

# Equality

( *S a m y a* )

**Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay**



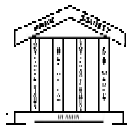
Classics  
Revisited

# Equality

( *Samya* )

**Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay**

*Translated by*  
***Bibek Debroy***



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**Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay**  
(1838-1898)

## Preface

We are very pleased to publish this English translation of *Samya ~ Equality*, which is one of the lesser known essays of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, the 19th Century Bengali author.

In 1882, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1898) published the historical novel *Anandamath* containing his most famous verse and created a wave. The resounding echo of '*Vande Mataram*' (Glory to Motherland) could be heard from young nationalist heroes headed for the gallows, leaders who addressed political rallies and barefoot children running the streets.

More than a hundred years later, in 2002, this 'second national anthem' is being sung in school prayer halls and by fervent Hindu revivalists. However, if we accord to Bankimchandra the brand of nationalism that *Vande Mataram* has come to signify today, we'd be telling only half the story. The 19th century author who lived in the heydays of the intellectual revolution in Bengal ranks high amongst the historical figures who have contributed to the notions of liberalism and freedom. With his unblinkered approach, he sought to reinterpret Hindu philosophy on the basis of universal human values rather than the fixed prescriptions of the scriptures. He was familiar with western philosophy and science and keenly spoke for the need of western education even in the Indian context. Some of the thinkers who influenced him include John Stuart Mill, Mathew Arnold, Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer. Bankimchandra was a visionary, remarkably progressive, extremely well-read and one of the giants of Bengal Renaissance.

Son of a deputy magistrate and collector, his initial school years were spent at the local English school of Midnapore in West Bengal, followed by junior and senior years at the Hooghly College near Kanthalpara. Simultaneously, he took extensive lessons in Sanskrit literature and acquired proficiency not only in the language but also the various systems of Hindu philosophy. The prestigious Presidency College in Calcutta was where he was noted for his brilliance in the BA examinations (he also secured a degree in law

11 years later) and as a result appointed deputy magistrate and deputy collector by the government. In this capacity, he travelled across several districts of Bengal, making a mark as administrator wherever he went. He also served the government as Secretary to the Commission appointed for revision of salaries, Assistant to the Commissioners of Rajshahi and Burdwan divisions, and Assistant Secretary to the Government of Bengal. Bankimchandra associated himself with many progressive movements of the times, notably as a member of the British Indian Association and Bengal's Social Science Association. He also associated closely with the Indian Association for Cultivation of Science, the Indian Association (a political body of the middle class intelligentsia) and Society for Higher Training of Young Men.

Apart from a large number of fictions that rank amongst the classics of Bengali literature, Bankimchandra also wrote a series of essays portraying his views on a number of social and political issues. Unfortunately, while most of his fictional works have been translated into English and other regional languages, the essays have been left in the background. *Samya* (~ equality) was one of them. It (as most other essays) was published in *Banga Darshan*, a periodical brought out by Bankimchandra between 1872 and 1876.

We have chosen to translate and republish *Samya* in particular because it is among the best illustrations of Bankimchandra as a modern liberal thinker. "Differences are a basic principle of the world. There is inequality in everything. There are real differences between people. Real differences are differences created by rules of nature. But just as there are real differences, there are artificial differences as well. Artificial differences are not created by rules of nature. The difference between *brahmins* and *shudras* is an artificial one... Similarly, the difference between domestic and foreign is yet another artificial difference." Time and again one is surprised by universal truths as these in Bankimchandra's writings, even as he quotes from sources as varied as Carlyle, Michelin, Rousseau, Voltaire, the *shastras* and the *Vedas*, suggesting an erudition exceptional for his times.

Rousseau and his notions of equality are ascribed a special focus in *Samya*. However, even as Bankimchandra hails Rousseau, he also makes a critique of his theories. “Rousseau believes that... society, kingdoms and rules of law are set up by men for the welfare of mankind. The fallout of accepting this principle is terrible... One should again repeat the essence of theories of equality. Men are equal. But this should not be interpreted to mean that all men are equal in every possible sense. There are natural inequalities. Some are weak, others are strong. Some are intelligent, others are stupid. Given these natural inequalities, there are bound to be social inequalities. The strong and the intelligent will give out orders. The weak and the stupid are bound to be the ones to follow the orders. Even Rousseau accepted this. However, the essence of the theories of equality is that social inequalities that are out of proportion to those determined by natural inequalities, violate principles of justice and harm the human race. Many of the prevalent political and social orders exhibit such artificial inequalities. Unless these systems are reformed, mankind will not witness true development.”

In his later years, Bankimchandra repudiated some of his earlier views – moving in principle from Jeremy Bentham’s utilitarianism (‘greatest good for the greatest number’) to August Comte’s humanism. *Samya* belongs to his earlier phase of beliefs. Notwithstanding Bankimchandra’s eventual take, the essay provides a striking perspective on the subject it espouses – equality, as equality may be understood in ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’, the basic tenets of modern democracy. *Samya* makes for an interesting reading also because of the author’s felicity of thought. It refreshingly moves away from philosophical purging as one may sometimes expect from a classical author and adopts a multi-faceted approach, elucidating points through fictional characters, mythical legends, ancient history, not so ancient history, varied philosophical doctrines, anthropology and so on.

Of course, the situations against which Bankimchandra bases his interpretations – such as the *zamindari* system, complete lack of women’s education, unequal property rights etc – are rooted in 19th century Bengal. But this window to the past cannot be viewed just for



its curiosity value. It brings our present sharply into focus and allows the possibility of reinterpretation and discussion. Bankimchandra's ideas still retain relevance because they help in understanding our own past and intellectual evolution. And the lyricism and inspirational quality of his writings unhesitatingly places him in the league of the best.

*Acknowledgement: We would like to thank Prof. Bibek Debroy, Director of Rajiv Gandhi Institute for Contemporary Studies, New Delhi, for translating Samya from Bengali to English, Mr. Ashoke Sen, author and critic, for editing the translation and Ms. Tanmayee Das for finalising the manuscript for publication.*

February, 2002

**Barun S. Mitra**



# Equality\*

**Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay<sup>†</sup>**

Translated by Bibek Debroy

## One

“That man is big – this man is small,” one constantly comes across such expressions everywhere in the world. These are not mere words. The human perception of such differences is the main factor behind several things people are motivated to do. He is a big man, take all the world’s riches and gift to him. Pick the choicest expressions from the ocean of vocabulary, weave a garland out of these and make this man wear that garland – because he is a big man. Remove that small, almost invisible thorn from his path with great care, lest it pricks his foot. Along the path of life, leave aside the shady and cool fringes and go and stand under the sun, for the big man is going past. Pluck the world’s flowers of pleasure and spread them on the bed. The big man will sleep there. And you – you who are not a big man – step aside. The world’s riches are not for you. Your lot is this fierce and greedy cane. For the sake of the big man’s

*\* Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay was not only a novelist, but also a noted essayist. He set up and edited a monthly magazine titled “Bangadarshan”. Two essays on Bengal’s peasantry and equality (“Samya”) were originally published in Bangadarshan and then brought together in 1879 as a volume titled “Samya”. This was never reprinted during the author’s life, since in his later years, Bankimchandra repudiated some of the beliefs stated in “Samya”. Italicised footnotes are those of the translator, while those without italics are Bankimchandra’s own.*

*† 1838-1894. Noted novelist and author of Durgeshnandini, Kapalkundala, Mrinalini, Vishavriksha, Chandrasekhara, Krishnakanter Uil, Devi Chaudhurani, Sitaram, Anandamath, Rajani, Yugalanguriya, Radharani, Rajsimha, Indira, Kamalakanter Daptar, Lokrahasya, Vividha Prabandha, Krishnacharita and Dharmatattva.*

pleasure, this cane will occasionally make acquaintance with your back.

How does this difference between the big and the small man arise? What makes Ram a big man, and Yadu small? Critics have a kind of explanation for this phenomenon. Yadu does not know how to steal, or to cheat. He is incapable of grasping another's possessions through fraud. Therefore, Yadu is a small man. Ram has accumulated wealth by stealing, cheating and fraud and so has become a big man. Alternatively, Ram may be a simple and good man himself but his ancestors may have been skilled in the art of theft and cheating and may have defrauded the entire wealth of their employers. As Ram is the great grandson of a cheat, he is a big man. Yadu's grandfather lived off his own earnings, so Yadu is a small man. Yet another explanation may be that Ram had married the daughter of a fraud, so he became big. Sing paeans in praise of the great Ram.

It is also possible that Ram benefited from the largesse of a ruler. He was good at bowing in servitude, and bore the scolding and the occasional kick. Perhaps he may even have performed some truly deserving act. Thanks to this, Ram has become a *babu*. *Babudom* has made him a big man. We are not just talking of Bengalis here. Throughout the world, the characteristics of *babus* are invariant. They behave like the smallest of insects towards superiors and towards others – as if they were gods! Whoever you are, salute the *babu* with folded palms. He may have no sense of righteousness; he may even have a predilection towards wrongfulness. How does that make a difference? The grace of the ruler has made him your superior. That he is ignorant and you are learned – do not even entertain such thoughts. He is a big man, bow in obeisance before him.

There is another type of big man. Gopal the *brahmin* walks the streets begging for alms with these words: "I have a daughter. I have to get her married." But he is also a big man – because Gopal belongs to the *brahmin* caste! And you who are a *shudra*, no matter how big you be, you will have to touch Gopal's feet. If he comes to your home, feed him well. Give him whatever he wants. You cannot afford to displease Gopal; he cannot leave

your home dissatisfied. Gopal may be poor, stupid, evil and a sinner. But he is also a big man.

Therefore, the world is full of inequality. There is inequality in everything. If Ram is not born in this country but in another one, that is reason for inequality. If Ram is not born of Panchi's womb but of Yadi's, that is reason for inequality. I am better than you in the use of words, I am physically stronger, I am better at defrauding, all of these are reasons for social inequality. The world is full of inequality.

There should be inequality in the world. Nature itself has provided for many inequalities and sent us to this world's stage. My bones are harder and stronger than yours, my arms have greater strength than yours, I can floor you with one blow of my fists. Therefore, I am a bigger man than you. Soudamini is prettier than Kumudini. Therefore, Soudamini is married to a *zamindar*, while Kumudini harvests jute. Yadu's brain weighs ten ounces more than Ram's. Thus, Yadu is revered in this world, while Ram deserves contempt.

Differences are a basic principle of the world. There is inequality in everything. There are real differences between people. Real differences are differences created by rules of nature. But just as there are real differences, there are artificial differences as well. Artificial differences are not created by rules of nature. The difference between *brahmins* and *shudras* is an artificial one. If you kill a *brahmin*, that is a serious crime. But if you kill a *shudra*, that is a light offence. Such norms are against the rules of nature. Why should one be able to freely kill a *shudra* and not a *brahmin*? Why should the *shudra* always give and the *brahmin* receive? Shouldn't the principle instead hold that the one who has the capacity to give, should be the giver? And the one who needs should be the recipient.

Similarly, the difference between domestic and foreign is yet another artificial difference. But that is not a point I can develop now.

The severest inequality is that which is caused by financial circumstances. Some people cannot imagine how to use their ample money. And there are thousands of those who develop severe diseases because of lack of food.

Amongst the many reasons behind the progress or regress of a society, the primary are artificial differences. The main explanation for India's prolonged state of deprivation is also prevalence of social differences.

It is not as if India is the only country where inequality prevails. The world is iniquitous; every country suffers from the web of social differences. In developed countries, members of society have got together and succeeded in reducing inequity. Such countries have developed and prospered. Rome is a prime example of this phenomenon. The primary inequality in the Roman civilisation – the groupist differences between the patricians and plebeians – was eventually diffused and made to disappear through a process of social convergence and osmosis. Thereafter, the difference between citizens and non-citizens was also done away with through the miraculous political skills of the rulers of Rome. Therefore, Rome went on to rule the world.

This has not happened everywhere. A few years ago, America witnessed a severe civil war<sup>1</sup> in an attempt to eliminate slavery. Just as surgery is used to remove gangrene, an operation was needed to eliminate a social evil and improve society. The greatest doctors of such surgery are Danton<sup>2</sup> and Robespierre<sup>3</sup>. The replacement of inequality with equality was the objective of the first and the second French Revolutions.

However, not every place has needed such surgical techniques. In most countries, the teachings of wise men have led to the acceptance and establishment of equality as a desired objective. The pen is mightier than the sword. The results of education are superior to those of war. Christianity and Buddhism spread through the power of words; Islam was spread through the power of the sword. However, there are more Christians and Buddhists than Muslims in the world.

<sup>1</sup> *The American Civil War, primarily between the North and the South, lasted from 1861 to 1865.*

<sup>2</sup> *Georges-Jacques Danton, French revolutionary leader and orator, 1759-94.*

<sup>3</sup> *Maximilien-Francois-Marie-Is Robespierre, Jacobin leader, 1758-94.*

The world has witnessed three amazing events. After many intervening years, in three different countries three different sages were born. They spread a great message for the benefit of the world. The essential substance of this message was, "All men are equal." By spreading this divine and wonderful message throughout the world, they planted the seeds of civilisation and development on earth. Whenever humankind is immersed in misery and is on the path of degeneration, a great man has spoken. "You are all equal. Behave equally towards each other." And then, misery has yielded to prosperity. Degeneration has yielded to regeneration.

