath tubs among which two will be attached, kitchen, balcony etc.

And that will be in Kolkata proper. In the South itself.”

“Oh my God. But it will be very costly. It will be minimum fifteen to sixteen lacs.”

“It can be more than that. But I will buy.” Soumya stood up. “I have fixed a deadline for everything. Next year I will buy the car. It will be on two year installment. In the beginning of the third year I will buy a house. I will complete the payment exactly in ten years. When I will be forty-five I will be a free person without any debt. Like our fathers I don’t have to take middle age worries.”

Really calculative. Or faesighted? How far could Soumya see? Up to his old age?

Soumya was yawning like a mini sized hippopotamus. Though he was about to go out of the room he stood in front of the door. With half-closed eyes loaded with dreams he said, “Don’t get nervous. My words are my vows! No earthly force can change my schedule. It’s a matter of will power, honey.”

Yes, Soumya had that will power. Deya knew it to the bone. Sometimes this force was equivalent to obstinacy. What an obstinate boy! The fact that Deya and Soumya have set up a separate home after marriage has been driven by Soumya’s obstinacy. “When *ma* is unable to accept our marriage, I will not keep any relation with *ma*!” Strange, was it called breaking the relationship? It was almost three years but he never uttered his mother’s name.

Not even once.

But to say the truth Soumy’s mother was no less than him. As Soumya did not marry the girl of her choice, would she disown her son completely? It seemed she does not utter Soumya’s name even by mistake! After marriage Deya herself took initiative to bridge the gap between Soumya and Supriya. Keeping anger and self-prestige in abeyance once or twice she went to the Fern Road house. Supriya did not misbehave with her but with the cold welcome she made Deya understand that her stepping in the house was highly disliked. Was Soumya this much happy with Deya’s effort? His intentions

were clear. In the battle between the mother and the son the interference of a third party was highly unwelcome.

Poor Soumya's father! In the battle between the elephant and the tortoise he was a helpless spectator. Debabrata was a genuinely good man. He also loved Deya very much. He used to regularly visit his son's family but avoided that topic carefully. What a strange matter! Deya failed to understand. It seemed that once Soumya was an ultimate mamma's boy and his mother too couldn't bear not seeing him for a moment. Willpower is in Soumya's blood.

Turning on the tape Deya started working. She was listening for a while, thinking for some time and writing on the computer slowly. Oh! The little girl had undergone such a bestial torture. There should not be any more delay. In the coming week before the day-off she would handover the writing to Ranenda. The feature was of thousand words; it would be long. The girl was really a fool. While staying in Dharavi could she not guess anything about that aunt? If she could escape then she would have been able to avoid the ugly world of the Forkland Road. Perhaps the news would not come in the first page. It might have appeared in the third or the sixth page. Third page would be better. Leave it, in whichever page it appeared if the writing was strong there must be some reaction. While describing what an abhorrence came up on the face and eyes of Shewli! A hatred for human beings. A hatred for love. How would that girl survive with so much of hatred?

Deya could somehow manage to arrange Shewli's words. From tomorrow she would have to start her expedition of collecting information. Malayda regularly used to visit Lalbazar for news. He said that he would take her to the missing persons' squad. But what about that police stations? Would it be possible to go to all the police stations? Then what was the use of the telephones? But she must have to go to the police station in the area where Shewli lived. It would be necessary to know how far they had proceeded in the missing investigation of Shewli. Tomorrow she would have to get hold of the old *Nabaprabhat*. She would need the news from Jalgaon.

Turning off the computer Deya entered the bedroom. Her sleep had vanished. Her heart was heavy. Deya slowly came to the balcony. She was filling her chest with the air. The road was quiet at the dead of the night. There was no moon in the sky. The shores of the nearby lake was almost dark. Just in front of that was the silent streetlight. Deya was looking at the light. Deya could see the darkness too.

4

Ritam peeped into the small wooden room through the swing door.

Balaram Ghosh was reading something carefully. Was it a manuscript?

Ritam coughed intentionally to draw the attention, "May I come in?"

Balaram lifted his face, "Oh, Ritambabu? What's up?"

"Just carrying on. Are you very busy?"

"Just a little. Sit down please. Anil, ask someone to get two cups of tea inside." Raising his voice Balaram threw his order and leant against the back of the old chair, which was wrapped in a towel. "Then? How is your writing going on?"

"Just routine. Sometimes it staggers and sometimes gallops!"

"Well said. Staggers! Gallops!" Balaram's tongue played with the words. Stopping his dot pen, with a pleasant face he said, "So what is your stage now? Are you staggering or galloping?"

"I am panting for breath."

"Why?"

"You people are not filling our pockets. So we have to run continuously."

"What are you saying? Didn't you get the money? In which issue was your story published?"

"In February. It's already four months."

“Is it?” Balaram again raised his voice, “Anil...?”

A very thin, dark man entered the room. Ritam became a little surprised. So far he knew that the boy who used to sit in the small office and see bundles of proofs was Anil! Is this man also Anil? In the office of *Mahaakaal* there were four or five employees visible. Were they all Anils? Or in the office of *Mahaakaal* Anil was a code name used daily. Is everyone working here called Anil?

The person holding the possible code name of Anil asked, “Balaramda, were you calling me?”

“Ritam Sengupta’s story was published in February. Why didn’t he get his remuneration?

The man gave an oblique glance to Ritam. That was not an eye but a metal detector. With a glum face he said, “Now we are only clearing the payments of December.”

“Oh.” Balaram thought something and then said, “Can’t we cash Ritambabu’s?”

“Everything is possible if you say.” The man’s face became gloomier, “But the only thing is that it will be a bit violation of the rules.”

“Let it be. Pay him in voucher.”

As soon as the man left Balaram said, “Bring one more story.”

“Again another story? This time publish something big.”

“Novel?”

“I have a novel ready. Set in the background of Kolkata. On the perspective of the present time.”

“Give it to me. I will read.”

“It means there is going to be a delay again? Give us a chance. Will it be right to run after the famous writers?”

“Look brother, we have to sell the paper. How will the advertisements come if there are no names of the renowned writers?”

“But if you don’t give a chance to the beginners how will they become famous?”

The tea came. Sipping from a small cup Balaram said, “Can anyone make the other big? People become big just like that.”

“I have understood. First one has to be little famous and renowned by writing in the reputed papers and then you people value them.”

“Look brother, why are you getting restless? I regularly publish your writings. Don’t I? I like them and therefore publish them. Let your hand mature a little.”

“You mean to say that for my first major work to come out I will have to be an old man. Isn’t it? Balaramda, in my age Manikbabu’s *Putulnacher Itikathaa* had already been written. Even *Dibaratrir Kabya* was already published.”

“He is venerable.”

“Where is the opportunity to be venerable for us? It feels while writing only short stories the mind is also becoming short. Otherwise can’t you see why I am coming to remind you about such a small amount of three hundred rupees?”

“It’s not three hundred but two hundred and fifty rupees,” Balaram quickly made the correction.”

“Oh I see. Another fifty rupees less. So just give a thought.” Ritam smiled. In the style of giving secret news he said, “Balaramda I want to tell you something. I have quit the job. I want to be a fulltime writer. I mean writing will be my profession. But in the very beginning if by just looking at the age you people pour cold water in our enthusiasm...”

With glittering eyes Balaram observed Ritam for a while. Perhaps he wanted to understand whether Ritam really had a job or not. Then he said, “You have great courage, I think!”

“Then? Will you not pay for this courage?”

Balaram laughed, “I told you to submit the novel. I will see. Can I propose something?”

“Yes, sure.”

“You are sitting just like that. Write something of short feature. Your pen has a good flow; your writing also has a pull which takes the readers till the end. Write something interesting on current affairs.”

“Like?”

“I will not tell you the subject, you have to choose. Politics, film, Kolkata, literature, sports, anything you like. On the whole I will pay on a regular basis.”

“The way you are doing now?”

“*Ha ha ha*, angry young man.” Saying this Balaram searched the drawer attached to the table and took out a postcard, “Read it, your anger will turn to water.”

Ritam ran his eyes through the letter. It was addressed to the editor of *Mahaakaal*....

‘I liked the story, *Rupkathar Mrityu* by Ritam Sengupta very much which was published in the February issue. Convey my thanks to the writer.

Why did not you display the photos of *Salvasan and Bhujangasan* in the *Sareer ebam Swasthya* section? How would the readers be able to understand if the descriptions of the *asanas* along with their photos were not given? It would have been fine if the photographs in the page covering the news of cinema were colored.’

Ritam could not finish the whole thing. A bald-headed man of around fifty years came in. Perhaps it was another Anil. He handed over the voucher to Ritam. As soon as he signed, the man gave him a bundle of notes tied with a rubber band. With surprise Ritam noticed that it was a bundle of dirty notes of five rupees. Would these notes work? It seemed that, an owner of a chit fund ran the *Mahaakaal*. Were those notes a collection of that chit fund? Keeping the post card and the money together in the pocket Ritam stood up, “Then I will give you the novel.”

“Keep in mind also the matter of the feature. If you can write adding some spice in it.... You can understand that we need juicy matters for the readers.”

Was there any sarcasm in his words? Were the stories and the novels that people like Ritam wrote things that didn’t matter?

Without spoiling the little piece of happiness Ritam came out of *Mahaakaal*. The crossing of *Fulbaagaan* was nearby. While walking through the footpath he took out the postcard from the pocket. He looked at the name and the address. One Mr. Gobinda Chandra Maal had written from Bankura. The man owned a shoe shop.

Under his name he had put a rubber stamp of ‘*Padashobha*’. No, he should not be ignored, as he was a businessman. The man could have taste for literature. He might be worried about the *yogasanas* but at least he had read the story. Could this letter be called as fan mail? Including this it was six mails altogether. Such flow of mails would definitely increase. In fact, in this way things would get popular. It was always said that many a penny makes a pound. One day Ritam Sengupta would reach in every household. He could reflect the ingenuous truth with the emotions of his heart. Why would the readers not read him? *Balaramda* had asked for the feature. It is fine. More the pen runs the more it becomes spontaneous. Self-confidence will increase. As a human being

Balaramda did not appear to be bad. There were many editors who even did not ask to sit; yet Balaram Ghosh gave him time and the money in cash too. Perhaps Balaram Ghosh was a bit afraid of Ritam. In the literary field Ritam had the ill fame of being outspoken. The noon was getting over and the evening was about to start. There were some clouds in the sky, condensed and heavy. The clouds were playing a hide and seek game with the sun. Sometimes it was shade and sometimes there was sunshine.

Ritam bought a costly packet of cigarette from the nearby shop. There were ten to twelve days more left to get the tuition fee, the pocket was about to be empty. Mahaakaal had filled more oxygen in his lungs. But *ma* gave him money whenever he had asked. Even Shrabani never said no to him. But still... Was it Ritam's instinct? It was the male ego that has flown in the veins from time immemorial. He must have to overcome it. There was a long way to go now.

While puffing the cigarette he let two buses pass by. Turning the wrist he looked at the watch. It was only ten minutes past four. Would he find anyone in the Coffee House? There was little possibility. No body would come before five thirty or six. Would he return home straight? His writing time was either the dead of the night or the morning. Now he could not sit with the pen and the paper. But he can cuddle Tuski for sometime. The girl's attractive chubby cheeks, cluster of hairs and doll like limbs demanded his affection. The best part was her smile. Not only pearls but she can shed diamonds and emeralds with her smile. Whenever he took her in his lap, his heart could feel a strange sensation. Perhaps it was called fatherhood.

No way! Perhaps going home Ritam would find Tuski sleeping. From where did these babies get so much of sleep! He could go to *Barapisi's* house. The last day when he visited both of his nieces was coughing heavily. Ritam promised that once they recover from coughing he would give them a treat of ice cream. Today his pocket is full with notes. So today is the best day to keep his promise.

The aunt's house from Belegghata is ten minutes' walking distance from Fulbaagaan. It is a two-storied building. In front of it is an open terrace. There an eight-year-old girl was

skipping attentively.

Entering the gate Ritam asked affectionately.

“Hey Micky, is your body totally fit today?”

The girl said with a tone of false anger. “*Babuakaka* you are mistaken today also. I am not Micky but Jhicky.”

“How can it be?” Making his eyes big Ritam said, “But Jhicky has long hair.”

“*Ma* got them cut. She wasn’t getting cured of her cold.”

Did it make sense? Only the hair could distinguish the twins. Making the two sisters identical was Julie *boudi* trying to test people’s sense of analyses and judgment?

Laughing Ritam asked, “So, where is your counterpart?”

“She went with *ma* to buy the sports uniform for school.”

“Is there a different uniform for sports?”

“*Hi hi*...*Babuakaka*, you don’t know anything.”

“Then why didn’t you go? Don’t you need dress?”

“It will do if any one of us goes.”

In between the conversation Indira came out. Seeing Ritam she frowned,

“When did you come?”

“Just now. I had some work in this side or you can say for a useless work.”

Ritam gave a sparkling smile “Where is *pisemoshai*?”

“He is inside. Good that you came. Come in, I have something to talk to you.”

Seeing the facial expression of *pisi*, Ritam’s sixth sense became alert. Something must have happened!

Ritam sat on the sofa of the drawing room. Turning on the fan Indira sat face to face. The fold of the eyebrows deepened, “Is your phone not working?”

“There was some problem. The dial tone was missing. Why are you asking?”

“For the last few days I am trying to get in touch with you. What have you done going to Kanan’s house?”

Ritam became perplexed, “What have I done?”

“It seems you took one girl from newspaper office.”

“Yes, my friend, Deya.”

“She has written something about Shewli. Hasn’t she? Kanan’s life has turned to darkness now.”

“But Shewli’s name did not appear in the paper. She wrote it like a general article. And in that a bit of Shewli’s story appeared.”

“Look Babua, don’t try to convince me with nonsense. I brought the paper and read. Though the name was not given it could be clearly understood that it was Shewli’s story. Do you think people are fools? East Kolkata...half slum...the mother works as a cook...the girl went missing for one month...”

“But *pisi*, it is wrong. When Shewli’s name is not there in the paper why you people take it as Shewli’s story?”

“Just don’t talk rubbish. Don’t you know the condition of Kanan? The poor lady concealed the incident with lot of trouble. Some people might have passed comment by signs or hints. But now her bad name is publicly declared. The police are heaping sorrow upon sorrow. Now every time they are facing abusive words. Now and then they ask the mother and the daughter to report. Most of the days Kanan is not coming for work, half of the day she is absent.”

“But why do the police drag Kanan and her family?”

“Don’t sound like an idiot, as if you don’t understand anything! Don’t you belong to this world?”

Actually Indira was a cold-headed woman. She loved Ritam very much. But when her temper used to go high she lost every bit of sense. In a heated tone she said, “Don’t you know the police? Once a piece of the news appears in newspaper Kolkata police becomes alert. And do you expect the local police to sleep after reading about what has happened? In actual work they are good for nothing but they very well make people’s life miserable.

Ritam became silent. Reading Deya’s writing did the Lalbazar police butt the local police station? Even Deya personally also went to the police station. From there also the police could have tried to come to a conclusion.

Indira again started, “The police is harassing the mother and the daughter a lot. ‘Why didn’t you inform that your daughter had returned? Why did you not make a statement in the police station? How did that scoundrel look like? Where did he live? How old was he? When did the marriage take place? In which room of Kaalighaat did the marriage take place? Who was the priest? Did Shewli know any close friend of that man?’”

Ritam’s tongue slipped, “They could have denied straightly. They could have told that the name which appeared in the paper was not Shewli.”

“Don’t speak like a fool? Don’t you know about police enquiry? Has Kanan or Shewli the guts to hide the things from them? And what is the outcome of all these? Because of the police’s frequent visit the matter has spread badly.”

Ritam again unexpectedly made a question like a fool, “Why, did the police announce by beat of a drum? The police can also call for mere query regarding the missing case.”

Now Indira’s voice was about to choke in anger. Her temper went high.

“Idiot...as if you don’t understand anything. Piklu is right. In your life you will never be matured. The news has come in the paper and you think that nobody will come to know! The police are coming time and again to call them and nobody will understand! Do you know that another dangerous thing has happened? The day before yesterday when Kanan was returning after finishing her work a hooligan had stopped Kanan in her way. He warned about something, which has no ground. He said that if Shewli went on continuous complaining to the police she would be hidden forever without leaving any trace. And after one month her half-eaten body by the dogs and the foxes will float in the Ganges!”

Ritam literally jumped, “How does he dare? Did Kanan inform the police?”

“No.”

“Why?”

“Because she is not stupid like you. She has to stay with her daughter. Will the police give her protection for twenty-four hours?”

Ritam was silent for a while. He started biting his nail by tooth. In an indistinct tone he said, “But we have concern for Shewli’s safety so that no other girl like Shewli faces any danger.”

“Babua, tell me who asked you people to think about her well being?” The expressions of Indira’s face changed in sarcasm “Do you have sense to understand what is good or bad? Otherwise, you would have asked me once before taking the person from newspaper office to Kanan’s house. Your friend! Bravo! I really cannot describe. In spite of being a woman can’t she understand what is good for a girl or what is harmful?”

Ritam became a bit agitated at Deya’s insult. He protested mildly, “Why are you blaming Deya? I myself had asked her.”

“That I understood long back. You are the brain behind it. It was my fault to call you regarding Kanan’s matter.” Indira exhaled with sound. It seemed as if after venting her spleen on Babua her anger came down. Even her tone was lowered, “See, how you have caused harm to her. Kanan had a bit of respect in the slum as she was from a comparatively good family. Now she has lost that too. Now what Kanan would do with that girl! Even if she goes to some other place is there any relief? And where will she go? Wherever she goes, the news will spread in any way. Now the question of Shewli’s marriage doesn’t arise at all. Her means of livelihood is also closed. At least in this area.”

“Okay okay, I will look into the matter.”

“What will you say?”

“If I can arrange something. Now as she is in problem we should stand by her. If it is required they can be removed to some other place.”

“Babua, I beg you. Don’t poke your nose anymore. It’s already too much.”

“No, no listen to me. Even Deya told that if necessary she would do something for Shewli.”

“Oh really? She has already finished her work. Now she is not under any obligation.”

“*Pisi*, Deya is not that type of a girl. She is very soft and compassionate enough. When she has written about it taking a responsibility she will certainly do something about it.”

“God knows what she will do! Nothing is striking my brain. Kanan is my old servant and

I am seeing her daughter also for a long time.” Indira again exhaled with sound. “Even I don’t get the confidence to ask both the mother and the daughter to come and stay here. If suddenly anything wrong happens! If there arises any problem at home will Piklu or Piklu’s father spare me! Your *pisemoshai* has already asked me to stay away from any sort of problem and let Kanan go leaving the work. Yet Julie and I, with much effort, made him understand...

Whatever it be, Kanan cooks well.”

Indira became silent. The atmosphere of the room was sad. Jhicky with a sweat-drenched face entered the room. Standing close to her grandmother she was looking blankly. Ritam was sitting lowering his head. From the outer corner of his eye he was looking at his niece. In a low voice he said, “I will go now.”

“Why will you go? Sit down. Have some tea and snacks.” Indira became anxious. In almost normal tone she said, “Your *pisemoshai* brought fresh mangoes from the market. Should I cut for you? Will you eat?”

“Leave it. In fact you have fed me lot, no more hunger is left.” Ritam gave a faded smile, “It’s all rumbling inside.”

“My boy, tell me why are you getting angry? For a few days my mind is upset. I did not mean it. See, today also Kanan did not turn up. I had to cook everything in spite of my knee pain.”

“What was Pikluda’s wife doing? Can’t Julie *boudi* cook?” The words just came to his lips but Ritam controlled. Standing up in a peaceful tone said, “*Pisi*, why should I be angry? You told me the right thing. I should have apprehended how much trouble Shewli and her family may get into... Today let me go.”

“Won’t you meet *pisemoshai* once? It seems your *pisemoshai* has read one of your stories in some paper. He intended to say you something regarding that.”

“Leave it today. Some other day...”

Gently patting on Jhicky’s head Ritam came out on the street. There was no trace of cloud. The day was bright. Yet the light appeared pale to Ritam. The pleasant evening was unbearable to him. Why did he do such a stupid thing! It would have been right if he had directly said no to Deya.

The public booth was near by. No one was there. Taking out the small notebook from the

pocket Ritam looked at the number of *Nabaprabhat*. It was not a day-off for Deya. Whichever shift it might be Deya would be in the office.

Nabaprabhat had two numbers. Both of them were engaged. After trying couple of times Ritam gave up. He stood for a while and thought whether he should go to the office of *Nabaprabhat* directly. *Bosh!* He was not in the mood. Could he stand in front of Deya with so much of irritation! Ritam came to the Coffee House directly. He bought a cheap packet of cigarette from Ismile's shop down on the road because the expensive packet would be finished within the blink of an eyelid if once taken to the upstairs.

None of his friends had come so far. Sitting on the corner table of the hall echoing with sound Ritam ordered for a black coffee. He was forcibly trying to drive out the Shewli episode from his head and was trying to think about the feature. How would it be if he wrote about the Coffee House? So many newspapers were springing up and dying here, so many buds of love were blossoming and shedding. Even his first conversation with Shrabani was here. Shrabani was highly fascinated reading his story, *Samudrer Swar*, published in the *Janapad* newspaper. With a shy face she came with one of her friends and introduced herself. Then Shrabani was studying in third year in the Scottish Church College. The name of her friend was Arunima. After that both of the friends would come often. The way Arunima used to look at him with her deep eyes that Ritam felt as if she had fallen in love with him and Shrabani was accompanying her. And he was disillusioned after two months when Arunima gave her wedding card in his hand. In this Coffee House itself. Arunima had a jocular smile on her face. "See dear, I would not be between you two anymore. Let Shrabani speak up her mind directly." Saying this she walked out of the Coffee House with *rhythmical steps of a swan*. Then Shrabani blushed in shyness. She started sweating. That was a scene!

"Hey, what's up? Are you scheming a plot?"

Ritam looked with surprise. It was Tamonash, with his spectacle, thickset beard and a hanging bag. He was wearing a saffron *kurta*. One would surely take him for a saint. Pulling the chair Tamonash sat down, "For how long are you here?"

"For around fifteen minutes. Are you coming directly from the office?"

"Then from where else do you expect! I could not be a vagabond like you. And there is

no such hope that my wife will feed me if I sit idle.”

“Yah. One has to make his skin pretty thick for eating and not doing anything.” Though Ritam tried to take it lightly his tone reflected the harshness a bit. The strong adjectives used by Indira sometime ago echoed in his ears. In a suppressed and sad tone he said, “Everything about being a vagabond isn’t all that good.”

“Boss, has your wife scolded you?”

“Why only my wife, whoever has a chance gives me a piece of their mind.” Ritam smiled with bitterness in his tongue, “Leave it. How far is your story collection?”

“They are saying that it will come out in the book fair. If it is not possible it will come out on the Bengali New Year’s Day. Day before yesterday, I went to the Datta Publishers and talked to Robinda directly.” But the Dattas have a bad name. It seems they cheat the writers’ of their money.”

“That they do with those who have royalty. I am naked. It’s true that in the publishing line the scapegoat is only one. Compositor, press, binder, paper, wrapper everybody has the attitude that if you touch the pot, you must throw penny. So the writer is left to be slaughtered whereas it is because of him that the fellows run their bountiful business.”

“You could have done an agreement.”

“Hmm. But even after agreement they had already bewildered many great writers. Even after saying to print one thousand copies if they print five thousand copies who can catch them? Where do I stand then? If they want they will give and if not they won’t. At least let them be sold. At least they are printing with enthusiasm, isn’t it enough?”

Ritam’s mood became sourer. Last week he went to meet Mr. Suprakash of *Sahityabandhan* and the man behaved so badly. “Do you expect me to publish a collection of stories and leave them in go-down to rot”, he said. God knew how Tamonash had managed the publisher! Though Tamonash was elder to Ritam in age but in the literary field Ritam was senior. There was no reason to think that the number of readers of Tamonash was greater than Ritam. Did he oil that bald-headed Robin a lot? But Ritam would not be able to do so that even at the stake of death. Literature also became a hard competitive field. He might lag behind by one step still he would not be able to do that.

The jealousy was not going from mind. It was giving him a tingling sensation. Avoiding the sting of the insect with a forced smile he said, "Then when are you going to celebrate the great news?"

"Any day? What would you like?"

"Whatever you give?"

"But you don't prefer the water way, I suppose!"

"So what? Once in a while it's okay to row the boat. Whisky, vodka, rum whatever you like."

"But I am a simple and chaste man, worshipper of rum"

"Then go for rum. Why should I object in the name of rum?"

Tamonash without replying was lifting his hand like a school student, in a way of saying yes. Turning his neck Ritam saw that Somshankar Majumder was entering the Coffee House. He was in his mid age; medium in stature and even as a litterateur he was medium. For the two decades he has been scribbling but could not earn much fame.

But he used to behave in such a way as if he was Rabindranath Tagore and incessantly went on snubbing the reputed papers like the *Dinkaal* and the *Janapad*. But he used to give his writings secretly to those papers. But putting himself in airs he used to speak boastfully! "If they ask can I say no to them?" Such clever and double-dealer people were eyesore to Ritam. How Tamonash could melt seeing him!

Somshankar saw the lifted hand of Tamonash. His eyes groped here and there to figure out his friends but as he could not find anyone he came and sat on the table of Ritam and his friends.

In a very soft tone Tamonash asked, "Somda, are you fine?"

"Look brother, to be well is a relative term, I suppose." Somshankar took a cigarette from Ritam's packet lying on the table and stretching his arms took the matchbox from Tamonash. Taking a long puff from the burning cigarette he said, "How much fine I am will be decided how unwell you are."

Tamonash nodded his neck in agreeing, "Yes, very true. You are absolutely right."

Somshankar with a pleased face, "Tamonash, I read your story. It was going pretty well, but somehow the end became clumsy. Why do you make unnecessary wrangling about

love?”

“How strange? In a love story there won’t be love!”

“In fact why do you need to write a love story? Does anything called love really exist?”

“Oh, doesn’t it exist?” Ritam sarcastically commented.

“No. Love is actually a biological concept. The love between a man and a woman means only the body. The love that you cherish for a girl is not love. Actually you want her body. You can call it your secret lust or your subconscious sexual desire. Have you read Henry Miller?

“No.”

“Freud?”

“A bit.”

“Go a bit deep. Read Joyce too.”

Tamonash again in a melted tone said, “*Somda*, a collection of stories of mine is going to be published.”

Somshankar stopped for a while. The next moment wearing a prudent smile on face he said, “The publishing of a book is not the ultimate goal. None of his writings came out in the form of a book when Kafka was alive.”

Tamonash became a bit embarrassed. But Ritam flew into rage. In a harsh tone he said, “*Somda*, can I ask you a question?”

“Yes, go ahead.”

“Do you take the foreign or the country liquor?”

“What do you mean?”

“From then onwards you are only singing praise of only the *Sahibs*. But I saw you lying down at Taltala being intoxicated by the country liquor! Name a few of our native writers.”

Somshankar in a heavy tone said, “Ritam, control your language.”

“Hey, Ritam, what are you up to?”

“Am I saying something bad? From then he is distributing his knowledge!”

Somshankar’s jaws became stiff. “Ritam, I told about my belief. Literature is above country or time. And each of the persons I named has defeated time. Even if you don’t like, that is a fact. See the life like those great men...”

“Again tall talk!” Ritam suddenly burst out, “Why do you give all those heavy expressions? Have you ever seen your face in the mirror when you are alone? Don’t you think that yours is the face-cutting of a fraud from an inferior class?”

Ritam’s tone rose quite high. The Coffee House was full. It was replete with smoke and noise. Still from the neighboring tables quite a many faces were looking turning at them.

Somshankar also said with gritting expression, “Tamonash, control your friend. He does not know what language he should use with his seniors. Just writing one or two stories he is thinking himself a big gun.”

“And what do you think of yourself, eh, the guru of literature?”

“Ritam, shut your mouth.”

“Why? Why should I shut my mouth? Everyday one has to digest his tall talks?” Ritam’s index finger was dancing in front of Somshankar’s nose. “You are a liar. An absolute liar. A hypocrite. I have read at least a dozen of love stories written by you. Whimpering. Whining and nusty. Aren’t they meant to be served to a gentleman? What do you say, eh? Publishing a book is nothing? Then why do you squat at the house of Mr. Harimadhab for bringing out your own book? Listen, listen to me. Human being has something else other than the body. It’s mind. Heart. And as you don’t have it as a writer you are a total failure. Understood?”

Somshankar’s face was pale. His tongue could not utter anything in anger.

Ritam stood up quickly. He picked up the cigarette packet by tweaking from the table and in hasty steps came down to the first floor. He was walking and walking. He lit a cigarette. Just taking two puffs he threw it. Now he was getting angry on himself. What was the need to talk to Somshankar like that? Every person is living in his way and Somshankar was also like that. Is there any meaning in getting so angry? The other days Ritam did not take his words seriously and took them in a sportive way. Today why could not he do that? Then was the anger inside him today? Which anger? For what? Was the distress of Shewli and Kanan haunting his subconscious mind? His stupidity was eating into him? Or the anger was on someone else? Deya...Deya...Deya!

5

Placing her mouth near grandmother's ear Deya asked, "How are you dear?"

Surama was lying down on her antique bed. Her decayed body had become one with the bed. Her once rosy, rose pink complexion had turned insipid and pale white. Now all that remained of her was skin and bones. All her veins were very prominently visible under the skin. The hands could be a real subject matter for medical students. Long-term effect of Parkinson's disease rendered the muscles inactive. These days Surama was barely able to open her eyes properly.

Nevertheless the eyelids parted a little on hearing the granddaughter's voice. Her once musical voice has turned husky. She said, "I am fine. Are you okay? What about Soumya?"

Deya finds it strange. She never heard her grandmother complaining of ill health. Last winter she suffered from severe respiratory problems. She had to be given oxygen supply for quite a few days. Even then, in spite of the severe pain her grandmother stuck to the reply, "I am fine." From where did she get the strength to endure so much of pain? Deya would find her collapsing even when she had a mere stomachache.

Stooping a bit more she said, "Everyone is fine."

"Why doesn't my grand son-in-law visit?"

"He will. His duty hours do not match with mine. And he feels shy to come alone."

Surama nodded her head on both sides. In a meek voice she said, "I really can't understand you people. You work at a particular time and his office hours at some other. Then when do you guys meet?"

She was very much in her senses. Deya couldn't stop laughing. "Once in a while we do."

"What times are these?" Surama's eyes were closed. "Santu's wife told that her sister was working in Siliguri while her husband has left for Bhubaneshwar. One leads a family life in this manner!"

"Of course, why not? Do you think clinging to one another the way you people did is the

best way to run a family?” Amused Deya said, “Actually, there was never a need for you to go for any job. You could afford to stay in your husband’s shadow. Why should we live like that? We make out time both for love and work. Ah, don’t you know that to live a happy life in future both need to save money?”

Gouri stood beside and she spoke out, “*Ma*, their times are totally different. You and I cannot understand.

Surama kept quiet. Her closed eyes were twitching.

For sometime, Deya ran her fingers through Surama’s white mane with a smile on her face. Softly she said, “*Thakuma* I brought *kachagolla* for you. Taste it.”

A smile appeared on her lips but faded away instantly. She whined like a baby, “They do not allow me any sweet.”

Gouri said, “What are you saying? Even in the morning you ate a *sandesh*!”

“Where? You never gave me one?” Surama’s eyelids parted a bit. “Mimi, do you know that they forcefully fed me chicken?”

Gouri lowered her voice, “Your grandmother must have gone crazy. Santu had brought some packed soup. Chicken is a far cry; there is no trace of any non-vegetarian element in it. After we fed her that she has been singing the same tune, “They fed me chicken, they fed me chicken.”

“Don’t give her any soup if she doesn’t like eating it...”

“What else can I give? Now she is unable to chew any solid food. It’s even troublesome even to feed her rice paste. Day before yesterday she was insisting to have mango. I gave her little bit but she wasn’t able to digest that too and had a heavy motion.”

“Hmm, problem.” For a second Deya’s face shadowed. For a couple of years grandmother’s condition remained static. No sign of improvement, there is deterioration with each passing day. Though she was almost without food, she was living only because of her vital power.

Deya sighed. With grandmother passing away, so many memories of this house would sink into oblivion. The pickles, little balls of pasted pulses. the fragrance emanated from her body as Deya clung to her on bed to listen to the stories before sleep...After returning from school once Deya opening the fridge ate some sweets without washing her

hands and seeing that her mother came forcefully chasing her. Deya just hid herself behind the grandmother. *Thakuma* was really expert in preparing *payesh*. Deya could still smell the scent of the whole cardamom. Would these memories really be wiped out? Would they grow? Would they be livelier? Would they trouble Deya like the loss of a rare gem? Deya did not know really.

Deya moved into the next room, “*Ma*, it’s better to employ a day nurse as well. You are also growing old, how long can you drag in this manner?”

Gouri pouted, “Tell the same to your father and see how he snubs.”

“Why so?”

“One should understand that he is a retired man now. Now every time the same tale of sorrow ... I don’t have money falling from sky. How would I manage extra two thousand?”

“*Dada* is there. He can pay.”

“That’s ruled out. In fact Santu was wanted to chip in. But he won’t relent. His mother would be taken care of by only his money. He will not take any from his son.”

Pranabesh’s sense of self respect was a bit strong. And at times it reaches an extreme point. Deya’s uncle moved out to his newly built house of Thakurpukur, he wanted to contribute for his mother’s expenses on a monthly basis. But Pranabesh ruled out the matter. He asked bluntly, “Can’t you have mother living with you? If not, it is fine but then don’t talk about money. Pranabesh Mittir knows it very well that *an ass that is a common property is always the worst saddled*.” But Nikhilesh’s intentions were good and he thought that it was his duty. Three years back when for the first time Surama was admitted in the nursing home she had to spend around fifteen days there. Even then Pranabesh had not agreed to accept his brother’s money. There was a pain suppressed in Nikhilesh’s heart because of Pranabesh’s obstinacy. Thereafter post retirement his son’s earnings are unacceptable for Pranabesh.

Deya said, “That means it’s you who has to always look after the patient.”

“It is my fate. Nevertheless Mahua helps me as much as she can. She also has to take care of the kid... what a naughty boy. Is it easy for her to give me a hand? The other day she

was cleaning up along with me when your grandmother had soiled the bed. The moment your father saw, he hisses and said, ‘She is after all a kid. Why are you subjecting her to those things?’ Just think of it. She is already a mother of one and he thinks that she is still a kid! Actually your father wants me to do everything single handedly, at least the nursing of his mother. In fact I have done it silently all my life without a grudge.”

“Who told you to do so? Why didn’t you protest?” Dancing her eyeballs Deya asked, “When will *baba* return?”

“It’s long since he left for the bank. He is expected any time. Now most of the time, he is preoccupied with his passbooks and bank. Always busy in calculations” Saying this Gouri’s eyes went on the clock, “Oh God, it’s already one? Would you sit for food now? Should I call Mahua?”

“What’s the hurry? Let *baba* return. Laxmidi stuffed me with *parotas* in the morning.”

“Did that son-in-law of Laxmi come again? Has he taken the money?”

“Oh, sure. She is a money minting machine...”

“Did he buy a rickshaw?”

“Who knows! As per what he said he has bought it. It seems one day he will take the mother-in-law for a trip to Sonarpur in his rickshaw! And because of that Laxmidi is also overwhelmed with joy.”

In the midst of their conversation Futku scurried into the room. Deya had seen him sleeping when she came but now he is properly awake. Holding a spectacle case he was trying to aim it at his grandmother.

Deya quickly snatched that, “Hey naughty, isn’t it *dadu*’s?

Gouri raised a hue and cry, “Oh God, you are right”. Saying this she opened the box and saw that the spectacle was inside. Turning her eyes she said, “Oh hell. What will happen now? He will create a hue and cry on returning from the bank.”

Deya instantly picked Futku up. He was extremely feeble. By no way he was putting some weight. He spent more calories in bustling compared to the amount he ate. Though he was one and half year old he was very light. Almost a feather.

Deya pinched Futku’s cheeks, “From where did you get the spectacle.”

“It was there with me”, he replied indistinctly.

“Hmm. Let *dadu* come. He will beat you.”

Staying in one's lap was not Futku's habit. He was getting restless. As soon as she put him down he ran away with lightning speed.

Gouri was running behind, "*Uff*, I just bear it. He is sure to disturb his mother in the kitchen now."

There was a cook in the house. Yet Mahua was in the kitchen. She was preparing something special for her sister-in-law. Deya usually visits this house once or twice every month. Her visits create a stir in the house. Gouri herself would certainly prepare one or two items. Today it was Mahua.

In bed room Futku was seen practicing jumping from the bed to the floor. His grandmother kept a careful vigilance. Leaving her *dupatta* on the bed of her sister-in-law Deya entered the kitchen. "Hey, what's today's special menu?"

Mahua was of the same age as Deya's. She was chubby and sweet. She wore a *salwar kameez* and had tied an apron on it.

A layer of smile appeared on Mahua's sweat strewn face. "I am preparing a new type of item. This is my first attempt at it. Let me know how it turned out once you have tasted it."

Deya winked, "Is it a TV recipe?"

"You are absolutely right. I got it from a show that I watched last afternoon. The preparation is tricky. It's a chicken dish. One doesn't need any spice."

"Give me the recipe too. I will try it at home."

"You? It's better to tell Laxmidi over the phone." "I too enter the kitchen madam. Don't you know that Soumya does not relish Laxmidi's cooking over weekends?"

"Do you really cook every Sunday? Don't bluff."

"Really. I leave for office once I am through with all the cooking."

"Okay. I'll believe if you insist. I thought that you only prepared Soumya's breakfast."

"Not just breakfast, I really have to run around in the mornings. The mamma's boy doesn't lift a finger. He only yells and creates tension before leaving for office. "I'm not getting my undershirt. Where have you kept my hanky?" I have to even mix the sugar in his milk."

"Even your *dada* is like that."

"Don't badmouth him. I know that *Dada* changes Futku's nappies at night."

“Soumya would do the same. Let him be under obligation, let there be an addition in the family.” Mahua casted a glance at the non stick pan opening the lid. Turning the flame low she said, “So dear, you have been a free bird for a long time now. It’s time to be tied down. Let the little angel come in the family of you two.”

“It will come definitely. Why are you hurrying?”

“What exactly are your plans? It would be difficult for you once you age.”

“You would see for yourself once it happens.”

With an enigmatic smile Deya picked up a fish-*chop* from the bowl. She left the room munching it. She smiled to herself. Just like a house or a car Soumya had deadline regarding a baby too. Four years. They had been married for two years and ten months. And after exactly fourteen months Soumya would be on his toes. Not before that. Not after that. Soumya had everything fixed. If Soumya’s service life ends at the age of sixty his child would be of twenty-five. Whether it would be a son or a daughter, he or she would be on his or her own.

Pranabesh returned. Taking out the papers and money from the pocket of his *kurta*, he kept them in the cupboard.

Deya said out from behind, “You have come back with a *hot head*, I suppose.”

“Pranabesh was surprised, “Oh, you have already arrived!”

“Yes, it’s been a while.”

“How did you come to know that there was a fight in the bank?”

Taking the spectacle along with the case from the top of the wardrobe of her mother, Deya said, “I think you couldn’t find this in the bank?”

“Forget it. I have another one with me. That I put on when I am at home. I became angry for some other reason. Last Thursday I submitted the cheque of my unit trust. It was credited after six days. I got hold of the manager. And he was telling what the big deal it was if it was one or two days late! I made him sit, calculated and showed him in the computer how much of money interest I lost!”

Deya with a jocular smile said, “How much money did you lose?”

“Not too much...” Pranabesh seemed a little bit embarrassed, “About one rupee forty *paise*. Money is not a big thing but it is a matter of principle. Why should it be like that?”

“True. Very true.”

“Are you joking? Once you are retired you will understand the value of each *paise*.”

Deya giggled, “*Baba*, what does one or two rupee count compared to the pension you draw?”

Pranabesh did not reply. He was changing his *kurta*. Pranabesh could not argue much with his daughter nor could he show his anger. Deya was Pranabesh’s weakest point.

Stopping her laugh Deya said, “Did you check your blood pressure?”

“I couldn’t find time in this weak. Who pushed you for that? *Ma*?”

“Why? Can’t I ask? Few days ago the lower one came down at hundred.”

“If I stay with your mother it will become one hundred and fifty.”

“Why do you always pull *ma*’s leg?”

“I don’t pull rather your mother does. Now I am a man without service and therefore, an eyesore. She can’t tolerate any of my words.”

“Why do you talk in an intolerable manner?”

Shrinking his eyebrows Pranabesh looked at his daughter for a while. Perhaps he was trying to guess the possible accusations that Gouri might bring. Then with a heavy tone he said, “Mimi, you know it well that I follow some principles. I don’t understand what is good or bad, but they are in my blood. I can’t change them just because I am a retired man.”

“But *ma* is also growing old. Consider her condition too.”

“In the family now she has only one work. In fact from the other works she is free.”

“But is it less in any way? Is it an easy job to nurse a bedridden patient constantly?”

“See, Mimi, I have already told that I don’t want to be dependent in any matter. And regarding this matter both my brother and son are the same in my eyes. Let your mother tell me that she is unable to do. I will take care of my mother.”

“Ah, why are you getting angry? I am sure that your blood pressure must have increased again.”

Pranabesh sat silent and glum.

Deya was looking at his father with her eyes still. Four months ago her father has retired. Presently except the problem of blood pressure his health is sound. On the day of his retirement from his service in rail he got almost all his dues and the amount was not too small. But suddenly he has developed a deep rooted fear that he might be forced to depend on others. Perhaps that's why he has become extra careful about his cheque books and with his calculations regarding the interests. What a pride of self-dependence!

Gouri was calling for food. Pranabesh and Deya came and sat on the dining table. Twenty years ago Pranabesh took this house in rent. In the smart and tidy room of the first floor there was enough space. Other than the four rooms the dining space was also spacious. The only drawback was that the house has not abundance of light.

Deya told Mahua, "You should sit with us too."

The other days Gouri serves and Mahua too sits along with them. Today Futku was almost in his form. After his sleep only for an hour he was in highly energetic form. Gouri is now totally exhausted to control him. Mahua said, "Once you are done with your food hold Futku for sometime. Then *ma* and I will sit. *Baba*, break the lump of rice; Shall I give you *dal*?"

Gouri was trying persistently to feed her grandson a piece of mango. Raising her voice she said, "Give him more. Today's *dal* is made just after his taste. It's prepared with the fish head."

Pranabesh frowned at her. In a thudding tone he told Mahua, "No.

Give me only one spoon." With a sidelong glance towards Deya he said,

"Did you see how she talks to me?"

"Why do you pay heed to her words? You can avoid if you wish."

"How long can I be silent? Everytime she scolds me. "Take your tea and calculate which round of tea it is! Why do you always prefer the slice of the mango? Can't you taste its stone for one day?"

"*Baba*, please. Actually the whole day you stay at home and that's behind all the problems."

"So what should I do? Should I stand on the footpath the whole day?"

"No, why so? You can roam around. In fact, you like to see antique items. One day you

can visit the museum, the other day you can go to the Victoria.”

“Then why don’t you mention the zoo?” Gouri interrupted in between, “Do you think that the tigers and the lions will flee away in fear?”

“Ah, *ma*, stop please. You are no less than him, I see!” Deya mildly scolded Gouri. Softly she told Pranabesh, “Or else, you can chat with the neighbors.”

“That’s your mother’s monopoly. It doesn’t suit me. Slandering and gossiping about others.”

Mahua simpered, “*Baba*, now you are being rude.”

“Hey, at least you don’t raise the wick of the lamp.” Deya tried to change the topic.

“*Baba*, today Mahua has prepared a new dish. Taste it.”

The white flag was flying. Pranabesh focused on eating. Deya and Mahua were busy in casual talk. Deya praised the chicken prepared by Mahua. Mahua wanted to know how much Deya’s lucknowi *salwar kameez* costed.

In course of conversation Mahua said, “You know, I had been to the university on Monday. I happened to meet Bibhuti sir. Bhimbhuti Roy, who taught us International Relations. He suggested that I should start work with him.”

While licking her fingers Deya said, “That’s good. Just start it. Futku is pretty independent now.”

Pranabesh said, “I too told her the same. ‘Don’t sit idle, don’t sit idle’.”

“But with such a hyperactive child. How can I leave him with *ma* for the entire day? Already because of grandmother...”

“I too am around these days. I can look after Futku.”

“I know what you are capable of. You get impatient after being with him for five minutes.”

Mahua looked a bit disheartened. Deya could subtly feel that perhaps *ma* did not want Mahua to start her research as of now. The perennial mother-in-law syndrome! In fact, *ma* is not a super woman. Poor Mahua was a bright student. In M.A. she missed a first class by a small margin. Mahua and *dada* first met in the Jadavpur campus. *Dada* joined a job after completing his degree in electrical engineering, and then changed it for another. Mahua finished her graduation, completed her Masters and M.Phil. Thereafter

the marriage was arranged with the consent of both the families. At that time the grandmother was seriously ill. So just after the marriage Mahua could not approach the topic of Ph.D soon after her marriage. Once she was a little settles, she had already conceived Futku.

Women have to compromise so many things! From that angle Deya was quite lucky, as she didn't live with her mother-in-law. But what about the future? Would it be troublesome for her once she has a kid? But then what's Laxmidi for? Suddenly an idea flashed Deya's mind. She said, "*Ma*, can't we do one thing? How it would be if *dada* engages a full-time maid, perhaps a little girl? She would give company to Futku and also could keep an eye on him."

"That's up to Santu. He'll do whatever he feels is right."

Ma floated her opinion in thin air and went into grandmother's room. Deya smiled to herself. *Ma* quite smartly managed to push the ball in her son's court! *Ma* knew the tricks of diplomacy quite well! Or did *ma* have a suppressed pain in her mind as the whole of her life she had dedicated in managing the household in spite of being a graduate with honors in Philosophy. And confining her daughter-in-law in a cage she wanted to avenge. No, Deya must have to sit with *ma* some day; Gouridevi really needed a good brainwash.

How strange the mother-in-law — daughter-in-law relationship is! The other day Deya's cousin sister-in-law called her up. She told her that perhaps Soumya's mother had been gifting all her jewellery to her nephews and nieces! And this pompous gift giving spree was surely not because of her anger for her son. Soumya would not adorn himself with bangles or necklaces! What a strange fear! What a strange terror! Of Deya taking possession of her jewellery once she is no more! What a strange psychology! Anyway forget about it. Deya wasn't greedy for the ornaments.

Father and daughter were through with lunch. Pranabesh went inside with Futku, perhaps to prove his skill in child care. Gouri and Mahua sat for their food. Now it was Deya's turn to serve.

Sucking bones of a fish-head Gouri said, "Mahua, did you tell Mimi about your elder sister's reaction on reading Mimi's article?"

Mahua is really a good girl. She forgot all about unpleasantness that prevailed a while ago. Mixing curry with rice she said, "Hey dear, Manudi and Ranganda came last Sunday, all praises for your article."

Deya's writing was being praised everywhere, in her office, in her friends' circle and among the relatives. Soumya's father had also paid a visit to pat Deya's back. Even Soumya had congratulated Deya on reading the article. For some days Deya too was under a spell of happiness. But things changed after she got Ritam's call on Monday. These days she feels a prick in her heart. She was a little upset even when she came here. Thereafter Deya couldn't be all that happy, once the topic came up. In a slight melancholic tone she said, "Although people are saying good things, it has created problem for the girl."

"Problem?"

"Yes. Both daughter and her mother are amidst an odd situation. I had suppressed the names but somehow the true identities have been revealed."

Gouri asked, "How did that happen?"

"It's the police. They have created much uproar about it. The girl's mother was apparently threatened by someone."

"Is it?"

"There is nothing much to worry about. I met the police day before yesterday soon after hearing the news. I told the O.C., 'Why did you expose the girl in this manner?' They were summoned time and again for interrogation. Does it make any sense?"

"What did the O.C. say?"

"He, in fact, was reasonable... 'See madam, your job is over once you have written about something. But we have to bear the brunt from higher authorities. There have been strict orders from the higher level seeking proper investigation. It seems it is because of our irresponsibility that the department is being vilified! But just think once where we stood

wrong. The girl came back but they did not inform. We are totally in dark as to what happened exactly. Should we catch the culprit in air?”

“This is absolutely right. Quite reasonable.” Mahua nodded her head.

“So I couldn’t say anything forcefully. Though Ritam asked me not to open my mouth regarding that matter of threatening, I have straightly informed the police about everything.”

“Oh my God!” Gouri startled. “But due to this would you face problems?”

“Forget it. Why should I face any problem? *Ma*, I work for newspaper office. Nobody will dare to touch us. Even *Yama* is scared of us.”

“But did you inform office about everything?”

“Of course. In fact, *Ranenda* daid that as the culprit had threatened he must be around. Or his gang. If the police does its job rightly, the scoundrel would fall in the trap.”

Mahua with a tensed face said, “But what about the girl’s future?”

“That arrangement will also be done. I have talked to *Anasuadi*, the lady who prepares the Saturday page of our newspaper. She has lot of addresses of the rehab centres. Next week I’ll contact all of them. I also intend to meet that girl again. I’ll see when I can make it out. It may be tomorrow or day after tomorrow.”

“Why do you need to go there again?” Gouri stopped eating, “No, no you need not go to those slum areas any more.”

“*Ma*, what are you saying? The girl is in trouble because of my writing. Moreover, I had given her word...”

“But you have already informed the police. Let them do whatever is required.”

No *ma*, it is not like that. I too have a moral responsibility.”

“What’s moral responsibility you are talking about? In fact, you told that the girl’s was not all that good; she flirted with every third person! Moreover, she herself willfully eloped with that man!”

“Please, don’t say like that. After all, the girl is pretty young. She stepped into a trap by mistake ...”

“Such types of girls are always ready to fall in trap. Even if she wants the girl can’t be good anymore.”

“No *ma*. I have talked to the girl. In Mumbai she had undergone a shock_treatment and

she is changed now.”

“Yet Mimi, I will suggest you not to stir the matter. There are different types of people in the slum. You have written about them. They may have grudge against you. And do you expect the girl’s mother to worship you when she will face you?”

These were all unreasonable talk. *Ma* might have studied philosophy but there was no logic in what she said. Yet Deya did not argue further. She relaxed for a while on Mahua’s bed. She had casual conversation with Mahua for sometime. She caressed and cuddled with Futku and later made the kid sleep.

Deya too slept for sometime. She woke up in the afternoon. She did not stay for long. After having tea and meeting Surama she came out. Soumya may come early in the evening. If he comes early both of them can go to have Chinese cuisine at night. A new restaurant was opened at *Gurusaday Road*. The food over there must be tasted once.

Many taxis are usually seen waiting at this time at the Gopalnagar crossing. But there is not a single one today. She did not want to get in to a bus by pushing others at least in a holiday. Deya started walking towards Hajra. She would definitely get a taxi there.

The evening is setting in. The color of the sky is fading away. There is no wind at all. The sultriness has increased a lot. One can feel that the rainy season is not so far.

Crossing the bridge over *Aadiganga*, Deya’s pace of walking became slow. With gaudy makeup the girls of the red-light areas came out. They were roaming at the entrance of Kalighat. Deya never looked at them. Even she did not know why she was looking at them today. The decaying, unhealthy faces with eyes sunken in the sockets had terrible make up. Their eyes were burning! Not for the sexual appetite but in hunger! There were so many Shewlis amongst them!

It seemed suddenly someone poured hot lead inside the ears. A bonny girl with indecent gesture spoke out, “*Didi*, what are you looking at? Whore watching? Is it fun to watch sluts, eh?”

6

Shrabani was busy in signing bundles of loose sheets. The B.Ed examination was taking place. The examinees were taking too many papers. It was unmanageable. In the first phase Shrabani signed around fifty sheets. But those were over before the bell of the first hour rang. It was a course of only one year. What do the teachers teach that the examinees need to write so much?

On the second floor of the college building there were the spacious classrooms. There were around thirty benches arranged in three rows. On each bench there were two examinees. Most of the examinees were not very young. Shrabani could easily call many of them *dada* or *didi*.

Shrabani lifted her eyes and loosely ran her eyes around the room. On the second bench at the right side a woman was writing in a stormy speed. She was almost of the same age of Shrabani's younger aunt. She had the looks of a Geography teacher. What a pain in the middle age! As she was forced to sit for the examination instead of her children! Certainly it would be a case of obstacle in the increase of increment. Poor lady! Why didn't she close all these chapters when she was young?

Today there are three invigilators in the room. Except Hiren and Shrabani there was another boy. The boy would be elder to Shrabani by one year, but in no way younger to her. Quite often Shrabani was looking at him. But she could not recognize him. The boy was patrolling the whole room with lot of enthusiasm. He kept a serious look on his face, very much unsuitable to his age. Did he join newly? In sciences or what? But Shrabani never noticed him before.

Right at this moment Hiren is not in room. He is a professor of Economics and can hardly be seen in a particular room. While signing, Shrabani was looking at the door quite often. But there was no trace of Hirenbabu. Who could say in which room he was busy in chatting!

The boy walked up to the table and took few signed loose sheets in hand. As his eyes clashed with Shrabani's he smiled for the first time. A smile with quite hesitation. Showing courtesy Shrabani told, "Now sit for a while."

"No, I am fine." The boy's eyes were running around the room. In the last corner there was little whispering. His eyes got fixed there for a while. Again his eyes turned back. With a shy face he asked, "You are the madam teaching Bengali, I suppose. Aren't you?"

"Yes...when did you join?"

"In this month of May."

"Science?"

"Chemistry. Part time."

Again a part time lecturer joined. Shrabani tried to calculate in her mind. Thirty-eight? Forty? Or more than that? Including all they were twenty-eight full timers. How many were the part timers when Shrabani got the job in the college after passing the SLET examination? Maximum eight or nine. Now the scenario is totally different just within three years. Now they are one and a half times more in number. Often they entered in flocks. The college authority did not have any other way out without appointing them; the government was not giving new posts. Last year Taritbabu from the History department retired. So far nobody came in his place. The government had all the profits. The salaries of the full timers are being saved. The government had so many ways to save money. No, in fact in making roads or bridges, huge money slipped. Only in appointing faculties even a needle doesn't slip.

Giving sheets to the three examinees the boy again came back and stood in front of her,

"My name is Dwaipayan. Dwaipayan Mukherjee."

"I am Shrabani Sengupta."

"I know. You are S.S...Tell me whose names were S.S?"

"Whose?"

"The police of Hitler, in fear of whom all the Jews trembled."

Dwaipayan is quite free. Most of the part timers hesitate while talking to the full time lecturers like Shrabani. Perhaps it is their inferiority complex. With almost same

qualification lecturers like Shrabani draw salaries ten or twenty times higher than them. It might be for that reason. Even in Shrabani's Bengali department two part timers have joined recently, Kanika and Dhriti. They are of Shrabani's age. But they talk in such a way as if Shrabani is their teacher. The two friends roam around together but don't mingle with Shrabani.

Shrabani smiled mildly, "I am not any soldier of Hitler. The students are not at all scared of me."

"That means you are a popular teacher."

"Who knows! I don't think so. The students of the pass course bunk my class a lot."

"Everybody bunks the classes of these courses. Didn't you bunk? I don't remember how many classes of Physics I have attended."

There is somewhere a very close similarity with Ritam in the talking style of Dwaipayan. Now Shrabani observed the boy carefully. A very ordinary face but the eyeballs are very bright. Like Ritam. But Ritam has a different magnetic power in his eyes, which can attract people.

The examinees were not letting to sit for a minute. They had incessant thirst for loose sheets. Again Dwaipayan rushed to distribute sheets. Shrabani too could not sit any more on the chair. She was roaming around the room with loose sheets in her hands.

In the course of the invigilation both of them came to amicable terms. Though in the first hour Dwaipayan was silent, he has started talking a lot by now as the veil of non-acquaintance dropped down. In a short time Shrabani was left with nothing to know about his bio data. Dwaipayan was one year senior to her. Like Ritam. After completing M.Sc. he researched in the field of inorganic chemistry in Burdwan University. In January he had submitted his thesis. From then onwards he is totally unemployed. The part time lectureship in this Vishnucharan Majumder College at Behala is his first job. The government has fixed their salaries at two thousand. There is minimum fund in Shrabani's college. So it couldn't give more than thousand. But Dwaipayan did not have much grudge about that. Rather he looked quite excited as he got the job because of his little connection with the principal. His research was over and so now he is free. This

year he would sit for the SLET examination.

During the casual conversation with Dwaipayan, Hiren appeared. The moment the aged and roly-poly Hiren entered he made Shrabani move quickly, “Hey Shrabani go, go. Visit the office once.”

“Why?”

“They are giving arrears of the D.A. For three months.”

So Hiren from Economics was busy for economic reasons.

Shrabani stopped though she was about to go out, “Hirenda, should I go right now? But you have to literally run around in the hall.”

“Ah, go, go. I am here. The right hand’s job comes first...Hey, new boy, listen.” Waving his hand Hiren called Dwaipayan, “Madam is going for an urgent work. By that time you wheel around.”

Shrabani went out with a smile. Hirenda did not care the part timers at all, yet because of his simple way of mode and gesture nobody could be very angry at him. Now he would sit tight and would make Dwaipayan run like anything. Even he would not do the sign.

Taking the money from the office Shrabani did not return to the hall directly. From the toilet she came to the staff room and sat for a while. She was ravenously hungry. She was quickly finishing the tiffin. Her mother-in-law gave her *luchi* and curry today.

Though the *luchi* became cool, in a hungry tongue that tasted like nectar from heaven. Suddenly there was shower of money from the sky today. But often it showers in this way. Shrabani doesn’t spend those unexpected amounts in the family’s expenditure. She buys small things of her choice. Last time she bought a costly perfume. Her mother-in-law really took good care of her. Presently she is too involved in religious matters. She would be very happy if she is gifted with a seat for her deities. How much would the wooden thing cost? She won’t take anything for Tuski. Last month Tuski received many dresses, ornaments and toys on the ceremony of her first tasting of rice. Though it was

not arranged in a grand manner, the celebration went well. Tuski's gifts overflowed. Ritam's dresses were in a very bad condition. He roams around in the sun and so no shirt lasts for long. Ritam loves T-shirts. She can think of buying two nice T-shirts for him. At some places there were offers of buy two and get one free. The blue color suits Ritam very much...

Shrabani's mind clouded with the thought of Ritam. Wasn't Ritam chanting Deya's name too much these days? Deya calls him up frequently ...and he too calls her back. The girl is a real devil. Even if standing in throat deep water of the Ganges Ritam would say that Deya did not know about Ritam's love, Shrabani would not believe at all. Women can easily read men's eyes. The queen is very much aware of Ritam's weakness towards her and that's why makes him serve like a hired laborer! 'Accompany me there...Let us go there!' Why? You will earn reputation through writing and for that why should Ritam be your follower? And why does Ritam act like that? Coming home he sat down lowering his neck after *pisi* had scolded him. When Shrabani kept on asking about the details he got so irritated but while talking to queen Deya he mumbled ..."Deya, this was not a right step. You just look after the matter. Tell me, can we avoid our responsibilities? Deya, I forbade you so many times but you did not listen to..." He did not even utter the matter of being scolded by *pisi*!

What does Ritam find in Deya? Shrabani has seen many such fickle minded flirts like her. They can behave coquettishly with friends but get married to only worthy fellows. Computer engineer, handsome, rock size salary and so on and so forth...! How long did the affair between Ritam and Deya continue? Did Ritam lie to her? Or half-truth? Who knows!

Is Shrabani jealous of Deya? No, never. It is just because she feels pity to see Ritam's foolishness...If someone would take opportunity of Ritam's simplicity why should Shrabani digest that with honest mind?

"Why are you sitting like that? Are you off duty?"

Hearing the principal's voice Shrabani looked startled. The principal was standing at the door of the empty staff room.

Shrabani quickly closed her lunch box. With a guilty face she said, “Sir, I was feeling very hungry.”

The eyebrows of the middle-aged principal shrank, “It is just a matter of three hours, and you could have taken food once you are done with it. You people are young and if you too come out the classrooms...”

“I am just leaving, sir. I am going right now. I thought that Hirenda was present in the room.”

“Oh. Then it was not at all right to leave the room.” Though he was about to go, he stopped for a while. He said with a smile, “Actually the order is going to be introduced soon.”

“Which order, sir?”

“One must have to be in the college forty two hours in a week. All those off-days will be cancelled. The summer holidays will be less; the *puja* vacation will also be cut short.”

“Oh is it?” Shrabani gulped, “From when is it going to be implemented?”

“From the coming session.” It seemed as if his smile turned into a secret murderous desire, “Now the college getting vacant by three o’clock will be stopped.”

All thoughts about Ritam and Deya were held in abeyance for time being. It appeared as if the sky had fallen on Shrabani’s head. It’s true that many articles were written in papers. But would the order really be issued? Ah, what would happen to the poor Tuski? Tuski is now completely weaned off mother’s milk. Yet she is always anxious in the class. Did the baby eat properly? Did she sleep? Would she fall down from the bed? The mother-in-law takes good care of her. Even Ritam stays at home at some afternoons. Yet she gets worried. If the order is released Shrabani would have to stay in the college from morning till evening. What would happen? What would she do? The examination was being held in seven or eight rooms of the huge three-storied college. Some of the male and lady professors, who came for invigilation, were in rooms and some were in the corridors. Shrabani gave a dry smile when her eyes met a few of theirs. She returned to the classroom pulling long face.

Hiren was reading the newspaper. Dwaipayana was making his rounds as usual. Shrabani

sat on the chair kept beside Hiren. With a glum face she said, “Will these loose sheets be sufficient, Hirenda?”

Hiren was indifferent, “Ask that new boy to give with a bit restraint.”

Shrabani got a bit angry. She restored at once, “Is it the fish dish of a wedding menu that he will feed miserly?”

Realizing the harshness of her voice Hiren turned to her. He measured the face of the colleague of his daughter’s age. With a smile he said, “Have they closed the cash?”

“No.”

“Then? Have you met Mahaprabhu?”

The principal’s name was Nimai Chakraborty. He was from Nabadwip. And thus sarcastically related to Mahaprabhu.

Shrabani gulped and nodding her head said, “Yes.”

“Did he scold? In fact today he is scaring everyone. Perhaps last night he had a nightmare and that’s why taking revenge of that.”

“Please, don’t joke.” With literally a crying tone Shrabani said, “What shall I do now? You know that I have a little baby at home. I never cheat in the class. Rather, I teach with my best effort.”

“Ah, you people are impossible. Won’t you apply little common sense? Is it possible to run the college forty-two hours a week? For how long does the morning college run?”

“Till eleven o’clock.”

“Then how long should the day college be opened? Up to six o’clock. Is it possible? The morning classes continue for four and a half hours. How will they manage forty-two hours in a week? Will there be a different law for the morning college?”

“But if there is no off-day...”

“Just leave it. Just wait and watch. Don’t speculate in advance. Increasing little bit of salary the government is showing its prowess. Nobody talks about how we endured for the sake of mere survival!”

Hiren’s voice rose a bit high. The examinee of the first bench shouted, “Sir, please speak softly.”

Turning his neck Hiren looked at the man once and immersed again in the newspaper. Shrabani also felt relieved by Hiren's words of consolation. She took loose sheets in hand. Looking at Dwaipayan she smiled softly. She came at the end of the room and stood for a while. Near the windows. It is the city outskirts. One can still notice much greenery here. There is a big pond on the other side of the wall of the college. A cormorant was swimming in the dark green water. There was the shadow of the cloud in the water. Does Ritam still love Deya? Is Shrabani less valuable in the eye of Ritam as she had offered her love willingly? To get attracted more towards what one can not acquire is human psychology. And if that unattained person is present day and night in front of one's eyes....!

No, Shrabani won't be jealous of Deya. If being hurt by Ritam is Shrabani's fate, let it be like that.

Dwaipayan started giving threads to the examinees. Taking some threads from Dwaipayan Shrabani too distributed them. Coming back to the table she was checking the amount of the loose sheets.

Hiren folded the newspaper. He cast a side glance to the man with beard sitting in the first bench and softly said, "He is scaring the women more. Actually Mahaprabhu has a grudge against women."

"Yes. He sounds so. Can you tell me why it is so?"

"Female employees mean double income group. His wife is not engaged in any job."

"Great, is it our fault?"

"It's not like that. Still you people are comparatively in an advantageous position. Your husband runs the family well and you too are not being taunted as just idling away at home.

Shrabani's words just slipped from her tongue, "How do you understand that we need not run the family?"

"No, no, I did not mean that. Today our expenditure has increased. The salaries of both are of use. Yet, I think you will agree that the major contribution is of your husband. Your salaries are extra. Consider your case... I just forgot; what is your husband doing?"

To hit Hiren directly Shrabani could speak the truth in a strong voice. But something stopped her tongue. Inhaling deeply she said, "Now he is in a pharmaceutical company."

“Is he not in sales line? ...Sales manager?”

“No, not exactly in the manager rank...”

“Okay, whatever it is he is in the officer rank.” While saying this perhaps the wise professor of Economics could guess something looking at Shrabani’s facial expressions, “May be he earns less than you.” Perhaps uttering the sentence in English Hiren tried to cover Shrabani’s embarrassment. “But isn’t it true that it is quite possible to run a family with what he earns?”

Shrabani unconsciously nodded.

