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Translation of 'Kamalakanta: A Collection of Satirical Essays and Reflections'

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Acknowledgements

This venture was born initially out of the desire to make those works of Bengali literature which have moved me profoundly, and which I consider first-rate by any yardstick, available to friends and fellow enthusiasts who cannot read the original. In attempting to channel literary and philosophical masterpieces into a different medium, I have experienced first-hand the formidable challenge that a translator must face because not only of the barrier imposed by the languages involved, but perhaps more so because of his or her own severely inadequate faculty being called upon to match both the genius and the inspiration of the creator. But I trust that the love of literature and the written word which drives such a precarious project, often makes up in some measure for the beauty, grace and import of the original lost in transition. I would also hope that a translator's impertinence and deficiencies have the clemency of the creator, in person or in spirit. On a personal note, I must express my appreciation to my friend and colleague Dr. Anjan Ghosh for sharing many hours of long-distance discussions of our mutual interest in the literature and culture of India. I must also offer my love and thanks to my wife, Joyoti, who valiantly stood by me during a time when she could not be by my side. Special thanks are also due to Professor P. Lal of the Writers Workshop for his kind encouragement, Shri N.D. Mehra and Shri R.K. Mehra, my publishers, who were brave enough to undertake publishing a literary classic, given today's trends in readership

worldwide, and Dr. Debashish Sanyal for playing an active role in making this publication possible. Above all, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to my father, Shri Suranjan Chatterjee, for his boundless love and support.

Preface to the Second Edition

I am very pleased that my publishers have decided to issue a second edition of Bankim Chandra's masterpiece. The reviews of the first edition were insightful and constructive; I learned much from them. To the extent that it has been possible, I have attempted to improve the translation by incorporating some of the reviewers' suggestions, as well as a few other changes scattered throughout the work. Since the publication of the first edition, I have received unstinting and unwavering encouragement for my attempts at excavating the literary masterpieces of Bengal from Dr. Arindam Purkayastha, and valuable support from Professor Geraldine Forbes, both of whom I hereby gratefully acknowledge. Finally, I hope this work receives the approval of those who share my enthusiasm for the creative traditions of Bengal. It is essential that the regional, vernacular literary works of India be preserved for future generations, and this is realizable only through the active participation of those who feel close to those traditions.

Monish R. Chatterjee
Endwell, New York, 1997.

Translator's Preface

The comments in this preface are substantially based upon related discussions which appear in two sources: (1) *The Complete Works of Bankim Chandra* published in Bengali by the Sahitya Samsad, Calcutta in the tenth edition in 1988, under the editorship of Shri Yogesh Chandra Bagal, and (2) the book '*Bankim Chandra*' by Shri Subodh Chandra Sengupta, containing critical evaluation of Bankim's literary works, published by A. Mukherjee and Company, Calcutta in 1987.

The first of the three parts of this collection of essays, *Kamalakanter Daptar (The Journals of Kāmalakanta)* was published as a book for the first time in 1875. Of the fourteen essays, only eleven appeared in this first edition because, as Bankim wrote in the preface, the three essays, "In the Moonlight", "Insect", and "A Woman's Beauty" were not his creations. The dedication of the Journals read "Dedicated to the Leading and Venerable Pandit Babu Ramdas Sen Mahasay as a token of Friendship."

Around the year 1885 the book was published in its expanded form. It was then titled '*Kamalakanta*', having now included the "Letters" and "Deposition" sections. In this edition, the essays "In the Moonlight" by Aukshoy Chandra Sarkar and "A Woman's Beauty" by Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay were added. The essay "Insect" was also by Aukshoy Chandra Sarkar; perhaps it was not included because it had already appeared in the book *Motikumari*. Comments about the "Letters" and "Deposition" may be found in Bankim

Chandra's preface to the above volume. In the second edition of the above volume (1889), the essay "The Thresher" was first added.