The first was Shakyasimha Buddha<sup>4</sup>. When India suffered from inequities imposed on it through ramifications of the Vedic religion, the Buddha was born to deliver India. Among all the social inequities that have developed in societies across the world, none is as serious as the caste system<sup>5</sup> that India had fallen prey to. Under suitable circumstances, the other castes can be killed. But even if a *brahmin* commits a hundred sins, he cannot be killed. The *brahmin* may harm you in every which way. But you will not be allowed to harm the *brahmin* in any way. Prostrate yourself at the *brahmin's* feet and smear the dust of his feet on your forehead. The *shudra* is untouchable. Water touched by a *shudra* cannot be used. The *shudra* is not entitled to the happiness of this world; the only occupation he can follow is that which is the lowest of the low. The breath of life is education. He is denied that as well. He is tied down by the dictum of the *shastras*, but he has no right to examine the *shastras* for himself. His after-life is also tied to the *brahmin's* will. Deliverance in the after-life comes from following what the *brahmin* has to say. There is no deliverance otherwise. Deliverance in the after-life comes from doing what the *brahmin*

<sup>4</sup> *Founder of Buddhism, precise date uncertain (6th to 4th century BC), born into the Shakya (Koshala) kingdom. 'Buddha' means the enlightened one.*

<sup>5</sup> *The four main castes of the caste system are brahmins (priests), kshatriyas (warriors), vaishyas (traders) and shudras (the serving caste).*

asks him to do. There is no deliverance otherwise. Deliverance in the after-life comes through donating to *brahmins*. But a *brahmin* who accepts alms from *shudras* is also condemned. The *shudra* obtains deliverance in the after-life by serving *brahmins*. But the *shudra* is a human being and so is the *brahmin*. In ancient Europe, there used to be a distinction between the master and his slave. But even that distinction was not as terrible. Even now, when Indians think of a terrible inequality, the difference between the *brahmin* and the *shudra* is quoted as the most common example.

The terrible inequalities of the caste system pushed India towards the path of deterioration. All advancement is based on acquiring knowledge. Other than satisfying the senses like animals, there is not a single other pleasure in this world that is not based on the acquisition of knowledge. The caste system became a constraint to acquiring knowledge. The *shudra* has no right to knowledge; the *brahmin* has this sole right. Most people in India are not *brahmins*. Therefore, most Indians remained ignorant. Imagine a situation in England where there was a rule that only those descended from the selected lineage of Russell, Cavendish, Stanley<sup>6</sup> etc. would be entitled to knowledge. Where would England's present civilisation have been then? Forget poets, philosophers and scientists. Would

<sup>6</sup> *The Russell family is an English Whig family and one line, that of John Russell, was made Duke of Bedford in 1694. The reference to the Russell family is largely due to Lord John Russell (the first Earl Russell), who was twice Prime Minister of Great Britain between 1846 and 1852 and 1865 and 1866. "Samya" could not have anticipated Lord John Russell's grandson, Bertrand Russell. The Cavendish family had the title of Duke of Devonshire and "Samya" refers to this family probably because of William Cavendish, who was Prime Minister of Great Britain between 1756 and 1757. The reference can also be to William Henry Cavendish Portland, Prime Minister in 1783 and between 1807 and 1809, but this Earl of Portland family is unlikely to be referred to as the Cavendish family. The Stanley family had the title of Earl of Derby and the reference is probably because of Thomas Stanley (1625-1678), poet, translator and historian of philosophy.*

Watt<sup>7</sup>, Stephenson<sup>8</sup> and Arkwright<sup>9</sup> have existed? That is almost what happened in India. And that is not all. Unaided by others, the *brahmins* acquired the sole right to knowledge. Thanks to the caste system, the *brahmins* used this knowledge for undesirable purposes. Anointed superior amongst all castes, they used this knowledge to preserve their superiority. The application and discussion of knowledge was designed to retain the *brahmin's* superiority and to ensure its further spread. So that the other castes fall at the *brahmin's* feet and accept the dust of his feet as the most important thing on earth. Have more *yajnas*, have more *mantras*, provide more and more for alms, donations and penance. Create more false histories of gracious gods and goddesses. Lace the mellifluous Sanskrit language that rings of the anklets that grace *apsaras'* feet with such mythical stories. Tie down Indians even more firmly in ignorance. What is the need for philosophy, science and literature? Do not pay attention to these. Increase the size of that *Brahmana*, compose a new *Upanishad*, pile *Brahmana* upon *Brahmana*, *Upanishad* upon *Upanishad*, *Aranyaka* upon *Aranyaka*, *Sutra* upon *Sutra*. Create an explanation, a commentary on the explanation, a commentary on the commentary, an infinite number of commentaries – cover India with religious compositions based on the *Vedas*. Knowledge? Let that disappear from India.

People became miserable, disturbed and frightened. The *brahmins* write that every act is a sin, the penance for each sin is difficult. Castes other than *brahmins* have no deliverance from sin; there can be no possible happiness in the after-life for anyone else. Where will people go? What will they do? How will they obtain deliverance from this oppression of the sacred *shastras*? Who will save people from the *brahmins*, who remove all sources of happiness? Who will bring back life to India?

<sup>7</sup> James Watt, 1736-1819, of steam engine fame.

<sup>8</sup> George Stephenson, 1781-1848, of railroad locomotive fame.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Arkwright, 1732-92, of textile machinery fame.



Then Buddha, the pure of heart, arose on the Indian firmament. His is the glory that will last forever. In a voice that thundered across the horizons, he said, "I will bring deliverance. I am providing the *mantra* for your deliverance, follow the precepts of that *mantra*. You are all equal. The *brahmin* is the *shudra's* equal. One man is equal to another. All are sinners; everyone obtains salvation through good deeds. The caste system is wrong; *yajnas* and sacrifices are false. The *Vedas* are false, the *Sutras* are false, earthly bliss is false. Who is the king and who the subject? All is false. The only truth is righteousness. Give up falsehood, everyone, and take up the religion of righteousness."

The India that spread from the snow-clad mountains to the great oceans, the India that was plagued by iniquity, was stirred at these great words. Buddhism spread throughout India, iniquities due to caste disappeared to some extent. Buddhism lasted in India for almost a thousand years. Ancient historians know that those thousand years were a period of great prosperity for India. The emperors who supremely ruled India from the Himalayas to the river Godavari – Ashoka, Chandragupta, Shiladitya<sup>11</sup> – all of them arose during this period. This was the period when India was full of thousands of populous and prosperous cities, stretching all the way from Takshashila to Tamralipti<sup>12</sup>. This was the period when India's glory spread from Rome in the West to China in the East – and the kings who ruled then established friendly ties with the emperors of India.

<sup>11</sup> *Ashoka (269-232 BC) was the third emperor of the Maurya dynasty. Chandragupta probably refers to Chandragupta Maurya (324-298 BC), who set up the Maurya dynasty, rather than to Chandragupta I or Chandragupta II (Vikramaditya) of the Gupta dynasty. Shiladitya is a reference to Harshavardhana (606-647) of Kanauj, since Harsha was known as Shiladitya before he became emperor.*

<sup>12</sup> *Takshashila (Taxila) was the capital of Gandhara and a centre of learning. It is now in Pakistan. Tamralipti (modern Tamluk in Midnapore district) used to be on the sea and was a famous port once upon a time. The sea has now receded and modern Tamluk is on the Rupnarayan river.*

This was the period when religious preceptors from India ventured abroad and spread India's religion to half of Asia. There is evidence that architecture was especially developed during this period. It seems that the special attention devoted to the study of philosophy was related to Buddhism. It is difficult to establish a precise era for special study of science and literature. But that there was a close link between all this and the religious revolution brought about by the Buddha may be proven.

The second proponent of equality was Jesus Christ. When Christianity began to spread, Europe and Western Asia were under the Roman Empire. Rome's prosperity had begun to decline. Rome no longer produced skilled and brave warriors. Wealthy "*babus*", addicted to the senses, then lived in Rome. Those who revelled in the field of battle now found amusement in gluttony, concubines and the artificial fighting that took place among gladiators. The love for the country that Rome was famous for throughout the world disappeared. The equality for which we praised Rome, the equality that made Rome the ruler of the world, began to disappear. I have earlier spoken of the city of Rome, now I am talking about the Roman Empire. In the Roman Empire, the inequality of permanent slavery had entered like a serious disease. One individual had thousands of slaves. All the lord's actions were performed by these slaves. Tilling the land, household work, handicrafts, everything was performed by slaves. They were bought and sold like cows and calves. The lord owned his slaves the way an owner owns his cows and calves. The master can beat if he wants. The master can whip if he wants. Even if the master kills a slave, that is not a crime. At his master's command, a slave would descend in gladiatorial combat with lions and tigers. The master amused himself, while the slave lost his life. The Roman Empire was divided into two groups of people, masters and slaves. One group was addicted to infinite pleasures; the other was immersed in infinite misery.

This was not the only inequality in Rome. The emperor did as he willed. There were no limits to his power and influence.

Nero<sup>13</sup> set the city on fire and amused himself by fiddling while Rome burnt. Caligula<sup>14</sup> made his own horse a senator. I am ashamed to describe the autocratic acts of Heliogabalus<sup>15</sup>. Whoever someone was, no matter how important, he could be slain on the emperor's whims. Without reason, without necessity, without justice, he could be killed. And the emperor who ruled over all emperors was the Praetorian Guard<sup>16</sup>. Today, they appointed whom they wanted as the emperor. Tomorrow, they killed this emperor and appointed someone else king. They sold the Roman Empire like vegetables. They did to Rome whatever they felt like doing. In each province, the ruler was an autocratic despot. Whoever had the power, became an autocrat. Where autocracy thrives, iniquity prospers as well.

At this time, Christianity began to spread throughout the Roman Empire. The great words spoken by Jesus Christ began to enter people's hearts. He said, all men are brothers. All men are equal before God. In fact, he who is oppressed, miserable and sad, is the one more beloved of God. This great message deflated the vanity of the big man; it deflated the vanity of the master. The limb-less beggar became bigger than the emperor. Christ said that his kingdom was not on earth, worldly happiness is not happiness, worldly importance is not importance. Twice in this world, two such sentences were uttered, representing the essence of all ethical sciences. There is no ethics beyond this. On the first occasion, the *brahmin* of Aryan descent said on the banks of the Ganges that he who regards everything as manifestations of his own self, is truly learned<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> 54-68 AD.

<sup>14</sup> 37-41 AD, also known as Gaius Caesar.

<sup>15</sup> 218-222 A.D, also known as Elagabalus.

<sup>16</sup> The Praetorian Guard was originally created by Emperor Augustus and were the household guards of the Roman Emperors. Eventually, the Praetorian Guard came to play a major role in appointing emperors.

<sup>17</sup> The reference seems to be to the Buddha, in which case, the word *brahmin* does not make sense. Alternatively, the reference can be to the teachings of the Upanishads, in which case, the word *brahmin* is being used in a generic rather than as specific sense.

On the second occasion, Jesus of the Hebrew descent stood on the mountains of Jerusalem and said, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." There is grave doubt whether the earth has ever witnessed words as great as these. And these words form the basis of equality.

These precepts began to be accepted as the basis of religion. The chains of the slaves began to loosen. Those addicted to sensual pleasures began to give them up. Consequently, the barbarians united in Rome and began to emerge as an energetic, prosperous and invincible race. They were the ancestors of modern Europeans. The kind of material prosperity that modern Europe witnessed could not have been imagined by its early inhabitants. It is not as if all this is a fruit of Christianity, there are several other reasons – but the main reasons are Christian principles, and Greek literature and philosophy. But it is also not the case that Christianity only led to good results. There were good as well as bad effects. Although Christianity was essentially equitable in nature, it resulted in a serious iniquity. The suzerainty of Christian priests increased enormously. In some European countries like Spain and France, this attained severe proportions. Particularly in France, the iniquity between upper classes and lower classes eventually led to the great French Revolution. One of the people who contributed to the churning then, was the third exponent of equality. This person was Rousseau<sup>18</sup>.



<sup>18</sup> *Jean-Jacques Rousseau, French philosopher, writer and political theorist, 1712-78.*

## Two

It is impossible to describe the state of France towards the end of the eighteenth century. This limited essay offers no scope for that description. Nor is such a description necessary. Several writers, who are famous, skilled, learned in history and perceptive, have described that situation in great detail. Those descriptions can be read very easily. A few words will suffice for our purpose.

Carlyle<sup>19</sup> described it in the following satirical way. “The law according to which a landowner could return from his hunt, kill two serfs and wash his feet in their blood, that law is no longer prevalent.” No longer prevalent! But was prevalent earlier! “In fifteen years no person like Charlois has shot masons to amuse himself at the sight of their rolling down the roof.” Sirajuddoula was the king of a country; Charlois was merely a high-ranking citizen<sup>20</sup>.