“I am just trying to explain this. You people have that much advantage. After successfully establishing his argument Hiren had a smile of satisfaction on his face, “I have heard that your better half has another quality too. He is a writer, I suppose.”

Shrabani was feeling suffocated. Now she became normal, “Yes, he writes.”

“One of his writings came out in *Nabaprabhat* few days ago, isn’t it?”

“The story...Have you read?”

“That is not my cup of tea. Your *boudi* is addicted to that. She voraciously devours stories.”

“Oh. Has she read?”

“Actually we don’t take *Nabaprabhat*. The other day Urmi was telling in the staff room....”

She could not listen to the whole thing. The warning bell rang up which indicated that there is another fifteen minutes to go. Right at the moment Hiren changed in a strange way. In an odd, shrill and loud tone he shouted, “Everyone, tie your papers. Once the bell rings, no one will be given an extra second.”

After handing over the papers in the office and clearing all the doubts Shrabani entered the staff room along with Dwaipayan. Dwaipayan said with a smile, “I never knew that invigilation is such a laborious job.”

“Go for the hard work now. Later you too will roar like Hiren.”

“Really, what a harsh voice! Very much practised!”

There was an interruption in the conversation. A young man with a smiling face was standing in front her, “Can you recognize me?”

Shrabani shook her head, “No, I mean...exactly...”

“I am Ritam’s friend. His batch mate. Anirban...It’s quite natural for you not to remember me. You saw me only one day. I mean on the day of your wedding reception.”

“Oh, I see...”

“But I have seen you several times. You used to come to our campus of Political Science, didn’t you? You usually waited for Ritam near the gate of the National Library.”

Dwaipayan moved aside. Yet Shrabani felt a bit shy, “Oh! Then how come you are here?”

“I sat for the examination. I thought that it is better to cross the pit as I am already in school teaching.”

“Which school are you in?”

“Naol High School. Near Bagnan.”

“Oh, God! But that is very far. Do you stay there?”

“No. I am a daily passenger. I mangle by daily traveling. But now I am on study leave. So how is Ritam now? Is he the same? Crazy? Eccentric?”

“Do you expect him to change?” Though Shrabani replied with a smiling face she was a bit stupefied for the next question.

Nodding head he said, “These days Ritam writes a lot. He is writing brilliantly. In fact I just love to read them whenever I chance to get any. I don’t miss even a single writing.”

Exhaling with much relief Shrabani bloomed. With a delighted face she said, “You are but his friend. You will certainly praise.”

“Honestly I like them very much. In the university life itself I understood that there was something in him. The story, *Jatismar* that came out in *Nabaprabhat*, has haunted me a lot. You certainly inspire him a lot. He would talk about you a lot. He told that you are his inspiration...!”

Shrabani again felt shy. She could not find out what to reply.

“Ask the crazy fellow to keep on writing. Tell him that you happened to meet me. I feel proud to think that he is my friend.”

Anirban left. Seeing Sudhirbabu from Chemistry, Dwaipayan also asked permission for departure and moved forward. Shrabani was under the spell of a strange illusion. If somebody praises Ritam’s writing her heart fills with joy to the brim. She

feels as if just to listen to those words, it is worthy to live with Ritam for thousand years. Crossing the college gate Shrabani came down to the street. Is she being cruel to Ritam? The other day Ambarda and *didi* came down. They were forcing Ritam to start a small business.

“Ritam, seeing your temperament it’s sure that service is not your cup of tea. Now be self-made. There is a company of my acquaintance who prepare fried snacks and potato chips. Take their distributorship of the South Kolkata. Not the whole of the south but a portion. From there itself you can earn in thousands. These days, people eat potato chips more than rice.”

Listening to Ambarda’s proposal Ritam laughed a lot. “Ambarda, why in fried snacks and chips? Can’t I do something in the business of cigarettes? At least I can save the expenses of my smoking.” Listening to that *didi* got enraged very much. *Ma* also got angry. Shrabani had also supported them. “Why won’t you do business? At least you can do this!”

The present Shrabani really wished to slap the insensible Shrabani of the other day.

Shame on you! Shrabani! Ritam would hawk chips and fried snacks! Would it suit Ritam to go for a job only for the sake of earning money?

Ritam would immerse in the ecstasy of creativity, wasn’t this the only thing that Shrabani always desired for?

Didn’t Shrabani dream that like a desperate and extravagant man, Ritam would exist in her life?

The engrossed Shrabani did not get into the bus immediately. She picked up a T-shirt for Ritam from a shop at Behala. She did not get the exact blue color of her choice. It was the mulberry shade. This one too was not bad. The broad shoulder would suit Ritam very much. She also bought a downward long *kurta* with fabric embroidery at the center of it. The guys of medium height look good in downward long *kurtas*.

When she reached home it was already the end of the evening. Basked in the light of the twilight Shrabani returned and saw that Atasi was feeding Tuski a boiled apple. The moment she saw Shrabani, the apple-smeared Tuski had a divine laugh on her face.

Shrabani kept the packet and the bag in her room. Suddenly Atasi called her, “Hey, listen

to me first. Today a gruesome incident took place.”

“What’s that *ma*?”

“Kanan, the cook of Indira’s home committed suicide.”

“Oh really? When?”

“Today morning. Indira called up at noon. Babua was just lying then. The news made his face pale totally. Right at that moment he phoned up Deya.

And just a while ago Deya turned up. She came quickly and left in a taxi along with Babua.”

Atasai was telling many more things. “Kanan...Kanan’s daughter...Indira.”

Shrabani stood like a statue. Nothing hit Shrabani’s ears anymore.

7

Roads, roads and roads. Uncountable roads. Like a cobweb. Two parallel roads ran sideby side for quite a long distance. They broke, took many twists and at a point met together. Again they got separated and ran in their own direction. The narrow lanes clasped the high road stretching their lean hands. The road changed its direction at the turning of a lake. It went on and on and then merged at another turning. The road scanned many nooks and corners. They met, separated and broke again and again. The complicated arrangement of those numerous roads seemed like a riddle.

It was the street map of the Kyoto city of Japan.

After finishing the day’s work Soumya was running his eyes over the street map. Just like that. A reputed company of Japan got the assignment of arranging all the traffic security system of the Kyoto city of Japan nicely.

The assignment was huge and complicated. They have assigned Soumya’s Infocal India a part of the whole work. Soumya and his colleagues would work only on developing and modernizing the traffic signal system of the city so that the speed of the vehicles could be increased more there.

The work was not very easy. The red, yellow and green lights of the main high roads in the city had to be controlled in many ways at different times of a day. Morning, noon, afternoon, night, at every moment the number of the vehicles were being changed. Depending on how they were changing, why they were changing and how much they were changing the employees were to decide which light would be enkindled where, when and for how long. They would have to think in the same way regarding the small roads. At the same time they would have to keep in mind how many narrow lanes merged and at what place. Hospital, school, office, factories, religious places, thickly populated area, comparatively uninhabited places for different place there would be different rules for the traffic signals. Those things would have to be arranged in order in the programming. They would have to be careful so that no unexpected accident could cause an upheaval to any part of the system. Considering everything the software package would have to be prepared.

But Soumya was not doing that work alone. Dividing the work in various parts four engineers of Infocal were carrying on the work. In this project of medium size Soumya's work more cumbersome. He had to assemble others' works. He was the coordinator of this project. Even the duration of that project was scheduled. Fifteen days. Eight days of that were already over and even half of the work was not over. But it was expected that the project would be over in time.

Shutting down the computer Soumya got up. Bending his tall body backward he stretched it.

Amitav was in the next cubical. Lifting his neck from the other side of the short partition he said, "Are you leaving?"

"Hmm. Today I will go."

"So early? It's only seven fifteen man."

"I know but I have to meet someone."

Amitav did not want to know whom Soumya was going to meet. This was the trend. Almost everyone of the office was individual devoid of curiosity. Here conversation other than work was rare and personal conversation was rarer.

The office of *Infocal* was on the third floor of a huge building. Coming down Soumya took his vehicle out from the parking space. For quite a few days the motorbike gave trouble while starting. It was needed to take it once to the garage. But where was the time? For instance, today he came out from the office couple of hours ago. Would Soumya not lag behind a bit? Perhaps he would have to stay tomorrow up to ten to make it up! It was true that nobody in his office bothered about the duty time. They did not even enquire about who had left first or later. But he certainly would have to finish the work within the scheduled time. He must.

Today the motorbike was like an obedient boy. It started roaring only with two strokes. Wearing the helmet Soumya was also on the way to Salt Lake. It rained at noon. The roads and lanes are still pretty wet. Trees stood in rows on both sides of the road. The light of the street lamps created fleeting shadow. There were pits and ditches on the way. One had to drive carefully. But Soumya had no problem. He never drove his chariot in high speed. Soumya preferred the medium pace. His appointment with Bugida was at eight o'clock. Soumya would definitely reach the Little Russel Street by that time. Soumya was remembering Bugida's face a person with square face, fair complexion, sharp nose, high minus power specs on eyes. The glow of intellect dispersed from his whole face. After how many days did Bugida come to the country? Seven years? No, no, eight years. When *baramashi* had expired Soumya was in the final year of engineering and in fact to perform the funeral ceremony that Bugida is landing on the soil of India. What a brilliant guy was Bugida! Bugida was really a name amongst all the relatives and friends. He stood ninth in the higher secondary and second in computer engineering from IIT Kharagpur! Bugida scored very high even in GRE and left for Illinois State University. The fatherless boy had indeed made his mother's struggle worthwhile. In the very beginning Bugida would visit every year from America. It created a great excitement amongst the cousins then. Bugida would constantly narrate stories about foreign buses and Soumya alongwith other cousins would listen with gaping mouths. During one of his Kolkata visits he married *mishtiboudi* and took her to the States. He would send air tickets to his mother, and because of her son *baromashi* too went to the

States a couple of times. At present the same Bugida is in Kolkata. But why is he in a hotel instead of staying in his brother's house? Is there any problem with Chotuda? What problem would it be about? In fact there was no parental property! Then?

With all those fragmented thoughts Soumya reached the Park Circus connector crossing the Bypass. There was light jam on the bridge. The vehicles were proceeding with snail-like pace. Soumya was managing his way slipping through them. But coming to the junction of Park Circus he got stuck oddly. Heaps of vehicles were motionless in the jam. It was such a situation that there was no way to move even with a motorbike. Soumya was frequently seeing his watch. His temper really would go high if he could not keep the time once it was scheduled. In between a taxi searching for space almost fell on him oddly. Gritting his teeth Soumya screamed at him though he usually does not hurl abusive. He was looking around with restless eyes. Where did the traffic police disappear? What a bad traffic system it is! Why doesn't anybody think of changing it? Being desperate he tried to push the vehicle towards the footpath but could not make it.

After struggling for almost half an hour in the jam he managed to escape. Soumya reached the hotel of his cousin at around eight forty. Tired. Shattered.

Bugi was in the room. Opening the door he embraced Soumya, "You are here? Actually I thought you would not come anymore..."

"Tell me what can I do? Everyday the condition of the city is getting worse! Now one has to remove the word punctuality from dictionary."

"Ah, leave it. The vehicles will increase in the city and you expect that there will be no jam."

"Really you are right. Suddenly there is a hike in number of vehicles in Kolkata. People have lot of money in their hands now."

Talking to him Soumya entered the room. He sat on the sofa. Taking out the handkerchief he was wiping his face.

Bugi put the air conditioner on high. He asked, "Which drink would you prefer? Soft or hard?"

The difference of age between Bugi and Soumya was almost fourteen years. Soumya felt

a bit shy with Bugi's offer. He said, "Give whatever you like."

"Then taste the whisky. Do you drink? There is no taboo such thing, right?"

"No, I mean...there is no such thing."

"Then why are you feeling shy? Drink...with soda, right?"

"It's your wish."

"*Ha ha ha*. You will drink whisky and wish will be mine...Somu, you are still remain a kid!"

Bugi brought the flat golden bottle and kept it on the center table. He took out soda from the fridge. He took some ice pieces too. He mixed the soda with skilled hand. Holding the two glasses with his hands he kept them at a certain height to measure the level.

Soumya's surprised eyes were fixed on Bugi. Bugi had changed a lot. He had accumulated quite a lot fat in his body. There was second chin on his throat and a thin tire on his waist. The forehead became quite broad after hair fall.

It was evident that he grew pretty old. That sharpness of his face was not there. Soumya felt little bad. Time takes away so many things from man! But yes, the style of his talking was still the same. Lively and sincere.

Bugi was wearing Addi's *kurta payjama*. Spreading his legs he leant against the handle of the sofa. In a homely mood. Taking a sip on the glass he said, "So tell me what's up? How are you doing?"

"It's going. Fine."

"Still now I didn't have a chance to meet your wife. It seems that she is very smart and pretty...?"

Soumya smiled, "You can easily see if you come to our house. Why did you unnecessarily call me to the hotel? Or you have decided not to go to our house."

"No, no, nothing like that. Is it possible that I will not go to your house? Actually this time after coming here I don't feel like going anywhere. I am only eating, drinking and sleeping and roaming around a little."

"Have you come from America only for this?"

"Yes. Rest, total rest. No relatives, no idle chatter. Only for this reason I did not go to Chotu's place this time. Dear, I want to enjoy the trip of this time totally alone." For a while Bugi seemed to be absentminded, "Leave it. I have heard that your wife is a

reporter. Is she?"

"Not a reporter, sub-editor. In a small Bengali newspaper."

"That's good. The girls from this place have become quite bold. They are going for odd jobs too. It sounds really great."

"But Deya does not do something very outrageous. Almost a routine job." Soumya smiled detached, "Basically she is shy type."

"Still. In our time how many girls could work with newspapers?"

"You are saying in such a way as if you are ancient."

"It is almost like that. I have left the country more than twenty years ago. Twenty years is hell of a time. Just imagine how the world has transformed in these twenty years!"

"That's true. What's up with *mishtiboudi*? Why didn't she come this time?"

"I have already told you that this time I wanted to visit alone! She may come later. Sometime around December. Actually she gets a long holiday during the Christmas."

"Is *mishtiboudi* still continuing her job in school?"

"Hmm. The job suits her."

"And what about Tup and Tap? What are they doing?"

"Studying. Playing. Going around. They are enjoying in their own away. The way the other American teenagers do!"

"That means they have become very lively! What do you say?"

"Yes, they are. In their own way. With all their vices and virtues."

Soumya could not follow his words. He was watching Bugi. Did Bugida look little unhappy? Was there a problem with Tup or Tap?

Bugi became active. Shaking his hand he said, "Hey, start now. Will you eat something? Shall I order?"

"No, no, leave it."

"Why do you say no? You are coming from office. Immediately he ordered the room service for chicken *pakoda* and prawn balls in the intercom. He got up and brought a plate full with cashew nuts. Sitting on the sofa he lit the king size foreign cigarette. He offered Soumya the packet.

Soumya denied nodding his head, "I don't smoke. Thanks."

"Are you telling the truth? Or are you feeling shy?"

“No. Really I don’t prefer.”

“Go ahead. Increase your lifetime. Live for hundred years and die.”

Bugi repeatedly emitted smoke.

Suddenly Bugi cast an oblique glance, “Hey Somu, You could not patch up with *sejamashi*. Could you?”

Soumya just had the first sip. Suddenly he had an attack of hiccups. With a bitter taste in mouth he said, “Bugida, I don’t believe in a patchwork in relationships.”

“I can see that you are very headstrong.”

“Bugida I follow the straight path. I can not stay with *ma* with the person whom she dislikes...I can understand that *ma* is disgusted with me yet with a forced smile I have to stay with her? Sorry, I can’t do that.”

“I find it very strange. When I came to know about this from Chotu’s mouth I really could not believe. I have seen how close she was always to you. I remember once when you got measles *sejamashi* was going around your friends’ houses to know the lessons taught in your school! My mother laughed a lot at this. ‘This Supu has become really crazy about her son. Does anyone become so anxious about the studies of such a little boy?’ In fact we knew that your exams were actually *sejamashi*’s exams. She would stop going out of home, take leave from office. She did not come out even at someone else’s call. If someone visited her house at that time she would pull a long face. It seems once she discouraged Chotu at the doorstep. She said, ‘Come later.’ *Sejamashi* did not know any other world except you. Office and you. You and the office. That *sejamashi*...”

“Bugida, why are you telling me all these things? Do you want the reconciliation of the mother and the son?”

“I don’t want anything. I was just reminded of and that’s why I told you.”

Soumya took a sip with sound. The wine was gradually casting its spell over the brain. “See Bugida, I don’t discuss about *ma* with anyone. As now you don’t stay with us anymore I am telling you. *Ma* has not done anything for me. Whatever she did, she did for her. To fulfill her wishes. Wish fulfillment. My son will become this, my son will become that; I want my son like that.... Only mine. Mine. Mine. Myself was the only priority, not the son. *Ma* was least bothered about what her son wanted. *Ma* wished that I

would become a puppet. And *ma* would move the puppet with remote. *Ma* even would decide whether I should marry Deya or Harimati! Strange! *Ma* did not have the least tolerance to show honor to my choice! I don't care! ... You are quite elder to me. I don't know how you will take my words. Yet I am saying that Soumya cares a damn whether someone's ego is satisfied in this world or not. Simply I don't bother."

"Oh God! You are no less egoist, I see!"

"Quite normal. I am the son of Supria Singharoy. And the genetic factor definitely works. Can you expect tamarind to grow in a mango tree?"

"You have learnt all the tall talks, I see! In fact earlier you didn't have a long tongue!"

There was sarcasm in Bugi's tone, "I have heard that a dumb person also becomes talkative once fallen in love. Is it the same case with you?"

Really Soumya became little agitated. He laughed at the joke of his cousin. Bugida never had any control over his tongue. Prior to his marriage at his visits to the native he would tell his cousins, half of his age, with which girl he was going around or who gave him the half soul without any hesitation. Bugida still remained the same.

Enjoying the fun, Soumya also told, "Am I the one to chatter! There is the only one who talks a lot. Nonstop. You can understand that once you will talk to Deya. She will make you completely tonguetied."

The food was ready. There was lots of salad with the snacks. Soumya could sense his terrible hunger with the smell of prawn and chicken. Dabbing them in sauce he bit the chicken *pakoda*. And finishing it he took a small sip.

There was a piece of cucumber in Bugi's hand. He was chewing it with much sound. The glass was over. He poured the golden drink again. He extinguished the earlier cigarette after smoking of its one-third portion. Again he lit another one. While tightening the cork of the bottle he asked, "Somu, by the way, how is your office?"

"I couldn't get you." Soumya picked up another *pakoda*, "What do you intend to know? How is my boss? Environment? Salary? Or turnover?"

"Tell me everything."

"There are two partners of *Infocal*. The major share is of a south Indian. Mr. Hariharan. He was in the Far East for a long time. In the software line he is a very experienced man.

It is actually Hari who procures the orders. Mr. Swarnakamal Basu sees the technical side. The working environment is very pleasant. No bossism, no red tapism. Whatever you want would be ready at once. The other day I needed a printer and once uttered it was just on my table. Though small the company has a hardware support. The company's itself."

"Come to the main point. How much do they pay?"

"Not bad. In total annually around four lakhs."

"Only? What is the turnover of your company?"

"In the last financial year it was around ten crores."

"That means that it is not a big company. What is your staff strength?"

"Here we are ten engineers. There are around twenty to twenty one employees, pass outs from all those computer centers. And few casual employees in the administration, finance..."

Bugi calculated something in his mind. Then he said, "That means your owner is earning quite a lot. You people are very understaffed."

"That's true and that's why the strain is also there. I can not come out before 8 or 8.30."

"Ah, I really can not understand this work culture. You all, not only you, all these Asians are so typical. Even in our place I see all the Indians and Japanese working even in the weekends with all the burdens on their heads. What is the logic? No, we have responsibility. Will we not finish the task? But you just can't make the Americans work on Saturdays and Sundays even if they are threatened to death. Straightforwardly they say, 'Why should I waste my fun, buddy?'"

"No, no. Sunday is a holiday for me too. I don't go to office."

"The other days you work like a dog. Right? They are enjoying the sweet results of ten people's effort investing only one! Listen to me. It leads to two meanings if you can't finish your task within the duty hour. Either you are inefficient or overburdened. Am I wrong?"

"What can I do? In our country this is a system that prevails. In the private companies. There is so much of unemployment... There is always a fear that if I don't do somebody else will do. May be in the less amount than that of mine..."

“Hmm.” Bugi again kept another piece of cucumber in his mouth. “After coming here I have also talked to some other persons. Everybody gave me the picture like you. Grim. Unhealthy. Terrifying.”

Soumya shrugged. He extended his hand to take another prawn ball. While eating he said, “Why are you not taking much?”

“Why? See, I am taking salad. I am putting on lot of weight. So I have controlled the intake of fried items and snacks.”

“Yet, take at least one or two. I am finishing it alone.”

“Eat. Shall I give you another peg of whisky?”

“Give. But only one. I don’t drink much. I have to drive back.”

Bugi again filled Soumya’s glass with the soda and ice. With a quite inquisitive tone he asked, “Your result was pretty good. Why did you choose to stay in Kolkata?”

“That was an odd situation. In the campus interview I was selected for a big firm in Bangalore. I think you know the rules of the placement section. Once you are selected in a company you can’t go anywhere else for interview. I was also very happy and did not try in any other way. But when our final results came the company cheated me. I will be wrong if I say only with me, in fact they hanged many. They sent regret letter, ‘Sorry, for time being we have stopped appointments.’ I was very angry. Scoundrels! I will not go anywhere. I worked in a small company for two years and from there switched to Infocal.”

“You did not try anywhere else?”

“I have already told you that I am the son of Supria Singharoy! Once I decide that’s final. There is no deviation from my decision. I won’t go anywhere. No way. Not even in Silicon Valley. I will show what I can do staying back here.”

Soumya took a big sip in the second peg. As not habituated the wine was affecting slowly the brain. He was feeling light. The hesitation of not seeing pretty elderly Bugida for long was totally over. In a soft tone said, “From the beginning it’s only discussion about me. Tell about yourself. How is your work going on?”

Bugi sat still for few seconds. His eyes were at the window of the hotel. Taking the glass in hand he stood up. With bare feet he was walking on the soft carpet.

Soumya got doubt. He asked, “What happened? Not good?”

Bugi went to the window. His eyes were at the city outside. With a quite worried tone said, “It is tough to make you understand in one word. I have started independent business there six and a half years ago. A software business in a location like Silicon Valley. It may be small but I have got lot of works. Money showered and the price of the shares increased swiftly. It seemed as if I would touch the heaven. I got a sudden shock two years ago. It was a situation when the share market was about to crush. Everyday the mercury was falling, falling, falling....I can’t tell you what kind of strange feeling it was. I used to feel as if I was standing on water. On the surface of water. I was drowning as I walked and the blood was getting cold. A cold fear devoured me. Whenever I closed my eyes my ears echoed -your days are going to be over, Pradipta.”

Surprised Soumya asked, “Is your company closed?”

Bugi returned back from the window side. While sitting on the sofa he sighed, “No brother and that is the saddest part of the story. The company survived. The business is running cursorily but not as before. But the memories of those days are not wiped out. That terrible fear is still eating me up. Whenever I close my eyes like an oracle I can hear ‘Pradipta, your days are over’! Suppose I had been ruined, this fear would not have chased me.”

It seemed as if Soumya could not realize the depth of those words. Laughing he said, “Bugida, you are just mourning. Time has changed its face. Again start business with utmost energy.”

“But I am not able to do anymore. I am fed up. Even your *mishtiboudi* talks like you. She just doesn’t want to understand that I am mentally ruined. I am no more fit for staying in that country.”

Soumya’s eyes blinked. He asked, “Do you want to come back?”

“This time I came to give a thought to my plan of coming back. I am only thinking. Thinking. In my odd days I found that country a lonely foreign land. I cried. I used to feel, ‘Will I be ruined here in this way?’ This time after coming here when I was walking on the roads of Kolkata I could feel a different kind of satisfaction. You know! Whomever I was seeing on the road it felt as if they are very much known to me. They

are my people! It is almost twenty-two years that I have left my native land. But I could never realize it before that still this country is very much in my blood. Your own soil is a tremendous thing, dear!”

Soumya again twitched his eyes, “That means you are coming back?”

“I have already told you that I am thinking. Thinking. It is almost a decade that I am in Silicon Valley. Yet every moment I feel as if I am staying in an unknown city. Why only there, wherever and whenever I had stayed had I ever been able to forget that this was someone else’s place! It is true that I have been dwelling there yet the earth, grass, water nothing of this place is mine.

Compared to the two-storied house out there, the lamppost of that crossing appears to be closer to my heart! God knows why does it happen? Somu, am I getting mad?”

Soumya laughed out loudly, “Ah, why are you going deep into so much of thinking? As your mind wishes come back.”

“Am I thinking in vain? There is problem in that too. Your *mishtiboudi*, Tup, Tap...”

“Why? Is none of them ready to come? Have you told them?”

“I gave a hint. Your *boudi*’s consent is fifty fifty. Shedding tears she will come and will adjust again too. But my children...They turned furious as they got the slightest hint.”

“Natural. They are born and brought up there, grown up there. For them everything is there...”

“And the fault is also mine. When they were kids I thought they should be brought up in that culture. If I would try to fuse both Bengal and America they would face problem. Now I can feel the result to my bones. Suppose, after my death if they stayed back there, as the descendants of Pradipto Choudhuri would their children and after them their children have any distinct identity? For them it’s not Choudhuri but *Chaudari*, something which merely sounds like other American surnames. They know nothing about Bengal. Not even of Ravindranath Tagore. Even they don’t have any interest to know. A Bengali festival was organized there. There were dances, music, theatre etc...They did not go at all. They told me straight, ‘Don’t bore us, papa’. These are things of your clan. We are not interested. To them all the Bengalis are nothing but a clan!”

“Then they are not coming?”

“Slim chance. Even I will not force. I will think that this is my punishment. Seeing the

outward show I had forgotten my poor motherland and this is its result.”

Were the dialogues not becoming very dramatic? Was Bugida totally drunk?

Stretching his hand Soumya patted Bugi’s knees, “Cool. Cool. Calm down.”

“No dear, my heart is burning. After talking to you I feel lighter.” Holding Soumya’s hands Bugi asked, “If I come back will you stand by me?”

“Is this a thing to ask? Everyone will be with you.”

“No, not like that. I am planning something. I have earned a good amount of money. After coming if I open a software company? In fact, I know the shrewd tricks of the trade well. I have connections too. Can’t you and I together build the business?”

Soumya was not at all ready for such a proposal. Quite surprised he asked, “Me?”

“Yes. You. It is said that all thieves are mutual cousins. And can’t mutual cousins do business? You can be assured that you will not loose.”

“But I don’t have capital.”

“I told you already that I have. You have to work. Man management, resource management, everything will be your responsibility. Then even if you work day and night you will be working for yourself.”

“Hmm. That is true. Yet...”

“What are you thinking about? Uncertainty? Oh darling, this is the age of taking risk. Think. Think. Actually I called you today to tell this. I am coming in October. Then both of us will sit together and chalk out the plan in detail. In between I will keep in touch with. Give me your e-mail address.

From there I will give you some instructions. You have to carry out them. What happened? What are you thinking?”

“I will see.”

With the thought in head Soumya was returning on his motorbike. ‘Will Bugida really come back? Will he return uprooting everything? But he told that he did not have any root there. Quite possible! He is not able to concentrate there. He is getting old too.’ From his mother he came to know that when Bugida became a green card holder *mashi* was very upset. Even up to her death *mashi* could not forget that pain. ‘Bugida is an intelligent man. Perhaps he knows some of it. Are those old memories causing pain to

Bugida now? Is it so easy to open suddenly a new business here? He told Soumya that he would make him his partner. But in the long run will it end up in a master servant relationship? Labour in lieu of capital. Will Bugida always remember this condition? By the way in such a situation Soumya can retreat. In no situation he will stand in unfathomable water! If the business really runs well Soumya will reach heights! Then no flat, not a flat, a bungalow. Deya loves flowering plants. Deya can do her gardening according to her wish. He will prepare a lawn of Mexican grass. Both of them will own separate cars. For holidaying they will go to Colorado. They will walk on the Grand Canyon. Or they will enjoy a motorboat ride under the Niagara waterfalls. Deya is very interested in seeing the historic places. They can go to Rome or Greece. Mediterranean sea! The vine orchard by the blue sea. The sculpture of Parthenon. Where will they educate their son? Whatever education he gets Soumya will make him a cricketer. He always had the wish to be a cricketer. It could not be possible in this life.'

Suddenly Soumya became alert. What was he thinking, eh? How could he intend to satisfy his unfulfilled desires through his son? Then what difference has remained between him and his mother?

A sense of pain was crawling in his head slowly, quite lighter now. There was a lump of condensed cough near his throat. Soumya breathed deeply. Does *ma* remember him even now? Does her heart cry for Soumya? Soumya had suffered quite a few days with fever at the end of winter. *Baba* came to see him. He must have told *ma* about this. Did *ma* become a bit anxious? Did she remember the days of his engineering when she sat the whole night near the head of her son who was down with fever? Why did *ma* turn so cruel? And why did she make Soumya so cruel?

The motorbike was crossing the Sukanta Bridge. A train passed under it. The shops nearby were closed. The roads were almost lonely. Now the air was little humid. The pale moon was hanging from the cloudy sky.

Covering the motorbike with a plastic Soumya climbed the stairs. He was almost running. Though there was little dizziness all his nerves were totally in control. Ringing the doorbell of his flat he looked at his watch. What a shame! It was pretty late. He did not inform Deya. She must be worried. Actually Bugida's call was so sudden in his office! Deya had a day shift. He could make a phone call in her office. At least he should have remembered when he was in the hotel. Could he do such a mistake if he had a mobile with him? No, it is high time that he gets a cell phone.

Opening the door Laxmi stood aside. Entering the flat Soumya kept his helmet in its place. Right at that moment he saw a young girl sitting near the kitchen. Huddled up. Oh God! Was she Laxmidì's relative? Soumya was about to ask Laxmi. Deya came out of the room. She looked at the girl once and in a suppressed tone said, "She is Shewli". "Who is Shewli?" Soumya could not understand. Deya with a meaningful signal of her eye called Soumya inside the room. "It is that girl. From Belegghata."

"Why is she here?" Soumya was taken aback.

"Her mother has died. Don't you know?"

"Yes. So what?"

"She was unable to stay there."

"Why? What happened?"

"It is a very odd situation. People from the neighboring houses were disturbing her; the landlord was threatening. The local guys were troubling her. At any time the outsiders were entering her house unasked. People really do not have any sympathy at all. Hearing the news of her mother's death all her relatives came running. But everyone ran away as nobody is willing to take her responsibility."

Soumya murmured, "So you have brought her?"

"What else was the option? What a terrible condition! I could not see."

"So is she going to stay here?"

"Let her stay here at least for some days. Then I will see what I can arrange for her."

Soumya was surprised. Sometimes Deya does such immature things.

8

Laxmi set two plates with rice. Today she had cooked very delicious items. The oil of *hilsa* fish, a curry with the bones of *hilsa* and *puishaak*, *hilsa* in mustard sauce and hog-plum chutney. The other days Mimi created so much of fuss with two handful of rice but today she ate to heart's content. Eggs had just started accumulating in the fish and there was enough oil in it. Actually the breed of this fish was different! It smelled so nice while cooking! Ah!

Laxmi's mouth watered. She raised her voice, "Hey girl, come and eat."

Her nose could smell the curry with the fish bones. The smell of the fish. The mouth watered. Laxmi took another spoon of rice in her dish. This time the rice was very good. Mimi brought it seeing it properly. There were no small particles of stone and moreover it tasted a bit sweet. In this house *Gobindabhog* rice came for Mimi and *dada*. It smelt very good while cooking. Even the rice was very light. But it was tasteless. Laxmi had tasted. Even if she were given Laxmi would not have relished. Even her stomach would not have been filled. Compared to that, she preferred the plump and full-grown rice prepared by the husking pedal.

Laxmi was mixing the rice with the oil of the fish. Her hand stopped suddenly. Her fat body leant back. Her eyes searched here and there, "Hey girl, where are you?"

There was no response.

Forget it! It was a real nuisance for Laxmi! It was a real pain for her to get up once she sat down. God knew where the girl was hiding! Why did the girl suffer the whole day with inexpressible pain? 'The mother left for the heavenly abode which was a part of destiny. Can you bring her back by crying?' Even Laxmi's mother died while giving birth to her brother. Laxmi was hardly twelve or thirteen then. Did Laxmi cry sitting on their corridor for long? 'And the mishap that was destined has already happened. Even if you pull a long face would it bring back your chastity or transform you into the pious Savitri?

Even after washing a thousand times with soap the stains of an unchaste woman is not removed! Yet you are lucky that you got the support of Mimi. Just remember the kind of foxes and dogs could not tear your flesh!

Laxmi shouted with much irritation, “Hey girl, how long do you expect me to wait for you with the plate of rice? Don’t I feel hunger and thirst? What do you think?”

Her shouting worked now. Shewli came slowly. She crossed Laxmi by leaping over her carefully. She was sitting lowering her head.

Laxmi said, “Start now.”

Shewli broke the lump of rice. She was not eating properly but nibbling.

“What happened? Eat.” Sucking the bones Laxmi gave an oblique glance to her, “Little girl, hunger is a great evil. The hunger is behind all the happenings in this world. Say it for happiness or misery...”

Shewli did not show any reaction to Laxmi’s philosophical speech. She was still sitting silent.

Laxmi’s tone became softer, “Tell me, what you think the whole day. In fact, *didi* is now thinking about you. Can’t you see that she is running around to so many places for you? At least you will find a good shelter. Rather as long as you are here enjoy a bit. See, how costly the fish is! Two hundred rupees per kilo! Everyday you can eat fruits, fish, meat and many more things. The people of this house have a big heart. They give whatever they eat to their servants. Didn’t you listen to Shyama, the servant from the second floor, who was scolding her masters last noon? They give her coarse rice, which does not get boiled easily. It is like a goat’s pellet of dung...”

Laxmi’s speech was not yet over. Shewli suddenly cried out.

“Damn it? Why are you creating an ocean again?”

Shewli’s cry increased more terribly. She was sobbing and making sighing. “I am a sinner, *maashi*. A big sinner. There is no place for me in hell too.”

“Ah, stop. He is the one to judge virtue or vice. Was it your wish to plunge into sin? Can’t God see that?”

“*Maashi*, my mother died only because of me... My mother.... my mother.”

Leaving the plate of rice in front of the eyes the hungry Laxmi was not at all enjoying the lamentations of Shewli. From the time the girl had stepped in she played a sad tune. ‘Where was the pain for the mother when you had eloped, girl?’ Laxmi could easily understand the torment of that poor mother. If Laxmi were at the place of that mother she would have died consuming poison much earlier.

Yet Laxmi was feeling a bit sorry for the girl. Whatever might be the situation the girl was pretty young and in fact at such budding age girls do such kind of mistakes. Really the mother left the girl to face utter distress. Laxmi tried to comfort Shewli by her words. Words have magical power. They help to lighten one’s grief; even a stone like heart becomes soft.

Nodding her head Laxmi said, “Darling, in this world nobody dies because of other’s fault. Everyone dies because of his or her own fault.”

“But *maashi*, my mother had not done anything wrong.”

Laxmi murmured within, “Certainly she did. She conceived you in her womb.”

But outwardly she said, “Little girl, can we recognize all our faults? She must have done something.”

“No *maashi*, I have killed my mother.”

“May goddess *Shashthi* save you! Why do you consider yourself instrumental to other’s action?”

“No *maashi*, you don’t know anything. On that day I have used so many foul and abusive words for *ma*.”

“Is it so? What did you say to your mother?”

“*Maashi*, I can’t tell that. My heart is bleeding.”

“Darling, don’t hide things in your heart. If you tell me you will feel better.”

“On that day *ma* returned from the money-lender’s house after giving delivery of the blouses...” Shewli cleansed her nose with the backside of her palm. “On her way the scoundrels stopped *ma*.”

“Who are those scoundrels?”

“They live near the canal. They are the ultimate bastards. They were irritating her very much. It seems they said what the point was in slogging with stitching jobs. They said,

‘Send your daughter to us. We will keep her like a queen. Why are you keeping the girl in the house who has been sleeping around?’ Returning home *ma* took it out on me. I was beaten by a piece of wood. She told me, ‘Why did you return? Anyway you were doing well where you were. Why did you come back to take my life?’ *Maashi*, even I could not keep my head cool at that time. People from the neighboring houses were enjoying. Very much in front of them I told, ‘I think in spite of being my mother you want me to plunge in this line. Do you really wish to enjoy the money earned by selling my flesh? Let it be, let it be...’ *Maashi*, those words really hurt *ma*’s heart. With a hot head I went out of the house...I did not go very far. I was sitting on the bank of the lake with a heavy heart. After sometime when I came back I found that the door was closed and *ma* was not opening it. At last people from the neighboring houses broke the door.” Narrating all these continuously Shewli wept aloud, “*Maashi*, my mother hanged herself by the neck...!”

Laxmi became speechless. It seemed as if the unseen Shewli’s mother came up in her imaginary eyes. It was not a body but a hanging corpse of a woman!

Laxmi could not eat anymore. The delicious *hilsa* fish tasted insipid. In a heavy tone she said, “Darling, anger is the biggest vice. Anger causes so much of harm to people.”

Shewli was silent. Being able to tell those things her crying also stopped. She was eating little bit. Slowly.

Laxmi asked, “Do you want some more rice? As you don’t eat I gave you less.”

“No.” Because of the lingering after effect of her cry Shewli trembled a bit.

Again her head dropped down. Taking a sip in *chutney* Laxmi got up.

Washing her own dish and glass in the sink she kept them at their place. She came to the balcony slowly. The color of Mimi’s new bedcover was fading fast. The machine would spoil it more. Sabita washed it in the morning. Laxmi took the dried bedcover from the cloth line. She was folding it. Unconsciously a small breath rolled out from her heart. A sigh of satisfaction. Fortunately her two daughters got married in time. The whole day Laxmi had to be busy in the houses where she worked. Even she could not keep an eye on her daughters properly. This was no less a matter of luck that in spite of that her daughters did not end up in such scandals. Though the elder daughter was a bit

restless and roamed around idly, Laxmi luckily arranged her marriage as soon as she crossed fourteen. Presently Sadhana was the mother of three. Even Laxmi did not have to face much trouble in getting married her younger daughter. Kalpana had bright complexion and a lovely face. She passed the test only in one sitting. Are her daughters living happily? Whatever conditions they might be in, at least they are not in a state like Shewli.

The telephone was ringing inside. Laxmi came inside the hall with heavy steps. As soon as she placed the receiver on her ears her face was filled with joy and smile. It was Mimi's mother.

"Who? Laxmi? Where is Mimi? Call her. I want to scold her."

"*Boudi*, she went out long back. At around eleven o'clock."

"Why? Doesn't she have duty in the evening?"

"She told that she would go to office after visiting some place in Behala."

"After visiting some rehab or so?"

"That's what she told."

"*Phew*, I don't know what to do with this girl. God knows from where she has brought such a nuisance! Everyone is irritated and angry with her...Mimi's father and elder sister..."

"*Boudi*, same is the situation in this house." Laxmi's eyes went around and then she lowered her voice, "Even *dada* isn't happy with it at all."

"It is obvious. All of a sudden she brought home that dirty girl. Even there is no guarantee whether that girl brought some disease with her or not." Gouri's agitated voice on the other side paused suddenly, "Mimi must be arguing heavily with Soumya?"

"Yes *boudi*, you are right. Whenever they meet they pick up quarrels."

"Hmm." Again Gouri was silent. "So where is that queen?"

"She is crying continuously."

"And Mimi's heart must be melting at this, I suppose. The girl is a real fool, a real stupid. She should complete her office job and its problems in the office itself. Why is she bringing all these at home?"

"Very true." The sympathy that sprang in the heart of Laxmi for Shewli even few minutes back was wiped away imperceptibly. Lowering her voice she said, "In fact the matter is a

big scandal in the neighborhood. Sabita works as a maid in five other *felats* (flat)...Once Sabita gets to know about it can it be hidden from others at Santoshpur?"

"Who told Sabita? You?"

Laxmi gulped. Though Sabita has come to know most of the incident through her, Mimi also told her the story to some extent! The girl was in trouble, the girl's mother had died and there was no one to look after her...!

Didn't she tell?

Hawking Laxmi spoke out the half-truth, "*Boudi*, don't you know your daughter? Can her stomach hold anything?"

"Yes, very true. She is the daughter of Yudhishtira! Then did anyone in the apartment tell anything?"

"They are not opening their mouth but everyone is curious to know. Take the *boudi* next to our flat. That lady who never peeps into this house was so interested in chatting with Mimi yesterday morning. But all the time her eyes were at Shewli. Yesterday I went to bring dried tobacco leaf. The skinny lady from the ground floor asked me so many questions standing near the staircase!"

"Just see. Is it possible for Soumya not to be angry? Does anyone volunteer to bring these problems in a decent household? Whatever late it is for Mimi to return, ask her to call me as soon as she is back."

"I will tell her. But make it a point not to tell your daughter that you have heard so many things from me. Otherwise she will scold me a lot."

"Okay. Listen, always keep an eye on that girl so that she can't run away stealing anything. God knows what her identity is or from where she dropped in."

Very true. Very true. Putting down the telephone Laxmi stood for a while pulling a long face. *Boudi* was not wrong. There are so many expensive things in the room. Both the husband and wife are careless about their belongings. Especially Mimi. Sometimes she keeps her earrings on the table, sometimes forgets the gold chain in the bathroom... If anything goes missing now it may bring bad name to Laxmi. They may think that taking the opportunity of that girl's arrival Laxmi herself...!

Laxmi came to the kitchen in a hurry. Shewli was not there. God knew in which pit she

was hiding. No, she was exactly where she thought. She was lying down in the small room. In a huddled up state. Near the divan. Laxmi once thought of waking her up. *Dada* usually works in this room. Even if a single thing is displaced he would be very angry. Then she thought that let her be like that. Anyways she has to manage some space for her. At least as long as she stays in this house.

Coming to the hall Laxmi lied down on the carpet. At this time she feels sleepy after lunch. Her eyelids drooped in drowsiness.

Who knows why Laxmi isn't getting sleep today. Shewli's mother was peeping in her mind. How could she hang to end her life? Poor lady. How so much of pain had ruined the life of the widow! How did the woman look like? Fat? Thin? When did Shewli's father die? While remembering all these, another man appeared in front of her eyes. A man, short with a very slender moustache like *Bhringi's* and with marble like eyes. The man who brought Laxmi from the distant village of Bankati. In the slum area of Gopalnagar. He used to work in the battery factory. He started a life with her but actually had spent his whole life in the burning grounds. Intoxicated with liquor and opium he usually returned home late at nights. He had the strength of a monster then. If anything came out of her mouth he would beat her up mercilessly. Then one day suddenly he disappeared as a disciple of some guru. Since then with the responsibility of her two daughters Laxmi has been working as a maid from one door to another.

Thinking about the man at one point she slept. Under the spell of drowsiness she was seeing fragment dreams. Laxmi was getting married under the tamarind tree of Bankati. The groom with matted hair, a trishul in hand was wearing a conical sponge wood. The groom was laughing very loudly. He was poking Laxmi with the trishul. And just after that he was dragging her by hair. He pushed her inside a room made of mud-plastered bamboo laths. There hundreds of girls variegated in colors were moving in swarms. Men, one after another were coming. They were giggling and taking the girls inside the room. A person forcibly was stripping Laxmi. The naked Laxmi was trying hard to hide herself. She was trying to escape. She was running through the tram track of Gopalnagar. While running she saw her two daughters. There was no single thread on the

bodies of Sadhana and Kalpana. Laxmi shouted, 'Run. Enter the jail.' Laxmi's man was standing in front of the jail gate posing as a guard. He had the trishul in his hand, matted hair on head and was wearing a khaki dress. The man roared, "Hey get me some opium!" Laxmi somehow managed to enter the jail. In front of it there was a huge and lonely field. A rope for hanging was there. Placing the rope around her neck Laxmi hanged. And with that some musical sound was heard. *Jhyang jhyang...*

Suddenly Laxmi's eyes opened up. The calling bell rang!

Laxmi got up with half-closed eyes. She opened the door. It was Sabita.

"What happened? Why are you sleeping so deeply? I have been ringing the bell for so long?"

Laxmi was still under the spell. Rubbing her eyes she said, "Wash the utensils properly. Otherwise there remains fishy smell in them."

Coming to the door of the kitchen Sabita's eyes were going around, "Where is Shewli?"

"Why?"

"When I was coming out after cleaning the floor of the opposite house, I saw a boy standing on the road. He looked like a rogue."

"So?"

"He was coming towards this *felat* (flat). The moment I turned back he started walking in haste."

Laxmi's eyes turned thin, "When did you see him?"

"I have already told you. Around twelve or one." Sabita frowned. Standing near the sink she started cleaning the utensils piled up. Her tongue was also moving non-stop. "I felt as if Shewli was also standing on the corridor. Seeing me she left."

Sabita could tell a fib without any hesitation. Laxmi cast angry glances upon her. "Don't lie. Your tongue will fall off."

"You will surely understand when she will give way to a man in this house! And he will slit your throat."

Laxmi's face turned pale. She protested with fear, "Don't utter useless things. In fact she is leaving within few days."

"Let her leave first. Such a cosy place, neither the owner nor his wife stays..." She was giggling. "If she stays for ever you will lose the favor of fortune."

“Then everything, such as scolding me always at silly matters or your permanent right to stay in this house, will be over. Will *boudi* allow you to work here once she gets such a young girl? That girl will never be married...See, what an opportunity!”

There was slim chance of that happening. Laxmi knew Mimi from her childhood.

Mimi loves her like her own mother or aunt. If Laxmi leaves who will look after her family? That girl? No way.

The cleansing of the utensils was over very soon. Sabita came like an express train and left like the Punjab Mail. But unnecessarily she created an atmosphere of fear in Laxmi's mind. Like fog. With a gloomy face Laxmi moved here and there for a while. She swept and cleaned the room. She stood on the balcony for some time. The sky was cloudy. It was raining pitter-patter. The road was lonely. There was nobody anywhere. Yet Laxmi's eyes went around. Did Sabita cook up the story? Where was the girl when she called the girl to eat? On the corridor? Should she inform Mimi about this?

The fog was getting thick. Coming in the small room Laxmi pushed Shewli, “Hey girl, get up. You sleep now, cry the other moment...I can't understand your behavior at all.”

Shewli got up. Her eyes were puffed up.

“Can you light the gas?”

“Yes.”

“Go and prepare two cups of tea. Pour mine in the glass and yours in the cup. That old cup which I took out for you.”

Like an obedient girl Shewli went to the kitchen and put the kettle on the stove. There were two *salwar-kameezes* on the table meant for ironing. Laxmi got busy. She was about to fix the plug. The calling bell rang again.

Opening the door Laxmi was surprised. “You? Again today?”

Subhash handed over a wet plastic bag to Laxmi. I brought down coconuts today from the trees. Your younger daughter has prepared *laddus* and sent them for you.”

Laxmi felt happy within. As she gave them money, now-a-days her son-in-law takes special care of her. Otherwise Subhash was not the person to come along way from

Sonarpur to give her *laddus*. Laxmi knows that Subhash beats up Kalpana cruelly. After drinking up to his throat he even abuses her lot by calling names of her mother and father. But Laxmi got a doubt suddenly in her mind. Shewli came on Tuesday and Subhash saw her on the very next day ...! But what could be the urgency of bringing *laddu* on Saturday?

Subhash didn't bother for anything. Switching on the fan he fixed his back on the sofa. He was wearing a full pant of butter color and a vest with stripes. He was dancing his feet.

Laxmi sat on the carpet in front of him. What was the need to bring down coconuts in this rainy season?

"*Dada* is not going through a good time. The rainy season has already started. Nobody is interested in building construction. There is no work in hand. He told me, 'Subhash, bring down the coconuts. Let us share...' Even your daughter said, '*Ma*, loves *laddus*. There is no one to prepare them for *ma*'."

Shewli was standing at the door of the kitchen. With a feeble tone she asked, "*Maashi*, should I serve tea?"

Subhash's teeth were all wide spread instantly. "What's up?

How are you? Is everything going well?"

Shewli lowered her eyes.

"Why are you feeling shy? I am like your *jamaibabu*. I am the son-in-law of your *maashi*. I am her relative."

Shewli moved away.

Laxmi herself got up and brought tea. She told Subhash, "Drink the tea and go quickly. Today the condition of the sky is not well."

"*Ma*, what do I have to do with the sky? In fact, we always drench in the rain...*Ma*, actually I need to consult something with you."

"What?" In an alarmed tone Laxmi asked, "Did you pay the whole amount of rickshaw?"

"No, no. It is not about the rickshaw. There is something else. I am planning to build another room adjacent to ours once the *puja* is over. Just for you. Sunk in sorrow for twenty four hours, your daughter says, 'the whole life *ma* has been working in others' houses'...You are growing old. And now you need *retunmen* (retirement). At least enjoy

the rest of your life with your daughter and your grandchildren...”

There is a temptation in the proposal. For a moment Laxmi’s heart melted. The next moment she became alert. Like a smart customer she asked, “How much I do have to give?”

“As much as you can afford. There is no compulsion.”

“And if I can’t give?”

“Then what can I do?” Subhash appeared to be out of spirits. “You can stay with us.”

“No dear. I am pretty well.”

Laxmi made her mind strong. The scriptures say that temptation leads to sin and sin to death. She was in a secured place. Why would she walk on the path of uncertainty? Nephews and sons-in-law are none but strangers. One should keep them at bay.

“Then come for a few days at least. Your grand daughter remembers you a lot. You have never sat on my rickshaw.”

“I’ll come. Let the rainy season be over.”

“If you come you must have to stay for some days.”

“I’ll see.”

Lowering her face Shewli came to take away the cups. She was going back with slow steps, “Hey listen, give me a glass of water.”

Laxmi’s jaws became stiff. With a serious face she said, “After tea you should not drink water. You may get acidity.”

Who could say what Subhash had understood? It seemed as if he was hurt a bit. He stood up and said, “I will leave now.”

“See you again.”

Even after opening the door Subhash was standing for sometime. He was thinking something. Turning back he said, “But *ma*, on Tuesday or Wednesday I may come once again. This time our trees have produced plenty of bottle gourds. I will come to give.”

“No, no. Nobody in this house eats bottle-gourd.” Laxmi spoke out quickly, “Even I get cold if I eat bottle-gourd.”

“But Kalpana was telling that you...”

“Actually she has been staying without her mother for long. She must have forgotten. It is true that I used to like bottle gourd but it is a long time that I have stopped taking any.

Does everything, you like suit your body?"

With a quite disappointed face Subhash left.

The mist in Laxmi's mind became more condensed. What a disturbance it is! Oh God, may Mimi transfer this girl to somewhere else quickly.

Shewli was standing near the dining table. In a low voice she asked, "*Maashi*, should I sweep the room?"

Laxmi was quite rude, "Are all these works waiting for you?"

"Should I knead flour?"

"Why darling? Have I become disabled?"

"Then let me iron *Didi's salwar kameezes*. I can do that."

"No. You need not touch anything. If something goes missing..."

Shewli's face became pale. She was nipping the nail by her feet.

Laxmi concentrated on her work. Mimi may take both rice and *roti* at night. It would be better to cook another item with *roti*. Picking few small potatoes she kept them in the pressure cooker. She grinded onion, ginger and garlic separately. She started preparing *alur dam*. Peeling the mouth of three *langda* mangoes she soaked them in water. She cut cucumber and onion in round shape and placing them on the plate sprinkled salt over them. Both *dada* and Munia liked salad very much.

It was getting dark quickly in the evening. The sun could not show its face as it set. The children usually play on the terrace at this time. But today their noise was not heard much.

Finishing her work, Laxmi was going to the small room. Suddenly her feet stopped. Her eyes went to the balcony through and through Mimi's room. Mimi was standing there. When did she come?

Couple of seconds and she was disillusioned. Where is Mimi! It's Shewli. Wearing the old *salwar kameez* of Mimi she looked exactly like Mimi from the backside.

How could she take Shewli for Mimi? Strange!

9

“Hey, why are you sitting in a thoughtful mood?”

Deya was absent minded. Turning her neck she saw that Sukanya came for evening duty. She was putting the sunglass in her hand in the bag. Casually she said, “Oh, you!”

Pulling the chair Sukanya sat beside her, “What are you thinking so much?”

With a tensed face Deya said, “I am unable to do anything by any means. I am in much trouble regarding that girl.”

“Why? What happened again?”

“I thought that somehow I would arrange something. But nowhere I am seeing any hope. I visited three homes. But everywhere it is ‘no vacancy, no vacancy!’ Those who have the capacity of accommodating thirty have already accommodated forty. Twenty people are somehow managing where only fifteen people can stay. Everyone took me on a round to show the situation. What a miserable condition! All of them are huddling for a shelter. The number of homes is so few in number compared with the number of the destitute girls!”

“You can say it in the reverse way. Compared to the homes the number of destitute girls is very high!”

There was a sarcastic tone in Sukanya’s voice. Deya did not like it. With a gloomy face she said, “I don’t know what to do. It is already more than eight to ten days...! Don’t you have any contact?”

“That day itself I told you. I don’t know anyone. This is *Anasuadi*’s line.”

“Actually I am roaming with *Anasuadi*’s reference. But I could see light of hope in one place. It seems there two girls are going to get married in the month of *Shravana*. And then on their place...But that means the pressure of another one month.”

“Hmm. Problem.”

“Yes dear. Real problem. In fact all these homes are private. Either some individuals are running through collecting subscriptions and perhaps they get some donation from here and there or they are under some trust. Each of them has very limited fund. Perhaps some

of them get some grant from the government. But that is also very less. These are organizations for noble cause. I can't force them...."

"Why don't you send her to the Government Rehabilitation centre? She has already some problem of police case...her mother has committed suicide...once she was abducted...now she is homeless and her life is in danger. Saying these things file a prayer in the court. Once the magistrate passes an order there will be no problem."

"What are you saying? I will not send her there. *Anasuadi* time and again forbade me. The atmosphere in those places is so bad that the girl's life will be ruined."

"Then what can I say? Unless some arrangement is done, sit idle bearing the burden on your head."

"I don't have any problem. But..." Deya stopped.

"But what?"

"Soumya is feeling very uneasy. Everyday coming from the office he has the same question to ask, 'What have you arranged? Till now nothing could be managed?'"

"If I were at Soumya's place I would have said the same thing. No intimation, no permission and suddenly you will bring a stray girl at home and you expect Soumya to clap seeing that? Deya, this is too much of an expectation."

"Why are you calling her stray? Shewli is a helpless girl. And now as by some way or the other I got an involvement with the girl it is my duty to take her responsibility. Everybody should understand this also."

"You are thinking from your angle. Only to earn a name in your profession you did too much with that girl and as you are trapped now... Deya, still don't forget that the household is not yours alone. Before bringing the girl like that you must have discussed the matter with Soumya."

Of course, Deya admitted her mistake. She did it deep from her heart. And as she admitted her fault, seeing the slant look of Soumya she felt a prick of sensation in her mind. But suddenly she got into such a situation and the girl was crying so terribly that at that moment she did not have any other choice left. How she could live in mental peace unless she managed a good arrangement for Shewli. How could Soumya be so unreasonable!

Sukanya got up and went to Tirthankar. With a sad mood Deya tried to pay attention to her work. She asked Kanad sitting on the table beside her, “Hey, how far? Will you leave the computer?”

“I am done. One minute. While taking printout from the computer Kanad simpered, “What was the Lady Chatterbox telling you? Must be giving you sermon?”

Deya turned her hand upside down, “Yeah, something of that sort. As I am so far not able to arrange something for that girl she was telling...”

“But she is very jealous regarding that matter, I suppose.”

“Why?”

“Ah, strange! Your writing was so much talked about. Ranenda has praised it separately...”

“Don’t talk rubbish. What’s there to be jealous about?”

“She is actually of that type. She can’t bear anyone else’s reputation. In fact, yesterday she was laughing with Tathagata saying, ‘See, how she will manage to get another assignment by buttering Ranenda! But I think this time she will not be involved in such type of trouble’.” Taking the printout in hand Kanad left the monitor. “I felt so bad on hearing this!”

Kanad had the habit of indulging in useless arguments. Sukanya or

Tathagata might suffer from professional jealousy. But it would be stupid to pay heed to Kanad. He uses to take pleasure in provoking people to lag behind one another regarding silly things. He must be the descendant of *Naradmuni*! If Kanad had felt so bad he must have protested. Did he do that?

Not extending the discussion Deya started her work. She was editing the long report that was faxed from Dhanbad. It was a report regarding the disturbance caused by the rowdies in the areas of coal mine. The news would not get anymore space beyond twenty centimeters. The correspondent from Dhanbad always wrote a lot. Tirthankarda had asked to prepare another copy. Death of a couple in *Nakashipada*. A couple married four months ago. The police was suspecting it to be a suicidal case. What might have happened that before dying out of the love-showers of honeymoon the husband and the wife had to consume poison? For a few seconds Kanan cast her shadow on Deya’s mind

but as she went on working it faded away too. The whole news section was extremely active. It was already five. Now the pages would be released one by one. Before finishing the work in her hand Deya was again allotted with another task. Day after tomorrow is *Rathyatra*. It was a report regarding the assemblage of devotees in Puri.

Handing over the copies with headings in their exact place Deya went to the next room. Into the supplementary office. Though the room was not that huge like the news section it was considerably big. There were three tables, few desks and around eight employees, both regular and temporary, were working. Some were busy in proof reading; some were preparing the lay out and some were occupied in writing exclusive features. Now a days the *Nabaprabhat* was printing the supplementary thrice a week. Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. After so much of persistent requesting, Jayashree was shifted in the section regarding current issues and Shubhamoy from this department was shifted to the news section. There was no need of staying more than seven or seven thirty in the supplementary section.

Deya came to Anasua and not to Jayashree. The fifty-year-old Jayashree was the head of the journal of Tuesday. From the very beginning of *Nababharat* she has been there.

Seeing Deya, Anasua loudly called out, "Hey, come here. Up to now we were talking about you."

Listening to the cheerful welcome Anasua felt embarrassed, "Why, Anasuadi?"

"Eh, you are the hot news now. We are preparing news regarding you on Tuesday."

"Oh my God! But why?"

"Yes dear. I am focusing how you have shown noble gesture to that girl in the *Prabhatdarpan*. Jayashree is preparing the matter."

Jayashree waved her hand from the corner table. With smiling face she said, "Come and see this."

Deya was very surprised. Various types of casual and attractive news found place in the column of the *Prabhatdarpan*. Fine arts, literature, culture, science, small but special moments of the city life or any eminent personality- these were the basic items of the *Prabhatdarpan*. This section of the *Nabaprabhat* was very popular. What was being written there regarding Deya?

Jayashree was reading out. The heading was 'The Generosity of a Reporter'. The young reporter Deya Sinharoy did not finish her duty only after reporting the news. She had set a great example by providing shelter to the helpless and exploited young girl in her own house...

With an emotional tone Jayashree read the whole matter. Finishing the thing she was simpering, "Hey, do you like it? How have I written?"

Deya flushed with shame. With a hesitating tone she said, "Oh my God! Why have you placed so many adjectives beside my name?"

"At least I can never do such type of thing. I don't have that guts." Jayashree's smile looked sympathetic. "Take it as a felicitation to a bold lady like you from the weeks like us."

"Forget it! That's an exaggeration."

"Even to go beyond the limit for a noble cause is good." That was Anasua's voice.

"Leave it. What's the news of that side? Could you arrange something?"

Deya explicitly described the scene in each and every rehab centre.

Anasua was frequently nodding her head. Crease of tension appeared in Anasua's dignified face. "The demand of all the social workers goes high at the time urgency. Okay, let me talk once."

Right at the moment Anasua took out the thin diary from the drawer. While stooping on it she was pressing the buttons of the telephone. "Hallo. *Natun Diganta*? Is Ms. Nisha Maitra there? ...Oh, not available? When will she be coming? ...Oh, okay...when she returns inform her that Anasua Goswami had called. From the newspaper office. *Nabprabharat*. Tell her that it is urgent."

With a sullen face Anasua put down the receiver. "Your luck is bad. I am sure that it would have worked out if I could talk to Nisha Maitra. Nishadi is the president of *Natun Diganta*. Once I prepared a page regarding Nishadi. But presently Nishadi is in Delhi. By next Wednesday she will be back. Have patience for a few more days."

Listening this Deya smiled, "Anasua, I am already holding my patience."

But she murmured within, "But how will I convince Soumya?"

It seemed as if Anasua could sense something seeing Deya's expressions. She asked, "Is that girl staying comfortably with you?"

“Yes, she is. But she cries a lot.”

“Did you inform the police station as you have brought her home?”

“Yes, I have given them my address and other necessary information.”

“And what about your local police station?”

“What is the need for that? The investigation is being carried out by the police station in Shewli’s locality!”

“How strange! How can you forget those ruffians? There is no guarantee as to how long their hands can be? In fact the whole day both of you don’t stay at home. If they attack your house!”

“How will they recognize my house?”

Suddenly Debnath from the supplementary section of Friday told, “It will not be that hard if the police double-crosses. They generally have a link with the police.”

And right at the moment spoke out, “The ruffians have their own sources too. Searching your address would be a trivial task for them.”

“In fact I think that you should inform Ranenda about this. And if possible go and inform Malaybabu in Lalbazar.”

Jayashree asked timidly, “Hey, are you sure that nobody has followed you when you brought her home.”

Deya remembered Laxmidevi’s words. Somebody was wandering near the house. It seemed that Sabita had seen. Suddenly Deya felt her heart beating fast. Was it for herself? Or for that girl? Was everyone scaring her unnecessarily?

To get rid of her anxiety Deya laughed forcefully, “What are you saying? So many things are being written in papers. Do you think that anyone will dare to do something?”

Deya did not stand any more time in the current journals section. She returned to her office. She worked for sometime with restless mind. Special news was being written regarding her. A secret happiness was bubbling in her mind. On the other side there was an anxiety like continuous damp sweating. In the warp and woof of the two feelings Deya could not be stable. Before going out she sprinkled lot of water on her eyes and face thinking that the cold touch would make her inside also cool.

This time the monsoon set in time. Almost everyday the sky's face looked heavy. Often there was monotonous and tiring heavy downpour. Though it did not rain today, the sky was red. The weather was sultry and the wind was not blowing. At any time it could shower. Deya was walking through the footpath. The workers from the telephone department were digging the footpath. She had to walk carefully. The condensed sky brought down the darkness quickly. Even the bright streetlights appeared to be pale. Smeared with anxiety.

No sooner Deya crossed the temporary tea stall a sudden call terrified Deya, "Are you running away?"

An icy cold flow coming down through her spine made Deya numb for few seconds. The next moment she moved in wonder, "You-u?"

Ha..ha..ha... Ritam laughed out loudly, "Hey, you are scared, I see."

The palpitation did not stop yet. Deya took long breath. "How come you are here?"

"There is a newspaper office called *Nabaprabhat*. I came there."

Deya's eyes were wide open. "In our office? To whom? Why?"

"One of my friends works there. Deya Sinharoy. I had some work with her."

Deya burst out into laughter. "How flippant you are! As you are a writer you can't talk anything directly, I see. Why didn't you come upstairs to call me?"

"It is not good to enter the newspaper office frequently. The weight of a writer comes down."

"If I had come out after one hour?"

"I would have waited. If you had come after one month also I would have stood for one month. If you had come after one year...."

"Stop. Don't cross the limit. While walking Deya pinched Ritam, "Without going to my house why did you come to bother me here!"

"There is a great news for you."

"What's that?"

"Slow, friend, slow. Today I had a very busy day and I am heavily tired. Call a taxi first."

"How will I get a taxi here now? In this office hour?"

"If a beautiful girl wishes something in her mind the taxi will definitely stop. Closing your eyes meditate for a yellow and black taxi...the way Kunti called Surya..."

Deya was about to slap Ritam on his head. Before that really a taxi appeared. How strange. There was smile on the face of a taxi driver of Kolkata. Extending his head he asked, “*Didi*, are you going somewhere?”

Deya was quite embarrassed, “Yes, I will. Santoshpur.”

Miracles still happen. The driver did not run away. He said, “Come in, madam.”

Ritam relaxed his body in the back seat. He was lighting the cigarette taking it out from his embroidered *kurta*. Taking a long puff he said, “Could you arrange anything for Shewli?”

“I am trying my best. I hope to arrange something soon.”

“That means you haven’t managed to arrange anything so far. But I have arranged.”

“Really? Where?” Deya literally jumped, “You should have told this before.”

“There is a way of revealing good news. First take me home and give me something substantial to eat...”

“Hey Ritam, please tell it.”

“No, make a promise first.”

“Okay, I will feed you poison. Will it work?”

“If you give it with your own hand I will drink that too.”

“One should give you only poison.”

“*Guru* that’s what you did. You kicked me out and got married to a computer.”

“Hey, what are you saying?”

“I am not that worthless. I can even do something.”

“Hey! Are you in mood of delivering lecture? Be serious, please. Tell me something useful.”