"Kamalakanta's Philosophy" and "Kamalakanta's Style" have been the subjects of several discussions. In the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad edition of the collected works, edited by Brajendranath Bandyopadhyay and Sajanikanta Das, there appears a charming introduction by the editors. Of special interest is their description of the genesis of Kamalakanta. Here is a part of their assessment (translated from the original Bengali):

"Bankim's natural talent for pointed humour had first found an easy outlet in his "Lokarahasya" (an essay collection which predated Kamalakanta — *this translator*), and in this outlet for free expression he had found some solace. However, Bankim could not be content to simply create humour of a superficial nature month after month. Floating atop the apparently pleasant waves of everyday life, the keenly perceptive Bankim would sometimes delve deep into the dark and mysterious aspects of living and be gravely concerned about the mortality of man, in particular about the many ill-fated fellow humans floating around him in thoughtless nonchalance. Feeling deep within himself their dreadful destiny, he could not afford the luxury of light-hearted entertainment. In those situations, he had little recourse but to take shelter in the thoughts of the half-mad addict named Kamalakanta. The kind of things he would hesitate to state straight and up front, he could express them without any reservations via Kamalakanta's mouth and, with this enigmatic madman at the centre of the attention of his readership, he had little difficulty holding their interest. By mixing honey-laced poetry, politics, social science and philosophy in a single medium, Bankim the editor and publicist thus made his work

a great deal easier. This is the history of the birth of Kamalakanta.”

Shriyukta Aukshoy Kumar Dattagupta has expressed the timeless relevance of Kamalakanta beautifully in these words: “Whether for the beauty of its language, the impact of its thoughts, its measured, guileless and lively humour, or for its genuine and sincere nationalism, Kamalakanta is the pride of Bangadarshan (the literary journal founded by Bankim’s elder brother Sanjeev Chandra — *this translator*). Kamalakanta is simultaneously a poet, a philosopher, a teacher, a politician and a patriot; yet in him there is no poet’s vanity, philosopher’s razzle-dazzle, social educator’s humourlessness, politician’s lack of imagination or patriot’s narrow zeal. Where else may one find such marvellous combinations of laughter with tragedy, of truth with the curious, of soothing fluidity of thoughts with burning reality that sears the core of one’s heart, of addiction with ethics, metaphysics with materialism, and spitefulness with generosity?” (*Bankim Chandra*, 1920, p.197.)

During the early years since its publication, there had been debates concerning the originality of Kamalakanta. In recent times, too, such discussions have been carried out to varying degrees. Aukshoy Kumar’s opinion in this regard is noteworthy. He wrote, “Some continue to ask to what extent Kamalakanta is an original literary work? Alas. O Fate! This obsession with “originality”, or, worse yet, this tendency to doubt the originality of anything native has become the bane of our national cultural downfall. When, after reading Kamalakanta in my youth I had felt overcome with thrill and amazement, a certain pandit, full of vanity about his knowledge of English, had said grimly, “This is nothing but a Bengali version of De Quincey’s *Confessions of an Opium Eater*.” Later, when I was older, I realized that was not a

statement worthy of a pandit. I cannot declare that a few of Kamalakanta's statements do not have their parallels in the vast compendium of English literature, and I admit that Kamalakanta's "Deposition" has been written in the style of Sam's testimony in the *Pickwick Papers*; however, I still maintain that the above have in no way degraded the originality of *Kamalakanta*." (ibid., p.197.)

It is believed that Bankim Chandra himself considered Kamalakanta to be his best creation. In his novels there are many humourous and light-hearted moments; there are even a few comic characters such as Gajapati Vidyadiggaj; however, there is no marked proliferation of humour in his novels. For the greater interest of the storyline in the novels, humour has necessarily been minimized. For the same reason, Bankim Chandra was forced to eliminate another vital element from his novels. Even though he was a great social teacher, he was unable to emphasize moral and ethical messages in his novels. The story and the characters are the main components of a novel. The story must be given fullness in every way, the deepest mysteries and complexities of the characters must be brought to light. Moreover, in the best of novels, it is practically impossible to delineate the expression of imagination and the promulgation of one's own concepts and views. As a result, concepts that cannot be transmitted via imagery in a novel remain obscure and unexpressed. To circumvent this limitation of the novel Bankim Chandra had created Kamalakanta. Kamalakanta is a comic character of the highest order; from that viewpoint alone, Kamalakanta is exceptional; however, through Kamalakanta, Bankim has achieved a far greater objective: he has given expression to many facets of his thoughts vis-a-vis human life. Kamalakanta is given to humour and satire. Most of his views project a special feeling and conviction, an acute outlook. Even though

one might not regard his every word as the ultimate expression of Bankim Chandra's intellect, one must nevertheless admit that the ideas which have been given shape via Kamalakanta, are without parallel for their clarity, lustre and acuteness.