The satirical statements illustrate the kind of unthinkable iniquity that had developed among the French. Louis the Fifteenth was addicted to sensual pleasures and amusement, he was profligate and selfish. He needed an infinite amount of riches to satisfy his mistresses. The riches that Madame Pompadour<sup>21</sup> and Madame de Berry<sup>22</sup> enjoyed were far in excess of the riches enjoyed by the pure and wedded queen. Madame de Berry had an ape-like African cook. On Madame’s orders, he was appointed the ruler of a province. Descriptions of Louis’ pleasure-house could be compared to the city of

<sup>19</sup> *The British historian and essayist Thomas Carlyle, 1795-1881. The quote is almost certainly from the three-volume “The French Revolution”, 1837.*

<sup>20</sup> *Sirajuddoula was the last independent nawab of Bengal and his defeat by the East India Company in Plassey (1757) signalled the beginning of British rule in India. Charlois probably refers to Charles-Philippe, Comte (Count) D’Artois (1757-1836), later to be King of France as Charles X from 1824 to 1830. At the time of the French Revolution, he was merely a nobleman.*

<sup>21</sup> *Madame de Pompadour, 1721-64, mistress of Louis XV.*

<sup>22</sup> *Marie-Antoinette (1755-1793), Queen and wife of Louis XVI. Louis XVI was known as the Duke de Berry.*

Indraprastha<sup>23</sup>, created for the Pandavas by the gods – how can I describe the festivities in that temple of pleasure? Money flowed like water and the royal treasury was empty. The royal treasury was empty and wails of starving subjects rose to the high heavens. The royal treasury was empty and subjects were starving. Then where did the money for the *rajasuya yajna* of the *sabhaparva*<sup>24</sup>, the pleasure of Indra's *nandankanan*, come from? By stealing the life's blood of those starving subjects. By extorting the dry, by burning those who were ashes, by crushing them against stone, the evil de Berry decorated her hair with a myriad jewels. What about the big men? They did not contribute a penny to the royal treasury, but benefited from the king's largesse. The king's largesse – plenty, unlimited, infinite – he who could, grasped even more, because it was the juice extracted from the grinding stone. Those who benefited did not contribute a penny to the royal treasury. The big men did not pay taxes, the clergy did not pay taxes, the aristocrats did not pay taxes. Taxes were only paid by miserable and poor peasants. On top of this, there was the oppression of the tax-collectors. Michelin<sup>25</sup> says that tax collection bore resemblance to a well-thought out plan of battle. Through this, two hundred thousand useless people oppressed the earth. These locusts grasped everything and destroyed everything. To extract more from those who were already oppressed, required a cruel ruling order. It required terrible penalties, serfdom, the gallows and other instruments of torture. The collection of royal taxes was leased out. Those who obtained the leases had the right to

<sup>23</sup> *Indraprastha was the capital city of the Pandavas, built near what is now Delhi, after burning down the forest of Khandava. Bankimchandra is simplifying, because Indraprastha wasn't created by the gods. Instead, it was created by Maya, who was the architect of the danavas (demons).*

<sup>24</sup> *The Mahabharata has 18 parvas or sections, the sabhaparva being the second. The rajasuya yajna has Vedic origins and is a holy fire ritual (yajna) that signifies the coronation of a great emperor. In sabhaparva, this meant Yudhishtira's coronation.*

<sup>25</sup> *This probably refers to Jules Michelet (1798-1874), French writer and historian, who wrote a multi-volume "History of France", only parts of which were translated into English.*

collect taxes through use of weapons. They even killed subjects for this purpose. On the one hand, there were festivities in gardens and forests, singing and dancing, adultery, laughter and amusement, infinite pleasure and thoughtlessness. On the other, there was poverty, starvation, disease, slavery, gallows and murder. During the reign of Louis XV, France had such serious iniquities. This inequality resulted from distorted and reprehensible forms of ruling. Rousseau's powerful blows destroyed this kingdom and this method of ruling. Those who followed his teachings brought about this destruction.

The Buddha and Jesus Christ spread the sacred truth throughout the world. It is quite appropriate that they should therefore be worshipped as gods among humankind. Rousseau was not their equal. It is not the case that Rousseau spread pure and sacred truth through the world. With the great and sacred truth that would have brought welfare to mankind, Rousseau mixed up some undesirable falsehood. He used the dexterity of his words and their amazing captivating influence to serve up a mixture that entered straight into the hearts of Frenchmen. The words suited the times. And Rousseau was a wizard of words. The French not only accepted Rousseau's truth as the basis for all their action, but they accepted his falsehood as well. The entire French race accepted his teachings and became his disciple. It were these teachings that led to the French Revolution.

Rousseau's basic principle was that equality is a law of nature. In a state of nature, all men are equal. Civilisation leads to inequality. Therefore, Rousseau regarded civilisation as the greatest evil that befell mankind. Rousseau also agreed that in the natural state, inequalities exist among men. But he ascribed this too to the evils of civilisation – to sensual pleasures, sins and sentiments that result from civilisation. In a completely uncivilised state, all men must physically exert themselves equally, thus their bodies will physically develop in an equal way; and a healthy body will mean a healthy mind. When the uncivilised man roamed the forests, hunted for food and slept under the trees – the use of language was limited, and he did

not know how to manipulate language. He did not know the desire that has no gratification, the greed that has no fulfilment, the wishes that cannot be met. 'I will love this person, I will not love that one, this person is related to me, that person is not, this is my wife, that is someone else's', all these sentiments were unknown to him. Rousseau imagined this state to be one of divine happiness and called out to mankind, "Regard this wonderful picture. Compare this to the state of the present civilisation and its misery and sins."

He who is born a man, is equal to all other men. All men are equal in their natural state and all men are equal in their right to property. The king has as much right to a piece of land as a beggar. The land belongs to everyone; it does not belong to any specific individual. When the powerful began to deprive the weak of their rights, society began to be established. The deprivation obtained permanence through the institution of law.

The first person who singled out a piece of land and said, "This is mine", was the one who initiated society. "That fellow is a cheat. Don't listen to him; the earth does not belong to an individual, the crop belongs to everyone." Had someone uttered these words and got rid of that prospective landowner, he would have done the greatest service to humankind.

Such were the terrible teachings of Rousseau. When Voltaire<sup>26</sup> heard them, he called them the philosophy of a scoundrel. Following his master's teachings, Proudhon<sup>27</sup>, the inheritor of Rousseau's mantle, said that all property is theft.

In his world-famous book *Le Contrat Social*<sup>28</sup>, Rousseau changed his views somewhat. And he also curbed his tendency to curse civilisation. He said that in the uncivilised state, what is right is determined by one's natural instincts. But in a state of civilisation, what is right is determined by one's sense of justice.

<sup>26</sup> Pseudonym of Francois-Marie Arouet, French writer, 1694-1778.

<sup>27</sup> Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, radical and anarchist, 1809-65. This phrase occurs in "What is Property?" 1876.

<sup>28</sup> The right title is "Du Contrat Social", 1762.



Rousseau accepted the principle that whoever owned property first, should be its rightful owner. But there were certain conditions. First, the land cannot have been owned by someone else first. Second, the prospective landowner must only occupy that much of land as is necessary to sustain himself. Not more than that. Third, land cannot be acquired merely in name – that person must actually till it. Only under such circumstances will an individual be recognised as the owner of the land.

The main idea behind *Le Contrat Social* is that society is set up by its members on the basis of a contract – just as five businessmen may get together, accept some rules for interaction among themselves and form a joint stock company. Rousseau believes that in exactly the same way, society, kingdoms and rules of law are set up by men for the welfare of mankind. The fallout of accepting this principle is terrible. You and I have a contract that you will till my land. In return, I will provide you food and clothes and permit you to sleep in my house. The day you stop tilling my land, I will grasp you by the neck and throw you out of my house. I will stop providing you with food. This act obtains the sanction of law. In exactly the same fashion, if the relationship between king and subject is established on the basis of a contract, the subject can tell an oppressive king, “You have broken the contract. You promised that you would look after the welfare of your subjects. Your task is to look after our welfare. Our task is to pay you taxes and follow your orders. You no longer look after our welfare. We will no longer pay you taxes. Nor will we follow your orders. Get down from your bejewelled throne.”

Therefore, the day *Le Contrat Social* was publicised, the French king’s sceptre broke in his hands. The ultimate result of *Le Contrat Social* was that Louis XVI was dislodged from the throne and sent to his death. Everything that happened in the course of the French Revolution owes its origin to this book. The *mantra* used in that *yajna* was drawn from the words of this book.

In the course of the French Revolution, the king went. The royal dynasty went. The throne went. The concept of kingship disappeared. The class of aristocrats disappeared. The old

Christian religion went. The clergy went. The concepts of month and day also disappeared. Everything was washed away in everlasting rivers of blood. In due course, everything reappeared. But that which used to be there, was gone forever. France evolved into a new form. A new civilisation was established in Europe. The goal of human welfare was permanently established. Rousseau's false teachings led to an event that would be remembered forever. As Rousseau's false teachings were based on the notion of equality, their creation was built of a half-truth.

Eventually, the French Revolution quietened down, its objectives had been attained. But "land belongs to everyone" was a seed that Rousseau had sown. It developed into a gigantic tree and continued to bear all kinds of new fruit. Even today, Europe is full of fruit obtained from that tree. 'Communism' is a fruit of that tree. The 'International' is a fruit of that tree. I will talk about all this in a limited way.

In this country, and in others, property usually belongs to individuals. My house, your land, his tree. However, it is not as if there can be no other notion of property. It is possible that property does not belong to an individual, but belongs to the public at large. The earth that sustains all was not created for any one single individual. Nor was it created for ten or fifteen landowners. Therefore, everyone must have an equal right on land. With the power of his words, Rousseau spread this apparently welfare-enhancing wisdom throughout the world. Eventually, wise and perceptive scholars began to propagate notions of public ownership of property based on this wisdom.

The first opinion that came forth was that land and capital – inputs based on which other wealth can be created – should be vested with public ownership. Whatever is produced – let everyone share in that equally. Then, there will be no difference between the big and the small man. Everyone will work equally. Everyone will have an equal share in wealth. This is true communism. The propagators of this idea are Owen<sup>29</sup>, Louis

<sup>29</sup> *Social reformer and Utopian socialist, Robert Owen, 1771-1858.*

Blanc<sup>30</sup> and Cabet<sup>31</sup>. The ordinary communist wants to give everyone an equal share in wealth, regardless of whether he works a little or works a lot, regardless of whether he works all the time or works not at all. Louis Blanc does not agree with this dictum. In his opinion, the share in wealth should be proportional to the work or effort one puts in. The creed that goes by the name of St. Simonism<sup>32</sup> also subscribes to something similar. It accepts that it is not necessary that everyone will have an equal share in wealth. It is not necessary that everyone will work equally hard. People will work at the task in which they are skilled. They will work according to their capacity. The salary will depend on the importance of the task and on the intensity of the work effort. There will be a few supervisors to decide who is suitable for what task and who will be paid how much. Land and capital will belong to the public. Etc.

Fourierism<sup>33</sup> prefers a different kind of public ownership in property. But this school does not believe that there should be no individual ownership of property. It believes in classification of property and also in its inheritance. According to this school, two thousand people, or similar numbers, will work together as a community to create wealth. In this way, different communities will work to create wealth. Each community will select its own leaders. There will be differences in ownership of capital. A fixed amount will be set aside from the wealth that is created. This will be distributed equally to everyone. This share will also be obtained by someone who is reluctant to work. Following a prescribed rule, the remaining amount will be distributed proportionately to those who work, those who own capital and those who are especially skilled. Distribution will be according to one's worth. Etc.

<sup>30</sup> *French Utopian socialist, 1811-82.*

<sup>31</sup> *French socialist, Etienne Cabet, 1788-1856.*

<sup>32</sup> *Henri de Saint-Simon (1760-1825) was a French social theorist and one of the founders of Christian socialism.*

<sup>33</sup> *Francois-Marie-Charles Fourier (1772-1837), French social theorist, who advocated communal associations of producers known as phalanges. This system came to be known as Fourierism.*

One should also mention what the sage John Stuart Mill<sup>34</sup> has said about inheritance of land – because that too has something to do with the notion of equality. Mill agrees that an individual has complete right on the property that he has earned for himself. He who has earned property through his effort or skill has the right to enjoy it throughout his life, even if that property be unlimited. When he dies, he has the right to leave it to whoever he wishes. But if he dies intestate and does not leave his property to anyone in particular, no single individual has the right to enjoy the inherited property alone. Ram has earned property through which ten thousand people can make a living. However, as Ram has earned the property on his own, he has the right to deprive nine thousand nine hundred and ninety nine people and enjoy the property alone. When he dies, he has the complete right to single out his son or any other individual as his sole inheritor. But imagine a situation where Ram has failed to single out an inheritor. In that situation, why should the system decree that Ram's son be the sole inheritor? The right belongs to the person who has earned the property, not to his son. When the right holder has not said that his son should inherit everything, the son cannot be the sole inheritor. Every individual in society should have an equal right to that property.