“Okay, listen to this.” Ritam puffed the cigarette deeply. “Yesterday I placed the matter of Shewli in our parliament. There, poet Satyabrata, whose name has already been registered in the Guineas Book as a liar, gave me an address. And for the first time in his life he showed some respect for his name. According to his direction today morning I rushed to Diamond Harbour. It was not exactly proper Diamond Harbour. It is towards the South. Almost near Kulpi. There is an establishment for girls at that place. Golden Hope. An N.G.O. An Italian woman runs it. She is an Italian by name but now she has turned almost local who eats *jingeposto*. Perhaps she came here by kick of fate in her life.

Now she is busy with the destitute girls.” “I introduced myself and the *memsahib* showed special treatment in knowing that I am a writer. She let me know that it was her duty to give shelter to distressed and poor girls. Then...”

“Then what?”

“A sponsor is needed. The lady roams around to arrange some foreign advertisements. She runs the organization mainly depending on the funding from sponsors. We have to give her a lumpsum amount annually. But not much. Around five thousand.”

“That’s very good. I easily can sponsor Shewli. Paying five thousand yearly is not a big deal, isn’t it?”

“But the expense is recurring until Shewli becomes independent.”

“I told you. I can afford. But how is the place?”

“It seemed to be good. Most of the girls are orphans. And there are some whose parents can’t feed them...”

“Did you explicitly tell the lady about Shewli?”

“Why should I hide? Though the lady listened to it with interest but did not give importance to it. She told that her organization was meant for wiping out one’s past. If Shewli doesn’t open her story herself there will be no problem.” Ritam paused for a while and then told, “I knew that you would agree. I said yes to that lady.”

“You did a good job. When are you taking me there?”

“Whenever you say.”

It would be good to get rid of Shewli as soon as possible. Both for Deya and Shewli. Tomorrow is Saturday. So should she go tomorrow? Or the next Thursday? On her day off. Her two casual leaves are already over for Shewli. If she would take another leave now Asheshda would surely scold her. In fact the other day he was casually telling, ‘No sooner the responsibility increased you have started escaping.’ She must have to shop some things for Shewli. The girl would like to get new things before beginning a new life. She would need so many little thing. Other than the dresses she would need a bed sheet, towel etc. It would be good to buy a small suitcase.

Ritam threw away the small piece of cigarette through the window, “Why are you silent?”

“I am thinking.”

“Why are you thinking again? In fact the chapter is closed now.”

“Yes.”

“Then let me open another chapter. There is another good news.”

Deya turned towards him.

Ritam was dancing his eyebrows. “The *Janapad* has given me place.”

The matter did not strike Deya’s head. “What?”

“The *Janapad*. The leading Bangala literary magazine. They asked for my story in their special *puja* edition of the *Janapad*. Through post. What? Did you understand? I am not that insignificant compared to your computer.”

“Aha! Who says that you are insignificant? Deya ogled. “You are a genius.”

“All the legpulling will stop. There will be lot of fanfare all around me. Got it? The plot has already started pricking my brain. I have to bring it out properly. Everybody writes sad stories behind the screen of happiness. Mine will be smile coated with pain. Black irony. Would you like to listen? ...Think that a guy gets married to a girl...”

“That usually happens. A girl doesn’t marry another girl. At least not now.”

“Don’t interrupt. Think that the guy is crazy. He is not an insane but crazy. Bohemian type. He is not able to adjust with anything...”

“I got it. It is your autobiography.”

“You shun even the shadow of literature. How will you know? The writer is always present by all means in all his works. Sometimes directly and sometimes crouched in the characters. Now listen...”

Ritam was telling the idea of his story with great enthusiasm. He could not progress much. They reached home. He was literally jumping the steps to reach the third floor. He was singing in his awkward harsh tone, going out of tune. Deya was very pleased to see the happy face of Ritam. He was so full of life! Though outwardly he said that he was tired there was no such trace in his actions.

Entering the flat Ritam extended his arms in front of Laxmi. “India, how many days would you depend only on tea and air!”

Laxmi looked blank. At one time she was looking at Deya and the next moment at Ritam. Ritam was singing the tune of *keertana*. “There is so much scarcity of food in this country, bring *puri parota* and chicken mutton.” Laxmi now could understand the inner significance of the *Rabindrasangeet*, which was an instant brainchild of Ritam. She smiled showing all her black teeth, “I understood. You are hungry, right? But there is no chicken or mutton today. Today I cooked *tangra* fish.”

“Oh! Does the computer eat *tangra* fish?”

“Of course not!” Deya smiled. “In fact he does not prefer fish at all except for certain types. You can count them in fingers. Prawn, *hilsa*, *rohu*, that’s it. Because of him I have almost forgotten the taste of fish fish. Today I was desperate. So I brought some local *tangra*...”

“You don’t have a sense of humor at all. Celebration of good news with *tangra* fish?”

“Dada, what’s the good news?”

“Your helping hand will leave soon. Deya has arranged something for Shewli.” And saying this Ritam called, “Hey Shewli, where are you hiding yourself? Come here.”

Shewli was in the kitchen. She came out slowly.

“Go and pack your bags.” Ritam was hurrying in such a way as if Shewli was about to leave at the very moment. Dancing his finger he said, “The quota of your staying in *didì*’s house is over. Hey Deya, which date is she leaving?”

“Ah, Ritam. What are you doing? Why are you so restless?” Deya scolded him lightly.

He called Laxmi. “First get us some hot coffee.”

“And along with that get some food also. *Roti*, *luchi*, *parota*, omelette toast, any damn thing. A hippopotamus is jumping in my stomach.” Throwing those words to her Ritam got busy with Shewli’s topic again. “Shewli, the place that your *didì* has arranged for is firstclass. Do you get me? It is on the banks of a river. You can enjoy the gentle breeze and there is much greenery around. You will get many friends. Twenty to twenty five. All are of your age. You can learn to dance, sing and you can play even outdoor games. The court is already drawn.”

Shewli was looking blank. Deya pulled Shewli close. "Listen; there will be no pain for you anymore. It is a permanent solution. And once you go there, study hard. Do you understand? And concentrate in learning handiwork as well. Knitting in machine, preparing *papad*, pickle. The *memsahib* out there actually sells these things. And that money will also be yours."

Shewli's eyes were filled with tears. The drops ran down on her cheeks.

Deya became worried. "Hey, you fool. Why are you crying? You will play, dance and sing.... You will be absolutely fine there. Sometimes we will also visit and see the things that you have learnt."

Shewli lowered her head. She wiped her cheeks.

Deya patted Shewli's back, "Go with Laxmidi. Help her."

Shewli left silently.

Shewli's tears had broken Deya's tune of happiness. Both Ritam and Deya turned silent. Sitting on the sofa Ritam took out a cigarette from the packet and put it between his lips. But he did not light it. He was playing with the matchbox. Deya brought the ashtray and sat facing Ritam. Lowering the face she was running her fingers through her hair.

Deya's mood was off. Within these few days she became quite fond to the girl. Shewli stayed by her side all the while she was at home. Like her shadow. Or perhaps in the shadow of Deya she felt secured and happy. If Deya asked for something it breathed life in Shewli. She wanted to please Deya by all means. Within these few days Shewli's existence got established in this house in a strange way. Wouldn't Deya miss her when she would leave?

Ritam asked her absentmindedly, "Why did the girl cry?"

A small sigh rolled out from Deya. She said, "Perhaps she is missing her mother."

"Is it? But I think it's something else."

"What do you think?"

"Nothing. Leave it." It seemed as if a breath also rolled out from Ritam. Giving a strange fade smile he said, "You are happy, right?"

Could Deya find real happiness deep inside her heart? What she had was a mere feeling of assurance. But would it be right to utter those things now? At least in front of Ritam? In fact, nobody better than Ritam knew that, Deya was responsible to a great extent, for the distress of the girl.

Deya would bask in praise and glory in the following Tuesday and that too because of that girl... No, Deya doesn't have the face to let Ritam know about that. Ritam warned her again and again. And in spite of the rise of an adverse situation he did not blame Deya much. But like a real friend he willingly made Deya free from any accusation. Wasn't she being mean in front of the Ritam's noble gesture? Should Deya thank Ritam? Should she show gratitude to Ritam? No, no such word came on Deya's lips. In a low and indistinct tone she said, "Soumya will feel very relieved with this development."

It started raining in midnight. It was raining in the same pace. In the same tune. Continuously. The fan was moving in the full speed in Deya's bedroom. Smeared with the cool coziness the monsoon breeze was blowing in the whole room. The blue light is on. Like soothing happiness. Suddenly Deya's sleep got disturbed. Soumya was pulling her. Deya was lying turning her back to Soumya. Indistinctly she said, "What happened?" Soumya removed the thin bed sheet from Deya's body. Lifting his head he was hiding his face in Deya's bosom. Like a petted cat he was making a sound, 'Ummm'.

At the end of the night such erotic call from Soumya was very familiar to Deya. He started snoring soon after going to sleep. At that time he wouldn't even touch Deya. He would wake up exactly at three o'clock. And at that time he needed Deya the most. Everyday Supriya would wake her son up at this time for his studies. The habit of getting up at three had stuck steadfastly in the cells of Soumya's brain. And if his sex appetite rose at this hour what Soumya could do!

After marriage in the beginning Deya enjoyed the matter very much. And sometimes it seemed very strange to her. At the start of the night even if Deya's body desired something and even if she was restless with drive Soumya paid no attention to it. Deya needed to respond when he needed her the most. Soumya did not want to understand the fact that anything unusual would seem boring once it became routine. But today Deya did not mind. She was aroused with physical touch. She tightly hugged Soumya. Rubbing her face against his she said, "What happened, Somu dear? Are you going to study now?"

Soumya was madly kissing Deya. On the face, lips, neck, cheeks and all over her body. He was taking her sheer nightdress off. He was a man meant for business. He had no time to talk now.

Deya too felt heat between her legs. She felt dizzy with the smell of the man's body. Every pore of her body opened up. She was overwhelmed with sensation. Routine lovemaking ended in habitual rhythm.

Most of the days Soumya fell asleep at this time, but on some days, he would talk voraciously. Today in a satiated mood he was half asleep. He was running his fingers through Deya's hair. He said, "Do you know that Bugida has left today?"

"But your Bugida did not come here. He promised you..."

"It seems in the end he had to run around a lot. But Bugida's proposal is good."

"Hmm."

"If it clicks, the life's gear will really change. All the deadlines will rapidly come ahead."

Deya kissed Soumya's cheek. "Even starting the family?"

"No, that is fixed. The baby will not come in the higher purchase scheme."

"But sir, I have to count an installment for nine months. Deya smiled lightly. She lightly hugged Soumya. In a serious tone she said, "Hey, let's go for now."

"Why?"

"I want to. Mahua was saying, 'Why are you delaying it? In fact the increase in age means complication for women.'"

"But sweetheart, there are doctors for that. I can't change my plans suddenly."

"Even if I want?"

"Why will you make unfair demands? Once you are a mother you will be busy. Will you

be exclusively mine then? Let's enjoy life, sweetie."

Deya breathed out. Soumya is so immature.

Soumya lightly pressed Deya's hand. "Hey, our anniversary is knocking the doors. Whom you are planning to call?"

"Those who usually come. You can call your *Chotuda* this time."

"Why?"

"Why not? You are going to start something with *Bugida*.... Plus count your *Lalidi* too."

"No, I will not invite anyone from our family."

"But you are unfairly obstinate. *Lalidi* always remains in close touch with us. She visits us from time to time too. Whatever you say, I will definitely call *Lalidi*."

"No, never. Who are you to invite the people from my family?"

"Strange! Am I not the daughter-in-law of your family? Don't I have any wish?"

"Okay. Call her. But on the day of our anniversary I will not be present. In fact, that is a social gathering. It will not affect much even if someone is absent."

Deya laughed out. Soumya was really so immature. Pulling Soumya's nose she said, "Okay dear, as you wish. No *Lalidi Bhulidi* will come. Happy?"

Saying this Deya got up from the bed. Coming from the bathroom she drank some water from the glass kept on the dressing table. The rain was about to stop. The sound was very low now.

Though she was to go back to the bed she stopped. She was trying to listen to something. She said, "Hey can you hear something?"

"Where?"

"No, it's there. Listen carefully. It is a sound of moaning. It's coming from our flat."

Opening the door Deya came to the drawing room. She went slowly to switch on the dim light. Removing the center table Laxmi was in deep sleep on the carpet. Where was Shewli? Was the girl there?

Yes, it was. What she had thought was correct. Deya could sense that the sound was coming from the kitchen. Hiding the face between her knees Shewli was crying because of her suppressed pain.

Going there Deya kept her hand on Shewli's head, "What happened? Why are you crying sitting here?"

Shewli came to her senses suddenly with Deya's touch. With her dumb eye she looked at Deya once. In a moment throwing herself down she clung to Deya's feet. She cried out like a wounded animal, "*Didi*, I beg of you, *didi*.... Don't drive me out, *didi*.... I will stay here like a good girl.... I swear on you....I want to stay with you, *didi*.... Don't send me anywhere, *didi*.... I will die *didi*.... I don't have anyone except you, *didi*."

Shewli was shivering over all. Deya stood motionless like a pillar. Deya's eyes overflowed with tears.

10

This time the monsoon has suddenly disappeared before the arrival of the month of *Shravana*. After a couple of months' imprisonment, the Sun God has finally broken the shackles of clouds after his imprisonment of few months. Now he is all set to show his prowess. He doesn't give a damn to a few fleeting clouds and is steaming the whole city with the humid heat. It seems as if the water laden clouds have lost their way and moved to the West chased by some pressure. Who knows when they would return!

Ritam does not like such sultry summer at all. Sitting in his den Ritam was chewing his pen and every now and then was casting cruel glances at the prehistoric pedestal stand. Empty vessels sound much. The noise only caused headache but didn't give cool air. He was soaking with sweat since he returned from the market which didn't dry in any way.

Ritam wanted to drive away the hotness from his mind. In fact heat or cold is related to one's mind to a large extent. There is no harm in thinking that he is sitting in Siberia itself. There is a shower of snow from the sky. Trees and roads are covered with shredded cotton like snow. One can have the view of the houses; however they are

smeared with whiteness. Men, covered with fur from head to toe scurried along wanting to enter their homes quickly. Children threw snowballs at each other with their glove covered hands. An old man with his nose, frozen in cold, rubbed ice on it. Shivering terribly with cold, Ritam is walking beside the old man. How about bringing a polar bear in the scene?

Really, thoughts have their positive effects. The heat really seemed lessened. Ritam lowered his eyes on papers. Lighting a cigarette he was trying to concentrate on his writing. He had not been out of his house at a stretch for two days in order to get back to the story. But it's not shaping up...not shaping up. The fire is missing. The sour and sweet shades of the girl's pain are not taking a proper shape. It is drifting towards pathos. Hang it! Why doesn't the pen ever remain in his control? Again he would have to break, start and tear it.

Outside there was cacophony of female voices. Though unwillingly, Ritam's ears went there. *Didi* has come. Damn! Forget it now. It's all shattered now. Gudum is also here. Both the mother and son competed in shouting. Does it make any sense? Of all days *didi* had to come on this Sunday? With the thought there was a bang on the door. Opening the door wide, Gudum jumped like a ping pong ball. "*Mama* is here! Here is he!" He had managed to create quite a cool atmosphere. But with a blink of an eyelid it was over. Ritam wiped the sweat on his forehead, "Hey, what's up? What brings you people here?"

Immediately Runu appeared on the stage. Rolling her eyes in anger she said, "What do you mean by why? I have come to my father's house. I have come to see *ma*."

"That means to meet *ma* you have come to your father's house!"

"That means to meet *ma* you have come to your father's house!"

Thirty-five year old Runu was taken back. Twisting her neck she said, "Yes, I have come and it seems that you are not happy!"

"When did I say so? I just want to say that though *baba* died eight years ago it is still your father's house, not your mother's."

"What do you mean?"

“That means *ma* is a nonentity. Just think even *ma*’s own home is also not her own in our eyes but the house of our *mama*. The house where *ma* got married is also not hers but the house of our father. Now place yourself where *ma* stands.” Saying this with a grin, he asked Gudum, “Where have you come now?”

The answer from the five and half year old Gudum came quickly, “To my *mama*’s home.”

“Did you hear? Here you are a nonentity. Go back to your Baagbazar house and that will be your father-in-law’s house or the house of Gudum’s father, which means, there too you would be a nonentity. Am I wrong?”

Runu’s eyes were wide open. “Why are you weaving a cobweb in your mind?”

“I just want to make you to see the point that women still have no existence. However liberal you might be, you are like a cow tied to a post.” Ritam danced his eyebrows. “What did you understand? This is the main theme of my next story. Women themselves can’t understand how patriarchy has ingrained inside our bone marrows. I mean even women like you.”

Runu sneered, “Stop it. No need of delivering lecture sitting in your den. Come out of it.” Ritam shrugged. Is there any other choice since her majesty has appeared? If he didn’t come out there would be another danger. In another minute Gudum would want to write. Ritam’s literature and Gudum’s knowledge literally would all be one then. During Gudum’s last visit he had drawn a big sun on Ritam’s faded copy of a story. In case Ritam can’t make sense of what it is, he scribbled in capital letters ‘SUN’.

Putting down the pen and the paper in the drawer Ritam latched the door. Whenever *didi* visited their house a lively atmosphere was created. *Ma*’s face glowed with happiness. Shrabani would talk her heart out with her sister-in-law. *Didi* would toss Tuski around her. With his continuous mischievous activities Gudum would make the house lively. The household which is generally melancholy with the gloom of an imagined misery is flooded with happiness like the picture of a perfect family. Ritam quite enjoyed it even though it meant putting his work on hold. Everyone now was in Atasi’s room. Tuski’s mealtime episode was on, spectators were surrounding her. Quite a tough task. Shrabani held her tight. Opening her jaw she was forcing Tuski to swallow

the Cerelac. Like a mighty emperor Tuski can spend her entire life with a spoonful of Cerelac in her mouth. If another spoon was forced in her mouth she would spit it out. These days her favorite diet comprises of slippers and shoes. She has started crawling with quite a speed. And because of her queer diet tendencies all the footwear of the house had to be hidden from her reach.

Tuski just spat again... *fuuurrr*. Gudum clapped with joy. He was encouraging his sister. Shrabani's face got smeared with Cerelac. Runu looked fascinated.

Insinuating Runu told her brother, "Your daughter is just like you. She doesn't like any good food."

Ritam said, "*Didi*, don't talk rubbish. I never say 'no' food."

"Really? Then who threw up all those good jobs?"

"I swear. I really could not digest them."

"You did not even care about the business."

"The business would have been risky. It must have upset the stomach of people. How much mixture and potato chips can one consume, tell me?"

Atasi stormed in. "Runu, why are you again asking him about earning a livelihood? For someone who doesn't know what's good for him, to pressure him is mere wastage of one's own energies."

"I will not tell him anything. Your son-in-law has strictly forbidden me. He said that if good sense dawns upon Babua and he feels the need of earning he will have to take an initiative and meet Ambarda. He has sworn that he will not come forward to do anything on his own for Babua."

At last Ambarda himself has called it quits. Poor Ambarda! But he is a good man. In spite of hobnobbing with big-shot politicians his heart has not turned to stone. He still retains his virtues. In spite of being the secretary of a middle grade minister Ambarda is still quite honest. Till date he hasn't acquired a flat or a car. Neither does he have the reputation of mishandling money. But he can't be a saint either. Taking to someone or the other to procure jobs for the unemployed brother-in-law time and again is a form of favour. Brother-in-law's would-be wife managed a posting in a college of Kolkata itself. It was all because Ambarda could pull some strings. Those days it was Ritam himself

who saw Amabarda with Shrabani to plead her case. But yes had there not been that little pinch of lime in pure milk then Ambarda would have been an angel falling out of heaven. Whatever Ambarda had done it was only because he loved Ritam.

Yet Ritam could not control himself from poking Runu. Having a laugh he said, “Are you sure that Ambarda won’t do anything for me anymore?”

“He cares a damn.”

“Keep watching. People in politics are usually unable to keep their promises for long. Perhaps he can again build an argument as to why he should try doing something for Babua....”

“Ma, can you see? See how he talks!”

Not Atasi, this time Shrabani flashed angry eyes on Ritam. She was teaching the guilty a lesson by railing at the innocent. She whacked Tuski’s cheeks with force. Tuski whimpered. Runu cried, “Ah, why are you beating the little child?”

“Why shouldn’t I?” The sensible Shrabani quickly controlled herself. “It is almost killing me to feed her a mouthful of Cerelac!”

Atasi quickly cooled the environment.

“Now-a-days Tuski prefers *khichdi* quite well. Mixing the rice with *dal* I add vegetables and put it in the pressure cooker. And once it’s cooked I just add a bit of ghee. She devours it with pleasure.”

Runu pulled Tuski on her lap. Free of being fed Tuski’s tears also vanished within a moment. She was gleefully smiling and playing with her aunt. Gudum really wanted to take his sister on his lap. With a lot of efforts Runu was trying to save Tuski from Gudum. Cuddling her niece Runu said, “Now she is developing her sense of taste. You can try animal protein for Tuski. Small fish, chicken...”

Shrabani said, “In fact she likes. But I don’t give her much.”

The topic of the conversation changed. The house became vibrant again. Tuski, Gudum’s school, Runu’s office, Shrabani’s college, discussion about the relatives...

In between Atasi got up and went to the inner verandah. She gestured and called Ritam. Once he was there she asked in a low voice, “Why are you sitting tight? Go and bring some meat.”

“What should I bring? Chicken?”

“No, get some mutton. Runu likes it.”

“Hasn’t she had enough of meat? So far wasn’t she chewing all our brains?”

Atasi glared at him with anger enough to reduce Ritam to ashes in no time.

Ritam simpered, “*Ma*, who scares you more? Shrabani or *didi*?”

“Will you shut up? Will you now leave?”

Runu’s eyes and ears both were sharp. She could see across the wall. Shouting from the inner room she said, “Babua, are you going to the market? Take some money from me. Bring a lot of sweet curd. It’s been a long time since I have eaten curd from Satyanarayana’s shop.”

Shrabani’s voice could be heard, “*Didi*, why will you pay? I will give money for the curd.”

“Ah, in fact I wanted to buy it on my way. But I forgot...”

“No, no, you keep the money. I will give you treat.”

Both the women were busy in arguing regarding rights and courtesy. Ritam came in front of the door, “Nobody has to give. I have my tuition money. Today I will treat everyone to sweet curd. With it there will be a *Kamalabhog* for each of you from Satyanarayana. But don’t ask more than one? Is it alright?”

Back from the market Ritam found that there was a strange silence prevailing in the house.

Along with Tuski and Gudum, Runu went upstairs to meet the *jethus* and *kakus*. The relationship of Ritam’s family members with their *kakus* and *jethus* was not bitter. Whether it was a necessary or unnecessary occasion both the family members used to visit each other’s home. Even on special occasions they used to forget that they had separate ovens. Still there was a distance.

Everyone was somehow detached. Of course, whenever the daughters of the Sengupta mansion visited their paternal house they made it a point to peep into all the rooms at least once. In fact, Runu was welcomed especially as she was the wife of the right hand of a minister.

Runu came back after few hours. Again after chatting for sometime, feeding Gudum and making Tuski sleep all of them sat at the dining table around one o’clock. It was a grand

menu, *dal*, *beguni*, *machher kaaliaa*, meat, *chutney*, curd and sweet.

While eating, Runu herself raised the topic. “By the way Babua, what happened to the girl?”

Being a food lover Ritam was engrossed in relishing the dishes. Mixing rice with the curry he asked, “Which girl?”

“The girl from *boropisi*’s the house, ...whom you people rescued.”

“You mean, Shewli? But she is in Deya’s house now.”

“Why? Couldn’t you people manage a shelter home or something of that sort?”

“Actually the girl was not ready to go. She is not willing to leave Deya by any means.”

“Would Deya keep the girl with her for ever?”

“What else can she do? In fact Deya has become very fond of the girl.”

“Unnecessarily all the efforts of your brother went in vain.” Shrabani suddenly spoke out.

“In wee hours of morning he ran around to search a home for that girl. He found a place too for the girl to stay. But the girl did not budge an inch! Both that girl and your brother’s friend are glued to each other. And now your brother’s load has increased more with the mission of imparting education to that girl. Everyday, almost everyday he is going to that house!”

“Why are you talking rubbish?”

Shrabani’s cynicism pierced Ritam. In a hurt tone he said, “Do I go everyday? Did I go yesterday or day before yesterday? Wasn’t I at home for the entire day?”

“Oh, so you are repenting for having not gone there for the last two days? Go, go everyday, go twice a day. Who is forbidding you?”

What has Shrabani started? Ritam really felt very uncomfortable. There is no reason for Shrabani to nurse a grudge against the girl. So it isn’t difficult to guess that all her bitterness is targeted at Deya. But Ritam doesn’t go there for Deya. Whatever he is doing for Shewli, is his duty. Or else as a human being Ritam will not be able to respect himself! Doesn’t Shrabani have the sense to understand this? Or else is she blinded by baseless jealousy?

In a heavy tone Ritam said, “Shrabani, you don’t know what you are saying.”

In a heavier tone Shrabani said, “I know it very well. Too much of anything is not good.”

Runu looked at both Ritam and Shrabani. With a serious tone of an elder sister she said, “Babua, I think Shrabani is not wrong. A girl was in danger. You helped to rescue her. It’s fine. But now the girl has settled in some house. Now you don’t need to bother yourself so much about the girl. If they want to educate her it’s upto them. And even if they want to treat her like a maid it’s entirely their business. It’s unfair on your part to be anxious about her. One can not entirely ignore the girl’s past.”

“But it is our moral duty to help the girl to forget her past.”

“This is the responsibility of those who have housed her. Listen Babua, you haven’t seen much of this world. Forbidden life may be disliked but it has its allurements too. You would have to admit that the girl was in bad company. It is hard to give up bad company compared to a good one. Perhaps the girl is interested to lead a decent life but whether she can be good or not won’t be easy to tell. Her inner instincts will drive her towards evil. I mean this could be a possibility.”

“Even I am afraid of that.’ Atasi also could not sit as a mere spectator. “Any day the girl can trap Babua by doing something vile...!”

“Ma, please don’t tell these things to me. I feel very bad to listen to these things. Shewli is just a kid. She is the victim of an unfortunate situation.”

“Babua, that’s why I am telling you to be a bit alert about her. The environment that she belongs to...to change herself completely...”

Runu swayed her head on both sides, “Though you are calling her a kid it is not so. After the process, which she has gone through, she is not a kid any longer. She can’t be. I believe that you should keep a safe distance. You can go to see her once a while. That’s enough.”

What pointless arguments are these! Sitting in one’s own safe boundary, what a ridiculous effort it was to judge people from a distance! Meaningless middle class mentality!

Though Ritam was highly irritated he did not argue. There was no point in trying to convince them. It was enough that they could not understand the direction of Shrabani’s shaft.

Ritam concentrated on his food. He was taking out the marrow from the chicken bone by gentle strokes. The chicken was well cooked. He took a little more rice. Others were

eating silently too. Runu's and Atasi's faces bore the satisfaction obtained by suggesting Ritam to keep from falling into a pit. Shrabani too was eating with serious look on her. She added, "*Didi*, you know what bothers me all the more? Everybody uses him conveniently but never gives him the due credit. Did you see the newspaper article which was written about his friend?"

"Oh, really? Where did it appear?"

"In *Nabaprabhat*. Ten twelve lines of praise for Deya Singharoy."

"Doesn't Deya work in *Nabaprabhat* itself?"

"Where else? She got an article written in her own paper. But your brother was with Deya all through the matter. From supplying the news...even when the girl's mother died. That day too she picked him up from home. Then he had to rush to the cremation ground, morgue, police station and where not. But it was Deya Singharoy who got publicity! There was not a single mention of Ritam Sengupta's name! Hmm, that's what you call a real friend!"

With a pale look Ritam said, "I don't work for name."

"Very crestfallen. You are born to give life unconditionally for others. *Didi*, do you see the way he speaks."

Now Runu had a suppressed smile on her face. As if now she understood the actual secret of Shrabani's anguish. Spreading her smile she said, "What can you do? That's your husband's nature. You don't have the good fortune to be proud of your husband's achievements.

Babua always does things for his friends selflessly. To him things like name and fame are meaningless."

"*Didi*, I have a different sphere for name", Ritam retorted instantly. "My name also comes in print. But it's different that it does not draw attention of a few people. Tell Shrabani that the value of that name and fame is totally different. I don't need to be famous as a social worker."

"*Didi*, you can tell your brother that my eyes are very sharp. I notice everything."

"Even my writing?"

Now Shrabani had nothing to say. Runu laughed out, "What have you both started? It's enough. Stop now." Saying that she turned to Atasi, "What do you say Atasidevi? Will

you go to Rajasthan during the *Pujas*?”

Atasi could not understand quickly. “Rajasthan? All on a sudden?”

“The reason for which people go to Rajasthan. For a tour. I have already chalked the plan and programme. From here we will go to Jaipur by train. At Jaipur we will halt for two days. Then we will hire a car and see Ajmer, Jaysalmer, Jodhpur, Mount Abu, Udaypur, Chittor, Ranathambor and we will be back to Jaipur again. It will be a tour of three weeks approximately. With her face filled with happiness, Atasi spoke “I have never been to Rajasthan. Once I planned it with your father but for some reason we could not make it.”

“*Ma*, I had my board examinations that year. Hadn’t I?”

“Yes, I remember. That was a sudden obstruction and after that year...”

“But a journey of so many days....Runu, will it not be tiring? Would I be able to endure it?”

“Tell me why you think that you are that aged? You are only sixty. At your age Liz Taylor married again. The more you think that you are old...”

“*Ma*, there will not be a problem. You must go.” Ritam said. “*Didi* will hire a car. It seems that the roads of Rajasthan are also very good.”

“We might go as well. I have already asked to book tickets for all.”

“It will be a nice trip. You are alluring me. The land of forts. Love, chivalry, desert, architecture...”

Ritam’s eyes were dreamy.

“One has to take a good camera.”

“We will take the one of your *Ambarda* has. It is a good SLR camera. It is not that old too.”

“How did you coax *Ambarda*? In fact *Ambarda* doesn’t want to go anywhere these days.”

“He is not going. He doesn’t have the time! There is party conference in the month of November. At Bolpur. Do you think that he will have time for anything in October?”

“Hmm. In fact that will be a *Rajasuya Yajna*.”

“Actually he is not coming. And that’s why I have selected you.”

“Why? How can I substitute *Amabarda*?”

“We are going to such a distant place. Don’t we need a male with us? Do you expect us all three women to go out just like that?”

“Oh. That means I am a bodyguard.” Ritam winked. “But you have a male next to your hand.”

“Who?”

“Gudum. He is enough to guard you all... Didi, I don’t understand what you people are. You are working, your health is also sound and you have good dominating power too. Yet you need a guard?”

“Don’t talk rubbish. God Knows what will happen if we unfortunately run into a dacoit...”

“Do you want me to save you from dacoits? No chance. I won’t utter a single sound even if they rob you of everything. I’ll simply run in a ragged. Instead if Shrabani smiles a little at them there is a fair chance that the dacoits’ hearts may melt.”

“I understood. You are good for nothing.” Runu licked the last drop of curd.

She asked Shrabani, “Your holiday starts from the day of *Panchami*. Isn’t it? Or is it starting from *Mahalaya*.”

Shrabani looked a bit pale. Feebly she said, “*Didi*, I can’t go.”

All the three heads turned towards Shrabani at a time. Words spattered from Runu’s throat, “What are you saying? Why?”

“It will not be possible for me this time. I have given my word to *ma* that I will spend the whole vacation there. After marriage I have not spent quality time there. Even *baba* was insisting on it.”

In a low voice Runu said, “You are not coming for this? Spend the whole December there. You can stay there even now. You can go to college from there.”

“*Didi*, it is not so easy to manage daily up and down from that distant Chandannagar. The pressure in college is also high during this time.”

“Then should I cancel the trip?”

“Oh, no. What are you saying? No way. You take *ma*. Even your brother will also be coming. Let me be pampered by my parents for a few days.”

“Will it work if I talk to *mashi* and *meshomoshai*?”

“Please don’t tell them anything. They can’t say no to you on your face. But they will be hurt deep into their heart. They will think that I have asked you to tell them.”

Sharavani avoided eye contact with Ritam. “*Didi*, *ma* and *baba* is nourishing the hope for long.”

Looking at Shrabani, Runu left the table. She washed hands in the basin. Without speaking a single word she entered Atasi’s room. She fell flat on her mother’s bed next to her son.

There was a dead silence prevailing in the house. With a glum face Atasi also entered her room after cleaning the table. Ritam sat smoking. Why did suddenly Shrabani behave like that? Ego? Irritation? Or the fear that the split in their relationship would surface in front of others. No, in that case Shrabani would not have fought in that manner in front of *didi*. Would she to spend her entire vacation in Chandannagar? The relationship between Shrabani’s sisters-in-law and her parents was quite bitter. Because of their tiffs Shrabani doesn’t prefer to spend a single night there. She used to say that she felt suffocated. No, no, excuses, they were all excuses. There must be something more to it, some other secret to it.

Ritam could hardly breathe throughout the whole afternoon. After Runu left in the evening he caught hold of Shrabani. In an unanimated tone he asked, “Why did you hurt *didi* like that?”

Sitting on the bed Shrabani was correcting papers. In a quiet tone she said, “Can’t I wish to stay with my parents?”

“You are lying. It is just an excuse.”

“If you have understood why are you asking?”

“What was your point in hurting *didi*?”

“I have not hurt anyone. Where do I have that power? Yet if *didi* is hurt I will apologize to her.”

“But why did you talk like that? Why won’t you go?”

Shrabani stilled her red pen. She turned towards him. Looking straight at Ritam’s eyes she said, “If you apply a bit bit of common sense you can understand why I will not go. It is a tour of three weeks. Have you calculated how much it would cost per head? *Didi* has

money. She works in a bank. She has LTC...Whenever *didi* goes for an outing she wants to stay in a good hotel with comfort...That means it will be blow of ten thousand rupees per head. I don't have so much money."

"Strange, only because of this petty reason you...!"

"For you it may be a petty reason but it matters a lot to me. At this moment it doesn't suit me to blow up twenty to twenty five thousand rupees. Moreover, I don't have that much money. Should I borrow for a tour?"

"But *didi* never raised the topic of money."

"That's what hurt me. Why didn't she raise it?"

"*Didi* is taking us for a tour. *Didi* is aware of our condition. Will *didi* think about money?"

"Why should I tour with *didi*'s money?" Shrabani emphasized a lot on the word 'I'. It seemed that she was trying to draw attention to something more than 'I'. Her voice was slightly tearful, "Don't I have any self-respect?"

"Oh." Ritam raised his eyebrow, "You could have told this openly to *didi*."

"It can't be said. At least it was not possible on my part."

"Why? Is it that dangerous?"

"You won't understand."

"Make me understand. I will surely understand if you try."

Suddenly Shrabani's continence changed. The bluish veins in her throat were throbbing. She bit her lips with her teeth. She was almost breathless.

Turning his hand Ritam said, "Tell me, what happened?"

Controlling the tears, which were about to burst out Shrabani told shaking her head, "You can't understand at all where a woman gets hurt...!"

Ritam was stupefied. He murmured, "Hey Shrabani...We already had discussed this. Didn't we?"

"That's why I feel bad to force you." Shrabani seemed to shake a little with the force of her suppressed tears. Wiping her tears with her fingers she said, "I can't go and stay at Chandannagar...a question mark always hangs on the faces of *baba* and *dadas*. I have to lie in so many ways to my friends, relatives and at other places...!"

"Why do you lie? Shrabani, what is the problem in speaking the truth?"

It seemed as if there was spark of lightning in Shravan's eyes along with the rain, "Ritam, what are you made of? Don't you write stories? Can't you read the mind of a woman?"

Ritam looked at Shrabani without blinking an eyelid. How could he make such a big mistake in understanding her? Time and again Ritam has laughed away Shrabani's anger about his frequent job quitting. He thought it was temporary. It's not what she actually means. But Shrabani in the bosom of her heart....! One was still familiar with the envious Shrabani. Jealousy is another of love. But this cloudy Shrabani is completely unknown to him.

Deep, very deep inside Ritam's heart an odd pain was in the process of solidifying. The pain was rotating. No, girls can't take it! Girls still can't take it!

Had Ritam been someone like Soumya Deya too would have suffered from such an inferiority complex? Perhaps she would.

Ritam came to his own room silently. He sat with his pen and paper. This time definitely his writing would get its flow.

11

Soumya was finishing his breakfast before going out. Deya has changed the routine a bit today. She has fried the bread slices dipping them in the egg batter. French toast. This is something Soumya more or less likes. One had to turn the bottle of ketchup and pour a lot of it on his plate. Soumya needed a lot of ketchup with French toast. Although he was not eating cornflakes today, some milk was kept nevertheless aside for him. In a big glass. Soumya never touched tea. Once in a while during an off-day he drank a little coffee if he felt like, with lots of milk. It was tough to make out from sipping that hot concoction whether it was coffee mixed in milk or milk mixed in coffee. Taking out the frozen chicken from the freezer Laxmi was boiling it. Just a while ago Sabita has cleaned the utensils. Wiping them with a dry cloth Shewli was arranging them

on the rack. Taking her plate Deya sat on the table, “Do you want some more? I have distributed whatever was there.”

“I don’t need.”

“I have put chicken sandwich in your lunch box. Should I put a banana too?”

“Okay, put it.”

“Salad?”

“No. The other day the onion turned sour. If you want, put only cucumber.”

Deya raised her voice, “Laxmidi, slice only cucumber today. No need of tomato and onion. And yes, spread mayonnaise on the bread slices. I will make the sandwiches. She bit a piece of the French toast as she said this. Pointing the finger towards it she said, “Please, pass the pickle.”

Deya didn’t like tomato sauce. She loved chilly pickle. Soumya passed the bottle of pickle towards her as he ate. He asked, “What’s your plan for the day?”

“I will be at home. Rest. I will eat, sleep and relax. I may even sit with the article in the afternoon for sometime.”

“That story of yours regarding the female feticide?”

“Yes. Anasuadi is asking me to speed it up. I am almost through collecting the state wise data. Even in the computer age you can’t imagine how horrible the picture is!”

“Just see to it that a feminist stamp doesn’t get attached to you.” There was narrow smile on Soumya’s lips.

Deya frowned, “Strange, half the human race is female. At least that’s what it should be to maintain nature’s balance. They are killing the girls even before they are born or throwing them in the dustbin after birth. Shouldn’t there be a protest in a civilized society? And if a woman happens to protest then it is fair to instantly label her a feminist.”

“Have you ever thought why they are killed? The parents are often reduced to beggars in order to get a girl married. Because of that fear...”

“Why should this go on? The system needs to change. I will write against dowry too.”

“Can you change the system only with your writing?” Soumya smiled derisively with a sense of neglect. “Forget it. Nothing will change by writing about these things.”

“What else then? A public opinion is created with incessant writing. The practice of Sati

could be banned because people like Rammohan and Vidyasagar wrote against it. The widow marriage started too...”

“It was not because of the public opinion. For that a law was required.”

“The pressure of the public opinion consequently brought about the law...”

“That law is still there. The dowry system is still illegal. Then why does one need to create fresh public opinion?”

“Because a particular section of the society is not obeying the laws.”

“Then why do you think that they will change on reading your articles?”

“But public opinion created in various forms will generate some kind of mental pressure.”

“Come on dear. Face the truth. This is not the age of Rammohan and Vidyasagar. Now life is fast. Nobody has time to create an uproar only by reading an article.” Soumya sipped his glass of milk, using his tongue to check the amount of sugar. Gulping the milk he said, “In today’s world people would see the article, read it, show some concern and the maximum they would do is to say that the girl has written quite well. This is not something that should go on. And after that they forget everything. So despite all your noble intention ultimately it ends in spreading gems in a jungle.”

Deya turned silent. Neither she could entirely deny what Soumya said nor could she accept them wholeheartedly. If nothing really worked then how could one prevent these gruesome incidents? Didn’t the pen create a small wave somewhere? It’s true that the blow of an axe is not enough to bring about the fall of a mountain but does the blow go in vain? The blow exists at least somewhere in nature.

Soumya finished his milk. He was wiping his lips. Spreading his smile he said, “Listen to me, journalist. To stop these dirty things is the duty of government. You want to write, go ahead. Write with all your heart. It will fill the pages of your supplement. The topic would be interesting too. But don’t expect any result. You have made me blabber a lot before going to the office. Now give me some water.”

The jug on the table was empty. Finishing the last bite of the French toast Deya went to the kitchen. Laxmi was cutting the bread in a triangular shape in a very slow pace. She took the knife from her hand. Casually she told Shewli, "Give a glass of water to *dada*. Don't give him cold water but mix both the hot and cold water." Saying this she asked Laxmi to work fast.

"Laxmidi, hurry. Make it fast. Shred the chicken pieces quickly. It is already eight fifteen. Your *dada* will start shouting now."

Deya was working like a machine. She sliced cucumber into pieces. She prepared sandwich and made the lunch box ready. She kept the bananas in the box carefully so that they don't get crushed."

Covering the lunch box with a polythene packet Deya proceeded to the bedroom quickly. On the way she stopped. The glass full with water was still there on the table!

Taking the glass in hand Deya entered the room, "What happened? Why did you get up without drinking the water?"

Soumya was knotting his tie standing in front of the mirror. Pretending not having heard Deya, Soumya asked, "Where is my towel kerchief?"

"I'll get it." Deya kept the glass on the dressing table, "Drink the water."

Soumya cast a side-glance at the glass.

Opening the wardrobe which was bought from an auction store Deya took out the handkerchief and put it in Soumya's pocket. In a surprised tone she asked, "What happened? Why didn't you drink?"

Combing his hair Soumya said, "Please bring my briefcase from that room."

Deya stopped after taking a couple of steps ahead. Lines of surprise were visible on her forehead. She slowly retreated her steps. As soon as their eyes met Soumya moved his eyes to avoid eye contact. He was sniffing at the handkerchief taking it out from his pocket.

With a frown Deya asked, "Why are you not drinking the glass of water? Is it because Shewli gave it to you?"

"I asked you to give me a glass of water." Soumya was serious, "If you had to order someone else, you should have told me in advance that you can't do it."

"You wouldn't have any problem if Laxmidi had given the water, would you?"

Without replying Soumya proceeded to the next room. Deya quickly caught hold of his hand, "Wait. Answer my question. Why do you hate Shewli so much?"

"Deya, everyone has his own likes and dislikes."

"But this is an insult to me. Just because I have forced Shewli's stay on you."

"You are free to interpret it as you like. My likes and dislikes are very clear. And you know it."

Within a fraction of a second few pictures flashed in front of Deya's eyes. Some fragmented pictures. Laxmidevi's making *rotis* at night, placing them in a casserole. Shewli's standing by the table, saying that his stomach was full. Soumya's getting up and leaving...! Shewli was taking Soumya's shirts and trousers to put them in the washing machine. Soumya scolding, "Leave them, I will wash my clothes...!" Soumya was working on his computer. Shewli devouring the pictures on the monitor from a distance. Soumya shouting with anger, "Why are you here?" Soumya watching cricket in television and sensing Shewli's presence turning off the television...!

Does such childishness suit an adult like Soumya?

Deya did not pick up a quarrel. She tried to convince Soumya. In a soft tone she said, "Why are you behaving like that? In fact Ritam and I tried to send the girl to a destitute home. The girl is scared...doesn't want to go. You have seen how she has been crying. Let a couple of months pass. Once she regains her mental strength we can think..."

"You will never send her anywhere. That I have very well understood."

"You just wait and watch whether I send her or not."

"I have nothing to see. If she doesn't stay here how would at every moment you get to prove that you are noble in front of others? She is a living advertisement of your greatness."

The words pierced her heart like a sharp arrow. Still Deya did not get agitated. In a cool manner she said, "Well, may be you are right. But you too would admit that the girl is in distress. I have not done anything wrong by letting her stay in our house. Have I?"

"The question doesn't arise regarding good or bad. The whole thing is about likes and dislikes. Do I have to like everything done with noble cause? If today someone arranges

for a boxing match for the aid of thalassemia patients do I have to sit and watch the duel of punchers? When blood oozes out from boxers' noses do I have to clap saying that oh, what a noble cause. What a noble cause it is!"

Deya was embarrassed. She said, "Is it the right comparison? Have I done something so gruesome?"

"You may not feel so. But for me it is like that. You may think that this act is noble. But why are you forcing me to like it? I am enduring it and isn't that enough? Which other husbands would bear with it, eh?"

Soumya freed his hands from Deya's clutches and left. Bringing his briefcase from the next room he was putting the lunch box in it with a lot of noise. He opened and closed the wardrobe without any reason. Thereafter he started wearing his socks and shoes sitting in the drawing room.

Deya came out quickly. Shewli and Laxmidi were in the kitchen. She looked at them once. No, neither of them had raised their voices. The others had not heard anything.

To overcome her uneasiness Deya talked to Soumya. In a normal tone she asked, "When would you be back?"

"Let's see."

"If possible come soon."

"Why?"

"Just like that. We can go out somewhere."

"I will try but I can't promise."

As soon as Soumya went out a fragment of a smile appeared on Deya's face. *Uff*, what an anger. He would consider this act as noble but by any means would not like it.

No, Deya would have to take a lot of initiative. She must try to melt Soumya's heart. Perhaps there was no need for that too. After few days Soumya would gradually accept Shewli. People get attached even to the cats and dogs at home and she after all was a human being.

Her head had started aching a little. Why hadn't Laxmidi brought the tea till now? Deya was about to throw an order to Laxmi when the calling bell rang.

Was it Soumya? Had he forgotten to take something?

As Deya opened the door, there were two women standing. Strangers. One would be of

thirty-five or thirty-six and the other lady would be a little older than her.

The relatively older woman folded her hands in greeting her. "You must be Deya Singharoy?"

"Yes I am. Hello. Tell me."

"We are coming from the Women's Welfare Society. We have a specific work with you."

With a delighted face Deya said, "Come, come. Please come inside."

Sitting on the sofa the other woman said, "I am a cousin of Ashesh Dasgupta in your office. My name is Mallika Dasgupta. And she is our secretary. *Basantidi*. Basanti Pal."

What a surprise! *Asheshda's* sister! Deya anxiously said, "Shall I ask for tea? What will you prefer? Tea or coffee?"

"Oh, why do you worry? Sit. Let us talk about business."

"That's not done. Just a second."

Going into the kitchen Deya asked Laxmi to make some good coffee. She also asked to bring some cashew nuts, salted biscuits and mixture arranging them nicely. Coming back she asked, "Is it *Asheshda* who gave you the address?"

"No, *dada* could not give the exact address. I called him last night. He gave me a rough direction. He said that it is somewhere behind Santoshpur Lake."

Deya was all the more surprised. The *Glumtherium* had so much information about her?

Basanti said, "But we did not have to search a lot. A lot of people seem to know you, I found. When we mentioned the name of *Nabaprabhat* at the junction... Downstairs we met a tall and fair person. He was taking out his motorbike. It was he who directed us to the second floor..."

Deya laughed out, "He is my husband."

"Oh, is it?" Mallika was smiling, "That's why he was asking where we were coming from."

Basanti said, “Ah, if we knew it before we could have talked to him for a couple of minutes.”

“But what it is about?”

“No I mean the gesture that both of you have shown. I mean the broadmindedness that both of you have shown....”

Deya’s acceptance of the praise offered to both of them got reflected on her merry face. Shyly she said, “No, no, have we done anything special? She did not have any place to stay and that’s why...”

“These days who else would do like that? How many people would have the guts to bring home a girl like that?”

Deya did not like the phrase ‘such a girl’. She does not like such thoughtless and sudden comments about Shewli at all? It’s been quite sometime since she had been seeing Shewli from close quarters. Has she ever found Shewli different? She might not be at par with them but she could be easily passed as Laxmidi’s daughter.

The girl turned greedy due to poverty. And she was lured into a trap of love which brought about the dangerous turn of events. But that’s nothing unnatural.

Deya asked humbly, “But you haven’t yet told what you need from me.”

“Yes, let’s come to that.” Basanti settled herself on the seat. “We conduct two or three seminars every year on behalf of our society. This year too we are going to conduct one on the occasion of Independence Day. The topic this time is ‘the status of woman in our present society’. You have to be there as a speaker.”

“Me?” Deya was almost startled, “I can’t deliver speech or anything like that. Moreover on such a heavy topic...Oh my God, I can’t do it!”

“It’s you who can do it. The condition that girls from lower middle class families live, how they are exploited, what kind of dangers they have to face, the problem of rehabilitating such helpless girls... You have gone through such an experience. You’ll

narrate your experience in your own way. You tell about how the girl's mother died."

Mallika said, "Many famous women from other spheres will also come. Artists, writers, and social workers...we want you as a journalist and also as a person who provided shelter to that girl."

Deya was in a dilemma. She had never been to such meetings and seminars in her life. At least as a speaker. Many women with great qualities and intellect will be present. What could an ordinary woman like Deya speak in front them? Her knees were shaking just to think about it.

On the other hand Deya felt enthusiastic inside. Was there any need to deliver a long speech? She would tell those things in a well-organized manner whatever she had seen, whatever she had understood. That much she could speak, couldn't see? Ah, Soumya would definitely tease her when he would come to know about this. Was the tag of a feminist going to be attached to her?

Basanti said, "So we are going to print your name on the card?"

"But..."

"No 'buts'. We want young women like you. We want your opinion, the reflection of your thought."

Coffee had arrived. Shewli herself had brought it. She carefully placed the tray with cashew and snacks on the center table. She handed over the cups and plates to Basanti and Mallika.

Signalling through her eyes Basanti asked, "Is it the one?"

Deya nodded her head.

Basanti asked, "What is your name?"

Shewli isn't diffident any longer. Sportingly she said, "Shewli. Shewli Chakraborty."

“Oh. You are a Brahmin’s daughter? How far have you studied?”

“Class eight.”

Deya quickly said, “I have made her pursue her studies again. Now a days she sits with books at home.”

“Wonderful. It’s great.”

Shewli smiled mildly, “May I go?”

“Yes, you can leave.” As soon as Shewli left Basanti, lowering her voice asked, “Can you get her admitted in a school?”

“Let me see. I will approach her. Otherwise she will study in private.”

Mallika said, “Really, you have guts. NadudaI mean Asheshda also have praised you a lot. He said that she is a very active girl. She never cribs. Always full of enthusiasm ...”

Deya was surprised. Not because of having known that Asheshda is called by another name but about Asheshda’s praises about her. That means there was another face of *Ragudada*?

After Mallika and Basanti left Deya moved around from room to room in a pleasant mood. With duster in her hand she was cleaning the furniture. Recently she bought three foliages of tropical plants from Gariahaat. She inspected the plants attentively. There were marks of water on the mirrors of both the bathrooms. Using wet newspaper she scrubbed them sparkling clean.

And like a tail Shewli was trailed behind Deya. She followed every step of hers. She showed great enthusiasm in whatever Deya was doing. She could not understand how to help her *didi*. Sometimes she was running to bring a duster of feather or a cloth. At times she shifted the tubs from here and there. They were busy in conversation while working.

“*Didi*, who were those people? Your friends?”

“*Psh*, how can they be my friends? Didn’t you notice that one of them was quite older

than me! They had come to invite me.”

“For a wedding...?”

“Don’t be stupid. This is an invitation of different kind. I have to go to a place to give a speech.”

“Why do you give a lecture? In fact, you are not a teacher.”

“Do you think no one other than teachers can deliver lecture? Okay, I will be going somewhere. Will you come with me?”

“Definitely. If you take me I will go.”

“Won’t you be scared?”

“I won’t have anything to fear if you are with me.”

“Throw any kind of fear from your mind. Haven’t I told you that I had been to Lalbazar? I have talked with all the highly placed police officers. They said, ‘Don’t worry. Nobody can touch even the tip of the girl’s hair’...will you remember that?”

“Yes...But if you don’t stay with me...”

“Hey idiot, from where did you get so much of trust upon me? Do you know if any day I become angry with you I can drive you out from my home?”

“Ah, you can’t do that at all.”

“If I put you in some shelter?”

“Why are you scaring me again?”

“Hey, again lemon water? Again lemon water? Wipe your tears.”

“I will not go to any home.”

“Why? Why are you so scared to go to any home?”

“Because you will not be there.”

“Will it do if you say like this? Your Babuada found such a nice place for you where you could have stayed far better than this place.”

“No, *didid*. I don’t know anyone there; don’t know what is there in the mind of the people out there. If anyone forces me again...*Didi*, I feel very scared.”

“Idiot. I have already told you that so many girls like you stay there. Your Babuada is very angry with you.”

“*Hi hi*. Do you know Babuada is crazy? The other day I was unable to solve an arithmetic. A problem of interest. Babuada was tearing off his hair and said, ‘if you can’t solve the problem I will jump from the second floor.’”

“Do you like Babuada very much, eh?”

“Yes.”

“And *dada*?”

Shewli’s mouth was shut as soon as the topic about *dada* was raised.

Deya wanted to enjoy the fun. “You are very scared of *dada*. Aren’t you?”

Shewli nodded her head with fear.

Deya was laughing. “No dear. *Dada* is not at all bad tempered. He is a bit different. And he is always under a lot of work pressure. Go in front of him checking his mood and temperament. Do you get me?”

Shewli nodded her head quickly.

“Now I will go for a bath. You go and help Laxmidi.”

“Laxmi *mashi* doesn’t allow me to cook. She says, ‘*dada* will not eat if you cook.’”

Has Laxmidi too noticed Soumya’s different behavior? Laxmidi doesn’t behave badly with Shewli. Yet Laxmidi did not like her staying in this house. Deya could feel that. Now and then Laxmidi complains against her regarding little things. Did Laxmidi say

like that only to hurt Shewli? Could anyone say like that to a girl of her granddaughter's age?

Deya changed the topic, "Can you cook?"

"Who else cooked at home? Did *ma* have time? I would go to school only after finishing all the cooking."

"What all can you make?"

"*Dal, laughanta, chachchari, ...* While saying Shewli's voice got choked with tears, "My mother used to cook very well."

"Again you have started crying? I have already asked you not to think about the past any more!"

"*Didi*, my poor mother never had any peace. After my father's death when *ma* started working as a domestic help in others' houses she cried everyday on returning..."

"You were very young, I suppose. Do you remember?"

"In fact later too *ma* would tell many times, 'Shewli, I had never imagined in my life that I would have to earn a living by working as a maid servant.' You remove all my pains after being educated. And to that mother I have..."

A bond was being formed through the conversation. The bond of sympathy. Care. Deya was getting involved in Shewli oblivious of her knowledge.

Tugging at Shewli's plait Deya said, "It's enough. Stop. Go and get my hair oil. Let me have my haired oiled for sometime. Then I will shampoo my hair."

Shewli wiped her eyes, "Should I apply to your hair?"

"Can you massage? By rubbing it?"

Again something new for Shewli to do. She was indeed delighted. She ran to the

bathroom and brought Deya's coconut oil. Parting Deya's hair she was massaging the oil."

Deya's eyes got closed as she relaxed, "Wow, you have a first class hand for massage! In fact you can join in a beauty parlor."

"My mother used to massage oil in this way. She used to say that oil is the life for hair."

Again past affairs. Deya changed the topic, "Just see if I have a gray hair."

"*Tut*. How can you have any gray hair?"

"It's quite possible. Due to all kinds of tension."

"What kind of tension?"

"About you? Who else can it be?"

"*Didi*, I have put you in a lot of trouble. Haven't I?"

"Again why are you crying? Hey, you conscious sinner, You'll get a good spanking from me. Look for a gray hair."

Shewli started comb searching with full concentration, looking for a gray hair on Deya's scalp. Her thin fingers were searching around like an expert detective. The tingling sensation on her scalp was really making her sleepy.

During the initial days Deya was quite tensed. What status would she give Shewli in her house? That of a maidservant? Or else a helpless relative? She felt quite hesitant to make Shewli work. She felt as if exploiting her because of her condition. But Shewli herself found out the solution. She had herself chosen a middle path.

A sudden pulling of hair came between her thoughts. As if she had discovered hidden treasure of Tutenkhamen, the much-delighted Shewli said, "*Didi* I have found it. It's here."

Scratching her head, Deya looked at the hair. Not completely gray. A combination of black and white.

There was fake sadness on Deya's face, "What will happen now? I am not even a mother yet and already I have aged. What if your *dada* drives me out!

Shewli's face looked crestfallen. "*Didi*, you need not tell anyone. Even to Laxmi *mashi*. I will throw it without anyone's notice."

Shewli ran to the window to throw it. Deya was looking at Shewli.

Deya felt that the cruelest experience of life still had not yet robbed her of all her simplicity.

Laxmi came inside wiping her hand in her *aanchal*. Seeing the intimacy of Deya and Shewli she looked a bit grave. She said, "There is something that I have been waiting to tell you since morning."

Deya turned her neck. "Yeah."

"Subhash came yesterday."

"Oh really? So what does he want to buy this time?" Smirking Deya said, "Taxi? Bus? Minibus?"

"He didn't come for money. He wants to take me to Sonarpur one of these days."

"Will he take you for a rickshaw ride? Okay go. Next Thursday I'll be at home. Go on that day."

"He asked me to go on Monday itself. That's convenient for Subhash."

Deya had a doubt now. Was Laxmi showing her anger?

Deya frowned, "How will it be possible on Monday? How can Shewli stay alone?"

"Is she a kid? She can do everything by herself. She'll manage for a day."

"That's not what I mean. You know that I don't want to keep her alone at home!

"Because of that shall I be in lifelong confinement?"

Quite often Laxmi used chaste vocabulary with correct grammar. At other times Deya would laugh it off. But now she didn't find it funny. Anger, jealousy or ego whatever she had in her mind Laxmidi was not wrong in what she said. Would Laxmidi have to be confined for Shewli? For how many days can this go on? Shewli must slowly get used to stay alone.

With an expressionless face Deya said, "Okay. Go. But I have a three o'clock duty on Tuesday. So try to get back before that."

Laxmi perhaps hadn't imagined that she would get the permission so easily. She was standing still.

Deya asked, "Anything else?"

"Your mother was enquiring about you last evening. Call her sometime."

To talk to the *ma* now meant to listening to the same old tune. 'Listen, why have you kept the girl with you! Listen, why you are not driving her out! Today this girl may seem like a needle but tomorrow she will prove to be a knife. Be careful.' These days she didn't feel like calling her parents' house. Even *dada* the other day curtly said, "Mimi, why are you inviting problems for yourself! *Baba* is much tensed about it!" How strange! Even her near and dear ones didn't want to understand that Deya was mature enough to judge between good and bad. Terrible! Terrible!

Ma bares her soul to Laxmi. Regarding Shewli. Deya knew it. Did Laxmidi intend to scold Deya through her mother, as she did not have the guts to do so.

With a serious face Deya said, "I'll call her later."

Deya got up and went to the bathroom. She massaged the shampoo on her scalp for sometime. Today she was not in a hurry to dry her hair. Today is the day of a luxurious bath for her. Standing under the downpour of the shower, Deya planned that she would ask Ritam to come on Monday without any fail and come early.

In the afternoon after finishing her lunch, Deya sat with her work. Sabita has left after cleaning the utensils.

Laxmi was lying in the drawing room. Shewli was sleeping on the floor of the smaller room. First Deya opened her e-mail for messages. There was something. It was from her friend of university days, Enakshi. Married and relocating herself in Canada Enakshi was touring a lot with her NRI husband. She has listed a lengthy description of her tours. Having sent her a reply Deya started working on her own article. Organising it. She was deep into data and statistics. She collected quite a number of pieces from old newspaper cuttings archives. She read them attentively.

Sitting at a stretch always gave Deya a throbbing pain in her spine. She got up and drank water, opening the fridge. Then she stood on the balcony. Today the sky was deep blue. There was not a single trace of cloud. One couldn't feel that *Shravana* had already arrived. But there was heaviness in the wind. The humidity in the air proclaimed that its there, the monsoon is still there.

From a distance the main road was full of traffic as usual. The road in front of the house was almost lonely. The absentminded eyes of Deya at times were at the distance and at times near. Were Sabita's words true? Was someone really coming often? It couldn't be so easy. Even the police told her the other day, 'madam, the rowdies and hoodlums are also concerned about their lives. If they are caught red handed could they survive the beating!'

Suddenly she remembered the two ladies she met in the morning. Soumya would tease her a lot if he came to know.

As soon as Deya stepped into the smaller room she was very shocked. The sleeping Shewli looked restless on the floor. Curling her body she was trying to save herself from someone. An odd sound was coming from her mouth with inexpressible pain

Perhaps the nightmare of those horrible days...

Deya trembled. Could those days be ever erased? Poor Shewli!

12

Soumya was unable to concentrate on his work since morning. His mind was disturbed. There was a group discussion with Amitabha, Deepanjan and Sutanuka about the new project. Soumya kept being distracted amidst the discussion. This rarely happens to him.

What has Deya stared? Deya didn't even bother to inform him that Laxmidi would be leaving for Sonarpur the next day. It seems she forgot all about it. Even her argument seemed so absurd! "When I return from office either you dozing off for sleep or sitting in front of the computer like an addict, and morning means a rush for you. When can I discuss the domestic matters with you?" But the day before yesterday was Sunday and Deya spent the whole morning in a leisurely manner. Would it be fair if Soumya considers Deya's mistake as something intentional? Did Deya not know what kind of uneasy situation Soumya would have to face in the absence of Laxmidi?

Soumya understands everything. Deya was making a futile attempt of creating pressure on Soumya. She thinks that in Laxmidi's absence Soumya would be forced to seek help from that girl. Deya, you haven't known Soumya as yet. It was not that easy to change Soumya's decision. Strange! Deya forgot to tell Soumya but not Ritam. Ritam comes and sits in order to guard and Soumya has to see that! Was it not an insult to Soumya?

Last night Soumya heated the food himself. Deya was annoyed even with that! "Look you have caused stick to the pan. Shame on you. Don't you know that one has to reduce the flame while heating food? The bowl of *alur dam* has turned lampblack. Can Sabita clean it tomorrow?" Her conversation was interspersed with needle like sarcasms. Once in his school life Soumya had asked one of his friends whether one should boil an egg just like that or one should peel it before boiling. In an unfortunate moment Soumya had told the story to Deya. Picking on that instance she was leaving no stone unturned to pinch and taunt him. Did Deya intend to see the limit of Soumya's patience? Hmm, in his

life Soumya had fought not a few battles of obstinacy. Let this be another one!

With his mind full of tension Soumya continued his paperwork. In spite of sitting in an air-conditioned room his head was hot. In front of him were workmanship of logic-gate, signal and waveforms. Today he did not like it all. He had expected to make some progress with the preliminary plan of preparing the microchips. Nothing was happening at all. The day he had joined work Swarnakamalda said, “If you want to succeed in life you will have to work with a few conditions. Never mix home and office. Always be careful so that your family life doesn’t interfere in your job. *Infocal* will pay you heavily for your efficiency. To satiate your material needs the company would do its best. But you have to give hundred percent in lieu of that. Remember that you will never rise if you can’t leave your family life behind the moment you step into the office.”

No, everything was going wrong with Soumya. Soumya got up. Going to the washroom he splashed water on his face and neck. He was trying to concentrate on the computer. He was preparing a program to simulate the design. He was modifying a familiar computer language according to his need. The work had been designed by a Japanese organization, regarding the personal security of the bank. The prevailing system had to be more advanced and perfect. Perhaps Sutanuka had gone. She called for Soumya standing at the door, “There is someone waiting for you.”

Soumya looked up. With a question in his eyes.

It was Sutanuka repeated, “He is standing outside. Little bit aged.”

Soumya who had stopped working got startled on hearing this. *Baba!*

With a surprised look he asked, “You? Here?”

There were scratches of wrinkles on the forehead of the tall and thin Debabrata. Debabrata had retired only a couple of years back. But he already showed signs of aging. He was wearing a gray bush shirt. He wore thick glasses and most of his hair turned grey.

With a hesitant tone Debabrata asked, “Are you busy?”

“A little...but suddenly why are you in the office?”

“Just like that. I had some work with you.”

“Why are you not coming to our place? Is your health fine?”

“Just going on. I was planning to go to your place for quite a few days. But I am not sure

when you people would be there at home. Today I was in my old office at Salt Lake. I thought that I must meet you today you.”

“I see. Soumya looked around. The hired guard of *Infocal* too stood indifferently! Their office did not have any tradition of bringing visitors inside. How could he talk to his father standing in the passage? Soumya thought for few seconds. Then he said, “Let’s go downstairs.”

There was something like a small market on the first floor. There was even a reasonably decent restaurant. Soumya sat there with his father. He ordered coffee for his father and soft drinks for himself.

Sitting comfortably on his seat he asked, “So tell me what you were saying. You wanted to talk to me about something?”

“I’ll tell you.” Debabrata lit a cigarette, “Tell me about Deya? How is she?”

“She is alright. These days she has an evening shift.”

“I think that girl is still in your house.”

“Yes.”

“Were there any more problems? Deya had said that a man would be seen standing....”

“May be. But I don’t know.”

“Don’t tell me. You know anything about it?”

“Did you come to discuss all these?”

Debabrata turned silent for sometime. He was looking intensely at his son. Absentmindedly he nodded his head. It seemed as if he sighed. Then in a moist tone he said, “I am worried about your mother.”

Soumya had anticipated that his father was going to tell something like this. There was no change in his facial expression. In a casual manner he said, “*Ma* has always been a problem woman. What’s the latest did she do now? Has she started distributing bed and mattresses this time?”

“Son, actually your mother is not keeping well.”