As commonfolk, we have a specific idea about life and livelihood; we use our established yardsticks to measure those among us who are crazy or unusual by our standards. With accepted norms we measure the abnormal. However, the laws which we accept in our daily lives and place upon a high seat of respect are not necessarily any more substantial — they are merely the products of our experiences. A little speculating will make it clear that our established social norms have no significance beyond temporal experience. If, now, one considers someone who is far removed from the worldly concepts of profit and loss, good and evil — a person whom our perceived axioms do not even touch — to such a person the natural and normal in our lives will appear curious and even funny. To the non-attached eccentric, our rules and precepts will appear strange; before his unspoilt inner vision, the narrow, petty and foolish facade of our civilization will be unmasked. Then the real must answer to the imaginative. Such a character is Kamalakanta. Kamalakanta is not a fool, his intellect is razor sharp, his knowledge uncommon. Kamalakanta is fully aware of his limitations, yet, in spite of his exceptional wisdom and intelligence, he is disorganized, unpredictable. As much as we poke fun at him, he pokes fun right back at us. Outside of Prasanna the milkmaid and opium he has no third attachment in the world. With Prasanna, the relationship is more dairy-oriented than poetic or romantic; the opium is only a means to acquiring his special insights. This complete non-attachment in Kamalakanta is a source of great laughter for us. Much as a professional athlete accepts the criticism of spectators in light-hearted good spirit, we too

derive great pleasure from Kamalakanta's observations about "Utilitarianism", politics or economics, but are never moved or driven by them. Kamalakanta was a failure at the game of material success; however, he did recognize the emptiness that permeates it. Hence, he can readily accept our derisions with derision, and ignore our nonchalance.

The primary merit of Kamalakanta's criticism is that he has not only exposed the meaninglessness of social customs and classifications, but has established that the exaggerated self-satisfaction we humans derive from considering ourselves different from animals and birds, insects and worms, or fruits and flowers is just as hollow. Sure, Vishnusharma and Aesop have collected many moral and ethical precepts from animal life, but their views are still human, and only go as far as finding some parallels in the world of animals. In this established approach, it is the animal who has ascended a few steps upwards to come upto level with humans. Kamalakanta, however, has attempted to turn this accepted human law upside down, and establish a new order. In the process, Swift's insight has coalesced with Vishnusharma's imagination; hence, here it is the human who has descended to find common ground with animals and flowers. Kamalakanta does not stop at simply indicating the similarities, but goes much farther into microscopic analyses to shatter human claims to superiority. He has likened Bismarck-like politics to that of a bull, and the politics of a Bengali to that of a dog. A cat who purloins milk is fundamentally socialist, whereas the human who chases the cat away to protect the milk is essentially capitalist. As far-reaching as his imagination is, Kamalakanta's vision is equally unfettered and all-encompassing. It is because of this unlimiting vision that Kamalakanta finds harmony in the middle of the most obviously discordant. Observing the grain thresher, the blinds have fallen from his eyes, and he has

seen the whole world as one giant threshing shed. All the big and small edifices of Man have appeared before him as threshing pestles, and people of every rank, zamindars or subjects, lawyers or judges, wealthy or poor, babus or writers — none have escaped from Kamalakanta's view; each one is busy flattening or getting flattened by another in the great thresher of life.

Kamalakanta's inner vision is at its widest in the "Giant Market" dream sequence. We often consider that the processes and practices of our social and political lives are based on high idealism. Kamalakanta has perceived no higher laws or ethics in them — everywhere he has witnessed the rules of the marketplace. Women and their beauty, pandits and their disbursement of knowledge, the English and their governance, European research in Sanskritic works, favour-seekers' solicitations, writers' approach to their craft, the gluttonous yearnings of fame-seekers, judges and how justice is meted out — Kamalakanta has found a common thread in all these apparently disparate matters: in everything there is a buy-and-sell relationship. Not that he is unaware of their characteristic diversity — a woman working on perfecting her beauty and fashion, and a judge presiding over a court's proceedings are not the same thing; therefore, they are found in two different areas of the marketplace. Every young maiden sells her beauty as a commodity, yet within them there exist many variations. Hence Kamalakanta finds various types of Rohus, Katlas, Mrigels, Hilsas and even lowly Puntis thrashing about for buyers in the fishmarket of beauty. Each type adopts a distinct technique to lure customers; they all, nevertheless, have the nature of fish waiting to be sold. The beauty market and the literary market are not entirely alike, albeit they are both markets; Kamalakanta's curiosity about the activities of men and women is limitless, his descriptions are thorough, his

