



## Douloti the Bountiful

### I

These days everyone calls Ganori Nagesia Crook Nagesia. He wasn't always Crook, crooked and broken, that is. He was firm and straight like everybody else. How he did get up in the morning, and go off to the field with his can of water, chewing on his tooth twig. Back from the field he would say to his wife, Give me something love?

Oh yes, rice-lentils-puffed bread-stuffed bread.

No Nagesia gets such a menu from a wife of a morning. This is the talk of their deep despair. Or the talk of the dream that does not come true. The wives of the Nagesias give them commel, or

kurthi porridge. Ganori's wife gave him the same fare. Having fed, and drunk a deal of water, with a pinch of tobacco in his mouth, Ganori would run to the Master's house. He would slave from morning to night, carry sacks of paddy and wheat on his back.

How blemished his fortune, that he broke into a crooked misshape.

He is a Nagesia by birth, their community is small. In Palamu, the communities of Nagesias and Parhaias are small. The bigger communities are Bhuyians, Dusads, Dhobis, Ganjus, Oraons, Mundas. The village is called Seora. Its owner is Munabar Singh, a Chandela Rajput. Crook's job is to look after Munabar's plow steer. Everything is his job. Crook can't reckon what is and is not his job.

Sometimes Crook imagines some bespectacled town gentleman who has come by car, and listening to him, is writing down everything. Actually these people have heard that the government is going to abolish the bonded labor [*kamyouti*] system. Then bespectacled gentry will come from the towns and write everything down on paper. This too is a dream.

Crook talks to such a gentleman in his mind.

- All work in the owner's house is yours?
- Why not, sir?
- Why must you do all the work in Munabar's house?
- How can I not have to do it all?
- O learned town gentleman with glasses
- All Munabar's work is Crook's work
- I am his bondslave [*kamiyal*].
- You are his *kamiya*?
- I am his bonded laborer [*seokia*].
- His *seokia*?
- I am his bonded worker [*beth-begar*].
- Hey, what are you? *kamiya*, *seokia*, or *beth-begar*?
- I am everything, I am his chattel slave. Come come, write everything down. Write and get in your car, buzz off to town, and I stay behind in the jungle. Each in his own place.
- You and I are men of two different worlds.
- No such conversation has taken place. Crook has thought it all up. If such a thing had happened, if some bespectacled gentleman had come, words like this are what he would have heard from Crook Nagesia.

Crook Nagesia is Munabar Singh Chandela's *kamiya*. Who

reckons how long the Crook Nagesias have been their servant-*kamiya-seokia*? It's a matter of hundreds of years. When did the Rajput brahman from outside come to this land of jungle and mountain? When did all the land slide into their hands? Then cheap field labor became necessary. That was the beginning of making slaves on hire purchase.

Crook Nagesia is Munabar's *kamiya*. Munabar Chandela is a big man. You must cross four villages. His huge house is on the bus route, in the market area, with an extensive garden. Munabar's son lives there. The son is very smart. An important government servant. Now times are different. There is a need to keep one's own man in a government department to hang on to the land. His son is an important government servant. Munabar's footing has become much firmer as a result.

Munabar Singh Chandela has built the house. But he doesn't live in the house. He lives in the village of Seora. He keeps Dusad, Ghasi, Nagesia, Munda, Lohar, Oraon, Bhuyian, Chamar, Parhaia as *kamiya*. There is no end to the people he has lent money to, and made into *kamiyas*. By what strength? Where is his strength?

That all *kamiya* women know. On winter nights old *kamiya* women light fires to warm their limbs. Then they say,

By the strength of loans, by the strength of loans.

Two rupees ten rupees hundred rupees

Ten seers of wheat, five of rice

Munabar lends us.

We don't know what to do

We gape like fools

His pet wolves catch our hands

Smear ink on our left thumbs

Take our mark on white paper

Put the paper in the safe

He has thousands of sheets of paper like this

He is king by the strength of loans

He is the government by the strength of loans

He is the *patwari*, he is the jungle *officer*

He is the police station, he is the *policeman*,

He the judge the verdict the court.

If he wants to go to town

The train stops at Chowkipura *Halt* that day

If he invites

The Minister comes to Seora village

He has become the government by lending money

And we have become kamiyas

We will never be free.

When Crook Nagesia's name was Ganori, then he gave his thumbprint to Munabar and took three hundred rupees. How daring he had become that he took three hundred rupees, he feels faint to think. He really needed it then. Quite a few of them had gone to *jail* on charges of stealing water-buffaloes from the market. If you go to *jail* and do time you have to feed your community when you return. This is such a rule that you can't get around it.