“Take her to a doctor.”

“What would the doctor do? She has become very tired from within. She is not enthusiastic about anything. Just lies quietly. She doesn’t want to talk and gets very much irritated if I say anything...”

“What can I do for that?”

“The whole thing is crossing its limits. Suddenly she is taking voluntary retirement. She has already sent notice to the office...”

“In fact that’s good. She has been working for long. Now let her take rest at home.”

“Can you expect someone to get rid of mental problem only by taking rest?”

“Take her to a psychiatrist.”

“Why are you talking like that?” With a hurt face Debabrata said, “I am not discussing an outsider with you. She is your mother. Don’t you have any concern regarding her wellbeing?”

“*Baba*, I stay away as she doesn’t like my presence.”

“Do you have to repeat even what your mother says? Won’t any of you even think about me?” There was earnest request in Debabrata’s voice. He held Soumya’s hand, “Listen to my words, Somu. Come to your mother at least once. Supria will be alright if stand by her once.”

“If you feel so then it is necessary bring *ma*. The door of my house is open for all.”

“Please Somu, be reasonable. Listen to me at least for once. It’s okay. Even if you don’t want to go at least call her once. At least if she listens to your voice over phone...”

“Even *ma* can call me.”

“*Uuff*.” Debabrata shook his head. “I can’t take it anymore. I really can’t. Somu, I have become very lonely.”

Suddenly Soumya was reminded of a childhood dream. He would often dream of it. Like the villain of a Hindi film hanging from the cornice of a huge building *baba* was crying for help. Soumya and *ma* were clapping from upstairs and laughing. Suddenly *baba*’s hands lost his grip and he was falling down. Floating on air he was going down in slow motion.

Why would Soumya see that strange dream? Okay, let us suppose that seeing the helpless condition of Debabrata, Supria and Soumya were making fun. But why should Debabrata be the villain? Wasn’t he a tragic hero? Did Soumya’s subconscious mind tell him that whoever would stand between him and his mother was a bad man?

The coffee and the soft drink were served. Placing the straw between his lips Soumya took a sip from the bottle. By the manner of consoling his father he smiled gently, “Why

have you become so emotional today? This is something perennial. It's between me and *ma*."

"Yes, you are right. It has always been the two of you who exist." Debabrata's voice turned bitter. "Do you know about her latest whim? She doesn't want to stay in Kolkata. She is buying a house in Shantiniketan. She will spend the rest of her life there."

It seemed as if Soumya felt a sudden blow. He looked blankly, "What will happen to the Fern Road house?"

"I don't know. It will be locked for the time being. She might eventually leave it."

Soumya felt a crack in his heart. So many memories of his childhood are build up in that house. How could *ma* wish to destroy everything by leaving that house which was inseparable from Soumya's blood? Whom did she intend to inflict pain? To Soumya? Or to herself?

Or was she thinking that this was the best way to free herself from her pain?

In a dry tone Soumya said, "Why are you so worried? In fact Shantiniketan is a very nice place."

"Somu, how could you say this?"

"Why not? These days a lot of people are building their houses and staying there. In fact you people are lucky. You can stay there and visit us in Kolkata from time to time."

Debabrata was motionless. One could see a breakage going in his face. His veins were throbbing. He pressed his temple with his fingers. The coffee was getting cold. He did not even look at it, "I'll be off now."

"Are you leaving?"

"What's the point in sitting here?" Saying this he left and after a few steps he returned back. With a shaking voice pointing his index finger he said, "Listen to me Somu. It's not good on the part of a father to usher ill luck for his child. So I pray to God so that you should never have kids. And if you do you should not go through my condition."

Was it a prayer? Or a curse? Soumya could not finish the soft drink. He sat as if he had lost his senses. *Baba* had never talked to him like that in the last three years. *Baba* never raised the topic of *ma* willingly. Even if Deya raised the topic he gave short replies. Why did *baba* come to the office in spite of going to the house? Didn't he want to tell these

things in front of Deya? Why didn't he want? Did *baba* not yet consider Deya as one of the family members? Or did he intend not to hurt Deya saying these things in front of her?

Soumya returned to the office with a bitter temper. He wanted to start working. He turned on the computer. He was blankly looking at it. *Baba's* face appeared in front of his eyes amongst the words and data. *Baba* almost cried today! Was Soumya turning to a stone? No, today he wouldn't be able to concentrate in his work. Soumya got up after arranging his things.

Though he was about to leave office he returned to his table. He dialed the Fern Road telephone number.

It was ringing! It was ringing!

After ringing for quite sometime Supria was on the other side, "Hello?"

Soumya suddenly pressed the mouth of the receiver. He stopped inhaling.

"Hello? Hello? Who is there?"

Soumya's jaws were stiff. He pressed the mouth of the receiver more strongly so that the least sound of his breathing didn't reach there. On the other side Supria was repeatedly making sounds. Those sounds appeared to be two to four times stronger and were hitting the membrane of Soumya's ear.

Suddenly the other side was silent. Soumya carefully put down the receiver. Was the sound of heavy breathing heard at the last moment? Could *ma* sense that Soumya had called? Defeat! ...Defeat!

Soumya's heart became heavier. Coming downstairs he was driving his motorcycle. After covering some distance he felt as if the bike was not running properly. He turned on the accelerator but the speed did not increase. What happened to the mischievous machine? Again it was not taking pick-up today?

Soumya loses his temper whenever the motorcycle slows down. Somehow he managed to reach Santoshpur and directly went to the garage directly.

Madan came running, "*Dada*, what happened?"

On listening to the problem Madan examined the vehicle. He was an experienced mechanic. He repaired it within few minutes. Cleaning his sticky and dirty hand with a

cloth he said, “*Dada*, the problem is in the sparkplug.”

Soumya was irritated, “What do you say? I have recently changed it.”

Widening his teeth Madan was smiling, “*Dada*, the sparkplug is unable to strike a cord with your bike.”

“Strange!” Soumya frowned with doubt, “But I fixed an original one. It wasn’t fake and it was you who gave it to me.”

“Actually your original place is weak. The engine has no energy. If the whole thing can be mended once....Madan kept the sliding wrench in the tool box, “It will take time. You have to keep it here.”

“How much will it cost?”

“I have to see. Without opening it I can’t say anything.”

“Hmm...:

“*Dada*, can I ask you something? For how many years is your vehicle running? Ten?”

“More than that.” Soumya calculated within. “I think, thirteen years.”

“Then it is giving you very good service. Now relieve it. Now a days who drives a 200cc model? Such a heavy model...! There are so many good 100cc models available in the market. Take one.”

Soumya did not pay attention to his words. Taking out the purse he said, “How much do I have to pay?”

“Give me fifty bucks.”

Madan is usually a little expensive. Soumya knew it. The work that he did was very little; he only cleaned the plug. At another place it would not have been more than thirty. Madan too would have charged that only, had Soumya taken him to task.. But Soumya was not in a mood to bargain. Handing the money Soumya started the bike, “If I want to get the engine repaired I will let you know. You have to finish the work by the exact time you promise. Don’t trouble me.”

Madan Naskar used to keep his words. Touching the bike Madan said, “*Dada*, sell it. I will give you eight. Down payment.”

This time also Soumya didn't pay attention to his words. Even if he bought a car he didn't plan to sell his motorbike. There was a reason too. He had not bought it himself. It was a gift. To say the truth it was not even a gift. It was the price of fulfilling a condition. He had a deal with his mother at that time. If he would secure marks according to his mother's expectations in the Higher Secondary he would get whatever he wanted. Soumya secured unexpected high marks in the higher secondary, almost nine hundred. In lieu of that he got this two-wheeler. Supria did not wish at all to buy this turbulent vehicle for her son. But at that time Soumya wanted only that thing. And he wanted it more as *ma* had strong objection against it. "I have pleased you. You also have to keep your promise!" In the very first year while driving the bike he met with an accident though not a big one. In a turning, while driving the bike in high speed the wheel skid. Though Soumya tried utmost he couldn't control. It hit a buffalo. He had to give compensation to the owner of the buffalo. Soumya was also on bed with a fractured leg. *Ma* was desperate to sell the unlucky chariot. Soumya didn't allow her at all. He told her directly if she would sell the motorcycle he would leave his course of computer engineering.

Yes, that was the relation between the son and the mother. At every step there were arguments, at every step arrogance, at every step fighting. "Soumya, today if you can mug up five rhymes you will get a cricket bat."

"I will memorize but I will take a football and not a bat."

"If you can complete thirty sums you will get two Cadbury Chocolates."

"No, I want ice cream."

"If you stand first I will take you to Kashmir this time."

"No, you have to take me to Goa."

At every step in spite of fulfilling a desire there was denial of another wish. In the game of give and take the son was as much strong as the mother.

How could Soumya leave that bike which he won after so much of confrontation?

There were many sweet memories too regarding that bike. Soumya took Deya to so many places on this bike. Deya was very much attracted to rivers. *Kolaghat, Diamond Harbor, Basirhaat, Kanning* everywhere these three were all together. Soumya, Deya and Karl. Yes, Deya called the motorcycle with that name. In the name of the famous car of

Remark's novel, *Three Comrades*. Sitting on the back of this Karl first time Deya hummed in his ears, 'I love you'. Soumya pretended as if he did not listen to it. He said, "Speak louder."

Spreading her arms Deya shouted, "I.....loooooovvvvveeee you....."

That day they were on the way of *Ichaamoti*.

The endless embankments on both the sides never seemed to end. Water, and only water. The still water had gently swayed with Deya's declaration, I love you... The leaves of the trees danced. The sky was deep blue. A nice fragrance spread all over the earth.

Was it possible to sell Karl? Never.

One's gloominess is intensified by the past. Soumya's mind became duller. There was so much of fight with *ma*, but what was the profit? *Ma* would perhaps never know but Soumya was defeated by himself today. The father whom he never had taken into consideration pierced his heart today. What could Soumya do but for sitting drooping his head? So much of love with Deya, so much mental compatibility and physical proximity. But what is left now? Deya does not care for Soumya anymore. Deya has changed. She has changed.

Soumya parked the motorbike in the garage in a dull mood. He was climbing the steps slowly. Tarit Paain stood on the first floor staircase landing. He was coming down. On seeing Soumya he stopped.

There was an elastic smile on the lips of the forty year old Tarit, "Are you coming back from office?"

Soumya stopped for the sake of courtesy, "Yes."

"The sky is cloudy again. Isn't it?"

"Perhaps I didn't notice."

"It is lightening. It will pour again. A change of rain will surely bring in floods."

"Hmm."

"Where is your Mrs.? On duty?"

"Yes."

"But she made us very proud. I talk about her everywhere. To shelter to a prostitute in a gentleman's house..."

“The girl is not a prostitute.” Soumya really hated the topic. Yet he was forced to say, “The girl was forced...”

“But brother, that seems to be true for all prostitutes. Tell me please, how many girls come into prostitution willingly? Many wish to escape but can’t. She could. She has devil’s luck. And see how she got a place in such a nice family...”

Tarit was telling many more things. But nothing was getting in Soumya’s ears. He felt some kind of nausea. He just felt like shutting his eyes and punching the man on his nose. Ah! How many tests of tolerance Soumya would have to pass?

Soumya climbed the rest of the steps quickly. With all his anguish accumulated he lashed at the calling bell violently.

Shewli opened the door and instantly stepped aside.

Soumya looked at her with anger, “Where is Laxmidi?”

“She hasn’t come”, Shewli replied softly.

Almost immediately there was Ritam’s voice from the sofa Ritam said, “Good evening computer. Back so early today?”

Soumya’s head burnt with anger. Even today the crazy man is sitting today here. Books and copies were scattered on the carpet. So here the farce of studies was going on so long! What was happening to this house day by day? How come Ritam is so intimate with a girl whose morality can be doubted? Soumya controlled his nerves with lot of effort. Putting a forced smile on his lips he said, “When did you come?”

“Long back. Shewli prepared so many things for me. *Parota*, *aluchachhari*, pickle, *sandesh*... Will you have tea? Then I will also have chance of another cup.”

“No, you can take. I will take dinner after some time.”

“Brother, is there any harm in breaking the rule for a day? Hey Shewli, take all the books. Let me chat with your Computer^{da} today.”

Shewli buried herself in kitchen. She ran to the room and left quickly picking up her books.

Taking out his shoes and socks Soumya was on the sofa.

Loosening his shirt buttons he said, “I think now a days your evenings are colorful.”

“Are you joking? I am almost dead!” Ritam lighted a *bidi*, “She is such scatterbrain when it comes to maths that the task of putting sums in her head has reduced my life to ashes. With the bitter smell of the *bidi* the nausea sensation returned again. With a sideways glance Soumya noticed that the expensive cut glass ashtray was overflowing with *bidi* stubs. Because of this friend of Deya Soumya would have to leave his own house.

Keeping his smile intact Soumya said, “Yet I feel that you are enjoying a lot.”

“A challenging job, it is indeed. However, she is quite interested in History and Geography. I can be off once I have managed to create an interest. Then she can proceed on her own.

“That means your noble job will be fulfilled, isn’t it?”

“Yes. I mean...” Ritam was embarrassed a bit with the manner Soumya talked.

“Brother, can I say something if you don’t mind? You have lot of interest in noble jobs. Don’t you...?”

“I don’t understand good or bad.” Ritam sat straight. “If I can help a girl who has fallen into ditch ...”

“Brother, in fact you could have helped the girl a lot more.”

“In what way?”

“By keeping the girl with you. You could have given her your valuable guidance twenty four hours.”

Ritam’s eyes shrank. It seemed that he could catch the underlying sarcasm of Soumya’s words at last. To Soumya’s utter surprise he laughed loudly, “Brother, do I have that strength? Or do I have any say at home? I am at my Majesty’s mercy? She’ll perhaps drive me out holding onto my neck if I add to the burden. Don’t you think so? ”

“So you have cleverly shifted the entire burden on your friend’s head! I mean very cleverly!”

“But I ...In fact I ...” Ritam was hesitating, “But I haven’t forced Deya to take any burden”

“Did I ever say that you have forced? I said that you have done cleverly. What else are dear friends for! First you provoked Deya to do the story in the newspaper. Even Deya was eager to be famous overnight. So she swallowed the bait. Without raising his voice, keeping his smile intact, Soumya was pouring venom in a cool manner. “You are a

vagabond. You knew it very well that once the news was published that girl would land in trouble. And then started the second course of your action. Taking the opportunity of Deya's weakness you started pricking her conscience. And without giving it a second thought out of sympathy Deya brought in the girl.

Is any of my statements wrong?"

Ritam's face turned pale. Feebly he said, "I think what you said is correct. With your level of education and exposure there is hardly any scope for error."

"Do you understand that? Do you get the difference?"

Shewli has brought Ritam's coffee. Keeping the cup and saucer on the table she left the way she came in. She didn't understand anything that was going on. She was used to listen to folk music. The subtlety of classical Dhrupad was beyond her comprehension. Ritam gave a quick glance to see where Shewli was. Then he almost muttered, "Tell me what you want exactly. Do you want me to stop coming?"

"Who I am to say no to you!" There was smooth rudeness in Soumya's voice, "You will come to your friend, both of you will enjoy together with utter satisfaction, compete in pretending nobleness...Of course not pricking thorn in your throat...Not making wet your own hair plate. Who can leave the opportunity to be great free of cost putting the gun on someone else's shoulder?"

Ritam stood up with a dull face, "I am sorry, Soumya. I could not understand that I had disturbed you so much. I will also ask Deya to forgive me."

"Please don't destroy our peace by provoking Deya anymore. Whatever you do, with whatever intention you do, you surely are not our enemy! Am I right?"

Opening the door without uttering a single sound Ritam went out with his head down.

Soumya sat still like a stone. Did he do the right thing? Perhaps he needn't have insulted him so much. But did he have any choice? He heard how the scandal spread everywhere. It is Ritam who is Deya's chief adviser. If Ritam's visits are stopped at least one of Deya's wings would be chopped.

Shewli stood in front of him. Forgetting all about the place, time and person the girl asked with surprise, "What happened? Why did Babuada leave without drinking the coffee?"

The suppressed anger arose. Soumya shouted, "What's your problem? Go and take the cup and dish."

Like a chased dog Shewli ran away.

Soumya quickly went to the bedroom. Rudely he asked, "Hey, listen."

Trembling Shewli came and stood near the door.

"Why are *didi*'s lipsticks and other stuffs scattered like that?"

"I don't know." Shewli mumbled.

"Don't tell lie. Didn't you touch the dressing table?"

"No *dada*. In fact *didi*..."

"Again you have started arguing on my face? You have become so arrogant, eh? Don't I know how your *didi* handles things?"

Shewli's eyes were filled with water because of the scolding.

Soumya looked at Shewli with much anger. That beggar like weak look was not there anymore. She became quite glazy within these few days. Was there a bit reddish glow on her lips? Was there any coating of cosmetics on her cheeks?

Soumya became angrier as he didn't understand. The angry eyes were moving on Shewli's dress. Didn't he buy this pink *salwar kameez* for Deya in their honeymoon?

Soumya gnashed his teeth, "Leave. Leave from here. Don't you dare to enter this room in our absence!" God knows why Deya does not lock the room!

Shewli escaped. Standing near the door of kitchen she was trembling in fear.

Soumya entered the bathroom taking trouser and *punjabi* on his shoulder. There was flame of fire in his head. There was no relaxation in spite of standing near the shower. He felt as if the water was not reaching his body. Deya was taking fun by sending Laxmidi to Sonarpur! Let her see. Soumya wouldn't leave that girl. He would show her darkness by scolding her. He would see how long Deya could give her shelter under her *anchal*!

The shadow of Supria Singharoy was getting prolonged in Soumya. That Supria who never experienced defeat and never taught also...

13

Laxmi had gone home for one day but returned after having spent four days. It seems she fell very sick in Sonarpur. The son-in-law had brought a jackfruit for his mother-in-law to express his love and concern. A big and juicy one. Laxmi was knocked out on the bed because of her greed. For the two days she was down with upset stomach and vomiting. It seemed that her daughter had insisted her to take rest for two more days but she couldn't stay back because of Shewli.

Whatever be the care, the return of Laxmi meant relief. Not Soumya but it was Deya who heaved a sigh of relief. No more worries about Shewli, no tension for Soumya either and she also got respite from hasty cooking sprees. The household started running smoothly again.

Even Soumya stopped grumbling about Shewli. Soumya's Bugida had mailed him from Silicon Valley. Thus his temper was slightly happy. Bugida was supposed to visit before the Pujas and thus a new thought had entered Soumya's mind. He had to find a good office space before Bugida arrived. Soumya was pretty occupied with all his future planning.

In between Deya too went to Chetla. Her grandmother was not keeping well. She was suffering from respiratory problems and so she paid her a visit. She paid least attention to her mother's constant nagging on her father's grumbling. There was an intense discussion with Mahua about her forthcoming wedding anniversary. Jokingly she also informed that Soumya might prepone his deadline of becoming a father. The usual rhythm had returned back in Soumya and Deya's house. Not totally but almost. But a subtle unease still remained there. Soumya was trying his best to avoid Shewli. Even Laxmi seemed not so happy with Shewli. Let it be. Everything can't change as per Deya's wishes within a few days. One has to give it time. It takes time.

The coming Monday itself is Deya's wedding anniversary. She hadn't done any shopping. On Thursday after taking lunch Deya went out. Noontime Gariahaat was almost empty today. The clouds which lost their ways were back in the city again. They were taking control of the sky. It was drizzling from the morning. There was a strange sleep inducing light on the streets. It appeared very sweet. The marketing for *puja* did not start yet. The shopkeepers were sitting drowsily and at times getting up from the nap, were driving away the flies at their counters. And it was a run of luck for the customers. They could bargain as they wished. Deya was roaming around to complete her purchasing. She bought a nicely embroidered bed sheet which was off light shade of *champak* flower. Along with that she bought matching frilled pillow covers. She will spread it on the day of the wedding anniversary. The fragrance of newness will spread around. She wanted to change all the curtains that day and, therefore, bought fabric according to the required size. The shop had its own tailor. They will deliver the stitched curtains to her house within Sunday. They were charging a bit high but there would be no haste of carrying them home all by herself. She also bought four coffee mugs of deep red color at which her eyes got fixed. The coffee was always served in the cup saucers and it looked odd. Laxmidi was whining to bring small containers to keep various spices. After a lot of searching she got some plastic containers. She bought a leaf of *bindis* for herself and matching its shade got lipstick, compact and nail polish. Shewli had once touched Deya's dressing table and Soumya was very angry with that. And he also scolded Shewli one day. There was no wonder that she could touch. Now a days the girl is little inclined to make-up. Whenever Deya sits for her make-up Shewli stands with a gaping mouth. Poor girl! At this stage of life such kind of desires spring up. This is the age for such kind of inclinations! She bought little bright lipstick for Shewli. She also got a cheap nail polish and few gaudy clips. She will dress herself nicely on the day of their wedding anniversary. Let Shewli too dress. Some *salwar-kameezes* were kept in the hangers of the footpath. The price range was within two hundred. She searched and selected a *salwar* of sandalwood color for Shewli. She thought for a while and did not take it. The girl prefers bright colors a lot. She roamed around and bought a set of false silk with the combination of red and yellow. The *kameez* was very glazy and there was no *dupatta* with it. Let it be like that. But it is enough to take only for Shewli. Laxmidi is there. She will be offended.

Laxmidi was not fussy about colors. She bought a striped *saree* of green color for Laxmidi. Now it is turn for Soumya. Deya felt tired after roaming so much. While sipping on a bottle of cold drink she was thinking what to take for Soumya. Trouser and shirt? But he had many. The wardrobe was falling short of space to hold them. Should she go for perfume? Colon? *Psh!* She gave him perfume on last March on the occasion of his birthday. Won't it be a repetition? How will it be if she opts for faded jeans? Leave it. If Soumya doesn't like the shade of Deya's choice! A good tie? Yes, tie. An expensive pair of ties can easily be given. How will it look if along with that she presents a set of handkerchiefs? She smiled within. Just after giving the gift she will take one rupee from him. Handkerchiefs should not be given free of cost!

Just finishing the cool drink Deya entered the shop again. It was a huge showroom of a reputed company. While selecting ties her eyes got suddenly fixed on the cash counter. A young man was paying his bills. His face was very familiar! Where did she see him? *Jadavpur*? Wasn't he Soumya's friend? The guy too looked at Deya with a smiling face. Deya went forward, "Are you Soumya's...?"

"Yes. I am Soumya's batch mate. I am Deep....You were his fiancé, I presume?"

"We have been married for three years."

"Is it? Congrats...Soumya has not moved an inch leaving Kolkata. Isn't it?"

"No. He does not have plans too."

Deya noticed that Deep had put on lot of weight. Earlier he used to be very slim. Sitting on his Karlo, when Deya flew with Soumya, Deep used to look at them with restless eyes. The old memory brought little smile on her lips. Holding the smile on her face Deya asked, "Where are you now?"

"New Jersey." Deep picked up the packet from the counter.

"Tell Soumya that we chanced to meet. Bye."

Deya felt little bad as Deep went away. The guy used to roam around a lot with Soumya. But didn't he have inquisitiveness about Soumya? Why didn't he want to know where Soumya was and how he was? Why didn't he have anything to know about him? He did not even feel any necessity to tell anything about him! After studying four years together, was Soumya only Deep's batch mate? Not a friend? There were eighty students

in Deya's class in the university. They were forty five students in total in the honors class of the college. Even there was not much closeness with many. Yet they used to chat for few minutes if they had chanced to meet sometime. But Ritam's case was different. She always had contact with Ritam. Even she used to chat with Debashish, Sanghamitra, Piali and others over phone. On special occasions they used to invite Deya. Deya also invited them on Monday. But how couldn't she find such a single friend of Soumya in these three years!

Did Solumya have no friend because of his obstinacy and arrogance? Or did his state of friendlessness make him like that? Didn't life appear to be a desert without enjoying with friends? Did Soumya have any pain as he did not have any friend? But it did not seem so. Deya came back at around 5p.m. after finishing all her shopping. Shewli, like a *shalik* bird rushed towards her as soon as she entered home.

"*Didi*, what did you buy? Let me see."

Sitting under the fan Deya wiped her neck and throat, "First get me a glass of water."

Shewli brought water with the speed of an airplane, "Show me. Show me."

Deya simpered, "Now get a cup of hot tea."

Laxmi turned her eyes, '. As soon as you go out she becomes restless. 'When *didi* will be back? When will she return?'"

Deya pouted, "But Laxmi *di* the comparison you have made is not appropriate. You can say that in my presence she finds the heaven at her hand's reach."

"Actually I meant to say that."

"*Didi*, now show me what you have brought."

"Hey girl, why are you standing like that? Put the tea on the stove."

Deya was revealing all the pearls and gems one by one while sipping tea. Shewli rushed to see them. As soon as Deya took out the *salwar kameez* she jumped with joy. She ran to the bathroom and wore it. Stretching her body she was seeing whether it fitted perfectly or not.

Deya gave a side glance. She was looking like a dazzling beauty. It enhanced her beauty! Shewli was twisting her body with shyness.

Making face Laxmi said, "What a nuisance! I just can't bear such a show! Go and put off

the dress now.”

Deya said, “Yes she is right. Fold it properly. You have to wear it on Monday.”

But Shewli did not take it out then itself. Like a fop she sat at the feet of Deya. “*Didi*, many people will come on Monday, isn’t it?”

“No, not many. Only around twenty.”

“Can Laxmi *mashi* cook for so many people? Can she?”

Carrying the *saree* under her armpit Laxmi was trotting. Turning back she said, “Why should I do? In fact you are there.”

“Oh my God! Can I do?”

“Even if you cook do you think people will eat your dishes?”

“Ah, Laxmidi!” Deya scolded her lightly. Slapping on the back side of Shewli’s head she said, “Listen stupid, nobody needs to cook on that day.”

Shewli was not at all bothered by Laxmi’s words. Perhaps she became used to listen to such comments. Showing her teeth she said, “Then what will happen? Will you serve mixture and sweet to all?”

“No dear, not at all. The food will be ordered from outside. Mutton *biryani*, chicken chop, fish butter fry, cake, ice cream and cold drinks.”

“*Biryani* is something Babuada is very fond of. That day too he was telling that he would make you treat him with *biryani* one of these days.”

“Yes, it is indeed your Babuada’s taste that has to be kept in mind.”

Saying this Deya became little absent minded. Ritam was not coming for the last few days. Deya called him up day before yesterday or the day before that. Shrabani had taken the call. Ritam was not at home at that time. Deya had repeatedly asked Shrabani to convey the message of ringing her back as soon as Ritam returns...Shrabani must have told. This guy is really crazy. He must have forgotten. Only God can say at what time and for what purpose this eccentric guy wanders about! Shrabani and Ritam haven’t been invited as yet. As soon as the thought hit her Deya sat with the handset, “*Masima*, is Ritam at home?”

“No, who is speaking?”

“I am Deya, *mashima*.”

“Oh, I see. But Babua went out early morning. Today he has job interview.”

“Is it? When will he return?”

“That I can’t say.”

“Is Shrabani around?”

“It’s time for her to return.. But she was telling that there was some meeting. Should I tell her something?”

Will it be proper to invite Ritam and Shrabani for the wedding anniversary through Ritam’s mother? Shrabani is a sensitive girl. She has a strong sense of pride. She may take it to heart.

But Ritam will definitely run to her as soon as he will get the news. Does Ritam remember the date of Deya’s marriage?

With lot of hesitation Deya said, “No *mashima*, nothing serious, I’ll call again later.”

Putting down the receiver Deya sat still for two minutes. Then she pulled the thin diary from the side table. She got Piali at home and Sanghamitra at her father’s home. Debashish was not at home. She informed his wife. She asked her cousin, Chinidi to come along with the brother-in-law without fail. That too with Gaja and Nimki .One and half hours easily slipped away in making about six phone calls. She was tired from the incessant chatting. Exhausted Deya entered the room and kept Soumya’s packet inside. She will not show it to Soumya before Monday. Shewli came inside to give her a bunch of letters, “Sabita *mashi* brought them from downstairs. I forgot to give you.”

Deya’s eyes ran through the envelopes. But these were all Soumya’s. He had got a credit card last year before *pujas*. The bank sends lots of letters. All types of odd allurements such as, just with a phone call we will get you: “one lakh at your doorstep. Renovate your house, buy gadgets, stay in this hotel on your trip, and travel in so and so airlines...!” But Soumya did not even look at his credit card except for paying a hotel bill while they were eating out. Is Soumya miser? Or a spendthrift? No just calculative discreet when it comes to money. While checking the envelopes she found the telephone bill. Two thousand four hundred eighty eight rupees. Most of it was due to internet’s courtesy. It would increase some more. The way Bugida had possessed Soumya. There

was an envelope from the post office beneath the stack. It was on Deya's name. As soon as she opened the letter Deya's face glowed with a pleasant smile. Her cousin Hiya wrote from Simla. She got married in the last *Agrahayan*. Her husband is a central government officer. Hiya's unending honeymoon is at her husband's place of work. Hiya has persistently invited Soumya and Deya to visit Simla at least once. Next year Hiya's husband may get transferred. Before that itself....

It would be really nice. Since a long time Deya hasn't been out. She went to Kodaikanal for her honeymoon and after that to *Lava Lolegaon* for seven days. That is all about her outing. Day and night work, work and only work. Soumya is busy with his job and Deya too. Should she pester Soumya once to go to Simla? It will certainly take one year *Bugida* to set up the company...If both of them can take leave before that....They can plan for the winter. Deya has never been to Himachal Pradesh. The Bipasha river flows there from the heart of the mountain. How does the river look in the chilling cold? Alas, how can Deya go out? What will happen to Shewli? If they go to Simla Laxmidevi will surely not stay at all in the house! This time when she went to her younger son-in-law's house her stomach was upset after eating jackfruit. Will she not compensate that in capital and interest together by visiting her elder son-in-law's house?

Shewli is really a headache! No more sympathy from now! Now she must get rid of her feelings. She became quite stable. The girl should not cry at the proposal of going to home. If necessary she has to be forced. In fact Deya is her well wisher. For Shewli's benefit she should go away. Deya came and lay on the bed. She closed her eyes to overcome the tiredness.

She was terribly hungry yet she didn't want to tell about it. She felt pleasure relaxing and lying down like a dead body. Will Soumya return early today? Last two Thursdays were wasted. How will it be if they plan for Chinese in *Tangra*?

A sound was coming from distance. The phone was ringing in the drawing room. Shewli rushed to give her the handset. Lying on the bed Deya presented the button, "Hallo?"

"Is Deya Singharoy there?"

"Speaking."

“Oh. You saved me. My fingers are literally aching from calling *Nabaprabhat* many times. Though I got the line at last they said that you were on leave.”

A male voice. A professional tone.

Deya turned, “Who is speaking?”

“*Beleghata* P.S. I am the second officer. Madam we need to see you urgently.”

Deya was tensed, “Why? What happened?”

“The girl called Shewli Chakroborty is with you, right?”

“Yes.”

“You have to bring her once to the police station.”

“Why?”

“We have arrested two men. We believe that one of them is the fellow behind Shewli’s case.”

Deya sat up in hurry-scurry, “Really? From where did you nab them?”

“From a gambling den. Our source informed us about his earlier den. All of you consider us good for nothing but we kept a constant eye on him. The rascal had thought that the atmosphere became cool. So he was trying to set up a shelter.

“Are you sure that he is the same person?”

“It is only to confirm that we are calling you. Come with the girl. Let the identification be done.”

“Now? At night?”

“Madam, you people think about proper time and improper time. But we don’t. We are twenty four hours on duty. Come without fail tomorrow morning by nine. O.C. will also be present. In fact tomorrow we have other procedures to produce him before the court.”

“Yes, you are right.”

“Then are you coming tomorrow in the morning? ...Today let’s give him a dressing down to see if we can extract some information. We believe that this time the whole gang...”

“I will come certainly. In fact it is my duty.”

“If every citizen were aware of their duties one wouldn’t need a department like this. Ha...ha...ha. Okay. I am putting down the phone.”

Lines of tension appeared on Deya's forehead. Was the riddle getting solved or getting more complicated? Will there be any negative reaction if she takes Shewli to the police station? Now Shewli has forgotten many things. Will the fear in her return? She needs to talk to Shewli. Shewli really needs counseling. If the man really happens to be Shyamchand will there be no possibility of anything else? Although false it was a marriage. It might be for few days but Shewli loved Shyamchand. How will Shewli behave seeing that man? Will she burst into anger? Or will she break down? Or will she crouch in fear like a snail in its shell? How will be her mental state after coming back from the police station? Can Deya handle the situation? No. She must call Ritam. Right now. Deya pressed the buttons of the handset quickly, "*Mashima*? Is Ritam back?"

"No. Not yet...Shall I give the phone to Shrabani?"

"No, I will call later."

Deya disconnected the phone absentmindedly.

14

Ritam managed to get a job. In sales. In a small company dealing with *Ayurvedic* medicine. In the beginning there will be training for fifteen days. He has to identify the medicines, and thereafter has to understand their medicinal values and then has to roam around to convince the doctors. He will also have to rush to the medical stores and market regularly. Taking orders is also a part of his job. Actually the medicines of that company are sold primarily in the villages. In the town there is less demand of their products.

Ritam managed to find the job on his own. Ambarda did not give. The fact that Ambarda didn't have to do anything brought a lot of satisfaction to Ritam. But did it mean Ritam was happy on getting the job? Or sad? No, not like that. For engaging himself again to work was he accusing Shrabani deep inside his heart? It is difficult to tell. Ritam was trying his best to be neutral. Every moment he was trying to convince his inner self that he really needed the job. Financially? No. Was it possible to measure every need of life by the parameter of money? That Ritam would move everywhere, and get to meet a lot of people also has some value. Did his earlier jobs give him nothing? He got gradually confined to a small boundary. He became involved in the craft of using words. Now he can realize that those things also have become tasteless. To draw the picture of life man has to see it on a bigger canvas. Where is the sense of life in his writing? Where is the philosophy? Even any base of firm belief was not built in him. Not of distrust too. Who can nourish the store of life experience of a parasite like person who is averse to labor and how? Is pen for him a mere hobby and luxury? Nothing more than that?

Though Ritam was brooding over this inside but at times all the logics appeared to him absurd. Like a bell it rings continuously near his ears ‘Ritam, you are a defeated person. Ritam, you have not understood even the people close to you. Writing is not your cup of tea. Throw your pen in the drain. Gird up your loins and engage yourself in work. Take care of your wife and child properly. Nothing more than that suits you. What kind of childish whim is this to go for writing with a blind eye to everything?’

Thus Ritam was combating with himself sitting at the tea shop in the morning. He was building arguments and the next moment went on breaking them. The moment Shrabani came to know that he was sitting for the interview to get a job she became confused in a strange way. Every time she put on a face of guilty. Perhaps she was sure that it was the reaction of her anger. Could Shrabani understand where she had hit the blow in Ritam?

“Hey Babua, what you are meditating for?”

Ritam landed in the real world from the world imaginations. It was Bishuda. Bishwanath Halдар. His age could be forty five and might be sixty five. From when Ritam became grown up he did not notice in the face of Bishuda. Only few wrinkles appeared on his skinny face.

Ritam opened his jaw, “I was thinking a tough thing whether the earth rotates from right to left or left to right!”

“What?”

“Even I can’t understand. I was trying to achieve *bodhi*.”

“What incredible things you are talking about!” Bishwanath sat on the bench, “Order a cup of tea, dear.”

Ritam did not need to order. The glass came. Gopalda is an expert shopkeeper. He was running this tea stall for almost last twenty years.

He knew every person of the locality like his own palm. A glass of tea will always be ready for Bishwanath whomever he sits with.

It was nine thirty. It was the Saturday morning. There was not so much crowd at the tea stall. Someone was reading the newspaper attentively. In between he was commenting inside. Four boys comparatively young sitting on the front table were chatting. Standing

outside a rickshaw puller was drinking tea. There is hide and seek game between the sun and the cloud in the sky today. There was an odd heat; one could feel burning sensation on the body.

Sipping on the cup of tea Bishwanath told in a suppressed voice, “Babua, why did you hide the news from me?”

“Which news?”

“I heard that you people are selling your house.”

“No way. Who told you?”

“Dear, why are you concealing? It seems that your aunts have already talked with the elder brother of your father. And all of you decided to give the house to the promoter...”

“Who is telling you these fibs, eh? The house is situated in a narrow lane. Will the promoter have anything remaining after giving shares to five people?”

“Then did I get wrong information!” With a little tensed face Bishwanath said, “Paltu was spreading the news that a flat will come up there.”

Paltu is the son of Ritam’s uncle. He is a very clever and mischievous boy. He must have been cracking jokes with Bishuda. Bishuda is a broker who deals with land and houses. He is a needy person. Naturally such a person skips with joy hearing such news.

Smiling Ritam said, “Forget Paltu’s words. We don’t have such plan at all.”

Bishwanath did not listen to it. He asked, “How much *cottah* is your land?”

“Around five *cottahs*?”

“Forget about the promoters. I have a party in my hand. They will pay twenty lacs. Outright purchase. You talk to your *kakus* and *jethus* I will bring them one day to show the house.”

“Oh my God, Paltu has tickled him a lot. Ritam told him quickly, “Believe me. No one of us is thinking to sell it. I must have known then.”

“Perhaps they have talked to your mother.”

“Won’t she have told in such case? You listen to me, there will be no selling.”

Yet there was enough doubt in Bishwanath’s eyes. With a glum face he said, “I am a poor man and you have even objection if I earn some money?”

“No, Bishuda, you will not understand.” With a soft tone Ritam asked, “How much will

be your percent?”

“Two percent of the fixed rate.”

“How much of it will you give to me?”

Bishwanath got interested. His eyes became bright. “Will you take? Tell me how much you want? Eighty twenty?”

The depression which clouded Ritam some time before passed away. Making fun he said, “Then a lion’s portion will out of your reach.”

“In fact such cheatings are common to me.” Bishwanath lowered his unusual tone, “I helped in selling the Madhuri Cinema hall. A person from Ghusuri bought it. I was supposed to get eighty thousand. But I did not a single penny. They showed so many excuses- you did not arrange sitting with the party, Ratan has taken the money! In fact rattan got the information through me.”

“You hold Ratan tight for the money.”

“That rascal has deceived. He said that the party asked to see for interested people. An out and out lie. What can I do? There is no victory of the truth.” Saying this he picked up a cigarette from Ritam’s packet kept on the table. Puffing he made his eyes small, “So you mean to say that you people have not talked to the promoter so far? Is the promoter is not talking it?”

“No. No such question arises.”

“Then should I bring the party once? If you ask I can start bargaining from a high amount. Twenty five...”

“How annoying! You are invincible. Okay I promise that even after one hundred years if we sell I will inform you first. Is it okay?”

Bishwanath had a mouthful smile. “You are like my brother. Please don’t make me fool. I know you will not do like that. I am seeing you from when you were a child. You have a good heart....Can you give me five rupees? The ration shop will not give me change for hundred rupees. I have to get sugar.”

What a strange life! All his hair turned grey with the hope of making a fat bargain in a fluke and thus spent the whole life by gleaning. He used to dream of eighty thousand but got hardly eight hundred. Dream or zeal to reach the unattainable? *khuror kal*? Or food for life?

The moment Bishwanath got the money he disappeared.

Right at the next moment another person was standing nearby. He had moustache and beard on his face unshaved for a long time, matted hair on his head, thick layers of dirt on his body and totally torn pant and *punjabi*. He was Bholapagla of the locality.

Ritam raised his voice, “Gopalda, give the mad his due.”

“Today there is no plain. Shall I give me slice?”

“Okay, give him. My pocket is empty today. Write this on my copy.”

Taking the loaf in his hand Bholapagla was going trudging his leg. He was a boy from an educated family. Once he used to study in school with Ritam’s cousin. Because of the failure in love he turned mad. Now he has no feeling except hunger. He roams around the road. Whenever Ritam steps in the tea stall he surely turns up there. God knows from where. He does not utter a single word but a silent prayer can be seen in his eyes. A request for a quarter pound loaf. As soon as he gets it the mad gets immersed in his own world.

Ritam was looking at Bholapagla as he was leaving. The girl whose love turned Bhola mad must be leading a happy life after marriage. At the end of the day does she remember Bhola at least for once? Or she has also lost memory being confined in the family sphere? Like Bhola?

Suddenly Ritam’s eyes were unmoved. A taxi was entering their lane. It stopped in front of the house of Ritam. Wasn’t she Deya getting down?

Deya was calling repeatedly. Ritam was apprehending that at any moment Deya could come. Yet Ritam’s body all on a sudden became stiff. The insult of that day was still sticking on his body like faeces. Ritam was digesting the foul odor all alone. He could not share with anybody. Even not to Shrabani. He felt that it would demean Deya and not Soumya.

Ritam did not feel like standing face to face of Deya right at that moment. What should he do? Should he move aside?

Ritam could not move. The temporary maid servant was shouting, “*Dada*, somebody has

come for you. *Boudi* asked you to come home.”

Sighing Ritam left for home very slowly. As soon as he came in front of Deya he changed his facial expressions entirely. In a jocular manner he said, “Is it forgetting the way that the princess has stepped in the hut?”

“Shrabani, are you listening? Are you listening to his dialogues?” Deya shouted, “No one can get this gentleman even after repeated phone calls.”

Shrabani said, “But I informed him that you had called up.”

Atasi said, “I also have told. Ask him.”

“What happened to you? What royal work are you busy with that you don’t get time even to make a phone call?”

“*Devi*, control your anger. Don’t burn this devotee to ashes.” Ritam was giggling.

“Madam, there is work for me. It may not be a royal work but I also have some work.”

“Understood...Did you see today’s newspaper? That culprit of Shewli is caught.”

Ritam thought of staying away from the topic related to Shewli. But he could not hide his surprise. Tensed he asked, “Is it? When?”

“Day before yesterday. Yesterday I took Shewli to the police station. She identified the man.”

How didn’t such big news draw Ritam’s attention? But he did not read the paper thoroughly.

Ritam asked with excitement, “What happened then? What was Shewli’s reaction?”

“She was very puzzled. She became utter dumb after going to the police station. I was worried if she had collapsed. That’s why I was looking for you more.”

“I see...How is Shewli now?”

“Now she has become much cool. I could not go to office yesterday. The whole day I was making her comfortable....The police said that the gang was old. Shyamchand’s name was registered in the police record though in another name. In fact they change names as one changes dress. Such woman related cases were against him. Like woman trafficking. It seems that last time the police could not catch them. This time the whole gang...The Mumbai police is also informed. The other accomplices will also not be saved.”

Ritam became very happy. He said, “Grand news. Let’s have coffee in the honor of this news.”

Atasi and Shrabani were listening to attentively. Atasi suddenly spoke out, "Everything is right. But poor Kanan died unnecessarily."

"*Mashima*, there is no point in remembering that. Past is past. But I had already told Kanan that I would be beside them. If she informed at least once...In fact I was arranging home for her daughter at that time. If she could bear with a bit more...."

"No. You have done a lot. If you were not there the girl....But dear, don't keep that girl any more with you.... Now arrange something for that girl."

Deya did not reply. She was thinking something.

Knitting her brows Atasi looked at Deya. While going inside she said, "Babua, call your *barapisi* once. That day also Indira was asking about the girl."

The atmosphere was heavy with the news of Shewli. Even Shrabani was not talking.

Ritam scolded himself inside. Does it suit him to think about Shewli any more? Soumya reminded him of the harsh reality. When he does not have power to take full fledged responsibility it does not suit him to show sympathy obtrusively.

The cloud left Deya's face. With a smiling face she said, "Leave it. Listen to the important thing. Day after tomorrow come to my place in the evening."

Both Ritam and Shrabani were looking at each other. Ritam asked indistinctly, "Why? Are you celebrating the arrest of Shyamchand?"

Deya simpered, "No. The arrest of Soumya Singharoy."

"Yes. I remember. That's your marriage day!"

"Yes. You should have remembered. You presented a bouquet of magnum size...! Listen. Shrabani and you have to come a bit early. You have to help me in work."

Deya had an authoritarian voice. For a while Ritam thought that did Deya ever remember the marriage day of Ritam and Shrabani. But it is unjust to expect so. What is the relation between him and Soumya's wife?

Before Ritam could open his mouth, Shrabani started giving excuse. "I feel like going but problem is with Tuski. In a crowded place the baby starts crying."

"Hey, hey, no excuse. Last year you did not come as you were expecting Tuski. This time I will listen to no excuse."

"Really. The girl will create lot of problem."

"Keep her with *mashima*. When you go to college who handles her, eh?"

Ritam became very excited. “Yes, yes, why will she not go? She will go certainly. Tell me which *saree* are you going to wear on that day? Navy blue South Indian?”

Shrabani was little embarrassed. “Okay. I will see then.”

“No. Take the decision before. Otherwise just before going out you will say, ‘I don’t like that or this one is not ironed or I am not getting matching blouse... You should not prattle then. We will start at sharp six. Hey Deya, is it fine if we start at six?’”

“Excellent. We will chat to the full. Even Debashish and Piali said that they would come early.”

“Have you ordered *biryani* for the menu this time also? While saying all these Ritam noticed that Shrabani was looking at him in a strange way. Ritam lighted a cigarette quickly. It seemed as if the tobacco stick between the fingers could make artificial happiness natural. Making gestures he said, “Keep arrangement of those things. I want Shrabani to taste a bit on that happy occasion.”

Atasi brought coffee. With that home made *alur chop*.

While sipping on the cup Deya was reminded of something. Looking around she said, “I am here for long but could not see the little baby.”

Opening the big bag Deya took out a doll and with that chocolate. The doll was quite expensive. Ritam noticed that Shrabani looked gloomy for a while. But it was only for while.

She said, “Why did you bring that?”

“My wish. Where is Puchki?”

“She is sleeping.”

“Now? Ten o’clock in the morning?”

“Oh, didn’t you understand that my daughter was a burglar in her earlier birth?” Ritam laughed loud unnecessarily. “My daughter wakes at night and sleeps in the day time. All her playing and shouting are at night.”

“Did I say in vain that she creates lot of problem?”

The act of praising high for Tuski continued. Deya was listening to them with a pleasant mood. Finishing the coffee and chop she got up. “Let me go today. Evening shift. Going home I have to rush to the office again....Then we are meeting day after tomorrow. Right?”

“Oh sure. Both of us will go.”

Though Deya was about leave she stopped, “Ritam, come with me up to junction. Help me to get a taxi.”

Ritam felt helpless with the thought of going with Deya alone. But he could not say no to her directly.

As soon as they came out on the lane Deya asked him forcefully, “Hey, tell me clearly why you are not coming?”

Ritam tried to guess whether Soumya had told her something or not. But he could not understand. In the manner of avoiding he said, “I have already told that I was busy with work.”

“Don’t tell a fib. In these ten days I did not have even a glimpse of you...! Certainly something has happened.”

“What will happen?”

“You know that. Somebody perhaps forbade you.”

“Can someone forbid me? Who? Why?” Ritam tried so that the voice remains unshaken.

“That very reason, for which, everyone is forbidding me. Even no less I am listening to- Throw Shewli out...!” With little hesitation Deya said, “I thought perhaps Shrabani or *mashima*...!”

“*Ma* comments sometimes but casually but never pokes her nose. And Shrabani? She is not that mean.” Ritam felt little satisfied inside as he said that about Shrabani. He felt as if by that comment he had hit Soumya. Nodding his head said, “believe me I was very busy regarding a job. To make contacts, interview...For the last few days I had to run a lot.”

“Did you get the job?”

“Yes. I could hit it.”

“Great. Good. Then come in the evening today. Look after Shewli.”

“Why are you now worried about Shewli? The problem is almost solved. Now convince her to go to a home. If necessary force her. This will not be nice if she stays in your house for ever. Let her now stand in her own feet.”

“It would have been nice if it were possible.” Deya sighed. “As Shyamchand is arrested the problem has increased more. Now the case will run. She is the main witness. I have to

rush to the court regularly with her....Will the private homes take these responsibilities?"

"Hmm. That's true."

"Ritam, now I don't have anyone except you whom I can depend on. You have to stand by me."

Ritam's breathing stopped for while. Then nodding his head said, "I can understand. But I don't have time. I have to rush a lot in the new job. They will drive me from pillar to post. Half of the day I can't stay in Kolkata."

"The rest of the day you will stay, right? You can come then."

"Dear, I don't think I can come."

Deya turned at him quickly, "That means you don't want to be by my side. Am I wrong?"

"See Deya, don't be angry. Sometimes one has to walk alone. You have to think that nobody was ever with you and will never be with you. Can you do great deeds depending on others? If somebody comes forward to help that is optional."

Deya suddenly flared up. "Don't try to preach. Please don't. I considered you a bit different from others but by the end found that you are an ordinary man!"

"Have I ever claimed that I am a person of higher quality?"

"Shut up. Aren't you a writer? Aren't you? Aren't you supposed to be sensitive? Aren't you supposed to shed empathy from the tip of your pen?"

"Listen to me Deya....Try to understand my situation."

"Leave it. I have understood. Except me all of you have work! Alright. It's fine. Nobody has to be by my side. I am responsible for this condition of Shewli. I have to do everything for Shewli."

Deya was going way in a hurry. Ritam's feet were stuck to the ground. He wanted to shout and say, "Stop Deya, don't go. Then listen to the truth...."

But he could not utter a single word. Could he ever say the words from his heart to Deya? Lowering his head he stood there for sometime and then came back with numb feet. He came straight and lay down on the bed. He closed his eyes with his palm.

It was sudden touch of Shrabani. "What happened? Are you feeling low?"

Ritam removed his hands from his eyes. "No. Why should I feel low?"

"I can understand everything."

Ritam had a faded smile. "Shrabani, you can not understand anything."

“I can. For example I can understand that you will not go to Deya’s home day after tomorrow.”

Ritam was shaken. His eyes automatically shifted from Shrabani’s.

Shrabani whispered, “I also know that you will never go to Deya’s place. Why are you feeling hurt? Why will you go there to be insulted?”

Is Shrabani God? Ritam looked at her blankly. Not jealousy but it was another tone playing in Shrabani’s voice! How could Shrabani sense Ritam’s insult? How could she put two and two together so easily?

Ritam was looking at Shrabani with deep eyes. She turned wife from lover just within two and a half years. She was an idol in blood and flesh who had her black traits. Ritam’s shelter. His sorrow. His happiness.

Is this what marital life is all about?

15

People started pouring in from evening but Sanghamitra who had the bad reputation of a late comer since the university days was first to arrive. Without her husband. He was on an official trip. Trailing behind Sanghamitra, came Chinidi in and Bachhuda. After a long discussion, spending the whole of Sunday, Chinidi and company concluded that Gaja-Nimki wouldn’t fit in a wedding anniversary party. So both the kids were left behind. Tathagata, Kanad and Sukanya emerged together. Three of them had been to Gariaahaat to buy a gift. If Deya had invited Anasuadi she would have to call many seniors of the office. Inviting Anasuadi would mean inviting a lot of other seniors in the office; therefore, Deya had invited only Jayashree from the *supplementary section*. She too arrived early with her husband, Pratim from Switzerland.

Others followed quickly. Debashish and Susmita were last to come. Debashish teaches in a college in Nadia. He travels daily taking the Sealdaha main route.

It seems the train was obstructed today at Kakinada because of the conflict between a husband and a wife. As a result Debashish got late in returning home. It seems that now a days the trains are being obstructed because of such silly reasons. Last week a train was obstructed at *Barakpur* because the daily passengers did not get seat to play cards. There was a roar of laughter regarding this. The guests cleared their throats shouting at their hearts' content. The party was in full swing in Deya's apartment by eight o'clock.

The sofas and the tables were removed from the drawing hall. They were pushed towards the wall to make it spacious. Mahua came at noon. Deya, Shewli and Mahua had decorated the room very nicely. There were new curtains on the windows, bunches of tuberose in the big vases kept in the corner of the room, flowers on the fridge top and on the crockery case....There was prattling amongst the guests sitting on the sofa, carpet, divan and stool made of cane in that flower decorated room.

Tathagata is a bit restless. Today is his night duty. He has to rush to the office from here. He was frequently looking at his watch. Seeing Deya in front of him he caught her hand quickly, "Deya...dear...I have to leave now."

"Why will you go now? Eat and then start. I will serve dinner as soon as the cake is cut."

"You know Asheshda. He will be pretty angry."

"Nothing will happen. Please sit....Let the ice cream be delivered. God knows why it is late!"

"Give me whatever is there." Tathagata ran his fingers through his hair. "No need of ice cream. Later I will make a voucher. Pay that."

"Okay. Wait."

Deya rushed to the kitchen. Today she is flying like a bird around the flat. She is wearing a blue *Baluchari saree*. The battle of Kurukshetra was embroidered finely on the border and the *anchal* of the *saree*. Other than the ornaments her uncle also presented this *saree*. This is Deya's very favorite *saree*. Today morning she had gone for a facial to the beauty parlor. There is a different glow on her candle smooth face today. She has

arranged her hair in a decorative bun and wrapped a garland of jasmine around it. There is a *bindi* on her forehead, her eyes are finely outlined, reddish blush on her cheeks and she had colored lips. This year Soumya has gifted her a pearl set. Sea water sprinkled pearls adorned her ears, neck and fingers. Today Deya looks like a beautiful swan.

Mahua was not in the kitchen. Today Mahua has wilfully taken all the responsibility of serving food. As the dinner did not start yet she was having a gay time. Now Laxmi and Shewli are the guards of the kitchen.

Taking care of her *saree* Deya arranged plate for Tathagata. She told Shewli, “Bring water and come with me.”

In the presence of so many people Shewli was little hesitant. Keeping the water filled glass on the table she went to her own place.

Giving a side look Tathagata said, “That girl?”

Deya nodded her head.

“She has a worn a very bright dress, I see!”

It is true that today Shewli has embellished herself with a lot of enthusiasm. She wore a bright *salwar kameez* in the combination of red and yellow.

She had silver colored *bindi* on her forehead, sparkling clips on hair, hanging earrings on her ears, glass bangles in her hands and a necklace of pearl-shaped beads. She put the lipstick on her lips which Deya bought for her and also the pink nail polish on her nails. Overall it was perhaps a little gaudy.

There is a glass of wine in Santu’s hand. Soumya has arranged for some wine for today’s function. Whisky and vodka. One has to do it. None of the guests are addicted to drinking but all of them drink casually. In fact Santu loves it. And one has to be colorful on the occasion of his sister’s wedding anniversary.

Santu was taking the third peg. By waving his hand he called Deya, “Mimi, what are you doing? Cut the cake now.”

The cake was arranged on the table quickly. A heart of chocolate. Two arrows of cream have pierced it. Santu specially ordered that for his sister and brother-in-law.

Soumya was talking to Bachhuda. Mahua and Piali literally dragged him rapidly. They made him stand beside Deya. In spite of her fine decking up Deya appeared to be lusterless beside exquisitely handsome Soumya. But Soumya did not do much. Only an ordinary *Aligadi payjama* and long stripped *Pathan punjabi*. Even the color of the Punjabi was dull. It was of mud color. It seemed as if the color became bright as Soumya had worn it.

Even Debashish had glass in his hand. He spoke up suddenly, "Shouldn't we wait for some time more for Ritam. You could have cut the cake once they turn up."

Sanghamitra said, "Forget that crazy. He must be busy in attending literary association."

Deya's mind became overcast with cloud of gloominess. Will Ritam not come at all because of his anger? No, he will come definitely. Ritam can never be angry with Deya.

Mahua handed a long knife to Soumya. Sukanya placed Deya's hand over Soumya's. "Now, both of you together cut the heart into pieces."

As soon as the cake was cut everybody was beaming with mirth. Soumya fed Deya a piece of the cake. Deya also fed Soumya with a piece of the broken heart. The jingling sound came from the glasses, "Cheers."

There was shower of laughter and fun. There was no end of merry making and humor.

Piali was teasing Soumya, "Hey, tell me what was the secret of your cross connection?"

Soumya simpered, "What would you do on knowing that?"

"I am the one who need it most. I am getting old yet could not arrange a husband. If you tell me the technique I will sit with the phone on my lap."

Pratim cracked a joke. "Madam it is the Almighty who sets the entire cross connections. When it is destined it hits."

Sukanya turned her eyes, "Not at all. Ours is entirely direct. We saw each other at *Chhadnataala* as the barber went on calling names."

"Then don't say that it is direct. Say, cross connection through *baba* and *ma*."

Kanad became inquisitive. In a tone of investigating he said, "Deya, open up the story how your cross connection was done and when?"

Deya laughed, "Then I was in B.A second year..."

“From where did you call and to whom?”

“I called from home itself. To Chinidi.”

Chini had vodka in her hand. She spoke out, “Yes. She is right. I was saying something useful. In between there was a harsh tone who was constantly saying hallo hallo!”

Did you know that it was Soumya?

“Oh, how will I know then? As I got angry I put down the phone.”

“But Deya did not put down the phone. Did she?”

Soumya interrupted, “If she had put down could you people come to this place today?”

Bacchu gulped wine with much sound, “Right. Right. Intelligent reply.”

Kanad is a man from newspaper house. He is not the person to be repressed so easily.

With small eyes he asked, “What did you converse actually on the first day?”

Tathagata was leaving. His face showed that he did not wish at all to leave such an interesting get-together. Waving his hand to all from the door he said, “Deya, be careful. Don’t tell anything to Kanad. Whatever he comes to know tells that man with the face of tobacco pipe.”

After seeing off Tathagata, Deya came back. “That day we did not talk much. We talked just like that. That day he only took my number.”

Debashish and Susmita got married just in this *Falguna*. Susmita got very interested, “Oh my God! I did not know that. Cross connection love? When did you meet?”

“After a long time. Then I had already completed my part one. I was already tired of phone friendship. One day I asked straightforwardly to meet me.”

Sukanya danced her eye balls, “Why? Did you feel that Soumya could be blind or lame?”

“It could be. Doubt may arise. He calls up over phone and does not want to meet...”

“So once you saw him you melted seeing his glamorous look, didn’t you?”

“Not only beauty. I saw his quality too....Soumya, should I tell? Should I?”

“Tell.”

“Do you know that on the first meeting he ordered two fish fries for both? And while paying he took out money from his pocket only for one.”

“Why? Why? Why?”

“Wouldn’t it have become a bad investment if the relationship had not materialized?”

There was a roar of laughter in the room. *Hah hah...hih hih...huh huh.*

Taking the cake Mahua went to the kitchen. She shouted from there, “Mimi, shall I serve the dinner now? Ice cream is also ready.”

Santu shouted, “Why now? Let the glass be finished.”

“Then you will say that let the bottle be finished!” Chini raised her voice, “No Mahua. Serve it. Your *Bachhuda* can not drive after that.”

Mahua became busy. Arranging the food on the plates she was making them hot in the microwave. And she was sending them one by one through Shewli. Those who did not have glasses in their hands started eating.

Shewli was repeatedly coming and going. Till now she was almost behind the eyes of the people. In the midst of wit and laughter nobody noticed her much. But now seeing her many of them became restless.

In fact Chini spoke out, “The girl has settled herself here quite tightly, I see.”

Deya was drinking cold drinks. Making a sad face she said, “Tell me what I can do. I can’t leave the girl in such a helpless situation.”

Santu was looking unhappy. He said suddenly, “What an ugly outfit she is wearing, eh! I have not seen the girl before. This is the first time. Just seeing her one can understand that she is from that class.”

Deya was going to protest but before that Sukanya commented, “She can’t be blamed. For a quite some time she was with the sex workers. The influence of that is very obvious.”

“I have heard that she was there not more than ten to twelve days? And only with that....?”

“*Dada*, ten to twelve days is a long time. The desire of exposing oneself is an inner disease. Naturally the sex workers have it highly in them. It is obvious that the girl will bring something from them. At least she has not brought any disease from the sex workers. Isn’t it enough?”

Jayashree objected, “For quite some time what kind of odd and indecent terms you have been using! What workers are they? Is that a work?”

“It is definitely a work. Earning money in lieu of labour. In fact it is a profession.”

“Sorry dear. I don’t agree.” Sanghamitra poked her nose, “The Bengali equivalent word for profession is *britti*. If prostitution is called a profession stealing should also be

considered a profession. A very old profession. May be older than prostitution. Then can we call the thieves lift workers? Or theft workers?”

Jayashree said, “Where is the labor? Which labor you are talking about? Some pervert men are using a class of girls...against their wish, against their conscience... Where does the word labor come here?”

“But it is not always against wish.” Bachhu put down the glass on the table with much sound, “I know many stories of such girls who have willfully come to this profession. Do you know how many girls choose this profession as a fancy?”

“No Bachhuda, you are wrong.” Now Deya also became vocal. “No sane and normal girl comes to this profession willfully. Either they are forced or they come to earn their livelihood since they do not have any other choice left.”

“Do you want to say that no girl comes willfully? So many girls are taking advantage using their bodies! What will you call them?”

“Bachhuda, do they come in the normal category? It is irrelevant to discuss whether they can be categorized as worker or not. Suppose people from different classes are stealing using different means. Somebody defalcates money from bank, somebody is stealing the savings of workers, somebody is fattening themselves by taking bribe, and somebody is getting hands on the money of the common people....But do we put them in that class which is termed as thieves in the conventional use of Bengali? Though we call them thieves outwardly we don’t include them in that class. Why don’t we include? Because other than stealing, they have other options of earning their livelihood. In the same way those girls who have other means of surviving and yet have opted for prostitution to meet their own interests can’t be called prostitutes in the true sense. And in most of the cases we don’t call them so. People from both the classes can boldly roam around in the society, can’t they?”

“You will agree at least with this point that those who are forced to enter in this profession can be called sex workers?”

“Hey don’t talk too much.” Kanad became little tipsy only with two pegs. He literally scolded Sukanya, “Why are you talking rubbish? Sex is never a work. It’s an act. An act to perform. Eating can’t be called labor, to shit is not a labor, of course I am not talking about the piles patients....Similarly the act of sex also can’t be called labor.”

“Bilkul sahi baat. Debashish was nodding his head. Keeping the plate on his lap, in a manner of delivering lecture in a class he said, “Sex is nothing but an inevitable process of making creation alive. Personal happiness is something extra. If that is not there how will men and women be attracted to each other?Try to understand it better. If all the workers of this world sit idle stopping their work, the process of creation will not be disturbed. Provided food, sleep and sex continue smoothly. Just like the animal kingdom. In the case of insects. If they could arrange food sitting enjoying indolence they would not have worked. But the reverse of it is not true. A person may work endlessly but without food and sex creation will be lost. This is the difference between work and act. One is for the need; the other is ruled by nature. So prostitution can never be considered labor.”

“But they are earning their livelihood through it! Getting money!” Sukanya was not a person to relent easily, “And they are also not doing it for enjoyment and satisfaction. Then why will you not call it labor?”

“The answer of your question is hidden in itself. Just now you said that they are not doing it for procreation. Even not for enjoyment or satisfaction. And not for love too. If suddenly they give birth to babies it is against their professional ethics. That means these girls are resisting the law of nature. Or you can say that they are forced to walk against the law of nature. This is an imposed situation. And artificial. The patriarchal society has created it. For their enjoyment. This is an arrangement so that men can go out to seek pleasure crossing the boundary of sexual dictum controlled by the rules of the society. Here women have no role to play. Why will they be considered laborer? They are just used as women and not as laborers.”

Kanad said, “Consider the animal at the zoo. We pay to enter the zoo, getting some kind of pleasure seeing the tiger, lion and so on and so forth and the hunger of those animals is quenched by the money that we pay. Does it mean that to provide pleasure to our eyes is the profession of a tiger? Rather we can say that by keeping that tiger in a cage we are exploiting it for a bigger reason. Why are you people trying to give it a face of social right instead of touching the main point? Why to use bookish term? Sex worker! *Younakarmi!* If the girl, whom Deya has brought home, could not escape she would have to do sex slavery. Am I not right?”

The light atmosphere of the room was gradually getting tensed. Everyone was eating, picking mutton from *biryani*, biting fish fry. Only the earlier happy atmosphere was somehow missing. Suddenly Santu became very serious. Lines of irritation appear on Soumya's face. Till now Soumya did not touch liquor. Suddenly he got up and poured whisky in a glass. Without mixing water he sipped on. The expressions of his face changed. Deya could read Soumya's face. She could feel that he did not like the discussion at all. Even her brother could not digest them. Perhaps he was not ready to listen to such words from his sister's friends.

Deya tried to lighten the atmosphere. She told Debashish, "Hey, only would teaching be enough? Eat to your heart's content. Should I serve you a batter fry? Susmita, please take some more *biryani*."

Susmita got frightened, "Oh my God! No way. I am unable to finish what you gave."

Mahua sat down with her plate. She shouted, "Shewli, get me a glass of water."

In such a moment again Shewli?

Deya was not at all happy. She was thinking whether she should go herself to bring water. Before that Shewli entered the stage. Since afternoon she has been following Mahua at every step. She is not at all hesitant before Mahua. She asked comfortably, "*Boudi*, Laxmi *mashi* is asking whether to serve ice cream now?"

"Give it after some time. I will ask later."

Deya noticed that Soumya was looking at Shewli with anger.

Piali finished eating. She was licking her fingers. Deya quickly said, "Hey, take the plate of that *didi*. Throw the left over bones in the bucket."

Now not only Soumya's but all the eyes present in the room followed Shewli.

A suffocating silence came down in the dinner party.

Deya was searching words to open her mouth. Suddenly she spoke out, "Can you expect it from Ritam. He did not turn up!"