However, it was the father who brought the son into this miserable world. The father should provide the means to ensure that the son does not suffer from want and that the son is educated and can lead a life of happiness. One should therefore set aside a sum from the father's property to ensure all this, even in situations where the father has not singled out the son as his inheritor. However, the son is not entitled to a penny more. Mill believes that the rights of a legitimate son are no more than the rights of an illegitimate one. Both are equally entitled to that which is needed for self-preservation. But such rights only belong to sons. In the absence of sons, there is no logical reason why the dead man's other relatives should have any right whatsoever to the property. In case the dead man left a son,

<sup>34</sup> *English philosopher and economist, believer in utilitarianism, 1806-73.*

some amount should be set aside from the property for the son. But the residual should be owned by the public at large. In case there is no son, the entire property should be owned by the public at large. Truly, there is no kingdom on earth where rules of justice have been framed in accordance with principles of justice. Our *dharmashastras* are somewhat better than the principles in England. The *suras* are better than the Hindu *dharmashastras*. But all these principles are unjust. Today, just principles are not recognised by most people, and the ignorant laugh at them. But one day, principles of justice will be followed everywhere in the world.

The last strand in the notion of equality has also been preached by this great sage. Men and women are equal. Why should men alone be entitled to the rights of education, science, ruling the kingdom and different types of business? Why should women be deprived of these rights? Mill maintains that women are also entitled to these rights. The belief that they cannot do these things, or that they are not qualified, is a falsehood perpetuated down the ages. In Europe, Mill's arguments have been accepted and have led to results. In our country, it will take quite some time before such ideas are propagated.

One should again repeat the essence of theories of equality. Men are equal. But this should not be interpreted to mean that all men are equal in every possible sense. There are natural inequalities. Some are weak, others are strong. Some are intelligent, others are stupid. Given these natural inequalities, there are bound to be social inequalities. The strong and the intelligent will give out orders. The weak and the stupid are bound to be the ones to follow the orders. Even Rousseau accepted this. However, the essence of the theories of equality is that social inequalities that are out of proportion to those determined by natural inequalities, violate principles of justice and harm the human race. Many of the prevalent political and social orders exhibit such artificial inequalities. Unless these systems are reformed, mankind will not witness true development. Mill says that present desirable social orders are nothing but historical undesirable social orders that have been

reformed. This is true. But complete reform takes a long time. However, no one should interpret this to think 'I am a big man by birth, others are small men by birth'. You have not been born in a superior class because of any qualities you possess; he who is born in an inferior class is not because of any faults of his. Therefore, the lowly born is as entitled to the pleasures of earth as you are. Do not place hindrances in the path of his happiness; remember that he is your brother - your equal. Against principles of justice and because of faults inherent in legal systems, there are those who inherit property from their ancestors as well as titles that connote kingship and immense power. They need to remember that Paran Mandal, who is a Bengali farmer, is their brother and their equal. No man has control over his birth. Paran Mandal was not lowly born because of inferior qualities. The property that the king enjoys alone, is property to which Paran Mandal also has a right. Through principles of justice.



### Three

Since I have introduced Paran Mandal, I cannot avoid describing the state of his misery at some length. Everyone knows about the prosperity of the *zamindar*. But those who try to improve Bengali society by making speeches and writing articles in newspapers, are not necessarily aware of the state of Bengal's peasantry. Any attempt to explain theories of equality will remain incomplete unless one illustrates them with examples of inequality. The earth does not belong to anyone. But landowners have divided it up among themselves. The outcome of this division needs to be described.

The *zamindar babu* lives in a palace that has seven and a half storeys. Through mild light that is reflected from coloured glass panes, he gazes upon the beauty of diamonds that adorn the fair skins of his wife and daughter. At which time, Paran Mandal and his sons are in the fields, in the blistering sun of the highnoon. Their heads are uncovered and so are their feet. The mud of the fields covers them all the way up to the knees. Through this mud, with a blunt plough and two skeleton-thin bulls, they are attempting to plough the fields so that the *zamindar* may have his pleasures. It is the month of *Bhadra* and a strong sun is in the sky. To satisfy the thirst that burns their hearts, they drink muddy water from the fields. They are hungry. But this is not the time to go home and eat; this is the time to plough the field. In the evening they will return home and eat large red grains of rice mixed with salt and chillies from broken utensils. It will leave their stomachs half-empty. They will then sleep on torn mats or on the ground, at one end of the cowshed. Mosquitoes do not bite them. The next morning, when they are again on their way to plough a field full of mud, the *zamindar* or the moneylender will catch them, to recover money owed. They will not be able to work that day. Otherwise, the *zamindar* or the moneylender will seize the land and there will be no work for the entire year. That will mean no food for the entire family.

As soon as the paddy is harvested in the month of *Pousha*, the peasants have to pay the instalment for that month. Some are able to pay the tax in full, some default. The paddy is eventually threshed and stored, and then taken out for sale in the market. Once this has been done, in the month of *Chaitra*, the peasant comes to the *zamindar's* court to settle the tax for the entire year. Paran Mandal's instalment in *Pousha* is five rupees. He has paid four rupees and one rupee is still due. The instalment due for the month of *Chaitra* is three rupees. Paran Mandal has come to pay four rupees. The clerk sits down to calculate and says, "Your dues from the month of *Pousha* are three rupees." Paran Mandal shouts a lot, he begs. Perhaps he is able to produce a receipt, perhaps not. Perhaps the clerk has not given a receipt. Alternatively, having accepted four rupees, the clerk has given a receipt for two rupees. Whatever the case, unless he accepts that three rupees is outstanding, Paran Mandal is not safe. Perhaps if he does not pay up, the clerk will change the three rupees into thirteen rupees and complain. Therefore, Paran Mandal accepts that three rupees are still outstanding. Assume that three rupees are indeed outstanding. Then the clerk sits down to calculate interest. The *zamindar's* interest is four *annas* per rupee. It is four *annas* for three years and also four *annas* for a single month. The interest on three rupees outstanding is twelve *annas*. Paran pays up three rupees and twelve *annas*. Then he has to pay three rupees as instalment for the month of *Chaitra*. After that, there is the clerk's calculation fee. He has to be paid two *paise* per rupee. The worth of Paran Mandal's land is thirty-two rupees. So, according to the calculation, the clerk has to be paid one rupee. There are obligatory fees and tips for others; there are other types of clerks and servants who have to be paid - *nayeb*, *gomasta*, *tahshildar*, *muhuri*, *paik*. All of them are entitled to bribes. In aggregate, a certain sum of money has to be collected from every village. These bribe-takers divide it among themselves. On this account, Paran Mandal has to pay two more rupees.

I admit that all this oppression does not take place in accordance with the *zamindar's* wishes. He receives nothing but



the legitimate land revenue and interest. The rest of it is swallowed up by the clerks like *nayeb*s and *gomasta*s. But whose fault is that? The *zamindar* pays a salary to the guard he employs at the gate, the *nayeb* obtains exactly the same salary. The *gomasta*'s salary is slightly less than that of the cook. So, if they do not accept bribes, how will they survive? These things may not happen according to the wishes of the *zamindar*, but he is undoubtedly to be blamed. If his servants oppress and cheat his subjects, how does that harm the *zamindar*? Why does he need to interfere?

In the month of *Ashara*, the sacred New Year is celebrated. The occasion calls for an instalment of two rupees as land revenue. This he pays, but it is only the revenue. As it is the New Year, the *zamindar* has to be paid a little bit extra, something as a gift. Paran pays this as well. Perhaps the *zamindar*'s household is divided into many different families; each family must get a separate gift. He pays this as well. Then there is the *nayeb*, he must also get a gift. Paran pays this also. Then there are the various *gomastas*. They too, obtain their respective shares. The subject whose money runs out in the process of paying gifts, will have an outstanding due. That will be collected in due time.

After Paran Mandal settles everything and returns home, he discovers that he has no money left. There is no food. It is already time to plough the land. That costs money. But Paran is not scared of this eventuality. It happens every year. The moneylender exists as a saviour. Paran goes to the moneylender. At one and a half times the legitimate rate of interest, he borrows paddy from the moneylender. Next year, he will repay this with interest and have nothing left for himself. The peasant always borrows to eat, he always borrows at one and a half times the legitimate rate of interest. Such a situation can make a king go bankrupt, not to speak of a peasant! Perhaps the *zamindar* is himself the moneylender. He has silos of paddy in the village. Paran collects his paddy from there. Such *zamindars* have a roaring business. They steal money from the peasants and make them destitute. They then give peasants loans and enjoy one and a half times the legitimate rate of interest. In such a situation,

the sooner the *zamindar* can steal all the peasant's money, the more his profits.

Every year is not the same. Sometimes the crop is good, sometimes it is not. Too much rain, no rain, rain in the wrong season, floods and ravages of locusts or other insects, all these are possibilities. The moneylender gives loans only if there are signs of a good crop – because the moneylender knows that if the crop is not good, the peasant will not be able to repay the loan. The peasant is then helpless. He and his family die of starvation. Sometimes relief comes in the form of wild and inedible roots and fruits, or official relief or begging. Sometimes, the only saviour is God. In times of calamity such as this, barring a few great hearts, no *zamindar* comes to the aid of the peasant. Assume that this is a good year. Paran Mandal receives a loan and is able to survive.

Now, it is time for an instalment for the month of *Bhadra* Paran has nothing left, he is not able to pay this. The *zamindar* employs various types of *sepoy*s – *paik*, *piyada*, *nagadi*, *halshahana* and *kotala*<sup>35</sup>. One of these great chaps turns up to remind Paran. Perhaps they are unable to do anything and return home like good fellows. Alternatively, Paran borrows and pays the requisite sum. Or perhaps he loses his head and quarrels with the *sepoy*. The *sepoy* returns and informs the *gomasta*, “Paran Mandal has called you all kinds of names.” Then three *sepoy*s dash off to capture Paran. They drag Paran from his home and bring him to the *zamindar*'s court. As soon as Paran arrives there, he listens to some civilised cursing. Some blows are rained down his body. The *gomasta* imposes a fine that is five times the amount due. In addition, the *sepoy*s have their demands. The *sepoy*s are instructed to keep Paran there and recover the money from him. If Paran has a well-wisher, the well-wisher will bring the required money and free Paran. Otherwise, Paran is kept in the *zamindar*'s gaol for one day, two days, three days, five days or seven days. Perhaps Paran's mother or brother goes and complains to the *thana*. The great sub-inspector sends a constable

<sup>35</sup> *Anagadi* was a special *sepoy* used for collecting revenue, as was the *halshahana*, whereas the *kotala* was more like a chief *sepoy*.

to free the imprisoned from the gaol. The great constable owns everything on heaven and earth, he comes and entrenches himself in the *zamindar's* court. Paran sits down next to him and begins to cry a little. The constable has a smoke, but does not bother to mention the question of freeing Paran. He too is paid a salary by the *zamindar*. Twice or thrice a year, at the time of festivals, he receives gifts from the *zamindar* and cannot go against his wishes. That day also, he witnesses the sacred silver circle that brings gladness to the heart. As soon as men see this amazing circle, their hearts are filled with happiness. There is a surfeit of love and devotion. The constable is appeased by the *gomasta* and returns to the *thana* to proclaim, "No one was imprisoned in the *zamindar's* gaol. Paran Mandal is a scoundrel. He was hiding under the palm trees near the pond. As soon as I called for him, he came out and showed himself to me." That is the end of the case.

It is not necessary that subjects are arrested, imprisoned in jail, beaten up or fines imposed on them only because they have defaulted on revenue. Any trivial reason will do. Gopal Mondal pays the great *gomasta* a little bit of money and complains, "Paran refuses to share a seat with me while eating." Paran is arrested. Nepal Mandal pays the required obeisance and complains, "Paran is having an affair with my sister." Immediately, Paran is arrested and imprisoned. The news arrives that Paran's widowed sister-in-law is pregnant. Immediately, a contingent is sent to arrest Paran. Paran refuses to bear false witness in support of the *zamindar*. Immediately, people dash off to arrest him.

The great *gomasta* eventually releases Paran. Perhaps Paran pays up some money. Perhaps he is released on bail. Perhaps he promises to pay on instalments. Perhaps the *gomasta* decides that the matter can be sorted out later. Perhaps he fears a second visit from the police. Perhaps he decides that there is nothing to be gained by keeping Paran imprisoned for a long period. So Paran returns home and goes back to farming. There is a good harvest. In the month of *Agrahayana*, the *zamindar's* granddaughter will be married, his nephew will be fed his first

rice and there will be a celebration. The expenses are two thousand rupees. *Mangan*, a special tax, is imposed on the entire estate; every subject will have to pay one *anna* per rupee. That will yield five thousand rupees. Two thousand rupees are required for the celebration. Three thousand rupees will end up in the *zamindar's* treasure chest.

The subject who can, gives. Paran Mandal has nothing left, he cannot pay. The estate does not yield the intended five thousand rupees. On learning this, the absentee *zamindar* decides to pay a visit to the estate. He arrives there, the village is blessed.

The subjects bring large black goats and tie them up at the gate of the *zamindar's* house. Huge live fish, many varieties of carp, lie on the courtyard and thrash their tails about. The larders are crammed with huge and dark pumpkins, round potatoes, cauliflower and peas. Not to mention curd, milk, *channa* and *ghee*. The subjects are intent on showing their devotion. Unfortunately, the *zamindar's* stomach does not hold up. Forget the *zamindar*, his *sepoy*s and other minions also begin to suffer from stomach disorders.

But all that is irrelevant. The main point is that the *zamindar* has to be saluted with some money on his arrival. Half an *anna* is imposed per rupee. Everyone cannot manage all this. Those who can, pay. Those who cannot, are imprisoned. Or their debt begins to pile up.