At this time his eldest daughter and his eldest son were both married. And he had to feast the folks again and again. He also had to do the purification for returning from *jail*. Had to give a goat to the son-in-law. Ganori borrowed all that money for many reasons. Some flour was left over even after everything was over. They could eat flour and water for some days. Ganori became a kamiya when he took that money.

At first Ganori didn't think becoming a kamiya was a special misfortune. He's been seeing kamiyas all over since birth. It's fate's decree to become a kamiya. Our Lord Fate comes to write fate on the forehead of the newborn in the dress of a head-shaved brahman. No one can evade what he writes down.

On the high-caste boy's forehead he writes property, land, cattle, trade. Education, job, contract. On the outcaste's forehead he writes bondslavery. The sun and the moon move in the sky by Fate's rule. The poor boys of Seora village become kamiyas of the Munabars, Fate's rule.

Who will change this rule?

Ganori Nagesia is not that man. He did a million things for the master, watched the plow-cattle. His work was over at evening when he put expensive oxen and water-buffaloes back into the pen. Then he returned to his shanty. They never had or will have a home better than a shanty. Bono Nagesia wanted to build a good home, and he suffered much thereafter.

The Nagesias know well that when a Nagesia child is six days old, that day our lord Fate will lower from the sky a yellow turmeric-dyed string. Lord Fate will come down to earth on that string. He will look like a head-shaved brahman.

He will never enter the room with the Nagesia mother and child. He stands outside the shanty and writes with a thick pen in

high-Hindi in the clothbound ledger, You will spend your life as you are born. You will never build a home better than a shanty.

Bono Nagesia from Seora village did not keep this in mind. His feet always had wheels. He went here and there. They say money flies in the Bihar air. High-caste folks know this. I am only a Nagesia, a negligible person. Yet shouldn't I try and see? I don't hold with work fixed by birth.

Bono went to Dhanbad to dig for coal. A contractor called him. I'm taking some Mundas to Ranchi district to quarry coal. Let me write your name also as Munda, like them. Let me write your address as Station Duranda. Come on, come on. Raise a lot of cash at a coal quarry.

Bono cut coal and returned with cold cash. The cash turned his head. Tell me why it shouldn't. What Nagesia in Seora village has seen real cash? Cold cash?

And what Nagesia has come back with news of the underworld? You see the world above ground, below is the underworld. Bono would say. "O my god. I saw the sky dark. I saw the darkness of hell in the coal mine. Double darkness. How far down we went, it was like the underworld."

— What did you see?

— What was there to see? I saw darkness.

Bono wanted to build a home with the money from Dhanbad. An adobe structure. Very firm, very strong.

He built a fine adobe cabin. All the money he brought from Dhanbad he poured into the hut. The other Nagesias sighed.

Not in envy. The Nagesias of Seora village do not sigh in envy. They are not Munabar's wife that they will sigh in envy. Munabar's wife can't bear others' good luck. A simple soul, she gasps with her fat body. She smokes a water-pipe. She can't hide anything. She says all the time, "I can't bear other people's good fortune, dear!"

She goes to her son's house from time to time. She says, "I'll stay here a month." She comes back after four days.

— O mistress, why did you come back?

— I couldn't stay.

— Why mistress, why?

— Daughter-in-law didn't let me stay.

— What did she do?

— Nothing. What will she do to me? She will cook a pudding, she puts in this much butter. She tears her dress, she gives it

to the maid. The holy man begs, she gives away a rupee. I am filled with envy. My chest burns.

- So you came back?
- I saw more, new rooms, new cows. I can't see other people's good fortune, dear, I'm filled with envy.
- They are not other people, he's your own son.
- Listen, everyone but yourself is other people. Munabar's wife is an openhearted person. She suffers only when she sees other people flourishing. So she doesn't go and look. She gasps with her fat body at home, and curses. Munabar is a bad man.

The Nagesias of Seora sighed when they saw Bono's house go up. What is Bono doing? A Nagesia doesn't do this. Raise a house because he has two hundred rupees in hand?

First, a Nagesia shouldn't have money. If he does, he shouldn't raise a roof. If you raise a roof, or buy a water-buffalo, the master will notice. If you buy land, the master will grab it. If you buy cattle, the master will snatch them. If you buy an umbrella for your head, or shoes for your feet, he'll have you tied to the post in the yard and beaten. That's why the other Nagesias sighed when they saw him build a hut. What sort of thing is Bono doing? Munabar Singh Chandela will consider this a dreadful impertinence. He will punish Bono in whatever way.