Why did Deya remember Ritam now? Did her subconscious mind tell her that if Ritam were there the atmosphere would have been much normal?

Sanghamitra was finely separating chicken from bone. She said lightly, "The crazy guy has missed it by mistake."

Debashish said, “No, he is not the person to forget invitation. If he smells any invitation...Something else must have happened.”

“He might have suddenly flown away from Kolkata with a friend. Do you remember last time how he went to Kokrajhod?”

“Really he acted stupid!” Piali’s eyes were wide open, “he did not even inform *mashima*. Somebody pricked him about it at the Coffee House and he vanished. Poor *mashima* was calling every other person over phone...”

“He is no more a Bohemian now. He is married, got a baby....Check whether his baby is ill or not!”

“Deya, why don’t you call him?”

With a glum face Deya said, “Why should I call? If something was wrong he could have informed.”

Soumya got up suddenly and went to bathroom. Coming back he sat at a distance. He poured whisky in the glass again.

Mahua said, “What’s up Soumya? Why are you taking drinks again? Now have food.”

In a rough tone Soumya said, “I will eat. But after some time.”

Deya gulped, “Can’t you understand he is the host today! If he eats first, you people talk at the back of him?”

Debashish said, “Don’t be shy. You have attended us for quite some time...”

Bachhu said, “In fact Soumya is trying to overcome that tiredness. He is killing the body pain.” Saying this he made hint by ogling, “Doesn’t he need to be fit at night?”

Chini’s tongue was out of control just with the impact of little vodka. “If you drink so much everything will be in vain. You have to lie down like a bolster then.”

The wave of laughter was back again in the room. The suffocating atmosphere became vibrant again. Many had finished their eating. They were coming back from the bathroom washing their hands.

Mahua did not have any appetite left after cooking and stirring the food items throughout the day. After finishing only half she rushed to the kitchen. She came back giving the tray of ice cream on Shewli’s hand.”

Bachhu shrank his nose, “I don’t understand the fashion of ice cream now a days! Don’t you know that *rasagolla* should be arranged in a feast?”

Chini frowned, “How dare you name *rasagolla*? Have you forgotten that your sugar level is two fifty?”

“Strange, as if ice cream is not sweet.”

“You will not touch even that ice cream. Chini passed her orders, “Mahua give me the ice cream of your Bachhuda’s share. I will eat two”

“This is not fair! Have I suddenly caught blood sugar today? Right after my marriage I caught the *chini rog*.”

Everyone in the room started clapping at Bachhu’s humorous comment. Santu was also laughing loudly. The stiffness of Soumya’s face became loose. Deya was feeling relieved.

That unpleasant topic came back again. But in a different tune.

On not being able to handle the argument properly Sukanya was feeling uneasy for quite some time. Taking the ice cream from the tray she was measuring Shewli minutely.

She said to Kanad, “Have you thought of one thing?”

Kanad came back finishing his day shift. He had monstrous hunger in his stomach. Before finishing his plate he brought two more batter fries. He was chewing them with much sound. With a gaping mouth he said, “What?”

“That the girl has got shelter at Deya’s place is well and good. For this Deya’s boldness and broad mind must be praised. But....” Sukanya paused for a moment. Thinking for a while she said, “If this profession had social acceptance we would not have sneered at this profession. And Deya also did not need to show sympathy to her. And that girl also could earn some money through this work. Of course I agree that the girl was deceived and taken away and she was brutally tortured in Mumbai....In fact the brothels are nothing but hell. The girls become shallow because of the torture of hooligans, rogues, police, pimp and the aunties. If the profession were legalized such torture would have been stopped. The girls would not have lived in a frightened state. Then with open mind they would have determined which customers they would entertain and whom they would not allow at all to enter room.

Kanad winked, “Hey...what are you saying? Are you mad or I am crazy? Am I listening to the right thing? Do you understand the meaning of what you are saying?”

“Certainly I can understand. In fact if today this profession had egal protection Shewli

would not have landed in such a disastrous situation.”

“So you are asking for a legal protection of an evil social practice. He stopped taking ice cream and was again ready to argue.

Sukanya said, “Evil practice or whatever you say, this profession will remain unchanged till the patriarchy is there. This is what you said before. To lessen the distress of women that recognition is necessary.”

“I couldn’t get you.”

“What is there not to understand? Radical demolition of patriarchy is not possible. And if patriarchy is there this profession will also be there. And if it is true why you people have problem in giving protection to those girls? They will have some basic rights; their children will grow up with dignity....”

Sanghamitra liked these words. She said, “It is in fact should be thought about. Perhaps this will help the girls to overcome their hellish experience to some extent....”

“Don’t be confused with the logic trickled by sentiment. Listening to your words it seems as if it was a mistake of Ramohan to protest against burning of *Sati*. Ah, the poor wives are giving their lives in fire; no one can see their problems...so Your Honor, try to eradicate their pain to some extent; and please provide them the facility of dying by consuming poison!”

Kanad supported it. “Very true. Instead of abolishing the system you people are trying to make it permanent.”

Sukanya became angry. “Who will abolish? You? Is it so easy? And if you shout will patriarchy be over? Didn’t this Jayashree, who is chattering so much, bend her head in front of male domination? In fact she has the power to stand on her own feet! Could she show the minimum courage to protest? Rather, she is like a cat that loves fish but is loath to wet its feet. In fact we are talking about this much arrangement.”

Pratim’s face became red. Enraged he said, “You are wrong. Jayashree has chosen that path only not to disturb peace. If she had behaved arrogantly who would stop her? My parents? Never. For some days they might have become furious but after that they would have calmed down. Otherwise I would have to stay separately with my wife. What could it be more than that? It is only because Jayashree basically has a compromising nature...”

Being hurt Jayashree said, “Sukanya, don’t show bad example. There is heaven and hell difference between lessening one’s ego for the sake of family and to choose the dirtiest path for a handful of rice. Have you ever felt the pain of those women?”

“Don’t prattle.” Still Sukanya was growling, “Don’t try to judge their pain with your middle class mentality. Before joining *Nabaprabhat* I was with an N.G.O. I did a statistical survey of some brothels. I have seen with my own eyes. They not at all consider themselves unhappy in the way we think about them. Don’t they have laughter, crying, happiness, and sorrow in them like a normal family! They are running their families, they have children, they have husbands and have lovers as well...to them it is a mere work. Like ten to five office.”

“Again you are wrong. The very thing which a girl of a brothel has to perform is not a work but an act. A woman whether she has hunger or not has to eat continuously from ten to five with a bitter mouth. Is it a job? And you are also blind who saw them happy. You could not understand the basic nature of human being. A person, in however abominable state he or she is in, tries to find the taste of freedom in that. Do you want to put the level of happiness on that? Shame on you! Have you not seen a plant? A plant kept in a room? Have you ever noticed how they try to expand their branches towards the window? This is not happiness but *abhijojan*. Adaptation. They try to stock food through adaptation. Those, who can’t, die, they are ruined. Probably that Shewli also had to face the same thing.”

“Yes, dear. Very true.” Though Deya did not intent but opened her mouth, “Till now the girl is in panic! She groans in pain even in sleep!”

Sukanya did not even listen to it. With a serious tone Debashish said, “That means you don’t want any specific solution. Am I right? You want no improvement of condition for those girls. You want them to be oppressed in the same way.”

Debashish laughed out, “In fact you told that it is not possible for one to change. That means collective voice is required. Unfortunately you can’t get Rammohan or Vidyasagar. So women should demand it for themselves. Let them uproot this system. The custom should force the nation to demolish it. Mind it, I am calling it custom but not profession.”

“Strange, you yourself told that it can’t be demolished. It is a primitive profession?”

“Yes, old. But it is not older than the history of men. There were many evil practices in the society. But should they be continued just because they are continuing? Thousands of years ago there was the custom of slavery. Is it still there? Even the custom of *devdasi* is also stopped.”

“Dear, there is no use of tall talk. When the stomach burns girls are forced to plunge to this line. Your nation can’t arrange food for them.”

“People also steal because of hunger. They do it because the nation can’t provide. Then let stealing also be legally sanctioned.”

“Imagine what a terrible matter it will be! Stealing legally sanctioned! Prostitution legally sanctioned! In fact totally a *Raam Raajya*! No, *Kaam Raajya*.” Kanad was giggling.

“Then eighty percent duty of the police department will be lessened! Nameplate will hang from the door of any house, Mr. so and so Robber like the way the name of a doctor or engineer is written. Boasting any proud father will say, ‘my daughter has joined the career of prostitution’. New subjects also have to be introduced in the school and colleges. Like a home science. For girls. Really Sukanya your idea is very revolutionary.”

Sukanya became very angry. She could not utter any more logic. After sitting silent for quite some time suddenly Baccu opened his mouth supporting Sukanya, “Why are you teasing her? She is not asking for that kind legalization. She wants some rights to live peacefully for those girls who are in this business or are forced to join it.”

“That means make this matter alive in a comparatively acceptable way so that like other poor countries the flesh trade also runs well for the sex traffickers in this country too, of course with no hazards...”

“Ah, why are you interrupting so much? Let me tell. A solution is very much necessary as the pimps of these girls are beaten black and blue by the police and their children don’t get normal life. Let the nation give them at least some facilities till it can do something big.”

“*Dada*, what is this nation? Nation is not a solid matter. Nation means I, you, Sukanya, Sanghamitra, Deya, Soumya....Let us do one thing. If we are really well wishers of those girls why will we leave them in the hell? In fact we can take responsibility of their children. If every one of us sponsors one child the children can live with dignity. And if

each affluent family keeps a prostitute in his or her house....Those who have real feelings they can keep them in their houses by getting them married. If you let your son marry one, Kanad marries one, Sukanya arranges one with her brother the present problem will be solved to a great extent. For time being let us start it in this way. You who think about the condition of those girls will also be interested in giving them a place of dignity. Am I wrong? Of course if you people are not hypocrites. In fact Deya has shown such a gesture. You people also do something. What madam Sukanya, how will it be to think along these lines?

Sukanya got up quickly. She was going towards the door quickly, "My opinion will not match with yours. I am going."

Deya ran following her, "Hey Sukanya, stop. Chinidi and others are trying to pull you down."

Sukanya did not look back. She was quickly getting down the staircase.

Coming back Deya said, "*Psh*, is there any point? Why all of you were pulling her leg?"

Kanad shrugged, "She herself raised the topic. She is a very headstrong lady. It was right to give her a shake."

Debashish told Deya, "Do you know what the problem was? One section of women is dancing as puppets in the hands of men like fools. They think that it is progressiveness! They just can't shout saying that the men who go to the brothels should be shot dead."

"It's enough. Stop" Deya gave a side look at Soumya. Soumya's eyes were at the ceiling fan. It seemed as if so much of arguments did not touch him at all. Very doubtful! To get rid of the nervousness Deya said to Mahua, "Hey, did you ask Laxmidi to take her food?"

"Long back." Mahua was looking at the watch. She pushed Santu, "It's already ten. We should get up now."

Santu was sitting resting his back on the sofa. Closing his eyes he said, "Hmm."

Though he said like that he did not get up. He was sitting unmoved. All were leaving one by one. Bachhu was tired of sitting. Standing he stretched his body with ease. With a contented face he said, "Mimi, today's evening was very nice. Drink, food, chatting, everything was first-class. Your professor friend is outstanding. He talks about interesting things."

With a smiling face Chini said, "Mimi, when do you have that lecture, I forgot?"

“On 15th August. Next Friday.”

“So you must have got all the points for your lecture.”

“But mine is different topic. The position of women in the society.”

“Whatever. From this discussion you can say something in an organized way.”

Chinidi is very simple as a human being. Deya smiled at her simple advice. She went up to the door to see her brother-in-law off. From upstairs she heard Chinidi scolding Bachhuda on the steps, “Get down carefully. Why are you staggering?”

Mahua was arranging her bag. She said, “Mimi, there is so much of excess food.”

“Have you taken much for *ma* and *baba*?”

“Still so much is left. It will be tough for you and Soumya to finish.”

“I can’t eat any more. The appetite is ruined by the food smell of food. Hey *dada*, have you eaten properly? Was the food fine?”

Closing his eyes Santu said, “Hmm.”

“Are you drunk? Why are you not opening your eyes?”

“I am thinking. How impudent your friends are!”

Soumya suddenly commented, “See how you have added to your knowledge. You came to know about the pros and cons of prostitution!”

“Really, what a vulgar topic! It’s shameful.”

Mahua said, “Ah, there is no harm when this vulgar thing continues...! Get up please. God knows what Futku has been doing so long!”

It seemed that Santu had something more to tell Deya. He did not say, perhaps looking at the serious face of Soumya.

After the departure of Santu and Mahua, Deya came and sat by Soumya. She put her hand on Somya’s back. Softly she asked, “You never drink so much? Today suddenly...?”

With lack-luster eyes Soumya looked at her once. But he did not reply. He removed Deya’s hand from his back gently.

“Come. Have something.”

Soumya was silent. He was not moving.

“What happened? Get up.”

“Don’t irritate me. I am not feeling well.”

“You felt very bored. Didn’t you?”

“But you wanted that.”

“They started talking about such a topic...”

“You have kept a prostitute in your house. Do you expect talks about religion and divinity in stead of those discussions?”

“Shame on you Soumya! Mind your language.”

“Are you teaching me language? In which language people were talking so far?” Soumya suddenly burst out. He stood up quickly, “Hey Shewli, come hear. Come quickly.”

Not only Shewli but Laxmi was also standing near.

Soumya roared, “What do you think? Is it a brothel? How dare you to hang around my house being dressed up like that?”

Deya also raised her voice, “Soumya, behave yourself. I have asked her to dress up like that. I have bought her that dress.”

“Great! Perfect match. What else? Now make sure about the entry of the customers.”

“You are behaving like a drunkard so late at night, I see?”

“I am not drunk. It’s you and you. With the obsession of showing greatness you have lost all your senses. How can your flag of nobleness fly until you dress her up like a prostitute in front of all?”

“Shame on you! You are so mean?”

“What have you seen of meanness? I am telling you clearly that I will not tolerate a prostitute in my house. Enough is enough.”

“Soumya, you are being too much!”

“Too much? What do you mean by too much? Without my permission you brought a whore to my house. Isn’t it too much? Coming to my flat your dear friends have rejoiced discussing her topic the whole day. Isn’t this too much?” Soumya was gnashing.

“Coward! Just ran away tucking the tail between his legs with little scolding. Hah!”

Deya was shocked, “You...! To Ritam...! What did you say to Ritam?”

“That what one gentle man can say in a civilized language to a brute. I will not tolerate anyone behaving scandalously with that dirty girl in my flat. Understand?”

“Why are you again and again uttering bad girl, dirty girl? You know that Shewli is not a bad girl!”

“Isn’t she? Go and ask your parents. Ask the neighbors. Everyone is saying the same

thing. I just can't listen to them. Listen Deya, I am giving you last warning. You have to drive that girl out of this house."

Deya flared up in anger. Hitting the ground with her feet she said, "If I don't throw her out? What will you do? What?"

Laxmi rushed. She pressed Deya's lips, "Mimi, please be quiet. It is not good to talk to the husband in this way."

"Why should I be silent? Does he feed me or provide me clothes?"

"Have you become arrogant as you earn, *eh*? If you obey my words you can stay here or I will turn you out by the neck. Soumya Singharoy has not bothered for any one in his life. And he will never do that. Understood?"

Soumya entered the room kicking a glass lying on the carpet forcibly. Immediately it broke into pieces. Shewli was standing there like a stone. A piece hit the ground in front of her feet but she didn't even notice.

Sitting on her heels Laxmi was cleaning the pieces and crying loudly. "God, why did it happen? What a fire caught this home! Oh God...you wretched girl...What disaster you have brought down...!"

Entering the small room Deya closed the door with big bang. She was fuming with anger. With a sudden pull she took out the garland from her bun and tore it into pieces. She threw the pearl ornaments. What an intense insult! Her bosom was burning. Was it due for her from that person whom she thought dearest in this world? Why should she obey Soumya's words? Why will she drive Shewli out? She did nothing wrong. And by bringing Shewli Deya also did nothing wrong. How did Soumya dare? How could he say that he would drive her out holding her neck? Ah, why Ritam is like that! If he had told Deya once she would not have arranged this party to show people!

The insult was sucking all the energy from her body quickly. Deya was getting tired. She felt like crying but no tears in her eyes.

There are torn clouds in the sky of *Shravana*. Day after tomorrow is the full moon day. The moon looked like a broken brim. The moon was getting lost again and again behind the clouds. At the late there raised a breeze but disorderly. It stopped also beyond

anyone's notice. The moon traveled alone in the whole sky crossing the obstacle of the clouds. In vain.

At dawn she was feeling drowsy. In a half asleep and half awakened state Deya heard an indistinct call, "Mimi...? Mimi...?"

Deya got up in hurry. It was morning. The room was flooded with light. Rubbing her eyes Deya opened the door.

Laxmi had a mouthful smile, "The nuisance has left."

Nothing entered in the numb brain of Deya. Indistinctly she said, "Who?"

"Shewli. Shewli. Getting from sleep I could not find her. She ran away."

16

Deya was climbing the steps with tired feet. Belegghata police station, Jadavpur police station, Lalbazar, hospital....She even went to the slum area of Belegghata thinking that in case Shewli had gone there. Like a possessed person she visited the Shialdaha station too. Who can say whether Shewli thought of going to her *mashi*'s house or not?

But her mind was said that Shewli would not go to these places.

Where will Deya find Shewli?

If girls like Shewli wish to be missing can they be ever traced?

Standing at the doorstep of the flat Deya caught her breath. Her tired hands were at the calling bell.

Not Laxmi but Soumya opened the door.

How come Soumya was at home in the evening?

No, this question did not arise in Deya's mind at all. Her sense of wonder was lost.

Soumya looked at Deya for some time with his mouth wide open.

He screamed with agony and anxiety, "What happened to you? Where were you the

whole day? I could not go to office. I was worried for you every moment. I stood still at the junction of the road for long....I called at Gopalnagar but you were not there. You did not even go to office...?

Was Soumya asking questions or reciting a list? Without uttering a single word Deya walked past Soumya. Sitting on the sofa she wiped her neck and throat. In a low tone she called, "Laxmidi, please give me some water."

Opening the fridge Laxmi quickly took out the bottle of cold water. Filling the glass she came in a hurry, "Ah, you look so pale. Where were you roaming around? Did you eat something? Or have you taken only air?"

Deya finished the glass as if she would not listen to anything. Was the heat inside extinguished? Deya could not understand. It seemed as if her physical senses also became blunt.

Soumya was restless. Extending his arm he took the handset, "One second. Let me inform your home first."

Lifting her hand Deya forbade. In a cool tone she said, "Call later."

"Why? Why later?" Soumya was still worried. "Your parents must be tensed. They may come running any moment."

"First come with me to that room." Deya's tone was cooler. "I have something to discuss with you."

As if under the cast of a spell Soumya followed Deya to the bed room.

Deya closed the door. Facing Soumya in a heavy tone she said, "Don't you know where I was wandering?"

Soumya removed his glance from her. With hesitation he said, "Yes, I mean...no, I mean....Did you get any news of Shewli?"

Deya did not reply. She sighed, "Soumya, I am not going to stay with you any more."

The sudden blow of the words made Soumya speechless for a while. Then he murmured, "Deya, what are you saying?"

"Did I say anything cryptic?"

Soumya shrugged, "Deya, I am sorry. Extremely sorry. I was not in my senses. Whatever I said it was in a moment of anger....! Deya, why did you have to be so serious about whatever I blurted out in anger?"

“Soumya, what exactly should be considered not serious?” It seemed as if Deya had undergone a transformation within a single day. In a soft tone she said, “Your wish of not keeping Shewli here?”

“Deya, please try to understand. Nobody will like such a girl to stay in one’s house. It’s just not possible.”

“Still that blind mentality! Still that obstinacy!”

In a rough tone Deya said, “Leave others. Talk about yourself. Did I do anything wrong?” Soumya was silent.

“If I bring Shewli back you will not have any objection, will you?”

Soumya looked with surprise, “Have you...?”

“Suppose I have found her. Suppose I bring her back!”

Soumya felt helpless. He passed around restlessly. Suddenly turning around he clutched Deya’s shoulder, “Why are you behaving arrogantly? For some girl...third party...a nonentity...for her will you strain our relation?”

“Strange. Don’t I have to see on which ground the relationship is standing?” Deya removed Soumya’s hand from her shoulder, “You are right. Shewli is no one. Shewli does not really matter. My question is whether whatever I think to be right will be accepted in the household or not. What is the point in saving the relationship when you don’t have respect for my opinion?”

“Deya, remember that you are going too far for a trivial matter.”

“To you the matter is trivial but not for me.”

With a glum face Soumya said, “Don’t my likes and dislikes have any importance?”

“What that you dislike happens in the household? It runs depending on every little like, dislike and preference of yours.... I have adjusted myself with your past, future and everything. But Soumya the place of one’s values has to be kept aside. Our values do not match, if our sense of just and unjust is different....For example, my friend came to my house with my invitation. But you insulted him and drove him out in my absence and you did not even feel the need to inform me about that....Can you imagine what kind of insult this is?”

Keeping quiet for a while he said, “Okay. Okay. Sorry. I will ask for apologize to Ritam.”

“Do you think that can belie the insult? Or wipe out the cause of it? In fact Ritam is just a

dummy. You couldn't respect my values which is why you have done this thing. Asking for forgiveness is meaningless here.

"Deya...Come on."

"No, no, I won't stay with you."

"Are you out of your mind?" Soumya became restless, "What is more important to you? The issue of Shewli? Or our love?"

"See, you still placed our love and Shewli's issue in two different weighing scales! You want love to be unconditional. Or to be according to your conditions. Listen Soumya, love is not unconquerable, imperishable or eternal. Love also decays; silt also gets accumulated on it. And what is left at that time is adjustment. Compromise. To learn to depend on each other. And that adjustment again gives birth to a different type of love gradually."

Deya spoke with pauses in between. It seemed as if she wasn't trying to convince Soumya but herself. It was as if at that moment she did not have any anger, hatred or sense of insult in her but was trying to dig herself. And Soumya was nothing but a mirror. Soumya was feeling uneasy seeing Deya at that moment. And the uneasiness was increasing to a great extent as he could not burst into anger.

With a pale face he said, "I can understand that you have been very offended. Go and stay at Gopalnagar for some time."

"Will you decide where I will go or not?" Deya's face suddenly changed with sarcasm,

"Why are you so sure that I will go?"

"What do you mean?"

"The meaning is very easy. You can go away. It shouldn't always be the girls who have to leave their houses. You have not built up this household alone. This house is as much mine as yours. Here I can again bring another Shewli. If you can't adjust you...."

"Enough. Stop. Shut up." Soumya moved away from her quickly. His fair complexioned face turned blood-red. His nostrils flared. There was fire in his voice. "What do you think of yourself, eh? You are crossing your limits! I want to see how bold you are! I have to leave the house? Me? How dare you?"

Deya was not scared at all. With calm footsteps she came to the balcony. Behind her a man was roaring. He was tearing himself in shreds by his nails and teeth. There was a

shadowy lake nearby, the crowded road was smeared with halogen light, a noisy world. It seemed as if the false vaunting of an egoist man overflowed all the shadow, light and sounds.

Deya felt like crying. She also felt like laughing.

Glossary

Agrahayan - The eighth month of the Bengali calendar

Anchal - It refers to the flapping free end of the *saree* which is usually draped over the shoulder. *Anchal* is usually more densely ornamented than the field in matching or contrasting color.

Asanas –*Aasana* is a Sanskrit word which means is a body position, typically associated with the practice of Yoga, intended primarily to restore and maintain a practitioner's well-being, improve the body's flexibility and vitality, and promote the ability to remain in seated meditation for extended periods.

Alur dam - This is a very delicious spicy main dish of Bengalis. It is popular throughout North India. It is usually cooked under pressure so the potatoes get soaked in the gravy.

Alur chop - Boiled potatoes cooked with ginger and onions, made into roundels, dipped in gram flour batter and deep fried.

Baba – One's father.

Baluchari saree -. These traditional *sarees* are the creation of the East Indian artisans who give much effort to create this. The name, Baluchari is the derivative of the name of a small village called Baluchara, located in Murshidabad . Baluchari sarees possess a silk base with silk brocaded designs. These *sarees* are defined by the pictorial details that are created with great artistry in the *sarees*.

Baromashi - Elder sister of one's mother.

Baropisi - Elder sister of one's father.

Beguni - *Beguni* is a Bengal snack made of eggplant or brinjal slices deep fried in batter.

Bidi - an inexpensive cigarette locally produced usually from cut tobacco rolled in leaf.

Bindi- A *bindi* (from Sanskrit *bindu*, meaning "a drop, small particle, dot") is a forehead decoration worn in South Asia.

Biryani –This is a delicious dish made with scented rice, spices, meat, fish, eggs or vegetables. The name is derived from the Persian word *berya(n)* which means "fried" or "roasted". *Biryani* was brought to the Indian subcontinent by Muslim travelers and merchants

Bodhi - *Bodhi* is a Sanskrit word which is traditionally translated into English as enlightenment, but frequently (and more accurately) translated as "awakening" or "to know". The word "*buddha*" means "one who has awakened."

boudi - the wife of one's elder brother

Bhringi – a great devotee of Lord Shiva and one of the two chief attendants of lord Shiva while the other one is called Nandi.

Champak - a kind of flower and its tree belongs to the magnolia family

Chhadnataala: a canopied is a place bounded by banana plants and is decorated with *alpana* or designs under where Bengali marriage rituals are performed.

Chutney- *Chutney* is a loan word incorporated into English from Hindi. This is a term for a class of spicy preparations used as an accompaniment for a main dish. Chutneys usually

contain an idiosyncratic but complementary spice and vegetable mix. Bengali chutneys are usually sweet.

Cottah – *Cottah* (also spells *katha*) is an unit of area which is approximately 720 sq. ft

Daal – This is a preparation of pulses (dried beans, lentils etc.) which have been stripped of their outer hulls and split. It can be taken both with rice and *roti*.

Dada – One's elder brother.

Devdasi - *Devadasi* was originally described a Hindu religious practice in which girls were "married" and dedicated to a deity (*deva* or *devi*). In addition to taking care of the temple and performing rituals, they learned and practiced dance and other classical Indian arts traditions and allegedly enjoyed a high social status. As the time passed, system changed and they were used for sex obligation for high caste and class people.

Dupatta - This is a multi-purpose scarf that is essential to many South Asian women's suits. The alternative names of *dupatta* include *orni*, *chunri*, *chunni* and *orna*. *Dupatta* has long been a symbol of modesty in South Asian outfits. It is used a chest covering cloth which can be included in *salwar kameez*, *kurta* or *ghaagra choli*.

Falguna - The eleventh month of the Bengali calendar.

Fish-chop - a popular Bengali snack where fish along with potato and other spices made into balls and deep fried in oil.

Gharana - Hindustani music, a *gharana* refers to a system of social organization linking musicians or dancers by lineage and/or apprenticeship, and by adherence to a particular musical style. A *gharana* also indicates a comprehensive musicological ideology.

Hilsa- Ilish or hilsa is the national fish of Bangladesh, and is very popular in Bengali and Oriya speaking communities. It lives in the sea for most of its life, but migrates up to 1,200 km inland through rivers in the Indian sub-continent for spawning. It is said that people can cook *hilsa* in more than 50 ways.

Jaistha - the second month of Bengali calendar.

Jamaibabu - husband of one's elder sister.

Jethu – Father's elder brother.

Jhingeposto - a special Bengali food prepared with the fruit of cucurbitaceous plant and poppy seed.

Kachagolla – It is a popular Bengali sweet made from milk.

Kaku- Father's younger brother

Kalbaishakhi - storm clouds prevailing in the afternoon of May and June.

Kam Raajya - world of sensuality.

Kamalabhog – a popular sweet of Bengalis prepared from Indian cottage cheese and few drops of orange food color is added to it.

Keertana - To sing songs and about Radha and Lord Krishna It is a major practice of the Vaishnavites.

khichdi –hotchpotch.

Kurta - It is a loose shirt falling either just above or somewhere below the knees of the wearer, and is worn by both men and women. This is popular in many parts of South Asia.

Laddu - It is made out of flour and with variety of other ingredients formed into balls. The *laddu* can be made from gram flour, semolina, wheat flakes, and many other flours.

Langda aam –A very sweet variety of mango.

Luchi - Thin cake of flour fried in boiling ghee

Lungi- The *lungi*, is a garment worn around the waist which is very popular in India and many parts of South Asia. *Lungis* are sewn into a tube shape like a skirt. It is particularly popular in regions where the heat and humidity create an unpleasant climate for trousers

Maa- One's mother.

Machher kaaliaa – This is a favorite Bengali fish preparation with grated onion and ginger and other spices.

Mahalaya -*Mahalaya* is an auspicious occasion observed seven days before the Durga *Puja*, and heralds the advent of Durga, the goddess of supreme power. It's a kind of invocation or invitation to the mother goddess to descend on earth.

Mama – Maternal uncle.

Memsahib - Used formerly in colonial India as a form of respectful address for a European woman.

Meshomoshai – Husband of the sister of one's mother.

Naradmuni - The name of a divine devotee of Lord Vishnu who instigated the gods to raise pretty disputes against each other

Pakoda - A type of fritter dipped in a spicy chickpea batter; can be made with vegetables, cheese, chicken or seafood.

Papad - *Papad* is thin, spicy, crisp wafer discs, about 4 to 8 inches in diameter, made from *daal*, flour lentils, vegetables, potatoes, shrimp, and rice. The discs are deep-fried or dry roasted on an open flame and served as a crispy savory appetizer.

Parota - A kind of thin bread fried in oil or clarified butter

Payesh - a kind of sweet dish prepared by boiling rice in milk with sugar and other ingredients.

Payjama - The word which originally comes from the word *pāñ jāmāh*, literally meaning 'leg garment'. These are loose-fitting trousers worn in the Far East by men and women. This is worn in many cuts and shapes, much variation being seen in respect of girth, length, tightness, material, etc.

Pisemoshai – Husband of the sister of one's father.

Puishak - An Indian spinach.

Puja – It indicates Durga Puja, an important festival of Bengalees celebrated in the month of *Ashwin*, the sixth month of the Bengali calendar that is in the month of September or October.

Punjabi- long white tunic-like shirts with loose sleeves worn over close-fitting or baggy white pants, which are usually called *payjama*.

Raam Raajya - welfare state.

Rabindrasangeet – it refers to music written and composed by Rabindranath Tagore.

Ramgarur - A sour-faced person.

Rasagolla- This popular Bengali sweet is made from balls of *chhana* (an Indian cottage cheese) and semolina dough, cooked in sugar syrup.

Rathyatra - a sacred Hindu festival when Lord Jagannath travels by chariot.

Rohu – It is a fish of the carp family *Cyprinidae*, found commonly in rivers and freshwater lakes in and around South Asia and South-East Asia. It is treated as a delicacy in many Indian states like Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Roti - Wheat-based flat bread. Integral part of Indian cuisine.

Sahib - Used formerly as a form of respectful address for a European man in colonial India.

Salwar kameez – This is the traditional dress worn by both women and men in South and Central part of Asia. *Salwar* or *shalwar* are loose pajama-like trousers. The legs are wide at the top, and narrow at the ankle. The *kameez* is a long shirt or tunic.

Sandesh – It is a very popular sweet in Bengal which is prepared with milk and sugar. Some recipes of Sandesh call for the use of *chhana* (curdled milk) or *paneer* instead of milk.

Saree – This is a female garment in the Indian Subcontinent. A *saree* is a strip of unstitched cloth, ranging from four to nine meters in length that is draped over the body in various styles. The most common style is for the sari to be wrapped around the waist, with one end then draped over the shoulder baring the midriff.

Sarod - The *sarod* is a stringed musical instrument, used mainly in Indian classical music.

Sati - A Hindu custom prevalent in the nineteenth century where the sati, the wife of the expired husband was forced to sit on the pyre of death along with her husband.

sejomashi - the third sister of one's mother.

Shalik – A kind of small yellow-beaked singing black bird of Bengal.

Shravana -The fourth month in the Bengali calendar.

Tangra - a species of small scale less river fish.

Thakuma – The mother of one's father.

Yama -The god of death.

Yudhishtira - The eldest of the Pandavas in the *Mahabharata*, the great Indian epic.

CHAPTER THREE

Social Analysis of the Source Text

3.1 Introduction

By the term gender discrimination we understand the prejudicial treatment of a group or a person due to their gender or sex. It involves a reinforcement of behavior and attitude on the basis of traditionally stereotypical roles people have in the society we live in. Gender discrimination is practiced and supported in various ways which are crucial to our socialization into our sex roles. While in theory gender discrimination can affect both men and women, however, it is women who have been at the receiving end through the ages and across cultures, since most cultures in the world are male dominated. The right to be in the forefront and the power to control comes easily with the birth of a male child in the name of tradition and custom. The femininity women are socialized into are defined by the society which is again male dominated. “*Being a girl or being a boy is not a stable state but an ongoing accomplishment, something that is actively done both by the individual so categorized and by those who interact with it in the various communities to which it belongs*” (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003:17).

Today we are more aware about the gender bias that exists in the society. Demand for equality for women has always been a prime concern of the feminists. We may agree to the fact that men and women are biologically different there but this difference does not necessarily mean that they should be treated as inferior than men. Yes the society has moved forward and we find around us women prime ministers, presidents, astronauts, but

the goal is yet very far for gender awareness to seep into the grassroots and bring over a social change where women will not face the double standards at every juncture of their life. In India where goddesses are worshipped and are symbol of power, wealth or knowledge women are still being burnt in the pier of dowry. They are subject to domestic violence, rape or prostitution. Gender stereotyping usually associated with a society which identifies with patriarchal norms is easily identified as prevalent in our society where it presents itself under guise of traditional Indian values.

In this chapter we discuss how the persistence of male dominance in our society limits the scope for women to actualize their potentials. The forced prostitution in the case of Shewli in *Udo Megh* reveals the gruesome reality of our civilized society which at every step points its finger at women for this kind of disaster and hence tries to keep the cruel attitude of the patriarchal society in dark. This is not the society which can appreciate a woman for her courage, the selfless dedication to her work or her strength to protest against what is wrong. Deya, represents the undaunted spirit, which is the absolute, elemental, inner urge of womanhood. It is the strongest force in her nature. In facing all the adversities she did not let her spirit die and stood by what she thought to be her moral duty. When the outworking of this force within her is hampered by the society and Soumya's ego overpowered his love and confidence Deya she rebelled.

We have also looked at how language plays a vital role to reinforce the traditional gender roles, and sees women as inferior to men. Language itself can not be deemed good or bad, but it does reflect individual or societal values. We have cited several examples from *Udo Megh* which displays the way in which language can be used to stereotype gender.

3.2 Crisis of Modern Women

With the reading of the novel *Udo Megh* a serious question strikes our mind. With feminism playing a vital role in the modern world has it really contributed to the emancipation of a modern woman? Many skeptical brows are bound to raise on how far women's liberalization has become effective. Is it emancipation in the truest sense? It's true that women of modern days have jumped over the hurdles of just being the age old stereotype restricted to the role of home making. After a painful struggle in the patriarchal society women have succeeded in putting their foot in other vistas of life that were unfrequented. In many cases they are at par with men with regards to economic status. Suchitra Bhattacharya's female characters are modern in true sense. She portrays the character of those women which are urban, working and hail from the typical middle class. They do not hesitate to question the norm if it is wrong and strong enough to rebel. In this particular novel Deya, a modern woman has more self-respect and is a stronger person than the stereotypical woman, independent of making her own moves and exercising her own free will. But the indispensable question is whether all these external liberties have really succeeded in freeing her or has it involved further complexities as by products of her much craved liberalism and her fight for justice.

Despite the fact of external emancipation, the most ironic factor is that a modern woman is flung into the reality of further complexities of the world where along with her homely duties she juggles a career as well and is often blamed if she fails to maintain the balance.

3.3 *Udo Megh*: Reflecting Gender Relations

Deya is a thorough professional, strong, determined and is not scared of hard challenges. She has extended her boundaries and created a space outside the domestic front and pursues the job of a news reporter, again a profession a woman is unlikely to opt, as her primary duty always lies with the family. But as soon as she enters home she is the loving and caring wife like any other ordinary woman who doesn't underestimate her husband's likes and dislikes and takes care of every small requirement of her husband. Today's urban educated women may be fortunate enough in their attempt to extend her boundaries and find identities of their own but this has put modern women in more critical state. Today's working women have to harmoniously combine her career and her roles as a wife or a mother or a daughter-in-law. The family does not spare a working woman from performing all the household works and expects her to look after every nitty gritty of household in spite of her tight schedule of job. We see Deya efficiently balancing both her career and home. On the contrary we see Soumya very reluctant to perform the minimum household work even on holidays.

Deya loved Soumya very much who came out of his house and married Deya against his mother's will. But his was the last word for anything and Deya simply had to accept his decisions. She could hardly say no to any of Soumya's decisions. But we do not see Deya complaining for anything. It was not before Shewli's advent in their life that she could realize the hollowness of their relationship which looked apparently very stable and deep- rooted.

The true mental set up of a person can be understood only in adverse situations, when no mask of pretension can hide the hypocrisy of a person. Suchitra Bhattacharya's introduces Shewli in the novel only to show the true face of the society and its most

intellectual creature called human most of whom do very little to valorize the glory of humanity. We talk about society's evolution, redefining gender relationship and woman's freedom. But could we really achieve the true emancipation of woman? Yes we may argue that we are in an age where the custom of burning a sati is banned or a widow's marriage is not something illegal and strange. Today's woman has set her feet in the plane of moon. Whether it is politics or any other prestigious job a woman has proved that she is no less than a man? But is this the lot of every woman of today? Is each one of them is educated and privileged irrespective of class or caste? No, this is not the whole picture and exceptions can not be set for examples. We may hoist the flag of modernity but has the light of modernity reached the grass root level? We have to pause to answer it. Reforms have taken place and there are happy signs of change but the transition is very slow. The traditional mentality still affects the modern vision. The goal of a gender neutral society promoting a woman more active, ambitious and independent is yet to be achieved.

The novel revolves around the serious issue of prostitution and how a so called modern society sympathizes or apathies with the victim. But how a modern woman is still victimized if not physically but mentally and asked to sacrifice her individuality and compromise at every step is not sidelined. For ages it was believed that the different characteristics, roles and status accorded to women and men in society are determined by sex, that they are natural and therefore not changeable. Gender is seen closely related to the roles and behavior assigned to women and men based on their sexual differences. Agarwal writes, "Gender inequality dwells not only outside the household but also centrally within it (as cited in Baland, Bardhan & Bowels, 2007: 274). It stems not only from pre-existing differences in economic endowments between women and men but also from pre-existing gendered social norms and social perceptions. From time immemorial women have followed what society has told them to believe without actually questioning it and looking within to determine if this is right. Home is the place she suits in and extending the boundary is labeled as something rebellious. Male constructed images of women are embedded in Indian culture in such a way that they appear quite 'natural'. And women try hard lifelong to play her assigned role perfectly; show absolute

obedience and submissiveness to fulfill male expectations. But the irony is that there is no limit to the male expectations and their demands from women increase each day with new dimensions and when a woman raises her voice against such oppression it is subdued by violence. A woman, rural or urban, illiterate or educated, low class or an upper one, traditional or modern, experiences some form of male domination throughout her life. Gender inequality permeates the home, the workplace, and almost all aspects of life. Violence against women is the most insidious outcome of gender inequality. The cultural norms teach a woman from the time she is born to accept this as her fate. Women's capability of decision making at home front or at workplace is always doubted and any such symptom in her is considered as transgression of female domain. Suchitra Bhattacharya's *Udo Megh* is a novel which explicitly points at the subtle and loud entrapments of the male dominated society. She shows how the modern enlightenment is yet to change the age old male set up where a woman is considered a non entity. There are changes in the economic and social scenario but it has failed to bring any significant changes on the domestic front and overburdened woman leading to further complexities of woman's suppression.

Women are usually encouraged to take up the stereotypical jobs such as secretarial, clerical, nursing, childcare, social work, elementary teaching and so forth. There has been an established ideology of what jobs are suitable for working mothers and what aren't. Her choosing of a profession illustrates her concern for making time for the family. At first, the thought of a woman leaving her family to go and find a job elsewhere was unfathomable. The present scenario may not be like the early days yet a woman is expected to give priority to her family over her career. When a woman chooses a career, she is to consider the effects it would have on her family life. Thus, the woman is placed in the difficult position of having to balance the multiple roles expected of her with the roles she wants to carry out for herself. In this connection we must say that Deya is lucky enough to continue her challenging profession of a reporter in a newspaper office, *Nabaprabhat*. Her husband has been supportive enough. But not her every colleague is as lucky as her. Her job's demand doesn't allow her to stick to a fixed time table. Deya talks about her friend Jayashree who was very nervous when her office work

demanding her to go home in late nights. Her conservative joint family doesn't allow her to work so late. And in such a situation her husband seemed to play a neutral role. He couldn't speak anything to support his wife. A highly educated woman is expected to sit at home and teach nursery rhymes to her child. Deya herself comments:

“amader profession e Jayashree ekebare misfit.

English: Jayashree is a total misfit to our profession.

Though women have made great strides in the field of various jobs they are too often discouraged by family members from choosing careers that infringe too much on family life. Thus through negotiating her emotional, intellectual and physical space women always have endeavored to safeguard their identities. Interestingly in Deya's office the intake of women employees was less compared to the males. The women employees had the fixed time table of 12 p.m. to 6 p.m. No challenging task was assigned to them. Deya herself confessed that they were supposed to prepare page-filling news like daily horoscope, weather forecast or trivial news of entertainment.

Although it is encouraging to see today's women taking of professional roles in various sectors of the society, however deep seated prejudices against women cripple a woman's spirit everywhere, at home and outside. Though women have acquired the legal right to work, there is still plenty of sexism in the workforce. Most women take on a typical 9-5 office workday so that they can be home to cook dinner, do the laundry and oversee the children's homework; they come home is meant for the second shift duty. Though technically women can apply for the male dominant jobs, it does not guarantee that they will be equally chosen. Some businesses claim they do not discriminate, but statistics prove otherwise. “Women face wage discrimination too and excluded from the most powerful executive positions” (Benokraitis, 1996: 399). In many cases the issue of time commitment and maternity leave, play vital roles in hiring women employees. The notion that women might have children entails that they would necessarily take time off from work. This ultimately suggests that they will have to be paid for a specific amount of time without any work. That means that hiring a woman is not beneficial

economically. Unfortunately women are often defenseless to these discriminations. It is high time to see how we can change this reality. Women should not sacrifice a fulfilling career in order to maintain peaceful relations within the home and companies should not favor male workers for economic reasons. We must not forget that there is a direct link between a country's attitude toward women and its progress socially and economically. The status of women is central to the health of the society. If one part suffers, so does the whole.

Deya in *Udo Megh* is constantly critical of such discrimination. It is she who speaks to the editor, Ranen Samaddar, regarding the monotony and nature of the job. So when there was a sudden change and women were engaged in the evening shifts, the co-editor of the newspaper, Mr. Ashesh is not happy with Deya as he believes that Deya is instrumental behind it. He warns her that she should not complain if her task demands her to stay in the office till mid night. She is outspoken and clearly states that she is not afraid of any such situation. Deya is in full praise of Ranen Samaddar who made the change possible and believed in Deya. But if we look at the comments of the experienced editor we will see that he could not surpass the typical male nature. In the beginning when Deya approached him he pacified her saying that a job in newspaper is not only about adventure. Newspaper is like a huge family and there are many trivial nitty-gritty things in a big family! As women are inborn housewives; they can handle these particulars well. He must have believed that relying on a woman for something challenging other than the routine work would be foolish. Women are presumed to be less competent (Carli & Eagly, 2002: 631). People doubt their judgmental quality and power of exerting influence. "Although women's status has improved remarkably in the 20th century in many societies, women continue to lack access to power and leadership compared with men" (Carli & Eagly, 2002:629). Thus we see how a woman is left with least choices where age old ideology about sex roles plays the determinant factor of her efficiency in whatever she ventures and asked to be contented in what she is given.

Unfortunately a woman's initiative is never appreciated however great it is, rather her endeavor is meant to face harsh criticism from the male section. Deya was happy that the authority didn't doubt her capabilities and assigned her with covering important reports regarding interviewing the governor's wife, enquiring about the stealing of a girl child or observing parliament election in the district of *Howrah*. But her capability couldn't fetch any glory, rather her husband belittled the importance of her task saying that it was not Deya's enthusiasm that drew the attention of the authority towards her but as there were no male reporters available at that time those tasks were assigned to her. In the novel we see how Soumya could not be whole heartedly happy when his cousin, Bugi appreciated Deya pointing at her smartness and prettiness. When Bugi praises Deya for her progressiveness to opt an odd job of a newspaper reporter Soumya belittles such loud praises of his wife and says that she does nothing special and works in a small local Bengali newspaper and also emphasizes that she doesn't do anything odd or awkward. Negating Bugi's observation about Deya's guts and strength Soumya says that Deya is basically shy in nature. Perhaps Soumya tries to convince that Deya may take up a job which is primarily male dominated but she is very much feminine from the bottom of her heart. His wife is the traditional and conventional type. . She is very much anchored to home, her actual place. Soumya said,

“Deya abosyo temon bekhappa kaaj kare na. Pray routine job i...basically lajuk type”

English: “But Deya does not do something very outrageous. Almost a routine job “Basically she is shy type.”

Suchitra Bhattacharya clearly dissects through patriarchy which circumscribes and belittles the identity of a woman. They negate the idea that a woman can be self sufficient and capable enough to create an identity of her own without male support. Stereotyped gender roles which are heavily biased against women do not value a woman's individuality. Women still remain bogged down by the patriarchy in spite of all her achievements. Soumya wouldn't have minded if Bugi had pointed at his broad mindedness to allow his wife to be economically independent and work in a challenging

job. But here Bugi was looking at Deya as an individual, a separate entity, not as the 'other' of a male.

Several cultural codes are imposed on women and the responsibility of carrying that tradition also rests on their shoulders. Woman's place associates primarily to home and kitchen (Shands 1999:40). Her biological gender restricts her from accessing the things outside. In a patriarchal society man has played the role of breadwinner. It boosted his ego as he was the provider and protector. And a woman as the weaker section was meant to be domesticated and protected. Working both inside and outside the home is not a 21st century phenomenon; women have done it for decades. But being able to go into work hasn't been an easy fight for women to win and there has always been strong suppression, sometimes cruel, to deter a woman from earning her livelihood. Women face enormous pressure to conform to traditional roles within the family. Education plays an important role in the shaping up of a woman's identity. Women have started to question the patriarchal norms. Today they are more rational than earlier and now emerging into a new era of freedom and rights. A woman educated and employed gain status in the society. Status translates into power to influence family as well as society. Suchitra Bhattacharya's novel depicts how the idea of a man, playing the important role of earning money for his family, is deeply rooted in the society. From the very birth of a child the process of socialization starts. A man has to be strong and capable enough to bear the responsibility of the family. His wife may earn but he being unemployed is something always a 'no no'. Even today there is hardly any change in this mental set up. Ritam who struggles to be a successful writer is rebuked throughout the novel for being irresponsible and careless as he did not stick to any regular suitable job. It was not that he did not like to do anything but he considered himself a writer and wanted to succeed in this field. He could not tolerate hoaxing, deceitfulness or cunningness. He could not play tricks or be silent in the face of anything wrong for mere saving his job. And today's job demands so. This is why in spite of his brother-in-law's constant effort to get him a job did not work. He was rebuked for sticking to such baseless principles. His sister or mother could not understand why Ritam was reluctant to compromise to some extent to sustain his family. This was something unthinkable to Ritam's mother that his son would

not do any job and her daughter-in-law would earn money. The society did not allow him to be in his dream world of creation. His mother said,

“tor ki lajja saram kichui nei re? Bie korechis, akta bachcha hoyeeche....”

English: Are you not at all ashamed? You are married and got a baby too....”

She felt as if Ritam was quitting one job after another as he was careless, irresponsible. His inclination towards writing was nothing but silly excuse. She was disgusted with her son and said,

“Bou khetekhute rojgaar kore ene khaoabe aar purushmanush sue sue thyang nachabe...”

English: The poor wife will do all the hard work to earn money and feed us and the man will simply lie down and dance his feet.

Ritam’s sister also did not miss a single chance to rebuke him for quitting all the jobs arranged by her husband, Ambar. She was disgusted with Ritam’s habit of quitting jobs frequently.

Ritam’s wife, Shrabani was a lecturer in a college and it was not that the family was going through hard times for Ritam not doing any job. Ritam also had no problem with his wife working and didn’t mind at all to ask money from his wife. But here the problem is somewhat more complicated. Families whether they are nuclear or joint are normally set up on patriarchal basis, with the male figures determining fundamental conditions and making the key decisions. Women had always been at home and were not allowed to enter the other arenas of life. From the day a girl is born she is constantly reminded of the things she is not supposed to do. She is taught that her place is at home and not in the world of men and she is worth less than a man. Her identity is forged as soon as her family and society limit her opportunities and declares her to be second rate. Subjugation and exploitation of women is a product of man’s vested teaching and women’s acceptance of them. The sexist suppression still continues as the prejudices

against women are naturalized in the name of religion, culture and tradition. A male should be the breadwinner as the head of the family and this is something accepted as natural because of a hierarchical social system which solidifies male dominance.

Awareness about gender bias has spread over slowly. But it will take a long time for this awareness to seep into the grassroots and translate into social change. Shrabani did not underestimate her husband's skill of writing but she was at the same time ashamed of Ritam's unemployed status. She confessed at one point that it was just for this reason that she was avoiding going to her parents. She felt embarrassed to stay at *Chandannagar* as her parents, relatives, friends enquire about Ritam's job and she is unable to stand that situation. She said, “

“Chandannagare gie thakte pari na...baba dada der mukhe sab samoye akta prasno chinho jhulche...college,bondhubandhab,attiyosajan, kato jaygay je kato rakom mithye boli”

English: I can't go and stay at Chandannagar...a question mark always hangs on the faces of *baba* and *dadas*. I have to lie in so many ways to my friends, relatives and at other places...!

When Ritam's elder sister planned for a tour at Jaipur Shrabani simply refused to accompany them as her husband is jobless and therefore it does not suit her to go for such a luxurious trip. When her sister-in-law did not ask for any contribution it hurt her more. She felt as if it was a direct blow to her husband's self respect. It was as if Ritam's sister was showing pity to them. But Ritam did not look at the matter so deeply and argued with Shrabani for behaving rudely with his sister. But she was steady in her point. She said,

“Amar ki kono attosamman nei? ...Tumi kichu bujhbe na. meyeder je kothay lage.”

English: Don't I have any self-respect? You can't understand at all where a woman gets hurt...!

When one of Shrabani's colleagues, Mr. Hiren enquires about her husband's income she felt awkward and lied to him. The societal set up still believes that a woman may go for a job but it is just additional when the family needs are met with her husband's income. Woman's job may be a pass time activity or just to satiate her ego of being self independent. Mr. Hiren commented:

“eta to manbe, main contribution ta husbander i

English: You must agree that the main contribution is solely your husband's.

When Shrabani didn't respond to such a loud statement and felt awkward Mr. Hiren tried to lighten the seriousness of the matter saying, “May be he earns less than you.” But he was very sure that Shrabani's family runs well with what Ritam earns. And Shrabani nodded as she could not utter the truth. He tried to help Shrabani to come out of her helplessness and shame and praised Ritam's writing skill as his story was published in *Nabaprabhat*. She feels proud when somebody praises Ritam and his writing. In fact his skill of writing impressed her before marriage and Ritam also in a straightforward way let her know that he would be involved in writing and she might have to take responsibility of his family. And she agreed to it and was happy. But the harsh reality of life hardly let her to enjoy that contentedness and satisfaction. Ritam's quitting traditional jobs overpowers his other good qualities.

Society criticizes a man who sits at home and lives on his wife's earning. No one likes any change in gender roles. For a man depression follows unemployment. The hardest thing for a jobless man is the humiliation within the family itself. It makes him feel useless he takes money from his wife as he doesn't contribute a penny. It hurts his male ego.

Now as the tables are turned. The fact that Ritam has to ask for money from his wife to bear the minimum expense of his cigarette makes him feel low. Though he didn't pay heed to the comments of others he was surprised to know that his wife also felt pain deep inside her heart for his joblessness. He realized that though Shrabani did not nag or complain both his wife and mother tried to adjust to their depression. And it must be the

extreme point when Shrabani burst out and he was in complete dark about the tumult inside his wife's heart.

“Ato baro bhul hoye gelo bujhte? Bar bar tar chakri chara nie Shrabanir raag ke atodin hesei urie dieche Ritam, bhebeche ota samoik, ota Shrabanir moner katha noy, athocho Shraboni je bhetore bhetore....!”

English: How could he make such a big mistake in understanding her? Time and again Ritam has laughed away Shrabani's anger about his frequent job quitting. He thought it was temporary. It's not what she actually means. But Shrabani in the bosom of her heart....!

Such reaction from Shrabani pricked him the most but he had no words to console her or defend himself. Though he was running around to get a suitable job his failure deemed to be his incapability and indifference to his family. Every conversation used to end with his incapability. And everybody was reluctant to understand his stance.

Modern men are still quite reluctant to marry a woman with brain. They advertise for women who are homely and traditional. Because they know that such meek and docile women will never raise her voice against him and will serve him lifelong as her duty. This is just because men feel insecure or suffer from low esteem when a woman is independent and works outside home. They are threatened that the ideas which women develop due to her education and exposure to the outer world will affect the marital relationship or to say correctly the power game. Suchitra Bhattacharya's female characters are usually urban working women and she tends to show explicitly the problems they face internally and externally in spite of their privileged position compared to the uncountable number of women who are yet to be enlightened or strive for their rights. Somewhere she had hit the root of a very basic problem that the position of women in the society had remained more or less the same irrespective of their social strata. Yes, there are certain changes in the society though minimum where husbands do not have problem with their wives working. Yet the number of husbands like Soumya

who belittle their wives' achievements and believe that it is they who play the pivot role to sustain their families and can do it without their wives' financial assistance is innumerable. And the society always doubts the manliness of those few who are quite open to this issue and admit that they genuinely admire their wives' contribution and do not have any problem with women's equality. Being at home and depending on wife's money is a stigma to a man. For a man being effeminate is a matter of shame. And time and again society pricks this weak nerve of men like Ritam and influences a man to behave like a man. It becomes obvious that the spouse who contributes the most will have the greater decision making power. And there will be nothing more shameful if a woman gets hold of the power at home and exerts influence on her husband. Men who do not hold nine to five jobs with a salary cheque that puts food on the table are not deemed manly enough. Money makes the world go round. Psychologically money has many meanings. Most importantly it represents an avenue of autonomy and self-esteem. Men do not have the option of staying at home and look after the family like a woman. They have the option if they can withstand the gossip, the ridicule and the general disapproval. And Ritam's family and the surrounding were exactly doing the same. And interestingly Ritam's mother feels very helpless as her daughter-in-law runs the family. She scolds Ritam as he punctured her dream to be a proud mother of a son. Even as a woman she can not appreciate Shrabani's hold of the family; rather she rebukes her son for such a situation. Her son's less or no hold of the family makes her feel weak and voiceless and she feels as if they were living on the pity of Shrabani. She feels embarrassed as her son is jobless. As an adjunct to the male a woman is always welcome but a woman strong, economically independent spells threat to the family as well as the society.

There is another instance in the novel which shows how a woman always has to compromise somehow or the other. Deya's sister-in law, Mahua had been throughout a good student. But after her marriage with Deya's brother she could not go for Ph.D. She got involved in household things and after pregnancy it seemed quite impossible to speak out her desire to go for Ph.D. Now as her son was a bit grown up Deya asked her to start again. Even Mahua's father-in-law encouraged her. But the universal mother-in-law complex of Gouri discouraged Mahua. Deya tried to argue with her mother saying that if

they engage a full timer there would be no problem. But there was no green signal from her mother. She pushed the ball in her son's court and said that her son, Santu would do the necessary. She simply didn't talk about this any further. Deya finds a reason behind her mother's such indifference towards the matter of higher studies of Mahua. Her mother was a graduate in philosophy and could not do anything after marriage. In playing the ideal role of a good wife, all her intellect died in the kitchen and in looking after her family responsibilities. She must have nurtured the pain deep inside her heart. And her intention to keep Mahua engaged in household works and put out the light of hope for Mahua's higher studies could be a kind of revenge. By encaging her daughter-in-law she tries to compensate her anger of suppression. She was doing wrong as she was allowing the injustice to continue in the next generation. She might be aware of what she was doing but she never had the voice against patriarchy but her suppressed pain turned her selfish and keeping her daughter-in-law confined within four walls she wanted to get the minimum satisfaction that she was not the only victim of the system of male dominance. Moreover a woman who is highly qualified is seen as too smart and savvy.

The author seems to question the institution of marriage itself, which has always been considered the predominant feature of Indian society. No one gets tired of singing praise of the permanence of marriage in India which is the base of strong family bonding. But Suchitra Bhattacharya seems to critically observe the criteria which make a marriage successful in India. Our culture teaches a girl from the very childhood that she is weak and feeble. The society in the name of tradition kills her vital spirit to move forward. She is like a creeper who has no power to stand on its own without the support of a strong tree. And marriage is something which gives her security and respect. Her territory is defined by the society and expected to be a reed which bends down with the flow of water. If she tries to stand like a huge banyan tree, inevitably she has to face the adverse forces which try to uproot her. So she is taught how not to rebel against what is going on and should do the best to save her marriage as it is she who has the responsibility to go to any extent to make the spiritual bond successful. Outside marriage she has no existence of her known and she should worship her husband as her god and make him happy. In his "Paradise Lost", Milton said, "He for God only, she for God in him." The family operates

on the principle of inequality between men and women. Like the mother-earth, she should be all-giving and not ever demanding anything in return. Thus in the name of marriage she is kept away from the public eye and confined within four walls. Thus home becomes the microcosm of the outer world, the macrocosm where the poisonous tree of inequality grows up and dries away the life blood of a woman. Suchitra Bhattacharya is not happy with such an institution of marriage which puts a full stop to a woman's life. She lives her life not for herself but for others. If marriage demeans women's vitality and try to squeeze her freedom do women have no right to raise voice against it? In many of her short stories like *Samporko* or *Shikhar Thikana* we have seen how Suchitra Bhattacharya's female characters didn't hesitate to come out of a marriage which was not working out. It is not their disbelief in the institution but their partners' sense of superiority which was actually suffocating them. Her female characters remarried giving life another chance. They tried to live life without compromising their dignity. These women are not wayward or flippant trying to play with life. They love their husbands and care for them. They can do anything for love. But why should she tolerate any imposition from their male partners.

In *Udo Megh* we see Deya as a loving and caring wife. Though she has a cook at home but she loves to prepare dishes for her husband on holidays. Everyday she prepares breakfast for Soumya before she leaves for office. She takes care of every little thing of him. She avoids anything that can upset him. But in their relationship not everything is perfect. There are incidences which bring out Deya's deep love for Soumya. But readers will hardly find such things in Soumya. Yes he doesn't create opposition regarding her job. But hardly is he seen to value Deya's decisions or ideas. He does what he likes to do. Deya herself admits that her family rotates round what Soumya likes or dislikes. It was almost three years to their marriage and Deya wished to conceive. But whenever she lets him know about her will he simply speaks out his long term plans of buying a brand new car or home. He says, "No earthly force can change my schedule." Deya feels that motherhood is something that would bring a sense of fulfillment in her but she has to be on the pity of her husband to decide upon the time which he thinks to be suitable to start a

family. Soumya has always been passionate about new things. He was adjusting with a motorbike as he didn't want to buy a second hand car. He said,

“Soumya Sinha Roy doesn't believe in second hand. *Gaari, baari, bou, gadget computer – amaar possession e jakhon asbe they shall have to be virgin*”

English: Soumya Sinha Roy doesn't believe in second hand. Car, home, wife, gadget computer, whatever come to my possession has to be virgin.

This particular statement speaks for his typical male chauvinistic attitude. He is just like any other ordinary man for whom virginity of woman matters a lot. He considers wife as his possession. Soumya stands for patriarchy who takes woman as his property. Hence he believes that as he owns he rules. We don't find Deya taking up a scuffle out of it. The reason may be her blind love for Soumya or the age old custom which all the time reminds a woman of her duty. Deya says, “*ki jiddi chele*” (What an arrogant boy). But does she find the space to demand anything for her? Or she knows that he will be least bothered about it. After marriage like any other girl she changed many of her habits in the name of marital adjustments. But did Soumya change any of his habits? In his schooldays Soumya had the habit of getting up at 3 a.m. and now after so many years also he couldn't change this habit. Deya explicitly talks about his habit of wanting to initiate sexual intercourse at that unearthly hour. During the early hours of night even if Deya felt the sexual urge he never responded to her call. For a woman it is something like an insult. But she adjusted to that also. She says,

“*Prothom rate Deyar jodi kakhono sarir jege uthe, Deya jodi kamonay chanchol o hay, Soumya grajhyoi korbe na. Tar je samoytate Deyake chai, sei samoytate sada dite habe Deyake. Soumya bujhte chay na boichitro jodi abhyas e porinato hay, ta aksamoye klantikar theke.*”

English: At the start of the night even if Deya's body desired something and even if she was restless with drive Soumya paid no attention to it. Deya needed to respond when he

needed her the most. Soumya did not want to understand the fact that anything unusual would seem boring once it became routine.

It did not matter to Soumya whether Deya is interested or not to get involved with him at that time. He satisfies his hunger when he is interested and Deya admits that she is tired of it.

In India, marriage is considered the definitive experience in an adult woman's life. Consciously or otherwise, a woman is given to understand that her desires and dreams must henceforth be subject to those of her husband. Under such conditions, women find it difficult to talk about the physical violence that takes place under the guise of conjugal relations in the marriage. Any mention of rape or sex fills them with shame. The prevalent viewpoint is that when a woman marries, she is willing to fulfilling her husband's conjugal rights. Once she has made this commitment, she cannot back out of it. Since sexual relations are part of the marriage set-up, a woman cannot refuse to have sex with her husband. By the same token, a husband cannot be said to have raped his wife. The society rather doubts the woman's character and thinks that it was her fault not to adjust with her husband. In India, marriage remains the only route to social acceptance of adult womanhood. There are strong social incentives on women to enter into marriage. The same reasons act as a negative motivator, prompting women to stay in abusive marriages, simply because life outside marriage is not regarded very highly. Accepting that women go through the most heinous forms of abuse under the name of marriage may be the first step towards protecting women. Until then women will continue to be abused and raped by the one person they trusted enough to want to spend the next seven lifetimes with. One of Ritam's friend, Somshankar in an argument with him in Coffee House said,

“Prem adate akta biological concept. Nari purusher prem mane sudhui sorir. Tumi mone mone je meyetike bhalobascho, seta bhalobasa noy. Tumi adate tar sorirtake chahicho. Tumi etake tomar gopan lalosa bolte paro.”

English: Love is actually a biological concept. The love between a man and a woman means only the body. The love that you cherish for a girl is not love. Actually you want her body. You can call it your secret lust or your subconscious sexual desire

This is typical male voice of the society. By such depiction Suchitra Bhattacharya tries to give the grotesque reality of marriage.

The writer's representation of Deya is strong enough to accept her as a woman who values relationships and a very sweet girl. She is not a girl to decide anything irrationally. In the end of the novel Deya's decision of not continuing to stay with Soumya should not give the readers any wrong message. Till now there are ample examples to show how she is quite serious about her relationship with Soumya and is not a girl to put her marriage at stake for any trivial reason. Her one decision of helping a rape victim and bringing her home for shelter ruined her married life. And this time she seemed to be quite strong to stick to her decision because she knew that she had done nothing wrong. The Shewli episode in the novel brings forth the cruel and dirty realities of our society and plays an instrumental role to give an insight to Deya to rethink about her relation with Soumya. The sudden emergence of Shewli in Deya's life shook her trust on her marriage. It forced Deya to rethink about saving a marriage which was shallow from inside devoid of respect, love and faith. However, inspite of an indication of Deya's intention of ending her marriage, she has no plans to leave her marital home as she feels it to be her rightful place.

There are references in the novel which shows another cruel face of gender discrimination. Deya's newspaper covered four incidents of abandoned new born girl child in found dustbins in a short span of six months. She also covered a story where a baby girl was stolen from hospital may be to kill her or to leave her in another dustbin. She wonders whether the society was advancing or going back to the barbarism of middle age.

We live in a society where a boy child's birth is celebrated with pomp and joy. A boy will inherit his father's property and support his family when the parents will grow old. In the name of marriage he will fetch lot of money from his wife's home and will continue a line of descent. But a girl child's birth is an occasion to mourn. In a world of men, she just another expense. And for poor families the birth of a girl causes great upheaval. When there is not enough food to survive any birth of a girl puts a strain on a family resource. But the monetary drain of a daughter feels even more severe where dowry is practiced. The poverty stricken families see their daughters as economic predicament. This attitude results in the widespread neglect of baby girls. Women are forced to produce a male child. At one point Shewli's mother told Deya that they were from very poor Brahmin family and they were seven sisters. She told that with the hope of getting a son her father ended up with seven daughters. A poor family which doesn't have money to feed the children or to provide them with education goes on giving birth to seven girls. Even an educated man like Soumya dreams of a boy, who will be a cricketer one day, to achieve what he could not. Not only sex selective abortions and but cases of female infanticide are very common. Everyone wants to get rid of her. Women live in a society where women's rights mean practically nothing because her birth itself depends on the pity of the males. And mothers who lack their own rights have very little protection to offer to their baby girl.