Paran Mandal cannot pay. But his fields have yielded an excellent harvest. The *gomasta* notices this. He spends eight *annas* on stamp paper, goes to the appropriate court and submits an application for help in *kruking* the property. The upshot of the application is the following. "Paran Mandal has defaulted on revenue. We want to *kruk*<sup>36</sup> his paddy. But Paran is a violent scoundrel. He has collected a huge gang that will cause riots and murder people if we try to *kruk* the paddy. We pray that the court helps us with constables in the process." The *gomasta* is a simple and innocent soul, it is Paran Mandal who is the oppressor. So, the court appoints constables. The constable

<sup>36</sup> *Urdu word, meaning attachment.*

arrives in the fields and is overcome with the charm of the irresistible silver circle. He stands there, while Paran's paddy is harvested and carted off to the *zamindar's* court. This is known as help in *kruking*.

Paran sees that everything is lost. I will not be able to repay the money-lender's debt, I will not be able to pay the *zamindar's* revenue, I will not be able to eat. Until then, Paran has tried to endure everything. You cannot live in the water and quarrel with a crocodile. But Paran hears that one can complain against such unjust action. Paran decides to complain. However, that is not easy. The court and a brothel are similar, no entrance without payment. Money is needed for stamps, money is needed to pay the fees of lawyers. Process fees have to be paid for witnesses, they have to be fed, perhaps witnesses too have to be paid. The bailiff may have to be paid. The court has constables and clerks, they have expectations. Paran has nothing. Nonetheless, he sells his plough, his bulls and his utensils to complain in court. It would have been better had he simply hanged himself.

The *zamindar's* side comes up with a counter complaint. Paran Mandal has ignored the *kruk* demands. He has harvested the paddy and sold it off elsewhere. The witnesses are the *zamindar's* subjects. They are devoted to him. Not out of affection, but out of fear. They bear witness in support of the *zamindar*. The great constable follows the same route, charmed by the silver *mantra*. Everyone bears witness that Paran ignored the *kruk* demand, harvested the paddy and sold it off. A decree is issued on the basis on the *zamindar's* complaint, Paran's complaint is dismissed. Paran's gains are the following. First, he has to pay compensation to the *zamindar*. Second, he has to pay costs to the *zamindar*, for both complaints. Third, he has to bear his own costs, for both complaints.

Paran does not have a single *paise* left. Where is all this money going to come from? If he has some land, he sells that off and pays. Otherwise, he goes to jail. Or else, he flees the country and runs away.

We are not arguing that all this oppression is directed against a single subject in a single year. Nor are we arguing that every *zamindar* behaves in this fashion. Had that been the case, the country would not have survived. Paran Mandal is an imaginary subject. Using this imaginary subject as an example, our objective was to depict the various kinds of oppression despotic *zamindars* subject their tenants to. Today, one tenant is oppressed in a certain way. Tomorrow, another tenant is oppressed in a different way.

We have not described all the different kinds of oppression *zamindars* indulge in. In different places, at different times, different *zamindars* indulge in so many different techniques to extort money that it is impossible to catalogue them all. The rules vary from place to place. In the same place, different rules are followed for different people. Others have no particular rules. They collect whatever is possible, in whichever way.

It is now time to say a few words on behalf of the *zamindars*.

First, as we have already argued, not all *zamindars* are oppressors. Day by day, the number of oppressive *zamindars* is declining. The educated landlords who live in Kolkata are not oppressors. The oppression that occurs in their names occurs without their knowledge, or sanction. The *nayibs* and the *gomastas* indulge in this. There are also educated *zamindars* in rural areas, the same holds true for them. The really big *zamindars* do not oppress as much – in many big households, there is virtually no oppression. Oppression is prevalent among smaller *zamindars*. If someone's estate fetches a revenue of one *lakh* rupees, it is extremely probable that he is not likely to extort another twenty-five thousand through unjustly oppressing his subjects. However, there are *zamindars* who must preserve the pomp of their status, but whose estates do not even bring twelve hundred rupees in twelve months. They are therefore inclined to garner some extra money through beating and oppression. Then again, those who operate the system themselves and obtain revenue from their subjects directly, are less likely to oppress – as compared to those who obtain revenue indirectly through

middlemen who are granted different kinds of leases – *pattanidaar*, *darpattanidaar*, *ijaradaar*<sup>37</sup>. For the sake of brevity, in what has been said above, we have used the expression *zamindar*. The word simply signifies someone who is entitled to taxes. Naturally, if revenue collection is leased out to middlemen, the middlemen have to pay the *zamindar* a stipulated share and extract a surplus from peasants. The creation of this middle rung has been a great disaster for peasants.

Second, the various forms of oppression that we have described often take place without the knowledge of *zamindars*. Sometimes, they take place against the *zamindar's* wishes and are indulged in by *nayeb*s and *gomastas*. Many *zamindars* do not even know that their subjects are oppressed.


Third, many *zamindars* have subjects who are troublesome. They do not pay taxes without oppression. The *zamindar* will be ruined if he has to complain against each and every one before revenue can be collected. But one should also state that unless oppression has been a rule, subjects rarely turn against the *zamindar*.

We are against those who only criticise the *zamindars*. *Zamindars* have often performed good deeds. The fact that schools are now being set up in villages, people have access to elementary education in their own village – is due to the merits of the *zamindars*. In many places, *zamindars* have helped the populace by setting up medical centres and guesthouses, and building roads. The *zamindars* have a society known as the British Indian Association<sup>38</sup>. This is the only organisation that dares to raise its voice against the ruling classes from a different country. Therefore, it is not fair to criticise the *zamindars* alone. It is indeed a shame that some members of this clan oppress their subjects. It is the duty of the *zamindars* to remove this shame. If there

<sup>37</sup> *Pattani, darpattani and ijara were different systems of obtaining land on lease from zamindars, against which revenue had to be paid.*

<sup>38</sup> *The British Indian Association of Bengal was formed in 1851 with Radha Kanta Dev as President and Devendranath Tagore as Secretary, with a demand that local administration be improved.*

are five brothers in a household and two of them are wicked, it is up to the remaining three to try and reform the wicked ones. Our advice to the class of *zamindars* is that they should also act accordingly. That is the reason behind writing this essay. We are not addressing ourselves to the ruling classes, we are not addressing ourselves to society at large. Our complaint is to the *zamindars*. What we are asking for is not beyond their capability. The severest penalty is anger from one's own clan. The most effective action is disapproval and insults from one's own group. There are many evil people who refrain from indulging in theft because they fear the disapproval of their neighbours. The punishment doled out by law is not as effective as this form of punishment. The punishment to be meted out to *zamindars* lies in the hands of the *zamindars*. Scared of being insulted, abhorred and thrown out by their own clan, many oppressive *zamindars* will mend their ways.





## Four

How have the peasants of this country come to such a sorry state? How was this great social inequity created? To explain the principles of equity, let us go into some detail.

It must indeed be acknowledged that Bengal's peasantry has not come to this sorry state in a few years. The degeneration of the poorer classes has been progressive. The deterioration of the Indian peasantry can be traced back to the days when Indian civilisation was created. Westerners are fond of saying that Rome was not built in a day. The miseries of our peasantry have not been created in a hundred years, or even two hundred. Today, we will try to examine why India's subjects have never been able to move up.

That education is the measure and cause of civilisation is the essence of Buckle's<sup>39</sup> thesis. Buckle maintains that ethical uplift is not possible without educational uplift. We do not agree with this proposition, but it must be accepted that education is the source of civilisation. Without improvements in education, society does not improve. Knowledge does not create itself, it is a labour intensive process. Unless someone attempts to encourage the spread of education, society will not be exposed to knowledge. But education requires the leisure of time. Before discussing knowledge, stomachs need to be full; none will have an inclination towards education in a state of deprivation. However, if everyone was busy gathering sustenance, then none will have the time for education. Therefore, the first prerequisite for the creation of a civilisation is that a class should evolve that can sustain itself without physical labour. Others will labour and this class will sit and discuss knowledge. This will not be possible if those who do the physical labour only produce enough to sustain themselves; the physical labourers will use up whatever is produced, and nothing will be left for anyone else. However, if the physical labourers produce a surplus over

<sup>39</sup> Henry Thomas Buckle (1821-1862), English historian, whose most famous book is "*The History of Civilisation in England*".

and above what is needed for their physical sustenance, that surplus can be used to feed those who devote themselves to knowledge and are not engaged in physical labour. Evolution of knowledge becomes possible only in such a situation. What is left after the physical labourers have been fed can be called savings. So, the first prerequisite for the evolution of a civilisation is social savings.

In some countries, there are social savings. In some, there are none. Countries that have social savings become civilised. Countries that have none remain uncivilised. What are the various reasons that stimulate the initial creation of savings in a country? Two reasons can be briefly outlined. First, the productivity of land. In a country where the land is fertile, it is easier to produce large quantities of food. So, a surplus of savings is possible after satisfying the needs of physical labourers. The second reason is the climate of a country, whether hot or cold. Climate has two kinds of effect. First, in a hot country, citizens require less food. In a cold country, one requires more food. This depends on some natural laws, about which there is limited scope to speak of in this brief essay. We have based ourselves on Buckle's volume, the inquisitive reader can refer to that source. In a country where relatively less food is required by its residents, it is certain that social savings will come by earlier. According to Buckle, the second implication of climate is that under excessive heat people do not need heat-generating food as much. In cold countries, one needs greater amount of heat-generating food. Physical heat is generated through the chemical process of inhaled oxygen mixing with the body's carbon. Therefore, food that has a lot of carbon is heat-producing. Meats have a lot of carbon. Consequently, people who live in cold climates especially need meat. In warm climates, people require relatively less of meat and more of vegetables. Vegetables are easily available, but it is relatively more difficult to kill animals. Besides, animals that can be eaten are rare. Thus, warm climates have relatively easier access to food. And as food is relatively easily accessible, savings are faster.

India is a warm country and the land is fertile. Therefore, it is likely that savings should be faster in India. This is precisely the reason why civilisation evolved in India in the earliest times – because savings were available, a class developed that could refrain from physical labour and spend its time in discussing knowledge. It is because of the knowledge they accumulated and disseminated that the development of the Indian civilisation took place. The reader will have realised that we are referring to the *brahmins*.

But the nature of this earliest civilisation also had in it the roots of misery destined for India's subjects. The principles that led to the early evolution of civilisation were also the principles that ensured that such a civilisation would not progress beyond a certain point. It is because of those principles that ordinary people suffered. The dawn was shrouded in clouds. It is not good for a young tree that it should bear too many fruits.

When savings begin to be generated, it is natural that society be divided into two classes. One class labours, the other does not. The second class does not labour because it does not need to. They sustain themselves through the surplus generated by the first class. Those who do not labour are the ones who benefit from leisure. They alone have monopoly over thought and education. He who thinks, he who benefits from education, he whose intelligence is sharpened, is the one who will be relatively more qualified, more powerful. Such people gain prominence in society, and the physical labourers labour under their suzerainty. So right from the beginning, inequality was created. But this inequality is natural. It is impossible to eradicate it. Nor is such eradication desirable.

Physical labourers benefit from the knowledge and wisdom of the thinking classes. In return, the thinking classes obtain a share in the wealth created by the labouring classes. The surplus beyond what is required for the sustenance of the labouring classes accumulates in the hands of the thinking classes. The wealth created in society is divided into two parts – one for the labouring classes, the remainder for the thinking classes. The first part is “wages from labour”, the second part is “profits from

commerce”.<sup>40</sup> Let us keep using the terms “wages” and “profits”. Profits are retained in the households of the thinking classes. Beyond their wages, the labouring classes obtain no share of the profits. No matter how many physical labourers there are, it is only the wages from the produced wealth that will be distributed among the physical labourers. They do not obtain a single *paise* from the profits component.

Let us imagine that one *crore* coins are produced in a given society. Fifty *lakh* are wages and fifty *lakh* are profits. Imagine that there are twenty-five *lakh* physical labourers in that society. Then, fifty *lakh* coins worth of wages are distributed among twenty-five *lakh* physical labourers, each physical labourer obtains two coins. Let us now imagine that in addition to those twenty-five *lakh* physical labourers, another twenty-five *lakh* suddenly arrive. Then there are fifty *lakh* physical labourers. Those fifty *lakh* coins will be distributed among fifty *lakh* physical labourers. Because physical labourers are not entitled to a single *paise* from the profits accrued, not a single *paise* more than fifty *lakh* coins can be distributed among physical labourers. Therefore, each physical labourer’s share will become one coin instead of two. But it was because two coins were necessary for sheer physical survival that they received two coins. So now, they will have to go through misery in their attempt to procure enough food for survival.

Had the national wealth increased by one more *crore* of coins along with the addition in population, there would have been no suffering. Instead of fifty *lakh* coins as the wages share, the component would have been one *lakh* coins. Despite the increase in population, each and every physical labourer would have got two coins each.

Thus, we see that the increase in population is the major reason for the misery of the labouring classes. If national wealth increases in proportion to the increase in population, then the labouring classes do not suffer. If the increase in national wealth

<sup>40</sup> It must be accepted that rent from land and interest are also a part of this. But for purposes of brevity, we are avoiding mention of rent and interest.

is more in proportion to the increase in population, as in England or America, the lot of the labouring classes improves. But if these two things do not happen and the increase in wealth is less in proportion to the increase in population, then the lot of the labouring classes worsens. This is what happened in India right from the beginning.