analysis completely unbiased, because he is himself completely unattached. Such fineness of insight and depth of knowledge is aptly reflected in the essay "Human Fruit." Here, the entire human species has been compared to fruits. "At those times when I have indulged in an overdose of opium, I get the feeling that humans are simply fruits hanging on branches of Maya from the tree of this Sansara, waiting to fall when ripe....," the essay begins. Kamalakanta himself is freed from the branch of Maya, but not from the tree of Sansara (the phenomenal world of existence). He has unlimited opportunities to observe and comprehend; yet, for someone who is freed from the branch but is still caught in the tree, no matter how profound his analyses, we cannot but help chuckle in amusement.

A major component of Kamalakanta's character is his indifference. His only attachments to Sansara are his gastronomic indulgences and his addiction to opium. Of these two, the opium attachment may not strictly be defined as Sansaric, since this addiction only serves to open his eyes of knowledge. Kamalakanta has noticed that at bottom, even Bentham's theory of Utilitarianism is nothing but a treatise of human addiction to food. Human dependence on food may be concealed under deeply philosophical and metaphysical musings; Kamalakanta himself needles it via Sanskritic abstractions, but the true nature of stomach fulfilment has not been smothered under the weight of philosophy. Kamalakanta may be indifferent, but he is not entirely free of desire. Man needs some of his bonds, for, a species must survive. Kamalakanta has ridiculed the deluded narrowmindedness and tunnel vision of others; at the same time, he has understood that absolute detachment is just as painful as bondage. Therefore, a sound of deep agony and sorrow has often risen above the humour and criticism. At times the sense of suffering

and yearning has expressed itself directly through the jest. Kamalakanta has made fun of the insect's penchant for diving headlong into flames, yet he has also understood that it is precisely the very same nihilistic tendency that has carried mankind from his narrow precincts to the brink of the mysterious universe. Not finding the desired objects has troubled Kamalakanta persistently. He has not been vanquished by poverty or lost youth, hence he has not sought those things the people of this world run after. Yet he has been troubled — exactly for what, he has himself been unable to define adequately. He is unable to determine where exactly his mind has gone. He has attempted to bind his unencumbered mind, but has not found the rope to bind it with. This involuntary anguish of his life is deeply connected with the perennial tragedy of human life. Humans spend their lives chasing after objects of desire, yet with advancing years the driving and binding forces grow weaker, a ripened human fruit falls from its branch. With age, the power of desire begins to fade, and all those things which might have appeared most desirable before, through experience, now seem to be utterly empty and hollow. This inevitable tragedy came intimately to Kamalakanta's realization, and in all his writings this universal suffering has found its most intense expression.

Kamalakanta has no reverence or love for our activities — to him they are all nothing but a blind man's deerhunt. Then who or what shall bring light to the blind? — Universal Compassion. If one nurtures love for all humans, if all one's actions are freed from personal desires and given entirely unto God, only then does one cease to starve from the dearth of desirable objects, yet becomes free from the clutches of worldly delusions. The love for all humanity cannot weaken with age, since it is not a deluded pursuit, it does not have any selfish personal goal attached to it; hence it is akin to

especially when examined from the standpoint of its own life story. Its quest for, and ruthless conquest of alien territories underscore its own humble beginnings and meagre resources. Its several bizarre transmutations are indicative of an ability to stoop to any level of absurdity in order to achieve its ultimate goals. For colonial expansion, the ends justify any means of achieving them. An interesting insight into the purely exploitative aspect of the European colonial experience is found in the admission by the cockatoo that it has *not built any permanent homes*, and that it *prefers to go back to its cave*, since the plenitude of its colonized territories offers, on the one hand, *too much to eat*, and, on the other, *gives it ulcers*. This is a pertinent reflection on the fundamental attitude of non-acceptance of the territorial culture, lifestyle, or even geography by the colonists, who are there simply with a singular mission — *to eat as much as they can, and then embellish their caves back in the frigid zone with the loot*.