This shows how gender inequality is eating into the whole society and the discrimination begins from the time a couple plans a baby. Science is developed enough to determine sex. And so many baby girls are killed in the mother's womb and those who are lucky to see the light of the world are thrown to dustbins either to die or to meet with worst situation. Yes men and women are different but difference doesn't necessarily mean inferior or lesser than men in any way.

3.4 Rape: Physical Form of Male Dominance

Shewli, the rape victim is placed at the center of the storyline to unmask the heinous face of male dominance where at every moment many precious lives like Shewli's are lost without any hope of justice.

Shewli, the poor girl from slums eloped after marrying a man. Later she was sold in the red light area of Mumbai. There the girl was raped several times but luckily managed to escape and came home. Shewli must be amongst those very few lucky enough to come back. Perhaps the writer intends to tell how such a come back is never desired by society. Shewli's return could never make her life normal as earlier. And the story line is built to problematize the issue. Deya happens to cover the news of this rape victim in *Nabaprabhat* through her friend Ritam. There is no mention of Shewli's age but Deya says at one point that the girl is yet to bloom. The girl can be taken as a minor. Deya wanted to take the opportunity to cover the news so that the girl can be given justice and no girl becomes a prey further. Though she wrote about it in her newspaper without revealing Shewli's name the incident couldn't remain hidden and being unable to tolerate the harsh comments from the neighborhood Shewli's mother committed suicide. The girl was left with no one to call her own. Deya felt as if she was somewhere responsible for the incident. Considering it as her moral duty she brought the poor girl to her house but her decision made her relation bitter with Soumya and ultimately led Deya to come out of the marriage.

In a society where women are marginalized, a raped victim is doubly marginalized. She is a woman, thus inferior to men and raped means no place for her in the society as she is a slut, a curse in the name of womanhood. Griffin (1971) in her *Rape: the Politics of Consciousness* writes that rape is a direct function of the degree to which women are socially, politically and economically powerless in comparison to men.

Not only does rape derive from power differentials, but sexual violence also serves to maintain the status quo (as cited in Ward 1995:22). This is the most cruel face of the patriarchal set up in the society which hardly considers women as human beings and so a rapist is not bothered to take a woman's consent. Thus it shows no regard for women. Male aggressiveness and superiority bring down a woman from a human being to nothing but a mere body which can be intruded whenever a man wishes to. History also shows how during all wars the winning army ravaged the women of the captured country. It seems the winning over women bodies is equated with the winning of the land.

The origin of the Indian idea of appropriate female behavior can be traced to the rules laid down by Manu in 200 B.C. He says, "By a girl, by a young woman, or even by an aged one, nothing must be done independently, even in her own house. (Manusmriti V.147). In chapter IX verse 3 he says, "Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence" (as cited in Stein & Arnold 2010: 88). Thus women's lives are shaped by customs that are centuries old. She is advised not to cross her limits set by the society and if she does so she will be the sole responsible for the consequences. So it is not strange when society tends to blame the rape victim as if she is responsible for that crime either in whole or in part. People have a strong belief that certain behaviors of the victim may have encouraged the rapist. People who are under the notion that the world around them is intrinsically fair find it difficult to accept a situation in which a person is badly hurt and assaulted for no reason. This leads to a sense that victims must have done something as she met with such accident.

3.5 Society's Stance Towards a Rape Victim

A rape victim is viewed by society as being 'damaged' who brings dishonor to the family. Instead of sympathizing with her, the family members scold her and even do not hesitate to pray for death. Shewli's mother couldn't be happy when Shewli came back. As a mother she can not forsake her child. But she didn't know how to cope with the situation. She was really worried about Shewli's future. When she came to know that Deya was there to write about her daughter in newspaper she looked reluctant to tell her anything because she was apprehensive of worse situation if the news gets publicized and people in the neighborhood come to know about her daughter's rape. She was angry with Shewli as she had an affair with a man and eloped with him after marrying him at Kalighat. The man sold her in Mumbai. But she didn't blame the man rather she was scolding her daughter for such a foolish act. She says, "*Mukhe nudo jele dite hay*" (I feel like putting fire on her face). With much anger she bursts out, "*Oi haramjadi meye bangsher gaye gu lepe dilo!*" (That wretch has brought disgrace to our family!). There are so many incidents in our society where a girl is killed in the name of family honor. The family doesn't want to hesitate to kill their own child in the name of honor and tradition.

Society assumes that nothing can be done to help them out, so there is no need to try. Instead of blaming the rapist and punishing him the society provides no emotional and moral support to the victims, which they need badly. The gossip mongers go on speculating what might have happened to the girl. The rapists happily roam around as they are aware that, to some extent, the effort society puts into finding the rapist will reflect the value placed on the victim. People disbelieve, blame or even turn against the victim. They do not hesitate to ostracize her. As a rape victim brings stigma to the whole family the family members feel ashamed and go on blaming the girl instead of helping her to come out of the trauma. Driving rape victims into isolation and despair is one of the ways a male dominated society supports the ongoing existence of rape. The victim is

already wounded and such mental torture takes away the least zeal of starting a new life. She loses respect in the eyes of the society for no fault of her own. People are indifferent to her plight and fear to help her as they feel the victim is no one from her family and by helping her they may face the wrath from the rapist or his group. The society makes a victim feel very dirty and worthless. As she lost her purity she is a stigma to womanhood. This secondary victimization is the re-traumatization of the act of rape through the responses of individuals and institutions.

Matoesian(1993) wrote that

“...rape is not a violation of the social order, but a reinforcement of it. The state fails to intervene against violent male behavior perpetrated against women and thus condones and reproduces it. Even when rape is reported and prosecuted, the rate of conviction is much lower than for other forms of crime such as burglary, aggravated assault and manslaughter” (as cited in Romaine, 2009: 228).

The rape victim always tends not to file a case about the crime in the police station as there is no guarantee whether the rapist will be punished or not. A woman fails to trust the system which is male dominated. The victim is afraid that the news will be publicized once it goes to police and the guilty assailants escape due to the reluctance from the victim's part to report the crime. Even filed the police don't take the case seriously and for poor such a fight becomes almost impossible to challenge the system. In many cases police behaves rudely and discourages the victim not to file a case. Many are still obsessed with the idea that women fabricate the stories of rape to trap men or they are just being vindictive. Police threaten the family members to lodge a complaint if the rapist is from powerful position. The family is reminded of the social repercussions, attention and permanent social humiliation. In the name of enquiry the police make the life of the victim and her family hell. Moreover policeman is foulmouthed and may rape the victim in turn. A victim who takes such a case to the court ends up being raped not once, but again and again and the court room becomes the replica of the unforgiving society where a woman can never fight for her rights. The truth is that the perpetrators are

somehow never placed under the kind of microscope that women have to endure. The rape victim, and not the rapist, is put on trial.

Shewli's mother, Kanan reported the police that her daughter was missing. At that time there was no clue whether she was raped or not. If she knew she also wouldn't have been any exception. When Shewli came back from Mumbai with her mother didn't inform the police of her come back as she feared that the police intervention would spread the news and they would not be able to live in that locality. She told her neighbors that the culprit took Shewli with the promise of marrying her and escaped leaving her. When Deya came to gather information about Shewli's rape Kanan was doubtful about Deya's intentions. Her daughter eloped with somebody and it was a scandal. Kanan could not simply fathom how horrible the consequences would be if the news of the rape of her daughter got publicized. In spite of Deya's assurance she anxiously tells Deya, "*tobu didi...akhon tao akrakom badnam, takhon to...*" (Yet *didi*.... Now it's one kind of scandal but then....).Ritam's aunt, in whose house Kanan worked as a maid servant, scolded him a lot for taking Deya to the slum to cover the story. She said that Ritam's wrong step made Shewli's life more pathetic as there was no escape from such a scandal. The foul mouths of the neighbors His initiative has closed the door of hope of Shewli's marriage forever as people have come to know about the rape. She also informed Ritam how police was troubling the poor mother and daughter in the name of enquiry and the other day when Kanan was returning home from work some rogues stopped her and threatened not to open mouth to the police. The hooligans also scared Kanan by saying that if Shewli cooperated with the police and revealed anything she would be abducted and killed, dogs and foxes would tear off her dead body and it would float on the water of the Ganga. She was very angry with Deya's action who in spite of being a woman and knowing the societal set up published the rape incident of Shewli in paper. How could she be so irrational to spoil another girl's life? She tells Ritam,

"Tomar bondhur o bolihari. Se nije meye hoyeo bujhte pare na kise meyeder bhalo hay, aar kise mando hay?"

English: Your friend! Bravo! I really cannot describe. In spite of being a woman can't she understand what is good for a girl or what is harmful?"

The patriarchal illness has enfeebled women to such an extent that they remain silent in the face of oppression. They accept the exploitation in the name of fate. The society sows the seed of guilt in the rape victim because it has always been biased and supporter of male supremacy. Such a feeling of guilt eats into the victim. She may feel that there is something inherently wrong with her which has caused her to deserve to be assaulted. The psychological harm may last life long and the post trauma is unbearable for a victim. Survivors of rapes usually suffer from post traumatic disorders like depression, anxiety and also develop suicidal tendencies. Rape is the ultimate savagery against women. It damages the physical, mental and social well-being of its victims. The victim accuses and blames herself for all these. Not only does she lose trust in her own judgment but also loses trust in others to empathize with her. Deya brought Shewli to her home as after her mother's death none of her relatives took her responsibility and she was not safe in that locality. A rape victim who came from red light area is considered a stigma to the society. People may hate her. But the hypocrite males do not want to miss the chance to take opportunity of the girl. After Kanan's death the poor girl is even traumatized more then earlier. She spends sleepless nights and gets scared of the nightmares of those scary days in Mumbai. Shewli shrinks with fear. The world seemed to her the most unsafe place where there are hyenas to tear off her body. She felt secured in Deya's home and could not think of going anywhere else. Deya could not force her to go to a rehabilitation home. The very idea of rehabilitation centre was killing her inside. She groaned in the kitchen the whole night and begged Deya not to send her anywhere. Like any other girl she dreamt of leading a peaceful married life but whom she loved turned to be her greatest enemy who sold her for money. Her dreams are shattered. She trembles as she recalls those days. The girl seemed to be lost. She was fighting a battle with her own self. She was not sure of her capability of taking decision and highly depended on Deya. She blamed for everything that happened. She could not eat when Laxmi, Deya's maid servant placed the dish full of delicious curries in front her. She lost sense of hunger and

sleep. She made herself responsible for her mother's suicide. She felt that she was a great sinner for whom there would be no place even in hell. She said crying,

“ami papi maashi...mahaapaapi. Amaar narakeo jaayga nei.....amar jonyoi ma more gelo maashimaake ami i mere felechi.”

English: I am a sinner, *maashi*. A big sinner. There is no place for me in hell too... *Maashi*, my mother died only because of me.... I have killed my mother.

But she was strong that she did not commit suicide after going through so much of pain. Rape is neither a sex crime nor a crime of passion. Rape is often premeditated. And rape is a crime of violence rather than sex. It is crime of violence against women. It is an attack by men on women's bodies, on women's feelings, on women's very existence (Murphy 2004: 52).

Nobody is minimum compassionate to her so that her trauma can be lessened. She is treated as less than human creature. There are malicious tongues which volunteer their opinions. We often listen to comments like, “Dressed like this, what she expected?” or “if you didn't want it why did you have an affair with the person” and there is no end to such comments. Nobody tries to understand what the victim might be going through. The irony is that the harshest criticisms come from women forgetting that they themselves can meet such an accident in life. Rape victims are considered to be sluts. Everybody points at her loose character. Deya rendered voluntary help to Shewli, believed her so that her trust on the victim can strengthen Shewli. Such noble intentions are always doubted. Even Soumya thought that Deya was doing those things for name and fame. There are many such comments in *Udo Megh* which show the deep feeling of hatred and disgust against a rape victim. Instead of consoling her Laxmi tells Shewli that she will never be a ‘*sati sabittir*’ (the word *sati savitri*, a pious and virtuous woman, is mispronounced by Laxmi). Laxmi says,

“haajaar baar saabaankacha korleo ento meyer kalonko dhoy na”

English: Even after washing a thousand times with soap the stains of an unchaste woman is not removed.

And now as being raped the stain in her character will never be cleansed again. Her implication is that a girl who is unfortunate to be raped is like the left over on a plate. Nobody wishes to touch it and throws it in dustbin. The society always tries to get rid off such woman. Deya's mother, Gouri was very angry with her daughter's irrational step of bringing Shewli at home. She tells Laxmi over phone,

“Bhadraloker barite gaye pore esob jhanjhat dhokay keu?”

English: Does anyone volunteer to bring these problems in a decent household?). She talks like all those indifferent people of the society who never want to take any responsibility on their shoulders and anybody doing so is considered to lack common sense. Gouri also says,

“hut kore akta nongra meyeke ghare dhukie dilo. Kharap rog tog nie esechhe kina tar thik nei...”

English: All of a sudden she brought home that dirty girl. Even there is no guarantee whether that girl brought some disease with her or not

Gouri was worried if Shewli brought any contagious disease from the red light area. Such a thought intensifies her hatred against Shewli. After rape a woman can not be pure. She is considered dirty, rotten and like damaged good. Nobody trusts a rape victim as they believe that it is their fault to meet such an accident. Shewli is poor. Poor people are often treated as vulnerable. One can not swear on the firmness of a poor man's character. A poor can not be truthful. They can go to any extent for money. Gouri doubts Shewli's nature and thinks that the girl, taking the opportunity of Deya and Soumya's absence, can steal anything from the house. Such a girl can cause harm even to a person who helps her. She instructs Laxmi to keep an eye on her. Laxmi though poor feels that she has more respect compared to Shewli as she is a virtuous lady and always tries to take

an upper hand over Shewli whose body carries the stigma of rape. Even Sabita another maid servant makes story saying that she saw a rogue near Deya's flat and strongly believes that the man must have come to see Shewli. People doubt the character of a rape victim and think that they can never come out of their past life. People have a tendency to put a rape victim and a prostitute in the same category and believe that such a woman of low morals can contact her clients again to restart the business of selling body. Even the maid servant Sabita apprehends that Shewli may call her clients to Deya's home and can cause harm to the family. Soumya does not touch the glass of water which Shewli gave. A raped girl is treated like an untouchable.

Ritam's family was not happy with his involvement in the matter of Shewli. He faced lots of criticism within his family. His sister, Runu, believed that Shewli could never become a good girl after coming from the red light area. She is one of those who believe that such a girl of vile character can never return to the normal mode of life. It's tough for such an inferior girl to leave bad company. She can not overcome the allurements of that forbidden world. Runu says,

“Nisiddho jibon jatoi apachander hok, tar akta moho o ache.....susangsargo theke kusangsargo tyag kara onek beshi kothin....or bhetorer sabhabtai oke khrap dike tanbe”.

English: Forbidden life may be disliked but it has its allurements too ...It is hard to give up bad company compared to a good one.... Her inner instincts will drive her towards evil.

Ritam's wife can not understand when Shewli was settled in Deya's home what could be Ritam's interest to help that girl any more. It seems as if everybody has grudge against Shewli. A raped victim is considered to be a woman of loose character, devoid of morality. Ritam's mother Atasi apprehends that such a girl can never be trusted. She is worried that Shewli can put Ritam in a false position by doing anything mischievous. She says,

“meyeta konodin ki nastamo kore Babua ke fansiye debe.”

English: Any day the girl can trap Babua by doing something vile...!

Though Ritam tried to convince his family members that Shewli was innocent and just a victim of an adverse situation, everybody seemed to be consistent in their argument that such an unchaste woman could not be trustworthy. They go on scrutinizing her character and advise Ritam to keep safe distance from such an evil girl. Nobody shows pity for the helpless girl. Thus the society makes a rape victim feel that she is contaminated, defiled or desecrated. Because of the constant encounter with cultural judgments the victim's condition gets worsened. In such a society chastity gone means everything gone. Her damage seems to be irreparable. Thus we see that not only males but overall females too did not sympathize with Shewli.

3.6 Sexual Coercion and the Issue of Prostitution

The novel explicitly discusses the serious issue of prostitution which is global and fatal. The last two sections of the novel are very important which build the climax of the novel. Shewli's rape, her trauma, the society's attitude towards her, everything gives a genuine reason and scope to discuss the seriousness of the matter, highlighting those factors which underlie this dangerous problem.

Shewli's presence in Deya's home was embittering her marital relationship. She was trying to arrange a rehabilitation centre for Deya but the girl was under such a shock that she didn't agree to go anywhere. On her marriage anniversary Deya planned for a party to make Soumya happy and thought that everything would be normal again. But the party episode turned to be the ultimate disaster which leads to the break up of the couple. She calls her close relatives and friends. The conversations and arguments

amongst the guests regarding the rape of Shewli turned to spoil the party and ultimately bringing an end to Deya's marital relationship. Suchitra presents a multi-voiced approach in this section revealing the complexities of the problem of prostitution.

Prostitution is met with a lot of prejudice and stereotypes, which make up the whore stigma. This stigmatization has a major influence on the lives, working conditions and the health of the women who are forced to work in the sex industry. It furthers these women's social and social exclusion and compromises their dignity. The morally charged term 'prostitution' has been associated with deviance, corruption and criminality. Prostitution can be considered as a wood worm that has a capacity to eat away the whole infrastructure of the society. It instantaneously places women at a lower pedestal in the whole of the society. She is treated as a mere object of sexual gratification.

A prostitute sells her honor by offering to hire her body for base gain or for an unworthy doing. We have to rethink the ways in which prostitution exists in the sexually suppressive culture. The society sets boundaries to suppress the sex of women and prostitutes, byproducts of patriarchal society are considered deviants. The society sees these women as sexually immoral and men as the surrendered victims of their own uncontrollable sexuality. His being as a man permits his uncontrolled sex on his frequent visits to brothels. But fingers are raised only towards women.

Prostitutes are considered deviants and immoral as they freely engage in what most women deem to be a private, shameful subject. Having sex for money seems to stain womanhood. Prostitutes are generally from marginalized, poor and vulnerable populations. Prostitutes are engaged in this trade because of extreme poverty and most of the prostitutes come from a troubled background (childhood abuse, violent family background etc.). Poverty is a great force that drives an individual to think the unthinkable and do the undoable. Poverty kills one's humanity and parents sell their daughters for food. The desperate need for money and the lack of alternate means and ways to generate income creates an environment where a faint hearted individual can easily succumb to the temptation of wealth that sex industry offers. Under such conditions the ethical values of a community is severely put to test. Traffickers fish those

who are easily can be deceived. One can not dissociate prostitution and human trafficking. Like Shewli, so many girls are cheated and betrayed by the false promises of love, marriage, employment and are sold in brothels. They are compelled to stay in prostitution by violence, coercion or threat. Commercialized human trafficking all over the world is in an alarming stage. These criminals must be punished for the horrendous act.

In Deya's party Shewli easily drew attention of the guests. Everybody looked to be suspicious and started commenting on her. Many of them forgetting the fact that Shewli was a rape victim put her in the prostitution class as she stayed in the red light area of Mumbai for some days. It seems to be very irrational on the part of those so called educated people. The use of terms like prostitution or prostitute restricts a person's identity to the activities she engages in. Such negative labels demean a person. Pointing at her gaudy dress Deya's brother, Santu says,

“Ki kutsit saajposhake ghurche....dekhei bojha jay ekebare oi class!”

English: What an ugly outfit she is wearing, eh!Just seeing her one can understand that she is from that class.

Deya actually bought the dress for Shewli and she choose strong colors thinking that the bright color would suit the girl. There is such a mental block in the mind of the people that they find everything dirty in a prostitute's behavior even if it may not be the case. So her dress became symbolic of Shewli's class which was again constructed by them. Deya's cousin Chini rudely comments, *“meyeta besh gede bosheche dekhchi”* (The girl has settled herself here quite tightly, I see). She hardly could think in another direction. Where could a hapless girl, who was all alone without safety, go? Shewli must be given some time to be normal and come out of the shock. But Chini's comment shows how indifferent people are!

There are arguments between Sukanya and Jayashree regarding whether prostitution can be termed sex work or is it justified to call prostitution a profession. Jayashree opposed to Sukanya's continuous use of sex work and could not agree to call prostitution a profession. Jayashree could not understand how one can call it a labor. She believes that some pervert men are using women for lust. She says,

“Shrom abar ki? Kiser shrom? Kichu pervert lok akdal meyeke use korche...tader ichcher biruddhe, tader bibeker biruddhe...ekhane shrom sabdotai baa ashe ki hisebe?”

English: Where is the labor? Which labor you are talking about? Some pervert men are using a class of girls...against their wish, against their conscience... Where does the word labor come here?

Sukanya is of the opinion that as the prostitutes earn money by rendering sexual labor it can be called a profession. It's like any other job. Sanghamitra intervenes and says that if prostitution can be called a profession then why don't we label stealing as also a profession?

We have to critically look into the matter to understand what actually goes under such labeling. Sex worker earns living by providing sexual services. But prostitution exists because of the attitudes, behaviors and demands of men. It is the culture of male dominance and violence where men think that they have the right to buy a woman's body. It is their demand that has given birth to the sex industry which is growing and expanding throughout the globe. No other job is created specifically out of culture of violence, inequality and sexual abuse. There are no other jobs where a woman's reproductive system is the site of work and she is at the risk of conceiving and other Sexually transmitted diseases (STD). Women risk death and serious physical harm for doing such a job. We live in a consumerist society, where priority goes to individualism and to the unrestrained consumption of people and things. In such a context, prostitutes as sex workers and their act as a labor erases feminist opposition to the marketing of women on a global scale. It allows the perpetrators to assert that women do this by choice or by taste. Viewing prostitution as sex work hides the extent of this sexual slavery and

reinforces the notion that women are simply interchangeable objects that must be accessible and ready for all men at all time and everywhere. What kind of job it is where women are incapable of negotiating unsafe sex or unhygienic working environment. She is denied of holidays or to go back to her home. Even children are removed by authorities. Unlike other jobs there is lack of freedom and choice.

The term sex work tries to draw a distinction between the economic activity and the person's identity. The use of term 'sex worker' is a euphemism for the term prostitution. The word morality seems to be inseparable from the word 'prostitution'. Using 'sex work' is a trick to give the implication that morality is no longer an issue. It is just about selling sex. It is an attempt to detach the stigma from prostitution. Words are coined, tweaked and employed with a certain message embedded in it and also with deep intention. There are uses like 'prostitute woman' and the word humanizes prostitutes by feminizing the issue. Again there is usage like 'prostituted woman' which highlights the victimization of women and their passivity. 'Sex work' sounds neutral and shows the commercial aspect of it. Hence the term is used to make it simply an economic activity and to avoid questions of morality or a woman's identity.

When person chooses a suitable profession for livelihood there are education requirements. There are age bars too. Once a person takes up a profession there is growth. One feels proud to be identified as an intellectual of the society for choosing a proper way of earning at which no one can point finger. Does prostitution as a profession fulfill these criteria? In a job there are professional hazards. But by the word hazards do we mean bruises, beating, burning, suffocation, disease or death? No one can be forced to opt for a profession where he or she has no interest. But women are trafficked and forced to enter the hell. They are dehumanized into sex objects to be bought and sold in the market. There is no escape from it. Only death can give them ultimate emancipation. A job holder will not like to hide his identity from all or will not be ashamed of his profession. But a prostitute is and wants to remain anonymous. Nobody can think of deliberately choosing prostitution as career option. Kanad makes fun of Sukanya and says ironically that in such a situation proud fathers will not hesitate to say that his daughter has opted

for prostitution career. Like home science, in schools and colleges new subject of prostitution has to be introduced then. Actually the money a prostitute earns can not empower her as she finds no place for her in the society. This is because economically or otherwise, vulnerable women are coerced into selling their bodies and in our society it is nothing but sale of self. It looks more like sexual slavery than sexual service which should be condemned. Shouldn't we be vocal against calling it an 'oldest profession'? Bachchu, another guest of Deya, strongly gives a statement that he knows many girls who came into this line willingly and there are girls who take opportunities by using their bodies. Such an aggressive statement seems to express his instant made up logics only to argue with a female and to defend the male position from being called as oppressors and exploiters. But Debashis in spite of a being a man admits the fact that prostitution is made up by the patriarchal society, hence artificial. This is an arrangement so that outside the rules and regulations set by society a man can look for happiness and satiate his lust. So he emphasizes that prostitutes can not be laborers. They are just used as objects. He says,

“Eta akta balpurbok toiri kara poristhiti.. ebong kritrim. Purushtantrik samaj i eta nirman koreche. Nijer furtir jonyo. Samajik niyom jouna anusashanke jebhabe bendhe dieche, tar bairegieo purush jate sukh khunjte pare, tar jonyoi ei byabostha. Ekhne meyeder kissu bhumika nei. Keno tader sromik bhaba habe? Sromik tomik nay, nichok meye hisebei tader byabohar kara hochche.”

English: This is an imposed situation. And artificial. The patriarchal society has created it. For their enjoyment. This is an arrangement so that men can go out to seek pleasure crossing the boundary of sexual dictum controlled by the rules of the society. Here women have no role to play. Why will they be considered laborer? They are just used as women and not as laborers

Sukanya was not a person to be subdued so easily. She again started arguing but this time about social acceptance of prostitution. She thinks that as there will be no end to patriarchy prostitution too will continue. Hence she says if a prostitute can be given some basic rights and this profession is legalized the status of prostitutes will improve.

She believed that if the profession had legal protection Shewli wouldn't have been in such a helpless situation. She says,

“Duraachar i bolun, aar jai bolun jaddin purushtantro thaakbe, e peshta o tatodin bahaal thaakbe....Meyeder durgati kamaanor jonyoi to sikrititaar proyajan.”

English: Evil practice or whatever you say, this profession will remain unchanged till the patriarchy is there. This is what you said before. To lessen the distress of women that recognition is necessary

She also adds that such a legal protection will ensure good future to the children of the prostitutes. But Kanad opposes saying, *“system take abolish na kore system take tora aro pakapokto korte chaichis”*(Instead of abolishing the system you people are trying to make it permanent). But Sukanya did not have any proper logic to defend her point. She let others know that before joining *Nabaprabhat* she had worked for an NGO and in that connection she had visited some brothels. Seeing those prostitutes she came to the conclusion that many of them were not as unhappy in their lives as people from outside assume to be. Some of them have family, husband, and children. To her it was just like any other ten to five office job.

From outside the scenery may mislead people but no prostitute can be happy in leading such a miserable life. A prostitute has to lie when a customer asks if she is happy. The very edifice of prostitution is built on the lie that women like it as they get money. Man made society gives birth to such myths which allow such a violation of human rights to continue. Prostitutes know the fact very well the society will never respect them and even if she tries there is no way to escape the flesh trade. So when she is left with no option she tries to adapt and adjust. The whole life becomes a burden to her. Perhaps Debashish is right when he protests Sukanya and says,

“Maanush jato jaghonyo poribeshei thakuk na keno tar modhyei se ektu muktir batas khunjte chay. Setakei apni sukher takma dite chan?e sukh nay, etaake bale abhijojan.”

English: A person, in however abominable state he or she is in, tries to find the taste of freedom in that. Do you want to put the level of happiness on that? Shame on you! This is not happiness but *abhijojan*. Adaptation.

But Sukanya thinks that only legalization of the profession will improve their condition.

Many people who are in favor of legalization of prostitution believe that it will provide a generally healthier environment for prostitutes. It will stop human trafficking and safer sex will reduce transmission of STD s. It will also put an end to child exploitation and under age sex workers from participating in the sex industry.

But in reality legalization of prostitution means sanctioning all aspects of the sex industry: the prostitutes, the pimps and the clients. In many occasions prostitutes are arrested for publicly soliciting and suffer humiliation in the hands of police. So there is demand for decriminalization too. But one has to realize that decriminalization means decriminalization of the whole sex industry and not just the women. It means that pimps will be seen as legitimate sex entrepreneurs and men who buy sex will be accepted as legitimate consumers of sex. Legalization of the sex industry will convert brothels, sex clubs and other sites of sex trade into legitimate venues where commercial sexual acts will be allowed to flourish legally with no restraints. Brothel houses will spring up at every street corner with red neon lights proclaiming their business. People like Sukanya think that in calling for legalization of prostitution they are dignifying and professionalizing the women in prostitution. But dignifying prostitution doesn't dignify women in prostitution. It simply dignifies the sex industry. Yes the prostitutes should not be punished for her own exploitation. Instead of arresting those gentlemen of the society, who crave for women body and rape them it is inhuman to punish the prostitutes who are forcefully dragged in the flesh trade. But decriminalization will enhance human trafficking. There will no fear in the minds of the pimps or the predators and taking opportunities of law they will expand the industry. The perpetrators will be smart enough to escape the law by using the fine distinction of forced and voluntary prostitution. A pimp will never confess that he has sold her in the brothel. And how will marginalized women ever be able to prove coercion? It will prove to be a boon to the flesh trade. It will

contribute to the demand for victims. The exploiters will exert pressure on the law makers. They will use power and influence to shape laws so that the flow of women remains uninterrupted in the sex industry. Men who would not risk buying women for sex openly would now see prostitution as acceptable. Legal barriers will not be there and with this social and ethical barriers will also vanish to treat women only as sexual commodities. It gives a wrong message to the new generation that women are sex objects and prostitution is a harmless fun. After legalization, the clients will not be afraid to mishandle and torture them and can force them to engage in weird sexual act to satisfy the customers.

Legalization is supposed to get prostitutes off the street. Legalization demands registration of prostitutes. But hardly a prostitute will come forward to reveal her identity. Rather she will be interested to be anonymous. Thus it will be tough to check street prostitution. Another interesting thing is that once legalized only women are asked to register and not men. The men remain nameless and faceless. Attempts are made to track women but not men who purchase sex. Those who talk about legalization of prostitution believe that it will improve the health condition of prostitutes as it will be mandatory for them to go for regular health check. But what about the men? Only health check up of women doesn't protect them from various sexually transmitted diseases as male clients can transmit disease to the women. So unless the male customers are monitored how can be the safety policy will be effective? We consider murder or stealing as illegal and enforce law to curb them though we know that complete eradication of these crimes will never be possible. Nobody asks for legalizing these crimes knowing the fact that they are unstoppable. Then how can one demand for legalization of prostitution as it has only drawbacks? After gaining so many instincts of civilizations and social habits how can people go back far behind the animals by legalizing prostitution? Legalization is not the solution to the problem. Rather it is an admission of failure.

Bachchu in support of Sukanya says that the nation must have to do something great so that their children get normal life. The nation must give them some facilities unless and until it does something effective. But strongly opposes to it. For him it is

nothing but a trick to make flesh trade alive 'with no hazards'. He is right and hits the hypocrisy of people saying that nation is build by its people. He asks why those who are so aware of the rights of prostitutes don't come forward to adopt a child of prostitute or get married to a prostitute or arranges marriages with his or her relatives to bring them in the mainstream life. He hits the pretentious face of those who talk big without understanding the basic problem.

Can a man show broad mentality to marry a prostitute? This very idea is bound to plant the seed of infidelity. He will think that such a woman can never come out of their past and can contact her ex-hookers. A prostitute is taken to be an adulterer by default and hence unsuitable family. Society looks at the prostitutes as they are diseased ones who blatantly display sexuality but it never defiles the men for whom the work. Society always has compelled to follow certain sexual codes. Rules are for women. A woman has to be monogamous. And men in spite of having a sexual life with his partner are more likely to have more sexual partners. And he is permitted to do so as he is a man. Prostitution is never a choice a woman makes freely. And women are punished for choices made by others. Prostitutes thus occupy an anomalous position in societies through out history. She is despised and excluded from mainstream society. And their ostracized status is the main barrier to their improvement. It makes them more vulnerable to exploitation and people consider their helplessness as their willingness. It is seen as a crime against morality. People question the morality of only prostitutes for leading a promiscuous life when male domination and the thirst for sexual power is central for giving birth to prostitution. Not only men but women too become blind to another woman's pain. It distorts vision of their own feminine worth and they point finger to another helpless girl. The negative attitudes towards prostitutes are strong and contagious. Positive attitudes are not as contagious as the negative social reactions. They are treated as if they are filth.

In the party the debate about prost amongst the guests turned to be serious. All words are loaded. It does not remain a hush-hush subject. Everyone opens his or her mouth to let out their opinions. By sitting in a comfortable room and enjoying food and drink and

indulging in big talks, the pain and trauma of a raped victim can not be fathomed. It is mere pretension when nobody has any guts for changing the real status of prostitutes. One has to realize that it can't be anyone's choice but lack of choice. They go through a tormenting pain as well as public humiliation. People hate them as carriers of venereal diseases. Who infect them? Those who purchase a female body are more immoral than a prostitute. It seems that society does not allow an expiration date on the identity of prostitutes. Society assumes that nothing can be done much to help them and so there is no need to try. And it tries to create obstacle for those who genuinely help the prostitutes.

The party was over but what had happened made Soumya to burst out. He felt that Deya was solely responsible for what happened so far. It was the outcome of Deya's wrong decision of bringing Shewli home. He says with much anger,

“Tumi barite beshya pushe rekhecho, tomar barite oisab alochana habe na to ki bhajan keertan habe?”

English: You have kept a prostitute in your house. Do you expect talks about religion and divinity in stead of those discussions?

He shouts at Shewli for getting dressed like a dirty woman. He asks,

“ki bhebechis ki? Eta ki beshyaabaari? Kon saahose erakom nongra seje amaar baarite ghurchis?”

English: What do you think? Is it a brothel? How dare you to hang around my house being dressed up like that?

Deya was surprised at Soumya's behavior. The way he was talking surprised her. The very word 'slut' and 'whore' mean subhuman. She did not understand how Soumya could have so much grudge against Shewli as he knew that the poor girl was victimized for no fault of her own. Soumya blames Deya for doing such acts for fame. Grumbling he says,

“Mohiyoshi saajaar neshay tumi sab sense lose korecho. Oke beshya na sajie ghorale tomar dhajaata ude ki kore?”

English: With the obsession of showing greatness you have lost all your senses. How can your flag of nobleness fly until you dress her up like a prostitute in front of all?

He emphasized on the word ‘*amaar baari*’ and warns Deya that he will not tolerate this nonsense in his house. Deya was stupefied by Soumya’s meanness. He orders Deya to throw that dirty girl out of his house. It was enough for Deya to tolerate. The typical male ego of Soumya came out of the mask as he said that Deya might earn but if she wanted to stay in his house she would have to obey him. He says,

“Rojgar karo bole tel bereche khub, ae? Amar katha sune thakte paro to thakbe, noile ghar dhore bar kore debo”

English: Have you become arrogant as you earn, *eh*? If you obey my words you can stay here or I will turn you out by the neck.

After such an incident the poor girl could understand this much that it was she for whom the couple was fighting. She realized that she was most unwanted not only in this house but may be in the whole society. Deya brushed aside all oppositions from her family and friends and tried to stand by Shewli. But it was beyond her imagination that this could turn to be so disastrous. She could not understand how could Soumya be so irrational to blame her for healing the pain of an oppressed? Shewli left Deya’s home. The next day Deya roamed around everywhere to trace the girl but in vain. When she came back home Soumya looked sorry. But he was repentant only for shouting at Deya not for what he spoke about Shewli. He was still the same blinded and arrogant Soumya. Now Deya also becomes strong to say that if she brings Shewli back what will be Soumya’s stance? Soumya was surprised to see that Deya was putting their marriage at stake for a third person? He could not see where he was wrong. He argues with Deya saying how could she give priority to a girl over their relationship?

After coming a long way with Deya, Soumya could not understand that he had hurt the faith and trust of Deya. He insulted her by questioning her values? He went on blaming Deya without understanding her point. Deya was now sure that life with such a self obsessed person is impossible. Soumya expects unconditional love but he wants to impose his conditions upon Deya. She says,

“Bhaalobaasao khoye jay, bhaalobaasateo poli pore. Takhon ja thake, ta holo adjustment”

English: Love also decays; silt also gets accumulated on it. And what is left at that time is adjustment.

And she could not compromise anymore where there was no respect for her individuality or ideology. Without hesitation she could say that she did not want to stay with Soumya. Soumya asks Deya go to her father's house. And Deya answered as if she was the representative of the age old male suppression. She says why always a woman has to leave house. Rather she says that if Soumya wants he can choose to go anywhere. Suchitra Bhattacharya jots down the end of the novel in such a way which gives her readers the scope to delve on the matter deeply to see how a woman negotiates with ‘*pourusher mithya asfaalan*’ (the false vaunting of an egoist man) or is negotiation should be the only choice of women? Should women still compromise?

Everyone has a journey which has twists and turns. We are scared of getting out of the four walls and fighting. Deya, a modern woman emphasizes the true sense of liberation. She does not need a man to make her feel worthy. In stead she carries her self-worth in her mind and determination. We see her as loving and caring. But she is heroic too. We can call her stubborn. She did not accept what was imposed on her. But she challenged. She has the inner glow, an undaunted spirit which crossed all barriers. She teaches that a woman must listen but with a frankly questioning attitude to the dogmatized options of man made society. When she chooses her new, free course of action it must be in the light of her own opinion, of her own intuition. Only then she can remake the world if she is not enchained by the males.

3.7 Language and Gender: An Analysis of the Novel *Udo Megh*.

Sex refers to those features thought to differentiate biologically between people classified as male and female, and gender refers to those features thought to differentiate culturally (Eckert and McConnell, 2003). It is the major construct that organizes our world and social life. The sex-gender system is a social, psychological and cultural totality. One can not understand the social organization of gender apart from the fact that all of us are psychologically sexed and gendered. It is tough to find one's self, apart from being gendered. The gender-associated behavior is linked arbitrarily by society to each biological sex. Women's sexuality and desires are made and treated as subservient to that of males. Masculinity and femininity are essentially coercive categories that straitjacket men and women. Sex is viewed as an ascribed status and gender as an achieved one.

Barring some matrilineal societies, woman is perceived as an adjunct to the male from the point of view of religion, social conditions and cultural traditions. In the dichotomous system of 'self' and the 'other' a woman is looked as the other and as the other she is self-alienated. De Beauvoir calls the Other the minority the least favored one, when compared to a man, "for a man represents both the positive and the neutral, as indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity" (Alcoff and Mendieta, (2003:150)

This is a man's world. And here what they speak, their language becomes the matter of dominant discourse whereas a woman is not even supposed to open her mouth, rather she should listen to what a man speaks, to whom she always has remained subordinate from time immemorial. Sophocles writes in *Ajax*, 'Silence gives the proper grace to women'. Language is a major component of human culture. It encodes a culture's preoccupations and its values. In this connection we can bring in Lacan (1977)

here who emphasizes the crucial importance of language as the signifying practice in and through which the subject is made into a social being (as cited in Cameron 1998:56). In each speech act the individual and the culture speak simultaneously. So in an attempt to speak something we are also spoken. Language thus is the reflection of a society and interestingly in most parts of the globe it is patriarchy which has remained the pivotal point of the society. And one can not speak outside the structure of the society either of language or of society. Simone de Beauvoir says,

“...like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their point of view, which they confuse with the absolute truth” (as cited in Catharine A. MacKinnon, 1989:121).

Hence, the truth is constructed by language which is by default male. Feminists are of the opinion that inequality of sexes does not have a biological basis. But it originates in the cultural constructions of gender difference. Language itself is gendered. The language of literature, criticism and various disciplines actually has reinforced the patriarchal ideology. Feminists, however, struggle from inside to speak against the structure by being critique about the representation of women in language and discourse. Hence feminists have always tried to formulate a gender-neutral language, which in terms of language and epistemology are based on female subjectivity, experience and identity. Discarding the self/other dichotomy they should try to develop a perspective that confers selfhood all around. Elaine Showalter (1981) writes:

“The appropriate task for feminist criticism is to concentrate on woman’s access to language...on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression. The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women’s consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism and circumlocution” (as cited in Cameron 1998:8).

“Women enjoyed far greater freedom in the Vedic period than in later India. She had more to say in the choice of her mate than the forms of marriage might suggest. She

appeared freely at feasts and dances, and joined with men in religious sacrifice. She could study, and like Gargi, engage in philosophical disputation. If she was left a widow there were no restrictions upon her remarriage"(Durant1963:401). They had rights to be educated. Gargi, Lopamudra, Ghosa, Maitreyi, Apala are few of the names who were no less than their male counterparts in any aspect. The Upanishads refer to several women philosophers, who disputed with their male colleagues such as Vacaknavi, who challenged Yajnavalkya. The Rig Veda also refers to women engaged in warfare. Swami Abhedananda in his *India and Her People* wrote,

"India of the Vedas entertained a respect for women amounting to worship; a fact which we seem little to suspect in Europe when we accuse the extreme East of having denied the dignity of woman, and of having only made her an instrument of pleasure and of passive obedience."

He also said:

"What! Here is a civilization, which you cannot deny to be older than your own, which places the woman on a level with the man and gives her an equal place in the family and in society" (1906:253).

But once the patriarchy system took roots, women were restricted to their households. From those times to the present it has been a saga of struggle for women to give themselves a better position in a patriarchal society. Feminism deals with gender equality, equality in terms of law, jurisdiction, language, labor, and education etc. for women in the face of hostility. Here one should not get confused by terms like 'femaleness', femininity' and 'feminism'. 'Femaleness' can be described as a matter of biology, 'femininity' as a set of culturally defined characteristics and 'feminism' can be looked as a political position through which suppressed voices are heard.

Today's women are working hand in hand with men. Their endeavor to elevate their position in a man's world is note worthy. Yet by a language that originates in womblake darkness, women are still spoken of as a weaker sex. Karl Marx's theory talks about the conflict between the exploiter and the exploited, between the bourgeois and proletariat. This concept may be metaphorically and only metaphorically applied to the

domestic field as well where the husband holds the unquestioned authority and a woman is reminded of her limits within the four walls. Her language is labeled 'powerless' language (Lakoff, 1975). Men, like the ruling class holds the power to define reality and the rules of language reflect men's language including grammatical and semantic structure. Women like the deprived class are always defined by the male tongue and lacks capability to promote themselves. The refusal of access to public language is one of the major forms of oppression of women within a social class as well as in trans-class situation (Cameron 1998:55).

Socialization is a process by which male-female power differences are internalized and thus paves the way of producing properly dominant men and submissive women. One has to go through this process to live in harmony in a civilized society. The members of the society are abided by its norms.

"If gender flowed naturally from sex, one might expect the world to sit back and simply allow the baby to become male or female. But in fact, sex determination sets the stage for a lifelong process of gendering, as the child becomes, and learns how to be, male or female" (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003:16)).

Culture is defined by language and one must know the intricacies of language to make a meaningful conversation. In determining gender roles, language both in its verbal and non verbal components, plays an important role. Gender roles are defined as those expected attitudes and behavior which a society associates with each sex. In this connection one has to understand the concept of sexist language. Sexist language is language which deliberately unconsciously is patronizing or contemptuous towards one sex, usually women. It refers to terms and usages that exclude or discriminate against women. Sexist language is not clear and inaccurate as it excludes more than half of the population and encourages destructive stereotypes. The meaning assigned to language affects the realm of the society and its outlook. A 'master' is a powerful or skilful man but a 'mistress' is a woman kept for sexual purposes. A 'courtier' is a polished man of high social status but a 'courtesan' is just an up-market whore. There is nothing wrong

with calling a man ‘bachelor’ but calling a woman a ‘spinster’ is contemptuous. Bachelor has the connotation of a man who is still eligible and has prospects for marriage. However this is not the case with spinster. This word evokes a mental image of a woman who has failed to find herself a husband and does not even have chance to get a match any longer. While the word *bachelor* embodies hope the word *spinster*, in contrast, encodes despair and frustration. Given our social set up such a woman also means a life long burden to the family.

Language acts as a mirror of reality which reflects the biased attitudes of the society which sings the praise of male supremacy based upon the characteristics of male sexuality. And it is the male dominance which is the chief cause of language difference between the sexes and we will elaborate this later. The social structure is such where women are denied the right or the opportunity to express themselves freely. It is not that women lack the capacity to use language which is the birthright of every human being but in the society’s most valuable spheres like religion, law, politics, science etc. women are found mostly silent and in many cases silenced. Her use of language is confined to the space of home, family and immediate community. To speak in the public domain is almost forbidden for her. The conventional language silences and marginalizes women. Powerful males fear that the access to knowledge will empower the weaker section called women and facilitate critical thought in them which will finally turn them rebellious in nature. So women are prevented to speak whether by explicit taboos and restrictions or by the more genteel tyrannies of custom and practice. And males monopolize language to suit their purpose. From very childhood a boy child is overtly or subtly rewarded for what he does or for what he speaks.

Males are expected to use more verbally aggressive, persuasive message strategies. Whereas women have generally quicker perceptions and it is believed that women emphasize to speak more prettily than properly. Their language conveys notions of weakness, inferiority etc. Women speak to please men. And men speak to convince or confute. Thus one can notice ugliness of language, its politics, its lack of clarity and its alienating quality which emphasizes on the peripheral position of women in the

patriarchal set up.

In her *Language and Woman's Place* (1975) Robin Lakoff discusses the characteristics of women's language and shows that women gives priority to family and values personal relationships while men are more concerned with politics, sports or community. Their language seems to be the proof of their powerlessness in the society. Lakoff says,

1. Women's intonational contours display more variety than men's. Their language is marked by wider range of pitch. Their use of intonation patterns resemble questions, indicating uncertainty or need for approval.
2. Women use diminutives and euphemisms more than men.
3. Women make more use of expressive forms than men. For example a woman will prefer to use adjectives like 'charming', 'divine', and 'sweet' instead of saying gender-neutral adjectives like 'terrific', 'neat' and 'cool' respectively.
4. Women use forms that convey impreciseness for example 'so', 'such' etc.
5. Women's voices are breathier than men.
6. Women are more indirect and polite than men. One aspect of politeness is to leave a decision open without imposing one's views or opinions on anyone else.
7. In conversation women are more likely to be interrupted, less likely to introduce successful topics. They won't commit themselves to an opinion.
8. Women use hedges of all kinds more than men. Hedging is another aspect of women's insecurity. Such phrases as 'you know', or 'like' are scattered throughout women's speech which work as an attention getting device and also show the general insecurity of the speaker.
9. Compared to men, women use a particular type of tag questions. A tag question can be considered as a 'midway' between an outright statement and a yes-no question. When one has strong belief in his or her knowledge, he or she makes a statement. On the other hand, one prefers asking a question when one has lack of conviction or intends to seek solidarity. A tag question functions as an intermediate between these and is generally used when the speaker is stating a

claim but lacks full confidence in the truth of the claim. Lakoff writes, "...a woman, believing that a hesitant style will win her acceptance, will adopt it and phrase her opinions...deferentially...."

For example, John is here, isn't he?

The speaker is already biased in favor of a positive answer and wants only confirmation from the addressee.

10. Man tends to use expressions like 'shit', 'hell', 'damn' but females avoid such strong expletives and use terms like 'oh dear', 'goodness', 'oh fudge'. Vulgarity is censored in her language.

11. Women are more careful to be 'correct' when they speak. Thus they emphasize in using grammatically correct sentences and try to avoid colloquialism. One can find difference in the choice of lexical items when a woman speaks. Women make more precise discriminations in naming colors than men do. For example, to describe a painted pinkish shade of purple a woman will use 'The wall is mauve'.

In framing a request women use super polite structures. For example, a woman to place a request for closing a door may use structures like

- 'Please close the door',
- 'Will you close the door?'
- 'Won't you please close the door?'

But a male will prefer to say, 'close the door' which sounds more like an order than a request.

12. Women's communicative style tends to be collaborative rather than competitive and more of women's communication is expressed nonverbally especially by gesture and intonation than men's.

Lakoff finds the women section in dilemma. Once a woman uses gender neutral language she is tagged as 'unfeminine' or 'less than a woman'. Again if she sticks to use women's language there is a possibility that she will be judged as less than a competent human being. An unruly woman who speaks rough and lacks the soft and gentle qualities of a woman is ostracized or made fun of.

Both men and women play significantly distinct roles in the society. There are different styles of speech and distinct vocabulary that is individualistic to each sex and the society expects certain behavior and attitude from each sex. Usually words associated with men convey sense of leadership, power and prestige. Whereas words associated with women have negative connotations and convey sense of powerlessness and inferiority. If we look at words like 'man', 'common man', 'layman', 'mankind', 'humanity', 'manpower', 'forefather' etc, the list gives the impression that women's role in the society is not that important and they do not have any contribution at all. There has always remained the sexual division of labor. Only males are suitable for certain professions and home is the place where a woman suits. Though now women empowered with education have come out from the domestic sphere and try to find her place in the outer world the language of the patriarchal society remained unchanged which shows least recognition of such effort. Even if a woman holds a position of chairman, statesman etc. she is never addressed as chairwoman or stateswoman. When adjectives like 'macho' or 'manly' are attributed to a man, it is a matter of pride and gives the sense of boldness, strength and power. But if it is associated with a woman it demeans her and implies her unladylike attitude. Again if a man called 'womanly' which by default means shy, coy and submissive is considered disgraceful for a man. It indicates a man's effeminate character. But in both the cases it is a woman whose position is criticized. A married woman must put Mrs. before her name but Mr. is enough for both a bachelor and a married man.

In Indian society a woman is seen in relation to man, i.e. daughter, wife, and mother or even as a prostitute, concubine or mistress and is hardly considered an individual. Thus gender discrimination is reflected in the various expressions of language at various levels like forms of pronominal reference, abuses, similes, idioms and proverbs etc. The Bengali society is no exception where hierarchies are observed strictly in the household as well as within the society.

Suchitra Bhattacharya's *Udo Megh* is written in an urban setting. Her central figure, Deya is a reporter who works in a renowned newspaper called *Nabaprabhat*, in the heart of Kolkata. She is the woman who is very much aware of her rights and very much vocal about her liking and disliking. Her profession demands a full time devotion where one should not be bothered about the odd work shifts and she is quite comfortable in working with her male colleagues. The writer has very skillfully shown how language is influenced by time and space. In Indian society a woman being subordinate to her husband is not supposed to address her husband by name. Hence addresses him with term such as such *suncho* which means 'do you hear me?' But a husband can call his wife by name. But Suchitra's heroine, Deya is a modern woman who is educated and financially independent. She belongs to a time where every individual talks about equal rights. Perhaps her privileged status allows her to extend her limitations to some extent. Her language clears this point. She addresses her husband by name, Soumya, without hesitation. It may look odd in the time of her grandmother or mother. But she believes that her time is different from theirs and a woman is no less than a man in any sphere. Soumya is not a *potidebota* (one's husband regarded as one's deity) to her. She considers her husband more of a friend than a *swami* (a term very frequently used for husband), which can be literally translated as God or Lord towards whom she will look not with awe but with love and affection. Yet on one occasion Deya humorously calls Soumya '*sahib*' which has a connotation of master, chief or boss other than a European or White man.

The *Samsad Bengali English Dictionary* gives a long list of English equivalents for the Bengali word '*poti*' which are a husband, a master, an employer, a boss, an owner, a lord, a ruler, a king, a chief, a leader. But 'wife' and 'a married woman' are the two English equivalents given for '*stree*' and '*potni*'. It obviously shows men play the important role in society. They rule it and the world is at their feet. But a woman's place is secondary to that of a man. Terms like *potibrota* or *potiparaayana* (a woman who has taken the vow of serving one's husband; extremely devoted to one's husband) are very much accepted and a woman with such quality deserves respect from the society. In a

patriarchal society hardly a man will like to be crowned with such burdensome value. Interestingly subjection of a husband to his wife is looked down upon in the society and such a person is called *stroino* (henpecked) in Bengali. Actually domination of the weaker section is the norm but the other way is not acceptable.

In the novel there are many words which are associated with women and carry negative connotations. Language carries the ideology of the society and its people. In a patriarchal society many words are coined to indicate subordination of women. In the name of family, community or society women are forced to follow many rules and regulations. Those who accept them are praised but such words of praise are nothing but a fine trap to keep women in line and show her position in the domestic and in the social sphere. It is a mere trick to subjugate woman. For example, words like *kulobodhu* (virtuous wife belonging to a good family), *sahadharmini* (a wife associating with her husband in practice of virtues). But there is no masculine counterpart.

Shewli, the centre around whom the story of the text revolves, unfortunately landed in a brothel of Mumbai and was forced to prostitution. Though she had a devil's luck as she managed to escape from the hell, society was not ready to accept such a girl whose chastity was outraged. She was easily labeled a prostitute though she did not have any hand in what happened to her. Everybody pointed finger towards her. Even people of her own sex were not sympathetic to her. Many times she was referred as '*nongra meye* (dirty girl)'. '*Nongra*' in general means 'dirty' but here it refers to a vile woman or who is of abominable character because of her indecent character.

Ritam's mother, Atoshi believes that it is not safe for Ritam to keep in touch with Shewli. For Ritam's sister, Runu, up to now what Ritam did for the hapless girl was enough. Now too much indulgence in the matter may throw Ritam in further trouble. Atoshi thinks that such a girl is capable of putting Ritam in her trap. So it is better to stay away from her. She uses the word '*nostamo*' to describe Shewli's character. The word '*noshito*' actually means 'spoilt', 'rotten' or 'decomposed' but when it is associated with women refers to women who indulge in adultery or victims of sexual assault. By using

the word ‘*nostamo*’ Atoshi tries to say that a vile woman like Shewli can play tricks to entice her son. Thus such terms demean women as they bring women down to the level of an object of sex.

Soumya calls Shewli ‘*bajarer meye*’. The literal translation of the phrase will be ‘a girl of the market’ but here it refers to a woman of cheap character who is easily available to men. He calls her ‘*beshya*’ (a prostitute).

There is another term familiar in Bengali, ‘*potita*’ which refers to a woman who has gone astray from the path of chastity or a harlot.

Laxmi, the maid servant of Deya’s home says that after losing her chastity Shewli can never become ‘*sati sabittir*’ again. However, here the word ‘*sabittir*’ is a distortion of the word *Sabitri* as it was used by the uneducated maid servant. *Sabitri* was a chaste wife in ancient Indian mythology, devoted to her husband who won back her husband’s life from the clutches of *Yama*, the god of death. ‘*Sati*’ refers to a chaste and faithful wife who is intently devoted to her husband. Here one can make a connection with the ‘*sati protha*’ of the early Hindu society where a widow used to burn herself on her husband’s pyre which assured an easy entry to heaven not only for her but also for the family members. But in the name of religion the dirty politics of killing a widow was done to ensure that she wouldn’t claim her husband’s property. Laxmi rather calls Shewli ‘*ento meye*’. The word ‘*ento*’ is used in connection with food or drink which means left over on a plate after eating. It also may refer to something which has come in contact with cooked food. Laxmi also compares Shewli with the left over food which gives the impression she is no more fresh as so many people intruded her chastity. She can never go back to her early state again and thus will not be accepted by the society.

On quite a few occasions Laxmi addresses Shewli as ‘*chhuri*’ which is the feminine form of its male counterpart ‘*chhora*’ which means a boy or lad but ‘*chhuri*’ is a derogatory word used to refer a young woman. She also calls Shewli ‘*Lokkhichaara meye*’ (in Bengali *Laxmi* is pronounced as *Lokkhi*). A girl is compared with *Laxmi* when she resembles goddess *Laxmi* in beauty and virtues. A very chaste and pleasing wife who

brings fortune to her husband is called *Laxmi*. Thus the word '*lokkhichara meye*' refers to a girl who is bereft of grace and prosperity. As Shewli was no more a chaste girl, she lost every right to enjoy the status of being crowned with the title of *Laxmi*. Though she was not responsible for her present situation she was blamed for everything. She can't anymore bring any fortune to any family. Rather her presence is feared to usher bad luck.

Once Shewli lost her chastity the rogues around were looking for the opportunity to get hold of her and exploit her sexually as if an unchaste woman is property of all. They call her '*barobhaatari*'. The word '*bhaatar*' is a social dialectal use of the word husband in Bengali. *Bhaatar* refers to the person who provides *bhaat* (rice) to his wife. *Barobhaatari* is a slang which refers to a girl who has relation with uncountable. It simply refers to woman of 'loose' character who makes herself available for all.

Ritam while referring to the incident of Shewli's elopement to Deya, uses terms like '*dosti*' and '*latghat*'. The Hindi word '*dosti*' means friendship. But here the word has a derogatory connotation when associated with a girl. It indicates that the girl doesn't bear a good character. '*Latghat*' means the state of flapping or hanging loosely. It refers to the act of flirting. Here like a typical male Ritam doesn't go to the deep of the actual incident and makes fun of the situation.

Deya considers the act of Shewli's elopement as something which every girl at such tender age is prone to do. She calls her '*chhele manush*' which means innocent or childish. The word is used to mean the kiddish nature both of a girl and the boy though the word starts with *chele* (boy). On the other hand, *meye manush* is considered to be more of an insult. It refers womanly characteristics of a man. Again in Bengali children are always referred to as '*chhelemeye*' and not '*meye chhele*' which proves the upper hand of men over women. The word *meye chhele* bears negative connotation too which is an abusive term.

Once while coming back towards home Deya saw some women of the red light area who were over decked up and were waiting for customers. Deya was feeling sorry for them as she looked at those poor women. Suddenly a woman said out whether she was enjoying seeing a '*khaanki*'. *Khaanki* which is a vulgar and abusive term, means prostitute.

Shewli's mother scolds Shewli by addressing her as '*baapkhaki meye*'. The literal translation will be a girl who has eaten her father. When a girl child loses her mother or father she is always made responsible for the incident. But if the father or mother of a boy dies, he is called '*baapmara*' or '*maamara chele*' meaning a boy who unfortunately lost his father or mother. The society is quite sympathetic to the unlucky boy but for such a disaster a girl child is always blamed. It is important to mention here that when one wants to be sympathetic to women one can use terms such as *baapmaamaraa* etc but one doesn't have words for male counterpart of *baapkhaki*. This shows that only women can be condemned for the ill luck that falls on the family and not men.

At many occasions in the text women are referred to as *putul* (doll) or talking doll. Hence they are lifeless, devoid of emotion and subject of play in the hands of the males. Women are praised as '*misti misti*' which means sweet. A woman is expected to behave nicely, softly and soberly. She should be submissive. Anything aggressive or harsh is not allowed by the society when a woman is concerned. When Soumya's cousin, Bugi praises Deya's boldness of taking the odd job of a reporter Soumya emphasizes that she is basically of shy nature. It is the insecurity of the male who can not stand the boldness of his partner. Rather shyness, coyness and dumbness are the traits befitting a female character.

Another interesting fact is that a married woman's original house where she is born and grown up is called '*baper baari*' (paternal house) and not '*mayer bari*' (mother's house). Again when she gets married her new home is called '*sosurbari*' (the house of the father-in-law) and not '*sasurir bari*' (house of the mother-in-law). Ritam once humorously refers to such a serious issue and tries to point out how patriarchy has

crippled women. He calls women '*khontay baadha goru*' which means 'a cow tied to a peg or a stake'. Here he tries to show the helplessness of women in a male dominated society where like a helpless cow she is exploited and forced to obey her father, husband or son. In Bengali a woman is always called '*abola*' which means 'devoid of power or weak'. But there is no such term for a man. In Bengali it is said '*chhele biye kore*' which means 'a man marries'. But in the case of women it is said '*meyer biye hoy*' which means 'a woman gets married'. It is evident a man is always an active doer and women only play a passive role.

A woman is hardly considered an individual. The society has always treated her as an object which can be gifted, offered or used as males wish. Thus in Bengali the word *samprodaan* is popular, which is an act of gifting one's daughter's hand to her 'would be husband'. In the text there is a reference to *debdaasi* which means a woman offered to the service of an idol of a particular temple. But on many occasions these girls were exploited by those who hoist the flag of religion.

3.8 Concluding Remarks

The irony is that some 'feminists' (Suchitra Bhattacharya too) refrain from calling themselves so. The word 'feminism' provokes images of self-insufficient, stoic women who fight for equality and rights in an otherwise patriarchal backdrop. In the deep-rooted patriarchal thought process the term 'feminism' has a kind of social stigma attached to it. In our tête-à-tête with Suchitra Bhattacharya let us know that she would like to be called a humanist than a feminist. Even Deya also tries to skip the minimum scope of the attachment of such tag with her name. Soumya makes fun of the word 'feminism' as he believes the efforts of women to bring change in the society are of no use at all. Actually in a patriarchal society it is really foolish to expect heart-felt appreciation from males for the struggle, women are continuing for the betterment of themselves, because their endeavor to break the age-old shackles of subjugation threatens the privileged position of

men. We can conclude the discussion here by quoting Taslima Nasrin who wrote in her book *Nirbachito Kolam*,

“amar shikkha, amar ruchi, amar medha amake manush korte pareni. Amake meye manush kore rekhe dieche”

English: My education, my taste, my intellect could not make me more of a human, I am still a woman and not a human being.

O’Barr(1984:260) in his article *Asking the Right Questions about Language and Power* claims that language serves as a major means of expressing, manipulating and transforming power relations (as cited in Kramarae, Schulz & O’Barr, 1984). Language reflects a complex network of social, political and cultural set up of a society. In this chapter I have elaborately discussed the relation between language and gender in terms of the differences between women and men in conversational practice. The examples taken from *Udo Megh* indicate that men’s language exert power and control over women and women are acceptable and appreciated as long as they fit in the norm of speaking a powerless language. The difference in the use of language by men and women reveal the fact that women are not in the same footing as men even in this twenty first century.

CHAPTER FOUR

Metaphors in the Source Text and Their Translation: A Cognitive Approach

In this chapter we are going to discuss about metaphor, its various classifications, its cultural implication and also how metaphors are conceptualized. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics we will discuss the problems of translating metaphors and the strategies to tackle it. We are going to discuss some metaphorical expressions taken from *Udo Megh* to substantiate our arguments.

4.1 Defining Metaphor

Aristotle ("De Poetica," 322 B.C.) said:

"The greatest thing by far is to be a master of metaphor. It is the one thing that cannot be learned from others; it is also a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an eye for resemblance" (as cited in Nakamoto 2002: 31).

According to *Oxford English Dictionary* metaphor is a figure of speech "in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that in which it is properly applicable." The word 'metaphor' comes from Greek *metapherein*, meaning 'to transfer' or to 'carry over.' Metaphors carry meaning from one word, image or idea to another. Here an implied comparison is made between two different things or ideas. For example, *he is the pillar of the state*. Here an implied comparison is made between 'he' and 'pillar'. The metaphor is actually an implied simile. Here the words, as, so, like, etc., which are used in a simile to show clearly the

likeness between two things, different in kind, are dropped. A simile thus differs from a metaphor only in form and not in content. Thus a metaphor is, in fact, a compressed simile and in the same way a simile is an expanded metaphor. Thus the example, *the eldest son is the star of the family* can be expanded thus, *Just as a star is bright, so the eldest son is the bright member of the family*. Metaphor in its narrow sense may be defined as a figure of speech in which one thing is described in terms of another. But in its broad sense it may refer to any figurative expression, including the transferred sense of a physical word, personification of an abstraction, and application of a word or collocation to what it does not literally denote. We know that a polyseme is a word or phrase with multiple, related meanings and hence are possibly metaphorical in nature.

The earliest definition of metaphor, quoted from Aristotle's *The Poetics* by Richards (1965:89) is a "shift carrying over a word from its normal use to a new use". Under this quite broad definition all other instances of semantic extensions like allegory, synecdoche, metonymy etc might be categorized as being metaphoric. The metaphor, according to I.A. Richards in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1965) consists of two parts: the *tenor* and *vehicle*. The tenor is the subject to which attributes are ascribed. The vehicle is the subject from which the attributes are borrowed. In the sentence, "Love is a rose", rose is the vehicle for love, the tenor.

4.2 Classification of Metaphor

The most common classifications of metaphor are *extended metaphor*, *dead metaphor* and *mixed metaphor*.

An extended metaphor sets up a principal subject with several subsidiary subjects or comparisons. Shakespeare's extended metaphor in his play *As You Like It* is a good example ("All the world's a stage / and all the men and women merely players: / They have their exits and their entrances; / And one man in his time plays many parts, / His acts being seven ages."). First, the world is construed as a stage; and then men and women are introduced as subsidiary subjects that are further elaborated by the theater metaphor.

A mixed metaphor is one that leaps, in the course of a figure, to a second identification inconsistent with the first one. Example: *He stepped up to the plate and grabbed the bull by the horns*. Here, the baseball and the activities of a cowboy are implied where two commonly used metaphors are confused to create a nonsensical image.

A dead metaphor is one in which the sense of a transferred image is not present. Example: 'money', so called because it was first minted at the temple of Juno Moneta. To most people though, "money" does not evoke thoughts of the temple at Juno Moneta. Dead metaphors, by definition, normally go unnoticed. People are typically unaware of the origin of words. For instance, 'mantel' means "cloak or hood to catch smoke", 'gorge' means throat, and so forth for thousands more.

Rhetorical theorists and other scholars of language have discussed numerous dimensions of metaphors and these are,

Absolute or paralogical metaphor: It is one in which there is no discernible point of resemblance between the idea and the image. Example: *The couch is the autobahn of the living room*.

