

A NATIONAL BOOK TRUST BOOK

# SIX ACRES AND A HALF

ORIYA NOVEL

CHHAMANA ATHA GUNTHA

by

*FAKIR MOHAN SENAPATI*

*Original Translated into English*

by

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## INTRODUCTION

By

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*Chhamana Atha Guntha* (broadly it means Six Acres and a Half) is an Oriya novel which has stood the test of time. Over 65 years have passed since this book first appeared. It took the reading public by storm, as it were. Since then, it has held its field.

Fakirmohan Senapati (1843-1918), the grand old poet of Orissa, a man of varied experience in life and specially gifted with a sense of humour and satire, was also a pioneer of novel-writing in Oriya. The language of the book is superb, in the sense that it appeals to the common man as well as to the sophisticated reader. The depiction of characters, specially of the two 'villains', Mangaraj and Champa, will never fade from memory.

The plot of the story (set in the 1830s) is as follows :

Ramachandra Mangaraj of village Govindpur used to lend paddy and money to the inhabitants of the village. He gradually acquired more and more land, became a Zamindar and amassed immense property by quite unfair means.

Sheikh Dildar Mian was a big Zamindar of Midnapore. He owned some land in Orissa and Ramchandra Mangaraj was entrusted with the work of collecting revenue from this zamindari. Mangaraj succeeded in getting a loan-bond of thirty thousand rupees signed by the Mian when the

latter was drunk, then sued him for recovery of the debt and finally secured possession of the zamindari.

A weaver named Bhagia also lived with his wife Saria in village Govindpur. This couple owned a very fertile piece of land covering six acres and a half. They were simple, innocent and God-fearing folk who craved a child intensely and prayed for it. Bhagia approached Mangaraj for a loan of money which would enable him to build a temple to propitiate the village goddess. He executed a loan-bond, mortgaging to Mangaraj his six and a half acres of land. Mangaraj, instead of paying the weaver-couple any money, took possession of their land on the strength of the award of a decree by the court. Their house was put to auction and demolished. Their pet cow Neta was taken away by force. The weaver was in utter despair and turned mad. His wife starved herself to death at Mangaraj's residence.

The death of Saria, the weaver-woman, was reported by the village Chowkidar to the Police. The Police Daroga investigated the case and charged Mangaraj with homicide. Mangaraj was tried in the court of an English Judge and held not guilty of murder. But he was found guilty of theft for having stolen the weaver-couple's cow and was put into prison. His rapid deterioration and doom, as well as his wife's death, make an agonising tale.

Mangaraj had a vicious maid-servant named Champa. When Mangaraj was arrested, she secured the key of his treasure chest, took away all his valuables and made her way to Cuttack, accompanied by Govinda, a barber servant of Mangaraj. Govinda killed Champa and became master of all the riches. To make himself secure, he was crossing the river in a boat when he panicked and drowned.

This is obviously a picaresque plot (with a succession of incidents depicting the rake's progress) as all the earlier novels used to be. The modern reader would do well not to expect the neat inter-woven plots of the early 20th century

before these also succumbed to the "stream of consciousness," etc.

The style is didactic and epigrammatic as was the fashion of the times; homilies and proverbs were current coin.

The author has shown how man is destined to suffer inevitably the consequences of his evil deeds. He has given an analysis of human nature when man is afflicted with sins and sorrows and when he is in affluence.

Sarcastic satire on the shortcomings of contemporary society and some trenchant criticism of British exploitation are features of the novel which may seem dated now; but when Fakir Mohan Senapati wrote in 1898, it was pure dynamite. In particular he brought out the tragic details of a legal and administrative system under which many poor people lost their all, fleeced by greedy landlords, clever lawyers and unscrupulous policemen, etc.

To reach English-knowing readers, the novel has been translated by two of the author's relatives who knew the inner and outer world of the author and were thus highly qualified for this work.

## TRANSLATORS' NOTE

*Chhamana Atha Guntha* or *Six Acres and a Half*\* is a social novel, unique in its genre in Oriya literature. It was written in 1898 and first published in 1902. An English edition of this great novel should reach a wider circle of readers among people not acquainted with the Oriya language.

We have made the English translation as true to the original as practicable. We hope this will facilitate, among the reading public of this vast sub-continent of India, a closer understanding of life in Orissa in the last century; in so doing it may promote that unified view of Indian life which is unmistakable in spite of the rich diversity of our country.

Terms and expressions which are local or bear the stamp of local atmosphere have been given at the end of the book in the translation work in its initial stages, for which we are they occur.

Our esteemed friend, Shri Gokulananda Naik, M.A., retired Headmaster of Bhadrak High School, has helped us in the translation work in its initial stages, for which we are grateful to him.

Senapati Bhavan,  
Meria Bazar,  
Cuttack.

B.M.S.  
A.M.S.

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\*Strictly, Six acres and thirty-two decimals.

## CHAPTER I

### RAMCHANDRA MANGARAJ

Ramchandra Mangaraj was a mofussil\* Zamindar. He carried on an extensive business in lending paddy and money. Rumour goes that within a radius of eight miles no one else had so much money-lending business. Mangaraj was a pious man who observed all the 24 *Ekadashi* fasts over the year. Had there been 40 a year, he would not have missed a single one either. On the day of the *Ekadashi* fast, he partook only of the leaves of the sacred *Tulasi* with water.

Mangaraj's servant, Jaga the barber, was heard to say, however, that on the eve of each day of fast, a seer of milk, a small quantity of puffed-corn, some molasses and a few plantains were kept in his master's bed-room for his breakfast the next morning. And Jaga, when he cleaned up the room early next morning, found the vessels empty. People heard the story, exchanged meaningful glances and smiled. One of them remarked, "Even the gods would be none the wiser if one dives into water and takes a drink."

What exactly was intended, we would not know. Cavillers will cavil. Let us ignore them. We are more inclined to plead for the Zamindar. Is there any eye-witness who says that the vessels containing food had been emptied by Mangaraj? Hearsay or conjecture cannot be accepted as fact. Such is also the view taken by the courts of justice. And again, Science says all liquids evaporate. Milk is liquid. Would not the laws of science apply to the milk in the Zamindar's house? Moreover, there are mice, rats and other vermin in the house, always ferreting for food. Why then should we suspect Mangaraj of having eaten all the food?

There is a provision in the law for circumstantial evidence also. Mangaraj, being a pious man, never took even par-boiled

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\* That is to say, living in the countryside, unlike many big ("absentee") landlords who lived in the metropolis, Calcutta, or at least in big towns like Cuttack.

rice, not to speak of things like fish. On the day following the *Ekadashi*, he used to break his fast only after feeding the Brahmins first. Mangaraj was a very prudent man. To guard against unforeseen hitches in the performance of such a sacred rite as the feeding of the Brahmins, he had given one acre of land to a fisherman who also made flattened rice; and another *ācre* he had given to a confectioner. On the morrow of every fast, these two people used to supply flattened rice and molasses to feed the Brahmins. All male members of the 27 Brahmin families of Govindpur were invited on such occasions and the feeding was finished before mid-day. Mangaraj himself served the food to the Brahmins. After serving flattened rice and molasses once, Mangaraj would address the Brahmins with folded hands and loudly ask, "Will your worships tell me if anything more is required? There is still plenty of rice and molasses left. But I know you eat sparingly and have eaten enough to satisfy yourselves." If any unsatisfied Brahmin wanted more, Mangaraj would dole out a handful of rice to him. Then the Brahmins would rise from their seats and bless their host with the customary words of benediction. Only after feeding the Brahmins did Mangaraj help himself to the rice and molasses left over.

Does any reader wonder how a small quantity of flattened rice served by Mangaraj could satisfy the appetite of 27 Brahmins? Well Jesus Christ sated twelve hundred people with a few loaves of bread and had even then a good deal left. Lord Krishna gave a full meal to twelve thousand disciples of the great saint Durvasa in the Kamyaka forest when he had only a morsel of food. If you have no faith in the miraculous powers of a man like Mangaraj, you need not read this chronicle of his life.

It is said that on one occasion Mangaraj came to know that his cousin Shyam Malla had violated the social custom by eating onion-spiced cabbage curry in the company of bad people in a town. Walls have ears. The cousin would have been cast out of society but Mangaraj made him expiate his sin. For this he appropriated fifteen acres of the man's patrimony. Mangaraj called Shyam one day and spoke to him like an elder, "Look here, Shyam : be careful henceforth. Because of me, your brethren have excused you; otherwise, you would have been excommuni-



cated for good and your fore-fathers would have been in hell. I alone took your land at five rupees per acre; no one else would have purchased it even for two rupees an acre. You are after all my cousin; how can I neglect you? I am with you when you are in trouble, but you are not with me when you are in luck. The other day you did not even come out of your house when I asked you to be a witness in the criminal case against Bhima, the milkman."

Alas. It is no wonder that the descendants of the back-biters who crucified Christ and banished Sita, the incarnation of chastity, will find fault with Mangaraj, a benevolent man who observed the *Ekadashi* fasts. We cannot of course ignore the back-biters. They say that Mangaraj had already grabbed all land within a radius of eight miles, leaving none in the possession of anyone *except Shyam*. *He had always been looking for an opportunity* and now when he got one, he brought Shyam too into his clutches. Shyam had partaken of onions; so he had to feed the Brahmins. But, they say, is it not a fact that the women of the Mangaraj family get Champa, the maid-servant, to purchase onions from the weekly market? For the sake of argument, let us admit that Champa did purchase onions. But where is the proof that anyone ate the onions? Manu, the law-giver, forbade the eating of onions. He did not forbid their purchase. So let us not heed what the utterers of evil say about the ladies of a respectable family.

## CHAPTER II

### A MAN OF FAME

Mangaraj was the son of a poor man. It is said that he became an orphan at the age of seven and was thrown on the streets. For want of money he could not perform the funeral rites of his father. The mud walls of his house fell down because they could not be rethatched. His early life, education and later years were all full of ups and downs. The life of no great man in the

world is devoid of extraordinary events whose narration would require much time and paper. Benjamin Franklin, the great savant, has said that it is easy to buy paper from the market but very difficult to use it with economy. So we should pay due regard to economy by writing everything briefly.

The Zamindari estate of Mangaraj went by the name of Fatepur Sarasandha; it consisted of 560 acres of rent-free land and 327 acres of half-rent-free land. For the latter part an amount of Rs. 5,000 was paid as annual revenue; out of this part, seven acres were claimed by a co-sharer who had filed an appeal in the Civil Court.

People say that Mangaraj had a working capital of 40 or 50 thousands rupees in the money-lending business. The affairs of a big man are unduly magnified. We think the working capital did not exceed Rs. 15 thousand. It is against our principle to say *anything which is not true*. What we say is what we learnt from the income-tax peon. The accounts of the paddy-lending business had not been settled for the last 20 years; so we are unable to quote the exact figures. From the papers supplied by the keeper of his granary after the last Oriya New Year's day, known as Sunia, we have come to know that there was a stock of 2071 maunds, 36 seers and 2 chhataks of paddy.

His house consisted of five blocks, three of which were used by his three sons, the fourth by himself, his wife and his little daughter, Malati, and the fifth, which was the outer one, was used as the Kutchery or office. The Kutchery house had five beams with ornamental carvings in the wooden super-structure. The walls were decorated with paintings of several kinds of animals and flowers and of the battle between Rama and Ravana and between the monkeys and the demons, as narrated in the Ramayana. An old painting of a naked woman, seen somewhere in Rajputana, led Mr. Todd to believe that the women of ancient India were all naked. The paintings on the walls of Mangaraj's house would have dispelled Mr. Todd's ignorance, had he but looked at the picture of Radha in her richly embroidered pink gown in the midst of her maids. No painter was brought from outside to draw and paint all these pictures. These were the handiwork of Champa, the maid-servant. Champa could paint many

animals the like of which cannot be found even in the Calcutta zoo.

Behind the house and adjoining it, Mangaraj had a big garden and big tank surrounded by cocoanut trees; behind these were plantain, mango and jack-fruit trees. Clumps of bamboo formed the boundaries of these gardens.

Whatever Mangaraj did, he did for others. Men as selfless as Mangaraj are rare in this world. The Govindapur market depended for its existence on his garden. But for his supply of coconuts, plantains, brinjals, pumpkins and other vegetables, including even red pepper from the garden, the market would not have gained so much importance. As long as the vegetables from Mangaraj's garden were not sold out, no one else had the right to sell his produce. That was but proper, for it would not be fair to allow bad things to be sold while the good remained unsold. The market was within the jurisdiction of his zamindari. Things might have been otherwise if it had belonged to someone else. The vegetables presented to Mangaraj on new year's day, and on other festival days, found their way straight to the market.

After the construction of the Great Wall of China, it is said, the Emperor put to death all the historians of the time, lest they should record the amount squandered on it. Great men do not go about proclaiming the amounts they spend in doing great works. If you asked Mangaraj how much he had spent on the construction of his house, he would say that it was a big amount but he did not know how much.

The knowledge of antiquity alone can unravel old secrets. A European gave a rough calculation of the expenditure incurred on the construction of the Jagannath temple of Puri after 900 years. Mangaraj maintained an account even of the sales of vegetables produced in his garden. Then could we not get an account of his house-building expenses? No one in India has yet performed any rites in the style in which Dewan Gangagovind Singh performed the funeral rites of his mother, nor will anyone be able to do it in that manner even in future. The Governor-General of India requisitioned the services of all the Collectors of all districts of Bengal to supply rice, dal, flour, oil, ghee, coconuts and plantains for the ceremony. Raja Sibachandra of Nava-

dwip called for a tally of this expenditure when he wanted to perform the funeral ceremony of his mother in similar style. Dewan Gangagovind Singh gave him figures of the expenditure incurred on opium, hemp and tobacco alone, with a suggestion to prepare his own estimate on this basis. Only these things cost him 72 thousand rupees. Besides what was purchased, all the Zamindars had supplied many things as presents.

We are revealing here only one item of expenditure incurred on the construction of Mangaraj's house. The intelligent reader should be able to make out the total cost from this one item. From the accounts of the granary we find that 152 maunds and 30 seers of paddy were given to the carpenters and blacksmiths for their services in the construction of his house.

Mangaraj had many a time been heard to say that he lent out money and paddy simply because he could not stand the distress of the people; that he did not get any profit at all out of it. We would say rather that he suffered a loss. After all, paddy-lending carried an interest of only 50 per cent. Was it at all paying? Old and dry paddy was lent out; fresh and moist paddy was collected in return. Mark the difference, readers.

In the last annual statement, the Accountant of his money-lending business showed an irrecoverable bad debt of eight rupees, six annas and nine pies; for this the Accountant was taken to task. One Bhikari Panda had taken a loan of five rupees, the compound interest on which amounted to Rs. 12-5-11, the total being Rs. 17-5-11. Out of this, a sum of 17 rupees, 5 annas and 9 pies was realised and the balance of 2 pies was written off. Thus did the bad debts accumulate.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE GODDESS OF FORTUNE

There is an old adage to the effect that—

“The Goddess of Fortune favours trade;  
In farming half a fortune is made.”

A modern writer would have said :

The Goddess of Fortune favours trade.

Be a pleader; half the fortune is made.

A view of Mangaraj's house might have led the ignorant to think that it was the house of some pleader who had constructed it by ruining sixty-two homes. They say destiny prevails. Was there any lawyer, out of the many in the law courts, who could match Mangaraj in having exploited even twenty-five homes? Mangaraj often said that he did not owe a pie to anyone. It was only with his brain and brawn that he had turned clay into gold.

It is said—nay we know it for certain—that at first Mangaraj used to till two acres of land belonging to the headman of the village on a crop-sharing basis. Now he had 81 acres of his own; and from another 6,017 acres he realised a share of the produce. Almost all his land was rent-free except for a few acres for which he paid half-rent.

He had 15 pairs of bullocks and 12 ploughmen of low caste who were his wholetime employees. They did his cultivation and gardening. Such was the training and instruction given by Mangaraj that they were all active and energetic in their work. The rules of hygiene prescribe early rising as conducive to health. No one had ever seen Mangaraj violating this rule in any season. As the scriptures say :

All the streams and rivers you see,

Merge themselves into the sea;

They give up their own virtue

And become saltish, it's true.

So all the servants and members of the family followed their master in his habit of early rising. Mangaraj used to get up and clean his teeth before the crack of dawn. In the city of Calcutta, a gun was fired two times a day. The report of this gun in the early morning indicated day-break. When Mangaraj called out his ploughmen in the early hours of the morning, the women-folk too got up to attend to their house-hold duties. The people of the countryside knew no time-keepers. The bullocks would be un-yoked when the sun was over their heads. The cultivators in the neighbourhood would look around to see whether Mangaraj's

large palm-leaf umbrella was up on the ridge where he used to takè his seat.

Mangaraj looked upon his ploughmen as his own sons. Parents are not satisfied unless they personally look to the feeding of their children. When his ploughmen sat down in a row to eat, Mangaraj would call out to the cook to serve them immediately with a big cold drink of gruel, just to moisten their parched throats. The cook usually served two bowlfuls of gruel to each of them. If any of the ploughmen was unwilling to drink so much of gruel, Mangaraj would persuade him to do so with a short lecture on the invigorating properties of gruel. After this, he would ask the cook to serve the ploughmen their rice; and then he would go for his bath.

There were 17 *sajina* trees in his garden. The leaves of the *sajina* are digestive, invigorating, prophylactic and savoury. We do not know if these properties of the *sajina* are given in the Ayurvedic *materia medica*, for we have no knowledge of that subject. What we write here is what we have heard from Mangaraj. So the leaves of the *sajina* tree were not sent to the market; they were kept exclusively for the use of the ploughmen. The flowers, cooked with a little mustard, make a delicacy. In God's creation good and evil are mixed together and there is nothing like unqualified bliss. How sweet are the juicy pips of the jack-fruit! But its fibres are hard to digest. In the opinion of Mangaraj, all parts of the *sajina* tree were good, except the long pods which he said were indigestible. That was why the pods did not go into the plates of his servants or ploughmen; these found their way straight to the market for sale.

#### CHAPTER IV

#### SUPERVISION OF CULTIVATION

It is only narrow-minded people who make a distinction between self and non-self. Mangaraj made no distinction between his own cultivation and the cultivation of others. Mangaraj

gave as much consideration to other people's cultivation as to his own. The intelligent readers will follow us if we cite an incident which took place one day. By examining one grain of rice from the cooking-pot we can tell if all the rice has been properly boiled.

Early one morning the head ploughman, Govinda Puhana, came and reported to his master that "as there were not enough seedlings, one and a half acres of land could not be planted." Mangaraj just said 'yes' and fell silent. The head ploughman remained standing at the door with folded hands while Mangaraj put on an oil-stained piece of silk cloth and tied a grey-coloured napkin round his waist. Then he took a big palm-leaf umbrella on his shoulder and started on his round of the paddy fields. Behind him came Govinda Puhana, telling him all about the fields. Another ploughman, named Padia, followed them with two yokes slung on his shoulders. Hardly any of the villagers had yet left their beds. Mangaraj and his men overtook Sibu Pandit on the way.

At the sudden appearance of Mangaraj in his rear, the Pandit moved deferentially out of his way, put down the pot of water he had in his hands and uttered customary words of blessing. Mangaraj took no notice of this and looking straight ahead passed the Pandit by. After he had gone a pretty long distance, the Pandit slowly picked up his water-pot and muttered a Sanskrit verse to neutralise thereby the inauspicious encounter with Mangaraj early in the morning. We need not bother ourselves about this for Pandits have a superstitious habit of uttering such verses.

Let us follow Mangaraj. He saw Shyam working on his low-lying piece of land in the village. Shyam was a low-caste man. He had done the transplantation early and his paddy plants were looking parrot-green and luxuriant in their growth. Shyam was bending down at that moment, repairing the bund around his field. Mangaraj stopped near him and called him affectionately by name. Shyam straightened up with a start, threw down his spade and prostrated himself on the ground in obeisance.

"Get up, my child", said Mangaraj affectionately.

Shyam got up and stood at a respectful distance with folded

hands. There followed a long talk between the two, which, lest it be tiresome to the reader is here summed up.

All that Mangaraj wanted to say was that he had always had a soft corner in his heart for Shyam's family. Shyam's father Apartia used to call at his house every evening and talk to him about the fields and their cultivation and ask him how to improve the yield of paddy. But Shyam had not been doing so.

Mangaraj stopped short suddenly, looked across at Shyam's paddy field and, as if surprised, said in a minatory tone, "Why, Shyam! what is this you have done? You are a down-right fool! You know absolutely nothing about cultivation. You have transplanted your field so thickly! How will it yield a good harvest? You have left no breathing space for the plants. Root out half of it, I say." Govinda supported his master, staring hard at the field. But with folded hands and in a tremulous voice Shyam said, "May it please you, Sir, I transplant in this manner every year. All people do likewise." "Oh you fool", Mangaraj said, affecting deep disgust, "you won't listen to good advice." Then looking towards Govinda, he told him: "Show Shyam how to thin out the seedlings."

In no time at all Govinda and Padia rooted out half the plants from two plots. Shyam prostrated himself at the master's feet, crying bitterly. Mangaraj flew into a rage and started abusing Shyam.

"It does not matter whether you do your cultivation properly or not", he said menacingly. "But you will see what I mean to do, if you do not pay up your debt of paddy, with interest to the last measure."

Shyam stood there petrified while Mangaraj casually said, "Govinda! let him do his work as he likes". And he moved on to his unplanted fields with his two servants trailing behind, carrying two loads of fresh seedlings on their shoulders.



## CHAPTER V

### THE FAMILY OF MANGARAJ

Ramachandra Mangaraj had a big family to support. Besides himself and his wife, his three sons and their three wives, there were some 20 or 22 servants and maid-servants; altogether it was a household of about 30 heads.

If we give an account of each one of these people, we will have to write a lot. Gentle reader, you know our way. We write nothing that is false, nothing exaggerated, nothing irrelevant. Moreover, the proverb says,—Do not write unpleasant truth; so many things which are true have to be left unsaid.

In the house of Mangaraj, women predominated. No male voice reached one's ears, except maybe that of Ram the servant. The master was always busy with his own affairs. The three sons were in the prime of youth. They whiled away their time in playing chess, in catching birds and in brawling and disputing. Smoking hemp took some of their time. The hemp-vendor in the Govindpur market once told a customer in a fit of temper, "Who cares if you do not purchase my hemp? The whole of my stock will be insufficient to meet the demand of the Babus of the Mangaraj family."

The father hardly ever met his sons. Once an elderly man asked Mangaraj, "Why do you keep your sons at arm's length?" Mangaraj replied with a Sanskrit verse, the purport of which is that a child should be tenderly nurtured till its fifth year, disciplined for the next ten years, and treated as a friend on reaching the age of sixteen. Of course, Mangaraj had an interpretation of his own for this verse. He would say, "Children drool up to their fifth year. They are to be kept at a distance for the next ten years. And when they are sixteen, they and their friends should be dealt with strictly." It was rumoured that there was ill-feeling between the father and the sons, because the latter had been wasting his money in revelry.

His wife kept herself aloof from the others; she confined her-

self to her room and did not talk to anyone. She cared only for hungry and thirsty beggars. One does not talk about the young ladies of a house; it is not proper. What will people say if we expose their affairs to the public gaze? But this we can say. The women of this house left their beds late in the morning. Bathing and toilet took most of their time. Then they would take their meals and sleep till late in the afternoon. Towards evening, they got up and took some rice. Then they sat together, heard the village gossip, set the maid-servants one against another, aired their differences, laughed and passed their time in merry-making till it was midnight. Rukuni, Marua, Chemi, Nakaphodi, Teri, Bimali, Suki, Pata and Kausuli were the names of some maid-servants; there were many others whose names are not known to us. Some of them were child-widows, some were young widows and some were married. They had taken shelter under the roof of Mangaraj as diverse birds take their abode in a tree. A lot of quarrels spring up when many maid-servants with nothing much to do get together. The house of Mangaraj was no exception to this rule. Naturally, the house was noisy like a fish market till late in the night.

## CHAPTER VI

### CHAMPA, THE MAID-SERVANT

No one knew the relationship between Champa, alias Harakala, and the Mangaraj family, which consisted of so many people. All were ignorant of her parentage, her castè and her place in society. None could guess from her conduct and behaviour whether she was the mistress or the maid-servant of the house. But this much we can say; Champa's influence in the house was unlimited—greater even than that of the wife of Mangaraj. The ploughmen, the labourers and the record-keepers, who were all outsiders, obeyed her implicitly.

Champa had her other name, but, to tell the truth, no one had ever heard her being called Harakala. We are quite unable

to say whence the word is derived, or whether the name signifies anything. But one day, someone whispered into her ears that people were calling her 'Harakala'. She flew into a rage and complained to Mangaraj with tears in her eyes. Enquiries were made. Mangaraj warned everyone individually not to call Champa by the name of Harakala. That day, from one end of the village to the other, and in two or three neighbouring villages, people went round telling one another, "Beware, don't call Champa as Harakala". For months together, people of all ages, whenever they met their friends and acquaintances, would look around, smile and enjoy the fun of repeating this warning. In the course of time, the warning sentence was abridged; first the last two words were dropped; then one by one all the words of the sentence except the first one, that is, "Beware". Finally things came to such a pass that children would clap their hands and shout "Beware"!, whenever they saw Champa.