When Kamalakanta has left the arena of satire, and entered the domain of love and yearning within the human mind, and the suffering of old age, he has created wonderful prose, poems and songs. When the Vaishnava poet wrote

*“Come to me, my beloved, come sit upon my covering —
Let me see you, my love, to my eyes’ content.”*

then he had a special paramour (Lord Krishna) in mind. Kamalakanta has taken this personal love — (or spirituality—) intoxicated madman and channelled his yearning towards the patriot’s desire for the recovery and restoration of the lost Lakshmi of his country. No matter what else comes Bengal’s way in the future, Kamalakanta is convinced that the lost Hindu kingdom of Bengal is never again to be restored. Therefore the departed deity, the Rajlakshmi of golden

freedom. Kamalakanta declares, "If I have true love for humanity and the human race, then I desire no other pleasure." Through all his dreams and eccentricities, we perceive in Kamalakanta a deep-rooted love for the human race.

Kamalakanta's deposition is a veritable storehouse of laughter. He has ridiculed the process of law extensively. This is because he regards the court as the butcher-shop of the giant market, and the Hakim (Judge) as the pumpkin among human fruits. Kamalakanta has not directed his sneer at any particular judge or lawyer, because he is aware that the shackles of law are not the creation of any single individual. When selfish human society sits in judgment of others, any effort on his part will only result in false oaths, meaningless questions and answers, and legal clauses with no substance. Kamalakanta is far removed from this machine. Hence he repeatedly pokes fun at its stupidity, and because we are unable to break loose from the tentacles of tricks and rules we have ourselves created, we laugh at the crazy nuttiness of this lawless individual, yet feel quite disturbed and troubled as well. The solution that Kamalakanta proposes at the end of the trial is outrageously strange; nevertheless, no matter how absurd it might appear to be, it is inspired by compassion for the less fortunate. A civilization which has been built upon the acceptance of the stealing by the mighty of the possessions of the weak, a society which has developed stringent methods of ensuring the security of its ill-gotten wealth while keeping the disinherited hungry and homeless — it is futile and meaningless to attempt to bring it to trial. Therefore Kamalakanta concludes that if the world is given unto the mighty for pleasure, then the cow must necessarily also be given unto the cattle rustler.

The essay Cockatoo is a satirical revelation of the nature and characteristics of European colonialism. The white (implying Caucasian) Cockatoo is a strange creature, indeed,

Bengal, driven out in 1203 (Bengali calendar) by invaders, who is never again to return — it is her that Kamalakanta invokes as the dearly beloved and, recounting the vices due to which the Hindus of Bengal have lost her, attempts to instill the seeds of patriotism in the hearts of his countrymen. In this manner, the Vaishnava poet's song has been extended far, and mingling with the fierce passion of the lonely lovesick heroine, love for the country has assumed infinite pathos and urgency. The patriotism which Kamalakanta describes here is essentially a Hindu concept of patriotic love. However, elsewhere, transcending the narrow confines of religion, he has been inspired by an even higher feeling. Durgotsava (the Festival of Goddess Durga) is a particularly Hindu festival — it is the worship of one of the most exclusive goddesses out of the three hundred and thirty million gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. This is the greatest by far of all other gods or goddesses. Kamalakanta has chosen this auspicious Hindu goddess as the symbol of the motherland. In his imagination, the Devi has assumed a new form; the Durga festival has acquired new dimensions. In her new form, Devi Durga is no longer a Hindu goddess alone, she is the mother of all Bengalis — possessor of renewed powers, upright with renewed pride, dreamer of renewed dreams — this Mother is not for the worship of Brahmin pandits alone, people from all lands and of every status are to bow before her; to receive her benediction requires relinquishing all sensual attachments, destroying all feelings of hatred; her demands are fraternal love and service unto others. She is not merely a Hindu goddess — she is the golden image of Mother Bengal.

Monish R. Chatterjee
Binghamton, New York, 1991.