Active metaphor: It is one which by contrast to a dead metaphor, is not part of daily language and is noticeable as a metaphor. Example: *You are my sun*.

Complex metaphor: It is one which mounts one identification on another. Example: *That throws some light on the question*. *Throwing light* is a metaphor: there is no actual light.

Compound or loose metaphor: It is one that catches the mind with several points of similarity. Examples: "He has the wild stag's foot." This phrase suggests grace and speed as well as daring.

Dying metaphor: It is a derogatory term coined by George Orwell in his essay *Politics and the English Language*. Orwell defines a dying metaphor as a metaphor that isn't dead (dead metaphors are different, as they are treated like ordinary words), but has been worn out and is used because it saves people the trouble of inventing an original phrase for themselves. In short, a cliché. Example: *Achilles' heel*. Orwell suggests that writers scan their work for such dying forms that they have 'seen regularly before in print' and replace them with alternative language patterns.

Implicit metaphor: It is one in which the tenor is not specified but implied. Example: *Shut your trap!* Here, the mouth of the listener is the unspecified tenor.

Implied or unstated metaphor: It is a metaphor not explicitly stated or obvious that compares two things by using adjectives that commonly describe one thing, but are used to describe another comparing the two.

An example: *Golden baked skin*, comparing bakery goods to skin or *leafy golden sunset* comparing the sunset to a tree in the fall.

Simple or tight metaphor: It is one in which there is but one point of resemblance between the tenor and the vehicle. Example: *Cool it*. In this example, the vehicle, "Cool", is a temperature and nothing else, so the tenor, "it", can only be grounded to the vehicle by one attribute.

Submerged metaphor: It is one in which the vehicle is implied, or indicated by one aspect. Example: *my winged thought*. Here, the audience must supply the image of the bird.

Root metaphor: It is the underlying personal attachments that shape an individual's understanding of a situation. It is different to the other types of metaphor in that it is not an explicit device in language but merely a part of comprehension. Religion is considered the most common root metaphor since birth, marriage, death and other life experiences can convey a very different meaning to different people based on their level or type of religious adherence.

Metaphors are a wonderful vehicle for escaping common language and redefining words and concepts in terms of other things. Metaphors pave the way for us to equip the language into new meaning, stretching and enhancing its usage. According to Lakoff, Lakoff (1980) metaphor is deeply embedded in our language, culture and the way we think. They shape and sound what we intend to signify. In use, metaphors may run through the gamut of fashion, with some remaining obscure whilst others rising into popular use and eventually becoming hackneyed clichés and nobody realizes any more that they are metaphors. Newspapers, television and other media play a significant role in popularizing various metaphorical usages.

Newness in metaphor is always expected for better impact. Familiarity in the case of metaphors breeds cliché. With repetition it loses its effect. But by recombining with other metaphors or by ironic inversion it is possible to renew or reinvent metaphors. As metaphors are used to make unfamiliar concepts understandable we learn new and complicated ideas quickly. We should not be stuck to use same metaphors for long. Instead in the long run they should be modified or abandoned or else they interrupt true understanding and communication. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:221) wrote, “Successful functioning in our daily lives seems to require a constant shifting of metaphors.”

Language is embedded in culture and culture plays an important role in shaping language. The metaphors present in a language therefore are intrinsically related to its culture. In the following section we elaborate the relationship between language and culture.

4.3 Language as an Index of Culture

According to famous anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1924), culture is “that complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and other capabilities and habits acquired by the man as a member of society” (as cited in Muller 2005:49). Culture, on the other hand, has also been defined as a “design for living” and as the “shared understandings that people use to co-ordinate their activities” (Gelles and Levine 1995:80). Members of a society must share certain basic ideas about the world around, what is important in life, how technology is used, and what their actions and artifact mean. In recent years the definition of culture that is preferred by many anthropologists is that culture is “an abstraction from behavior”. Cultural models are a “great variety of human institutions that are the projections of conventional understandings of reality set in time and space, for all to experience as artifacts of a community’s life” (Shore, 1996:44). For example, the palpable entities, such as houses, pottery, tools, paintings, songs, dances and types of clothing give us an idea of material culture in the world. On the other hand, conventional styles of speech exist in the minds of people which are impalpable.

Undoubtedly one of the basic principles of translation is to be faithful to the original. According to this principle, translation should first of all be faithful to the content of the original, with literal translation on how to convey in a precise way the original cultural connotation and how to interpret it on the basis of the native cultural perspective. For scholars interested in translation of literary texts are inevitably linked to the study of the value of culture in language. Robertson (1981) says, “Culture consists of all the shared product of human society” (as cited in Scupin, 1998:39). This means culture includes not only material things such as cities, organizations and schools, but also non-material things, such as ideas, customs, family patterns and languages. In a word culture refers to the entire way of life of a society. “Culture hides much more than it

reveals, and strangely enough, what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants” (Hall 1990:29). It is just like an iceberg, with a big part of its real substance hidden in the sea.

Language is part of culture and plays an important role in it. On the other hand, language is influenced and shaped by culture. In a broader sense, language is the symbolic representation of people and it comprises their historical and cultural backgrounds as well as their approach to life and their ways of living and thinking. Since lexicon is the most active component of a language, due attention must be given to the analysis and comparison of the cultural connotation of words.

Translation is a difficult task and subject to countless misinterpretations. One thing may be unique in one country and the equivalent word reflecting this object may not be found in other countries. Language and its cultural influence are exemplified in the theoretical formulations of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, which in essence states that language is a guide to “social reality”. This hypothesis implies that language is not simply a means of reporting experience, but more important it is a way of defining experience. Example of Sapir-Whorf concept in practice would be: if a language has only one term brother-in-law that is applied to one’s sister’s husband, her husband’s brother, and her husband’s sister’s husband, she is led by his language to perceive all of these relatives in a similar way. That means there are things or concepts which are represented by one or perhaps two terms in one language, but by many more terms in the other language, that is finer distinction exists in the other language.

There are terms that have more or less the same primary meaning but which have secondary or additional meanings that may differ considerably from each other. Sometimes we can’t translate color words from one language to another without introducing subtle changes in meaning.

The English phrase ‘red-blooded’ does not necessarily mean ‘*Lal raktolipto*’ in Bengali rather it is another way of saying that someone of their behavior is confident and strong. English phrase ‘red-eyed’ just means ‘having red eyes due to lack of sleep or an affected

eye’. But in Bengali the equivalent of it ‘*rakto chokkhu*’ means to look at someone with anger.

Words that people utter refer to common experiences. Words reflect their author’s attitude and beliefs. In both the cases language expresses cultural reality. If we consider culture as a variable in the process of abstracting meaning, the problems become more critical because culture teaches us both the symbol and that, the symbol represents. When one communicates with someone from his or her own culture, the process of using words to represent one’s experiences is much easier as within a culture people share many similar experiences. But when communication is between people from distinct cultures, different experiences are involved and the process is more acute. For example if a Bengali speaker says that he or she got married amidst the barber hurling abusive words, someone from another cultural background would be unable to make any connection. In an auspicious event like marriage people cast evil eyes to the bride or the groom and hence the barber calls names to drive away those negative forces. In Bengali culture this act by the barber is called *gourbachan*. Thus we see that cultural gap hinders the process of understanding things which are very integral to a particular culture.

Intercultural awareness can not grow naturally. It has to be trained. For example when a child grows up in India and learns the word ‘dog’ he will normally learn the cultural meaning of dog: faithful and man’s best friend. A child brought up in the Chinese culture may be taught that the dog is a dirty and dangerous animal. In the temple of *Karni Mata* (Deshnoke, Rajasthan) rats are considered holy animals and people travel great distances to pay their respects. Even monkeys are worshipped in many parts of India as the incarnation of *Hanuman*. But this behavior can seem to be weird in many cultures as people always try to be at safe distance from these carriers of various diseases.

So people, who have thus been initiated into the culture associated with their mother tongue, are naturally inclined to interpret things with their own cultural references. So it is important to be familiar with the cultural background of the words. When creating an artistic image, a writer not only takes the description and portray of the image but also projects his own thoughts and feelings into the image.

So far we have discussed how language functions as an index of culture. In the following section we will discuss the conceptual theory of translation in the light of Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980).

4.4 Conceptual Theory of Metaphors and Its Relevance to Translation

In the Classical theories of language, metaphor was considered a matter of language not of thought. It was assumed that metaphor has no connection with everyday language. It was thought that all subject matter can be comprehended literally, without metaphor. The classical theory was taken so much for granted that over the centuries that people believed metaphors to function outside the realm of conventional ordinary daily language. But no theory can be close-ended or definitional. The cognitive approach towards metaphors proved classical theories to be inadequate. The cognitive approach to metaphor, largely initiated by Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) give us new insights in this field. Metaphors help people understand concepts which are difficult to grasp:

“Because so many of the concepts that are important to us are either abstract or not clearly delineated in our experience (the emotions, ideas, time, etc.), we need to get a grasp on them by means of other concepts that we understand in clearer terms (spatial orientations, objects, etc.)” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980:115).

In this view, metaphor is a medium through which abstract concepts are made more comprehensible, in order to make them easier to talk or think about.

Lakoff and Johnson define metaphor as a means to understand one domain of experience (the target domain) in terms of another, a familiar one (source domain). This usually takes the form of analogy or comparison between two existent entities or one existent entity and another one assumed to exist. For example, to say that someone is a fox as a symbol of cunningness reveals that a link has been established between that individual

(tenor) and the 'fox' (vehicle) as a symbol of cunningness. Thus metaphors are conceptual phenomena in which the source domain is mapped onto the target domain. Here the structural components of the source conceptual schema are transferred to the target domain. To put it differently, the structural components of the source conceptual schema are transferred to the target domain. Lakoff and Johnson say that metaphor is 'pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action' and that our 'ordinary conceptual system is fundamentally metaphorical in nature'. Cognitive linguistics came up with a revolutionary revelation that metaphorical expressions are not in language, but in thought. There are metaphors in virtually every utterance. The locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualize one mental domain in terms of another and in this process, everyday abstract concepts like time, states, causation, and purpose also turn out to be metaphorical. Thus metaphor instead of being a poetic device becomes central to ordinary language. In contemporary research of metaphor the word, *metaphor* means a cross domain mapping in the conceptual system. The discovery of this enormous metaphor system has destroyed the traditional literal-figurative distinction, since the term 'literal' carried with it all those false assumptions and overlooked the cognitive aspect of metaphor. The classification, identification, comprehension as well as the translation essence and methods of metaphor have been marvelously changed since metaphor is looked at as a cognitive process facilitating human conceptual system. Here one should deter the crucial role of culture in this process of symbolization and conceptualization.

4.5 Understanding Schema

Schema is the cognitive framework or concept that helps to organize and interpret information. Schemas can be useful because they allow us to take shortcuts in interpreting a vast amount of information. However, these mental frameworks also cause us to exclude pertinent information in favor that confirms our pre-existing beliefs and ideas. Schemas can contribute to stereotypes and make it difficult to retain new information that does not conform to our established schema. We use our understanding of schema and the relationship between the elements of the schema, to make sense of new concepts.

To elaborate this let us take an example *He would rather have his teeth pulled than face the interview*. In understanding this metaphor we use our knowledge of visiting a dentist and see how all those information entail the situation of facing a job interview. Here the source domain is the ‘visit to a dentist’ and the target domain is the ‘job interview’.

The kinds of things we associate with a visit to the dentist are: making an appointment, visit the doctor, brush before the visit, go to the exam room and wait, the dentist pokes and prods the teeth, the adrenaline rises as one feels worried expecting anything bad from the dentist and so on and so forth. The listing shows how we understand a structure and contents of a particular concept. Such a framework to understand a concept is called a ‘schema’. The individual elements of the schema can be called ‘slots’. In understanding a metaphor what we do is that we map one schema to a new concept in order to build an understanding of the concept. If we draw a parallel between the experiences of visiting a dentist and facing the job interview we’ll see that the individual elements or slots of the source domain entail the target domain slots. The person going to face the interview has a scheduled time of interview like the appointment of the dentist, he practices assiduously in front of the mirror as one brushes his or her teeth before showing them to the dentist,

he sits in the lobby room and wait as one waits in the dentist's clinic, the interviewer grills him on his resume as the dentist pokes and prods one's teeth, after interview one keeps on worrying expecting some bad news as one feels nervous after the check up to a dentist.

Thus it becomes clear that schemas are powerful because they are the instruments to organize characteristics, information and things into recognizable structures which are manipulative according to the situation. Metaphors are powerful because they provide shortcuts to concepts and help us get meanings of less understood concepts. Mappings are not arbitrary, but grounded in the body and in everyday experience and knowledge. A conceptual system contains thousands of conventional metaphorical mappings, which form a highly structured subsystem of the conceptual system. Sometimes a single word can ring a bell to a broad and complicated topic. Abstract concepts and phenomena like life and death which appear to be beyond analyses can be approached through metaphors. The interesting fact is that we constantly use schemas and metaphors with no noticeable effort to generate meaning though most of the times we are unconscious about them and also expect that other will easily get the subtle hints embedded in the metaphors.

The book *Metaphors We Live By* comes with the convincing argument that everyday metaphors that shape our thought and speech are coherent and culturally bound cognitive structures. They systematically order and clarify our world. Lakoff and Johnson illustrate a common metaphor 'TIME IS MONEY' and we live by it. Time can be spent, saved, wasted etc. But here we have to remember that this particular way of structuring our understanding of time reveals only some aspects of time. People having more immediate understanding about money may get confused as they have vague understanding about time. Looking at the phrase 'TIME IS MONEY' one should not think that time is one's personal property. One can not hoard it and die rich. So understanding a particular metaphor one has to imply his world knowledge and should not be misled by any false understanding. Because a metaphor does not necessarily speak about its every aspect. A metaphor may conceal aspects of its source domain which means mappings are asymmetric and partial. Lakoff and Johnson (1980:109) write "...the less clearly

delineated (and usually less concrete) concepts are partially understood in terms of the more clearly delineated (and usually more concrete) concepts, which are directly grounded in our experience.” So it ultimately depends on the individual and his or her understanding a metaphor. If we create a new metaphor TIME IS DOG it looks odd. Time can never be domesticated, we can not feed it, and it can not destroy our shoes with its sharp teeth. Thus we see that in understanding a metaphor we use our body of knowledge and see which metaphor is justified and which one is largely unmapped.

4.6 Mapping

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson (1980:3) argue that a metaphor is not a literary device; it is a fundamental mechanism of human cognition. In a metaphor, the "target domain" is structured by the "source domain." This structuring is called "mapping." The source domain is typically something more clearly understood, often through physical experience. On the contrary the target domain is typically more abstract. Thus we always attempt to structure the abstract in terms of something more clearly understood i.e. the source domain. "Mappings are asymmetric and partial" (Lakoff 1992: 35), which draws attention to the structural similarities between two different entities while hiding or suppressing certain other aspects. Mappings have a conventional character, being a fixed part of the human conceptual system. Mapping is the set of correspondences. We can elaborate this point by the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR where our knowledge about war is mapped onto the knowledge about arguments. When we refer at 'ARGUMENT IS WAR' the persons involved correspond to opponents, their words correspond to weapons, their plan of arguing correspond to war strategies, the win or loss of argument correspond to the victory or defeat of war and so on and so forth. One should not take 'Argument is war' as mapping itself; it is the name of the mapping. The mapping is done through setting our knowledge about war onto knowledge about argument. But one can not expect the exact knowledge to be same for

everyone. These examples clearly show how abstract experience of arguing with another person or a group of people is structured by the more basic concept of WAR, although the actions themselves are different in nature: "It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing [...], what we do and how we understand what we are doing when we argue" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 4). As part of cognitive and metaphorical processes, such mappings arise more or less automatically and unconsciously, and thus affect the way we experience, think and interact within our environment. Thus the correspondence between the domains, ARGUMENT and WAR, for example, "arises from a correlation in our normal everyday experiences" (Lakoff & Johnson 1999: 47). Nonetheless, the source domain does not necessarily have to be logically connected to the target domain. Taken literally, many metaphorical expressions would sound absurd, contradictory and false. For example, arguments cannot be shot down in a literal sense - whereas others presuppose a context bound interpretation holding as well a regular, true literal sense.

4.7 Elaborating Conceptual Metaphor

We have already discussed that the metaphor is not just a matter of language, but of thought and reason where the mapping is primary and language is secondary. It functions basing on the use of source domain language and inference patterns for target domain concepts. Lakoff & Johnson points out (1980:139) that these are "*conventional* metaphors, that is, metaphors that structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture, which is reflected in our everyday language." The mapping is conventional, which means, it is a fixed part of our conceptual system, one of our conventional ways of conceptualizing things. This view of metaphor is thoroughly at odds with the view that metaphors are just linguistic expressions. If metaphors were merely linguistic expressions, we would expect different linguistic expressions to be different metaphors.

We can elaborate this point through an example. *Love* has always been conceptualized as *journey*. One has to understand the domain of love in terms of the domain of journeys. Lakoff (1986: 217) writes about the scenario of travel:

“Two travelers are traveling somewhere in a vehicle, and it hits some impediment and gets stuck. If they do nothing, they will not reach their destinations. There are a limited number of alternatives for action: a) They can try to get the vehicle moving again, either by fixing it or by getting it past the impediment that stopped it; b) they can remain in the stuck vehicle and give up on getting to their destinations in it; and c) they can abandon the vehicle. The alternative of remaining in the stuck vehicle takes the least effort, but does not satisfy the desire to reach the destination.”

We can map this scenario about travel onto a corresponding love scenario which results from applying the correspondences to this knowledge structure: the lovers are travelers on a journey together, with their common life goals seen as destinations to be reached. The relationship is their vehicle, and it allows them to pursue those common goals together. The relationship is seen as fulfilling its purpose as long as it allows them to make progress toward their common goals. The journey will not be smooth. There will be impediments and crossroads where a decision has to be made about which direction to go in and whether to keep traveling together. The metaphor involves understanding one domain of experience, love, in terms of a very different domain of experience, journeys.

English has many such everyday expressions which are based on a conceptualization of love as a journey for example: *Look how far we have come, It's been a long, bumpy road, We can't turn back now, We're at a crossroad, Our relationship is off the track, We may have to choose our separate ways, The relationship isn't going anywhere, We've hit a dead-end street* and so on and so forth. One can notice that the ontological correspondences, according to which entities in the domain of love (e.g., the lovers, their common goals, their hardships, the love relationship, etc.) correspond systematically to entities in the domain of a journey (the travelers, the vehicle, ultimate destination, etc.). These are not rhetorical but very much everyday expressions. If metaphors were mere linguistic expressions as the classical theory perceived we would

have expected different linguistic expressions to be different metaphors. And if it was so 'We've hit a dead-end street' would constitute one metaphor and 'We can't turn back now' would constitute another totally different metaphor. But we don't see such innumerable different metaphors. We have one metaphor 'LOVE IS A JOURNEY' and the conceptualization of love is realized.

4.8 Conceptual Metaphor Theory: Culture and Translation

Following Lakoff and Johnson (1980: 12), "a culture may be thought of as providing, among other things, a pool of available metaphors for making sense of reality"; "to live by a metaphor is to have your reality structured by that metaphor and to base your perceptions and actions upon that structuring of reality"(ibid). However, the universe we are living in is made up of things, and we are constantly confronted with them, obliged to communicate about them, and to define ourselves in relation to them. This is a characteristic of all human societies, and due to this fact various language systems are not easily translatable. Different cultures conceptualize the world in different ways and therefore, metaphors are characterized as being culture-specific. Here we can discuss the matter of *association* and *deviation*. People often associate certain qualities with certain creatures or objects. These qualities often arouse certain reactions or emotions. Though there is little or no scientific ground for such association. The qualities that are associated or the emotions that are aroused are not always same with different people. In the Chinese culture the dragon stands for the emperor. All Chinese people regard themselves as descendants of dragon. But to English speakers the dragon is often a symbol of evil. In the Indian context white is associated with someone's death and a color of the attire worn by the deceased's wife. But in the Western culture this is the color of the bride's gown. Again here an 'owl' is often conceptualized as a sign of bad omen but it is a symbol of wisdom in the West. So the translator should attach great importance to cultural equivalence.

In the cognitive study of metaphor an emphasis is made on the psychological as well as on the socio-cultural and linguistic aspects of metaphor. Metaphorical concepts vary from culture to culture, sometimes even from subculture to subculture. However, compared to culturally variable concepts, some tend to be more universal than others. The next sections comment on the more universal concepts as opposed to the culturally variable ones.

The connection between metaphor and culture is elucidated within the framework of Cognitive Linguistics. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) argued that we do not just speak with metaphors but understand the world through them. Hence shared understanding can also be taken as metaphorical understanding when the focus of understanding is on some intangible entity such as time, mental processes, emotions, abstract qualities, moral values, social or political institutions etc. Most basic concepts of the world are comprehended through metaphorical mappings. In such a situation the metaphors one uses to understand these intangibles may become crucially important in the way one actually experiences the intangibles in a particular culture. In this light of thought metaphors become an inherent part of culture.

Here a question may arise that to what extent people around the globe share their understandings of aspects of the world they live in. According to the 'standard' view of metaphor in the Conceptual Metaphor Theory metaphors are based on embodied human experiences. For example we metaphorically view affection as warmth. The very idea of affection reminds of our childhood experiences of the loving embraces of our parents or near and dear ones and the comforting bodily warmth that follows it. Perhaps this gives answer to why affection is universally conceptualized as warmth rather than coldness. These are 'primary' metaphors which happen to us unconsciously and automatically. As this is a universal bodily experience, the metaphor corresponding to it will also be universal.

Orientational metaphors, for example, tend to be based on universal concepts that are derived from the fact that human beings are shaped as they are and perceive the world in a similar way, namely by using their senses.

Within this group of metaphors, the body itself and our sense of spatial orientation plays an important role. The central concepts emerging from this concern orientations like UP-DOWN, IN-OUT, FRONT-BACK, NEAR-FAR (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 57), expressing either the posture of our body (UP-DOWN), seeing our body as a container (IN-OUT) or correlating the body and the space around us (FRONT-BACK). Since these concepts also represent metaphorical concepts, we can assume that they are used universally.

Again the conceptual metaphor MORE IS UP (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 23) reflects a mapping process, in which quantity is associated with vertical movement, such as prices are high, the demand for fresh fruit is rising or I am feeling up.

The metaphorical concept HAPPY IS UP, for example, can be supported by the assumption that an erect posture means self-confidence, well-being and happiness, while a bent position means the opposite (cf. Lakoff & Johnson 1980:15.). If we feel confident, we show a tendency to keep our head up high. This is universal as it represents the natural human reaction to emotion. However, as emotion is not as sharply delineated as our physical posture is, we choose to think in orientational metaphorical concepts to conceptualize emotion. That means universal primary experiences produce universal primary metaphors. There are many such primary metaphors. For example,

EVENTS ARE MOTIONS (What's going on here?)

CAUSES ARE FORCES (You are driving me crazy).

Such "basic ontological metaphors are [therefore] grounded by virtue of systematic correlations within our experience" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 58). When we say that *keep this in mind* or *my life is empty*, we have the concept LIFE IS A CONTAINER in mind. In addition, embodiment can produce concepts that are based on human movement, e.g. LIFE IS A PATH, realized in language in expressions such as *it's been a long way*.

The concepts introduced as the more universal ones are understood more directly than others. They can be called 'emergent concepts' as they are based on direct experience that is based on direct interaction with the physical world. They "allow us to conceptualize our emotions in more sharply defined terms" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 58). They are potentially transferable from one culture to another, although they emerge out of

experience that is itself bound to cultural circumstances. This will be discussed in the next section, when we discuss the issue of untranslatability.

We have seen how most of our cognitive processes, the way we view, think, perceive or act are based on metaphorical concepts which highly influence our language and enrich: "Our conceptual system thus plays an important role in defining our everyday realities" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980:3). But the metaphorical processes vary to a certain extent from culture to culture, from society to society. Metaphorical mappings are likely to vary in universality, that is, some may represent potential 'metaphorical universals', and others might be highly culture and language specific. Just as the numerous numbers of universal metaphors there exist a large number of non-universal metaphors too. In discussing the mapping of metaphors we have to seriously look into which source-target mappings are common in all or at least many languages of the world and are therefore potentially transferable, and, on the contrary, which mappings are less transferable due to the physical, social or cultural experience they are based on: "For example, in some cultures the future is in front of us, whereas in others it is in back" (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 14). But here we must not forget that even the more universal concepts are formed in a culture-specific environment. They are also influenced by cultural factors, even though not as much as others. Lakoff and Johnson therefore claim that "all experience is cultural through and through [...] we experience our 'world' in such a way that our culture is already present in the very experience itself" (1980: 57). They continue by stating that our concepts are based on cultural presuppositions which have a tendency to be either more physical, i.e. universal, or more cultural.

In order to underline this, we go back to the orientational concept UPDOWN. We have already discussed and shown that the metaphorical concept HAPPY IS UP is rather universal. However, if we take the system RATIONAL-EMOTIONAL, it is not as obvious which attribute is assigned to which orientation. Whether RATIONAL IS UP or EMOTIONAL IS UP, now depends on the cultural and personal presuppositions of the particular person and the cultural environment. In the Western industrial society, the tendency is definitely towards the concept RATIONAL IS UP because they believe that rational way of thinking and handling our emotions is the key to success. This leads us to

the fact that material value is very important in Western industrial societies. A high value is attached to resources as they lead to material enrichment. But in a different cultural setting emotion may get preference to rationality. Metaphorical concepts are influenced by certain values of a society, while in other parts of the world this may be seen differently.

If we also take into account geographic circumstances, all metaphor types may vary locally. How we experience our world is strongly influenced by outer physical and social characteristics of the region we live in. Topography, climatic zones, different kinds of vegetation and animal life affect our mental concepts as much as the structure of our society. We must take into consideration a person's urban or a rural background. While concepts based on buildings and transport systems are likely to be more readily available to an urban person, a rural person will tend to incorporate concepts of landscape and animal species. Urban people, for instance, would rather take the concept of a machine to express strength, while others might prefer a strong and huge animal like a bull for this. In reality, however, traditional metaphorical expressions which once emerged in the countryside have survived even in the speech of people living in a city. One may say that a shift of the more universal concepts towards cultural variability is always noticeable depending on how the concepts are expressed in cultural terms.

Many of our metaphors vary because our experiences as human beings also vary. And, on the other hand, our metaphors vary because the cognitive processes we put to use for the creation of abstract thought may also vary. We know that languages are not monolithic but come in varieties reflecting the divergences in human experience. Actually metaphors vary not only cross-culturally but also within cultures. This variation can occur along a number of dimensions including the social, regional, ethnic, style, sub-cultural, diachronic, and individual dimensions. This approach to metaphor variation can be understood as the cognitive dimension of social-cultural diversity. Social dimensions include the differentiation of society into men and women, young and old, middle-class and working class, and so forth.

One example of this is the man–woman dimension. This dimension seems to be operative in several distinct cases: the way men talk about women, the way women talk about men, the way men *and* women talk about women, the way men *and* women talk about the world in general (i.e., not only about the other). In English-speaking countries (but also in others), men use expressions like *kitten*, *bird*, *chick*, *cookie*, *dish*, *sweetie pie* etc to refer to women. These metaphorical expressions assume certain conceptual metaphors: WOMEN ARE SMALL, WOMEN ARE BIRDS (*bird*, *chick*, *hen-party*), and WOMEN ARE SWEET FOOD (*cookie*, *dish*, *sweetie pie*). However, when women talk about men they do not appear to use these metaphors of men, or use them in a more limited way. Men are not characterized as *birds* or *chicks*, but they can be thought of as LARGE FURRY ANIMALS instead, such as bulls, lions or bears.

To explain regional dimensions we can think about South and East Indian traditions which give birth to many metaphors. It is possible to have conceptual metaphors related to ‘*tali*’ which is tied in the neck of the bride during Hindu marriage in southern part of India. Similarly the Bengalees from the East can easily relate to ‘*sankha*’ (white bangle made of choral), ‘*pala*’ (red bangle) and ‘*sindoor*’ (vermillion) which are signs of a married woman. And there is possibility of conceptual metaphors related to these terms. Personal history also plays a role in shaping metaphorical conceptualization. This is imperceptibly true of ordinary people but it is much more clearly true of poets and other creative writers. We can suggest that the unique metaphor-based symbolic system that an author uses may be partially determined by his or her personal life histories. For example, metaphors of American poet and novelist, Sylvia Plath’s poems come in part from the fact that her father was German and that he was an entomologist specializing in bees. Or, we can take popular American writer, Hemingway’s symbolic system. Hemingway did bullfighting in Spain, was a big game hunter in Africa, and was a deep sea fisherman in Florida. All of these activities became symbolic in his novels and short stories.

Undoubtedly human cognition is largely dependent on metaphors. Without them the possibilities to communicate in our world would be cognitively limited. We use metaphorical expressions to extend the repertoire of possibilities to express ourselves. Thus by using metaphorical expressions we not only fill in lexical gaps but also largely

extend our cognitive capacities. By doing so, complexity is reduced and the context is made more abstract. Moreover, metaphorical expressions contribute to the construction of the reality surrounding us. We build bridges not only between languages but also between the differences of two cultures. Each language is a way of seeing and reflecting the delicate nuances of cultural perceptions (Samovar & Porter, 2004:160), and it is translator who not only reconstructs the equivalences of words across linguistic boundaries but also reflects and transplants the emotional vibrations of another culture.

C. Schaffner rightly says, “By studying actual translations and their effects, Translation Studies can thus also contribute to the study of cultural aspects of conceptual metaphors. That is, the analysis of texts for metaphors and metaphorical reasoning processes in different languages may reveal possible cultural differences in the conceptual structures” (2004: 1264).

4.9 Issue of Untranslatability

Although translation as a human activity is as old as the Babel myth, Translation Studies as a discipline is relatively new and still evolving. The possibility of translation has always been a controversial issue. While talking about language, George Steiner in *After Babel* talks about two opposed views: the Universalists’ point of view and the relativists’ point of view. The Universalists are of the opinion that the underlying structure of languages is universal and hence translation is possible because the differences amongst languages are superficial. For long it was thought that there are two things which give birth to language, firstly, the structures of the Universe and secondly, the universal structures of human mind. And hence the possibility of communicating among different languages is strong as all of them always speak of the same Universe and they have the same human experience. But relativists simply deny the possibility of translation. They believe that the only thing when we do translating is to look for approximate analogies and equivalents. (Steiner 1977:73-4)

Within the last hundred years, the way the relationship between human experience of the Universe and different languages is conceived, has undergone slow transformation. In 1697, Leibniz said that “language is not the vehicle of thought but its determining medium.” He suggested that “thought is language internalized, and we think and feel as our particular language impels and allow us to do.” (Leibniz as cited in Steiner 1977:74)

In 1760, Hamann stressed the existence of “creative, irrational, and manifold proceedings through which language-unique to the species but so varied among nations shapes reality and is, in turn, acted upon by local human experience.” (Hamann as cited in Steiner 1977:78).

Humboldt spoke of the language as a “third universe” midway between the phenomenal reality of the “empirical world” and the internalized structures of consciousness. (Humboldt as cited in Steiner 1977:81). Language structures experience and at the same time this structuring is subject to the continuous flux of the collective behavior of the users.

In this century Internal linguistics made us aware of the fact that every language dissects different aspects of the same reality, that it is our language which biases our view of the Universe, that we only perceive in this Universe what our language shows of it. This position seems to be relevant to the questionability of translation as a satisfactory practice.

Here is one of the most famous quotations in which Whorf (1940) laid out his view on the relationship between language and thought: “...the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely a reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but rather is itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual’s mental activity, for his analysis of impressions, for his synthesis of his mental stock in trade. Formulation is not an independent process, strictly rational in the old sense, but is part of a particular grammar, and differs, from slightly to greatly, between different grammars. We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds – and this mans largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely

because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is confined in the patterns of our language” (as cited in Hudson, 1996: 96).

The principle of ‘linguistic relativity’ stated by Whorf implies, that no man can describe nature with total impartiality; on the contrary he is subject to certain ways of interpretation. As far as the human conscience is concerned, there is no universal and objective physical reality. We perceive and describe nature according to the orientations imposed by our native language. The same physical evidence does not lead all observers to the same image of the Universe, unless they have a similar linguistic background. The name of Edward Sapir has been largely associated to his disciple Benjamin Whorf, especially in the so called “Sapir-Whorf hypothesis”. However, both of them had different points of view about the relationship between language, thought and culture.

According to Sapir, there is no relationship of causality between language and culture that is between a selected inventory of experience (culture) and the particular manner in which the society expresses all experience (language). Culture and language are two non-comparable and unrelated processes unless it can be shown that culture has an innate form, a series of formal patterns quite apart from subject-matter that may serve as a term of comparison with language. However, the points of contact between Sapir’s and Whorf’s hypotheses are very important. Sapir stated: “No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The world, in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.” (Sapir as cited in Bassnett, 2002:21)

We must agree that absolute sameness between two languages can not exist. Eugene Nida, in *Language Structure and Translation* (1975), insists on the existence of three presuppositions which must underlie all semantic analysis:

1. No word (or semantic unit) ever has exactly the same meaning in two different utterances.
2. There are no complete synonyms within a language.

3. There are no exact correspondences between related words in different languages. After these statements, Nida rejects any possibility of perfect communication and affirms that all communication is one of degree.

Nida indicates that the cultural fact symbolized by a word provides the *denotative* meaning, whereas the emotional response experienced by the speakers in the culture is the basis of the *connotative* meaning.

The search for linguistic universals is still one of the main objectives of contemporary linguistics, and the general opinion is that inter-linguistic communication is possible, with a higher or lower degree of equivalence,

Eugene Nida, in *Language Structure and Translation* (1975:27), classifies the problems of translation as :

- Loss of information
- Adding of information
- Skewing of information

Catford, in *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* (1965:93) states that “in total translation, translation equivalence depends on the interchangeability of the SL, and TL text in the same situation.”

He distinguishes between 2 types of untranslatability: linguistic and cultural. Linguistic untranslatability takes place when the TL has no formally corresponding feature. This type of untranslatability happens typically in cases where an ambiguity peculiar to the SL text is a functionally relevant feature, for example SL puns. Cultural untranslatability, on the other hand, is not due to difference between two languages, but crops up when a situational feature, functionally relevant for the SL text, is completely absent from the culture of the TL. For example one can not find an English equivalent for the Bengali word *nandimookh*. And it happens because this is a very typical Bengali ceremony performed in the morning of the marriage when the eldest male members of both the bride and the groom perform certain rituals to please the souls of the long gone forefathers. As English culture does not have this type of ritual, untranslatability is obvious to occur while translating the word *nandimookh*.

Catford admits that in many cases, what provokes untranslatability is the impossibility of finding an equivalent collocation in the TL. (Catford 1965:93-103).

Peter Newmark in his *Approaches to Translation* states that any operation of translation entails a loss of meaning that he classifies in four groups (Newmark 1981:7-8):

1. If the text describes a situation which has elements peculiar to the natural environment, institution and culture of its language area, there is an inevitable loss of meaning, since the transference to or rather the substitution or replacement by the translator's language can only be approximate.
2. Two languages, both in their basic character (langue) and their social varieties (parole) in context have different lexical, grammatical and sound systems, and segment many physical objects and all intellectual concepts differently.
3. The individual uses of language of the text writer and the translator do not coincide. Everybody has lexical if not grammatical idiosyncrasies, and attaches 'private' meanings to a few words.
4. The translator and the text writer have different theories of meaning and different values. The translator may look for symbolism where realism was intended, for different emphasis.

The translator may intend to produce as nearly as possible the same effect on his readers as the source text created in the minds of its readers. But there are uncountable instances where this effect can not be attained.

This happens:

- i. Because of the peculiarity of the language, to the existence of puns etc.
- ii. a non-literary text relating to an aspect of the culture familiar to the first reader but to the target language reader is unlikely to produce equivalent effect.
- iii. There is the artistic work with a strong flavor which may also be rooted in a particular historical period. If the culture is as important as the message, the translator reproduces the form and content of the original as literary as possible, without regard for equivalent effect. (Newmark 1981)

According to Newmark all these elements that imply ambiguity, polisemy and puns are translated in a different way, depending on the type of text. If it is a literary text, these elements have to be produced as perfectly as it is possible, trying to keep the principle of equivalence. If it is a non-literary text, they may be explained in the TL.

Perhaps the most evident problems in translation are the handling of idioms, puns and metaphors. As Bassnett (2002:30) points out, “idioms, like puns, are culture bound.” She further states, “In the process of interlingual translation one idiom can be substituted for another. That substitution is made not on the basis of a corresponding or similar image contained in the phrase, but on the function of the idiom.”(2002:31).

The translation of metaphor is one specific problem in the process of translation. Metaphor points out to a particular vision of the world, specific in each culture. Dagut stresses the uniqueness of metaphor and denies the possibility of finding an equivalent in TL:

Since a metaphor in the SL is, by definition, a new piece of performance, a semantic novelty, it can clearly have no existing ‘equivalence’ in the TL; what is unique can have no counterpart. Here the translator’s bilingual competence is of help to him only in the negative sense of telling him that any equivalence in this cannot be ‘found’ but will have to be created. The crucial question that arises is thus whether a metaphor can, strictly speaking, be translated as such, or whether it can only be ‘reproduced’ in some way (Dagut 1976:21-3).

Perfection is like a mirage for a translator. In each work translators will have to fix a degree of fidelity and tolerance. Equivalence, more or less approximate, and adequacy of the translated text to its original is the only thing one may hope for.

4.10 Metaphor Translation: Existing Approaches

In his popular book *A Textbook of Translation* Newmark writes, “whenever you meet a sentence that is grammatical but does not appear to make sense, you have to test its apparently nonsensical element for a possible metaphorical meaning” (Newmark 1988: 106)

His book can be considered a practical guide to one’s strategies of negotiating the translation problems. He says that while the “central problem of translation is the overall choice of a translation method for a text, the most important particular problem is the translation of metaphor” (Newmark 1988: 104). Once the strategy of translation is decided all the hundreds of smaller decisions become necessary to the creation of the new text. Whether stock or original, for Newmark, metaphor “always involves illusion ... [it is] a kind of deception, often used to conceal an intention” (ibid). As we use language we have a natural tendency to imply messages rather than making blunt statements, the reasons of which may be wit, politeness, status etc. He goes on to say: “metaphor incidentally demonstrates a resemblance, a common semantic area between two or more or less similar things — the image and the object” (Newmark 1988: 104). But a question may arise here. Because if the resemblance is just ‘incidental’ can a sensible and effective equivalent be produced?

Newmark gives many examples of polysemy from single words to extended phrases and suggests possible translations. He even acknowledges that a whole text can be based on a metaphor. But he still presents metaphor in six degrees of conventionality; “dead, cliché, stock, adapted, recent and original” (Newmark 1988: 105). Though these are the surface forms in which we encounter metaphor, the importance of them cannot be overlooked. Each source text is a cultural product with a specific context and functions and the translator always has to deal with specifics.

Newmark defines the act of translating as transferring the meaning of a text, from one language to another, taking care mainly of the functional relevant meaning.

He works with three propositions:

- "the more important the language of a text, the more closely it should be translated";
- "the less important the language of a text... the less closely it needs to be translated";
- "The better written a text, the more closely it should be translated, whatever its degree of importance..."

He is of the opinion that the translator has to establish priorities in selecting which varieties of meaning to transfer in the first place. For that he has to use his creativity, particularly when he is forced to distort the target language introducing new elements of another culture.

Newmark criticizes the present-day controversies stuck to the conflict between free and literal translation.

For him if the theory of translation insists on discussing the topic of equivalence it would be text to text equivalence and not simply word to word. He distinguishes types of texts and types of words in the texts.

He classifies texts in three categories:

- scientific-technological
- institutional-cultural
- literary texts

But he stresses that technical or institutional translation can be as challenging as rewarding as literary translation

Because every word has its own identity, its resonance, its value, and words are affected by their contexts, he distinguishes different types of words:

- functional words
- technical words
- common words
- institutional words
- lexical words
- concept words

He considers two types of translation: semantic and communicative, although he states that the majority of texts require communicative rather than semantic translation. Communicative translation is strictly functional and usually the work of a team. Semantic translation is linguistic and encyclopedic and is generally the work of one translator.

Among the translation problems Newmark(1981) discusses he gives special attention to the metaphor. He proposes seven procedures for its translation:

1. Reproducing the same image in the TL, e.g., golden hair—*goldenes Haar*.
2. Replacing the image in the SL with a standard TL image which does not clash with the TL culture, e.g., other fish to fry—*d'autres chats a' fouetter*.
3. Translating metaphor by simile, retaining the image, e.g., *Ces zones cryptuaire ou' s' e'labore la beaute'*.—the crypt-like areas where beauty is manufactured. According to Newmark, this procedure can modify the shock of the metaphor.
4. Translating metaphor (or simile) by simile plus sense (or occasionally a metaphor plus sense), e.g., *tout un vocabulaire molie'resque*—a whole repertoire of medical quackery such as Molie`re might have used. Newmark suggests the use of this compromise solution in order to avoid comprehension problems; however, it results in a loss of the intended effect.
5. Converting metaphor to sense, e.g., *sein Brot verdienen*—to earn one's living. This procedure is recommended when the TL image is too broad in sense or not appropriate to the register. However, emotive aspects may get lost.

6. Deletion, if the metaphor is redundant.
7. Using the same metaphor combined with sense, in order to enforce the image.

For Newmark then translation is a craft. The translator acquires a technique in which the process to be followed takes into account the acts of comprehension, interpretation, formulation and recreation.

4.11 A Potential Application of Conceptual Metaphor in Translation

Lakoff and Johnson's idea of conceptual metaphor can potentially be very useful to the translator. Newmark looked at metaphor as 'incidental' but the cognitive linguistic approach considers metaphor to be a function of perception and thought which can be expressed linguistically. This is not incidental but fundamental.

An awareness of conceptual metaphor empowers us to explore terminology. The origin of a culturally bound word is often metaphorical in nature.

Etymology or the study of word origin is perhaps one place where metaphor exists almost entirely. The metaphors contained in an etymological word, phrase or term, can be ultimately the best means of understanding how our ancestors thought about the world, and how ultimately the ideas have changed into having what we now have. It happens quite often that the etymological metaphor of a word, even if we are not immediately familiar with the specific etymology, seems logical and totally understandable to us perhaps after a brief explanation of how it came to mean that. Eugene Nida, working for the American Bible Society, had the practical experience of the problems of getting both what he termed formal and dynamic equivalence in a greater variety of source and target languages than any other translator can even think of. In *Towards a Science of Translating* (1964) he identifies the gaps between culturally defined metaphors, even when they are playing a literal role. He explained it with an example of *Adam's apple*. In a region where nobody has ever heard about Adam or never seen an apple, this metaphorical phrase may create confusion. There may be different lexical realization for this phrase in another language but the literal translation of this English phrase is

problematic. In Uduk, for example, this anatomical feature becomes ‘the thing that wants beer’ (Nida 1964:219). But if the translator uses the analytical process which Lakoff and Johnson employed in the endnotes of their updated version of *Metaphors We Live By* (2003), the conceptual metaphor will help him to understand the dual metaphorical structures behind Nida’s two terms. The explanation will go in the following way:

English : <i>Adam’s apple</i>	Uduk: <i>the thing that wants beer</i>
<p>Conceptual Metonymy: In Judeo-Christian tradition Adam was the first man. Here Adam stands for all men.</p>	<p>1st Conceptual Metonymy: The thyroid cartilage is in the throat, i.e. in the area of the body where thirst is felt; where beer and its effects are first experienced, although it is the whole man who wants the beer. (The part stands for the whole)</p>
<p>Conceptual Metaphor: The stretched skin over the forward protrusion of the thyroid cartilage evokes the shape of an apple. In English, descriptions of the body abound in such linkings: roof of the mouth, bridge of the nose, arch of the foot, etc. (One object is described in terms of another.)</p>	<p>2nd Conceptual Metonymy: Although women also have a thyroid cartilage in the same part of the body, it is not a prominent feature of their physique. In Uduk culture of Southern Sudan women are associated with growing grain and brewing beer, while men are more associated with drinking it. So, a male feature can be described in terms of a male activity. (One aspect can stand for another.)</p>

This makes one thing crystal clear that in spite of the different linguistic terms the metaphorical thought process worked in the same way irrespective of the different cultures. The understanding of conceptual metaphor enables the translator to scrutinize the structure and components of these lexical items. While translating the translator is not misled to think of an actual apple belonging to Adam or of a physiological feature in a man’s throat craving for ‘beer’.

Prominentia laryngea is the descriptive medical term for the English phrase *Adam's apple*. But we hardly see anyone using the medical term. In fact there is no need of explaining the term if it is being used in the English community. In the same way a native Uduk speaker will not misunderstand something familiar and conventional in his language. But one can not deny the fact that conceptual metaphor will be of great assistance for a translator to make his job easy rendering his work an easy understandability to the target readers. Newmark (1991) encourages us by saying that a language such as English would gain by the literal translation of many foreign key-words, idioms and possibly even proverbs (Newmark 1991:35). Time and again there have been several discussions to minimize the translation loss. And there seems to be no end to the issue of the possibility or impossibility of translating metaphors. In this connection Nida comments: "Some persons object to any shift from a metaphor to another, a metaphor to a simile, or a metaphor to a nonmetaphor, because they regard such an alteration as involving some loss of information. However, the same persons usually do not object to the translation of a nonmetaphor by a metaphor, for such a change appears to increase the effectiveness of the communication" (Nida 1964: 220). But we should not adopt any extreme position as it shuts all possibilities of communication. Modern understanding of conceptual metaphor helps the translator not to look at the source text with a skeptical eye and indulge in the mechanical task of finding equivalent but to look at the 'metaphorical web' as useful for enriching language.

The reason why metaphors are especially hard to translate is that often, they are a product of the culture that belongs to the language. The author of the original metaphor probably had an audience in mind that has approximately the same cultural background as him. When the text is translated, however, a different culture has to be taken into account. The same metaphor might not have the wanted effect there. The metaphorical vehicle may not have the same connotations as it does in the source culture. This is the reason why metaphor often pre In her article "Metaphor and Translation: some implications of a cognitive approach" (2004:1253), Schäffner mentions similar reason for the translation problems that metaphors cause: "It has been argued that metaphors can

become a translation problem, since transferring them from one language and culture to another one may be hampered by linguistic and cultural differences”. The translator has to make an estimation about the knowledge or ideas which the source culture and the target culture share (in other words, he has to establish a common ground, if there is any), to translate the metaphor properly. It is due to this that “[translatability] is no longer a question of the individual metaphorical expression, as identified in the ST, but it becomes linked to the level of conceptual systems in source and target culture” (Schäffner 1258).

A successful translation must capture the sense of the original rather than merely the words and could only be regarded as a successful piece of communication if it makes sense to the receptor. In semiotic terms that would mean that signs, connotations, denotations and references in the source text would have to be translated or recreated in such a way in the target text that the response of the target language receptors would be equivalent to that of the source language receptors.

If a translation can meet the following basic requirements of (1) making sense; (2) conveying the spirit and manner of the original; (3) having a natural and easy form of expression; and (4) producing a similar response, it stands to reason that some conflict between form and content will result (Nida 1964: 164). Most often content will have priority over style.

The whole process of thinking is based on the perception of similarity and difference and metaphor is a fundamental tool of exploring that similarity or difference. Metaphors depend on the assumption that the reader or hearer shares a great deal of knowledge about the vehicle with the writer or speaker. Use and meaning of metaphors are generally culturally or group determined. Most metaphors that we use are based on easily recognizable grounds and thus do not disturb the flow of speech. But poetry tends to make extensive use of obscure metaphors and unraveling these metaphors poses a challenge for the readers and also makes poetry reading interesting. Proverbs are short sayings of folk wisdom -of well known maxims, facts or truths – expressed succinctly and in a way that makes them easy to remember. Sometimes when translating certain

word of cultural flavor, there is no equivalent word in target language but only to explain. One has to translate the implied meaning according to contexts.

As conceptual metaphor is a matter of thought it can pass over interlinguistic barriers. The translator has to look into the nature of the idiom, the potency of a given image and what relation it might have to an extended metaphor in the larger discourse of the text or to say precisely, to the larger culture. And it is possible when the translator considers a metaphor more than a stylistic category. As a result his or her translation will not be restricted to find a matching TL expression. He or she can feel more flexible and consider translation by explanation or paraphrasing or translation and explanation both at a time if the intentions of the author of the source text are accessible.

4.12 Metaphors in *Udo Megh*: A Discussion

It is worth mentioning at this point that the title of the concerned text is itself a metaphor. The title *Udo Megh* translated as *The Stray Cloud* embodies Shewli who appeared suddenly and unexpectedly like that piece of cloud which overshadowed the peaceful blue sky of Deya and Soumya and disturbed the apparent happiness of their conjugal life (Bhattacharya, 2007. Personal communication).

Since metaphors are related to different cultural domains, this implies that the translator has to do the job of conceptual mapping on behalf of the TL reader; he has to look for a similar TL cognitive equivalence in the target culture. The more the SL and TL cultures in question conceptualize experience in a similar way, the easier the task of translation will be. But since human real-world experiences are not always similar, and metaphors record these experiences, the task of the translator becomes more difficult when translating these metaphors across languages related to different cultures. The difficulty of metaphor rendition lies not in the assumption that languages cannot provide equivalent expressions for their metaphors, but in the fact that they lack corresponding metaphors related to the same conceptual domain or area. Hence translators, whose task

is to produce a TL text that bears a close resemblance to the SL text, should be aware of cognitive and cultural issues when translating from the SL to TL or vice-versa. It is not enough for translators to be bilingual, but they should have sound knowledge of the target culture.

In the case of our selected text our focus will be on conceptual metaphor as it provides a good approach to discuss various metaphorical expressions based on human concepts and experiences. In the cross-linguistic comparison we will compare two languages, Bengali (SL) and English (TL) to show cross cultural similarities as well as variations. The two languages belong to different language groups and have their distinct cultural ideas and assumptions. The method that we have adopted in translation of metaphorical expressions in the text *Udo Megh* will be very beneficial in understanding metaphors in the light of cognitive approach. It will also illustrate the relevance of Conceptual Metaphor Theory for Translation Studies.

In search for cognitive equivalence to replace the SL image with a TL image that does not clash with the target culture, we have differentiated between two cognitive mapping conditions to the translation of metaphors. And they are:

(1) Metaphors available in TL with

- a) Similar lexicalization patterns
- b) Different lexicalization patterns.

(2) Metaphors, not available in TL

- a) Possible to generate in translation because of shared experiences
- b) Not possible to generate in TL because of culture specific expressions.

These categories will be exemplified below:

1. Metaphors Available in Target Language

a) Metaphors which have similar lexicalization patterns in the Target Language

This category represents metaphors expressing a small number of ideas shared by the two languages and hence expressed, roughly speaking, by similar expressions. Anthropologists call these shared ideas 'cultural universals.' Comprising many diverse sub-cultures, a universal culture can be thought of as an assemblage of common core attitudes and values reflected by practices common to most of the sub-cultures. Similarities in mapping conditions across diverse cultures could be labeled as 'pancultural metaphorical expression,' which derives from 'panhuman sharing of basic experience'. The following examples from *Udo Megh* will help us to clarify our point.

(i) *Amar rakto tagbag kore futche*

English: My blood is boiling.

Sense: Anger

In the above example both the English and Bengali metaphorical expressions are used to convey the concept ANGER. It is to be noted that both Bengali and English use metaphorical expressions for the concept which have similar lexicalization pattern. We can say that in case of this SL metaphor, there is an equivalent expression available in TL which is identical in both form and meaning.

(ii) *setu baandhaar chesta koraa*

Bridge build try do

English: try to build a bridge

Sense: to minimize gap (physical or mental) between people.

A bridge is usually built to reduce the gap between two locations of space. Similarly the efforts taken up to minimize the difference of opinion between individuals can be compared to a bridge. We can see that the TL has the same lexical pattern as is seen in the SL.

iii) *Naak golaano*

Nose poke

English: poke one's nose.

Sense: to interfere in someone else's matter.

As nose is the most protruding body part on the frontal side of our bodies, it would be coming on our way if we make physical contact with another individual or object. Here the physical contact with nose is used to refer to the act of interference. This expression is available both in Bengali and English.

iv) *Nijer paaye daaraano.*

Own feet stand

English: Stand on one's own feet.

Sense: Self dependent.

A person standing on his own feet does not depend on anyone or any device for walking. Nobody has any doubt regarding this. This knowledge is easily connected with the idea of someone's self-sufficiency and self dependence. Both Bengali and English use this metaphorical expression to convey the sense of one's self dependence.

b) Metaphors having similar mapping conditions but lexically realized differently

In this category come many such sayings which embody a general truth. These are expressions which can be metaphorically linked to ideas, people, their life style, religion etc. These can be rational truths, with or without any empirical basis. Here we have cited some examples from *Udo Megh*. These will show us how the English translations and their Bengali counterpart metaphors are related to the same conceptual domain. But there is difference in lexical choice.

i) *Khaajnar cheye baajna beshi*

Revenue than musical instrument much

English : Empty vessels sound much

ii) *Chore chore mastuto bhai.*

Thief thief cousin brothers.

Birds of a feather flock together.

iii) *Thod bori khaada khaada bari thod*

Inside stem of a banana tree | little ball of pasted pulses | upright | upright | little ball of pasted pulses | inside stem of a banana tree.

English: Putting old wine into new bottle.

2. Metaphors not available in Target Language

a) Metaphors which are possible to generate in translation because of shared experiences.

While translating *Udo Megh*, it was observed that it was possible to undertake a literal rendition of certain metaphors based on universal or overlapping human experience.

Certain universal experiences share underlying conceptual structure despite the absence of relevant linguistic expressions in every culture. In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson mentions experiential gestalts which are based on the nature of our bodies, our interactions with our physical environment and our interactions with other people within

our culture. These experiential gestalts serve as the grounding of conceptual metaphors (1980: 117). Based on such shared conceptual mapping it is possible to generate new metaphors in the target language. Translation thus becomes a process to enrich the target language.

Chokh e dhulo deoyaa

Eye inside dust give

English: To throw dust in someone's eyes.

If dust is thrown in someone's eyes it obstructs vision. One can not keep track of things. Thus the sense of deception or cheating someone becomes evident by the expression *throwing dust in someone's eyes*. Anybody all over the world has the same physical experience and can easily connect to this.

Paayer nich theke maati shore jayoa

Feet beneath ground slip

English: Slipping away of ground under one's feet.

Ground is the base to stand. If that is not there one will be unstable to stand and fall down. Instability is always compared to a troublesome situation. Thus the literal translation of the Bengali expression will not be problematic for the target readers to relate to.

Maathaay aakash bhenge poraa.

Head sky break fall.

English : the sky falling in one's head.

Such expression springs up from our conception of the hugeness of the sky. If it literally falls on one's head it will bring about calamity. Such expression gives the sense of facing

in an unexpected disaster. Such expression easily conveys its inner meaning to the target readers because of the universal experience.

Mukhe chaayaa ghonaay.

Face shadow overclouded

English: The face clouded.

Cloud is related to darkness and darkness to unhappiness. Everyone is familiar with the concept HAPPINESS IS LIGHT. Hence clouding of face can easily be understood by the target readers as the unhappy state of mind.

Raag jol hoye gelo

Anger water become

English : Anger turning to water.

Everyone is familiar with the concept ANGER IS HEAT, Water is associated with cooling. Thus the literal rendition *anger turning to water* conveys the sense of cooling of one's anger.

.Chokhe andhokaar dekhaa

Eye darkness see

English: Everything dark in front of one's eyes.

We know that darkness impedes clear vision. Everyone has the experience that mental trauma or anxiety brings us to a state where we are almost blind to see anything. Thus the metaphorical expression *everything dark in front of one's eyes* easily can convey the meaning of source metaphor.

Pake pore jaoyaa

Mud fall go

English: To fall in filth.

Fall is universally associated with misfortune. Mud is associated with dirt. Thus *falling in filth* can be understood by the target readers as the misfortune of a person.

Pathor buk

Stone heart

English: Stone heart.

All of us know that stone is heavy, a big burden to lift. Here the concept SADNESS IS BURDEN is behind such expression. Unhappiness of mind is always associated with a heavy burden. And it is an universal experience.

- b) Metaphors which are not possible to generate in TL because of culture specific expressions.

We have already discussed how language functions as the best mirror of human society and culture. It is from the language that we can discover the culture specific terms which are very integral to a particular culture. According to Dagut (1972:32), 'the translatability of any given SL metaphor depends on (1) the particular cultural experience and semantic associations exploited by it, and (2) the extent to which these can, or not, be reproduced non-anomalously in TL, depending on the degree of overlap in each particular case.' Such metaphors are called root metaphors underlying people's views or attachments and shaping their understanding of a situation.

Here we have cited few examples from *Udo Megh* which show that the literal English translations for these expressions do not work as equivalents. The attempts to maintain these metaphors in English translation have communicatively failed. To solve this problem, we have provided glossary after the English translation of the text and thus clarified the meanings. However, few such terms were retained in our English translation so that the target readers enjoy the flavor of the original.

Dhoyaa tulsi paataa

Cleaned *tulsi* leaf

Sense: Honest person

Tulsi is the sacred plant dearer to the Lord Vishnu. *Tulsi* symbolizes purity. It is considered as the holy plant to the Hindus. *Tulsi* is believed to promote longevity and life long happiness and worshipped in every Hindu house. As this is very much culture specific the target readers would not have related to the original Bengali expression if it was translated literally. Hence the implied sense of an honest person is provided in our translation.

Mukh haandi

Face vessel for cooking

Sense: Dull or gloomy face.

Haandi means a deep, narrow-mouthed vessel for cooking food. This word is very specific to Indian culture. If we translate this term literally into English it will make no sense to the TL readers as they are not acquainted to the cultural item *haandi*. There is no single lexical item which corresponds to the word *haandi*. So the sense was conveyed as gloomy face or to pull a long face.

Chaadnataala

Chaadnataala is a canopied place, bounded by banana plants and is decorated with *alpana* or colorful designs. This is the place where rituals of Bengali marriages take place. There is no English equivalent for this culture specific term. We have retained this Bengali word in our English translation and clarified the meaning in the glossary.

Judhisthirer kanya

Judhisthir's daughter

Sense: A virtuous and true person

Yudhisthira was the first Pandava, born to Kunti, who was famous for his virtue and truthfulness. In any adverse situation he never left truth.

The translation of the particular word in the novel *Udo Megh* can not be literally translated as it will not make sense to the TL readers who do not know Indian epics. Hence the sense was translated as a true person.

Jodobharot

Lifeless Bharat

Sense: dull or inactive person

Bharat the eldest son of King Rishabdev, was a devout theist and a great ruler of Treta Yuga. Having duly installed his sons as new rulers he resolutely departed from his opulent palace and started to lead a life of a mendicant. He was always engaged in constant remembrance of the supreme lord. He completely lost any desire for mundane sense pleasures and remained steady in his devotion.

But unfortunately he become so absorbed in raising a bay deer that he gradually forgot his holy duties and even forgot to meditate on and worship the Supreme Lord. Even at the time of his death his mind was absorbed in the body of the deer. After death he was

reborn as a deer but remembered his previous life. Later he was born to a devout saint belonging to the family line of Angira.

Due to his exalted consciousness, Bharat, could remember his previous lives. He was afraid of making the same mistake and so he remained aloof from family attachments and material activities. He didn't want to fall into the false bodily identification again, so he behaved like a fool and dullard. Hence he was called Jado Bharat.

If we translate this term *jado bharat* into English it will not make any sense to the target readers as they might not be familiar with our culture and history. So while translating the inner sense of this term was conveyed and the word 'inactive' was used in the place of the original word *Jado Bharat*.

4.13 Conclusion

Since metaphors are related to different cultural domains, this implies that the translator has to do the job of conceptual mapping on behalf of the TL reader; he has to look for a similar TL cognitive equivalence in the target culture. The more the SL and TL cultures in question conceptualize experience in a similar way, the easier the task of translation will be. But since human real-world experiences are not always similar, and metaphors record these experiences, the task of the translator becomes more difficult when translating these metaphors across languages related to different cultures. The difficulty of metaphor rendition lies not in the assumption that languages cannot provide equivalent expressions for their metaphors, but in the fact that they lack counterpart metaphors related to the same conceptual domain or area. Therefore, in search for cognitive equivalence to replace the SL image with a TL image that does not clash with the target culture, we have differentiated between three cognitive mapping conditions to the translation of metaphors: (1) metaphors of similar mapping conditions, (2) metaphors having similar mapping conditions but lexically implemented differently, and (3) metaphors of different mapping conditions. The difference between these three can be represented as a continuum, with the set of metaphors of similar mapping conditions at

one end, and those of different mapping conditions at the other end of the continuum, and those of similar mapping conditions but lexically realized differently as an intermediate set in between the polar opposites. Examples of the first category generate as human experiences throughout the globe are more or less similar; the second set is related to the same conceptual domain in the SL and the TL, but the ethical system in the TL or the SL has led to major differences in lexical choice; whereas the third set includes the culture-bound SL metaphors that are mapped into a domain different from that of the TL.

It can be concluded that translators, whose task is to produce a TL text that bears a close resemblance to the SL text, should be aware of cognitive and cultural issues when translating from Bengali into English or vice-versa. Therefore, it is not enough for translators to be bilingual, but they should be bicultural as well. Because translators suffer twice when approaching some metaphors which are culture-bound and due to their figurative meaning intralingually; it is recommended that translators should be trained in coping with metaphor translation not only in foreign-language programs, but also in their native language.

CHAPTER FIVE

Specific Problems of Translation From Bengali to English

Translation involves transfer of ideas, thoughts, and facts of one language into another. Translation is a process of “reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style.” (Nida & Taber, 1969) Human beings speak thousands of different languages carrying their own linguistic and cultural heritages. Hence emerges the need of translation. For different speech communities, it paves the way to know each other. It is not possible for one to know each language of the world. Through translation, one can come to know the cultural setting, scientific and literary achievements of a speech community. In today's world, communication between different nations with different languages is feasible through translation. Problems arise when these languages are mutually divorce in their linguistic structure and cultural system.

The translator, therefore, has to bear greater responsibility because conveying one message of one language to another is really a tough job. Some scholars insist that a translator has to be loyal to the source language (SL) text to retain its soul. Spivak (1993:183), for example, considering translation as "the most intimate act of reading" writes that, "unless the translator has earned the right to become an intimate reader, she cannot surrender to the text, cannot respond to the special call of the text" In general, what seems to be understood as translation, as Bassnett (2002:11) writes, includes rendering an SL text to a TL text "so as to ensure that 1) the surface meaning of the two

will be approximately similar, and 2) the structure of the SL will be preserved as closely as possible but not so closely that the TL structures will be seriously distorted".

Discussing the responsibility of a translator to the target language (TL) audience, Susan Bassnett observes that "To attempt to impose the value-system of the SL culture onto the TL culture is dangerous ground, and the translator should not be tempted by the school that pretends to determine the original *intentions* of an author on the basis of a self-contained text. The translator cannot *be* the author of the SL text, but as the author of the TL text has a clear moral responsibility to the TL readers" (2002:30).

The bilingual readers and critics always have the tendency to compare the original and the translated text and praise or condemn the translator keeping in mind the extent of his loyalty and success. This happens in spite of the oft-quoted Italian proverb, *Traduttore, traditore*: 'The translator is traitor' and is often justified by a sexist statement: "All translations are like a woman. The more beautiful she is, the less loyal she is." Nida(1964) wanted to give this concept a more acceptable modern perspective by saying that a translation should be like a woman in a man's clothing, so that result can be both tasteful and alive. We find scholars like Lotman who may argue that translation is a process of creative thinking; consequently, it is subjective and cannot be systematized by laws.

Due to the assumption that compared to poetry, prose translation is easier; the translation of prose has not been given much attention. But it should not be considered like that. Bassnett writes "Every prime text is made up of a series of interlocking systems, each of which has a determinable function in relation to the whole, and it is the task of the translator to apprehend these functions" (1991:118). If a translator translates each sentence as a free sentence without relating it to the overall work, the ultimate goal cannot be achieved. The translator should choose the equivalents in such a way that the target readers get minimum of 'cultural shock'. Similarly, the translator must not choose

equivalents which are structurally awkward. Regarding correctness of a translation Nida (1971:185) points out:

“Ultimately, however, the correctness of a translation must be determined not in terms of the corresponding sets of words, but on the basis of the extent to which the corresponding sets of semantic components are accurately represented in the restructuring. This is essential if the resulting form of the message in the receptor language is to represent the closest natural equivalent of the source-language text.”

Word for word translation does not seem to be considered as a good one by Nida (1964:14), since such renderings, "generally make for a doubtful translation”.

One of the most difficult problems in translating literary texts is found in the differences between cultures. People of a given culture look at things from their own perspectives. A translator who uses a cultural approach is simply recognizing that each language contains elements which are derived from its culture that every text is anchored in a specific culture, and that conventions of text production and reception vary from culture to culture. In translating Suchitra Bhattacharya’s *Udo Megh* into English we have encountered several problems in terms of cultural items, idiomatic expressions, multi word expressions and so on. However reduplication, onomatopoeic terms or compound words which come under the big umbrella of multi word expressions have been discussed individually and several examples from the novel are cited to substantiate the discussions.