Children are always naughty. We need not mind what they say. It is no use bothering about such irrelevant things. But as Champa had an intimate connection with the Mangaraj family, the reader will hear her name very often. So we consider it our duty to detail all her features and attributes. Story writers are bound to follow the usual practice of giving a full description of their heroes and heroines. We cannot depart from this time-honoured custom. To suit the taste of the English-knowing readers of the present day, we should give an English type of description. Indian poets praise the elephantine gait of a woman as a feature of her beauty. But Englishmen would not relish this. They would say that a woman galloping like a horse looks beautiful. English civilisation is flooding our country like the Mahanadi river in the early rains; very soon our English-learning Babus will most likely propose to engage competent tutors to train their wives to 'gallop'. We may say that Champa had a swan-like gait when she walked through the narrow lanes of the village, swinging her arms and waving the apron of her fine sari. We guess Champa's age was near about 30. But people had heard her say many a time that the "21st  $\tilde{d}\tilde{a}y$  ceremony" after her birth coincided with the day on which Mangaraj married. By this reckoning her age would be much less. A description of the appearance of

so young a lady requires great caution, wide experience and sound judgement. Happily, Kalidas has already given us a model on which to base a description of the appearance of our heroine. Champa had a complexion which was neither fair nor black, but tawny. Two of her protruding teeth looked like twin peaks of a hill. Her lips were red from much chewing of betel leaves and looked like the ripe *Bimba* fruit. Kalidas, in his description of his heroine, had brought out other points of beauty too in the parts of the body covered with cloth. But as we have not seen those covered parts, we are not inclined to give a description of those parts. Such being the case, we are not prepared to proceed on the lines of Kalidas. The proverb goes that you should not believe even the words of your Guru, if you do not see with your own eyes. But we cannot forego a description of those parts which are visible :

With eye-brows on the forehead painted black,  
 With lips tinged red with betel juice;  
 Her body annointed with oil and turmeric,  
 She trotted fast in the village lane;  
 With a sixteen-cubit Sari worn on her body,  
 And with plaited hair knotted high on head,  
 With bangles on her hands, toe-rings on her feet,  
 She made a tinkling sound as she walked.

This is our description of Champa in a peculiar metre; her attributes will be narrated in chapters to come.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE VILLAGE DEITY

To Thee, O Goddess, who hath her abode  
 under the tree in the form of stone,  
 We bow down, we bow down, we bow down :  
 Thou, who rideth earthen horses and elephants  
 and giveth children to barren women,  
 And driveth away cholera, we bow down to Thee.

A big banyan tree flanked the right edge of the pathway leading to the village tank named Asuradighi. The main trunk of the tree was indistinguishable among the hanging roots and intertwined branches which covered half an acre of land. The branches and leaves of the tree were so dense that the sun's rays failed to reach the ground. It was an ancient tree. Elderly people used to say that the tree dedicated to the village Goddess had been there from time immemorial. They said the tree had neither grown nor decayed ever since they were children. A terrible storm had once uprooted all the *sajina* and plantain trees in the village; but not a leaf fell from this tree, so great was the power of the Goddess!

The Goddess had her seat in the middle of four thick roots which had run into the ground. She was called 'Budhi Mangala' and had two and a half acres of land endowed as her property. The seat of the Goddess covered half an acre and the priest enjoyed the produce of the remaining two acres. He had great influence in the village, specially among the women. The Goddess talked to the priest about everything in his dreams. Every villager offered the first fruits of his garden to the Goddess.

The image of the Goddess was installed in the middle of a brick-built dais. It was a very big image, not less than a hundred pounds in weight and covered all over with vermilion-paste. Scattered at some distance to the right were hundreds of clay horses and elephants, some intact and some broken.

Clay horses or elephants were offered to the Goddess so that children would recover from their illnesses; even elderly people had been known to get well.

The deity was not worshipped daily. Most days she remained covered with dirt and dry leaves. Only on the occasion of a marriage, or a remarriage, or when a child was ill, was the deity worshipped. If cholera broke out in the village, there was much pomp and ceremony.

The deity had no monthly income like the clerks. The approach of some calamity would create a commotion at the seat of the Goddess, just as people crowd round the doors of pleaders and doctors when in trouble. The expenses for the worship were met by subscription raised from the villagers. The Goddess was a guardian deity. The village owed its safety to her grace. Some-

times cholera broke out in the village, but the death-roll would not exceed fifty or a hundred if she was properly worshipped !

You, sophisticated reader, will laugh at this. From your scientific point of view, you will prescribe medicine for disease. You will certainly question the utility of worshipping the deity for a cure of an ailment.

We cannot, of course, give a list of the sterile women who gave birth to children through the grace of the deity. But we can affirm on solemn oath that those women of the village who bore children were without issue at the time of their marriages.

There was one woman, about 30 years of age, who used to bathe in the tank, then carry a jar-ful of water in her arms, put down the jar in front of the Goddess, sweep the frontage, offer a palm-ful of water at the foot of the sacred tree, bow down with her head touching the ground and mutter some prayer. Every evening she would offer a burning wick to the Goddess. People had watched her doing this for six months. No one knew the secret of her mind, for she was bashful, covered her face with a veil, avoid company and scarcely ever talked to anyone.

The cow-herds of the village usually played under the banyan tree around noon, leaving their cattle to graze in the fields. In the midst of their play, with their goading sticks in their hands, they suddenly stopped in curious surprise one day when they noticed some offerings to the deity lying scattered all around the image. There had been no ceremonial worship of the Goddess the previous day. The worship of the Goddess was always a spectacular event in the village. For this a subscription was generally raised, drums were beaten and people came to see the performance. The worship was performed in the evening and propitiatory offerings were also made. There had been no drum-beating and worship the previous evening. How could all these things have come to be there ?

One of the boys called out in a loud voice, "Look here. What is this ?" All of them ran to the spot. There was a big hole behind the seat of the Goddess, about 3 cubits from the dais and big enough for a man to go in.

The news spread far and wide. People flocked to the scene. Mangaraj too heard about it and ran to the spot. After much dis-

cussion, the consensus of opinion was that the Goddess had been pleased to visit some of her devotees at dead of night, and the hole was made by her tiger.

Mangaraj said the tiger seemed still to be there in the hole. This made most of the people run away. Mangaraj was the last to leave the place, except for Rama, the weaver, who received a meaningful glance from Mangaraj.

The next day, no one could see the hole. This became a common topic of conversation in the village. Soon it came to be established beyond doubt that the Goddess had visited the spot in person. Bhima-ma, the barber-woman said, "I cannot say how old I am. My age may be some 3 or 4 scores. Suffice it to say that I have been in attendance at the marriages of all the old men that you see in the village. To me they are all kids. This is the fourth time that I got a sight of the Goddess in person. Last night, I had come out of my house at midnight. I smelt incense in the village lane and heard the tinkle of anklets. Looking around, I saw the Goddess out on her huge tiger. It was about 7 or 8 cubits long. Its heads was big and black like that of a big buffalo. The tiger stared at me. I shut my door in terror." Some four or five old men bore testimony to the fact of their having heard the sound of foot-steps of the tiger on the village road at dead of night. Rama the weaver assured them of having seen the foot-marks of the tiger in the morning. No one could doubt that the Goddess had been there in person.

## CHAPTER VIII

### SHEIKH DILDAR MIAN

Sheikh Karamat Ali belonged originally to the Arrah District, but later on he had settled in the Midnapur District. The Sheikh was called by the popular name of Ali Mian, and we shall also call him by that name in our narration. Ali Mian was at first a dealer in horses. It was his business to purchase horses at the

Harihar Chhatar fair at Sonapur in Bihar, and to sell them in Orissa and Bengal.

Ali Mian once sold a horse to the chief European officer in the district of Midnapur. That horse turned out to be a good one and the officer was highly pleased. Condescendingly he enquired how Ali Mian fared in his trade. On being told that the Sheikh was not making much profit in his business, the Saheb enquired whether Ali Mian knew how to read and write; perhaps he could be given a government job. Ali Mian said he knew how to sign his name in Persian; he proceeded to get pen and paper and wrote out his name in the Saheb's presence.

In those days, Persian was the favoured language and it was also the court language. Through the patronage of the European officer, Ali Mian got an appointment as a Police Daroga. During his tenure of service, he worked fairly well; he had, at times, to face many difficulties but he acquired a sizeable property in the 30 years of his service. Besides his residential house, garden and furniture, he acquired four Zamindari estates.

Those were the days when the Zamindari estates of Orissa were being put to auction at Calcutta. Ali Mian had gone to Calcutta to escort some persons accused in a murder case. There he purchased the estate of Fatepur Sarsandha in an auction sale.

Do you doubt the veracity of our statement? A Thana Daroga was as good as a Police Inspector in those days. So you may take it for granted that our statement is absolutely true.

People know the words in which a Brahmin named Govinda Panda once blessed a Deputy Magistrate who had decreed a case in his favour. "Deputy Babu, may you become a Police Daroga", he had said. These words have a significance of their own; a hint is enough for the wise.

Moti Sil was a well-known rich man of Calcutta. He had started by selling empty bottles. An envious liquor-vendor once said, "Moti Sil has become a millionaire by selling only empty bottles while I am so poor even though I sell bottles full of stuff". We are afraid the story of Ali Mian may lead some of our B.A.s and M.A.s to deplore their lot like the liquor-vendor and say, "Alas! Ali Mian who could barely sign his name in Persian managed to become a Zamindar, whereas we, who can write long



essays, cannot even earn a living". Fate must have its way. One's education and one's efforts are of no avail against the decree of fate.

This Ali Mian had an only son, Sheikh Dildar Mian alias Chhote Mian. The father spared no pains to educate his son for a career. He engaged a tutor (Akhunji) for a long time to teach his son Persian. By the time Chhote Mian was fifteen, he had learnt all the letters of the Persian alphabet.

By the time Chhote Mian had completed his 22nd year, he fell to thinking : 'What will people say if I sit cross-legged before my teacher and swing to and fro while I read my books like a school boy?' Moreover, he could not tolerate that his friends should unnecessarily be kept waiting for his company. He also hated his teacher's occasional warnings. 'A man becomes a beast if he takes to intoxicants'. It was too much for Chhote Mian to bear.

One afternoon, the teacher was lying asleep on his back after taking his meal, his bushy grey beard covering his neck and chest like a bundle of jute fibre spread out by a fisherman for making rope. Somehow a glowing cinder landed on his beard and set it burning with a crackling sound. The teacher woke up suddenly and, crying 'Toba-Toba' (Alas, Alas), stroked his beard desperately. The violent shaking of the beard caused the glowing cinder to disintegrate and sparks of fire scattered all over his clothes while he ran about the room exclaiming "Woe on me, Woe on me" and trying to put out the fire.

The great sage, Valmiki, famous author of the Ramayana, has given no graphic description of what Hanuman looked like in the conflagration of Lanka. So we do not think it reasonable to mention anything by way of analogy. The scriptures say that wise men settle for half when the whole is in danger of being lost. Following this maxim, the teacher shut himself up in the room that night with half of his beard saved. The next morning he was not to be seen in the district of Midnapur.

When this news reached the ears of Ali Mian, he said, "My son has already gained enough knowledge. I know only how to sign my name and I have earned so much wealth. But my Dilu has learnt much more. The other day, he was put to test in my

presence. He was able to write his own name and also many other words like 'Calcutta', 'Midnapur', 'elephant', 'horse' and 'garden'. If the Bara Saheb (Superintendent of Police) comes to know this, he will at once offer him the post of a Daroga. But I have kept all this a secret. I won't allow Dilu to take up a job. He is a mere boy. He cannot stand so much strain."

He called his son and gave him a lot of advice about managing his own affairs properly. He warned him to be particularly careful about the management of his Orissa estates, and said, "Look here, the Kayasthas (scribes) of Orissa are very dishonest. They cannot deceive me because I am very good at accounts. I will give you an instance of their fraud. People all over the world count one, two, three, four in that order. But do you know the Kayastha's method of counting? They say, one one makes one, two ones makes two, and two twos make four. You see, there is no mention of the three in the middle. Why? It means a clear theft of three rupees."

We had to write all these things at such length to give the reader an idea of the Zamindar's family. But all these are events long past. Sheikh Karamat Ali had been dead five years and Chhote Mian alias Sheikh Dildar was himself the proprietor when, in the early hours of one night, we find Zamindar Sheikh Dildar Mian sitting in his Kutchery hall. It was a spacious brick-built structure. The floor was covered with a big carpet which seemed to be very old. It was oil-stained and had holes at several places; the borders were frayed. In the middle of the carpet, adjoining the wall, was a velvet bed-spread. A big velvet pillow was placed against the wall. Flanking it were two smaller pillows of the same material but round in shape.

It was on this bed that Sheikh Dildar Mian was sitting. His dress consisted of a loose pyjama of embroidered silk, a *chapkan* of satin and a silk cap on the head. Stuck in his ears were otto-soaked swabs. A silver otto-stand and a rose-water sprayer stood before him. Close by was a *hookah* with a long pipe and a tobacco-holder of the size of a small earthen pot, with a cover from which four silver chains were dangling. Like a sick man prostrating himself before the lord Siva for a favour, the smoking

pipe lay at the feet of the Mian, not gracing his lips for the moment.

In corners of the hall, and at odd places, lay worn-out broomsticks, a spouted water-pot, three or four opium-smoking *hookahs*, the ashes of burnt tobacco, opium and hemp, flakes of onion, goat dung and many other things useful and useless. Spit-tle of betel-leaf juice covered most of the floor and walls. One could see that the hall was rarely dusted; otherwise how could there be such heaps of dirt in the corners?

The ceiling of the hall was in a dilapidated condition. In the corners, spiders waited in their webs for flies and gnats as pleaders wait for clients, reclining on their pillows, with their law books arranged in glass almirahs. Sparrows kept up a merry chatter in the inter-spaces of the beams. Occasionally, a piece of straw or a twig or a feather came floating down; but in the assemblage below there was silence today.

The Mian Saheb sat speechless, his cheeks cupped in his hands. Even Napoleon could not have sat in such a pensive mood after his defeat in the battle of Waterloo. In front of the Mian Saheb sat seven of his comrades, either dozing or in a very thoughtful mood.

The music master, Bakaula Khan, sat with his beard resting on his legs bent at the knees joined together. His instrument, the *tanpura*, lay forsaken like a divorced woman. In one corner of the hall, two *tablas* lay keeled over on the floor like earthen pots thrown away in a field.

Fatua the waiter kept rolling something on the palm of his left hand with his right thumb, stopping now and then to add drops of water with his middle finger.

Munshi Zaher Baksh, holding a piece of paper with the debt account written on it, stood there like an accused before a magistrate. The Mian Saheb, his eyes still closed, heaved a deep sigh and moaned, "What then is the way-out?"

"May it please my master: I have been moving about the whole day, but no money could be obtained anywhere", the Munshi replied. "Rama Das, the money-lender, says he has already lent twenty thousand rupees against registered deeds and another four thousand against notes of hand. He refuses to lend

any more. Four thousand rupees are due to the grocers in the bazar; they refuse to supply anything more on credit."

"You are a fool, a good-for-nothing fellow", the Mian replied angrily. "Rama Sirkar was our manager for 20 years from my father's time. I dismissed him and gave you the appointment because I took you to be a friend and a competent man; but you fail me in my urgent need."

Munshi Zaher Baksh protested. "How is it, master, that you call me incompetent? Rama Sirkar could not procure any loan while I have secured a debt of 25 thousand rupees for you in five years."

To which the Mian replied impatiently, "Let us not talk about that. The point now is how to keep up my prestige. I don't mind the loss of property, but prestige once gone is gone for ever".

The Mian's dozing comrades suddenly woke to life on hearing this and supported him loudly with one voice. "Quite so, quite so, you are perfectly right".

"Go and meet the expenses of today's entertainment", the Mian directed the Munshi, "howsoever you like. Mortgage any property, movable or immovable. Look. Hurry up. The night is advancing. I don't require much money. One hundred rupees for the remuneration of the dancing girl and another hundred for the entertainment of her companions and my friends will be enough."

"That is quite sufficient", the Mian's associates chimed in. "What need of more money?"

"This dancing girl, Khatum Unnisha, who is here today", said the Mian's crony, Hanu Mian, "is an expert in singing and dancing. They say she is the best of the dancing girls from Kashmere. She has reached the peak in the art of vocal music and dancing. What does she care for this part of the country? She is here on tour only for a few days. She refuses invitations even from the Nawab of Murshidabad, the Nawab of Lucknow and the Chiefs of other States. You have now become famous far and wide. That is why she has come here of her own accord to give a performance".

All the friends present took up this theme in a chorus. "Who is there in this place who does not know you? Once anyone has

tasted the delicacy of your viands, he will never forget it in his life."

At this juncture, Faju the waiter came in and reported with a Salaam, "Sir, a money-lender has come from your Orissa estate for an interview."

As the new-comer was ushered in, he placed five silver rupees before the Mian as a present and bowed three times, touching the ground with his hand. Then he bowed once to every other member of the gathering, not excepting even the waiter.

The Mian nodded appreciatively at the manners of the new-comer. "The man is very polite and courteous", he said, and everyone else echoed the remark like singers chanting the burden of a song in a chorus party.

The Mian turned to the man and asked, "What is your name?"

"Ramchandra Mangaraj" came the reply.

"What? Ramchandra Mamlabaj (tout)?" , joked the Mian.

"No, Sir, it is Mangaraj".

"All right, Ramchandra Mangaraj", the Mian condescended

"I have brought only a very few things", Mangaraj submitted, "to offer as a present to your honour as a mark of my respect. Have I your permission to lay these before you?"

"Very well, bring them here," said the Mian.

The list of presents written on a palm-leaf read as follows :

- (1) Eleven maunds of fine rice packed in five straw-bundles;
- (2) Seven maunds of pulses in two straw-bundles;
- (3) Fifty pounds of *ghee* in one earthen jar;
- (4) Five bunches of green plantain;
- (5) Two bunches of ripe plantain and
- (6) 32 pounds of potatoes.

Here ends the list.

"The rice is very fine", the Mian remarked, "and suitable for the preparation of *palau*. The *ghee* is also very nice".

Encouraged, Mangaraj said, "Sir, you are the lord of our estate. We have been under your protection for the last fifteen generations. These are but trifling things. If you permit, I shall continue the supply of fine rice, *ghee* and dal."

The joy of the music master knew no bounds at this turn of events. His left hand moved at once to tune his *tanpura*. The *tablas* also joined in. The Mian ordered dinner to be prepared quickly. The Christians tell of the dead being called back to life at the sound of the archangel's trumpet on the day of resurrection. In a somewhat similar manner, the Mian's Majlis which had been deadly silent came suddenly alive at the jingling sound of Mangaraj's purse.

The Mian put the smoking pipe to his lips and smoked. The cloud of smoke covered the beard on his face like a fog enveloping a dark hill. The smoke inside the *hookah* was distributed through the pipe to the lips of all the others, like the waters of the Mahanadi distributed by canals to different Parganas by the British Sarkar.

A bleating goat was brought for the dinner and its price settled in the Majlis at two rupees and a half. This seemed to surprise Mangaraj. "What", he exclaimed, "is this poor animal worth two rupees and a half, my lord?"

"What would it cost in your village?" the Mian asked.

After thoroughly inspecting the goat, back and front and flanks, like a doctor examining his patient, Mangaraj said, "It should cost not more than 4 or 6 annas. If you please, I can send 40 or 50 such for your dinner. I must say, Sir, you have not appointed the right person to manage your estate. This is why so much money is squandered. A goat for two rupees and a half, my lord!"

This gave rise to a great tumult of joy. The Board of Directors of the East India Company in England were not so overwhelmed with joy at news of Lord Clive's victory in the battle of Plassey, for they had not yet been able to shake off their fear of the Emperor on his throne at Delhi.

All of them were in raptures, their faces beaming with smiles. Only Mangaraj sat there with folded hands and a grave appearance. The fowler watches in silent delight when the birds peck at the corn spread in his net to catch them. We who know the mind of Mangaraj can well imagine that he was telling himself, "Well, my dear bird, approach the bait now".

A servant came running to give the welcome news of the coming of the dancing girl. Everyone had forgotten about her remuneration, but the music master, who was a man of experience, reminded them that a fee of Rs. 100 had to be paid to her. This reminder became the cause of fresh worries and an excited discussion ensued, the like of which is not probably experienced when the British Parliament discusses the budget for the Indian Empire.

No decision could be arrived at and there was no time to temporise. Finding the moment opportune, Mangaraj spoke with folded hands, "Sir, why do you worry so much when your humble servant is here?"

Words of thanks and praise were again showered upon Mangaraj. "Mangaraj : You will get a befitting reward for your services", the Mian said, "besides interest at the rate of four annas per rupee for the money advanced".

"Sir, I do not practice usury", Mangaraj replied.

"What? You don't charge interest?", exclaimed the music master. "The man is very upright. Charging interest is one of the 25 things forbidden in the Quran".

A historian says that Clive Saheb obtained the Subadari of Bengal from the Emperor of Delhi in less time than it takes to bargain for the sale or purchase of a donkey. Then why need it have taken Mangaraj longer to acquire the right to collect rent and other rights in the estate of Fatepur Sarsandha?

## CHAPTER IX

### VILLAGE AFFAIRS

Fatehpur Sarsandha was a very big Taluka. The annual revenue payable to Government was five thousand two hundred and eight rupees and six annas. The actual collection was more than two and a half times as much.

The estate consisted of five villages, of which Govindpur was

the biggest. About five hundred families of various castes lived there.

At the solitary shop on the estate, one could get two or three picc worth of dal, tobacco, salt, oil, and even ghee. For three generations, the shopkeeper had stocked ten medicinal roots from which many a decoction was prepared as Ayurvedic medicine. The shopkeeper met the demands of physicians for 5 or 6 miles around for the supply of medicinal herbs.

The L-shaped village extended upto the northern and western banks of the Asuradighi tank. In between two rows of houses was a lane on both sides of which, in front of each house, were refuse-pits and open spaces in which cows and bullocks were tethered in the morning. Here and there were stray bullock carts. From the lane pathways led to each house.

The village was divided into three blocks, namely, the aristocrats' block, the weavers' block and the Brahmins' block. The aristocrats' block derived its reputation from the residence of Ramchandra Mangaraj, the most influential man there. His Kut-chery hummed with activity till mid-night. The shop too was in this block. So it was noisy till hours after sunset. But the other blocks were all calm and quiet in the night.

The Brahmins' block of 70 families was called Shasan. About 150 cocoanut trees lined both sides of the Shasan lane. At one end was a large platform where the deity Baladev was worshipped. At a distance of 10 to 15 cubits from the platform were a number of young coconut trees around a neat and clean space where the Brahmins used to meet. There they would take their snuff and hemp and gossip about their clients, their earnings and much else.

Sometimes there was a hubbub of noise from which one could easily infer that the Brahmins were engaged in dividing among themselves the offerings of rice and money obtained from their clients. People would hear the uproar and say they were quarreling like dogs for a handful of rice. But we do not relish such remarks. After all the Brahmins, even though quite illiterate, lazy and ignorant of religious rites, are still at the head of all caste Hindus. It is hardly proper to compare them to dogs. Besides, the comparison is not apt; Brahmins quarrel for their



share of the washed rice offered to the spirits of the dead, whereas dogs quarrel over the leavings of boiled rice after meals. Moreover, dogs bite one another whereas Brahmins fight at most with their hands or sticks; they are never known to bite or scratch one another.

The total endowment of arable land for the Shasan was 500 acres. A Marhatta Subedar made a gift of the land by a deed of gift executed on a copper plate, to such Brahmins as would live on the produce of the land and bless the donor three times a day at prayer times. The three phases of the day's prayer time are suggestive of the past, the future and the present. The dead past is known only to the dead. No one knows the future. But we know the present. We can see how their evening is spent in bringing the cattle home from pasture and tethering them, and giving watered rice to the ploughman for supper. Who has the time for prayer and for blessing the donor of the land ?

One day, in the course of a conversation, Bhagaban Misra, one of the Brahmins spoke out, "Where is the land in our possession to demand of us the daily prayer for blessing the donor ?"

This was not altogether wrong, for in the last ten years, 400 acres out of the total endowment of 500 acres had been sold off. The remaining few acres were there, because Mangaraj had these in his charge. He was particularly mindful of the welfare of the Brahmins and the cows. He carefully kept the stray cattle in his cattle-fold. He generally rewarded the men who brought such unclaimed cattle to him. Besides bullocks, the number of his cows exceeded 300. He had taken charge of so many cattle because he thought that the sacred, mother-like cows would otherwise suffer much hardship. Every year, when their number became unmanageable, he was forced to dispose of half of them to the Mahomedan cattle-dealers.