Old Bhuneswar had said, "There's only aunt, wife, and son in your family. How much better it would have been if you had taken the money and gone somewhere else with them."

- Where would I have gone?
- Again to Dhanbad.
- What would I have done?
- Worked at the mine.
- Mine! Work!
- Well, didn't you bring back money with that work? My word! So much money!
- I did not want to spill all this. Now I see that I must speak. I was the contractor's laborer. People brought by the contractor work in the mine. They don't get much money.
- What?

— Yes. The contractors cheat you hard. When I told the unine [union] bosses they agreed in word. But they did nothing. Contractor and unine are friends under cover. The government took the mine. But how many workers are permanent? The con-

tractor brings labor. The unine is there for permanent labor. No unine will say make contract labor permanent.

- What does that mean?
- What am I telling you? Government—unine—contractor—slum landlord—market-trader—shopkeeper—post office, each is the other's friend. Down in the mine! How dark down there! And at week's end, *double* darkness above the mine as well. The contractor's hoods stood with guns. They snatched the money. We got it only after they took their cut.
- You had a hard time.
- The unine didn't do a thing. Talk to the government officer, he laughs. The slumlord takes out rent. The trader and the shopkeeper will zoom down like a hungry wolf. They will falsify your account. Everyone sucks the coolie's blood. If a note comes from home, the postman doesn't give it without money. Send money home, the mail clerk says, "Give me a cut."
- Then how did you bring money? Your aunt cried a lot for you. I'd reason, why are you bringing Bono bad luck with your crying? He is all right.
- No uncle, I wasn't all right.
- How did you bring money?
- Much suffering. You think people mortgage their lives in exchange for a loan only in Seora? At the mine too they borrow and are mortgaged to the moneylender.
- Tell us about your money.
- A hood used to come to the coolie shanties. He had a liquor store as well. He walked around in the area. He had a lot of money. Pockets always heavy. He'd take out a 100-rupee note to buy *cigarettes*. A man with so much money is hard to find.
- Why did he go to the shanties?
- Lusting after women. He wouldn't leave a woman alone. Then he'd sleep in our rooms. It was very late that night. He was very drunk. Finally he passed out and fell asleep in our room. There are many men who look like babies when they sleep. When you look at them you think this is some mother's child, and you feel some compassion. When a hood sleeps there is no compassion. He doesn't look like a mother's son either. This guy was like that.
- You took his money?
- You feel no compassion. When a musclemán sleeps you think it's a devil asleep.

- You killed him?
- I didn't kill him, uncle. I was watching him and thinking, you've opened a liquor business in the ghetto to suck the coolies' money. You're also taking the honor of their daughters and wives. You are a real devil. And then ...
- What happened?
- It was as if my two hands did a dance. My hands said, Let's wring his neck. I reasoned with them a lot. My hands didn't listen. They said, We cut coal in the mine. We'll do what we like.
- Then?
- Then my hands did their dance. They ran up. A sleeping drunk is heavy. Dead he's heavier. See how much strength my hands had? My body has no strength. I am thin and slight. I myself dragged him in the middle of the night and took him very far. Far away I threw him near a drainage ditch. I rolled him into the ditch. Then there was only one thought in my mind, the coolies will suffer if his body is found in the slum.
- You took his money?
- No, Bono didn't kill for cash. When I got home I saw the wallet lying there. I saw a lot of money when I opened it.
- Won't the police get you?
- Uncle, there are many murders in Dhanbad town, which one is solved? Who'd they catch? Do they know my name and address? They knew I am Bono Munda, from Ranchi District. If they look, they'll look for Bono Munda, Duranda Precinct, district Ranchi.
- Good, you did fine.
- Not me, my two hands.
- Tell me why you're building a house.
- What else? The master will snatch pots and pans, cattle, whatever I buy. He can't take my house.
- You're building such a fine place, won't the master object?
- No no. I went to the master. I asked for permission at his feet.
- And the master gave permission?
- Yes, he did.
- He did!
- Bhuneswar knitted his brow. Suspicion appeared in his mind. Bono Nagesia will raise a roof on adobe, and the master gave him permission? Why? The suspicion in his mind is at a great depth.

Behind it is a narrative that is as immemorial as the Ganga River or the Himalayas.