The increase in population follows a natural law. One man and one woman give birth to a large number of babies. Each such child gives birth to several more children. Therefore, the roots of human misery are almost innate in nature. Every society has the possibility of such ill fortune. But there are remedies. The right remedy is simultaneous creation of wealth. But quite often, the increase in wealth is less in proportion to the increase in population. There are many constraints. So one has to search for alternative solutions and there are only two solutions. One is that part of the indigenous population emigrates to another country. There are some countries where citizens do not have enough food to go around, in other countries there aren't enough mouths for the food available. Some people from the first type of country can go to the second type of country and the population in the first type of country will decline as a result. No harm will occur to the second type of country. This is how England greatly benefited. People from England ventured to America, Australia and other parts of the world. England's prosperity increased as a result and so did that of the colonies.

The second solution is to curb the desire to marry. This is the main solution. If everyone marries, there is no limit to the increase in population. But if some people stay unmarried, the increase in population is dampened. In countries where people are not used to an easy life, where the commodities required for daily living are not available in abundance, people in those countries curb the desire to marry. People do not marry unless the capability for sustaining the family is ensured.

Neither of the two solutions could be adopted in India. Heat leads to lethargy in the body, it discourages physical effort. Emigration requires enthusiasm, enterprise and labour. Even nature has discouraged emigration here. Insurmountable

mountains and turbulent oceans have hemmed in India. Other than Java and Bali, one does not hear of any Hindu colonies. For a country as large and ancient as India, such minor colonies do not really count.

In trying to curb the desire to marry, India's situation has been worse. You scratch the earth and foodgrains burst forth. A little bit of food may not be greatly beneficial for the body, but satisfaction of hunger and sustenance of life are ensured. In this warm air, there is no need for a great deal of clothing. Even an inferior standard of living will suffice and is available. No one is afraid of not being able to support a family. Citizens were therefore reluctant to curb the desire to marry. As there was no way to dampen the increase in population, the increase proceeded apace. As a result, no sooner had civilisation originated in India, than the misery of the labouring classes started. The fertile land and the warm climate, both facilitators in the early origin of civilisation, also created conditions for the miserable state of Indian citizens. Both are consequences of inevitable natural laws.

The deterioration in the lot of the labouring classes resulted from this. But once the deterioration starts, the first round of deterioration contributes to further deterioration. As the condition of the labouring classes deteriorated, the disparity between the labouring classes and other classes of society began to increase in proportion. First, there was the disparity in distribution of wealth – contributing to disparity in distribution of power. Because the labouring classes deteriorated, their subjugation by the thinking classes began to increase. Greater subjugation contributes to greater oppression. This subjugation is the base of the *smriti-shastras* that led to oppression of the *shudras*. This inequality is unnatural. This inequality produces ill effects.

Three major conclusions emerge from what we have said.

- (1) Three outcomes emerge from the reasons we have adduced for the deterioration in the condition of the labouring classes.

The first is low wages for physical labour. This is synonymous with poverty. This leads to an increase in inequality.

Second, low wages imply increased need for greater physical labour. As wages have declined, this must be compensated with more labour. That destroys the scope for leisure. Without leisure, there is no scope to discuss knowledge. So, the second outcome is ignorance. This too leads to an increase in inequality.

The third outcome is the lordship of the thinking classes and an increase in oppression. This is synonymous with slavery. This is the ultimate measure of inequality.

Poverty, ignorance, slavery.

(2) Once these outcomes originate, in a country like India, the natural principles work towards making these outcomes permanent ones.

We have shown that the original source of civilisation is accumulation of wealth. If I state that the love of wealth is a common cause of development of civilisation, that will not be an exaggeration. The basis of social uplift rests on two human traits – thirst for knowledge and love of wealth. The first is acknowledged as desired and great, the second is derided as lowly and selfish. However, in a volume titled “History of Rationalism in Europe”, Lecky<sup>41</sup> has argued that among these two traits, the love of wealth has led to greater welfare of the human society. In fact, the thirst for knowledge is rare. The love of wealth is universal. That is the reason it leads to greater returns.

In a society, the love of wealth does not decline simply because the national wealth created is enough to satisfy the survival needs of everyone in the society. There is perpetual creation of newer and newer objects of desire. That which was earlier a luxury, later assumes the characteristics of a necessity. Once that is attained, other commodities become necessities. Desire leads to effort, effort leads to success. Therefore, happiness and

<sup>41</sup> The complete title is “*The History of the Rise and Influence of the Spirit of Rationalism in Europe*”, 1865, William Edward Hartpole Lecky, 1838-1903.

welfare begin to increase. Further, an increase in the desire for happiness and welfare is an essential prerequisite for the advancement of civilisation. Once the desire for physical happiness is satisfied, the desire for knowledge and beauty, together with love for poetry and literature and other forms of education, begin to emerge. When the desire for happiness is weak, the effort of labouring is also weak. There is no wish to excel and correspondingly, no such attempts are made. In addition, in a country where food is available in plenty, there is no incentive to curb the increase in population. The 'bliss' that poets perpetually praise, is extremely harmful for advancement of society. This poetic desire is poison to social life.

This harmful sense of satisfaction occurred naturally in India. Due to the heat, it is difficult to sustain continuous physical effort in this country. As a result, reluctance to labour becomes a natural habit. There are many other reasons behind such a habit. In warm climates, there is not much need for heat to be generated within the body and therefore not much need for hunting. This fact has already been mentioned. If one has to kill and eat wild animals, one becomes habituated to labour, courage, strength and activity. One of the sources of European civilisation was such early habit formation. Thus, the unnecessary element in physical labour, coupled with a desire to avoid physical labour, contribute to sloth and lack of enterprise. Satisfaction is another term for habitual sloth and lack of enterprise. So, once the condition of Indian subjects deteriorated, they were satisfied with this lot of deterioration. The lack of enterprise prevented uplift. An animal meant to be eaten does not automatically crawl into the mouth of a sleeping lion.

In the study of Indology, there are many interesting theories connected with satisfaction. Non-attachment to material happiness is sanctioned by both the Hindu and Buddhist religions. The *brahmin*, the Buddhist, the scholar, the philosopher, all have tried the utmost to teach Indians that material pleasures need to be spurned. European religious



preceptors also preached such detachment from material pleasures. After the collapse of the Roman civilisation, for a thousand years, human material conditions did not improve in Europe. That can be ascribed to such teachings. But once ancient Greek literature and Greek philosophy resurfaced in Italy, the resultant effect was a dampening of detachment with material pleasures in Europe. Simultaneously, civilisation improved. The undesirable trait never became permanent in Europe. But in India, it transformed itself into second nature for men. A tree takes firm root in a soil that suits it the most. The religious texts taught detachment from material pursuits. That owed its origin to the environment in the country. But then again, because of the teachings in those religious texts, the detachment to material pursuits became far firmer than what would have been dictated by the environment.

Consequently, there were different outcomes in Europe and India. European subjects woke up from their sleep, strove for material pursuits and attempted to remove social inequality. The result was happiness, prosperity and advancement of civilisation. The Indian subjects continued to sleep. Social inequality became perpetual. The result was deterioration.

(3) It is not just the case that the misery of the labouring classes became permanent. As a result, there were also adverse effects on the other segments of society. Just as one drop of acid in a container of milk leads to the entire milk curdling, the miserable state of an inferior segment of society leads to misery in all other segments.

(a) In accordance with occupation, the ancient Aryans were divided into four groups. *Brahmins*, *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas*, *shudras*. Inequality heaped on inequality. The *shudras* constituted the inferior class. So far, I have been talking about their miserable state. *Vaishyas* are traders. Commerce thrives when the labour of the labouring classes results in a surfeit of commodities produced through labour. In a country where commodities are not in surplus over what is required for physical survival, commerce cannot prosper. If commerce

does not prosper, those who earn their living from commerce cannot improve their lot. The source of commerce is unfulfilled needs among citizens. If we do not desire products produced in other countries, no one will bring commodities from those other countries and try to sell them to us. In a country where citizens do not have needs, in a country where people are satisfied with commodities produced with their own labour, in such a country, traders are bound to suffer. Someone might well ask, was there no commerce in India? Of course there was, but not in proportion to the amount of commerce and trade that should have resulted from a country of India's expanse, fertility, land and material resources. What has materialised is nothing compared to the potential that existed from earliest times. There were other reasons behind the reduced role of commerce – constraints imposed by religious texts, the lack of enterprise in society in general. In this essay, there is no reason to mention those other factors.

(b) The *kshatriyas* are kings or rulers. If there is one truth that has certainly been proved from a study of the history of the world, that truth is the following. If general subjects are not active and do not try to control the kings who rule them, the characteristics of the rulers do not improve. Instead, they decline. If no one says anything, rulers easily become autocratic. Autocracy implies selfishness, sloth in work and evil intentions. Therefore, in a country where subjects are weak, polite, unenterprising and lazy, in every such country there is deterioration in the characteristics of the rulers. Where subjects are unhappy, driven by the need for food and clothing, are perpetually striving to survive, in such a place, the subjects are weak, polite, unenterprising and desirous of avoiding conflict. The inferior castes of India who suffer from inequality, are exactly like this. It is precisely because of this reason that the kings of India have deteriorated from the strong, religious and non-sensual kings lauded in the *Mahabharata* to a weak, sensual, woman-loving and incompetent lot as depicted in medieval poetry and drama.

Eventually, this lot was swallowed up by the Muslims. The rulers do not deteriorate in this fashion in countries where the condition of general subjects is good. They can get angry if rulers display evil intentions, in fact, they are indeed angered. Both sides gain from this conflict. The rulers are perpetually worried about unnecessary resentment. But this is not the only beneficial result. The impartial criticism of rulers contributes to the creation and fostering of mental faculties. In the absence of this condition, these faculties deteriorate. The slavery of the *shudras* contributed to the loss of wealth and righteousness on the part of the *kshatriyas*. The conflict among the Plebeians in Rome and among the Commoners in England did improve the natural excellence of the ruling classes.

(c) *Brahmins* - Just as the deterioration in the condition of the inferior classes led to an increase in the power of the *kshatriyas*, and also to its eventual disappearance, the situation was no different for *brahmins*. The stagnation in the lot of the other three castes first led to severe caste-based inequality and to an initial increase in the power of the *brahmins*. As the mental strength of the other three castes declined, their minds fell prey to various inferior forms of religion. Weakness necessarily leads to fear. Inferior religions are based on fear. The belief that this world is populated by strong and evil gods, that is the essential characteristic of inferior religions. So the other three castes lost their mental strength and increasingly became oppressed by inferior religions. The *brahmins* are the priests of inferior religions, so their power and influence increased. Inequality increased. The *brahmins* spread the web of the *shastras* and the rituals and ensnared *kshatriyas*, *vaishyas* and *shudras*. The flies were stuck, they were not in a position to move. Despite this, the spider's web continued to spread. There was no end to prescriptions. All kinds of things came to be determined by rules laid down by *brahmins* - the principles followed by kings in ruling, law and punishment, war and peace, ablutions, sleep, clothing,

walking, conversation, laughter, tears. "Follow our rules when you sleep, eat, sit, walk, talk, laugh or cry. You cannot act contrary to our rules from birth until death. If you do, you will have to serve penance and pay us offerings." This was the source of the web. However, those who try to delude others end up deluding themselves - because discussions based on delusion make delusion a habit. I am forced to display my belief in that which I want others to believe. A continuous display of such belief leads eventually to true belief. The web the *brahmins* used to ensnare India in was also a web that snared them. The study of history proves that if you forcibly and unnecessarily try to restrain the natural inclinations of humankind, society begins to deteriorate. Among the many reasons I have listed for the progressive deterioration of Hindu society, this is probably the most important and is evident even today. The restrained and the restrainer, both suffer from the ill effects. Ensnared in the web of rituals, the *brahmins* lost their intellect. The *brahmin* who composed the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, Panini's grammar and *sankhya* philosophy, the same *brahmin* puffed himself with pride on composing *Vasavadatta*, *Kadambari* and the like. Eventually, that capability was also lost. The mind of the *brahmins* became a desert.

Therefore, the poison of inequality is a main reason for the deterioration in the lot of India's subjects.



## Five

Different individuals should have equal rights - that is the main philosophy behind notions of equity. I have already illustrated a deviation from this principle by using the example of peasants and landlords. Let me now mention inequality between men and women as a second example of deviation.

It is only correct that all human beings have equal rights. Women belong to the human race too, therefore women should have the same rights as men. It is just that women should have rights to the same activities that men are allowed to enjoy. Why should it be otherwise? Some people might argue that there are natural differences between men and women. Men are strong, women are weak. Men are courageous, women are cowards. Men are capable of bearing physical pain, women are soft. *Et cetera*. When there are such natural differences, it is but logical that there should be a differential in rights - because an individual who is incapable of physically exercising a right, cannot have that right.