Similarly, he had purchased the land belonging to the Brahmins and kept it in his charge more as a care-taker than as an actual owner. For one thing, the Brahmins were not all good farmers, and for another, thieves would steal away the paddy from the land of the Brahmins. If some land was sold to Mangaraj, the thieves were afraid of committing any more

thefts. Of course, some people said that Mangaraj purchased the land at a very cheap rate.

This land fetched him much more than what he obtained as interest by lending money.

Shibu Pandit had his dwelling in the middle of the Shasan. The Pandit used to recall that his grandfather could quote from memory all the seven parts of Sanskrit grammar. He had no rival in the study of *Naisadha* and its supplementary text. He could recite like a parrot the declension and derivation of all Sanskrit words, simple and compound. His palm-leaf treatises were preserved in a wooden stand, which Shibu Pandit now daily worshipped.

He was himself a first-class scholar and could recite from memory many chapters of the Sanskrit dictionary known as Amarkosh. A very distant relation of the Pandit had been to Navadwip to study logic. In short, the tradition of learning in the Shasan was kept alive by the family. In the outer courtyard of his house, the boys of the Shasan received tuition in the complete course for the performance of rituals. Some students received higher education also.

The Weavers' block of the village, towards the west, was inhabited by 150 weaver families. The lane in this block was neat and clean. There were no compost pits or heaps of cow-dung. You would perhaps have imagined that Section 5 of the Municipal Act was in force there or that the municipal cart removed all the garbage. We would warn you, gentle reader, not to jump to any hasty conclusion without hearing what we have to say. A thorough enquiry and collection of authentic information is necessary before we put down anything in writing. We undertake so much labour simply to dispel your wrong impressions; otherwise we would not have taken this trouble. Moreover, it is not our way to write anything at random. We do not accept anything not supported by irrefutable evidence or inconsistent with logic.

Here is the logical argument. "Why does a mountain emit smoke?" Because there is fire inside it. If there is a flood in the Mahanadi, it shows there has been heavy rain in the upper reaches of the river. Such is the invariable relation between the

cause and its effect. In other words, there is no effect without a cause. Thus, we can prove by irrefutable argument that there is an invariable relation between the cow and its dung. The absence of heaps of cow-dung in the Weavers' block proves that there are no cows there. It is said in the Bible that one servant cannot serve two masters. The weavers spend all their time in weaving cloth; they get no time to pull the plough. If they do not plough, why should they keep bullocks? If there are no bullocks, how can there be any dung? The absence of cow-dung heaps in the Weavers' block is due to want of dung. And as there are no dung-heaps, the village lane in this part is neat and clean.

Weaving requires operations both inside and outside the house. The weaving proper is done in the house, but the preliminary processes of warping and combing the yarn are done outside the house. Again, cloth cannot be made without the joint labour of both the men and the women folk. Starching the yarn and winding it on bobbins is generally done by the women folk. Therefore, the weavers have no time to look after cattle.

## CHAPTER X

### BHAGIA AND SARIA

At one end of the Weavers' block of the village was the *Bhagavata* house and the *Dadhibaman* Temple. The temple was built from a fund raised by the weavers. It consisted of amounts realized by way of fines for violations of the social code.

Let us explain this to the modern Babus. They are said to be well-read and have learnt many big things; but they cannot tell the name of their great-grand-fathers, although they have at the tips of their tongues the names of the forefathers of King Charles II of England! Since they pass for learned men if they study the social affairs of the English and the French, why need they know the affairs of their own society or those of their neighbours?

Forget it. What is the good of our saying so at the risk of

annoying the Babus? The common fund of the weavers was raised by imposing fines on those who were found guilty by the Panchas. If the guilty man was found to be very poor, he paid a nominal sum as a mark of respect to the Panchayat, who would then sanction his acquittal. The money remained with the headman. The temple had been built with this money. This used to be customary with the craftsmen class. But, alas! this fine custom is gradually dying out.

Now the doors of the law courts are open to all. The people have become educated and civilised. Who cares for the arbitration of the Panchas? The English law says, "Beware! If you commit any crime, and there be legal evidence, you will be punished!" To this a clever man says, "Sir, I know the tricks by which evidence can be suppressed". The lawyer pats him on the back and says, "Never mind the crime. Get me the money and I will turn black into white, and *vice-versa*." Thus many a clever and well-to-do offender escapes the clutches of the law. The poor and the innocent are put to trouble and both parties ruin themselves by spending money which disperses into the pockets of diverse persons. The fines realised by the Panchayat, from people who were really guilty, were accumulated for a good cause.

People say that folly is associated with the weaver class. If someone is found to be foolish, people ask if he is a weaver, implying that he is as foolish as a weaver. If you call yourself civilised, you will certainly say that the construction of the *Dadhibaman* temple by the weavers was an instance of their folly. You will say, "Why this misuse of public money? Provide money for a scholarship in the name of the Collector Saheb or found a hospital in the name of the Lat Saheb (the Governor); but why this nonsense about a temple!"

Actually, however, the expression "Weaver's folly" has a different meaning. The lotus grows in the mud of the tank, but much else that grows in the mud of the tank, aquatic plants, molluscs and the like, are not lotuses. Weavers may be foolish, but all foolish people are not weavers.

Don't you know how the weavers of Manchester moved the British Parliament the other day? It is the weavers who have made it possible for you to dress yourself as a Babu. So it is a sort

of ingratitude to find fault with the intelligence of weavers. On the other hand, we could well say that our forefathers were all weavers once.

If you know the people of the interior, you would know how they toil all day; and as soon as it is evening, they take their meals and go to bed. There are no religious preachers and no libraries in the villages. How would they ever know anything about religion? It is the blowing of conch shells and the ringing of bells in the temples that reminds the young and the old that there is a God. In the temple also is the sacred *Bhagavata* which is recited on such festive days as *Radhastami* and *Janmastami* and in the month of *Kartika*. Had there been no temple, the people would have been deprived of the opportunity of hearing about God and the scriptures. If a stranger comes to the village, or if any villager cannot cook for some reason, he can get a full meal from the temple by paying a small sum to the priest. The meetings of the Panchayat to judge the innocence or guilt of the villagers are held in the temple. We can perhaps make ourselves better understood if we use the English terminology to explain the purposes served by a temple. It serves as a church, a public library, a hotel, and a townhall for the village. Now let us put a stop to this topic. We have to deal with other subjects.

Like all other classes of craftsmen the weavers have a headman who is the leader of the caste. He is indispensable in all social functions. On ceremonial occasions like marriage, the headman takes betel-nuts from the inviting householder and delivers them to the invited castemen as a token of formal invitation. In recognition of this respectable service, he gets a piece of cloth and a betelnut. If any complaint is lodged with him by the castemen, he invites the Panchas by offering betel-nut to each of them. At a formal meeting of the castemen, he gets first place in the distribution of flowers and sandal paste. At a social dinner, he breaks the first morsel.

The headman's office is hereditary. That is, the son succeeds his father; in the absence of a son, another member of his family becomes the successor. No one else can become the headman.

The headman in those days was called Bhagia Chand. Bhagia was very simple by nature and incapable of any crookedness. He

would say 'yes' to anything you said. The village people called him the idiot weaver.

Now you would say, "Were not these people down-right fools? They bowed down to an idiot as their headman simply because his father was a headman. If they had to choose a leader, couldn't they elect a clever man by casting votes as people do elsewhere in electing a member of Parliament or the President of the U.S.A."

Again, take the case of the Brahmins. If you are a Hindu, you must respect the Hindu scriptures like the Vedas, the Vedantas, etc. The scriptures lay down the following characteristics of a Brahmin: Self-control, purity, contentment, forgiveness, honesty, devotion to God, kindness and truthfulness. A Brahmin possessing these virtues is worthy of respect and reverence. We are prepared to bow down at the feet of such a Brahmin. But we are unable to respect a so-called Brahmin like Sunder Tripathy.

Listen ! Listen ! O Readers good,  
 Watered rice and dry fish are his food.  
 Unlettered, he wears his sacred thread,  
 With sandal paste he paints his forehead.  
 Foremost is he in the paddy fields in weeding,  
 As for flattened rice and curd, none can rival him in eating.  
 Prayers he never says three times daily,  
 Catches fish in the paddy fields only.  
 The palm-leaf book never opens he,  
 Rice and pice he demands from clients as his fee.  
 Never speaks he in a meeting or party,  
 Such, such, you know, is Sundar Tripathy.

You bow down to Sundar Tripathy because he is born of Brahmin parents. He is your family priest because his father was the priest. We dare not say anything more.

Again, it is enjoined in the scripture that one should bow down to that perceptor only who can open the blind eyes of ignorance with the light of his knowledge. Tell us frankly if you will take such a man for your Guru (preceptor) or one who is merely the son of your Guru?

Now let us stop this discussion and attend to the affairs of the village.

Bhagia's wife was as foolish as Bhagia himself, matching each other like a lid fitting a pot. She was called Saria. Her age was about 25. Would you like to know anything about her appearance?

If you hear of a young princess, you take it for granted that she is very beautiful and accomplished, nay a paragon of beauty, even though she has swollen cheeks and a flat nose. When you hear that a certain Zamindar is a moneyed man, you take for granted that he is handsome, meritorious, kind and liberal and so on.

Similarly, you can draw your own inference about Saria, who was a mere weaver's wife in a village.

Bhagia and Saria were the only members of the family. Women say it is very good to have a family of two members. Our Bhagia's family was such a one. There was no domestic trouble. They never separated from each other even for a moment. They co-operated in their household work. While Bhagia was engaged in weaving, Saria would do all the preliminary work, such as winding the yarn on bobbins and making the shuttles. When Saria was cooking, Bhagia would blow the fire and bring water for the kitchen. Wags in the village made harmless jokes about Bhagia and Saria and their great attachment like that of a pair of doves. But we say, is it a disgrace to be constant in love? In our opinion, the couples ridiculed for their constancy are the really fortunate ones. It is only they who enjoy the bliss of heaven. An English poet has said that those who enjoy pure conjugal love are divine beings. If that love becomes strained, one suffers the pangs of hell.

But we have been guilty of a mis-statement. The proverb goes that there is no greater sin than lying. So we have to tell the truth. The fact is that Bhagia and Saria were not the only members of the family. They had a cow called Neta, who was the third member of the family. We mention the cow as a member of the family, along with human beings, because there is a reason for this. Saria tended and loved the cow as if it were her daughter. God has given the wonderful instinct of parental affection to

human beings. When someone is hungry, he chews leaves and twigs if he cannot get food. Similarly, a childless person loves and nurtures even a puppy, a kitten or a calf as his own child.

Saria was all attention to her cow day and night. Even when Neta was let loose from her tether, she followed Saria like a shadow. If Neta ever strayed for a while on to the village pathway, Saria would call her by name. Neta would respond with a loving moo and come back immediately to lick Saria, who would pat her and talk affectionately to her of many things. When Neta dipped her muzzle into a basin full of watered rice, Saria would give her a soft affectionate pat with an endearing rebuke. We know how a rebuke can be full of love and affection.

Bhagia, Saria and Neta used to sleep in the same room. Saria would make a smoking fire of rice-husks and dried cow-dungs beside Neta. A lucky animal was Neta. She had begotten a she-calf lately as her first issue. Neta was black all over with a white patch on her forehead. The proverb goes that a black cow with a white patch on the forehead adorns the house of the lucky householder. Her horns were thin and twisted, her tail thin, long and bushy at the end, sweeping the ground, the back low and broad, the hind part wide. Her hump looked like a small pumpkin, a little inclined towards the back, her gullet hanging down a little more than that of other cows and her udders looking as if full of milk. Neta was of medium height, unlike the tall cows of the Kalinga breed. There is a saying that a cow should be about 2 cubits high, should eat sufficient bran and enough grass in order to yield a large quantity of milk. It is said that the more a cow is fed by mouth, the more milk she gives. That does not mean that you can draw the milk from her mouth. We may say that a cow is just like a paper mill. If you fill the mouth of a mill with rags, fragments of ropes, rotten Panasi grass and soiled cotton, it gives out fine, white and smooth paper at the other end. Similarly, if you fill the stomach of a cow with bran, gruel and grass through her mouth, milk will flow down her udder.

We do not know the quantity of milk Neta yielded. One day, there was some talk about Neta in the Kutchery of Mangaraj. All present were of the opinion that Neta's yield of milk would not be less than five seers per day.



Mangaraj expressed surprise and said, "What ! a mere weaver has such a cow !"

People say that a son takes after his father. But it is also a fact that a worthless son is born when the ruin of a family is imminent. Bhagia's father, Govinda Chand, had been an important man in the village. At any sitting of the Panchayat in his village or in neighbouring villages, his presence was indispensable. Govinda was much in demand when any difficult case had to be decided. For instance, if a court peon came to serve any summons, or if a postal peon came to deliver a bearing (postage-due) letter, people would not come out of their homes until Govinda came there.

Govinda himself did not do any weaving. He used to purchase the cloth woven by other weavers and sell it in the weekly market or to some wholesaler. He used to make a decent profit out of it.

People thought Govinda was worth a few thousands. People have a tendency to over-calculate their own expectation of life and other people's wealth. Govinda had no doubt earned a good deal of money. When the Zamindar family of Baghasingha were approaching their downfall, they began to sell their lands in dribbles. One block of fertile rent-free land situated near Govindpur and measuring six acres and a half was purchased by Govinda.

They say the rent-collector of the village generally gains possession of the land through which the rain water of the village flows. That is to say, the rent-collector cultivates the best land of the village. The sewage of the village is washed into such land during the rains; so the land is very fertile. And as there is plenty of water in the land, the *Ravana* variety of paddy thrives well on it. There is a proverb that if a man sows paddy of the *Ravana* variety in such land, the yield is bound to rouse the jealousy of the neighbours. There being no risk of flood or drought, the land is sure to produce 24 maunds of paddy per acre every year.

Bhagia did not cultivate his land himself; so he let out his land on a crop-sharing basis, and used to get 15 maunds per acre as his share.

Foolish though he was, Bhagia possessed many good qualities. He used to feed his castemen on ceremonial occasions and never turned beggars away from his door. It is said that a dumb

person has no enemies. Bhagia and his wife shut themselves in their house whenever a quarrel took place in the village, for they were incapable of taking part in it. They were liked by all the villagers. Want is the root of all troubles. People feel unhappy whenever they lack any of the desirable things like wealth, learning, fame and health. Our weaver couple had none of these wants. If you wanted to see a conjunction of heavenly attributes like pure conjugal love, unalloyed affection, perfect contentment, unfailing good health and sincere piety in one place, you should have seen this weaver family. From our life-long experience, observation and study, we hold that uninterrupted happiness has never fallen to the fortune of any human being. Was this weavers' family an exception to this law of nature? The great poet Kalidas has said, "It is never the intention of God to create a being possessed of all excellent qualities to perfection."

Was not then this weaver family perfectly happy? Who can answer this question? The *Shalagram* idol does not seem to change its position. The feelings of a man find their expression in the outbursts of his laughing and crying. No one had ever seen this couple laugh or heard them cry. Their feelings could have been gauged from their speech, but they would speak to none. But no one escapes our notice. Hunters track their game by following the spoor. Similarly, we find out what is going on in the minds of people by following their actions.

One day, Saria had been to the house of Rukuni Ma to attend the ceremony observed on the 6th day after the birth of a child to her daughter-in-law. She just had a glimpse of the baby and came away, not waiting till the distribution of the ceremonial cakes. Returning home, she went to bed without eating anything, complaining of a stomach-ache. She lay tossing in bed till late in the night without any sleep. Saria had lately been very keen on the observance of periodic fasts and rites. She was also showing her devotion to Budhi Mangala, the village deity, to an increasing extent. If you find a man at the door of a doctor or a pleader, take it that the man is in difficulty. Budhi Mangala served the purposes of both doctor and pleader. If any villager fell ill or was entangled in litigation, some gain accrued to Mangala.

From Saria's devotion to Mangala, we inferred that there was

some worry on her mind. While plying the wheel in her verandah, if Saria found a child playing, she would stop working. When some dainty food was prepared on any social occasion, Saria would heave a sigh. She would not partake of it unless Bhagia fondly pressed her to do so. One day, Bhagia had to weave a small piece of coloured cloth to fill an order. After the weaving was done, Saria took half a day in folding it. Bhagia heaved a deep sigh as he saw her eyes fill with tears as she folded the cloth.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE CHOWKIDAR

The Harijan Basti was situated in the midst of paddy fields at a distance of 400 to 500 paces from the Weavers' block. It was not a separate village but a part of Govindpur, inhabited by 10 *Doma* families, besides Gobra Jena.

He was the Chowkidar of the village, for which he enjoyed one and a half acres of *jagir* land and, in addition, a bundle of corn from each family at harvest time. Jena was very particular in the discharge of his duties. It was due to his vigilance that thefts did not occur in the village. Though four or five burglaries did take place each year, the Chowkidar was in no way responsible for them. For on those nights, the Chowkidar remained absent on account of some social engagement in another village 8 or 10 miles from his own.

The Chowkidar kept watch over the village all night but so cleverly that nobody knew of it. He did not call out in his watch, lest the thieves should run away.

Our Jena Chowkidar was an honest and good-natured man. He took no bribe from anyone, except his annual levy of corn in the harvest season, a piece of cloth on the occasion of marriages, one rupee as his due from each bride-groom coming from outside the village, some ration money in case of any death, and a gourd

or a pumpkin grown by the villagers. Besides, he charged one rupee as his fee for lodging information with the Police in any case of theft or unnatural death caused by snake-bite or drowning. But as this fee was permitted by law, who could question it?

Gobra Jena alias Gobardhan was rather kind-hearted. If any poor man was in trouble, Gobardhan would let him off in return for only one or two of his few utensils. As is customary, he took a bunch of plantain, some gourds and pumpkins for the Sub-Inspector of Police, his assistant and the constables, whenever he went to the Police Station once a month to submit his report. On account of pressure of work the Chowkidar could not take his meal for the night in his own house. The villagers supplied it by turns. He always gave them timely notice for it. If for some reason a householder could not give him food, the Chowkidar became unable to concentrate on watching that house. The thieves got immediate information of the slackness of the watch that very night and would pilfer some vegetables or fruit from the kitchen garden of that householder, or steal paddy from his fields, or just ram down the front door of his house.

After eating in a villager's house, Gobardhan would wend his way home, bawling the usual watchman's cry, "Look out, beware, all ye householders!" Hearing this cry, the children still awake would fall asleep. Thereafter, nobody knew anything more about him. Gobra Jena was not a mere watchman of the *Pana* caste. He had about a thousand rupees in ready cash and a stock of 50 to 70 maunds of paddy.

One cannot escape trouble, however cautious one might be. Once there was a dacoity in the house of Bhubani Sha, a money-lender of the Teli caste in the village of Makhanpur. Eight persons were arrested and one of them, Dikadia of the *Pana* caste, said in his statement that Gobra Jena had abetted not only this dacoity but also 10 or 15 thefts and was moreover instrumental in the sale of stolen property. But his statement was unsupported and Gobra Jena saved himself by giving the Sub-Inspector of Police 250 rupees.

Gobra Jena was a favourite of Mangaraj on account of his cleverness. He attended the Kutchery of Mangaraj every morning and evening. People had seen Gobra and Mangaraj sitting

alone at dead of night. Many *Pana* families lived in Fatehpur Sarasandha. People suspected that they were professional thieves, dacoits and street robbers. The suspicion owed its origin to the fact that they were often arrested by the Police and often sent to the prison-house. Gobardhan very generously looked after the helpless children of the imprisoned men and procured paddy for their families from Mangaraj's granary. But slanderers always speak ill of others; they misunderstood Gobardhan and misinterpreted the generosity of Mangaraj too.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE VILLAGE TANK

There was a solitary tank in Govindpur village. Its water was used by all the villagers. It was a very big tank, measuring about 1,000 square yards, and was called the Asura Dighi.

Rumour goes that it was excavated by the Asuras (demons). That may be so. How could ordinary men like us have built such a remarkable and enormous reservoir of water? Ekadasia, 95-year-old weaver of the village, said the tank was excavated by Banasura, king of demons. He did not, of course, do the work himself. The demons, who started the work on his orders one night, could not complete it before day-break. They left unfilled about 12 or 14 cubits in the southern corner which now served as the mouth of the tank. When people began to move about in the village at day-break, the demons dug a tunnel under the tank, through which they escaped to the bank of the Ganges, bathed there and went away.

In former times, water used to flow into the tank when the tide rose in Gangasagar. There people took their sacred bath on particular auspicious days. The flow of water had now stopped because people had become corrupt. Let not the English-educated Babus laugh at Ekadasia's "history", for if they do, half the writings of Marshman and Todd will by the same token be meaningless.

There were fishes in the tank. You may say that wherever there is water, there are fish; then why need we say that there were fishes in the tank? But your argument is not quite consistent. The connection of fish with water is not like that of molasses with sugarcane, or of the body with bone. Were it so, fish could be found in the jar of water kept in your house. It is not our practice to write on the basis of mere presumption. We shall give irrefutable evidence to prove that there were fishes in Asura Dighi.

Three fish-eating alligators of varying sizes were to be found lying on land at a distance of 5 cubits from water on the southern side of the tank. They were there every day. Why were they in the tank? What did they live on? Had anyone seen them grazing like cattle in the field? Or were they non-violent like the Jainas? Certainly they were living on something found in the tank. And what was that thing? These alligators were also called fish-eaters, because they ate fish. Some might argue that they ate fish, no doubt, but they got it from somewhere else. Fish was certainly available in the market, but nobody had ever seen them going with money to purchase fish from the market. Moreover, when fisherwomen came to sell fish in the village, the women folk got fish from them in exchange for rice and paddy. But we are prepared to say on oath that we never saw any alligator procure fish in exchange for rice or paddy. Hence it is proved that there were fishes in the tank.

That is not sufficient proof. There are many other convincing proofs. Four cranes used to flap about in the mud like dancing boys; this they did for the pleasure of killing small fry. Some might blame the cranes for their cruel joy in killing the small fry. You might call them cruel, wicked, devilish whatever you like; but they would not sue you for defamation; for the more a man cuts the throat of his fellow-men the greater is the glory, honour and fame.

Some cranes waded in the mud from sunrise to sunset in search of small fry like poor labourers struggling for a job. But two water-crows came flying from some strange land, dived three or four times into the tank, filled their stomachs and fluttered away.

Another water-crow sat on the bank drying her wings spread out like the gown of a Memsahab.

Oh, you Indian cranes! Look at the English water-crows who came flying with empty stomachs and flew away bloated with big fish whereas you, living on the banyan tree on the very edge of the tank, are not getting anything more than small fry even though you wade in the mud all day long. The struggle for existence is greater now. Henceforth, swarms of water-crows will be coming to carry off all the choicest fishes. There is no way out for you, unless you learn to go to foreign countries by swimming across the seas.

The kite is very alert and very clever. It sits quietly on a branch of the tree near the tank like a High Priest. It earns its daily food by lifting whatever it gets by a single plunge into the water. The High Priests do not stir out of their homes except once a year when they appear at the houses of their disciples to press the demand for their annual fees.

Upto a distance of 40 or 50 cubits from the margin of the tank, the water is full of aquatic weeds. Amidst the weeds, lilies bloom at night and veil themselves during the day like shy newly-married Hindu maidens. Side by side, the aquatic Shimuli flowers dance freely in the breeze all day and night like unmarried girls. Further on in deeper water, there are the red lilies. They are like our educated Christian ladies, who have gone out of the lilies but have not been accepted into the lotuses. The centre of the tank is free of weeds, which cannot grow there because it is frequented by the deity Budhi Mangala at night. The tank is full of lotuses much valued by the Indian poets, wherein resides the Goddess of fortune, and the Goddess of learning, and which are the birthplace of Brahma, the Creator. The deity is sole owner of the flowers. Once a man swam in to pluck a flower. The Goddess chained his legs and dragged him down into the water. No one has ever made a second attempt.

Asura Dighi has four Ghats of which three are generally used by the common people. The southern Ghat is used by those who perform the rites on the 10th day after a death. This Ghat is a dangerous place, seldom visited by the people even during the day, night being simply out of the question. There is a very big Peepul

tree a little off this Ghat. Everyone knows that it is haunted by the ghosts of two Brahmins. Many people have seen them stretching their legs from the top of the tree to the middle of the tank. The names of the eye-witnesses are not known, but it is a fact! Besides, there is sufficient direct evidence to prove that many female spirits, having made their home there, catch fish in the tank; lights are seen on dark nights, and the spirits move about in groups, specially in the dark nights during the rains.

The eastern Ghat is used by the washermen. The washermen beat clothes on a block of stone and make a hissing sound. An Oriya proverb says—"The washerman's ghat shows how clean a village is." A cart-load of dirty clothes lies there in a heap. Four washerwomen are engaged in washing and drying the clothes.