The bespectacled town gentlemen will never understand these things. Among the Nagesias of Seora village, Bono went to Dhanbad, and Bhuneswar went to Daltonganj once. The schoolmaster from the next village called him. There a bespectacled gentleman had asked him so many things. Bhuneswar hadn't been able to give all the answers. But many questions were awakened in his mind. These he put to the schoolmaster. The schoolmaster was Chamar by caste, from Patna district. All the proprietors like Munabar were enraged because a man from the Chamar caste had come as the schoolmaster. It was they who'd maneuvered him out. The schoolmaster had told Bhuneswar to come with him when he left for Daltonganj. Bhuneswar told him many things later.

— Sir! The gentleman with glasses came from town. There's electric light in town, and so many cars. No one speaks of caste there. He told us we were independent, and there was no difference in castes any more.

— That's true, uncle.

— If so, why don't the rules change? Why doesn't Nagesia Dusad-Ganju kill a brahman or Rajput with a gun?

— All this has happened for ever, but it can't happen any more. This too is true.

— Sir, the ways that are in force are the ways of before. All I see is my lord the Sun rising in the east, the birds eating acorns, and the Koel River flowing.

— Bravo Bhuneswar, you say it well, you know?

— I see also that the old rules are in force. I want to build my place with my money, I need my master's permission. I'll buy pots and pans with my money, the master must say yes. I can't eat on metal plates, can't use umbrella or shoe, can't send my boy to government school, even if I have money, for I don't have the master's order.

— These rules don't exist no more. ]

— These are the rules that go on, sir. Rajput or brahman doesn't put his offerings at the feet of Chamar or Ghasi, they don't say, Orders please, sir! I'll arrange my son's marriage, my daughter will come home after her wedding, my mother dies, I must mourn her the right way. Everyone is equal? How so?

— Why didn't you tell the gentleman?

— Dear me, wouldn't he have thickened his eyes and

scolded me then? The high-caste town gentleman would have heard these words from the low-caste villager and torn up his paper and left.

Bhuneswar didn't say all this to Bono. The statement that the master had given permission raised a suspicion in his mind that kept needling him.

Bono Nagesia built his house. The walls were whitewashed. The roof was thatched. His aunt mixed colors and painted monkeys, elephants, horses, birds, flowers on the white walls. Everyone came to see. Everyone said it was wonderful.

Munabar Singh Chandela got some men to surround the place and burn Bono's house. They trussed up Bono like a pig and carried him hanging to Munabar's office. It was quite dark. Munabar's face couldn't be seen. But Bono could feel that even at the sight of Munabar's face no compassion would come. Nor the thought that Munabar was some mother's darling.

When the hood was sleeping, then Bono's two hands had told him many things. Now both his hands are tied with new rope. So the hands couldn't speak. Munabar kept him locked up in a room all night. In the morning he undid the ropes and made him put his thumbprint on a sheet of white paper.

— Take these twenty-five rupees. You are borrowing this because your house burnt down. From now on you are my bonds-lave. You will repay by the body's labor. I could have made your aunt, wife, and son my bondslaves too. But they have no strength in their bodies, they won't be able to work hard. I won't ever get back the cost of giving them snacks and their breakfast of thin gruel.

Bono had stood up.

— If you work with concentration, you will repay twenty-five rupees. You'll go to Dhanbad again, you'll bring money again.

Bono had said nothing.

— Go, build a brick house. Munabar laughed when he said this. Encouraged, the men around him laughed as well. Bono left the room. The blood in his body was throbbing hard.

Bhuneswar had taken his aunt, wife, and son. The aunt cried out when she saw Bono. Bhuneswar stopped her. What's there to weep for? Has the master never burnt down a new house put up by a poor Nagesia before this? Did a poor Nagesia never become a bondslave before this? It had happened before, and would happen again. It would go on in this way for as long as my

lord the Sun would rise from the Eastern Hills and set in the Western Hills.

Bhuneswar had spoken in profound compassion, "Bono! Don't worry. We will all bring bamboo from the forest, we will give labor, we will put up your place again."

— Do you have Moua [a drink made from a local fruit]?

— To drink?

— To massage on my body.

— I'll give you the burnt oil from a lamp.

Bhuneswar massaged burnt oil on Bono's body with great care. He had said to Bono's aunt and wife, "Stay with me now. You'll go when you have a new place."

Bono gave Ganori ten rupees. "Buy some rice at the open market, Ganori. Let's cook some starchy rice, let's all eat together. Don't buy in the village. The master will know. True. The village store will also cheat on the weight."

Bono sat down to eat with everyone. After the meal he doesn't leave the leaf. Hey Bono, get up. The rice on your fingers is crackling dry. How long will you sit?

Bono says, "What will happen to auntie?"

— What do you mean?

— This is something to think about.

— What nonsense are you saying?