For the moment, two brief answers will suffice. First, we do not accept that a difference in rights automatically follows from natural differences. To accept this would be tantamount to negating principles of equity. Consider the fact that just as there are natural differences between men and women, there are also natural differences between Englishmen and Bengalis. The Englishman is strong, the Bengali is weak. The Englishman is courageous, the Bengali is a coward. The Englishman is capable of bearing physical pain, the Bengali is soft. *Et cetera*. If these natural differences should lead to differences in rights, why do we scream our heads off when we encounter a difference in rights between Englishmen and Bengalis? If it is natural that the woman is the slave and the man the lord, why is it not natural that the Bengali should be the slave and the Englishman the lord?

The second answer is, the areas in which there are differences in rights between men and women, do not correspond to

sufficient natural differences between them. The evident differences are due to faulty social rules. The basic idea behind notions of equity is to amend these social rules. The renowned John Stuart Mill has beautifully marshalled up evidence in this context. It is unnecessary to reiterate these.<sup>42</sup>

In every country, women are the slaves of men. In countries where women are not imprisoned in cages, even there women are dependent on men. Women have to follow the commands of men in every way and please them.

Although this tradition has been prevalent in every country and from time immemorial, now there is a class of sociologists in America and England who oppose it. These are the socialists. They believe that there should be complete equality between men and women. Women should have rights in every area where men have rights. If men can work for a living or practice commerce, why should women not have such rights? If men can take part in courts and in assemblies, why can't women? A woman is a man's wife, why should she be his slave?

The extent of subservience of women to men in Europe or America is not even a per cent of the extent of subservience of women to men in India. Our country is a country of subservience; every kind of subservience just needs a seed, and given the fertile land, the seed sprouts and spreads everywhere. There is no country where the subject is as subservient to the king as in this country. There is no country where the uneducated is as obedient towards the educated as in this country. There is no country where individuals are enslaved by priests by as much as *shudras* are trampled upon by *brahmins*. There is no country where the poor are as inferior to the rich as in this country. There is no country where women obey the commands of men as much.

Here, the woman is a bird in a cage. Whatever words are taught to her, she will utter them. She will eat if you give her food, otherwise she will fast as on the occasion of *ekadashi*. The husband or the male is equal to god. Why just a god? He has

<sup>42</sup> *Subjection of Women.*

been described as the chief among all gods in the *shastras*. The slavery goes so far that the paragon of wifeness, Draupadi, said to Satyabhama in her own praise that to please her husband, she serves her co-wives.

This Aryan religion of husband-devotion is beautiful; this is what provides for divine bliss in an Aryan household. No one is against devotion to husband. Those who desire equality protest the fact that the wife is the husband's slave, the fact that the woman has no rights in most things in the world.

By now, some of our citizens have realised the great disparity that exists between men and women in our country. Several movements have begun to develop in society to remove some of the disparities. The following is a list of disparities.

1. The man must be educated. Women will remain illiterate.
2. If the wife dies, the husband is entitled to get married again. But a woman who is a widow, has no right to get married. Instead, she has to give up hope of all material pleasures and lead a perpetual life of celibacy.
3. The man can go wherever he wants. The woman does not have the right to cross the four walls of the house.
4. Even after her husband's death, the woman has no right to another husband. But even while his wife is alive, the husband has the right to several wives.

On the first issue, attitudes seem to be changing, even among ordinary men. Everyone now acknowledges that girls should be imparted a little bit of education. But no one yet believes that women should also be taught literature, mathematics, science and philosophy the way men are. Those who desire to consume poison when their son fails an MA examination, are quite content if their daughter picks up the elementary alphabet. The question as to why the daughter should also not pass the MA examination, never arises. If someone dares to ask this question, the questioner will be regarded as a madman. Others will ask a counter question – what will girls do with all this education? Are they going to look for a job? If the believer in equality dares to retort, “Why should women not work?”

everyone will be scandalised. Some really intelligent person will reply, it is difficult enough to find jobs for one's sons, how is one going to find jobs for one's daughters? Those who acknowledge that education is not merely for purpose of obtaining a job, might say, "But how is one to impart education to one's daughter the way one's son is educated? Where are the girls' schools?"

It is indeed true that in Bengal, or even in India, there are no means to educate women the way men are educated. This conclusively establishes that the equitable idea of educating women is only verbally stated in this country, it is not yet truly believed. Only when something is lacking in society, is it fulfilled; if the society wants something, it is born. If the residents of Bengal truly desired women's education, ways to achieve this would also have been found.

There are two solutions. First, there can be separate schools for girls. Second, girls can be educated in schools meant for boys.

There will be great indignation amongst Bengalis at any mention of the second. They are certain in their belief that if girls begin to attend boys' schools, they will begin to behave like prostitutes. Not only will the girls be damned, the boys will also be led astray.

No such objections arise in the case of the first method. But there is no dearth of other objections. If girls begin to attend girls' colleges, who will rear the children? Who will suckle the child? The Bengali girl becomes a mother and a wife at the age of fourteen. Whatever education can be imparted by the age of thirteen is alone possible for her. Perhaps even that is not possible – how can someone who is a wife and a daughter-in-law at the age of thirteen leave the house and venture out to college with books in her hand?

At the moment, our intention is not to provide appropriate answers to these objections. Instead, we want to argue that if you are true believers in equality, then try and ensure complete equality in everything, do not pass strictures that only ensure partial equality. An equal society is built out of several different and interdependent strands. If it is true that men and women



should be entitled to equal rights everywhere, then it is equally true that the woman's lot is not that of rearing and feeding the child, or at least, that is not her responsibility alone. If there is true equality, both men and women must bear an equal share in what is called the duties of the household. One partner will tend to the household and be deprived of education, the other partner will escape such onerous duties and become learned – regardless of whether this is natural or not, is against the principles of equality. It cannot be right that men should be allowed to venture forth wherever they want to and women are constrained. It is because there are such disparities in so many areas that there are disparities in access to education too. Inequality leads to inequality. A person who has been turned inferior, will continue to grow in inferiority.

This becomes clearer if one considers the issue from another angle

Is it desirable that women should be educated? Perhaps everyone will acknowledge that it is desirable.

The next question to ask is, why is it desirable? Someone might indeed say, for the sake of getting a job.<sup>43</sup> But most educated Indians will respond that it is desirable so that women pick up righteous ways and become knowledgeable, and so that their intelligence is sharpened.

Next, let us ask, why must men be educated? The long-eared local donkeys will respond that this is necessary so that men can get jobs, but their answers should be ignored. The others will say that it is desirable so that men pick up righteous ways and become knowledgeable, and so that their intelligence is sharpened. If there are some other reasons, those are clearly minor ones. And even in terms of those minor reasons, men and women are equal.

Therefore, one has to acknowledge that in the matter of access to education, men and women should have equal rights. If this is not universally accepted as true, there must be a flaw in the above logic. If you accept the principles of equality

<sup>43</sup> The believer in equality will maintain that it is also for getting a job.

here, how can you not accept principles of equality elsewhere? Rearing children, going anywhere one pleases and performing household duties, there must be equality in these as well. If one is going to accept equality, one has to accept equality everywhere.

Among the four social inequities I have mentioned above, the second is the question of widows remarrying. Whether such marriages are good or bad, is a separate issue. This is not the place to discuss that issue. But I can say this much. If someone was to ask me, is women's education good or bad? Should all women be educated? I will immediately answer – women's education is extremely desirable. All women should be educated. But if someone was to ask me a similar question about widows remarrying, I will give a different answer. I will say, widows remarrying is neither good nor bad. It is not desirable that all widows should get married again. But it is desirable that widows should have the right to remarry, if they should so wish. There are indeed women who are devoted to their dead husbands; they truly loved their husbands. Such women might not wish to remarry. There are societies where widow remarriage is permissible. But even in such societies, there are widows who are so devoted and so attached to their dead husbands that they do not wish to marry again. But if a widow, Hindu or otherwise, wishes to marry again after her husband is dead, she should be given that right. If a widower is allowed to have another wife after his former wife dies, by the principles of equality, a widow should have the right to another husband after her former husband dies. It might of course be argued that the woman should have such a right if the man has such a right. But should men have such rights at all? Whether they should, or whether they should not, is a separate matter. There is no right or wrong in this. Every person should have the right to perform the action that does not infringe on the rights of others. So widowers and widows should both have that right, to be exercised if they so desire.

Thus, widows are entitled to remarry. However, this ethical principle is not yet universally acknowledged in this country.

Those who accept the principle because of an exposure to Western education or because of the persuasions of Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar<sup>44</sup> or the *Brahmo* religion, do not actually practice the principle. He who accepts that widows should have a right to remarry, dare not arrange such a marriage if there is a widow in his household who wishes to remarry. The reason is the fear of society. This establishes that the principle has not been accepted by society. It is easy to understand that in instances where men feel threatened by the exercise of women's rights, ethical principles should not be accepted by society. But in this particular case, such a deduction is not that obvious. Widow remarriages do not harm anyone, they benefit some and are not easy. Yet, they are not accepted by society. Perhaps the answer lies in the immutable nature of social norms.

There is one more point. There are those who believe that perpetual widowhood so establishes devotion to husbands in Hindu households that it is not desirable for widows to remarry. Every Hindu wife knows that her hopes of happiness will end with this husband, therefore she is devoted to her husband. Those who subscribe to this hypothesis believe that it is because of this principle that there is such an excess of marital bliss in Hindu households. Let us accept for the moment that this proposition is true. But even if it were true, why should the proposition only work in one direction? If perpetual widowhood is desirable for society, by the same token, why should widowers also not follow the same principle, once their wives are dead? If you die, your wife has no other option, therefore she is so loving towards you. If it were that if your wife died, you had no other option either, then you too would be more loving towards her. Conjugal and marital bliss will be doubled. Why should there not be such a rule in your case? Why is the rule only applied to the helpless woman?

You are the man who frames the rules, so you can have the

<sup>44</sup> (1821-90), *Vidyasagar* is a title, meaning ocean of learning. *Vidyasagar* is not only identified with the spread of education in Bengal, but he also advocated widow remarriages to help rehabilitate destitute young women.

best of all worlds. You have the strength, so you have the right to oppress. But know that this is very wrong, serious and an inequity that is against religion.

Among the various kinds of oppression performed by men, among the various disparities between men and women, the third one we listed is the practice of confining women within the four walls of the house like caged wild animals. There is no other practice that is as cruel or contemptible, or contributes as much to unfair inequities. Like birds, we will move through heaven and earth, but they will be confined like caged mistresses to one and a half *kathas* of land. They will be deprived of most of the world's happiness, pleasures, education, fun and everything that is good on this earth. Why? Because the man wishes it that way.

These days, most educated men will accept that such practice is unfair and harmful. But even if they accept this, they will not deviate from the practice. The reason for this is dishonour. Others will gaze upon the flesh and blood of my wife and my daughter. What an insult! What shame! And there is no insult when your wife and your daughter are imprisoned like animals in cages? No shame? If the answer is no, I am ashamed at your sense of what constitutes an insult.

Let me ask you, for the sake of your sense of shame and insult, how do you have the right to oppress them? Were they born for the sake of maintaining your sense of honour? Are they like containers used in the kitchen? Your honour and shame are everything, their happiness and unhappiness amount to nothing.

I know that you have so engineered the women of Bengal that they no longer regard this punishment as unhappiness. This is not strange. If someone is made to adjust to half a meal, eventually that person will be satisfied with only half a meal and will not regard shortage of food as unhappiness. But that does not excuse your act of oppression. Whether they agree or disagree, if you curb their rights of happiness and education, you will be cursed as a sinner till eternity.

There are some idiots whose objections are not only on these grounds. They argue that if women freely roam around in

society, they will fall prey to evil ways and evil men will grab the opportunity to deprave them. One can tell them that in civilised countries of Europe and elsewhere, women freely move around in society. Has that harmed anyone? These people will then argue that in every other society, women are more depraved and corrupt than Hindu women.

We cannot bear this calumny against Hindu women that women have to be kept caged to prevent them from becoming depraved and corrupt. The Hindu woman's sense of righteousness is not like water off a duck's back so that it disappears as soon as they are exposed to other men in society, they are not likely to forget their duties and run after men if the opportunity arises. If righteousness is like these drops of water, whether that righteousness exists or not is quite irrelevant – there is no need to strive so hard to preserve it. One might as well remove this edifice that is based on imprisonment and create a new one.

The fourth disparity we mentioned is the right men have to many wives. There is not much that needs to be written on this. The Hindus of Bengal have now specifically understood that such rights are against moral principles. It is easily understood by those who want to reform society that the right solution to bring about equality is not to increase the rights of women. Instead, the objective is to curb the rights of men, since in human society, no one should have the right to several marriages.<sup>45</sup> No one will argue that women should have the right to several marriages, like men do. Everyone will argue that like women, men should also have the right to a single marriage. Therefore, where a right follows moral principles, equality implies that the right is extended. But where a right is against moral principles, equality implies that the right is curbed. The results of equality cannot be against morality. All texts on ethics base their

<sup>45</sup> It is possible that there might be some exceptions to this principle. Kings who have no sons, or women who are afflicted with leprosy and similar diseases. The word 'possible' needs to be used, because if one accepts this logic, similar systems should also exist against men. There can be one or two arguments in favour of polyandry or polygamy. But in my view, this practice is so condemnable that if such arguments are mentioned, it might do more harm than good.

theories on principles of equity and self-enforcement.