The weaver's Ghat is in the north-western corner. Being in the middle of the village, it is the meeting place for women in the morning. On account of the great noise and the gathering of a large number of women we call it a mart, not that commodities are actually bought or sold here. The rush is very great when the women come to take their bath before cooking their meals. If there were a daily newspaper being published in the village, this place would save the editor much labour in collecting news. He could sit there, with a pencil and a piece of paper, and note down information on matters such as what was cooked last night, what is the menu for today, at what time they went to bed last night, who were much bitten by mosquitoes, who were in need of salt, who bought oil on credit, how the daughter-in-law of Rama's mother is very quarrelsome, how she came but yesterday and has started defying her mother-in-law, when Kamali would go to her father-in-law's house, how daughter Saraswati is very good because she cooks very well and is very shy.

Padi began a short lecture while cleansing her teeth by the tank, the sum and substance of which is that there was no one in the village to rival her in cooking, and there was no stopping her tongue while she talked of many useful and useless things.

Some beautiful women were rubbing their faces with one end of their Saris to enhance their beauty. Lakshmi had already reddened the upper part of her nose above the nose-ring by hard



rubbing. Bimali had started abusing some unknown person using words which do not find a place in the lexicon. The subject-matter of her lecture was that somebody's cow had damaged her pumpkin plant last night. She was cursing the cow's owner unto the third generation. Citing instances of the damage done by the cow, the luxuriance of the pumpkin plant and its fruit bearing potentialities, she wished the cow's owner would gift it to a Brahmin.

We would have collected much more information at the Ghat, but the sudden outbreak of an unexpected quarrel between Markandia's mother and Jasoda prevented us from doing so.

Jasoda in chest-high water was cleansing her teeth. Markandia, a boy of five, muddied the water by playing in it. As some water splashed on to Jasoda, she stepped angrily out of water and abused the boy in filthy language, wishing him a premature death. Markandia's mother rushed forward and made a fitting retort in a similar tone. Ultimately, the quarrel ended in a defeat for Markandia's mother who slapped her son and returned home carrying a jar-ful of water in her arms, muttering darkly and dragging Markandia behind her, crying loudly.

The sound of thunder reverberates in the sky long after the bolt has fallen. The quarrel had ended, but discussion about it continued for a long time. The middle-aged and aged women divided themselves into two groups, one taking up the cause of Markandia's mother and the other of Jasoda.

We are fully with Jasoda. After careful consideration we come to the sound judgment that Markandia is the root of the trouble. He is entirely to blame and his offence is inexcusable. We are prepared to shoulder the responsibility if you abuse him still more, beat him or do whatever you like.

You see water is the very life of man, and what is more everyone drinks the water from the weavers' ghat. Is it not a serious offence to spoil that water? It is another matter that four or five score of women wash themselves there. Every day some wash their soiled mattresses and some the bed clothes of their children and other rags. All these doings of the women are nothing compared to what Markandia did. Markandia's offence was very serious indeed.

*Saanta* Ghat is some distance from the weaver's ghat. In the first half of the day, no woman comes to this Ghat. It is used exclusively by men. In the month of Baisakh, even before it is mid-day, the air, heated as it were by fire from above, scorches the body. The cloud of dust rising from the ploughed fields looks like smoke emitted by the burning earth. The Ghat is already crowded with people. The farmers unyoke their bullocks after finishing their work which they started at about 4 A.M., in the last moonlit part of the dark fortnight. The farmers plunge into water, some after a hasty anointing of their bodies with oil, leaving their ploughs inclined against the walls of their houses, some with their towels on their shoulders, some without these and some coming straight from their paddy fields after unyoking their bullocks at the Ghat. A few pairs of bullocks graze by the sides of the tank after drinking to their hearts' content. Some men come chewing their tooth-sticks, scrape their tongues and cast away the sticks at the edge of the tank. On both sides of the Ghat, there are heaps of discarded tooth-sticks, enough to make half a cart-load. It is not that the men hold their tongues while bathing. They too talk about many things like the women. The topics are of the same good old variety, "the sowing in the low land, the second ploughing in the square plot of land, Bhima's smart bullocks, *Saanta's* pair of white bullocks which are not ordinary bullocks but like a pair of young elephants". Someone said, "I have wasted a handful of money by purchasing that brown bullock. *Saanta's* granary will open this month for lending paddy. The influence of the *Shravana* star, from the 15th day of this month will bring incessant rain, the astrologer has said." Everyone knows this kind of talk. We need not dilate on that.

## CHAPTER XIII

### MORAL INSTRUCTION

Lord! What is this? Why this whispering at the weavers' Ghat? The time when village women take their bath before cooking had passed when two middle-aged women cleaning their teeth spoke a few whispered words and then fell silent after looking at each other with a smile, as if they were afraid of somebody.

If you speak aloud, nobody will listen. Even those who are near you will remain inattentive. But if two people whisper to each other, that will draw the attention of others who will try to know the secret. Like an acorn hiding an oak in embryo, a whisper sometimes contains the hint of a big occurrence. There was no one else at the Ghat; why then did these two middle-aged women speak those few words softly, hinting at something, and again keep quiet out of fear?

A Banyan and a Peepul tree stood close to each other, about 20 cubits from the pathway leading to the Weavers' Ghat. The trees appeared young but were rich in growth and thickly covered with green foliage. It is said that one gains the grace of giving one's daughter in marriage if one performs the ritual marriage of the two sacred trees—a Banyan and a Peepul—near the approach to a Ghat. This religious practice of the Hindus is found in many places. The two women had looked twice or thrice at the foot of the trees, while they were talking. One of them is a sly vixen of loose character, and the other is exactly the opposite—an extremely innocent idiot. One of them is delivering a fluent lecture, carefully looking around, her nose-ring raised like the hood of a snake. The other is listening to the flow of her words with rapt attention, an earthen jar by her side, a tooth-stick in her right hand, her head veiled up to the brow, looking vacantly in the direction from which she hears an unusual sound.

We are sure you will want to know what they were talking about. We do not consider it wise to keep you in suspense any longer. The two women sitting under the tree are well-known in

the village. You also know them very well. People are known not by their appearance but by their worth. The more a man exceeds the normal standard of goodness or badness, the more he is well-known, irrespective of whether he is good or bad. There are more or less one thousand women in Govindpur. These two are the most conspicuous of them—one in cleverness and shrewdness and the other in simplicity and foolishness.

With a good deal of labour and care we have gathered what they were talking about. One of them made a long speech.

Champa—"Look here, Saria : Budhi Mangala is at the root of everything. The earth moves at her bidding. The universe owes its creation to her. Can anyone defy her will ? By observing various fasts and rites you have earned the favour of the deity. You are extremely lucky. This favour is exceptional. It was only Saanta (her master Mangaraj) who was so long enjoying that favour. Now you have become another recipient of it. Build Mangala's temple and you will see the Goddess of fortune take up her abode in your home. Money will come in hundreds and thousands, and your granaries will be full. Will Bhagia need to work any longer at the loom? Ten maid servants will wait upon you. Obey the order of Mangala and build her a temple somehow. Don't worry about money. Will anyone refuse to give you money for the sake of Mangala ? Why should you seek for money anywhere else ? If Mangaraj comes to hear of it, he will lend you the sum even at dead of night. I stand guarantee for that. I will arrange the money for you. You need not take any trouble. It will not require much money. A very big temple can be built with one hundred and fifty rupees. It will be as high and spacious as the *Baladeva Temple* at Kendrapara. You just execute a mortgage deed for your six acres and a half of land, and I will get you the money. Nobody will take away your land. The land will remain where it is. It will simply be entered in the bond. When you have built the temple, you will be in a position to lend money to many people. The Goddess Mangala must have given you some indications about it."

We cannot persuade ourselves to believe that Saria was impressed by what Champa told her. She was looking vacant. It was not easy for her to visualise how many rupees make one

hundred and fifty? If Saria had to count copper coins of the value of one rupee, she and her husband had to shut themselves up for two to three hours behind closed doors. If on any day she sold a piece of cloth for a rupee and two annas or a rupee and four annas, she got her brother Lokanathia to count the money. Such being the case, she had a hard time deciding whether the advent of five or six maid-servants into her house, as suggested by Champa, would be a blessing or a curse.

Perplexing indeed. Bhagia was not by her side. What was she to do? With a deep sigh she looked at her earthen jar and started to say something. But she only said "*Champa Saantani*", and could say nothing more.

Shrewd Champa, however, realised that she had failed to win her over. Moreover, she knew that her victim was struggling to get out of her grip. It was like a cat catching a fish after a prolonged vigil. Can the fish slip so easily out of her clutches? Champa adopted a more tactful method.

"Look here, Saria. Money or gold is of little worth. None of it can lift you to heaven. A child is what is most needed. A home without a child is dreary and desolate. Is there any curse greater than a women's barrenness? Every day I listen to the recitation of scriptures in my master's house. The other day, the priest read out where it is said: 'Look not in the morning at the face of a woman who has no child. A mother of three children is lucky. A barren woman is the curse of the village. The woman who has no issue is miserable.' Can a text in the Bhagavat be false? Do people bow down to the Bhagavat for nothing? You must have noticed how no one passes by your door early in the morning. Do you know why? They avoid looking at your face. You must have heard how our mistress had no issue at first. We avoided looking at her face till late in the morning. Our mistress prayed to Mangala with tears in her eyes. The deity favoured her. Now you see she is going to have grand-children."

Saria, though wide awake, felt as if she were dreaming. Her ears were buzzing with the words of Champa. She wanted to go away. But how? She was like a mouse in the grip of a cat. Her eyes were suffused with tears. She wanted to speak, but could

not open her lips. It was with great effort that she spoke at last.

Saria—"What shall I do? People say that *Saanta* does not relinquish the land once he takes it on a mortgage bond."

Champa—"Lord: How can you say such a thing? He will lend you money to build the temple of Mangala, and you say he will take away your land. Why do you listen to the villagers? This village of Govindpur is the worst of all places. The women of this village will land you in trouble any time. They are jealous of your happiness. The people of this village envy one another. Do not speak anything to anyone. Look here. If anyone disobeys the diety, he loses his eyes and ears and even his life. Have you not heard of the three women of Gopinathpur who became widows at one and the same time for disobeying the deity?"

Saria had been listening like a statue, but she could not keep silent on hearing the last words of Champa. She broke into tears and said, "Oh Champa *Saantani*. What shall I do?"

Clever as she was, Champa immediately fathomed the mind of Saria. Satisfied that her evil design had had the desired effect, she said gladly, "Look here, Saria. You need not be afraid. You will not have to do anything. I shall look to everything."

Saria—"No, no. I do not want anything. Let but my husband be safe."

Champa—"Fear nothing. No harm will come to Bhagia, your husband." Putting a garland of flower from the village deity's feet and some *Mahaprasad* in Saria's hand, Champa said, "Look here. These sacred things are my witness. I will do you all good. You will have three sons and Bhagia, your husband, also will live up to a good old age. Don't worry."

Saria—"What shall I do? Champa *Saantani*."

Champa—"You will not have to do anything. Both you and Bhagia come here this evening. I shall do what is needful. When you take the pledge to Mangala, both of you will have to fast after bathing. Then, so long as the worship of Mangala is not complete take a little quantity of flattened rice and nothing else. You do not know the rituals of the pledging. That is why I am telling you about these."

While Saria walked slowly to the tank to her bath, Champa

stood watching from the foot of the tree. Then, looking carefully around, she proceeded towards Mangaraj's house in a cheerful mood.

From a confidential enquiry, we have come to know that Saria was that day in Mangaraj's house till midnight and Bhagia was in his Kutchery. After this, Bhagia was not found in the village for four days. Some say he was seen on his way to Cuttack.

## CHAPTER XIV

### NEW INTRIGUE

'Huke-Huke-Ho'; the jackals howled for it was just mid-night. There are no time-keepers in the villages. The howling of jackals tells the time. These animals are very useful. There are no municipal scavengers in small villages; the work of removing the carcasses of dogs, mice, cats and other refuse is done by the jackals.

It was mid-night. The village of Govindpur was now calm and quiet. There was dead silence. A baby was crying in someone's house. The mother, half-awakened, patted the baby, offered it many things, held out the threat of a thief, a chowkidar, a tiger and other dreadful animals, cajoled the baby with affectionate words and ultimately succeeded in putting it to sleep.

The two Chowkidars—one our Gobra Jena and the other, Dasa Jena, of a neighbouring village—snored peacefully in the courtyard of the Kutchery of Mangaraj. Casual visitors might have thought two pigs were grunting there.

In the outside verandah of the Kutchery, three tenants rolled from side to side in their sleep as they were bitten by mosquitoes. They had been detained for not repaying the loan of paddy. They had gone without food all day; they suffered a good deal from the bite of the mosquitoes, and above all, they were in great distress. So sleep was simply out of question.

Mangaraj's bed-room was in the next block as one entered after crossing the Kutchery block. When occasion arose, it

served the purpose of a strong room also. It was the best of all the rooms. No pains had been spared to make it so. The room had a ceiling of wooden planks over which a thatched roof rested on five wooden beams fixed length-wise. The room faced east with a broad verandah in front. At a height of about three feet from the floor, in a western wall, was a window with iron bars. The window was scarcely ever opened, except on Thursdays in the month of *Margashira* when the room was washed. The four corners of the room were pitch-dark, so much so that for outsiders a lamp was necessary during the day. Cockroaches and rats had made their home in the corners. Close to the northern wall was a bamboo frame on which three old and big cane trunks were placed. A wooden bedstead lay near the western wall. In one corner of the room were earthen pots containing molasses, tamarind and mango preserves. Two big wooden chests of mango-wood were kept along the southern wall. Close to these was a sal-wood chest. This was the chest of Fortune; it was worshipped by Champa every evening with joss sticks and incense; once a week, on Thursdays, there was an offering of sandal paste and vermilion, sun-dried rice and molasses. Three or four jars of ghee hung by ropes from the wooden beam. Patches of cobwebs, hanging from the wooden beams and the ropes, looked like the hanging tassels of a palanquin.

Mangaraj's big wooden bedstead was placed lengthwise, north to south, close to the western wall. To the south end of the bed was a big pillow to rest the head upon. A thick bed-sheet was spread upon a straw-mat. At first sight, one might have mistaken the bed-sheet for a piece of spotted calico. But careful examination showed that the dark-red spots on the sheet were blood-stains of dead bugs.

At this hour of midnight, Champa and Mangaraj were in the room, deeply engrossed in talk. Champa was sitting on the floor, her hands resting on the bedstead; Mangaraj was on the bed, his head inclined towards her. About 3 cubits from the bedstead a dimly burning earthen lamp stood on a brass lamp-stand.

Mangaraj told Champa, "I could not tackle that weaver in spite of all my efforts for three years. But as soon as you took up the matter, it was easily done."



At this, Champa laughed a hearty laugh, and said, "You see, my master: I too thought at first I would not succeed. But is there anything which cannot be achieved by tact? You are going to plough Bhagia's six acres and a half tomorrow. Aren't you?"

Mangaraj—"I have already asked the ploughman to go to that field tomorrow morning and to finish the first and second ploughings. I will also accompany them."

Champa—"You have done well by pulling down his house. Otherwise, he would have created trouble about his land."

Mangaraj—"The land was mortgaged for six months. I got it on the expiry of the time limit. His house was auctioned to pay the cost of litigation. I purchased it and have dismantled it."

Champa—"I don't care much for the land or the house. It is only to get that cow that I did so much. It is a lucky cow, just like a dwarf elephant. Today I have tethered it in the verandah of the Kutchery. Tomorrow I shall take it inside. Where are those two idiots now?"

Mangaraj—"You mean Bhagia and Saria? They are seeking shelter here and there like beggars."

Champa—"The other day, Saria was beating her head and shedding tears at the seat of Mangala. She cried even more bitterly when she saw me. She was coming to say something to me, but I turned away from her."

Champa and Mangaraj continued talking far into the night. Towards the end they talked so carefully and secretly that we could not get any hint of their talk. They were still very absorbed in the conversation when a woman's shadow fell between them. Both of them looked up startled. The conversation came to a dead stop. The new-comer heaved a deep sigh, which obviously came from a heart afflicted with agony. All three remained speechless and motionless for a while, like statues. Perfect silence prevailed in the room.

After a while, Mangaraj looked at the woman and asked, "What is it?"

There was no reply. Mangaraj repeated his question. There was again no reply but the sigh was repeated.

A little annoyed, Mangaraj asked in a louder tone, "Why don't you say something?"

Mangaraj's wife spoke in a low tone, "I say, the night is far advanced. Please go to bed and put a stop to these talks."

Champa uttered a scornful "Aye, aye."

Mangaraj—"All right, I am going to bed. You please go now."

Champa's scornful "Aye, aye" pierced the heart of *Saantani* like a spear; and, being asked by her husband to go out, she felt as if she had been stung by a thousand scorpions.

"Champa will remain here and I shall go out", thought *Saantani* to herself.

Women, who are soft-hearted by nature, can still bear what would break the heart of hard-hearted men. Women have much more patience than men. But a husband's neglect and distrust are too much for an honest wife to bear. Besides the humiliation of a wife by a maid-servant in the presence of her husband is more painful than death.

But the present incident was apparently not the first of its kind; *Saantani* seemed long accustomed to it. She choked and felt as if her limbs were giving way. Holding herself up somehow, she came out of the room and sat down on the verandah, leaning against the wall. No one heard her speak anything after that. In spite of efforts to conceal her feelings, she was seen shedding tears all the time.

Champa closed the door with a bang and told Mangaraj, "I don't mind if I am abused or beaten with a broom-stick. But my heart breaks if anyone utters a word against you. But your wife came to say that she disapproves of what you have done. She wants you not to turn *Bhagia* and *Saria* out of their land. It took us a whole year to work out our plan. Lots of money was spent. There was litigation at *Cuttack*; 10 or 20 cartloads of stones must have been carried from our garden to *Mangala's* place. After all this has been done, your wife comes to say, "Give up the six acres and a half in favour of *Bhagia* and *Saria* and do not demolish their dwelling house." Champa laughed derisively at the very idea.

Penetrating the deep silence of the night, that devilish laughter

must have reached the ears of Saantani. But, at that time, she had not enough possession of her senses to realise its serious portent.

No one knows the further mischief which Champa and Mangaraj planned that night. Only Champa is reported to have said, "Just arrange for me a palanquin and four men to carry some presents; and if I do not succeed in my plan, you can cut off my nose."

## CHAPTER XV

### THE BAGHASINGHA FAMILY

It was said by Abul Fazl, the famous author of *Ain-i-Akbari*, that the *Khandayats* were the real landlords of Orissa. During the reign of the *Gajapati* Kings of Orissa, the entire administration of the country was in the hands of the *Khandayats* who wielded both the pen and the sword. Though they were not paid from the royal exchequer, they enjoyed the major part of the landed property of Orissa as hereditary *jagirs*. It was due to the might of the *Khandayats* and their followers, the *Paikas*, that Orissa was able to retain her independence for a pretty long time. The Pathans could not cross the Subarnarekha river from Bengal though they tried for three long years.

The *Paikas* were not in constant attendance at Court. The seats of their Chieftains were called Choupadhis, from the fact that the four kinds of military art, namely, wrestling, sword-play, archery and bullet-shooting, were practised there. After the fall of the *Gajapati* dynasty in Orissa, Todar Mal, in his land-settlement, recorded the big Choupadhis as Killas. Even now there are many small Choupadhis in Orissa, existing only in name; and there are not a few unworthy descendants of the ancient chieftains.

Our *Baghasingha* family was descended from one of the aforesaid chieftains. Their surname was Malla. The oldest son

was designated as Baghasingha. He inherited the *jagir*. The other sons got only their maintenance. Where there are no trees, even a castor plant is called a tree. The Baghasingha family were petty Jagirdars, but they had a reputation of their own in their part of the countryside. They had a Choupadhi in village Ratanpur. It was a revenue-free Khandayat estate.

Natabar Ghanashyam Baghasingha had squandered his *zamindari* estate. He had been very extravagant and reckless in expenditure. Whatever money came into his hands, he had spent. He had never said 'nay' to anyone asking for anything. His door was always open to beggars and other favour-seekers. People counted on getting his help whenever in urgent need of anything.

He liked to eat and to feed others. The villagers used to say that a person once fed by Natabar Ghanashyam Baghasingha on exquisitely made cakes, pastries and puddings could never get these off his mind.

In his life-time he had incurred debts which consumed all his *zamindari* after his death. The Khandayat Mahal was the only estate now left to his family.

Natabar Ghanashyam had four sons of whom the eldest was Bhimsen Baghasingha, the other three being Prahlad Malla, Kuchuli Malla and Balaram Malla. The sons were not extravagant like their father. They were sober and considerate. They had lost their paternal property but somehow managed to make both ends meet.

A silk cloth cannot be other than silk, even when it is in rags. Being descendants of an ancient family, they commanded the respect and reverence of the people.

Besides the family of Baghasingha, there were 18 other families of cowmen, barbers, confectioners and their kith and kin in village Ratanpur enjoying hereditary *jagir* lands given to them by the ancestors of the Baghasingha family. Occasionally they rendered free service to the Baghasingha family. The priest also belonged to this village.

In addition to these, there were eight Harijan families, who enjoyed *jagir* land in return for drum-beating on ceremonial

occasions. They had to perform also the duty of keeping watch over the house of Baghasingha.

For various reasons a dispute had been going on between Mangaraj and the Baghasingha family for the last three years. Mangaraj was shrewd and an expert in litigation, but he was terribly afraid of the *lathi*. On the other hand, the Baghasingha family had implicit faith in the effectiveness of the *lathi*. For fear of Harijans, Mangaraj's men dared not approach Ratanpur.

Some Harijans had been put into prison because stolen property had been found concealed under the ground in their enclosures. People say that the Harijans are traditionally innocent of theft.

One day Balram Malla openly abused Mangaraj, from the verandah of the shop at Govindpur, for having destroyed crops in Ratanpur village by letting his cattle loose there. Mangaraj dared not open his lips.

Ratanpur is at a distance of four miles from Govindpur, but the fields of the two villages are contiguous. There were frequent reports of Mangaraj's cattle having damaged crops in Ratanpur village.

## CHAPTER XVI

### THE MATERNAL AUNT FROM TANGI

It was the *Snana Purnima*, full moon day of the month of *Jyaistha*, a very hot and sultry day on which Lord Jagannath retires from public view for a fortnight. There had not been a drop of rain for two months and a half. The air was dead still. The trunks of leafless trees appeared like the *Garuda* Pillar standing in front of Lord Jagannath. No leaves stirred even on the Peepul, not to speak of other trees. The sand in the street was so hot you could parch a handful of paddy on it. The stray bitch of the village, with a black spot on its head, wallowed in the mud of the tank, panting, its tongue protruding. It was afraid

of going into the water which was too hot. Not a cow or a calf was to be seen on the meadow. They were chewing cud under the trees, their eyes closed like the *Vaisnavas* counting their beads and muttering God's name. No birds flew in the sky. They perched among the foliage on the trees, with their beaks open.

It was past midday; the sun's rays were scorching and the sky seemed like pouring fire.

In the village lane of Ratanpur, the rhythmic shout of 'Hoom, Hoom' of the palanquin bearers was heard. A palanquin was coming, followed by five men carrying shoulder-loads of presents. The palanquin was covered all over with a coarse cloth.

Almost none of the men-folk was in the village at the time. There was no work to be done in the paddy fields; so Baghasingha had gone to Kendrapara with his brothers to attend the *Snan Yatra* festival of the god Baladev.

The coming of the palanquin created a commotion in the village from one end to the other. Old and middle-aged women opened their doors and came out of their homes into the village lane. The young married women peeped out through half-closed doors, showing little of their faces beyond the nose-rings.

The village women wondered aloud who was coming in the palanquin. They first argued whether it was a man or a woman, and then about who he or she was. Some said it must be a newly-married woman; others said it was a police jamadar; some others held it must be a Saheb.

With conviction, Jema's mother said that the Jamadar Saheb was coming home for the *Snan Purnima* festival with shoulder-loads of vegetables. But the palanquin took a turn near the *Tulasi Choura* of Baghasingha's house. The bearers halted at the door. There they put down the palanquin and fanned their faces with their napkins.

They were perspiring profusely and wiping the sweat from their faces with their left hands. Word was sent into the inner apartment that the maternal aunt of the newly-married daughter-in-law had arrived. In the month of *Magha*, Baghasingha's son Chandramani had married the daughter of Fatesingh of Dalijoda. The clever women of the village could easily understand without any comment that the palanquin had come straight from Dalijoda.

The barber woman Manika ran into the Zenana to inform the ladies of the house.

Manika was no ordinary woman. In wit, tact and cleverness she could outclass any woman. Everyone in the village held her in awe. Even elderly and middle-aged women consulted her in important matters. She had no equal in "countercharms". If a baby were taken ill by the influence of some evil eye, she could fend it off. She was an expert at midwifery. She knew a good deal about medicinal herbs.

She was as forward in doing good to others as she was ever ready to pick up quarrels for their sake. If anyone fell ill, she would stay up all night nursing the sick, provided she was spoken to in polite words. On ceremonial occasions like marriages, etc., she would present herself without being sent for and would render services without being asked.

She was supposed to know everything. She was the only source of information to the village women about the affairs of Cuttack town, the Sahebs living there and the temple of Jagannath at Puri.