— I took money to build my place, and became a bondslave. I will arrange a marriage between Dhano and Ganori's daughter Douloti. Thus Dhano has borrowed money, he too is a bondslave. Douloti will come to live, I'll have a feast. Thus my wife has borrowed, she too is a bondslave.

— What are you saying?

— I am right. Then see, father-mother-son are all Munabar's bondslaves. But no one reckoned for auntie. She is dead. She must be burnt, must have a funeral, will she become a bonded worker herself to supply those expenses? There is no one else to become a bondslave? I can see Aunt dying, and then becoming Munabar's bonded worker. The living and the dead are both his bondslaves.

Bono foamed at the mouth and fainted as he said this. Then everyone poured water on his head, brought him to his senses. Then Bono sighed and lay down under a tree. He did not speak again.

That night there was a knock on Ganori Nagesia's door. Ganori opened the door.

- Is it Bono?
- Yes, Ganori?
- Come, come in.
- No, Ganori.
- Where are you going?
- I am leaving.
- Where?
- I don't know. But I'm not going to slave for his bond. I will go anywhere I can.
- If the master catches you?
- I will escape by train.
- Where?

— Do I know? There are many places like Dhanbad and Patna. Calcutta is also a very big city. No untouching problems there. When I was in Dhanbad, I heard a lot about Calcutta.

— You'll leave?

\* — Yes. I really wanted to make a marriage between your daughter and Dhano. It's not to happen. Give my wife these ten rupees. I am going with five. There is a brass dish buried under the foundation of the house. Uncle Bhuneswar should dig it up and take it.

That was Bono's final departure from Seora village. So many things happened in Seora village. Munabar's white horse died. The lightning-struck tree suddenly fell over one night and suddenly the bear-players came to the village. Although Munabar made the bears dance in front of his own house, the whole village could after all see.

Munabar stamped after Bono in vain. He cross-examined the Nagesias most thoroughly. The Nagesias had no clue. The villagers themselves did not talk about this but cutting wheat in Munabar's fields they would look at each other and think, We could not escape the master's clutches. However, one of us has. Bono has escaped.

The women started up the harvesting song whenever they remembered Bono:

Down in the wheat field a yellow bird has come  
O his beak is red.

Their small children would pick the fallen grains of wheat. They would pick them up quite like birds.

Munabar did not give any work to Bono's aunt, wife, and son. They too left the village one day. Whether they left following news

from Bono is unknown. In this way the name "Bono" was erased from Seora village.

## II

So many things came up as I tried to tell you how Ganori Nagesia became Crook Nagesia. These things must be said. In the world of Seora village, Bono is just as true as Ganori.

After Bono left, Munabar became extremely ruthless about his bonded workers. Whenever the Nagesias, the Dusads, Ghasis, the various tribes of bonded laborers met, this is what they discussed.

There are landowners and moneylenders in every village. They are not all so ruthless. Bonded labor is sown into the soil of this district. Every house has a bonded laborer. Not all masters are so ruthless. No one has seen what a good master is like. But they have heard that there are good masters.

At this point, unsettling everyone, arrived the body count or census of 1961. Mohan Dusad knows the various disasters that can happen if human beings are counted like cows and sheep. Weaving grass mats is a way of assuring extra income for people of this area. Suddenly, weaving a mat, Mohan started speaking. Mohan has a very particular way of speaking. He says everything in a quarreling tone. As if people had been quarreling for some time and words are leading to words. He suddenly burst out as he went on weaving.

— It is most unnatural to count human beings.

— Why?

— You count people, you are asking for famine. There was a census at the time of my father's father. And right away a big Hunger, a real famine. All the new babies were deaf and dumb.

— Yes, I've heard.

— Did they count your mother?

— Mother wasn't born yet.

— If your mother had been born, if she'd been counted then, you too would have been born deaf and dumb. And we wouldn't have had to listen to all this.

— No joking matter. You think a census is an easy thing.

— Not at all.

The census was a hard thing in Seora village. The government people were out of their minds. At first Nagesia, Dusad, Dhobi,



Ganju neither opened their mouths, nor spoke. And when they did it was hard to stop them.

— What sort of thing is this? You won't write the names of the children who are dead? Dead or alive they are my children. Their names won't be in the government books?

— Listen sir! Write my mother's brother's name first. Uncle stole my goat and ran off to his daughter's in-laws. You are government people. If you write it up, I will surely get it back.