Kamalakanta

Part I

*The Journals of
Kamalakanta*

BANKIM CHANDRA CHATTERJEE (1875)

Many called Kamalakanta a lunatic. One could never tell what he might say or do at any time. It was not that he could not read or write, though. He did know some English, and some Sanskrit. But what good is knowledge that does not help earn a living? The fact of the matter is, you have to visit the *Sahibs*, and move in the circle of the wealthy and powerful. So many unsurpassed morons, barely able to sign their names — have acquired great estates and fame — I believe they are true pandits, wise men. On the other hand, such scholars as Kamalakanta, wise only in the matter of books, I call them idiots. Once Kamalakanta found a job. A Sahib, having heard him converse in English, called him up and gave him a clerical position. But, woe to his incompetence, he could not keep the job. He would go to the office, but do no official work. Would write poems on vital governmental documents — smear official correspondence with quotations from some writer named Shakespeare; on bills and memos leave doodles and pictures. On one occasion, the Sahib asked him to prepare the monthly pay-bill. Kamalakanta took the bill-book, and drew a figure showing a few naga fakirs begging for alms before the Sahib, and the Sahib flinging a few coins in their direction. Underneath he wrote, "The true pay-bill." Seeing this modification, the Sahib immediately showed him the door for good.

So much for Kamalakanta's professional career. He was in no great need of money, it would seem. He would be quite content to have a little food from somewhere, and a pellet of opium. He would lie around just about anywhere. Spent many days at my place. Knowing that he was a madman, I was fond

of him and took care of him. But even I could not keep him around. He never stayed anywhere for long. One morning, clad in the saffron robes of a Brahmachari, he disappeared. I have no idea where he went; I never saw him again. He has not returned since.

He kept a journal. No scrap piece of paper went unnoticed by him. On any available writing surface, he would scribble some gibberish that no one could make any sense of. Often he would read from them to me — it would always induce me to sleep. The papers used to be wrapped in an old, soiled, ink-stained, worn-out piece of rag. On the day he left, Kamalakanta donated that journal to me. He said, this is my bakhsheesh to you.

Now, what would I do with such a priceless gem? My first instincts were to donate it to Agni, the fire-god. Later, however, for humanity's sake, my mind fell into a deep turmoil. I figured that, he who does not serve mankind, his very birth is in vain. This journal is an excellent cure for insomnia and sleep disorders — anyone reading it is guaranteed to fall into a state of slumber. For the benefit of chronic insomniacs, I therefore proceed herewith to publicize the writings of Kamalakanta.

Shri Bhismadeva Khoshnavis

CHAPTER I

Solitude

"Who Sings Thither?"

The sweet strains of that song, like a long-forgotten dream of yore, wafted gently into my ear. Why was it so pleasurable? It was not like it was the most beautiful of songs. Just that a lone traveller, rather absent-mindedly, sang it along his way. Being that it was a sparkling moonlit night, obviously the joy in his heart had sprung forth. Naturally, he had a beautiful voice — with it, in this season of love, he was merely radiating the gladness of his being. Why did it move my heart to such depths, as though a melodious, many-stringed instrument of music had just been brought alive?

Who knows why? There is a full moon out — lotuses in full bloom smile by the riverbank. Waves, lean and blue like half a flowing veil on a beautiful woman, wrap around the coastline. The thoroughfares are flooded with delight — young boys and girls, men and women, even ancient elders are out soaking in the moonbeams. I alone am without mirth — hence that song has stirred the strings of my heart thus.

I am alone — thus the song has given me goosebumps. In this crowded city, among these endless waves of humanity filled with such bliss, I am alone. Why should I not be one more drop, one more bubble, in this infinite human ocean with its waves driven by currents of joy? An infinity of drops makes up the ocean; why do I not add to it a drop more?

These things I do not know; all I do know is my loneliness. Now, if no other creature shares your feelings of love, then

this human birth is for naught. The flower may be fragrant, but not without the one who smells it as such. Without the sense of smell, there is no fragrance. The flower does not bloom for itself. Let the flower of your heart bloom for others.

I have not explained yet why that song, heard only twice, sounded so sweet to me. It has been long since I had heard a joyful melody, experienced the feeling of sheer delight. In my youth, when the earth was young, when every flower was filled with aroma, the rustle of every leaf was music, in every star there was a *Chitra* or a *Rohini*, the heavenly nymphs, every human face was filled with innocence — I knew joy. The earth is still the same, human livelihood is still the same, man's character is still the same; only this heart is not like it used to be. Then music brought me great pleasure. Tonight, the song I heard reminded me of those times. The state, the feeling of contentment which used to bring me happiness, suddenly came back to me. As if momentarily I rediscovered my youth. As if, once more, I sat down in the assembly of my friends. Once again, for no reason at all, I burst into an explosive laughter. Those things which I no longer say, thinking they are trivial, yet a long time ago would pour forth from the uncontrollable urge within my heart — suddenly, I began saying them without any bias or inhibition. Once more, as long before, I accepted without pretense the sanctity of someone's love. A moment's delusion was born — hence the song sounded so sweet. But that is not all. I loved music then — but not any more — the joy within whence that love issued is no longer there, hence this indifference. Hiding my thoughts deep inside my mind, I was ruefully reminiscing the lost days of my youth — when the sweet strains of the song carried me back to earlier days — hence the song sounded so sweet.