There can be a tank without fish, but there can be no village without evil-speakers. Some said Manika talked too much, told lies, and made false forecasts about the future. No one in her family for three generations had ever gone out of the village. How could she know about Cuttack and the Sahebs there?

She found much favour in the house of Baghasingha. Every evening she was sent for by the ladies to tell them the oft-repeated and oft-heard stories of the King's son, the Minister's son, the Merchant's son and the Captain's son who went abroad together, and other stories of a like nature. She could tell off-hand the story of the battle between Rama and Ravana. She could give a reply to whatever you asked her. But you had to be careful of one thing; say 'yes' to whatever she said. If you said 'no' or 'perhaps not', you were undone. Her name, Manika, which means jewel, fitted her too well.

When the palanquin was passing down the village mainway, Manika picked up all information about it from a talk with the barber who was following. Then she ran into the house of *Baghasingha*, shouting at the front door, "Come, first mistress,

come second mistress, come third mistress. Where are you? Come sharp. The palanquin carrying your son's mother-in-law from Dalijoda is waiting at your door. I had heard of her coming four days ago, but I had forgotten to tell you about it. She started from Dalijoda yesterday. I was wondering why she was so late. I suppose she took a bath in the big tank on her way."

The four sisters-in-law of the Baghasingha family looked at one another's face, wondering what they were to do for the uninvited and unexpected guest. But Manika made the decision for them; they should go at once and receive her.

The lady guest got down from the palanquin and went in with quick steps. She embraced the ladies of the house one after another, addressing them familiarly as sisters-in-law. They conducted her inside the house, taking her by the hand and smiling. Manika was more prompt than the others in making arrangements for the reception of the guest. Going ahead, she spread an old carpet in the verandah in front of the bed-room of Baghasingha. The guest seated herself on it and taking the ladies of the house by their hands, made them sit down by her side.

The five shoulder-loads of presents were placed in the middle of the courtyard. One of them contained ripe mangoes, the second two big jack-fruits, the third bunches of green and ripe plantains and the fourth and fifth contained sweet-meats covered with plantain leaves.

The village women came running to see the sight. Some of them had babies in their arms, some were dragging children by their hands, some followed others and some were coming alone. Sukrai's mother had been mudwashing her house. She had had no time to wash her hand; so she kept it raised like a serpent's hood.

The courtyard was overcrowded now. The women were scrutinising the features of the lady guest. But the naughty children were intent on the ripe mangoes and ripe plantains in the courtyard, like cats watching a basket of dry fish, with not a care for the appearance of the lady guest.

This was, no doubt, uncivil and indecent on the part of the children. The way they were gradually coming closer and closer towards the ripe plantains and ripe mangoes would most pro-



bably have led to plunder, had not the foresight of Manika, who could read their evil intention, prevented it by warding them off with a movement of her right hand.

The guest, with a thick paint of vermilion on her forehead like that on the forehead of the goddess Mangala, mascara in her eyes, various kinds of ornaments on different parts of her person, dressed in a nicely bordered Berhampur-made silk sari, and with her mouth full of betel leaf, looked like a member of the aristocratic family of Fatesingh of Dalijoda. The village women had already heard of the magnificence of the Fatesingh family. Now, getting direct evidence of it from the richness of the guest's ornaments, they came to the conclusion that the family really was as well-to-do as they had heard it was.

"Where is my niece?" the lady asked. "I want to see her".

The youngest mother-in-law led the newly married girl to her. The girl, covering her face with a veil and bending a little, touched the feet of the aunt. The aunt embraced her warmly, exclaiming affectionately, "Oh : my dear daughter, I was longing to see you. Light of my house, my house is dark since your coming over here. Oh : my precious jewel."

The aunt appeared to be breathless and tears fell from her eyes. The eldest sister-in-law embraced her. Wiping the tears with one end of her sari, she consoled her with sweet words.

But the aunt said, "Alas, my sister : I have almost given up eating and drinking since my darling came here. I was constantly looking towards the road and was asking every passer-by from this side for news about my niece."

Her niece, however, was puzzled because she found the voice and the wailing unfamiliar. She was just going to raise her veil to have a look at the face of her aunt. The visitor, however, clever as she was, guessed her intention and pushed down the veil, saying, "Ah : my darling. You are as bashful as a sensitive plant. Your mother was as shy as yourself. Though she lived upto a good old age, she never looked at the face of her mother-in-law. Rather she would talk even to her mother-in-law only from under the veil. If paddy is sown, will it grow weed? If *Tulasi* seed is sown, will it grow nettle? Can a good mother beget a bad child?"

Hearing these words of the aunt, the niece covered herself up once more and kept her peace.

At her father's house, she had heard that her mother had a cousin, the daughter of her mother's uncle, who had married someone at Tangi. This aunt must be that cousin of her mother's, she concluded.

Much jolly talk ensued, and many jokes were exchanged between the aunt and her sisters-in-law. You may want to hear about these talks. But we are very reluctant to divulge the private conversations of the ladies of respectable families. To satisfy your curiosity we can tell you only as much of these as will give no offence to anyone.

The aunt said, "A rare combination of stars has taken place this year. People are going to attend the festival of the god Baladeva. So most of the people of our village are not at home. I thought it was a rare opportunity to kill two birds with one stone—to see the god as well as to meet my sisters-in-law. And at the same time, I would see how my niece was faring. I persuaded everyone in the house to come along. My husband, his elder brothers and my sister's husband have gone ahead on horseback. They are waiting for me in the mango-grove on the way. The servants are with them.

"I could not go with them without visiting my niece. So I have come alone. Tomorrow we shall be returning this way after visiting the god. On the way, I heard that my brothers-in-law (*i.e.*, your husbands) have all gone to attend the festival. We shall all come back together. On our way back, we shall stay here for four days."

Patting her niece on the head, the aunt said, "You are so young, my darling. You may not recognise me. You have not seen me for a long time. Let me come back, I shall tell you many things privately." And she whispered into her ears, "I shall bring you many things from the festival".

Excusing herself on the pretext that she had to visit the lavatory, she proceeded to the palanquin, which was placed at the front door. Her attendant was standing there holding a water-pot. Taking the water pot which contained fire instead of water and covering it with her hand as if to prevent overflow of water,

she went to the back door. Baghasingha's maid-servant showed her to the alcove behind the house and went away.

It was getting dark. The aunt came back from behind the house and said, "I cannot stay any longer. They will be waiting for me." The sisters asked her to eat something. But she gave the customary answer. "I have given my daughter to your family. How can I touch even water at your place?" She warmly embraced the sisters and took her leave saying, "I bid you good bye, but my heart remains with you."

The palanquin was seen out of the village till it vanished from sight in the darkness. Then the presents that had been brought were arranged neatly for the inspection of *Baghasingha* and his brothers on their return. With her departure, the aunt became the subject of much comment in respect of her appearance and manners. Everybody praised her, some for her beauty, some for her winning ways, some for her ornaments and some for the presents she had brought. But Manika said, "Yes, may be she comes of a rich family, but her appearance is not to match. Her front teeth are protruding. Her cheeks are out of proportion". Another woman said, "Her speech lacks grace. Her tone is harsh". A third woman said, "She walks with a hump". In a moment, all her merits were drowned in a flood of criticism. The newly-married girl was questioned in various ways about her aunt. But all she knew was, "Tangi Mausī," this was the Aunt from Tangi.

## CHAPTER XVII

### HOW DID THE HOUSE BURN DOWN ?

Next day the whole village of Ratanpur was wailing. All of *Baghasingha's* house together with his granary of paddy had been burnt to ashes at midnight. The charred walls stood covered with ashes. The fire had not been extinguished even then. The thatches had fallen down and were burning furiously. The

bamboo knots burst with a cracking sound. Pillars of fire were everywhere; doors, door frames and everything else was on fire. The granary had caught fire and a thick cloud of smoke was coming out of it.

It was a day in the month of *Jyaistha*. The straw thatch had been as dry as any inflammable material. The wind fanned the fire, but it had not yet reached the room which was roofed with wooden planks; only the doors had caught fire. The ploughmen were trying to approach the room by throwing jarfuls of water at the doors.

Those who had gone to see the festival had returned by noon. When the house caught fire at midnight, the women of the house had come out in a hurry with only the clothes they had worn. Now they were sitting under the trees in the mango grove, looking at the fire and wailing aloud like wild cats. The ploughmen had already set the cattle free from their tethers and run away. Had they tried, they could have saved much from the fire. But how many would like to jump into the fire for others?

The sun was about to set. No one in the Baghasingha family had yet even cleaned his teeth. The children and the young married girls were in distress for want of food. The old priest, Kelu Ratha, coaxed them to clean their teeth, got some flattened rice, molasses and bowlfuls of watered rice from his home and refreshed them with these. Some of the women partook of these and others did not. Baghasingha's wife fell down in a swoon after drinking a glass of water.

The fire died out in all rooms except the granary. Smoke was still coming out, however, from some of the rooms at about 8 o'clock in the night. Baghasingha was sitting with his brothers and the other people of the village at the foot of a tree.

"How did the house catch fire?" he asked. The question was echoed by all of them. But who could answer it?

Kelu Ratha said, "Who could set fire to the house? Who could have the courage to come to the doors of the Bagha (Tiger) family? It is certainly the work of some devil."

"No, no, it is due to the wrath of Budhi Mangala", said an elderly Brahmin, "Don't you see? Mangaraj worships Mangala all the year round. I advised Baghasingha several times to send

offerings for the worship of Mangala, but my advice was not heeded. Now see what has come to pass. Whatever I say, I say after proper consideration. How did fire come from the haystack near the alcove behind the house if it was not contrived by the goddess ?”

Manika had her own opinion. “I think the coming of the new bride is very inauspicious. So many mishaps have occurred since she set foot in the house”. “Very true”, Shyama’s mother said, “I was afraid of speaking this out so far. Didn’t you see how the cow was unexpectedly bitten by a snake in the month of *Chaitra* ? Were there no snakes in this village before ? But did they ever bite a cow ? I have lived two score and ten years now and never heard that a Baghasingha’s cow was ever bitten by a snake.”

The ploughman Makara agreed. “Quite so. Two years ago my two bullocks, which were as big as elephants, died all of a sudden one after the other”.

“Mangoes in this garden were formerly so profuse,” another ploughman Arjuna said, “that even cattle used to feed on them. But you won’t find a single mango this year.”

The ploughmen, the barbers and their wives were unanimous in their conjecture supported by argument that the house burned down because of the bad luck of the bride ! Manika reinforced this conclusion again, saying, “Don’t you see, this mishap has come scarcely a day after the bride’s aunt set foot in the house ?”

“Who is this aunt ?” Baghasingha enquired, sharply. “Who is she ?”

Manika gave a full description of what she had seen of the aunt who had come in a palanquin, and what she had heard of Fatesingh of Dalijoda going to Kendrapara on horseback to attend the festival, not omitting to mention the number of presents.

A fisherwoman thereupon remarked that the bride’s aunt looked exactly like Champa of Mangaraj’s household, whom she had seen at Govindpur, where she had been several times to sell flattened rice. The ploughman, Sankara, said one of the men who had carried the presents on his shoulder was Mangaraj’s ploughman. Baghasingha’s brothers looked at one another and

said, "We came straight from Kendrapara, but we saw neither the palanquin nor the horse on our way".

Men were sent that very night to Kendrapara and Dalijoda to enquire about the aunt. They came back to say that no aunt could be found anywhere. This led to much discussion for many days in the village and became the talk of neighbouring villages. Some thought it was due to the wrath of Mangala, the goddess, but we know it to be the work of a female devil.

Fatesingh of Dalijoda came to commiserate with the distressed family. He took away his daughter who had given up eating and drinking and would otherwise have succumbed to death.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### SAANTANI, MANGARAJ'S WIFE

It was *Radhastami* day in the month of *Bhadra*. People had not yet left their beds as the darkness of the night still lingered. Of course, many people were awake; but in the winter and the rainy season, people do not like to leave their beds early in the morning unless there is some urgency.

Marua, a maid-servant of the Mangaraj family, opened the door with her right hand and came out of the house with a water-pot in her left hand. There she stood shocked by what she saw.

"What is this white thing?", she exclaimed, staring towards the *Tulasi Choura* in the middle of the courtyard.

The mistress of the house of Mangaraj had vowed to worship Brundavati, the presiding deity of the *Tulasi Choura*, all her life. She had herself brought the holy plant from the garden. All her time was spent in the service of the holy plant. On getting up from her bed, she used to sweep the surroundings of the *Choura*, then water the holy plant after taking her bath, offer some sunned rice to the deity, and worship her with a joss stick in the evening. After lighting the stick, she used to bow down at the foot

of the *Choura* and pray for half an hour muttering some words which only she knew. Now there she lay, near the plant in the courtyard. Marua proceeded slowly to the *Choura*, and carefully examined the prostrate figure.

"Mistress, Mistress!" she called.

There was no reply.

The maid put down the water-pot and felt the body of the Mistress with her hand. The clothes she had on were soaked in rain water and the body was stiff and as cold as ice.

With a terrifying shriek, Marua cried out aloud. "My Mistress, oh my Mistress! where are you gone? Who will feed me now?" Members of Mangaraj's family came hurrying out into the courtyard and began to cry. The daughters-in-law, forgetting to veil their faces, rolled about on the ground. Champa cried loudest of all the mourners.

The news of the death of the *Saantani* travelled from one end of the village to the other like lightning. Women gave up their morning chores, and the men kept away from their work, and all of them recalled the good qualities of the Mistress. Even women who were in no way connected with the family burst into tears. Some said, "Today is Radhastami day. The Goddess of Fortune has departed from the village on this sacred day". Some said, "The prosperity of the Mangaraj family has come to an end. The family is ill-fated from today."

Whenever the women of the village talked of a wife's fidelity to her husband, they would cite the *Saantani* as an unparalleled example. "The purity of her character was as intense as her devotion to God. The husband's love, which is an invaluable treasure to a wife, was denied to her by destiny. But this did not deter her at all. She was thoroughly convinced that devotion to her husband was a wife's paramount duty and her happiness lay in such devotion. She took pleasure in rendering service not only to her husband but also to humanity at large.

"After coming of age, her sons had lost touch with her. It was not that she was not respected by her daughters-in-law; yet she did not demand from them the respect due to her as the head of the family. No one had even seen the daughters-in-law massage their mother-in-law when she lay in her sick-bed."

She had been incapable of influencing her sons, daughters-in-law, servants and maid-servants. She had treated them all impartially irrespective of their regard or disregard for her. She remained silent in the face of abuse. She was neither on good terms nor on bad terms with anyone. No one had even seen her talk to anybody about her weal and woe. But if anyone in the family fell ill, she would sit beside him and nurse him day and night. During the illness of a maid-servant or that of any daughter-in-law, she would massage her hands and feet even if she was asked not to do so.

She would not take any food before all the members in her family or guests had been fed. She used to take care of the poor old women and helpless widows of the village. If it came to her ears that someone was in need of food, she would send it to him or her without the knowledge of her husband and her sons and daughters-in-law; she would send a seer of rice, a handful of pulses, a pinch of salt, a little mustard oil, a bit of gourd, and so on. The poor and the destitute looked up to her with hope. Many poor debtors and tenants were known to have been freed from the oppression of Mangaraj through her intervention. If Mangaraj coerced anybody, he could escape if he brought his grievances to the ears of the Mistress through a daughter or a daughter-in-law. For this, she received much reproof from her husband. She turned a deaf ear to all the jeerings and sneerings of Champa. If she could do anyone a good turn she felt as happy as if she had found a treasure. Shibu Pandit used to say that she was an incarnation of the divine virtues of kindness, affection and devotion.

The Mistress had one great fault, a shortcoming it certainly was, for which her husband was always displeased with her. She had absolutely no knowledge of house-keeping. She could not realise how invaluable money was. She did not seek money. So no money came to her hand. If by chance, a few small coins came to her hand, she would spend the amount freely on getting a piece of cloth or a nose-ring or a seer of fried rice for a newly-married girl of the village to be given to her at the time of her going to her mother-in-law's house; or, the coins would fall to the



lot of someone who needed food. People told of her making such gifts, but no one had ever seen her at it.

Irrespective of her merits or defects, however, everybody inside and outside the house was now distressed at what had befallen her.

Only one man was not crying. The ploughman, Mukunda, sat leaning against a wall, stretching his long bony legs, his eyes shut and his toothless mouth agape.

No one knew whether Mukunda had anyone in the world whom he could call his own. Mangaraj's wife, as a very little girl, had played in Mukunda's lap; he had come with her from her father's house to the house of Mangaraj. Mukunda alone had known the mind of the Mistress. He who had shed unceasing tears whenever the Mistress was in the slightest grief was not shedding any tears now, although she was lying dead. He who loses at one stroke all his happiness, all peace, all support, all hope and all affection does not shed tears. Mukunda only heaved a deep sigh now and then.

Mangaraj was staring vacantly at her face. Tears fell steadily from his eyes. No one had ever seen tears in his eyes. People said there was no room in Mangaraj's heart for affection, shame or righteousness. For him money was all. Day and night he thought and dreamt of money. He had often been seen sitting alone, deeply engrossed in thought. But the trend of his thoughts was different today. His eyes were half-shut, unblinking and full of tears.

Was Mangaraj shedding tears for his wife? Separation from any beloved object is painful. Was Mangaraj in tears because of pure conjugal love? Perhaps not. No one had ever heard him speak a loving word to his wife. Why then was he so perturbed today? Perhaps, after all, he was feeling the pangs of separation from his wife. Good or bad, there was some attachment to one whom he had once accepted as a partner in life, at the sacred nuptial altar.

It is not easy to overcome what is innate in human nature. A wife shares your rites and religious observances, she is mother of your beloved children, shares your weal or woe, a nurse in illness and a minister in adversity.

Mangaraj's life flowed in two streams. One was like the current of the *Charanavati* (the Chambal river) which flows rapidly and overflows its banks; the other was like that of the *Phalgu* which moves gently and sanctifies its banks with its sacred water. Mangaraj probably knew that the sanctifying stream of the *Phalgu* had taken leave of him for ever.

Put a cup of wine and a cup of water before a drunkard, and he will prefer the cup of wine. Rarely does he realise that water is his life, and not the wine which is only an intoxicant.

Mangaraj was apparently distraught with grief and repentance. A man sheds tears in grief. Grief is a glowing ember in the heart of man, but repentance is a fire. Was Mangaraj repenting, thinking of his misdeeds and the neglect that brought about his wife's death? Innumerable misdeeds had been committed by him. But who had ever seen him repent for his misdeeds? And who can say that he did not? Who knows how human nature changes in a moment?

The Creator of the Universe made all men and women out of the same elements. As the body is composed of flesh, blood, bone and waste matter, so does the mind comprise the qualities of kindness, attachment, love and affection as well as envy, jealousy and cruelty. A harmonious and effective combination of these qualities makes a man in the true sense of the term. But when one of these preponderates over others, man loses his humanity and becomes either a god or a devil.

A man's mind is composed of divine and infernal elements. The divine elements raise a man to godhood and the infernal ones make a devil. Will you not attribute godhood to a man who sacrifices his own life to save that of another? When you hear of a man killing a child to rob him of his gold and silver ornaments, won't you call him a devil?

A particular faculty is strong in some, weak in others, and dormant in still others. On particular occasions, due to change of circumstances, dormant faculties are known to be roused. Who knew that wicked drunkards like *Jagai* and *Madhai* would be turned into great devotees of Vishnu? And Paul, who was one of the worst enemies of Jesus Christ and a tyrant, came to be adored as a saint. A passing glance from *Menaka* set at nought

the spiritual ardour of the noble saint *Viswamitra*, who had been practising austerity for thousands of years.

On deep reflection, you will find that such a sudden change is attributable to circumstance and company. In this connection one should remember the wise saying of the venerable saint *Sankaracharya* : "The company of good men, even for a moment, serves as a boat for crossing the ocean of the World".

Who can say that the faculty of man which makes him repent had not now been awakened in Mangaraj. We are not omniscient. How can we gauge the feelings of Mangaraj? Even if we can, we have not the capacity to make it intelligible to you by describing how he was being over-powered simultaneously by grief and repentance, which were choking his throat and making him insensible to what was going on in the outer world.

Excuse us, gentle reader. Let us now stop. The angels in heaven are now beating the muffled drums on the death of a Hindu wife predeceasing her husband, and the lucky women of the village whose husbands are living are waiting to collect the *couries* scattered while taking the dead body to the cremation ground and to preserve these in their toilet boxes. Let us say, "May her soul enjoy eternal bliss".

## CHAPTER XIX

### POLICE ENQUIRY

The day dawned on Govindpur as usual. But the sun was not seen in the sky. It was drizzling.

Weeding in the paddy fields had been finished and the men were not going out to work in the fields. After finishing their morning chores the women were going out to the tank to take their bath. The weavers' quarter of the village echoed with the sound of working looms. The women weavers turned their spinning wheels on their verandahs.

At about 9 o'clock in the morning one Gopal Samal, Sahu's ploughman, was repairing the bund around his paddy field, a

palm-leaf hat on his head and a spade in his hand. As Gopal Samal was working near the road, he attracted the notice of Ghosuria, Mangaraj's ploughman, who was going hastily towards the house of Gobra Jena.

Ghosuria beckoned Gopal to come to him and told him that he was going on an important errand and that he would tell Gopal a great secret as he had full confidence in him. Ghosuria whispered some words into his ears and warned him not to divulge the secret as he had been strictly forbidden by his master. Proceeding further, Ghosuria met Makar Jena on the way and told him the secret, advising him also not to make it public. One by one he met Danai Sahu, Binodia, Natabaria and Bhima's mother, to all of whom he revealed the same secret in a low voice, telling each to treat it as strictly confidential.

Gopal gave up his work in the field and ran to his master to tell him about the secret. Hari Sahu reported it to Sama Sahu, Hatia to Natia, Jema's mother to Shama's mother. All the villagers began talking about it, but all in whispers and each one asking everyone else to keep the matter a secret.

Someone said, "The Jamadar is coming soon". Another protested saying, "No, no, it is a murder case. The Daroga himself will come on horse-back". But those who were more sensible said, "Is it an ordinary affair? The Company (Government) itself will come from Cuttack with a force of armed men".

It was universally acknowledged that the villagers would certainly be arrested. The village became hushed and quiet in a moment. The married young girls scurried homeward after a hurried bath in the tank. They had had no time to squeeze out and dry their clothes which flapped wet against their legs. Their jars, not having been filled with water to the brims because of the hurry, rattled like over-zealous patriots delivering lectures at public meetings. The village school-master having disappeared suddenly with his cane in his hand, the school children were making a great noise and tumult, running here and there in the village lane. A small schoolboy was caught hold of by the monitor and taken into custody like an accused arrested in a murder case by the Police.

Ghosuria returned and informed Mangaraj that Gobra Jena

was not at home, and had been out since last night. Mangaraj sent his ploughman and then went personally to each and every house of the weavers. But to whichever house he went, he found the door shut and no one responded to his call. Much annoyed, he returned home, undecided what he should do. His ploughman, Ghusuria, holding a cudgel in his hand, was chasing away the dogs behind his house. Two jackals lay in wait, peering from their hiding place in the bushes.

A little past noon, from the eastern edge of village Govindpur, a tall and stalwart figure appeared astride a pony. The big beard of the rider covered his chest. He had on his person a loose *chapkan* of a peculiar cut, a cap of fine embroidered cloth perched askew on his head, and loose trousers covering his legs. Five chowkidars with *lathis* on their shoulders brought up the rear. Leading them all was Gobra Jena, running with *lathi* on his shoulder.

In front of Mangaraj's house Gobra halted with his back towards the house.

"Is this the house?"

With folded hands Gobra said, "Yes, your honour".

The rider got down from the pony and, saying "Bismillah!", (In the name of Allah or God!), took a deep breath.

An hour later another rider appeared in the village. His pony was ill-bred and old, a mere skeleton, obviously fed on grass. Its hind legs were sore and bare. Two big eyes were protruding from sunken sockets. But the rider had a bulky body and his dress was like that of a rich man. His dhoti was of fine quality. His coat had straps on both sides and the turban wrapped round his head was a silk scarf with six rows of ornamental borders.

A Chowkidar with a club on his shoulder was goading the horse from behind. A syce-boy went ahead, pulling at a rope attached to the reins.

This rider too got down at the door of Mangaraj's house.

Sheikh Enayat Hossain was a first class Police Daroga (Inspector) in the Cuttack District. He was well up in Persian. He could not write Oriya as he did not know it and signed official papers in Persian. On account of his efficiency he had been stationed at Kendrapara Thana for twelve years at a stretch. The

question of his transfer was raised only once when there was some delay in sending to the Superintendent and the Peshkar of the Sadar Court some things they had ordered on the occasion of Durga Puja.

His Munshi (Police-Sub-Inspector), Chakradhar Das, too was an experienced Police Officer. The District Magistrate was said to be highly pleased with the Sub-Inspector.

The police enquiry was held in the Kutchery of Mangaraj. The Police Inspector, Sh. Enayet Hossain, was sitting on a carpet. Sub-Inspector Chakradhar Das had his seat on a straw mat in front of the former. At a short distance stood two constables (named Golam Kadar and Hari Singh) and five chowkidars.