5.1 Idioms and Proverbs

The *Compact Oxford Dictionary Thesaurus & Wordpower Guide* defines idioms as a group of words whose meaning is different from the meanings of the individual words. Idioms and phrases are combinations of two or more words, functioning as a unit of meaning. They are unique as their meaning can not be inferred from the meanings of the individual words. For example, a person who ‘eats like a bird’ doesn’t actually hop about on the ground pecking for grains and grubs. Rather, he simply eats very little. Idioms and phrases are like coins and currency notes of smaller denominations without which human interaction is almost impossible. They help in cutting down words and economizing. They help in weeding out the non-essentials of communication. They enable to meaning precise and clear because of their close-up effect and thus make language concrete and at the same time persuasive. Some embellished with metaphors, some germinating in history and some woven round nice language add variety, range and effectiveness to our expression.

In this discussion we will talk about proverbs too. So it is important to know what proverb is. *The Pocket Oxford Dictionary of English* defines proverb as short pithy saying in general use, held to embody a general truth. But these so called general truths are not eternal. They are perceptions of different social categories (men and women, upper or lower social classes and groups etc.) living in an unequal society. Proverbs can be rational truths, with or without any empirical basis. They can be described as phrases, which can be metaphorically linked to ideas, people and even lifestyles in general. It has been noted that proverbs tend to explain behavioral patterns as well as this can be broadened to explain that many proverbs seem to appear as defacing as deriding certain classes of society. One such class can be highlighted as ‘women’. Since society believes in the subordination of women to men, hence proverbs which are intrinsic part of our daily lives will also include such ideology in marriage. For example the Bengali proverb *Sonaar aangti baanka hoy naa* can literally be translated as the gold ring is never crooked. *Aangti* here metaphorically stands for man. A gold ring can not be defective for it is made of gold, the purest and best amongst all. It illustrates the social norm that a

man's physical look is of no importance for men are always deemed more important than woman. Another Bengali word '*Puroshottom*' means strong man but no feminine equivalent for this. Proverbs and idioms provide insight to the behavior of people across cultures. Proverbs which constitute more than half of our everyday language can help us seek an answer to the way thought processes are developed through the medium of folklore and myths.

Almost every language has its own sets of idioms and phrases which spring up from human action, relation and experience. In our second chapter we have elaborately discussed about metaphorical expressions and human cognition. We have seen that worldwide human experiences are more or less alike. Hence some idioms and phrases of a particular language which encapsulate all the stereotyped aspects of experience can also be understood by the speakers of other language if it is literally translated. These are more flexible. But problem occurs with those idiomatic expressions which are very much culturally grounded. In such cases there is less transparency in meaning. These are such frozen patterns of language which allow little or no variation in form and often carry meanings which cannot be figured out from their individual components. The expression has to be taken as one unit to establish meaning. The literal translation of such expressions will usually be nonsense in the receptor language. Translating idiomatic expressions involves more than replacement of lexical and grammatical items between languages. One idiom in a particular language can be substituted for another in the receptive language. But according to Bassnett (2002:31) "that substitution is made not on the basis of the linguistic elements in the phrase, nor on the basis of a corresponding or similar image contained in the phrase, but depending on the function of the idiom". The SL phrase is replaced by a TL phrase that serves the same purpose in the TL culture. Thus literal translation may not always be effective because of cultural barrier.

A translator's competence in efficiently using idioms and fixed expressions of a foreign language hardly ever matches that of a native speaker. A native speaker knows it better how to judge or manipulate an idiom than a translator. One language may express a

given meaning by means of a single word, another may do it with a fixed expression like proverb and a third one may opt for idiomatic expressions.

A translator's task is not easy in this matter. He has to identify the idioms correctly and decide how to render the hidden meanings of idioms and proverbs in the receptive language. Actually the matter of transparency or vagueness of an idiom is very tricky because a vague expression may be easier to translate than a transparent one. Actually the difficulties of translation are more prominent in the case of idioms than fixed expressions.

In translating Suchitra Bhattacharya's *Udo Megh* we have encountered many idiomatic expressions and there are some proverbs too. There are some proverbs for which English equivalents are available which convey the same meaning of the Bengali proverb but in a different form. For example, '*Raai kudie bel.*' The English translation for this used in our translation is 'many a penny makes a pound'. *Raai* in Bengali means mustard seeds and *bel* means wood apple. So a literal translation, 'many mustard seeds make a wood -apple', would have made no sense.

Again this particular Bengali proverb *Khaajnar cheye baajna beshi* is often conveyed in English by 'Empty vessels sound much', another proverb. *Khaajna* means revenue and *baajna* means musical instrument. A literal rendition of the Bengali proverb would have been confusing. This particular proverb is similar in meaning but different in form if we compare this with the source proverb.

The Bengali proverb *Thod bori khaada khaada bari thod* is always used to give the sense of a monotonous work. We can see it in the word for word translation given below.

Thod | bori | khaada | khaada | bori | thod.

Inside stem of a banana tree | little ball of pasted pulses | upright | upright | little ball of pasted pulses | inside stem of a banana tree.

Literal translation would have not conveyed the sense and hence another English proverb 'putting old wine into new bottle' is used to give the necessary effect in our translation.

But there is mention of one proverb in the novel '*Chore chore maashtuto bhai*' which we translated as 'All thieves are mutual cousins'. Here the English translation is similar in form and meaning as it was conveyed in the source proverb. But 'birds of a feather flock' together was an option available in this case but we opted for literal translation.

We usually use 'To cast pearls before swine' to give the sense of '*ulubone mukto charaano*', though it is not similar in form to the source proverb. In translating this particular proverb we chose to give a literal translation 'spreading gems in a jungle' as we thought that the target readers would easily get the meaning of the source proverb even if it is a word to word translation.

For this proverb '*Jhi ke mere bouke sekhaano*' we have used a readymade equivalent proverb in English, 'teaching the guilty a lesson by railing the innocent'. Perhaps a literal translation 'teaching wife a lesson by railing the maid' also could have served the purpose.

In the novel there are many idiomatic expressions, literal translation of which is simply impossible. In such case we translated according to the sense of the original. There is a line in the text, '*sapno, na khuror kal*'.

We can look at the word for word translation here:

Sapno | *na* | *khuror* | *kal*

Dream | or | uncle's | machine.

It is impossible to convey the meaning of the original by literal translation. Here an allusion is drawn from Sukumar Roy's poem '*Khuror kal*'. There we find a strange character called Chandidasher Khuro, who invented a mechanical device by which one could easily cover five hours' journey in one and half hour. It was very simple. The machine was attached to his neck and in front of that various food items like sweets, *luchi* etc were hung. The food will cause the person's mouth to water and he will run faster to get that. But in reality whatever distances he covers the gap between the food and his mouth will remain same. He would be so enthusiastic to eat the food that he could cover

miles after miles with no pain. The underlying meaning of the expression '*khuror kal*' thus means the zeal to reach something unattainable. In reality this expression is always used in an ironical way to hint at someone's stupidity to run after something which can never be achieved. So we translated the sentence '*sapno, na khuror kal?*' as 'dream, or a zeal to reach the unattainable?' We have simply omitted this particular expression in our translation because it has no close equivalent in the target language.

Same is the problem with another idiomatic use, '*Raadhakle naachte dao age thaaakte tel purio na*'.

Raadhake | *naachte* | *dao* | *age* | *thaaakte* | *tel* | *purio* | *na*

Raadha (objective case) | to dance | give | before | to stay | oil | burn | not.

Let Raadha dance and don't burn oil in advance.

This literal translation would make no sense to the target readers. Hence we have completely omitted the whole expression and conveyed the sense by the sentence, 'Just wait and watch'.

In the novel there is another expression, '*aadaajal kheyee laagaa*'.

aadaajal | *kheyee* | *laagaa*

Ginger- water | after eating | to stick.

Here we can see that the word for word translation does not convey its inner meaning.

We have used 'firm determination' to express the inner meaning in our translation..

The writer used the word '*Ramgorur*'. This is very culture specific and indicates a person who does not laugh and always looks gloomy. An allusion is drawn from Sukumar Ray's collection of poems *Abol Tabol*. We translated this word as a sour-faced person.

We can take another example from the text, '*Sodoshi baalikaa amaay prochur ghol khaaieche*'.

Sodoshi | *baalikaa* | *amaay* | *prochur* | *ghol* | *khaaieche*

Sixteen | girl | me | much | buttermilk | fed.

The literal translation ‘the sixteen-year-old girl has fed me lots of buttermilk’ would sound simply absurd according to the context.

This has been translated as ‘the sixteen-year-old girl has put me in lot of trouble’. The meaning of ‘*ghol khaoano*’ is always understood as to put someone in trouble.

Deya on one occasion uses the expression ‘*Tui amaay naachie moi kede nibi?*’ The word for word translation of this sentence would be: You | me | dance | ladder | snatch | take. The literal translation of this idiomatic expression would be ‘Will you make me dance and take away the ladder?’ This simply does not make any sense when one reads the translation. We translated this as ‘Would you now put me in an awkward situation?’

It is interesting to look at the word for word translation of this expression:

Amaader to oopor theke baansh khete hoy

Our | but | above | from | bamboo | eat -infinitive | be.

Literal translation of this sentence would be ‘we have to eat bamboos from above’. The Bengali word *baansh* means bamboo. If someone is poked by the sharp end of a bamboo it hurts. Thus *baansh khaoa* is always understood as to face trouble caused by someone. We translated this sentence as ‘But we have to bear the brunt from higher authorities’.

Ritam’s mother scolded by saying *Gharer khey boner mosh taaraao*.

Word for word translation would be: house’s | after | eating | forest’s | buffalo | chase.

We can literally translate this sentence as ‘You eat at home but chase wild buffaloes’.

The target readers will find it difficult to get the meaning if it is literally translated.

We have translated the idiomatic expression *Gharer khey boner mosh taaraano* as ‘you work for others without remuneration’.

There are some idiomatic expressions in *Udo Megh* where we found that the word to word translation perfectly conveys the meaning of the original. Here are some examples where the translations correspond to original expressions in form and content.

Tumi akti khontaay badha goru - You are like a cow tied to a post. A cow is helpless when tied to a post as it has a limited range to go around. By this expression one's helpless state and lack of choice are conveyed.

Khaanti dudhe oituku chonaa na thakle Ambarda to sargo theke khose pora debdoot hoto -But yes had there not been that little pinch of lime in pure milk then Ambarda would have been an angel falling out of heaven. Any target reader will not find it problematic to understand that a pinch of lime can spoil the milk. It is a universal experience. And we very often use the expression 'angel fallen from heaven' to give the impression that the person is very honest and does not make mistakes which every human being tends to do.

Tui aar paltey kaathi dis na is literally translated as 'at least you don't raise the wick of the lamp'. The very expression '*paltey kaathi deoa*' is often used to mean provocation. When one raises the wick of the lamp it blazes more brightly. Thus words also have the power to provoke. Thus the literal translation is enough to convey the underlying meaning to the target readers.

We provided literal translation for the idiomatic expression *Oi meye sunch hoye dhukeche faal hoye berobe* and the translation was 'Today this girl may seem like a needle but tomorrow she will prove to be a knife'. The readers of the receptive language will definitely understand that the degree of fatal outcome by someone's presence is conveyed here. Because our experiences tell us that a knife is more dangerous than a needle.

Here we have discussed some selected problems that we faced in translating idiomatic expressions, though there are plenty such examples scattered in the novel. An efficient translator should not deprive the readers of the receptive language from taking pleasure of the subtlety of idiomatic expressions which might have proved to be very effective in the hands of the author of the original text. But in the process of translation we realized that it is not an easy task because sometimes there is no close equivalent in the target language, at times we have to use some other idiomatic expressions to retain

effectiveness and there are situations when paraphrasing also becomes complicated. Idioms and proverbs are something which enhances the beauty and subtlety of a text and translation has its limitations in capturing those stylistic effects of the source text when we endeavor to transfer it to the receptive language.

Following Nida (1947), we have adopted three translation procedures while translating the idioms and proverbs of *Udo Megh*:

1. Replacement of source language (SL) idioms by corresponding to target language (TL) idioms.
2. Replacement of SL idioms by non-idioms in TL.
3. Replacement of SL idioms by their literal translations in the TL.

5.2 Collocation

A collocation may be defined as a sequence of words or terms that often go together. In any language there are such combinations of words which occur more often than would be expected by chance. Our ears get so used to such set of words that other combinations may sound just unnatural or wrong. For example in English we often use ‘strong tea’. If ‘strong’ is replaced by ‘powerful’ it is sure to draw our attention because we are not used to listen to it. In the same way we never use ‘quick train’ but prefer to say it as ‘fast train’. One will not find it problematic to trace the collocations in his or her mother tongue. The native speaker of any language intuitively makes the correct collocation, based on a lifetime’s experience of hearing and reading the words in set combinations.

But to master collocations in any foreign language is not easy because there are no such rules to help out or learn collocations.

Hence translation of collocations from one language to another may be problematic. The non-native speaker has comparatively limited knowledge about the

foreign language and may frequently create collocations in a way that sounds odd to the native speaker.

In translating *Udo Megh* we also had to think and rethink before transferring the collocations from Bengali to English. Here are some examples cited from the text which we have translated. Within brackets we have listed all those options out of which we have selected the term of our choice for the particular Bengali collocation.

Mukhorochak khabar - spicy news (Not hot news, salty news, mouth watering news or juicy news)

Gobhir monojog - focused attention. (Not engrossed attention, intensive attention, deep attention, concentrated attention or fixated attention)

Ujwal jyotishko - shining star (Not glossy star, lustrous star, glistening star or glazed star). Perhaps bright star could have been used but shining star was preferable to us since it is contextually more appropriate.)

Tapto galaa – heated tone (Not inflamed tone, angry tone, excited tone or violent tone)

nirjib aalo - dull light (Not gray light, fade light, dismal light or lifeless light)

Loghu swar- soft tone (Not delicate tone, indulgent tone, mild tone, light tone or cushy tone)

Bhaangaa bhaangaa mukh –decaying face (Not broken face, indistinct face or inaccurate face)

Taantaan figure – Toned figure (Not tight figure, stretched figure or taut figure)

We have tried to translate the Bengali collocations into English in such a way that they sound more natural and easily understood. It is easy to remember language in chunks or blocks rather than as single words. With the alternatives given in the brackets we have tried to show that our choice for the particular collocation expresses them in a more appropriate and contextually consistent way.

5.3 Expressives

In our day to day conversation we often use various indeclinables that suit our mood. This phenomenon is common to almost all languages.

An Indeclinable is simply a word which remains immutable in all genders, numbers and cases. Expressives in particular context become meaningful. Otherwise used in isolation, they convey no meaning or partial meaning. Expressives convey the idea or feeling of the speaker. One's emotional motif is determined by his or her choosing of expressives in different situations. Even the increase or decrease in the pitches in uttering an expressive can be very meaningful. Higher pitch may denote that someone is very aroused or deeply involved in what he or she is saying. These vocal expressions of emotions include sobs, whimpers, screams, various types of laughter and so on and so forth. It is very interesting to note that human beings, to express their attitude or mood, choose such non-linguistic repertoire in their dialogues instead of saying something explicitly. And while using these expressives one assumes that the other person can easily perceive the meaning which the speaker intends to convey. We are very much aware of the fact from our daily experiences that facial expressions and sounds are more powerful than verbal communications in many situations. Even a gaze to someone's eye can be interpreted in many ways.

Suchitra Bhattacharya who is very particular about capturing every shade of human emotions makes extensive use of expressives in *Udo Megh*. Even the writer uses the English expression ‘shit’ to indicate utter disgust. The expressive ‘*hu*’ and ‘*uhu*’ appear several times in the text which we have translated as ‘yes’ and ‘no’ respectively. In translating the expressives we paid attention to the mood of the speaker and tried to convey the sense in our English translation. Because the Bengali expressions in many cases can not be directly reproduced in the translation as the target reader may express the same thing in another way. For example, “*Ore bbas, ato?*” is translated as “Oh my God, that much?” Here ‘oh my God’ captures the surprising effect as was expressed by ‘*ore bbas*’ in Bengali. The single expressive *jah* is translated as ‘don’t talk rubbish’ according to the context. Another expressive ‘*dhyat*’ is translated as ‘What are you saying!’ Bengalees often use the term *mairi* to make one believe his or her statement. We have translated this term *mairi* as ‘I swear’ in the novel. By this sentence ‘*Dhur, amar kiser bipad*’ Deya tried to convince her family that there was hardly any chance of any danger for her. We translated it as ‘Forget it. Why should I face any problem?’ The target readers might have not understood the expressive *dhur* if it were unchanged in the translation. In our translation the Bengali expressive *iisshh* was replaced by English expressive. We have used ‘Oh God’ to express the shocking effect conveyed by the Bengali expression ‘*ore baps*’. Ah. The sentence chi ‘*chi chi Shrabani*’ was simply translated as Shame on you! Shrabani

The expressive, ‘*uuff*’ as a free indeclinable may indicate the sense of pain, the sense of regret or a sense of wonder. But the context actually decides in which sense it is used. Basing on the context the sense conveyed through ‘*uuff*’ may extend. In the novel there is a sentence, ‘*Uuff, aar pari na*’ which we translated as ‘*Uuff*, I just bear it’. Here the expression *uuff* is used to indicate utter disgust and irritation. We have retained it as any target reader must have uttered the same expression in such a situation. Shewli’s statement ‘*Tut, tomar mathay paka chul kothেকে asbe?*’ was translated as ‘*Tut*. How can you have any gray hair?’ In the novel the expression ‘*hmm*’ is used several times to give the sense of agreeing to someone’s comment or enquiry. We have retained the sound ‘*hmm*’ in English translation.

Expressives help us to get the idea of the emotional motif of a person towards something. But these expressives vary from language to language. While some expressives can convey the same effect of the source language when used in the receptive language, others have to be translated depending on the sense underlying those expressives.

5.4 Compound Words

A compound is a word that is formed by two or more different words acting as a single entity. The two words can be joined by hyphen or can simply be juxtaposed. The inflectional suffix of the first root word may be deleted in the resultant compound word. For example in Bengali we very often use *maamaa baari* instead of *maamaar bari* which means maternal uncle's house. In Bengali the constituents may retain inflectional suffixes on either or both the constituents and the resultant compound may then be inflected further as a whole word. *Chaand mukh* – moon like face is an example of compound word. In any compound there is always a head word and a modifier. In this example *mukh* is the head word while *chaand* is the modifier and both of them are nouns.

A compound word possesses a single semantic structure. The meaning of the compound is first of all derived from the combined lexical meanings of its components, which as a rule, retain their lexical meanings, although their semantic range becomes considerably narrowed. The lexical meanings of the components are closely fused together to create a new semantic unit with a new meaning that is not merely additive but dominates the individual meanings of the components. The semantic centre of the compound is found in the lexical meaning of the second component which is modified and restricted by the lexical meaning of the first. An example from Bengali would be '*haat ghor*'.

There are some compound words that we see in the novel *Udo Megh*. Interestingly many of the examples are from English as Suchitra Bhattacharya often uses many English words in her writing.

For example,

Lunchbox - a box containing lunch

Bed time- time to bed

Newspaper - paper for news

Night shift – working shift at night

Body guard – a guard on duty for protection of anybody

Breakfast - Tiffin that breaks fasting over night at day break

But we have to keep in mind that a mere change in the order of stems with the same lexical meanings brings about a radical change in the lexical meaning of the compound word. For example, a fruit-market means ‘market where fruit is sold’ while market-fruit means ‘fruit designed for selling’.

There are some Bengali compounds in the novel which are very interesting but at the same time poses problem for the translator.

She used the compound word ‘*uddhhaar aashram*’ which can not be translated as a rescue *aashram*, a salvation *aashram* or a recovery *aashram*. Rather it means a home for destitute people.

Another example from the text is *kaajer lok* which means maid servant. Interestingly if the sentence would have been ‘*tini baro kaajer lok*’ or ‘*lokti baro kaajer*’ the meaning would be an efficient person.

Bou bhaat – This compound does not mean rice cooked by the bride or rice which is meant to be fed to the bride but the ceremony of serving boiled rice by the newly married bride

Indrapatan means fall of Indra. But other than the mythological context it means death of an eminent person.

Jantro ganok – In Bengali *jantro* means machine and *ganok* may mean a calculator or astrologer or fortune teller. But the compound word *jantro ganok* means computer.

A mere change in the order of stems with the same lexical meanings brings about a radical change in the lexical meaning of the compound word. For example a fruit-market means 'market where fruit is sold' while market-fruit means 'fruit designed for selling'.

5.5 Compound Verbs

Compound verb is a multi-word compound that acts as a single verb. A compound verb often has a meaning which is different from the original verb. The compound verb (CV) consists of two verbs V1 and V2 which are semantically substantive. In Bengali V1 chooses between conjunctive participial (CP) form 'e' and the infinitive form 'te' and carries most of the semantics of the compound. The second part i.e. V2 is inflected indicates tense, mood or aspect and also gives fine shades of meaning.

For example, *Bani chole gelo* – Bani went away. Here *chala* or go verb has taken the conjunctive participle form 'e'.

Madhu kaaj ta korte thaklo – Madhu continued to do the work. Here *karaa* or the do verb has taken the infinitive 'te'.

The V2, '*gelo*' if used individually might have meant the past tense of 'go' verb. But once attached to the verb '*chala*' meaning walking carries altogether a different meaning and indicates the completion of the action of going.

Again in the second example the V2 '*thaaklo*' can be translated as 'stayed'. But when put together with the infinite form of 'do' verb (*korte*), it means a continuous action of doing a work.

Thus we see that V2 suffers a semantic loss when it is placed after V1, the primary verb. Every language has a closed set of verbs from which V2 is selected. Bangla has 16 V2s. they are:

Aashaa – to come, *Daaraa* – to stand, *raakhaa* – to keep, *aanaa* – to bring, *deoyaa* – to give, *Paraa* –to fall, *paathaa*- to send, *Beraano* – to roam, *neoyaa* – to take, *tolaa* – to lift, *bashaa* – to sit, *othaa* – to rise, *jaoyaa* –to go, *Chaaaa* – to leave, *phelaa* – to drop and *moraa* – to die. (Paul 2003)

The verb *bashaa* can be used individually in a sentence for example, *Rabi chair e Boslo* (Rabi sat on the chair). But as used in a compound verb *Rabi kaajta kore boslo* it means Rabi happened to do the work

To translate the compound verbs from Bengali to English the translator has to be very careful. Because we have already discussed how in a CV the two individual verbs placed together brings about a new meaning. In translating *Udo Megh* we also have come across many such compound verbs. But in most of them V1 has taken the conjunctive participial form '*e*.' Here we are giving some examples,

Jaishtha | ese | gelo

Jaishtha | come-CP | went

The compound '*ese gelo*' implies that the month of *Jaishtha* is not approaching but has already arrived. We translate this sentence as 'Jaishtha has already set in'.

Minto | park | e | jaygaa | peye | gechilo

Minto | park | in | place | get-CP | went

‘*Paao*’ is translated as ‘to get’ but ‘*peye gechilo*’ has the sense of luckily getting something. We translated it as ‘She luckily got a seat at Minto Park’.

Saamle | *nieche*

Manage-CP | taken

The verb ‘*Saamlano*’ can be translated as ‘to control’ but ‘*saamle nieche*’ indicates that there is an effort involved to control. Hence we have translated it as ‘He managed to control himself’.

Bikelta | *mayaabi* | *hoye* | *jacchilo*

Afternoon | magical | be-CP | go-past continuous

As ‘*Hoye jacchilo*’ has the sense of continuity we have translated this as ‘The afternoon was turning magical’.

Raag | *jal* | *hoye* | *jabe*

Anger | water | be-CP | go-future

‘*Hoaa*’ can be understood as ‘to become’ or ‘to take place’ but ‘*hoye jabe*’ means it will turn to something. We translated this as ‘Your anger will turn to water.’

Bhul | *kore* | *akta* | *phande* | *pa* | *die* | *felechilo*

Mistake | do-CP | one | trap | foot | do-CP | threw.

‘*Pa die felaa*’ has the implied meaning that it was accidental. Nobody wishes to fall in a trap. We translated it as ‘She stepped into a trap by mistake.’

Mukhta | *dekhe* | *hasi* | *peye* | *gelo*

Face | see-CP | laugh | get-CP | went.

By ‘*hasi peye gelo*’ it is meant that there was an effort to control laugh but ultimately it could not be controlled. We translated this as ‘Looking at the face he burst into laughter’.

Ritam | *abaar* | *akta* | *nirbodher* | *mato* | *prosno* | *kore* | *boslo*

Word for word translation: Ritam | again | one | fool | like | question | do-CP | sat

‘*Kore boslo*’ has the sense of doing something unexpected. Ritam’s enquiry is not demanded by the situation. We translated this sentence as ‘Ritam again unexpectedly made a question like a fool’.

Compound verbs are constructions which occur quite frequently in Bengali. It is a feature of many Indo-Aryan languages like Hindi and Urdu. A translator needs to look at the context and decide the meaning of the whole unit constituted by V1 and V2.

5.6 Unusual Expressions

Then we would like to draw attention to her use of some Bengali expressions which are very unusual or to say it another way, such words we never use. One such expression is ‘*haraamir haatbaksho*’. It is slang and the simple word *haraami* would have been enough to serve the purpose but the addition of *haatbakso* confuse us. *Haatbakso* can be translated as hand box. *Haraami* can be translated as scoundrel. But the ‘hand box’ simply does not go with the slang usage. We have omitted it and simply used the expression ‘real scoundrel’ to convey the sense.

In another sentence ‘*Futku ke ustam khustam ador korlo*’ the expression *ustam khustam* is something which does not exist in any Bengali dictionary. We translated the sentence as ‘She caressed and cuddled with Futku’.

We are familiar with an idiomatic expression like ‘*ghodaar dim*’ which means ‘bosh and nonsense’. But Suchitra uses expression like ‘*bokaar dim*’. *Bokaa* means fool and *dim* means egg. It is very unusual to put these words side by side. Perhaps she wanted to express that Shewli was very fool. And thus she used *bokaar dim*. We translated this as ‘out and out a fool’ because literally if translated it would make no sense.

5.7 Reduplication

Although a rather marginal phenomenon in Indo-European languages reduplication plays an important role in the organization of morphology. Reduplication, by definition stands for repetition of all or a part of a lexical item (word) carrying a semantic modification. (Anvita Abbi, 1994: 14) For example in Bengali *badi badi* refers to every house. Here the base is the word (or part of the word) that is to be copied and the reduplicated element is called the *reduplicant*. In this section we are just talking about lexical reduplication. Bengali like several Indian languages is rich in reduplicated terms. We find lots of reduplication in adjectives which convey plurality, physical feeling, intensity etc. There are reduplications of verbs too and it is often used to indicate a continuous action.

In translating *Udo Megh* we encountered many reduplicated words with or without derivative suffix. In the text we find at times not only reduplication of a word but also of a sentence. Word to word translation of Bengali reduplicated term is not possible in English. For example, '*Mala khete khete eta bollo*' can not be translated into English as 'Mala eat eat said this'. The natural sentence would be 'Mala said this while eating'. We have paid attention in translating such terms. Below are given some examples cited from the novel and also have shown how we had translated them.

Uthte uthte bollo – She told while getting up.

Bhetore jete jete bollo - While going inside she said.

Misti misti Sukanya – the very sweet Sukanya

Jhudi jhudi mithye bolte hoto - He had to lie so much that...

Kemon nue pora, bhitu bhitu - Somewhat bent and coward type.

Sange sange uthe poreche Ritam o - Ritam too got up immediately

Aamta aamta kore Ritam bollo- With much hesitation Ritam said.

Deya haat chatte chatte bollo - While licking her fingers Deya said.

Pathghaat ekhon o bhije bhije -The roads and lanes are still pretty wet

Amaar jonyoi maa more gelo maashi...amar maa...amaar maa – Maashi, my mother

died only because of me... My mother.... my mother. (repetition of the phrase '*amar ma*')
ma')

Ei to maamaa! Ei to maamaa! - *Mama* is here! Here is he! (Repetition of sentence. But the second time use of *maamaa* is omitted as it does not sound natural in the English translation)

Aami aar paarchi na. Aami aar paarchi na - I can't take it anymore. I really can't. (Sentence repetition. In this case too the word '*aar*' is omitted and we have not used the word 'anymore' in the repetitive part. This is done just for stylistic reason.)

Bujhbe bujhbe - You will surely understand

Anasuadi poipoi kore baron koreche - *Anasuadi* time and again forbade me.

Taar nidra bahngo hoy kaantaay kaantaay raat tintey - He would wake up exactly at three o'clock

Besh seet seet poribesh toiri hoyechilo - He had managed to create quite a cool atmosphere.

Roj chutche, roj chutche o baadi - Everyday, almost everyday he is going to that house!

Naa, naa. Chuto chuto - No, no, excuses, they were all excuses.

Sei bhikhiri bhikhiri khaayate bhaabta aar nei - That beggar like weak look was not there anymore.

Gaadaa gaadaa chithi - lots of letters

Mahuar paaye paaye ghurche - She has been following Mahua at every step.

All these examples show that reduplicated expressions have to be translated in different ways in different sentences. In some cases they show continuity of action, in other cases they convey the sense of degree, accuracy, intensity and so on so forth. A sentence is at time repeated to emphasize a statement. But in such cases we may have to make slight changes for stylistic reasons as we have shown in our examples taken from *Udo Megh*.

5.8 Onomatopoeic Expressions

Onomatopoeic forms are especially imitative intense forms which denote sounds as symbols of natural phenomena or actions and also express the physical and mental feeling of pain, joy, agony, hatred, intensity, excessiveness, sense of diminution, largeness and, so on. For instance, the Bengali word *jhirjhir* denotes drizzling, *jhamjham* means raining cats and dogs etc. These symbolic forms are the repetition of forms with same phonetic feature. Such repetitive forms cannot be separated simply because they cannot form words singly. However, it is important to note that there are some instances where a single component is used as a word but it may have totally a different meaning. For example in Bengali *chatchat* means 'sticky' but the single word '*chat*' means 'quickly'.

In *Udo Megh* there are plenty of such onomatopoeic words which at times are very challenging for any translator. While translating whenever it was felt that the readers of the receptive language may relate to the sound of the source text, it was kept unchanged. For example, *ha ha ha*, *hi hi* are the sounds denoting laughter. Now whoever laughs the sound will be of this kind. So we have retained these sounds in the translation. There is a line in the source text. '*Sange sange beje utheche. Jhyang jhyang...*' We have translated it as 'And with that some musical sound was heard *Jhyang jhyang*'. The loud sound of the calling bell is indicated by *jhyang jhyang* and anyone can relate to this sound.

Another example is '*Baagane akta paakhi daakche. Bichitro awaaj. Pik Pik Piiik*'. We have translated this in this way, 'A bird was singing in the garden. A strange sound. *Pik pik piiik*'. The chirping of the bird is denoted by *pik pik* sound. And we have not omitted this in our translation. Again at one occasion Ritam makes fun of how his mother cried and used sounds like *fyanch fyanch*, *fonch fonch*, *fonsh fonsh*. These are sounds produced when someone blows the nose or tries to inhale with choked nose. The target reader can easily interpret the meaning here.

Ritam's daughter Tuski was being fed cerelec against her wish and the baby simply spat it out. Ritam says, "*Ei maatro Tuski arekta furrurr korlo.*" It was translated as "Tuski just spat again... *fuurrurr*". We have retained the sound *fuurrurr* so that the reader can get the sense that the cerelac was spat like a fountain by Tuski. Ritam was kissing the naval point of Shrabani when she makes the sound *umm umm*. We have kept the sound unchanged to get the effect of the tickling sensation. Deya once refers to the *sarod* player, Rahim Khan to which Soumya comments "*O achha, piring piring*" which was translated, "Oh, I see. *Piring piring*. Here *piring piring* is used to mean the sound of the musical instrument *sarod*. So we also used the same sound in English translation.

There are some onomatopoeic sounds mentioned in the text which can not be translated into English. In such cases the sense was conveyed in the translation. For example '*ke ekhon pagoler bakar bakar sunbe!*' is translated as 'Who would listen to the useless talk of this crazy fellow! Here *bakar bakar* is translated as useless talk. There is another expression '*vyanor vyanor karaa*' which was translated as continuous complaining. The sentence '*Maajhe maajhei akgheye klantikar jharhjar jhamjham*' is translated as 'Often there was monotonous and tiring heavy downpour'. Here *jharjhar* and *jhamjham* were used to mean heavy downpour. Another sentence '*Ritam hi hi kaapte kaapte haantche*' is translated as 'Shivering terribly with cold, Ritam is walking'. If the sound *hi hi* had the implication of laughter we could have retained the expression. But here *hi hi* denotes shivering with cold.

Thus we see how the writer uses many onomatopoeic expressions as an artifice of language by which sounds are made suggestive of their senses. But these terms are quite tricky for translators to translate them in an effective way.

5.9 Echo Word Constructions

Echo word constructions are characteristics of colloquial speech throughout the Indian subcontinent. Echo words result from a partial reduplication of words where an initial consonant or syllable is replaced in the reduplicated word. The base of an echo formation, which in the vast majority of cases appears first, is always a lexical item with its own right. But the reduplicated part follows the sound pattern of the first word and as a separate entity may not necessarily carry any meaning. It is usually used to sound casual, or in a suggestive manner. It is often used to mean *etcetera*. For example in Benagli we often use sentence like akta *chair tair de* which means 'give me a chair or something to sit'.

Throughout the Indian languages echo expressions are predominantly restricted to colloquial speech. It often occurs in informal conversations, which is not controlled by any rule. We have already discussed that Suchitra Bhattacharya efficiently uses the conversational style in her novel *Udo Megh* and we find several echo word expressions in the novel. The examples of echo word constructions from the text are given below along with the translations attempted by us.

Protocol fotocol e jinaa haaram hoye jaabe (My life will be a hell in all kind of protocols)

To give the sense of *protocol fotocol* we have made the word protocol pluralized.

taader o to bhulie bhaalie nie gie blue film tufilm er byabsay namiechilo (They were also misled and forced to plunge into the business of blue films)

The word 'blue film' is pluralized as blue films to get the sense of *blue film tufilm*.

pakhaa takhaa chaara garib maanush gulo thaake ki kore? (In this scorching heat how could these poor people survive without any fan?)

Here we have not attempted to translate the word *takhaa* as we felt that the single word ‘fan’ is enough to convey the sense of *pakhaa takhaa*.

Naamkara patrikaay likhe ektu khyati fyati habe, tarpar aapnara tader dar deben
(First one has to be little famous and renowned by writing in the reputed papers and then you people value them)

Here we have translated the cluster *khyati fyati* as fame and renowned. We have joined the word renowned with fame to get the effect of *khyati fyati* though renowned does not mean *fyati* at all.

cha a taa khaa (Have some tea and snacks)

We felt that *taa* can be considered as anything supplementary that can be taken with tea and we have used the word snacks for that purpose. Though the sole use of *taa* can mean an article in Bengali but it never refers to snacks.

promoter fomoter fotao (Forget about the promoters)

Here the plural form of promoter is used for translation

chaakri baakri to korte naa, chile barer chaayay

(Actually, there was never a need for you to go for any job; you could afford to stay in your husband’s shadow)

We have not translated the word *baakri* here as we felt that the word ‘job’ is enough to convey the meaning of *chaakri baakri*. Perhaps we could translate *chaakri baakri* as job or business in another situation. But on reading the text we got the feeling that Deya was hinting at job and not business.

tor aar oi basti fasti te jaoar darkaar nei (You need not go to those slum areas any more)

We have pluralized the word slum as slums to translate the cluster *basti fasti*.

ami Hitler er sepai tepai noi (I am not any soldier of Hitler)

We have just focused on the word *sepai* and translated it as soldier. *Tepai* as a single word has no meaning. And soldier is enough to convey the meaning here.

khaataa taataa office e bujhie die Deaipayaner sange staff room e aschilo Shrabani
(After handing over the papers in the office and clearing all the doubts Shrabani entered the staff room along with Dwaipayan)

We have used the plural form of ‘paper’ to translate the cluster *khaataa taataa*.

taboo fyaboo nei to? (There is no taboo such thing, right?)

To convey the sense of *taboo fyaboo* we have translated it as ‘taboo such thing’ which to some extent is effective to mean taboo or something of that sort.

ami baktrita taktrita dite pari na (I can’t deliver speech or anything like that)

We have introduced the phrase ‘anything like that’ to get the sense of *taktrita* which individually does not mean anything.

sramik tamik nay, nichak meye hisebei taader byabohaar koraa hochhe. (They are just used as women and not as laborers)

Plural form of labor is used to translate the cluster *sramik tamik*.

Translating these eco word constructions were not very easy as we had to keep in mind that the translations should not confuse the readers and at the same time would achieve the target of convey the meaning effectively.

5.10 Cultural Items

Words or expressions that contain culturally-bound words create certain problems for translators, especially when source language and target language are culturally different. The socio-cultural problems exist in the phrases, clauses, or sentences containing words related to ideas, behavior, products, and ecology. By ideas we mean our beliefs, values, and institutions. Behavior includes customs or habits. Art, music, and artifacts are the cultural products and flora, fauna, plains, winds, and weather constitute ecology.

Each speech community has its own culture. In the fourth chapter we have elaborately discussed various aspects of culture. The geographical setting of a nation or a speech community is integral to its culture. The culture of typical Kashmiri family differs to a great extent from that of a typical Tamil family. When the distance is larger, larger is the cultural difference. In a country like India where there are people from different languages, religions and races the scenario of cultural difference is very prominent. Again, in the border areas there is possibility of cultural overlapping. In India from time immemorial, there is co-existence of many cultures. In a general sense, the dress code of a man from Bengal may be *dhoti* but he may not be unaware of the dress code of a man from Tamil Nadu, which is *lungi*. Due to this long co-existence of different speech communities, there is exchange of some food habits, clothing or custom. Thus, we talk about pan Indian phenomena.

While translating a regional text into English there will obviously be problems in translating the different cultural items. If the target readers are fellow Indians the problem of unintelligibility or incomprehensibility of particular words, integral to a particular speech community, is less than that of the readers from the West. In translating culturally-bound expressions a translator may apply one or some of the procedures: Literal translation, transference, naturalization, cultural equivalent, functional equivalent,

description equivalent, classifier, componential analysis, deletion, couplets, note, addition, glosses, reduction, and synonymy. In literal translation, a translator does unit-to-unit translation. The translation unit may range from word to larger units such as phrase or clause.

In translating Suchitra Bhattacharya's *Udo Megh* we have encountered quite a lot of cultural terms. These include names of months, outfits and mostly food items. We started with the assumption that the non-Bengali Indians are somewhat familiar with the Bengali culture due to their proximity to it and their common nationality. But non-Indians are comparatively less familiar or completely unfamiliar with the source culture.

We have retained most of them as original in our translation and made them Italicized. There is mention of many food items like *aloor dam* (for North Indians *Dum Alu*), *rasagolla*, *sandesh*, *laddu* which are very familiar names all over India. In spite of their integral association with Bengali culture they have become popular among Indians with the passage of time. So we felt no need to change those words or search for equivalents. *Sarees*, *salwar kameez* or *lungi* are very common words to all of us and are deeply associated with Indian culture. However, there is mention of months in the Bengali calendar or some typical dishes of Bengali culinary which may not be familiar to others. But we have retained the original terms in our English translation with explanations of them in the glossary.

In translation theory, the two terms 'domestication' and 'defamiliarization' or 'foreignization' have drawn the attention of translation theorists for long. Venuti discussed those two techniques in his book 'The Translator Invisibility', 1995. Domestication takes place when one tries to erase the cultural specificities of the source text to make it fit easily fit into the culture of the receptive language. For Venuti, this method makes the translator 'invisible' on the one hand and implies 'an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target-language cultural values' (ibid: 20). Venuti recommends applying Foreignization as a solution for cultural clashes in terms of translation. When the translator strives against the reductive homogenization involved in the process and stubbornly retains the markers of the source text, reminding the reader

constantly of its source culture, we call it defamiliarization or foreignization. If foreignization is applied to a translation, the TL readers will feel that the translator is 'visible' and they will tell 'they are reading a translation' (Munday, 2001:147).

In translating the cultural items in *Udo Megh*, between domestication and defamiliarization we chose the latter. Because if we had opted for 'mom' to express *maa*, or tunic for *kurta*, sweet for *sandesh*, the taste of the original text must have disappeared. So we kept them intact. However, we have illustrated all these terms in the glossary given at the end of the translation. But there is mention of some dishes which is not a single word but a phrase. For example *maacher muro die daal*. In translating this word we resorted to literal translation and made it *dal* prepared with fish-head. *Puishaaker chachhari* is translated as curry of *puishaak* while *puishaak* is glossed. *Laau ghanto* is translated as bottle gourd curry. Below are given the list of explanations of the Bengali cultural items in *Udo Megh*.

Agrahayan - the eighth month of the Bengali calendar

Alur chop - Boiled potatoes cooked with ginger and onions, made into roundels, dipped in gram flour batter and deep fried.

Alur dam - This is a very delicious spicy main dish of Bengalees. It is popular throughout North India. It is usually cooked under pressure so the potatoes get soaked in the gravy.

Anchal - It refers to the flapping free end of the saree which is usually draped over the shoulder. *Anchal* is usually more densely ornamented than the field in matching or contrasting color.

Baluchari saree -. These traditional *sarees* are the creation of the East Indian artisans who give much effort to create this. The name, Baluchari is the derivative of the name of a small village called Baluchara, located in Murshidabad. Baluchari sarees possess a silk

base with silk brocaded designs. These *sarees* are defined by the pictorial details that are created with great artistry in the *sarees*.

Beguni - Beguni is a Bengal snack made of eggplant or brinjal slices deep fried in batter.

Bidi - an inexpensive cigarette locally produced usually from cut tobacco rolled in leaf.

Bindi- A *bindi* (from Sanskrit *bindu*, meaning "a drop, small particle, dot") is a forehead decoration worn in South Asia.

Biryani –This is a delicious dish made with scented rice, spices, meat, fish, eggs or vegetables. The name is derived from the Persian word *berya(n)* which means "fried" or "roasted". *Biryani* was brought to the Indian subcontinent by Muslim travelers and merchants.

Chhadnataala : a canopied is a place bounded by banana plants and is decorated with *alpana* or designs under where Bengali marriage rituals are performed.

In the novel there is mention of *napiter kheur* in connection with *chhadnataala* which needs to be clarified. In the *Chadnataala* the barber plays an important role. He hurls abusives to drive away evil spirits from the place of the marriage. This is known as *gaurabachan*.

Champak - a kind of flower and its tree belongs to the magnolia family.

Chutney- *Chutney* is a loan word incorporated into English from Hindi. This is a term for a class of spicy preparations used as an accompaniment for a main dish. Chutneys usually contain an idiosyncratic but complementary spice and vegetable mix. Bengali chutneys are usually sweet.

Daal – This is a preparation of pulses (dried beans, lentils etc.) which have been stripped of their outer hulls and split. It can be taken both with rice and roti.

Devdasi - *Devadasi* was originally described a Hindu religious practice in which girls were "married" and dedicated to a deity (*deva* or *devi*). In addition to taking care of the temple and performing rituals, they learned and practiced dance and other classical Indian arts traditions and allegedly enjoyed a high social status. As the time passed, system changed and they were used for sex obligation for high caste and class people.

Dupatta - This is a multi-purpose scarf that is essential to many South Asian women's suits. The alternative names of *dupatta* include *orni*, *chunri*, *chunni* and *orna*. *Dupatta* has long been a symbol of modesty in South Asian outfits. It is used a chest covering cloth which can be included in *salwar kameez*, *kurta* or *ghaagra choli*.

Fish-chop - a popular Bengali snack where fish along with potato and other spices made into balls and deep fried in oil.

Hilsa- Ilish or hilsa is the national fish of Bangladesh, and is very popular in Bengali and Oriya speaking communities. It lives in the sea for most of its life, but migrates up to 1,200 km inland through rivers in the Indian sub-continent for spawning. It is said that people can cook hilsa in more than 50 ways.

Kachagolla – It is a popular Bengali sweet made from milk.

Kalbaishakhi - storm clouds prevailing in the afternoon of May and June

Keertana - To sing songs and about Radha and Lord Krishna It is a major practice of the Vaishnavites.

Kurta - It is a loose shirt falling either just above or somewhere below the knees of the wearer, and is worn by both men and women. This is popular in many parts of South Asia

Laddu - It is made out of flour and with variety of other ingredients formed into balls. The *laddu* can be made from gram flour, semolina, wheat flakes, and many other flours.

Luchi - Thin cake of flour fried in boiling ghee.

Lungi- The *lungi*, is a garment worn around the waist which is very popular in India and many parts of South Asia. *Lungis* are sewn into a tube shape like a skirt. It is particularly popular in regions where the heat and humidity create an unpleasant climate for trousers.

Machher kaaliaa – This is a favorite Bengali fish preparation with grated onion and ginger and other spices

Pakoda - A type of fritter dipped in a spicy chickpea batter; can be made with vegetables, cheese, chicken or seafood.

Papad - Papad is thin, spicy, crisp wafer discs, about 4 to 8 inches in diameter, made from *daal*, flour lentils, vegetables, potatoes, shrimp, and rice. The discs are deep-fried or dry roasted on an open flame and served as a crispy savory appetizer.

Parota - A kind of thin bread fried in oil or clarified butter

Payesh - a kind of sweet dish prepared by boiling rice in milk with sugar and other ingredients

Payjama - The word which originally comes from the word *pāë jāmah*, literally meaning ‘leg garment’. These are loose-fitting trousers worn in the Far East by men and women. This is worn in many cuts and shapes, much variation being seen in respect of girth, length, tightness, material, etc.

Puja – It indicates Durga Puja, an important festival of Bengalees celebrated in the month of *Ashwin*, the sixth month of the Bengali calendar that is in the month of September or October.

Punjabi- long white tunic-like shirts with loose sleeves worn over close-fitting or baggy white pants, which are usually called *payjama*.

Rasagolla- This popular Bengali sweet is made from balls of *chhana* (an Indian cottage cheese) and semolina dough, cooked in sugar syrup.

Rohu – It is a fish of the carp family *Cyprinidae*, found commonly in rivers and freshwater lakes in and around South Asia and South-East Asia. It is treated as a delicacy in many Indian states like Bengal, Orissa, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh.

Roti - Wheat-based flat bread. It is an integral part of Indian cuisine.

Salwar kameez – This is the traditional dress worn by both women and men in South and Central part of Asia. *Salwar* or *shalwar* are loose pajama-like trousers. The legs are wide at the top, and narrow at the ankle. The *kameez* is a long shirt or tunic.

Sandesh – It is a very popular sweet in Bengal which is prepared with milk and sugar. Some recipes of *Sandesh* call for the use of *chhana* (curdled milk) or *paneer* instead of milk.

Saree – This is a female garment in the Indian Subcontinent. A *saree* is a strip of unstitched cloth, ranging from four to nine meters in length that is draped over the body in various styles. The most common style is for the sari to be wrapped around the waist, with one end then draped over the shoulder baring the midriff.

Sarod - The *sarod* is a stringed musical instrument, used mainly in Indian classical music.

Shalik - a kind of small yellow-beaked singing black bird of Bengal

Yama -the god of death

5.11 Honorifics

Unlike English, Bangla has honorific pronouns. They occur in third person singular and second person pronouns in both the singular and plural. In the case of third person singular we use '*tini*' to show respect and '*se*' in informal situation irrespective of masculine or feminine. There are two demonstrative pronouns *e* this and *o* which can also mean he or she. They have also their honorific counterparts '*ini*' and '*uni*'. In the case of second person singular we use '*apni*' and for plural '*apnara*'. These forms are used to show respect. The informal usages of second person singular are '*tui*' and '*tumi*' and the plural are '*tora*' and '*tomra*' respectively. '*Apni*' is used in the honorific sense, '*tumi*' in the ordinary sense, and '*tui*' in inferior or intimate relationship. But in English in second person we use 'you' whether it is with respect or devoid of respect. It happens because in English there is no distinction between the honorific and non-honorific use of second person singular number. Moreover, confusion may arise in the mind of the target readers as it does not indicate which one of them is indicating singular or whether both of them are used in the sense of plural. Problem arises in English as there is no distinction between second person singular and plural in possessive case. In Bangla, the second person singular (possessive case) is '*tomar*' and in plural '*tomader*'. If we literally translate a sentence '*Tomader bari*' into English as '*your house*' it will not indicate whether the reference here is made to a single person or whether more than one person is involved here.

The complex structure of Bengali society in terms of kinship words and honorifics have always created problem for the translator. In *Udo Megh* all the office colleagues of Deya use *tui* (nominative case), *tor* (possessive case) or '*toke*' (objective case) while

conversing with each other. A friendly relationship works behind such usage.

Same is the case when Deya and Mahua, the wife of Deya's brother talk to each other. The use of *tui* and *tora* occurs frequently because both of them are of same age and the intimacy factor works here.

When Deya's boss talks to her he uses '*tumi*' which again denotes his higher status and Deya's lower designation compared with him.

Earlier it was a norm to use '*apni*', '*tini*' or '*uni*' when talking about one's husband to show respect. Even a wife could never utter her husband's name. But *Udo Megh* represents a modern urban society and the change in the patterns of addressing show certain changes in society. For example, when talking to Deya her mother always refers to her husband, Pranabesh not by his name but as '*tor baba*' which means your father. But Deya, a modern woman calls her husband by his name Soumya. Such addressing by Deya can mean a very informal friendly relationship as well as her belief in man-woman equality.

5.12 Kinship Terms

Kinship has been a central concern for the translators. In every human society kinship is a major source of the values that guide people in the other spheres of life. Kinship terms are words that are used to designate a family member who is connected to other family members by blood, marriage, adoption, or fostering (Biology-Online.org, 2007, Farlex, 2007, Schwimmer, 1998).

It is a well-known fact that one-to-one correspondence between the kinship terms of any two languages is not easy to find out. Some of the kinship terms of a language may not have equivalents in another language or a single word of one language may have many equivalents in another language. Moreover, every language has a set of kinship terms that are ambiguous and this set differs from language to language.

The English word grandfather can be used to mean the father of one's father and also to mean the father of one's mother. In Bengali we use the term *thakhurda* or *thakurdada* in the first case and *dadu* for the latter.

In the same way grandmother can mean the mother of one's father or the mother of one's mother. But in Bengali we use *thakurma* or *thakuma* for the first case and *didima* or *dida* for the latter.

Uncle can be used for father's elder brother or younger brother, mother's brother, father's sister's husband, mother's sister's husband. But Bengali language has different terms like *jyathaamoshai* or *jethu*, *kakaababu* or *kaka* or *kaaku*, *mama* or *mamu*, *pishemoshai* or *pisho*, *meshomoshai* or *mesho* respectively to indicate all these English expression.

Aunt can denote father's sister, mother's sister, the wife of father's elder brother, the wife of father's younger brother, wife of mother's elder/younger brother. *Pishi* or *pishimaa*, *maashi* or *maashima*, *jyathi* or *jyathima*, *maami* or *maamima* are the respective Bengali words for the above mentioned terms.

Difference of age or relative 'bigness' or 'smallness' among kinsmen are indicated in terms of reference by the use of adjectives like '*baro*' (big) and '*choto*' (small). Where more than one distinction of age needs to be indicated within a set of siblings of the same sex, other adjectives like *mejo* (middle born) and '*sejo*' (third born) are used. For example a man may describe his eldest brother as *baro* bhai, his second elder brother as *mejo* bhai and himself as *sejo* bhai and his youngest brother as *choto* bhai. However he will address any and all of his elder brothers as *daadaa* and distinguish among them by compounding, such as, *barda*, *mejda*. (Inden and Nicholas, 2005:73). The adjectival use of *baro*, *mejo*, *sejo* or *choto* can be compounded with any terms of addressing. Hence we can talk about, *bardi* (the eldest sister), *mejdi* (the second elder sister), *sejomaashi* (the third sister of one's mother), *baro pishi* (the eldest sister of one's father), *sejo jyathima* (the wife of the third brother of one's father), *mejo maamima* (the wife of the second brother of one's mother), *baro maashi* (the eldest sister of one's mother) and so on and so forth.

Nephew is the single English term which is used for sister's son (*bonpo* or *bhaagne*), brother's son (*bhaipo*), wife's brother's son (*shyaloker chele*), wife's sister's son (*shyalikaar chele*), husband's elder brother's son (*bhaasurpo*), husband's younger brother's son (*deorpo*). In Bengali, the brother of one's wife is called *shyalak* and the sister is called *shyalika*.

Niece is the term to mean sister's daughter (*bonjhi* or *bhaagni*), brother's daughter (*bhaaijhi*), wife's brother's daughter (*Shyaloker meye*), wife's sister's daughter (*shyalikar meye*), husband's elder brother's daughter (*Bhasurjhi*), husband's younger brother's daughter (*deorjhi*).

Another interesting thing to notice here is that if a woman refers to the son of her own brother she will use (*bhaipo*) but a man in such a situation will use the term (*bhaagne*). In the same way the daughter of a woman's brother will be called (*bonjhi*) and a man will use the term (*bhaagni*). Surprisingly when a woman gets married she will address the son of her husband's brother as *bhaagne* and if a girl, *bhaagni*, as her husband does but the husband will never call the son of his wife's brother as *bonpo* as his wife does. Rather he will simply call him as (*shyaloker chele*). If it is a girl he will use the term *shyaloker meye*. If it is the son of the sister of one's wife the man will say *Shyalikaar chele* but not *bonpo* and if a girl, *shyalikaar meye* and not *bonjhi*.

Cousin is the most classificatory term; the children of aunts or uncles. One can further distinguish cousins by degrees of collaterality and by generation. Two persons of the same generation who share a grandparent count as "first cousins" (one degree of collaterality); if they share a great-grandparent they count as "second cousins" (two degrees of collaterality) and so on. In Bengali if we are referring to the son or daughter of mother's sister we use terms like *maashtuto bhai* or *maastuto bon*. If it is son or daughter of one's father's sister we use terms like *pishtuto bhai* or *pishtuto bon*. The son or daughter of maternal uncle is called *maamaato bhai* or *maamaato bon*. The son or daughter of the elder brother of one's father is called *jethtuto bhai* or *jethtuto bon*. And the son or daughter of the younger brother of one's father is called *khurtuto bhai* or *khurtuto bon*.

Bhaaj or *boudi* (used while addressing) is the term used for the wife of one's elder brother. However the wife of one's younger brother is called by her name.

Sister-in-law refers to three essentially different relationships in Bengali, either the wife of one's sibling, or the sister of one's spouse, or, in some uses, the wife of one's spouse's sibling. Brother-in-law expresses a similar ambiguity.

There are many such kinship terms in Bengali. In *Udo Megh* Suchitra Bhattacharya has made use of many kinship terms and most of them we have discussed above. Now one decision we had to take while translating the novel related to how people address each other within the family. We made up my mind to retain the Bengali terms of addressing each other in our English translation because the English terms are quite inadequate for conveying the range of relationship of Bengali culture. So terms like *maa*(mother), *baba* (father), *dada* (elder brother), *boudi*, *thakuma*, *sejomaashi*, *baro pishi* were kept as the same in the English translation. And these terms are elaborated in the glossary at the end of the translation.

In section 10 there is a situation where Ritam's wife Shrabani and his elder sister Runu indulge in a casual conversation. The particular line, "*Nanad bhaaje adhikaarbodh aar loukikataar pyanchpayjaar cholche*" is quite problematic to translate into English. Sister-in-law is the English equivalent for the Bengali term *nanad* and *bhaaj* can be elaborated as the wife of one's elder brother. Here runu, the *nanad*, is sister-in-law of Shrabani and Shrabani, the *bhaaj* is too the sister-in-law of Runu. We thought that if we translate the terms and use them in this particular sentence it does not sound good and the flow of the novel somewhere gets disturbed. So we translated it as "Both the women were busy in arguing regarding rights and courtesy". In the novel the context is already known to the readers. So I thought that if I translate the sentence in this way it would sound better. The phrase 'Both the women' carries the sense of involvement of Shrabani and Runu.

Deya once refers to the sister of Soumya's uncle, who can be called Soumya's cousin. The word '*khurtoto nanad*' is used to refer to that girl by Deya. We translated this as 'cousin sister-in-law' instead of saying the daughter of the uncle of Soumya.

Here we have discussed several problems of translation encountered in translating *Udo Megh* and how we have dealt with them. In spite of these problems translation practice has been a fascinating area of study for various disciplines and presents stimulating possibilities for creative writers. We must have to keep in mind translation is a critical human activity that bridges different languages, cultures and nations.

Observations and Conclusions: A Summary

In our thesis “Translating gender politics: A practical translation and an analysis of Suchitra Bhattacharya’s *Udo Megh*” we have translated the Bengali novel into English and titled it as *The Stray Cloud* and discussed various linguistic issues in it as well as the gender problems which is at the core of the whole novel.

With a novel like *Udo Megh* it is interesting to talk about translation not just in terms of language, but also in terms of the translation between reality and fiction. The brutality faced by Shewli is any real life incident around us and Deya, extending her help to the hapless girl can be identified with any noble spirit amongst us. Even after finishing the novel we are glued to the gruesome reality of our society as the writer blatantly points at it and leaves a lingering impact on us. Such effect is inevitable when art draws from life. It is Suchitra Bhattacharya who could easily negotiate the tricky passage from reality to fiction without diluting the seriousness of the novel. The language as used by the characters is used as emphasis in an assertion of truth, a truth that reveals the unequal status of women. And the characters become the mouthpiece of revealing the face of the truth.

There were problems at different levels in terms of kinship terms, cultural items, honorifics, pun, onomatopoeic sounds, some unusual expressions and multi word expressions. In discussing the broad category of multiword expressions we have looked at the problems of translating echo word construction, reduplicated terms, collocations, idiomatic expressions, compound words, expressive etc. And in every case we have substantiated our points by citing examples from the text. Bengali and English have a wide cultural gap which in case of translation poses lot of problems for any translator.

The task of translation becomes tougher when one deals with Suchitra Bhattacharya as her use of language and experiment in style makes her writing very challenging to deal with. Finding equivalents often leads a translator to nowhere. And when so many Indian terms like *guru*, *chutney* or *masala* are assimilated in English vocabulary the translator at times find it very tricky to look for any English equivalent. It was tough for us to transfer always the humorous element, the witty remarks, and the metaphorical usage of *Udo Megh* into English. English fails to capture those cultural idiosyncrasies. We had to gloss many words because there were so many culturally loaded terms which needed explanation. We preferred to retain many of the original Bengali words in our English translation so that the target readers do not miss the flavor of the original.

We have also discussed the writing style of Suchitra Bhattacharya. Her world is not a world of fantasy. Her writing merges with the real word. We have talked about her minute observation of things which renders fine detailing to her style. And this detailing helps film directors to transform her novels into cinemas. Her frequent use of English words in *Udo Megh* captures an urban setting and also focuses on the fact that the colonizers' language is no more restricted to academics and has become a part and parcel of modern way of living. Her use of Hindi words also reveals the impact of the national language on our mother tongue. The borrowing of words may not be as much as English but it has managed a place of its own though slowly. In metropolitan cities such inclination of bringing in Hindi words is much compared to the small states as industrialization and urbanization opens the gate of many linguistic communities coming together.

Suchitra Bhattacharya is a writer who loves to experiment with style and form. She does a marvelous job in bringing out a perfect blend of humor and serious philosophical thoughts. She brings in lots of intertextual references in *Udo Megh* from Sukumar Ray's poems to provide humorous effect to the novel. The book is quite a page turner. One will be hooked till the end with its easy flow.

We have discussed the cognitive approach to metaphors and its relevance to translation which we have illustrated with examples from novel *Udo Megh*. We intended to show how translation serves as a means to generate and create new metaphorical expressions in the target language. Language is the indicator of the conceptual system and an evidence for what the system is like. Establishing the conceptualization on which a particular metaphorical expression is based is relevant for translation. Translatability is no longer the question of just an individual metaphorical expression as identified in the source text, but is linked to the conceptual system in the source and target culture. Certain universal experiences share underlying conceptual structure despite the absence of relevant linguistic expressions in every culture. Basing on such shared conceptual mapping it is possible to generate new metaphors in the target language. To discuss the problems of translating metaphors into English in the light of cognitive linguistics we have focused mainly on the arguments proposed by Lakoff and Johnson. Our discussions make the fact very clear that metaphorical thought is very relevant to an understanding of culture and society. In discussing the universality and diversity of metaphorical thought, cognitive approach gives us a better understanding.

We have focused on the social issues discussed in *Udo Megh* and from the language used in the novel we have tried to show how in the existing social system language is gendered and often used to silence and marginalize women. In the patriarchal set up man monopolizes language. Language becomes the mirror of gender discrimination. Hers should be the language of the shy and the submissive. And he is born with the right of using language without any restriction as such and where there is hardly any space of valorizing or praising women. Any attempt to cross this borderline is unexpected from a woman and such intrusion labels her as unruly and a man has every right to tame her. We have picked up many expressions like ‘*nasto*’, ‘*meyechele*’, ‘*sati sabitri*’ etc. from the text to substantiate our arguments.

The writer has incorporated many such words through her characters’ conversations to draw attention to the fact that the image of a woman is built up by such terms. From the beginning of a girl child’s birth the process of her becoming a woman is

initiated and language plays an important role in that. She grows up with the lesson to use a particular language befitting the male society and at the same time it is the language of the patriarchal society which projects her state of being positively or negatively.

The issue of Shewli is at the centre of the whole story and her forced prostitution has many things to talk about the so called civilized society. The last two sections of the novel are highly important where we find multiple voices in favor or against prostitution. We have brought forth those important issues to get a clear picture of the gender biased society.

In the novel we can place Deya and Shewli at two extreme ends — Shewli, a poor, uneducated girl from slums and Deya, a modern educated working woman. But a parallel can easily be drawn irrespective of their status and class and that is the fierce and painful gender struggle within the traditional society. Deya's knowledge and empowerment might have made her more rational, aware or vocal yet she is a victim of the patriarchal system. The culmination of their love affair to marriage gave her great satisfaction but could she rebel when she had to run the family according to Soumya's likings or dislikings? Why could not she stop Soumya whenever he needed to satiate his physical needs even when she did not like it? The reason might be the age old tradition of our society which teaches a girl from the beginning of her life that she should obey some rules. She is the home maker and it is her responsibility to do whatever she can do to sustain her marriage. She must endure pain silently for the sake of their marriage keep going. Deya loved Soumya and though his stubbornness and unrelenting attitude hurt her sometime she never thought of leaving him till Shewli came in their life and revealed the rottenness of their marriage which apparently looked simply perfect.

On the other hand stands Shewli, who is a victim of the brutal face of male oppression. The incident of rape not only violates her body and but also wound her soul. *Udo Megh* points fingers to those intellectuals who can talk like reformers while munching snacks or with a peg of wine but they close all doors for a girl like Shewli when it comes to help the distressed girl. The novel unmasks the faces of those hypocrites

who pretend to show sympathy but hate a victim of rape and have deep abhorrence for prostitution.

Shewli's body is only a symbol of sexuality. Her chastity once lost makes her doubly marginalized in the male dominated society. Only she is blamed for the plunder. The actual culprit of it escapes the responsibility of answering.

When Deya takes the bold step to shelter Shewli in her house instead of appreciation she at every step is tried to be convinced that one should not make her hands dirty by voluntarily touching the filth. And to bring the filth of outside road to home is more foolish. And unfortunately women also become a part of the system. Hence in the society there are many like Deya's mother, Ritam's mother or Laxmi who too fail to sympathize with Shewli like their male counterparts. And we see how Deya's noble gesture proved to be instrumental in ruining the couple's relationship.

The love of Soumya disappeared the moment he saw Deya's strong determination to keep the girl in their house. Everything was fine till Deya fulfilled all the duties of woman and took care of his every need before her own and lived according to his wish. But how could he digest his failure in curbing Deya's determination? He measured Deya's love for Soumya by her utter submissiveness to whatever he demanded. The relationship would have worked if Deya listened to him like a good wife and drove Shewli out from her house. By being inhuman she could have lived up to Soumya's expectations. But it is at this point that Deya was steady. She could not compromise her inner self, her values to save her relationship. Soumya took Deya as his possession and to stay with him she had to do everything according to his terms and conditions. Deya is seen compromising all through and she even had to suppress her desire of being a mother as Soumya had deadlines to meet. Soumya has been ungenerous in denying her values, her beliefs. He tickled himself with the notion that his wife was also a typical obedient wife. He thought that Deya's step of bringing Shewli to their house was a sudden flash of doing something good which would vanish in no time. But Soumya gets agitated when he finds Deya so strong to stick to her noble cause. How could Deya assert herself so positively? His ego was hurt. And Deya was not interested to stay with him any longer.

She did not want to live with a person who had no respect for her values and ideologies. Such a self obsessed person can never be a soul mate.

The novel ends in such a fashion that it leaves many questions in the readers mind like what happened to Shewli after she left Deya's home or could Deya find her ever or did Deya break her marriage? But readers always crave for a narrative closure. But she does not do so. Perhaps she wanted her readers think deeply about the whole thing even after they are done with the novel. The problems dealt in the novel are not that type that one can simply finish the novel and can go for a good sleep. Her novel must have the after effect; it should prick the conscience of the readers. The novel has the potential to make the readers think what they can do to change this crudity. Suchitra Bhattacharya did not intend her readers to revolt against men, but to revolt against inhumanity. She wants an inversion in the present order of things.

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APPENDIX