— You'll write my age? Write, write, maybe ten, maybe twenty, eh? What? I have grandchildren, I can't have so few years? How old are people when they have grandchildren? Fifty, sixty? No, no, how can I be sixty? I have heard that our brave master is fifty. I am Ghasi by caste, and poor. How can I have more age than he? The master has more land, more money, everything more than me. How can he have less age? No, sir, write ten or twenty.

The 1961 census took place in this way.

In 1962 was the vote. What vote, why vote, tell me what the people of Seora village know about this. They will vote for whomever Munabar tells them to vote for. They don't know what the vote or the election signifies. But Munabar is a Rajput and Jayvant Singh is also a Rajput. Munabar has told them that they must vote for his caste brother. Then that's what they'll do. You can't say "no" to the master.

Munabar Chandela said to the opposition candidates before the Elections, "Why are you wasting your pains? They will vote for the candidate we specify. They will vote for the group of candidates we mark out. Jayvant Singh is our candidate, everyone will vote for him. This time around. Why are you spending so much breath? When they come to your speeches, they come for the fun." Jayvant Singh depends on Munabar Singh as well. Will they vote for him? he asks.

— Why not?

— Who knows what they'll do? Shall I give them a rupee per head? Whatever you say.

— Brother, they too are giving a rupee.

— Shall I feed them puffed bread and stuffed bread?

— That may be better.

Much later gun and muscleman enter the voting game. In 1962 the picture was clearer. Jayvant Singh leaves everything to Munabar. Money he has to spend. He gives all the money to

Munabar and Munabar tells everyone, Put your vote on Jayvant's symbol, otherwise things will go bad.

Even after all this there is a festival in the air on Election Day. As if it's a Fair or a Holiday. People excitedly get in groups and go vote. But they find the appearance of the voting center most suspicious.

Omniscient Mohan Dusad starts whispering and muttering. "What sort of thing is this, that each person is put into an empty pigeonhole? How shall I put the mark on the paper or on my hand?" The election officer explains. Bhuneswar cannot understand at all. The officer scolds him loudly. So Mohan Dusad says, "Now run away. No doubt there will be fighting."

Everyone runs for their life. The representatives of the candidates run to catch the voters. The police run to help them. When the police run, then Mohan Dusad says, breathing hard, "The government doesn't mean well."

In such glory do the Third General Elections come to an end. After the counting Jayvant Singh disappears from the Voting Center, relieved for the next five years. The roots of the wood apple tree in front of Munabar's office were hollow. Suddenly it crashed down in a storm. Word got around that the Baram-Spirit lived in the tree, and he left in anger. Everyone had thought it was a summer storm. Baram-Spirit left in a cloud of dust.

Munabar was in pain after the tree fell. Perhaps there will be cholera or smallpox in the village now. He will arrange for a penance service. An educated *sadhu* comes as priest. He tells everyone, we must worship the Mother Cow and we must unite to protect Hinduism.

Seora village remains highly unstable for these reasons. It is at this time that Ganori Nagesia's carelessness sends Munabar's plow steer into the tiger's belly. All the jungle has not yet been cleared. Leopards still turn up. Drunk on moua, Ganori had forgotten to fetch the animal from the field at day's end. The jungle is a good way off from the field. The steer was independent spirited. It was probably going to take a look at the moon. Otherwise there's no reason why it went toward the forest.

The fall of the sacred wood apple tree. Then the untimely death of the steer. Munabar is furious. If the steer's gone you fill the cart. Take the yoke on your shoulders. Lift, lift. Pull the cart. Do you know how much a head of steer costs? I'll straighten you out with the whip.



The scene is delightful. The big officer's Dad, the big landowner of the area, Munabar Singh Chandela has put the axle of the carriage on the shoulders of a human being and is screaming his abuse, shaking his whip in the air. Ganori tries to lift the cart by the strength of his shoulders. Trying, he falls on his face. The axle sits hard on him.

Tohri hospital is eleven miles away. Bhuneswar and others take him there on a wood-and-rope cot. After three months he returns with his body broken and becomes Crook Nagesia. His back is stooped, and he has to limp on his right foot when he walks. You cannot expect a better repair job at the Tohri hospital. Is his head all right? He sees his little daughter Douloti and says, \*

"Who is this girl?"

His wife said, "God save me! That is Douloti."

— Is that it? Where is the goat?

— I sold it.

— Did you sell it or did Kalia's mother sell it?

— I sold it myself. Take this, here's a smoke. It's a nice blanket around your shoulders. Did they give it to you at the hospital?

— No, no. Bono bought it.

— Bono? Which Bono?

— There is only one Bono. Bono Nagesia.

— Where did you get him?