Why, then, is that joy, that thrill, no more? Are there fewer materials of comfort? Acquisition and depletion are both the

laws of nature. Yet, there is more gain than loss — this too is the law. The longer you walk through life, the more things of comfort you acquire. Then why does the joy fade away with age? Why does the earth not seem as beautiful? Why do the stars not twinkle as bright? Why is the blue of the sky not as lustrous? What once appeared verdent with leaves and grasses, colourful with fragrant blossoms, wet and fertile with rippling brooks, flowing with the spring breezes — why does it now seem like a sandlocked, barren desert? Because there is no colourful window to gaze through. The colourful glass called hope. In youth, the quantity of acquisitions is minimal, yet the hope for happiness unlimited. Now there is a stockpile of goods — but where is that universe-engulfing hope? Then I knew not what leads to what, but hope was ever present. Now I have learned that I have ascended merely upon the wheel of life, and must return exactly where I started; when I think I am now moving forward, I realize I am only spinning around. Now I understand that when one swims in the sea of life, the waves will eventually carry one right back to the shore. I now know that this forest has no pathway; this terrain has no waterhole; this river has no coast; this sea has no island; this darkness has no star. I have learned that flowers have worms, lush leaves have hidden thorns, the sky has clouds, the laminar river has deadly whirlpools, fruits have poison, gardens have snakes, in the human heart there is only love of self. I have learned that not every tree bears fruit, not every flower is fragrant, not every cloud carries rain, not every forest contains sandalwood, not every elephant has ivory. I have now understood that glass has as much splendour as diamond, brass is as radiant as gold, slime is as cool as sandal paste, alloys sound as musical as silver. But what was I saying — I forget. Yes — the great song! Indeed, I loved listening to it, but I do not desire to hear it a second time. Just like the song arose

from a human voice, this world itself has a song of its own. Only those who thirst after the deeper, subtler music of life, hear it. My heart overflows with the yearning for that song. Will I never hear it again? Indeed I will — but never again will I hear the orchestra of many instruments, the chorus of many voices from the past. The singers and musicians are no more — that age is gone, that hope has evaporated. However, that which I hear instead is sweeter by far. The depths of my hearing are permeated by the one absolute song. Bliss is omnipresent — God is that bliss. That bliss is now the song of the world in my ears. May that great symphony play forever in the strings of the human heart. If I have feelings of tenderness and love for the human race, I seek no other bliss.

Shri Kamalakanta Chakraborty

CHAPTER II

The Human Fruit

At those times when I have indulged in an overdose of opium, I get the feeling that humans are simply fruits hanging on branches of *Maya* from the tree of this *Sansara*, waiting to fall when ripe. Some do not get to ripen — they are shaken loose before their time by storms. There are others that get eaten by insects, yet others pecked and bruised by birds. A few may even become shrivelled and fall off unceremoniously. Some are plucked in their prime, doused in the holy water of the Ganga, and offered to the gods or the Brahmins — they are the select few whose fruit-birth or human-birth is blessed. Some do live to their prime, but fall on the ground to be devoured by jackals. In vain is their human-birth or fruit-birth. Some fruits are bitter to the taste, some sour, some alkaline — but they may have great medicinal value. Some are poisonous — anyone who eats them, dies. A few others are of the Makala genus — they are only good-looking.

Sometimes, as I rest in half a daze, I observe that people of different categories are actually different types of fruit. The high class in our country today seem to be like jackfruit. Some bear excellent, juicy kernels, some are rather sticky, some are rotten and useless, fit only for cattle. Others ripen undersize, or remain undersize and never ripen. Some have the mettle to ripen, but have the misfortune of being preyed upon by the earth's greedy monsters who cook them and eat them up while quite green. Some may get to ripen, but jackals are a real pestilence. If the tree is fenced in — well and good. If the fruit