Ramchandra Mangaraj had been arrested and sat with his head bowed. The house had been surrounded on all sides. First of all, the women were shifted to one side and the house was searched.

Every chest, trunk and wicker-work basket was searched. The granary was thoroughly inspected. The cooking pots were examined. The floor was dug up at three or four places to see if there was anything hidden under it. The straw of the thatched roof was removed in three or four places. Nothing incriminating was found.

Only one *lathi*, 3 or 4 cubits long and 6 inches thick, was seized from Mangaraj's bed-room. The dead body of a woman covered in an old straw mat lying at the back of his house was brought to the front door.

Gobra Jena identified the dead body to be that of the weaver woman Saria. The Daroga stroked his beard with his hand and asked, "Well, Ramchandra Mangaraj! What's your intention? Don't you remember the case of the Harijans of Ratanpur?"

"Mangaraj probably thought he would not be in trouble again," the Munshi said.

Mangaraj had promised a bribe of one thousand rupees to the Daroga for securing the imprisonment of the Harijans of Ratanpur, but he had failed to keep his promise. That is why the Daroga now reminded Mangaraj of his treachery.

The investigation of the present case now started. Munshi Chakradhar Das produced the papers from a bundle. The china-

clay inkpot, with a cork at the top and a string tied around its neck, was placed in front. The Munshi mended a reed pen with a pen-knife, the handle of which was made of ebony. He tried out the pen by writing on a slip of paper. Then, inscribing the names of several gods and goddesses with a prayer to each of them, as an introduction, he began his official work.

“The East Indian Company Sarkar—complainant, *Versus* Ramchandra Mangaraj, of Village Govindpur, District Cuttack—accused.

“Complaint : The murder of a weaver woman named Saria, and the plunder of her property including a cow called Neta.”

The house was searched. Going round the village, the constables and chowkidars reported that there was not a single male in the village. The female members answered through half-opened doors. It appeared that half the males had gone out to see distant relatives, one fourth were out in search of missing cattle, one eighth had gone to Puri on pilgrimage and the rest were lying on sick-beds. Only a few gentlemen of other villages presented themselves as witnesses out of a sense of duty.

The Daroga was very irritated, as no villager of Govindpur came up to him. So he took the constables to task, calling them many names. Then followed a succession of blows and breaking of doors. The villagers were forced to come out. They say a dying man can escape the jaws of Death for a day or two by hiding under a straw mat, but who can escape the clutches of police-men?

The male population came straight out of their houses. The evidence of 32 witnesses was recorded in two days.

On the first day, the dead body, escorted by the Chowkidars, was sent to Cuttack for post-mortem examination. The Munshi Sahab wrote down the statements of witnesses on two and a half quires of brown paper made by convicts in the jail.

For your information we are giving below the statements of some witnesses :

Witness No. 1. “My name is Gobra Jena; father’s name the late Guhia Jena; caste, *Pana*; age, 45 years; occupation, village chowkidar; residence, village Govindpur, Pargana Balubishi, District Cuttack.

"I am the chowkidar of the village. I keep watch over the village all through the night. Last night, while I was on watch, at about midnight I heard the weaver woman Saria crying out from the back part of the house of Mangaraj, 'I am being killed, I am being killed'. It seemed as if she was being beaten with a bamboo stick". On cross-examination, he said "No, I did not see Mangaraj at the time." He said again, "Yes, I heard his voice. This cow belongs to Saria. It is called Neta. For about a month, I am finding it tethered in the courtyard of Mangaraj, I don't know how it was brought here". He again said, "Mangaraj has got it tethered here."

Witness No. 2, Sana Rana, at first denied any knowledge of the occurrence. The Daroga got very angry and ordered the constables to take him aside, that is to chastise him. After half an hour, he was produced before the Daroga, escorted by two constables. The hair of his head were dishevelled; his body was covered with dust; his back, hands and cheeks bore marks of whipping. Then he made his statement.

"Sir, I shall tell the truth. My name is Sana Rana; Father's name Bana Rana; Caste, Mali (gardener); age 30; occupation, worship of the village deity and cultivation; Residence, Village Govindpur, Pargana Balubishi, District Cuttack.

"I know Saria. I don't know how she died. About a year ago, one morning I was sent for by Mangaraj through a ploughman. He took me to a garden and told me confidentially, 'Look here, Sana! I tell you to do one thing. If you follow my instruction, I shall give you 2 acres of good land for cultivation of paddy and two rupees more.' I asked him, 'What have I to do?' Mangaraj said, 'You know this weaver Bhagia. His wife Saria has no issue. She bows down to Budhi Mangala every day, praying for a son. Go to her and tell her, 'The deity has told me in a dream that if you worship her, she will speak to you (Saria) in person and bless you with a son.' I told Bhagia and Saria twice or thrice as instructed by Mangaraj. They listened to me, but gave no reply.

"One afternoon, Bhagia took me to his house and asked me how the worship should be performed, what things would be required, and how much it would cost. I explained everything



to him. I took from him 10 annas and 6 pies for purchasing the articles to be offered in worship.

“One Saturday, after nightfall, four of us, namely, Mangaraj, his barber-servant Jaga, a ploughman with a spade in his hand and I, went to the shrine of Mangala. According to the instructions of Mangaraj, a big hole was dug at the back of the shrine of the deity. The barber Jaga hid himself inside the hole. The mouth of the hole was covered with leaves and twigs. I had instructed Bhagia and Saria that morning to observe a fast.

“At midnight, when the village was all quiet, I called them out and worshipped the deity with offerings. According to my instructions, Bhagia and Saria were lying prostrate before the deity. I appealed to the deity, ‘Mother Mangala! Be pleased to grant a boon to Saria. She has been worshipping you so long. You have favoured many devotees. Please extend your favour to these two persons.’ From within the hole where he was hidden, Jaga replied, ‘You, Saria, have been worshipping me for a long time. You bow down to me everyday on your way home after taking your bath. You offer me a palmful of water which I gladly accept. I now bestow on you the boon that you will have three sons and much wealth. But you must build me a temple. Tomorrow, early in the morning, both of you will come, before washing your faces, to the weavers’ ghat and dig where you find a scarlet flower. Take to your home the gold coin you find there. Make offerings to me every day. I will give you bags and bags of such gold coins. If you do not do as I say, I will wring the neck of Bhagia.’

“Saria and Bhagia trembled with fear. They could not speak. After finishing the worship, I gave them a portion of the offerings made to the deity and escorted them to their home. The remaining offerings I wrapped up in a piece of cloth. On my return from the house of Bhagia and Saria, Jaga came out laughing from the hole. Then both of us went and put a gold coin under the earth near the Ghat, and put a scarlet flower there. Then we went home.

“The next morning, I went to the house of Bhagia. In a voice choked with tears, both of them said, ‘Please tell us how we shall build the temple.’ On my advice they borrowed money

from Mangaraj, mortgaging to him their six and a half acres of land.

“A civil court peon came to pull down Bhagia’s house. Mangaraj’s ploughmen demolished the house in the presence of the peon and carried away all his belongings. Bhagia had gone mad and was wandering in the village since his house was broken. Seven or eight days ago, I heard Saria crying at the back-door of Mangaraj’s house.”

Cross-examined, he said : “I do not know how much money was given to Bhagia by Mangaraj. But I know that Mangaraj purchased a sari for Saria when Bhagia was taken to Cuttack for registration of the mortgage bond. Mangaraj had gathered about 20 cartloads of stones and piled them up at the site of Mangala’s shrine for building the temple. Mangaraj gave me 4 annas that day and nothing more. I know nothing more.”

Witness No. 3. “My name is Marua; father’s name, Lakshman Tahadi; caste, Brahmin; age not known; present address village Govindpur, District Cuttack.

“I do not know the disease of which Saria died. For the last eight days, she was sitting at our back door. Day and night she was there. She was crying out to whomsoever she met, “My six acres and a half, my six acres and a half, my Neta’. When she met the Mistress, she used to fall at her feet and cry. The Mistress also shed tears for her. Champa tried to drive her out three times, beating her with a broom-stick. But she did not go. She did not take any food for eight days. The Mistress would place her own food before Saria on a piece of plantain leaf. But Saria would not eat it. It was eaten by a dog or a cow. Sometimes she would take only one or two mouthfuls when pressed by the Mistress.

“My Mistress too did not take her food for seven days. She would shed tears when she was asked to take her food. So I did not speak to her any more about it. On the seventh day of the waxing fortnight in the month of *Bhadra*, cooking her own food consisting of sunned rice and ghee, she was just going to offer it to Mangala when Saria cried aloud; so she placed the sacred food before Saria. Since then the Mistress remained confined to bed. She breathed her last next day.”

She answered further on cross-examination, "I don't know what disease the Mistress was suffering from. She had been indisposed eight days before *Snana Purnima*. On that day Champa had gone out somewhere in a palanquin. She returned in a cheerful mood and told her something. From that day the Mistress's ailment had been aggravated. She gave up taking her food at night and in the daytime too. She was constantly shedding tears. The Mistress prostrated herself at the feet of Mangaraj and appealed to him to relinquish Saria's land. But he turned a deaf ear to all her entreaties. As Champa got angry, the Mistress did not press the matter any further, but gave up taking food. Mukunda got some medicine for her from the village physician. But she did not take it".

She continued in answer to cross-examination, "I am in this house for the last 10 years. My father had his house in a Brahmin village in the district of Puri. Jagannath Tiadi is my husband's name. At the time of my marriage, I was seven years of age, as I have heard, and my husband was three score and four years old. My husband was known to be an asthma patient and he died of that disease. There was no other member in my husband's house. My father sold away all the property of my husband and took me to his house. I stayed at my father's house for five to seven years.

"There was a *Vaishnava* mendicant named Lalita Das in our village. As I used to go to hear the narration of *Chaitanya's* life, my brothers picked up a quarrel with me. One night, I came away with the mendicant in order to go to Brindaban and remained at Telengabazar at Cuttack. Mangaraj had been to Cuttack in connection with some litigation. I came here with him and I have been living in this house."

Witness No. 4. "My name is Baidhar Mahanty; father's name, Dambarudhar Mahanty; caste Karana; age 56; Residence, Village Kanakpur, Pargana Jhankada, District Cuttack.

"I have been serving as an accountant in the zamindari estate of Fatepur Sarasandha for the last 20 years. Keramat Ali of Medinipur was originally the Zamindar of this estate. Ramchandra Mangaraj has now acquired it by a mortgage bond on contract basis."

The Daroga put a number of questions to the witness who answered all of them. We give here only his most important replies.

The replies of the witness.—“Mangaraj has not purchased this estate with any money from his own pocket. He has purchased it with money collected from the estate. In the first year, Mangaraj collected the rent and gave it to Zamindar Dildar Mian. With the rent of the next half-yearly instalment he went to Medinipur accompanied by me. He told the Zamindar, ‘The *Baghasingha* family are creating disturbance. So the rent could not be realised. What shall we do? Tomorrow is the date fixed for the deposit of revenue in the Government treasury.’ Mangaraj lent him money on execution of a mortgage bond by the Zamindar and paid the revenue. Mangaraj used to realise interest from the tenants on the loan advanced by him to the Zamindar in addition to the rent dues. This was repeated in each instalment of rent collection. At last, he bribed the associates of the Zamindar and with their help he got a bond executed by the Zamindar for thirty thousand rupees including capital and interest. Dilu Mian signed the bond when he was drunk. Then Mangaraj did not go any more to Medinipur. He got possession of the Zamindari by filing a suit at Cuttack.”

Questioned further he answered,—“Yes, he got a mortgage bond for Rs. 150 executed by the weaver Bhagia for six acres and a half of land on condition that Mangaraj would take possession of the land if the money was not paid by the stipulated time. By a reference to records I can say how much was spent for the execution of the bond and the cost of litigation.” On reference to records he said, “The total cost amounted to Rs. 35-10-9”.

He further said,—“Yes, Mangaraj filed a suit against Bhagia in the Civil Court at Cuttack. The summons, the warrant for the execution of decree and sale proclamation in the case are all with me. None of these has been given to Bhagia. The Civil Court peon used to take his remuneration from Mangaraj and go away with receipts given by me. I do not know how Saria died. This cow belongs to Bhagia.”

Witness No. 5. “My name is Champa; Father’s name, not

known; Caste, a member of this family; Residence, village Govindpur, District Cuttack.

"I do not know Saria. She does not belong to this village. She did not die at our house. She died of fever. My master did not tell her anything. My master is a perfect gentleman. He is a peaceful man. My Mistress died of fever. I am not taking my food since her death and am always shedding tears". (So saying she began to cry, but became quiet on being admonished by the Daroga). "This cow is the offspring of our calf. We purchased it from Saria.

The investigation was adjourned for the night. The Daroga, the Munshi and Chowkidar Gobra Jena sat together till far into the night. A selection of further witnesses was made and their statements were recorded the next day.

Witness No. 6. "My name is Bana Jena; Father's name, Dana Jena; Caste, Pana; age 18; Occupation, ploughman; Residence, Village Makrampur, Pargana Balubisi, District Cuttack.

"I know Saria. I have been to her home several times. She belongs to this village. Ramchandra Mangaraj caught hold of her and beat her 8 days ago. This is the *lathi* with which she was beaten". (The witness exhibited the *lathi*). "I saw Mangaraj beating Saria at mid-night on the twelfth day of the lunar fortnight. He gave her 20 blows on the back. I had come here in search of my master's cow. My home is about one mile from this place. I am not on bad terms with Mangaraj. It is not a fact that Gobra Jena is my sister's husband."

Witness No. 7. "My name is Dhakei Jena; Father's name, Nanguda Jena; Caste Pana; age not known; Occupation, Ploughman; Residence, Village Raipur, Pargana Balubisi, District Cuttack.

"I saw accused Ramchandra Mangaraj beating Saria with his *lathi* at midnight on the ninth day of the lunar fortnight. I had come to purchase salt from the shop. I was sleeping on the verandah of the shop as the night was advanced. On hearing the sound of blows I got up on the roof of the shop and looked around". He further said "No, no, I got up on the roof of Mangaraj's house from where I could see what was happening. I know this cow and I have milked her several times. The cow is

called Boula. This cow belongs to the weaver Bhagia. Ramchandra Mangaraj has stolen the cow from his house.”

He then replied to questions put by the accused. “It is not a fact that Gobra Jena is my cousin. He did not ask me to come here. I have come to depose as a witness of my own accord. He has not provided my meal. I have brought my own rice from my home. I do not know what day of the week today is.”

Witness No. 8. ‘My name is Khatu Chanda; Father’s name, Nitai Chanda; Caste, Weaver; Age 28; Occupation, weaving; Residence, Village Govindpur, District Cuttack.

“I know this cow belongs to Bhagia, who is my neighbour. Mangaraj brought the cow to his own house the day Bhagia’s house was razed in the presence of the court bailiff. I do not know why the cow was brought. The servants of Mangaraj levelled the house of Bhagia and carried away all his belongings. Both Bhagia and Saria were crying bitterly. We had shut ourselves up inside our houses. I was peeping through an opening in the door. Chowkidar Gobra Jena was calling me. I did not respond. My wife replied that I was not at home.”

The statement of the accused Ramchandra Mangaraj. “Father’s name, Dhani Naik; Caste, Khandayat; age 52; Occupation, Zamindar; Residence, Village Govindpur, District Cuttack.”

His answers to questions.—“I did not beat Saria. Bhagia borrowed money from me. I acquired his six acres and a half of land by the execution of a court decree. I have taken possession of his land against the cost of litigation.”

As Ramchandra Mangaraj was affixing his signatures to the paper, a mad man appeared on the spot. He had a torn piece of cloth wrapped round his waist. His hair was dishevelled. His whole body was covered with dust and mud. With an earthen cooking pot in his hand, he danced insanely and sang something about Saria.

Seeing him, the villagers groaned in distress and remarked. “Alas; poor, luckless Bhagia.”

Seeing Mangaraj, Bhagia ran to bite him but the Chowkidars

grappled with the man and, unable to restrain him, tied him up under orders of the Daroga.

Thirty two witnesses were examined in the course of the investigation. Detaining four of them, the Daroga dismissed the rest.

Mangaraj was despatched to Cuttack at 9 o'clock next morning, handcuffed, walking with a towel on his head and with his face down-cast, surrounded by constables and chowkidars. The villagers looked on like sight-seers at a festival. We are unable to say whether anyone in the village was moved to pity at Mangaraj's plight. Only Champa's loud crying resounded in the street as she ran alongside saying, "My master, my master, why are they taking you away, my master?"

Mangaraj looked back twice or thrice and told her to go back home. But she followed Mangaraj for a distance of two miles before coming to the point.

"What will happen if the things in your strong-room are ruined by white-ants and rats?"

Mangaraj halted a while and made over to her two heavy keys, instructing her to keep all the things carefully and not to worry.

Tucking the keys carefully in her loin-cloth, Champa said, "Please take care of yourself and do not go without food."

The barber Govinda had all along been with her. The two returned home together. Nobody heard her cry on her way back.

On reaching the Police Station, the Daroga made the witnesses recite their statements once more. These were suitably modified according to the advice of the Munshi, and proper instructions were given to the witnesses. The accused was then sent up to the District Magistrate of Cuttack with the Daroga's report. We have procured a certified copy of the report. You may read it too, if you like.

Copy of the Daroga's report :—

"May it please your honour, justice incarnate. While your most obedient servant (my humble self) was engaged in the performance of Government duties in his office at 8 A.M., on the 3rd September current, while Munshi Chakradhar Das was writ-

ing the daily diary seated at the right of your servant, and while the two constables, Golam Kadar and Hari Singh, were on watch duty, it was reported by Gobra Jena, Chowkidar of Govindpur in Mouza Fatepur Sarasandha in the jurisdiction of this Police Station, that a weaver woman named Saria of the Govindpur village had been murdered. On receipt of this report, your humble servant did not lose a moment in sending the first information to your honour. The accused being a Zamindar notorious for his wickedness and oppression and the offence being of a very serious nature, your humble servant at once proceeded to the spot. After a careful search of the accused's house and property, your humble servant very cautiously arrested the accused and seized from the possession of the accused the dead body of one woman named Saria and all goods and chattels of her house along with one black cow belonging to the deceased. Your humble servant has also seized the *lathi* with which Saria was beaten to death. It is clearly proved from the evidence of four witnesses that the accused Ramchandra Mangaraj has himself murdered Saria with a *lathi*. All the four are eye-witnesses. From the evidence of Witness No. 4 it is clear that the accused who is an oppressor by nature has fraudulently usurped the Zamindari of a pious Mussalman. In view of the above-mentioned facts, I am convinced that the accused is guilty of murder. Hence, I send him to your honour for trial. Your honour, emperor of the universe, is like father and mother to me. Your humble servant begs pardon for any defects in the report and prays for impartial judgement."

"Dated the 10th September 1831.

"Daroga Enayat Hossain,  
"Thana Kendrapara."

"P.S. The stolen property recovered from the house of the accused is sent in charge of constable Hari Singh as per list enclosed. Saria having been murdered by the accused, her husband Bhagia Chand has gone mad and is committing acts of great violence. There being no near relation to take charge of him, the mad man is also sent to your honour for trial; your honour is all in all."



## CHAPTER XX

### PLEADER RAM-RAM LALA

The accused sat with his eyes closed in a corner of the judicial lock-up, leaning against the wooden railings. Four constables kept watch. Alas! there was none to speak a word to that man. In prosperity all are friends and slaves of money, but in adversity one is deserted. There are people whose houses no one frequents and there are people whose houses are always crowded. Man is a creature of circumstance. An English poet has said, "A man without a friend is like a world without a sun".

When someone said, 'Good morning, Mangaraj', the prisoner looked up with a start. Time was when he thought nothing of such greetings, but today it had the effect of infusing new life in him. He scanned the visitor from head to foot, a tall figure in a loose *chapkan* stained here and there with ink and extending upto his knees. The visitor had a big turban on his head and a folded scarf wrapped round his neck and laid cross-wise upon his breast. He wore a fine Dhoti with an ornamental three-line border. A pair of old-fashioned slippers covered with floral designs, a reed pen stuck in his ear, long whiskers and a mouth full of betel leaf completed the picture.

The sight of this man agitated the mind of the accused with hope, surprise and suspicions. He had not to wait for long. Gopi Singh, the constable on duty introduced him to the man and said, "Ram-Ram Lala is his name. He is a leading member of the bar. Depend upon him. The Saheb (Magistrate) has regard for his pleadings".

The pleader spoke like a dear old friend. "Mangaraj, why didn't you inform me before the case took such a serious turn? I am always busy with law-suits. My clients do not allow me time even to breathe. But I hurried to you as soon as your name reached my ears."

Mangaraj heaved a deep sigh and burst into tears. With

folded hands he went down on his knees and touched the ground with his head.

"Please get up," the pleader said. "From this moment I take up the entire charge of your affairs. Rest assured. Don't worry. Last night I have been to the bungalow of the Magistrate. I had a talk with him about several cases. Had I been informed of your case, I could have done a lot for you. I have now come to know everything about your case. The bloody rascal, the Daroga, is at the root of all this. You will see what a plight I shall bring him to. Just let me talk to the Magistrate."

With folded hands, Mangaraj said, "I am undone, Vakil Saheb. Please save me. You are my god-father. I am like a child and ignorant. I leave everything to you."

"You need not explain anything to me. I know all," the pleader said. "I shall do the needful. But there is one thing that you should know. It is a very serious case in which your life is at stake. If you are not alert from the beginning, the result will be capital punishment. That rascal Daroga is after you. You are an intelligent man. I need not tell you more. You know well the ways of the law-courts. It will cost money. If you are afraid of spending, that won't do. You will have to open your purse. Do you know what that Daroga is saying? He says it is a murder case and fit for capital punishment. Life has got to be saved at any cost. You have earned money. Now you have to decide whether you will save your life or your money."

"How much will it cost?" Mangaraj asked with tearful eyes. "I have not a single pie with me, Sir, nor is there any man with me to get money from my home. The Daroga does not allow my servants and account-keeper to talk to me. Get me free and I shall pay you one thousand rupees when I get home."

Constable Gopi Singh interrupted Mangaraj with a jibe. "Was it with this much of sense in you that you were managing an estate? This is not a sale transaction. How can payment be deferred? The pleader wants ready cash to work for his clients. Without money the pleader won't even speak a word. Bring out your money if you want to win the case. Vakil Saheb, I won't allow you to talk further with the accused. The

Nazir ordered me to allow only a few words. I am not the only man on duty here. There are four of us”.

“You see, Mangaraj?” the pleader said. “It is not an easy affair. You will have to win over everyone from the constable right up to the trying court. It is such a serious case that no other pleader would have had the courage to take it up, even if he were paid ten thousand rupees in cash. When you have made me your god-father, I cannot leave you helpless. All right, I shall bear all the cost of litigation, which will come to not less than Rs. 10,000, and you will execute a deed mortgaging your Zamindari in my favour. All the money may not have to be spent. I shall give you an account of the expenditure to the last pie, after your release”.

Mangaraj sat immersed in thought for a while, his head resting on his hand. A guilty mind is always suspicious. Mangaraj was fully aware of the implications of such a mortgage deed. But a drowning man catches at a straw if he can get at it.

Ram-Ram Lala acted very promptly in execution of the work. Within two hours he had purchased the stamp paper, drafted the deed, made a fair copy of it and got it registered in the Registration Office before it closed for the day.

“Now, Mangaraj”, he said, when it was all done, “sit calm and quiet in the lock-up. I am here to help you. Don’t worry.”

## CHAPTER XXI

### THE SESSIONS COURT

The Sessions Court at Cuttack is crowded today. People are flocking to witness the hearing of the case of Mangaraj. There is a great rush and much noise. Two ushers are adding to the uproar by their loud cries of “Silence, Silence.” An important Zamindar from the Muffasil is in the dock for murder. The Magistrate had committed the accused to the Sessions, where the hearing has been going on for five days. Today is the last date of hearing.

The proceedings have not been started yet, because the mail bound for England is to leave tomorrow and the Judge is writing a letter beginning, "My dear Lady".

When a criminal case is taken up for hearing, the European Judge busies himself with an English newspaper or sets about writing letters. All the proceedings of the case are entrusted to the Bench Clerk. The Judge merely initials the statements of witnesses and reads out the judgement.

Today, however, the Judge will have to do everything himself, because one of the witnesses is an Englishman, and also because he will have to write the judgement in English. So he licks the envelope, closes it, gives it to his peon for posting, and then says, "Well Babu : Put up the case."

The Clerk calls out :

"Isan Chandra Sarkar, Government Pleader—  
Present yourself.

"Enayat Hossain, Police Daroga—  
Present yourself.

"Ram-Ram Lala, Pleader for the accused—  
Present yourself.

"Accused Ramchandra Mangaraj".

The accused stood up in the dock with folded hands.

The Civil Surgeon, seated to the right of the Judge, took his oath on the Holy Bible and said, "My name is A.B.C.D. Douglas; Father's name, E.F.G.H. Douglas; Nationality English; Age 40; Residence, at present, Cuttack.