— He came. Listen, if there is a real human being in Seora, it is Bono. We are all animals. It's good that the master beat me and made me crooked. What should he do with an animal but beat it? Bono is human and we are all animals. This is the thing.

— Shut up, people will hear.

— What do you mean "people will hear"? Everybody knows this.

— Where did you find him?

— They put me in hospital. Bhuneswar, Jhari Munar and Jakan were gassing away outside the hospital. They are thinking that I will die. There's a truck waiting outside the hospital. The driver is drinking tea. What a surprise! Who gets out of the truck? Our Bono.

— O Lord Mahabir the great. What an astonishing thing! We had taken it for granted that the bastard was dead. No, no, the son of a bitch is not dead. He asked Bhuneswar and the others, What are you doing here? You bond workers of Munabar Chandela, why are you here? How very well he speaks now, eh.

— How does he look?

— Different. A red and blue shirt on his back, a band around his head, and a drum around his neck.

— Why?

— He travels about in far market towns, gets people together with his drum, and tells stories as he sings. I feel amazed to think where he learnt stories, and where he learnt to sing. He sits on a truck if he gets one.

— Really amazing stuff.

— After Seora he has really been around. He went to Ramgarh at the time of the famine. Someone gave him that shirt there.

— You saw yourself?

— I did.

— I can't believe this.

— Do you think I believed it? I opened my eyes in hospital and saw Bono standing. Then I thought, dear oh dear! Bono is dead, and so am I. No one gave him a proper funeral so he's wandering about as a demon and a ghost, and he has come to take me. But he said to me, You asshole bondsslave! He put you in the shafts instead of a beast and you pulled the cart? Then I realized that it was truly our Bono.

— His wife, Dhano, aunt?

— They are all digging a pond in Boroto.

— What, Bono is getting a pond dug?

— Don't talk nonsense like townfolk, Douloti's mother. There is a huge mission at Boroto. The Father there is having a big pond cut after the famine. Bono's wife and they are doing the digging work. Bono is wandering in the market towns. He's right. He's seen the world. How brave he is. Not an animal like us.

— He gave you this blanket?

— Bono gave it to me. Gave it to me one day in hospital. He said, They gave it to me at the Mission, I give it to you, don't sell it, wear it.

— Nice blanket. Keeps the cold out.

— Douloti is wearing a nice cloth?

— I'll tell you everything.

— What, wife?

Crook's throat is dry. What will the wife say? What will he hear? When he's not home, where does his daughter get a good cloth? They beat up the father and sent him to hospital. Did the master abduct the girl? Munabar never does such a thing. His lust

is for mature women, after all. His children are born in the houses of Mukami Dusadin and Rajbi Dhobin. Those boys are also Munabar's bonded laborers. Did Munabar lose his mind over Douloti?

Douloti's mother kept sighing. "What shall I tell you? You're not expected to live, I was half-crazed. I went to Tahar with the daughter."

— Why?

— Misraji [Mr. Misra] is a batambhon [brahman], a god. I went to take consecrated flowers and leaves from him.

— What happened there?

— Another god was sitting there. Some relative of Misraji's. Big strong man. The father of three sons. He felt a lot of pity for Douloti. What's the matter with you, how did it happen, asked the lot. How much talk, what can I tell you!

— You didn't say anything, did you?

— No no, what do you think? Munabar Singh always goes to Misraji. If I say a word, master will know everything.

— That's the thing.

— But that god fed Douloti a lot of puffed and stuffed bread, found out everything. The more he heard the more he shook his head, clicked his tongue, and said, What a pity, how unfortunate.

— O god! Douloti told everything?

— Told everything. Then the god bought us two pounds of flour. I tied up the flour at the end of my cloth and came home. Ate very well for two days.

— Very good. Then what happened?

— Let's say this was a month ago. Then Douloti was going to cut matting grass with Bhuneswar. There too the same god. Saw them.

— Oh my god!

— He was talking with Bhuneswar and looking at Douloti. Douloti came home running. That god gave Bhuneswar this cloth for Douloti. He said, Give her this. I feel sorry for the girl.

— So he gave. Why did Douloti wear that cloth?

— She always wears torn stuff. If she gets a new cloth can she be patient, or hold herself?

— Why did Douloti tell him everything? Is she a child? If she were married she would be a mother now. She told everything about the master, this will go to the master and he'll take off my hide.

— A god after all! She told him everything because she was afraid

— She was very wrong.

— The master was looking for you.

— I'll go, definitely.

Bhuneswar, Mohan Munar, Jakam, and Jhari came to Crook's place. They are very curious. Ganori Nagesia fell on his face as he tried to pull Munabar's cart. His body broke and he became Crook. He will never be able to stand straight in this life. They are all very sorry at his misfortune.