For the moment, Bengal's society has concerned itself with these four forms of disparity. When one is unable to do something about that which is extremely despicable, there is no reason to expect that something good will come out of focusing attention on other forms of disparity. We will cease after mentioning one or two other points.

Among inequity prevalent between men and women in several societies, principles that govern inheritance of ancestral property are the most terrible and serious. The son has the complete right to ancestral property, the daughter does not count. Sons and daughters are born of the same father, the same womb. Fathers and mothers care after both equally well, the same kinds of duties are followed towards both sets of offspring. Yet, after his father's death, the son is entitled to waste one *crore* coins left by his father on drinking. The daughter cannot use a single *paise* for a specific purpose. An explanation for this principle can be found in Hindu *shastras* to the effect that a person who is entitled to perform funeral rites, is alone allowed to inherit. This argument is so illogical and inappropriate that one need not waste time examining this rationale. Let us see if this principle has some other natural root or not. It might be argued that the wife is entitled to her husband's property in her husband's house, she enjoys that wealth as the mistress of that household. There is no need to give her rights to ancestral property. If this is the sole root for the inheritance principle, it is legitimate to ask why a widowed daughter should not have the right to ancestral property. But we are not interested in raising such minor objections. Our main objection is to the argument that women must enjoy property rights or wealth in a position of subservience to husbands or sons or some other male person. Women can enjoy wealth only if it belongs to someone else and women have to be slaves to that someone else – otherwise they will remain poor; our objection is against this principle. Serve your husband even if the husband is evil, ill-spoken and a scoundrel. Bear everything. Be obedient to a son who is disobedient, ungrateful and sinful. Or else, women will have

no connection with wealth. If the husband or the son drives her away, that is the end. There is no way to become independent, there is no path except that of endurance. On the other hand, the man owns everything. His wife's property is his own. If he wishes, he can deprive his wife of everything. There are no bars towards the husband becoming independent. This serious inequality is against moral and ethical principles.

There are those who will argue that the system is excellent. It is because of this system that wives remain devoted to their husbands. True, the intention of norms formulated by men is precisely that. Think of as many ties as you can, use all of them to tie up woman's hands and feet and deliver her at the feet of men. The men have the right to kick them as they wish, the inferior woman has no right to protest. Let me ask, if it is desirable that women should be devoted to their husbands, why is it not desirable that men should be devoted to their wives? There are many ties with which you have fettered women, why is there not a single bond for men? Are women naturally more evil than men? Or is it because the ropes are in the hands of men that women are so firmly tied? If this is not unethical, I am not in a position to say what is truly unethical.

There are some rare instances in the Hindu *shastras* where women have a right to property. For example, when the husband dies without a son being born. These are the rare instances of the glory of Hindu *shastras*. It is because of these one or two exceptions that we proclaim that the ancient code laid down by the Aryans are superior in certain respects to codes laid down by modern European civilisations. But this is just the few good among several bad instances. The woman indeed has a right to property, but has no right to sell or donate that property. How much of a right does this constitute? Her right is limited to ensuring her sustenance out of that property. As long as she is alive, she cannot give anyone else part of that property. An evil son can sell off the entire property and devote himself to carnal

<sup>46</sup> *Queen Swarnamoyee, 1827-1897, became zamindar of Kashimbazar after her husband died. Because of a will her husband left before committing suicide, the East India Company appropriated all the property. In 1847, Swarnamoyee won*

pleasures. But even a righteous wife like Queen Swarnamoyee<sup>46</sup> cannot sell off one *bigha* of land to save someone's life. Why is there this inequality? There is no dearth of reasons. Women have no intelligence, they are capricious, and incapable of preserving property. They may sell off the entire property suddenly and hurt the interests of successors. So, they should have no right to sell property. We do not agree with this. Women are not inferior to men in intelligence, wisdom or cleverness. There is indeed some material knowledge required for taking care of property and in this, women are inferior. But the responsibility for this lies with men. You will confine them within the household, you will encourage them to stay away from property issues. So, it is not surprising that they should have no material knowledge. Expose them to material concerns and then expect them to display the material knowledge. Women are uneducated because of what men have done. But the punishment for that devolves on women. What a wonderful sense of justice!

I have just remembered an interesting anecdote concerning women's right to property. Some years ago, there was a case in the High Court. The point of law was whether an adulterous woman should have the right to property. The judge ruled that she has such a right. Immediately, there was pandemonium in society. How terrible! Devoted Hindu women will now turn corrupt. No one else is going to come forward to save society! Normally, Bengali society is reluctant to spend money. Unless the king orders it, no one pays subscriptions. But this bolt from the blue struck at the roots of Hindu society. Of their own volition, Hindus began to pay up subscriptions so that an appeal could be submitted to the Privy Council<sup>47</sup>. The major newspapers had headlines that proclaimed, "Oh, true womanhood! Where hast thou gone?" "Pay up subscriptions" was the battle-cry, in English and in Bengali. I do not know

*her case, contesting the will, at the Supreme Court. Was famous for donating alms and doing public work.*

<sup>47</sup> *Historically, the English crown's private council, which gradually lost power to the Cabinet. Until the Supreme Court of India was established, judicial appeals were routed to the Privy Council, which was the highest court.*



what eventually happened, because I am deprived of the pleasure of reading local newspapers as an act of choice. Whatever might have happened, I have one question to ask those who protested against this supposedly terrible judgement. Let me accept that adulterous wives should be deprived of the right to property, then adulterous wives will be kept in check. But by the same token, should there not be another similar principle? Adulterous husbands should also be deprived of the right to property. If you want to check adultery by restraining the rights of women, why not use the same logic to restrain the rights of men? If evil women do not have the right, why should evil men have the right? The evil man, who is adulterous, a thief, a liar, an ungrateful wretch and a drunkard, will get the entire property because he happens to be a man. The adulterous wife alone will be deprived because she is a woman. If this is ethical, then where is that which is not ethical? If this is legal, then where is that which is illegal? If collection of subscriptions to preserve such laws amounts to nationalism, then what constitutes sin?

By all means, condemn adultery in every way. To prevent adultery, think of as many constraints as you can. No one will object. But why are there no constraints on men? Why is there no punishment if a man frequents brothels or has a relationship with someone else's wife? The *shastras* of course prohibit several things. Everyone will agree that these are evil acts for men as well. But some people will merely criticise and that is all. The stringent strictures on women do not have a mirror image in the strictures imposed on men. Words do not matter, no social punishment is meted out to men who are depraved. If a woman deviates even a little from the righteous path, she is not fit to show her face in society. Relatives will offer her poison. But a man performs similar actions openly. At the end of the night, riding his carriage and with all lights blazing, he comes to offer his wife the dust of his feet. The wife is delighted. People do not waste the effort to disapprove of the man's deeds. His reputation and position in society are untarnished. No one spurns from a relationship with that man, if he has the might, he proclaims himself as one of the leaders of society. This is

another serious inequality.

Yet another unfair inequality is the fact that with the exception of women who come from the lowest rungs of society, women of this country are not allowed to earn a living. It is true that men earn enough to sustain their wives and families. But there are several women in this country who have no one to take care of them. We specially have in mind the state of Bengal's widows. The starvation that orphaned Bengali widows suffer from, is well-known. No detailed description is necessary. It is a gross social cruelty that these women are not allowed to work for a living. It is true that there is nothing to prevent them from obtaining a job as a maid or as a cook. But these occupations are not open to the daughter or wife of a *bhadralok*, it is better to die instead. There are three main reasons why they are not able to earn money through other occupations. First, in accordance with the norms laid down by indigenous society, they are not allowed to step out of the house. The possibility of earning is considerably reduced if one does not step out of the house. Second, the women of this country are not educated and are not trained in crafts and industry. Unless one is educated and has skills, one cannot earn. Third, foreign industry and foreign applicants are competitors. In this country, Indian men find it difficult enough to find a job and practice commerce or industry so as to make a living. What are the women going to do?

There is only one solution to these three constraints – education. If people are educated and especially if women are educated, they will easily be able to overcome the constraint of being restricted to within the confines of the household. Education will provide the skills for women to make a living. And if Indian men and women obtain exposure to all kinds of education, they will be able to handle the competition from foreign commerce, industry and trade. Education is the way to handle a variety of social evils.

If everything we have stated in this essay is true, the state of India's women is really pitiable. Who has done something to remedy this? The learned Vidyasagar and the *Brahmo* movement have made several efforts, may their fame be everlasting. But

other than this, nothing has been done by the society. There are several associations, leagues, societies, *sabhas* and clubs in the country. Some are after politics, some are after social uplift, some are after religion, some are after curbing social evils. But there is not a single one that is concerned with improving the lot of women. There is even a *sabha* devoted to the cause of preventing cruelty against animals. Half of Bengal's population consists of women, no one is bothered about them. In the last few days, we have noticed vast amounts of money being spent on schools, medical centres and animal pounds. But can nothing be done about Bengal's society that is like an animal pound?

No, nothing can be done. Because there are no headlines or glory associated with such actions. No, nothing can be done. Because titles like *Rai Bahadur*, *Raja Bahadur* and *Star of India*<sup>48</sup> are not associated with such actions. There is only the applause of idiots. Who will dare to advance?



<sup>48</sup> Awards by the British government. *Rai Bahadur* and *Raja Bahadur*, were titles, with the former less important. *Star of India* was awarded as part of the Orders of the British Empire.

## Conclusion

To demonstrate a third example from this country's society, one will have to mention inequality associated with race and class. I do not mean inequality resulting from the caste system. I have referred to caste-based differences in ancient India. I have demonstrated the resultant social inequality using the example of the peasant. Now, there is not much correlation between inequality based on caste and inequality based on rights; that which exists is minor. By inequality associated with race and class, I mean the inequality between the rulers and the ruled. There is inequality in rights between the class that constitutes the kings and the class that constitutes the subjects. Indians perpetually harp on these kinds of inequality, so I see no reason to discuss them in detail in this volume.

In conclusion, we want to stress that we do not interpret notions of equity to mean that all individuals must certainly have the same position in society. That is impossible. Where there are natural differences in intelligence, mental faculties, education and strength, there must be differences in position. No one can prevent that. But there must be equality in access to rights. No one should be deprived from access to a right, even though that individual does not possess the strength. We desire the freedom that comes when everyone's position improves.



## Bengali Wordnote

*Aghrayan*: November-December

*Anna*: 16 annas = one rupee

*Apsaras*: celestial courtesans

*Aranyaka*: parts of the *Vedas*

*Ashar*: April-May

*Babu*: originally, a rich and wealthy class, but used in a derogatory fashion to suggest clerks. The term is often used to signify a type

*Bhadra*: August-September

*Bhadralok*: a Bengali gentleman

*Bigha*: a unit of land measurement, approximately 6,400 sq. cubits or 1/3 of an acre

*Brahmana*: sacred texts associated with the *Vedas*

*Brahmin*: the highest caste in the Hindu caste system, priests

*Brahmo religion*: religious movement (19th century) that spurs idol worship and rituals of Hinduism and opts for monotheism of the *Upanishads*

*Chaitra*: March-April

*Channa*: cottage cheese

*Crore*: 100 million

*Dharmashastras*: sacred texts or scriptures, specifically the *Smriti* texts

*Draupadi*: wife of the Pandavas in the epic *Mahabharata*

*Ekadashi*: eleventh day of the lunar fortnight, a traditional fasting day

*Ghee*: purified butter

*Gomasta*: bursar or steward of a feudal lord, responsible for collecting rent, similar to a *tahshildar* appointed by the government

*Indra*: king of the gods

*Kadambari*: prose romance written by Banabhatta (7th century AD)

*Katha*: a unit of measurement of land, approximately 320 sq. cubit of land, or 1/20th of a *bigha* or 1/60 of an acre

*Kotala*: he was more like a chief sepoy

- Lakh*: one hundred thousand
- Mahabharata*: one of the two great Hindu epics
- Mangan*: demand
- Mantras*: sacred chants
- Muhuri*: clerk
- Nagadi*: he was a special sepoy used for collecting revenue, as was the *halshahana*.
- Nandankanan*: heavenly pleasure garden
- Nayeb*: manager or chief administrator of a *zamindar*
- Paik*: sepoy
- Paisa*: one unit of a rupee
- Pandavas*: protagonists of the epic *Mahabharata*
- Panini's grammar*: Sanskrit grammar written by Panini around 5th century BC
- Poush*: January-February
- Ramayana*: the second great Hindu epic
- Sabhas*: assemblies
- Sankhya*: a philosophical school associated with the sage Kapila
- Satyabhama*: Krishna's wife in the epic *Mahabharata*
- Shastras*: authoritative religious and legal rulebooks of the Hindus
- Shudra*: the lowest caste in the Hindu caste system
- Smriti-shastras*: sacred texts learnt by heart, as opposed to revelation (*shruti*)
- Suras*: sacred verses in the Iranian religion from the *Avesta*
- Sutra*: commentary
- Tahshildar*: rent collector appointed by the government for a small administrative area
- Thana*: police-station
- Upanishad*: sacred texts, there are eleven major ones.
- Vasvadatta*: Sanskrit play written by Bhasa in 3rd century AD
- Vedas*: the four sacred books of the Hindus: *Rig*, *Sama*, *Yajur* and *Atharva*
- Yajna*: ritual of holy fire, usually for a cause
- Zamindar*: feudal lord