"I am Civil Surgeon of Cuttack District. At 7.30 in the morning of the 8th, the dead body of Saria was examined before me in the Government post-mortem house. As identified by Chowkidar Gobra Jena, I say that the dead body was that of Saria. From what I have come to know from the examination I dare say that no deadly weapon or any such thing caused her death. I have sufficient proof that her death was caused by prolonged starvation and excessive mental agony."

Questioned by the Court, the witness said—"The dead body bore no marks of injury. Her blood had dried up; there was almost no blood in the heart. Her stomach was almost empty.

There was nothing in the kidney and the viscera. All these indications show that she died of starvation."

Questioned by the Government Pleader, the witness replied, "Yes, Gobra Jena particularly pointed out to me three marks on the back of the dead body. I have examined these too, carefully. But these were not marks of injury. They were slight scorching-marks caused by a hot iron or some other heated thing after life had become extinct."

Questioned again by the Government Pleader, the witness said, "No. I did not dissect the dead body myself. The Native Doctor Gouranga Kar and the Compounder Basudev Patnaik dissected it in my presence."

Further questioned by the Pleader, the witness replied with some irritation. "I have been working as Civil Surgeon for the last 10½ years. I was previously attached to the Military Department. I passed the medical examination from the London Medical College." In answer to another question, he said,—“I used to be a hospital assistant. I was promoted for my service in the Burmese War.”

Turning to Defence Counsel, the Judge said, "Have you got anything to ask?"

Ram-Ram Lala looked towards the Civil Surgeon and asked, "Was there any mark of the *lathi*, now exhibited in the Court, on the back of the dead body?"

Judge—"Nonsense. Isn't there anything else you want to ask?"

The Pleader again turned to cross-examine the witness.—“Well, you say that Saria died of starvation. Did she fast of her own accord or did the accused make her fast?”

Judge—"Never mind. Go on. Go on".

Pleader—"Well, is there any evidence of Saria having died at the house of the accused?"

The Judge got angry and said, "If you ask such irrelevant questions, I shall cancel your license."

Pleader—"Your lordship is the master of the universe."

Those among our readers who are pleaders themselves should bear in mind that this happened sixty years ago.

After the statement of the accused was recorded, the case was

argued by the pleaders on both sides. It was a tough fight which lasted for over two hours. In the meantime, the Judge had finished reading a newspaper and had also had his tiffin. Had the Judge not intervened, the argument would have continued endlessly.

According to the orders of the Court, the Office Superintendent wrote out the judgement. It ran into 12 sheets of paper and took three days to draft before it was pronounced. We have procured a certified copy of that judgement. But as we are always brief, we shall give here only such extracts as will enable the reader to know all about the case.

### *Judgement*

In the Court of the Civil & Sessions Judge.

H. R. Jackson Esq.—Sessions Judge.

In the district of Cuttack, Orissa territory, in the revenue Estate of the East India Company.

Plaintiff—The East India Company.

*Versus* Defendant—Ram Chandra Mangaraj, Vill. Govindpur, Paragana Asureswar, District Cuttack.

The charge of murder of a weaver woman named Saria and looting the belongings of her house.

Having studied all the records of the case and after hearing the evidence of the parties and the arguments of the pleaders on both sides, it appears that it is a case sent up by the police. The District Magistrate has committed the accused to the Sessions, charging him with murder. To establish the charge against the accused, the Police has produced eight witnesses. I have very carefully examined the witnesses and after hearing the arguments of pleaders for both the parties, I come to the conclusion that the accused did not kill Saria by beating her with a bamboo stick as alleged by the Police. Prolonged starvation and mental agony are the causes of her death. My finding is based upon the definite and clear evidence of the Civil Surgeon, who is an important witness in this murder case and who attests that the dead woman bore no marks of injury on her person.

From the evidence of the witnesses I have got sufficient proof of the case being a concocted one. I believe the first informant,

Gobra Jena, Chowkidar, is at the root of this plot. A comparison of his F.I.R. (First Information Report) with his subsequent statement before the court will clearly show that he has tried his utmost to give a touch of verisimilitude to a false thing, and has been unable to defend himself in the cross-examination. The two eye-witnesses, Bana Jena and Dhakei Jena, who allege having seen the accused beating Saria to death with a bamboo stick, are relations of Gobra Jena. They live at a distance of 4 miles from the house of the accused. It was quite impossible for them to have seen the occurrence by keeping themselves awake at dead of night. From the map of the locality filed by the Police, it clearly appears that there are three blocks of houses between the place where the accused is alleged to have beaten Saria and the place from where the witnesses are said to have seen the occurrence. So it is quite impossible for the line of vision to pass through the intervening blocks. There is sufficient reason to disbelieve the witnesses on account of discrepancy in their statements in the cross-examination and collateral circumstances. These unfortunate village folk, who are very simple in nature, are unable to realise the seriousness of what they have attempted to do at the instigation of designing persons. Gobra Jena has been repeatedly exposed in his cross-examination and found to be telling lies. I order his prosecution.

The Police has taken depositions from some witnesses to prove the previous vicious character of the accused. From this, I am convinced that the accused is adept at robbing others of their property by intrigue. But there is no evidence of his having used criminal force on any person. The commission of murder is impossible on the part of such a man and there appears to be no motive for it.

The police has seized the weaving instruments and the utensils of the deceased Saria and Bhagia Chand from the house of the accused. From the list furnished by the accused to the Civil Court it appears that six and a half acres of land belonging to Bhagia Chand was mortgaged on contract basis to him. The accused has purchased all the instruments and utensils in auction sale for the recovery of the cost of litigation in the Civil Court. Of course there is sufficient reason to believe that the mortgage

deed, its execution, and auction sale were all fraudulent transactions. But that is not the point at issue for consideration in the present case. I am convinced that the insanity of Bhagia Chand and the fasting of Saria unto death are due to the grief caused by the appropriation of their six and a half acres of rent-free land, and all their property. But for these offences the accused cannot be convicted of murder.

The Police has seized a black cow called Neta from the courtyard of the accused. Both parties admit that the cow belongs to Bhagia Chand. The accused says that he has purchased it in the public auction sale made by the Civil Court bailiff for recovery of the cost of the suit. But this is totally false as there is no mention of a cow called Neta in the list of articles put to sale, bearing the signature and seal of the Civil Court, which is produced before me. I have got sufficient evidence to prove that the accused is very good at the art of misappropriating other people's property by fraud and deceit. He was a man of ordinary status. By adopting dishonest means he has amassed much wealth. Being an influential Zamindar of the locality, he has misappropriated the said cow, knowing that Bhagia Chand is too weak to defend himself.

In consideration of the grounds given above, it is ordered that the accused Ramchandra Mangaraj be acquitted of the charge of murder, but convicted for criminal misappropriation of the cow called Neta. He is sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment for six months and pay a fine of Rs. 100, or in default to undergo R.I. for another 3 months.

17-5-1832.

Sd/- H. R. Jackson  
Sessions Judge

The court has risen. The Judge's coach is already off. Four constables came out of the court lock-up with the accused in handcuffs and with a jail warrant. Ram-Ram Lala, who had taken his seat at the foot of the banyan tree in front of the court, saw the accused from a distance and called out, "You saw, Mangaraj, how I fought for you before the Judge. I saved you from the gallows. Never mind. Go to the prison without fear.



I shall get you acquitted by appealing to the Supreme Court\* before you have pressed out one jar-ful of oil in the jail."

He took no steps to file an appeal.

## CHAPTER XXII

### FATE OF CHAMPA, THE MAID-SERVANT

People going to Cuttack cross the Birupa river at Gopalpur Ghat. The village of Gopalpur was formerly situated at this place, but it was washed away by a great flood. The village is there no more but the Ghat still remains and is called after the name of the village.

There is a big banyan tree at the Ghat. Gopi Sahu had a shop at the foot of the tree, covering about seven cubits by five. One half of it was a room; the other half, in front, was walled on three sides. Next to the room was a verandah about 2 cubits in length. Any passing traveller who halted at the Ghat could cook his food there.

Gopi was now too old to do the work of a farmer. The death of his wife the previous year had pulled him down. His sons too did not want their father to work. But Gopi was not a man to sit idle. As something is better than nothing, he had kept himself busy for about a year now by opening a shop. He used to come to his shop at about 9 o'clock in the morning after taking a frugal meal and go back home in the evening after fastening the door of the shop with a heavy lock.

He lived about a mile away. Rice, dal, salt, flattened rice, tobacco-leaf, were his stock in trade. Going back in the evening, he would carry these things home in a basket.

Gopi used to tell the people of his village now that he was getting far too extravagant. He could not help taking a bit of

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\*The East India Company had at first established the Sadar Dewani Court at Calcutta. Later on it was converted into the Supreme Court, which was again converted into the High Court subsequently.

opium in the evening, without which he could not sleep at night. After taking opium, he would have a little snack of some powdered flattened rice or powdered fried rice. He had the habit of smoking too. But he met his expenses from his own income. His sons had given him a few rupees to start the shop. He lived on the small profit he made and kept the capital intact.

It was a day in the month of Aswina. The sky had been overcast with clouds throughout the day. Two or three showers of rain had already fallen. The path was muddy but there was no way-farer.

The sun had not set but it was getting dark. Gopi muttered a curse. "What ill-omened face did I see first thing in the morning? Such an unlucky day that I did not sell even half a pice worth of tobacco leaf." He put his wares in a basket, tied a napkin round his head and sat down in his verandah, looking at the sky and telling himself, "The sun has not yet set."

Waiting for some passer-by to come crossing the river, he was looking intently towards the Ghat, and singing a hymn :

"My days are passing out, I do not pray;  
All my time I idle away.  
The tide of life is ebbing fast,  
It'll merge in Eternity at last.  
Beset by wordly affairs, I forget  
To pray to God, His bliss to get.  
Oh God, my Saviour : mercy take,  
For your sinful servant's sake.

Someone called out, "Shop-keeper : Can we find lodging here?"

Gopi woke from his reverie to see two way-farers in front of the shop. One of them was a man wearing a dhoti, with a napkin wrapped round his head, a small bundle on his back and a palm-leaf umbrella on his shoulder. Behind him was a woman wearing a silk sari, with another folded linen sari covering her head and body. Nothing but her nose-ring was visible. From the dress of the strangers, Gopi at once gathered that they were wealthy people. Stepping down from the verandah

in a hurry, he bowed to both of them respectfully and said, "Come in, please. You are quite welcome to my shop. Stay here and cook your food. I shall supply all you need."

Gopi brought them two pots of water to wash their dirty feet, and spread out his tattered mat for them to sit on. The woman washed her feet first, changed her wet clothes and seated herself cross-legged on the mat.

Seeing the ornaments on her person, Gopi had been addressing her with all the respect due to persons of wealth and position, and the woman was well pleased. Untying a four-anna piece from her apron, she flung it to Gōpi saying, "Look here, old man: Fetch us things for cooking."

Gopi picked up the four-anna piece, turned both sides and examined it carefully. Then he kissed it two times, and touching his forehead with it as many times, tied it in one corner of his dhoti. It was apparent from his expression that he was thinking, "I must have seen some lucky face this morning to have got a four-anna piece even before fetching anything". This was the first time it had happened to him since he started his shop.

Gopi brought all the necessary things for cooking and lit a fire in the hearth. The woman set about cooking and the man went with a jar in his left hand to fetch some water.

"Old man: Would you have milk and ghee here?" the woman asked. "I do not take my meal without these things."

"True", said Gopi. "What I have supplied is a few paltry things not fit to be served to you. Fine flattened rice, pure cow's milk, sugar or fresh molasses would have been suitable for your supper. Big fish, green plantain fruit, mung dal, milk and ghee would have been the proper things for your dinner. What shall I do? This is a poor country place. It is my sheer good luck that the dust of your feet has graced my poor cottage. Give me a few copper coins and let me go round the village to see if I can get anything for you."

The woman again flung him a four-anna piece. Gopi carefully tucked it away as before and ran to his village.

At about eight in the night, Gopi's youngest son Brundaban arrived with two or three tolas of ghee on a plantain leaf form-

ed into the shape of a cup, half a seer of milk in an earthen pot and two brinjals. He put these things on the verandah and respectfully said, "Madam and Sir: my father is night-blind and could not come. He told me to come to you with these things". So saying he went away.

There was no third person in the shop. The woman was cooking food and the man was helping her. They began talking.

Woman—"Did you hear, Govinda? Didn't you listen with your ears open? They were addressing me as a lady and now I shall be addressed like that wherever I go. Who ever addressed you before as Master? Come with me to Cuttack. Come with me and you will see what I shall make of you. I am tired of urging you for the last four days to go to Cuttack."

Govinda—"No, no, Mistress Champa: Let us return to our village. We shall put up there, purchase lands and engage ploughmen to cultivate them."

Champa—"People rightly say that the barbers are the worst among men, as dark nights are the worst of all nights. What do we want with lands? What I have got with me will not be exhausted even in a hundred years, even if we live entirely on it without doing any work."

Govinda—"No. That won't do. I shall go to my village. I have not heard anything from my home for a long time. I am anxious to go home. Give me my share and let me go. As for yourself, do whatever you like."

Champa—"What did you say? Your share? What kind of share is that? Your demand for a share is as ridiculous as a dwarf lifting his hands for the moon. The wealth was mine when it was there, and it is mine also when it is here. Have I stolen it? For the last seven days, you have tired me by making me wander in mud and rain from village to village and from house to house. Do you know who buried the gold mohurs, silver coins and gold ornaments in three places in the bed-room of Mangaraj. At dead of night, I dug the holes and both the Master and I buried them. Did you know about all these things? Are not all these mine? Who else can claim these?"

Govinda—"Yes, you buried the wealth and did everything

else. But would you have got anything without the key of the house? Who hit upon the idea of getting the key”.

Champa—“Well done: I know empty vessels sound the most. What a wonderful device did you contrive. Could I not have done as much? You saw how my feet were blistered by running four miles on heated sand after Mangaraj, and how I cried bitterly and made myself hoarse. And yet you say that you told me the trick. Do you aspire to excel me in wit? I wonder at your audacity. Well, you know how I got the Sanad (deed of ownership) from inside the wooden chest of the Brahmin widow by making friends with her and by staying at her house for a night. Did you tell me the way to do all that too?”

Govinda said nothing more. He strode out angrily and took his seat in the verandah. Champa too kept silent. Trained in the same school, taking lessons from the same master, being equally shrewd, none of them was inferior to the other. Why should one yield so easily to the other? They knew each other too well. Champa apprehended that if she went to Govinda's house, and the money and the gold passed from her hands into those of the barber (Govinda), it would be no easy affair to get these back. Moreover, she thought, Govinda's mother and wife might dislike her presence.

Govinda on his part apprehended that if Champa once set foot in Cuttack, it would not be easy to check her.

When two persons pulling in opposite directions are equally matched in their strength, both of them keep their respective positions. It was now 11 or 12 o'clock in the night. The meal was ready. Champa pondered over something for a while. Then she came up to Govinda and said softly, “Look here, Govinda: You say your home is eight miles across the river. All right. If you agree to go to Cuttack, I shall give you some money; hand it over to your family and come back. If you don't listen to me, I won't give you a single pie, not to speak of money or gold. Come, my dear: Let us eat. I am very hungry.”

Govinda too was awfully hungry and was perhaps reluctant-

ly getting up to partake of the meal when Champa, unable to see Govinda in the darkness, lost her temper.

Hearing no reply from Govinda, she exploded. "I damn care for you. A servant gets all swollen-headed if he is coaxed too much. Do whatever you like. I don't mind if you eat or not."

Govinda had been about to get up, but slumped back again on hearing this. He thought to himself, "Alas, I am a servant and she is the mistress." But he did not utter a word.

Govinda had been dreaming of a bright future for himself; immense landed property, servants and bullocks, milch-cows tethered within his home precincts and a crowd of debtors waiting at the door of his house for loans. But he was now going to be altogether deprived of what he had expected. Wandering about all day in mud and rain had exhausted him. To add to this, he was oppressed with hunger.

Govinda had so far been brooding over it in sullen silence. But when Champa called him a servant, he felt as if he had been stung by a scorpion. He was unable to give vent to his anger. He knew that even two of his kind could not overpower Champa. With his own eyes he had seen Champa on several occasions beat up Mangaraj's strong and stout ploughmen. Anger smouldered in his mind like fire inside a pile of husk.

Champa served out the boiled rice in two leaf-plates and poured cooked dal into the pits she had made in the middle of the rice heaps. Then, looking out to see if anybody was watching, she poured on to her rice the potful of milk which had been brought by Brundaban.

Govinda was watching her from his vantage point in the dark. The sight of milk poured over her rice made him feel as if fire had been poured over his body. He thought to himself that if Champa was capable of such meanness in the sharing of a little milk, the sharing of money and gold was simply out of question.

Champa called out to him aloud and said, "Look here. Take care of your meal. You may or may not eat. I cannot flatter you so much."

Washing her mouth with a handful of water, Champa sat down to her meal, which she lapped up in an incredibly short time in big mouthfuls at a time. She washed her mouth in front of the hearth after the meal, looked out once more, and again asked Govinda to come and take his meal. There was no reply.

Annoyed, she spread herself out on the mat, taking care that the bundle they had brought was securely under her head.

Govinda continued to brood over the situation, sitting in the verandah as before. He was now fully convinced that it was not easy to "take the gem out of the hood of the she-snake." Govinda had even expected something more from Champa. It is in the nature of man to expect respect, love, devotion and obedience from a woman.

It was pitch-dark by now. The south wind was whistling in the trees, it rained every now and then, and the banyan tree standing by the river looked dark and forbidding. Its branches rattled weirdly. Bats came flying up from all directions, hung a while from the tree and flew away again into the sky. They were shrieking and gnawing at the banyan fruits which dropped down to the earth below with a pattering sound. The snoring of Champa from inside the house made things all the more dreadful.

Govinda started from a stupor and looked in all directions. He could hear the yelping of two animals quarrelling under the massive darkness of the banyan tree. The light of the lamp in the room was gradually fading away. A faint ray of light radiating from the lamp dimly in that encircling gloom looked like a streak of red from the western sky late in the evening falling on the endless east.

Govinda watched the two jackals fight each other for some scattered banyan fruits. One of them ultimately drove away the other and took sole possession. What Govinda saw of the jackals set him thinking and planning.

He sat up and looked carefully around. Gently, very gently he rose and looked Champa over from head to foot. He had kept his barber's bag in a niche in the wall. Gently, he took out something from the bag. Girding up his loins tightly with

his waist band, he took a firm grip on what he held in his hand. Going softly up to Champa he looked venomously at her. Like a wolf watching a sleeping sow from the cover of a forest, he stared at her, his eyes burning and his grip tightening.

He was cautious and calm, not even taking a deep breath. As he stepped up to Champa, his right foot forward, a shaft of light fell on her face. Startled, Govinda fell back and ran out to the verandah.

There was nothing there except the dreadful devilish sounds. Some bats, like patches of darkness, flew away from the lower branches of the tree. Govinda realised that the shaft of light had been only a reflection from what he had in his hand. Mustering courage again, he stepped into the room and pounced upon Champa like a wolf on its prey.

In that moment, the lamp died out with a flicker. There was a sound of violent groaning and struggling and then all became quiet in the room. The jackal ran away hurriedly, alarmed at the sound. The bats flew away from the tree, flapping their wings furiously. A terrible squall of wind shook the branches of the tree and the earth around it. In the midst of the impenetrable darkness, some horrible deed had been done.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### RETRIBUTION

The Birupa river is very wide—not less than a mile—at Gopalpur. But the main current flowing to the south of the river is narrow and deep.

The Gopalpur ghat was full of sand. It was only in high flood that water came up to the ghat. As there had been no heavy rain for the last 10 or 12 days, the river had wasted away. But the water was rising a little now. Countless pieces of straw and twigs were being swept away in the current. The river was very deep and infested with several kinds of crocodiles



and alligators. No one would venture into knee-deep water. The crocodiles used to create havoc when there was a flood in the river. They would come out of patches of foam and kill animals.

A ferry-boat was always there, waiting to take villagers across the river. The boatman remained in attendance, day and night, in a hut. He used also to ferry the Government mail-bag for which he got a fee of Rs. 2/- per month.

The villagers did not make any cash payment. In the harvest season, the boatman went about from field to field and got one sheaf of paddy from the field of each family. On weekly market days, the dealers who crossed the ferry paid him in kind some such thing as a quarter dozen of small dried fish, one or two brinjals, a pinch of salt or a few drops of mustard oil. On some days a big money-lender or a passing stranger would tip him a pice or two. The amount varied in consideration of time, place and circumstances; but if a Government servant, such as a Thana Daroga, a Munshi or a Kanungo happened to come there for crossing the river, the boatman was generously remunerated with the pulling of his ears, a slap on his cheek and much abuse. The boatman Chandia Behera used to say that he had been doing this job of plying the ferry boat all his life and a sturdier boatman was not to be found in that part of the country.

The night was approaching its end. There had been heavy rain accompanied by a great storm which had now subsided. The sky was still overcast with clouds and little twinkling stars shone here and there through the openings in the clouds.

At such a time, there came to the Ghat a man with a small bundle on his back; going a distance of four or five hundred cubits from the Ghat, he came back again. One could guess that he was thinking of swimming across the river, but lacked the strength and courage.

Chandia Behera had tied the boat with a long rope to a pole fixed in the sand, and was lying asleep in his hut near the Ghat. The traveller shouted for the boatman, looking furtively behind him every now and then.

"Who is this traveller at this unusual hour?" Chandia

thought to himself. "Whoever he might be, let him wait till the day breaks."

But the traveller called out again, "Please come out of your hut, brother boatman. I shall give you an extra something for your tiffin." Chandia could hold himself no more. He coughed once or twice. Oh : What a charm there is in the offer of an extra something. What to speak of a boatman, even big persons cannot resist the temptation when they are offered extra money.

"Who is calling?" Chandia responded from within. "Wait till the day breaks. I won't come out even if you offer me a lakh of rupees."

Traveller—"Brother boatman : I have a law-suit to attend to at Cuttack. So I am in a hurry. Take five rupees."

"Five rupees from a single passenger", the boatman reflected. In all his life, Chandia had never handled five rupees at a time. Only a minute ago, he had said he would not stir out even if a lakh of rupees were offered. But now he was afraid lest the traveller turn back; or the day might dawn, whereupon he would get one pice or two at most. "Wait, wait, I am coming". He came out of the hut, oar in hand. "All right. Give me whatever you like. It is for you and you alone that I have come out of my hut. I would not have stirred out for anyone else."

The traveller handed over five rupees.

The boatman counted the coins three or four times, shifting them one by one from one hand to the other. He tied the money in a corner of his waistband and tucked it securely in his waist. He looked around, then looked at the sky and found that the night was nearly gone.

The traveller had seated himself on the prow. Warning him to take his seat carefully, the boatman touched the boat with his right hand and touched his forehead with the same hand, repeated this gesture twice again; invoking the name of "Ganga Mata" (Mother Ganges), he unfastened the boat and got into it.

The strong current caused by the on-rush of flood water, from the upper course of the river, made it difficult to control

the boat. He rowed with all his might but it floated down a good deal in the strong current.

It was now almost dawn. Someone was singing at the Gopalpur Ghat :

Rama and Lakshmana went out to chase the deer

When Ravana in saint's disguise did appear.

"Come out, give me alms," said he,

"Else I'll pronounce a curse on thee."

The traveller was looking anxiously towards the Gopalpur Ghat. As the sound of the song reached his ears, the traveller became restless. He stood up in the boat which began to rock.

"Sit down, you, sit down," the boatman cried. Then looking toward the Ghat, he added, "Hallo, the mail-runner has arrived."

So saying, he veered round and started to row back to the Ghat. The traveller became nervous and said, "Please, boatman, don't turn back. Get me across the river first."

"But the mail bag is a Government affair and my foremost duty," the boatman replied. "Do you want me sent to prison?"

It was daylight now. The boatman noticed that the traveller was spattered with blood all over his body. There were bloodstains on his clothes, on his hands and on his bundle. Taken by surprise, the boatman exclaimed, "What is this? Where did the blood come from? Have you murdered someone?"

The traveller did not wait to reply. He took up the bundle in a hurry and jumped into the stream despite the boatman's frantic warnings. He had scarcely swum a distance of 15 or 20 cubits when a man-eating alligator snapped him up. The bundle also sank in the stream after floating down a short distance.

Chandia stood looking on, asking himself, "Who was this man? Where was he coming from? And where was he going to?"

For a long time Chandia Behera chose to keep the whole thing a secret for some reason or the other. When the traveller jumped into the stream, some palm-leaves fell from his pocket into the boat. Chandia kept them concealed in his hut. After

some time, he got one leaf read by a literate passenger. The contents are given below.

“At about 2 o'clock in the day, on the 2nd day of the dark fortnight in the month of *Phalguna* in the 7th year of Mukunda Deva's reign, I Sama Sahu, an oil-man of this village Govindpur execute this deed for a loan of Rs. 10/- received from Ramchandra Mangaraj Zamindar of Govindpur, to defray the expenses of marriage of my son Bhima, and I hereby agree to repay the loan in paddy at the prevailing rate, with 50 per cent interest from my threshing-floor in the month of *Pousa*. I execute this deed with the Sun, the Moon and the ten Deities who protect the universe as witnesses.”

For several days thenceforth Chandia Behera used to stare vacantly into the water while rowing his boat past that spot.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### INVESTIGATION OF MURDER

It was about 9 o'clock in the morning. The rain had stopped. Gopi Sahu the shop-keeper came to open his shop as usual with a torn dirty napkin on his head, the basket containing his wares on his shoulder and the key in his hand.

As he unlocked the room, his eyes were assailed by a terrible sight, which rendered him speechless like a statue. A dead woman lay in a pool of blood, her glazed eyes staring at the thatched roof. He felt faint. The entire room was blood-stained. There was blood near the hearth and on the cooking pot. The walls were sprinkled with blood, as if it had been squirted from a syringe.

Gopi ran home and informed the villagers, who came running to see the sight. The village Chowkidar, Sauntia Jena, ran to the Police out-post, 3 miles from Gopalpur, to lodge information. At about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Jamadar

(Head-constable) Sh. Torab Ali came to the spot with Constable Pitu Khan.

Sh. Torab Ali was a very strict officer. He was a terror to everyone for miles around and even a pregnant cow, so it was said, would step aside to make way for the Jamadar to pass. The Jamadar, covering his nose, proceeded to examine the dead body. It was that of a woman in a silk Sari with some gold and silver ornaments on her neck and arms. The woman's neck had been severed as a Mussalman does to a chicken. A blood-stained razor lay by her side. Innumerable flies had settled on the body and many more were buzzing about in the room. The mud-floor of the room had been scratched and pitted by her struggling legs when her throat was being cut.

The Jamadar could not remain there long on account of the offensive smell and her ghastly appearance. Coming out of the room, he concluded, by a masterly process of deduction, that it was a murder case but by no means a case of dacoity. Had it been the latter, there would have been no ornaments on the person of the deceased. Under his orders, two sweepers dragged out the dead body with ropes tied round the legs and placed it on the bank of the river. The ornaments were removed from her person and put in a bag to be sent to the Magistrate.

An enquiry was instituted. The Chowkidars and constables arrested suspects from five adjoining villages and brought them before the Jamadar who held court under the banyan tree. Three to four hundred persons had been rounded up. But all were not detained there. Most of them were being let off after enquiry. Meanwhile, scores of vultures hovered around the dead body as it lay on the sand bank of the river, some of them flying close upon it. More than a dozen jackals and dogs had already come to the scene. The dogs were nibbling at one of the ankles. Some vultures were tugging at the other ankle when a jackal approached. The vultures then moved aside a little and sat with wings out-stretched.

The Jamadar recorded the statements of many persons.

The statement of the aged shop-keeper, Gopi Sahu : "I am now at the fag-end of my life. Would I tell a lie at this ripe age? Today is the Ekadasi and I am observing a complete fast.

I swear on this Tulasi plant that I know nothing of this case. For the last six months, I have been confined to bed and have not come to the shop."

The statement of Chandia Behera, the boat-man: "No one was crossing the river on account of rain and storm. I did not come to the river bank for the last 4 days."

Similar statements of many persons were recorded. The sun was about to set. The Jamadar and the constables were consulting each other as to whether the enquiry should be closed that day or postponed till next day, when a kite perched on a branch of the tree eased itself on the Jamadar's beard making half of it white. The Jamadar stood up in a towering rage and called the kite all sorts of names. The Chowkidars too abused the kite and threw stones at it. The Jamadar washed his long beard clean with three potfuls of water. Then he gave his finding.

"Look here. No one knows the dead woman. Most probably she is a way-farer. She has not been murdered. Her death is due to snake-bite".

Gopi Sahu, the shop-keeper, immediately hailed the officer as the "incarnation of Justice" and said, "This place is full of snakes. Thousands of snakes have come floating from somewhere in the flood to take shelter here. The village was deserted for fear of the snakes. Yesterday I came to the shop but ran away when I found a big cobra moving about."

Chowkidar Muturu Malik also agreed. "Yes, Incarnation of Justice: This place is full of snakes. The other day when I was coming to you, I saw 15 cobras at the foot of this tree."

Budhai Dhapat Singh, the Chowkidar of village Mugpur, bore testimony to the fact of a poisonous snake having been moving at the door of the house when the woman was sleeping inside on the night before last.

The Jamadar thereupon closed his investigation and submitted a report to the Daroga (Inspector of Police) of Kendrapara to the effect that an up-country beggar woman had died of snake-bite the night before yesternight; that the dead body bore marks of snake-bite; that there was no shade of doubt and no other allegation as to the nature of her death. The report, en-

closed in an envelope, was sent to the Thana with some presents for the Daroga and the Munshi.

Under orders of the Jamadar, four sweepers dragged the dead body by a rope tied round its neck and set it afloat in the river. The boatman Chandia Behera saw the dead body, as it floated down the river, seized by an alligator exactly where Govinda had met a similar fate.

On his way across the river, the Jamadar was remarking to the constable, "Such a serious case and it did not fetch us even two hundred rupees". To which the constable replied, "Such was the will of the Almighty. His will be done."

Gopi Sahu stopped going to his shop from that day. The storm that continued for three days in the month of *Kartika* swept away the structure. That pathway was also abandoned. Chandia Behera shifted his ferry half a mile down to Haripur. Even in day time, nobody ventured in future to pass that way. People told how the hideous evil spirit of a woman rocked the banyan tree and moved its branches. Many people had seen her sporting in the sand of the river bed at mid-day. Gopalpur Ghat was no longer called by that name. People called it Petunipada—the haunt of a female evil spirit.

## CHAPTER XXV

### EVENTS IN THE HOUSE OF MANGARAJ

The world-famous diamond, Kohinoor, was supposed to ruin the family which held it in possession. Convincing proof had been supplied ever since Allauddin's time and all the way down to Ranjit Singh. But the glory of England is gradually increasing in the world since that precious stone came to adorn the crown of Queen Victoria of England. Poison, which destroys the life of man, manifests the greatness of godhead when it is swallowed by Mahadev. The right thing in the right place causes no trouble.

Apart from these ponderous instances, let us take an insignificant case like that of our "Six Acres and a Half". People say there is no land so fertile as that plot of low-land in Govindpur village. But it brings a curse on any family that takes possession of it. The Baghasingha family was ruined; Saria lost her life and all her possessions; and now look what happened to the family of Mangaraj within not six months, nor even six fortnights, since the land was taken by Mangaraj.

On the fourth day after Mangaraj was sent up as an accused to Cuttack, it was found that the floor of his strong room had been dug up knee-deep at four places. Govinda and Champa were nowhere to be seen in the house that morning. Some people reported having seen them going to Cuttack.

The sons of Mangaraj, who had been afraid of their father, were now enjoying full liberty. His eldest son had been susceptible to fits of insanity. Smoking of Ganja (hemp) day and night made him an out-and-out lunatic. The other two were busy catching *bulbuls* to train for fighting on *Makar Sankranti* day which was fast approaching. For expenses, they were selling paddy recklessly.

Today there was great commotion in the village. Mangaraj's house and property were to be sold by public auction. Mangaraj had been fined Rs. 500/- by the Judge, and this money was to be realised by selling his movable property. It was about mid-day. The Police Jamadar, Constables and Chowkidars numbering about eight or ten were bringing out the goods from the house and putting these in the open. The married young women of the house left it in panic and waited in the garden behind. None of the sons was present. The account-keeper wanted to say something but the Jamadar frowned on him and he kept quiet. Mukunda moved in and out saying "Yes, Sir" to everything he was asked.

The goods were put to auction. Did anyone ever hear of a pair of bullocks, that had been yoked to the plough for two years only, selling for 4 or 5 rupees. The milch cows were sold at a rupee each. Heifers 2 years old were sold for a song. Very soon the Jamadar had the sale proceeds up to the required amount. There was none to take care of the cows and



bullocks. They roamed about, uncared for, in the fields and pathways. The ploughmen had not received their wages for two years. We are told they realised their dues from the yield of the cattle and of the mango gardens and cocoanut groves.

But about the middle of the month of *Kartika*, the harvesting of the early paddy had not yet begun. The *Pana* ploughmen had gone away, taking with them some of the cattle.

It was widely rumoured that the Judge had dispossessed Mangaraj of his *zamindari* and had transferred it to a pleader who was coming to take possession of it on *Makar Sankranti* day. The tenants could not care less; whoever their Zamindar, they would have to pay him his dues. But some people were jubilant. Out of fear and shame Mangaraj's rent-collectors dared not approach the people in the villages to realise the revenue, not to speak of extorting their own surcharges. The ill-natured did not fail to pass sarcastic remarks at them within their hearing.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### THE MENDICANT

On the seventh day after Mangaraj was sent up to Cuttack, a mendicant came from Puri, the holy place, and took up residence in the *Bhagavata house* of Govindpur. Lalita Das was a middle-aged man, dark of complexion and well-built. From his shaven head a single lock of hair protruded like the stem of a water-melon. Five strings of big-sized Tulasi beads encircled his neck. He used to get up very early in the morning and after taking his bath smeared a white paint over his nose and forehead. He covered his body with stamps of God's name, looking like a bearing (postage due) letter returned from the dead-letter office. His dress comprised a loin-cloth over an under-wear, a wrap printed with God's name and a small bag in his hand.

The mendicant spent his day going around the village chanting God's name; in the evening he used to sing religious songs accompanying himself on a tambourine, after which he recited the Chaitanya Bhagavata to huge gatherings in the Bhagavata house. Some ten or twelve elderly weavers of the village had asked to be initiated by the mendicant into his sect.

But he was not to be seen for the last two days. At the same time, Marua, maid-servant of the Mangaraj house had also disappeared. Some said she had gone with the mendicant to Brindavan. If she had really gone on a pilgrimage in company with the pious man, we are unwilling to bring censure and remark on the character of the pious man and his chaste companion by speaking ill of them. But one detail makes us suspicious.

Marua was very faithful to the youngest daughter-in-law of the house of Mangaraj. She was her constant companion. The daughter-in-law's ornaments were kept in her box together with the ready money presented to her on the occasion of "the first look" at her face in her father's and her father-in-law's house at the time of her marriage. The box was now lying open with the contents missing.

The front door of the house of Mangaraj, which used to be crowded with people going in and coming out all day and night, was now overgrown with weeds. In the course of a few months all the wealth, prestige and influence of the Mangaraj family had vanished. The Goddess of fortune had made good her escape.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### A STRANGE RE-UNION

Man reaps as he sows. One has to bide the consequences, either good or bad, according as one's actions are good or bad. Clever people think they can do something secretly and very

cautiously beyond the range of anybody's vision. Nobody marks the falling of a small seed on the soil, but the tree that grows out of it cannot escape notice. You, and sometimes your descendants, will enjoy the fruits of the tree that you have planted. You who exult in power, pride and wealth, do not know what can be achieved by one whom you look down upon as an insignificant creature. The Subedar of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa could not escape the consequences of ill-treating a mere Fakir and Guru Govinda, the Sikh, saved himself from mortal risk by doing good to an ordinary Mahomedan.

Mangaraj had to suffer humiliation at the hands of those *Domas* of Ratanpur whose imprisonment he had brought about because they kept watch over the house of Baghasingha. Seeing Mangaraj in jail, the *Doma* prisoners mocked him; sarcastically they said, "Our comrade has come", "our father-in-law has come", "our master is here with us." When Mangaraj was put to pressing oil with the *Domas* of Ratanpur, he received kicks and slaps from them.

One thing we had forgotten to mention is that Gobra Jena was sentenced to one year's R.I. for perjury.

Time waits for none. People say that happy days fly fast, and the days of misery linger on. Say what you like, the day runs its own course. The eight *Praharas* of the day run their full course without any deviation for a single moment. Mangaraj had now passed two months in jail.

He was shifted to another cell, as the one in which he used to sleep needed some repairs. There were eight raised platforms in each compartment of the jail for eight prisoners to sleep on. It so happened that the six *Domas* of Ratanpur and Gobra Jena were put in one compartment with Mangaraj.

At that time there was no lunatic asylum in Cuttack like the one that now exists in the *Dargha bazar*. Lunatics also used to be confined in the jail. Their enclosure was at a short distance from the cell in which Mangaraj was kept. There was a particularly furious mad man in the lunatic asylum. Getting no sleep at-night, he used to laugh and dance and jump about crying, "My Saria, my six acres and a half." Whenever he caught sight of Mangaraj, he rushed to bite him but usually the

warders managed to check it. One day he flew at Mangaraj all of a sudden and bit away his nose. The native doctor and the compounder bandaged the wound.

At 9 A.M., the Civil Surgeon came and examined one of the prisoners who had just died. A reference to the register showed that it was the dead body of prisoner No. 977, Gobra Jena. He then turned to prisoner No. 957, Ramchandra Mangaraj. There were swellings all over this man's body. His severed nose was bleeding and he was vomiting blood at times. The Civil Surgeon ascertained violence to be the cause of the injury.

An enquiry was held with much ado. But it could not be ascertained who committed the violence. The patient himself was too weak to tell. The warder who had been on watch in the night deposed that he had heard sounds of hard blows exchanged at dead of night. The six Domas deposed that Gobra Jena and Ramchandra Mangaraj had exchanged blows between themselves.

The enquiry ended. The Civil Surgeon ordered that the friends and kinsmen of the patient could take him to his home for treatment, as there was little chance of his survival. The order of the Civil Surgeon passed through the Police Station and reached Govindpur.

Mangaraj's sons had by now almost exhausted the stock of paddy. They knew their father too well to welcome the prospect of his return. Which wise man would seek his own ruin?

The old ploughman Mukunda raised some money by selling two steers and half a dozen pack saddles. He hurried to Cuttack with a palanquin and bearers to bring Mangaraj home.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### CONCLUSION

Mangaraj lay motionless on the ground, near the Tulasi Chaura in the court-yard of his house, on an old tattered mat, exactly where his wife had been found dead three months ago.

The two village physicians, Siba Chamar and Kartik Naik, who were attending on him, had declared the case hopeless.

Gopia Tanti had now taken up the treatment. Gopia Tanti, alias Gopi Kaviraj, was an efficient physician of established reputation. He was known to the people of four villages and had a roaring practice which kept him awfully busy day and night.

Getting up early morning, he went to see his patients with a *chadar* tied round his waist, a red-coloured towel placed on his shoulder, a bamboo stick in his hand and his medicine bag hanging under his armpit. His bag contained pills for 72 diseases, tied and preserved separately in pieces of silk cloth. Gopi's uncle too had been a reputed physician. His medicine used to be like magic for his patients. Gopi had preserved till now the pills prepared by his uncle.

Gopi seated himself to the right of the patient and felt his pulse for a long time. Looking upward with his eyes closed, he tried to diagnose the disease.

Mukunda was looking vacantly at the Kaviraj. "What did you find?" he asked. Looking grave, the Kaviraj made a show of his proficiency in the science of medicine by quoting a Sanskrit verse which had no bearing on the case. He then gave a ridiculous interpretation of the verse and averred that the case of the patient was almost hopeless. "Yet", said he, "am I an ignorant Kaviraj like so many others? You will see how I take away the malady." So saying, he tied a knot in a corner of his *chadar*.

"Why are there so many swellings on the patient's body?" Mukunda asked anxiously.

The Kaviraj again quoted a Sanskrit line and said the swellings were due to dropsy. He prescribed musk as the most effective remedy for the disease. Reciting another quotation from Sanskrit, he prescribed that a portion of the musk be painted on the fore-head and another portion taken by mouth. The Kaviraj took four annas from Mukunda and gave him a gram of musk from his bag.

The patient moved restlessly as the Kaviraj was explaining his diagnosis of the disease and the prescription of the medicine. A tear fell from his eyes. Mangaraj had been very ill for four

days. Whenever he dozed off, he would be seized by a nightmare and wake up with a start, uttering in broken syllables the words "Six acres and a half". His voice had become feebler and feebler till it became quite unintelligible. Whenever Mangaraj fell into an uneasy slumber, he would dream of a huge head with dishevelled hair, big white teeth and a long protruding tongue, rushing to devour him. Mangaraj remembered having seen a woman seated in the verandah of the weaver, Bhagia. It now appeared to him as if that woman had been transformed into this terrible figure which demanded in a thundering voice, "Give me my six acres and a half".

In another fit of delirium Mangaraj saw a dreadful skeleton gazing hungrily at him with her mouth wide agape. He knew well that figure of one whom he had dispossessed of her land and who had starved herself to death. Then thousands of mad men, all looking like Bhagia, swarmed suddenly out of the dark clouds in the sky, each with a sword and an iron mace in his hand. He felt as if he was simultaneously hit by all the mace-bearers on his head. Mangaraj would fain have escaped, but he had no strength of body, no power of speech.

In his helplessness, Mangaraj was reminded of the sacred name of God, who protects the helpless and purifies the sinful. He saw the shining figure of a woman eager to bring peace and solace seated on a golden throne in the endless sky far beyond the solar sphere. Mangaraj felt the soft touch of her hand on his person as it used to be in earlier times whenever he was lying ill on the sick-bed. That figure was now beckoning to Mangaraj. Swiftly, his soul winged its way towards the blessed figure.

## GLOSSARY

- Aswina .. The 6th month of the Hindu year (Sept.-Oct.).
- Baghasingha family .. Baghasingha literally means tiger and lion. This family title is significant of strength and valour.
- Baladeva Temple .. An old and famous temple situated in the Kendrapara Sub-Division of the Cuttack District. The God Baladeva is the presiding deity in this temple.
- Bhadra .. The 5th month of the Hindu year (Aug.-Sept.).
- Bhagavata .. Holy scripture of the Hindus, which treats of the life and doings of Lord Shree Krishna in simple verse. It is preserved in the village temple and is worshipped and recited everyday.
- Bhagavata House .. A community-centre in the village where people meet in the evening to hear recitals of the religious scripture called Bhagavata.
- Bimba fruit .. A small oblong fruit of a climbing plant like the gourd which grows wild. The fruit turns scarlet when ripe.
- Brundavati .. The presiding deity of the sacred Tulsi plant or the Holy Basil which is daily watered and worshipped by every Hindu house-holder.
- Chaitra .. The last month of the Hindu year (March-April).
- Chaitanya' .. Chaitanya came to Orissa in 1510. He was a religious reformer of the modern Vaisnava faith and is regard-

- ed by some as an incarnation of Lord Shree Krishna. His religious doctrine has been embodied in a treatise known as Chaitanya Bhagavata.
- Chanakya .. Famous minister in the court of Chandragupta. Owing to his political skill, the Maurya Empire reached heights of glory. His work on Political Economy (Arthashastra) is a standard book on the subject.
- Charanavati .. The present Chambal river in the State of Rajasthan. The stream is considered sacred. It has a rapid current and is infested with snakes and crocodiles. When the river overflows in the rains it erodes its banks.
- Dadhivaman Temple .. The village temple where the god Dadhivaman is worshipped. The sacred Bhagavata scripture is placed in this temple also.
- Dargha Bazar .. A section of the Cuttack Town, where there is the District Jail. Previously there was a Lunatic Asylum attached to the Jail. This was abolished later on and its site was included in the present Compound of the Jail.
- Doma(s) .. A section of the Harijan (low-caste) people who are usually employed as village Chowkidars.
- Ekadashi .. The 11th day of each half of a lunar month observed as a fast-day by the Hindus.
- Gajapati .. The title assumed by a dynasty of Kings who ruled over Orissa and during whose reign Orissa flourished in arts and sculpture. The present



- Rajahs of Puri are also called Gajapati.
- Guruda Pillar .. A stone pillar with an image of Guruda, the King of Birds and vehicle of God Vishnu, placed in front of Lord Jagannath at Puri.
- Jagir .. A block of land granted to persons for rendering service to Government.
- Jagai and Madhai .. Two wicked persons, who later on turned devotees of Lord Chaitanya, a religious reformer of Vaishava faith, regarded by some to be an incarnation of Krishna or Vishnu.
- Janmastami .. The 8th lunar day in the dark half of the month of Bhadra (Aug.-Sept.). This day is observed by the Hindus as the birth anniversary of Lord Krishna.
- Jyaistha .. The 2nd month of the Hindu year (May-June).
- Kamyaka .. A forest on the banks of the river Saraswati where the Pandavas, as narrated in the Mahabharat epic, lived for some time during their fourteen years' exile.
- Kartika .. The 7th month of the Hindu year (Oct.-Nov.) considered particularly a month of religious observance. In this month only a single meal, of sunned rice and ghee, etc., is taken in the afternoon everyday by many people, specially women.
- Khandayats .. A warrior class in Orissa, reputed for swordsmanship. Up to this day they worship swords, preserved in their families, on the Dashahara<sup>s</sup> festival every year as a family tradition.

- Magha .. The 10th month of the Hindu year (Jan.-Feb.).
- Mahaprasad .. The sacred offering of boiled rice offered to Lord Jagannath at Puri. The term also applies to sweetmeats which are offered to Lord Jagannath, and portions of which are distributed to devotees thereafter.
- Makar Sankranti .. The first day of the month of Magha, the 10th month of the Hindu year (Jan.-Feb.). It is a day for religious observances. On this day many people enjoy the fun of Bulbul-fighting.
- Margashira .. The 8th month of the Hindu year (Nov.-Dec.). It is a custom among the Hindus to clean and wash their houses and to worship the Goddess of Wealth on each Thursday of this month.
- Menaka .. A heavenly courtesan, in the Court of Indra, the Lord of Heaven, noted for her enchanting beauty and graceful dance.
- Mukunda Dev .. The Hindu King who ruled over Orissa from 1655 to 1693. He improved the Barabatj Killa (Fort) at Cuttack, the Capital of the Kings of Orissa, by constructing a magnificent nine-terraced castle.
- Naishadha .. A Sanskrit poetical work by Sri Harsha, depicting the character of King Nala and his consort Damayanti.
- Paika(s) .. A fighting class of people in Orissa, who lived under different Chiefs. They were not regular soldiers but

- were called to action in times of war.
- Pala .. A kind of folk dance, accompanied by song and music, peculiar to Orissa. The performance is given by a party in the open air. The head of the party sings songs, generally of a religious character. The songs are followed by witty and popular sayings in which others of the party join. This part of the performance is very much relished by the audience. Often a competition between two parties is held which is attended by crowds of spectators.
- Pana(s) .. A class of low-caste people who are said to be professional thieves.
- Pani Simuli .. A kind of aquatic plant which bears small white flowers.
- Phalgu .. Name of a river in Gaya in the State of Bihar. It has a shallow stream of clear water and it does not overflow its banks during the rains. The stream is considered sacred by the Hindus.
- Phalgun .. The 11th month of the Hindu year (Feb.-March). In this month is held the Dola festival, in which the image of Krishna is swung in a decorated wooden structures known as Vimana.
- Pousa .. The 9th month of the Hindu year.
- Prahara .. According to Hindu astrology, a day is divided into 8 praharas, one prahara being a period of 3 hours.
- Radhastami .. A religious observance on the 6th day of the bright lunar fortnight in the month of Bhadra (Aug.-Sept.)

- on the occasion of the birth anniversary of Radha, the consort of Lord Shree Krishna.
- Ravana paddy .. A variety of paddy which thrives well in excessive water in the fields and the roots and stems do not rot if submerged in water for some time.
- Saanta .. A respectful address for master or land-lord.
- Saantani .. A respectful address for the mistress of a house or land-lady.
- Sajina .. (Moringa pterygosperma). A common tree found in almost every kitchen garden. Its leaves and long pods and flowers when cooked make delicious curry.
- Shalagram .. An oval or round-shaped black stone, which is an emblem of the God Vishnu, the Second God of the Hindu Trinity. It is collected from the Gandaka river.
- Sankaracharya .. A great philosopher and a religious reformer of the middle ages celebrated for his writings on Vedanta philosophy.
- Shravana .. A star that appears in the sky on the full-moon day of the month of Shravana, the 4th month of the Hindu year (July-August).
- Snana Yatra .. The festival of the bathing of Vishnu or Jagannath of Puri on the day of full-moon in the month of Jyaistha.
- Snana Purnima .. The festival of Snana-Yatra is performed on the full-moon day (Purnima). Hence it is also called Snana Purnima.
- Sunia .. The Oriya New Year's Day. From this day begins the distinct Oriya

era, which is reckoned since the reign of Yayati Keshari, who ascended the throne of Utkal in 552 A.D. This era is quite different from that of the Mahomedans and the Christians and the other Hindu eras. The Sunia is celebrated as a festive day all over Orissa.

- Tulasi .. A small plant held sacred by the Hindus—Holy Basil (*Ocimum Sanctum*).
- Tulasi Choura .. A raised structure for growing the holy Tulasi plant which is daily watered and worshipped in every household.
- Vaisnava(s) .. A religious sect devoted to Lord Krishna.
- Viswamitra .. A famous ancient sage.