But this is also true that he has been in a hospital in a market town like Tohri. Electric light burns there. Buses run, the train stops, the market sits three times a week, the circus plays in a tent. Occasionally there are movies. Tohri is a little town. It is not Munabar's empire like Seora. Is it to be minimized that Ganori has stayed in such a place?

Everybody has arrived, Crook felt highly honored. Then tears sprang in his eyes.

— I will not be able to walk without a stick.

— Yes, yes, that is so.

— And will I be able to work?

— Some.

— What's in my future?

— Brother, don't go on about the future. The way you were hurt, you should be dead.

— It would have been better if I had died.

— Stop that noise. Now tell us, did they keep you in the bed where they put you, or did they put you on the floor?

— I stayed in bed. Nice mattress and pillow, and at night they would even put up a mosquito net.

— You couldn't walk. How did you go to the field to take a shit in the morning? Did they give you a toothbrushing twig in your hand, a mug to wash your ass, did they go with you?

At this Crook's face falls. He shakes his head in great sorrow. No no, why go to the field? There was an attached lavatory, there too he couldn't go at first. They would make him shit and piss in the kind of shiny pot or pan that you would find in the house of Master or Moneylender. Who has heard anything stranger? To piss and shit in pots and pans? Pots and pans that he'll never be able to eat off in his lifetime, to have to do his business in such costly things, this sorrow will remain in his mind.

— Did they give you enough to eat?

— Yes, yes, why not? They gave rice, lentils, vegetable, tea, wheaten bread. bread. milk.

- You lived well.
- The hospital is a good place?
- It's good. But there's one problem. They won't let you smoke and they won't let you spit on the floor.
- You can't have everything.
- Now tell me your news.
- We too have news.
- What news?

— Let uncle Bhuneswar speak!

Bhuneswar loves to speak properly. Now he amazed Crook and told him a fairy tale. At the end of this fairy tale Cinderella doesn't become queen, and the shepherd boy king. But in 1962 in the District of Palamu, the precinct of Tohri, the village of Seora, this event is a fairy tale.

Hanuman Misra, the priest at the Shiva temple in Tahar, is a man of name and substance. His relative is a compassionate god.

He felt much compassion when he saw Douloti. Fed on puffed and stuffed bread, Douloti told him everything. Hearing about Munabar Chandela that god said many times, "Oh! How long will the caste-Hindus continue this torture on outcastes and tribals? When will this regime of inequity come to an end?" It was that god who sent a new cloth for Douloti. A really fine cloth, fast color, ten arms length. Must have cost ten or fifteen rupees.

Munabar's son is a top officer of the district's Lac Development Corporation. He has worked it so well that he lives in his own house, and also picks the government's pocket and takes rent money. An important holy man came to Palamu from the Gandhi Mission from Delhi. Munabar's son came to Tahar with him. That compassionate god was sitting there then.

— Munabar's son Kamaljit Chandela?

— Yes yes, who else?

— Where was he going in Tahar?

— To Hanumanji's temple.

— Then what happened?

— The holy man from Delhi said, "Gandhi Mission will establish a center in Palamu. All oppression of outcastes and tribals will stop. Tahar Hanumanji will have to help him."

— But this is strange news, uncle Bhuneswar?

— Listen carefully. That compassionate god did not know Kamaljit Chandela. He said to the Delhi holy man, "these are just words, nothing will be done. This Palamu is a great scene of

oppression. Here all the brahmans are good and all the Rajputs are scoundrels. Real scoundrels."

— He said this, in front of Kamaljit?

— What else? Kamaljit said, "My lord, don't bring up caste."

The god said, "Why not? Munabar Chandela from Seora village was drawing his ox-cart with his bondslave Ganori Nagesia. The man is badly hurt, lying in hospital. Munabar is such a monster that he has made no provisions for Ganori's wife and daughter."

— What did Kamaljit say?

— He was very angry. He said, "Everything that you hear is not true. Low caste people habitually lie about the upper castes."

— Lies?

— Listen, all the shopkeepers at the Tahar temple said, "No, no, this is absolutely true. Ganori Nagesia is lying in hospital, go and see."

— They didn't come to the hospital, did they?

— No no. Then there was a fight between the Delhi holy man and Hanumanji from Tahar. I was in the crowd. When I went to see you, I would sit in the temple courtyard. I sat and saw the fun.

Bhuneswar had seen everything and told Crook everything with many hand movements. A true fairy tale.

— The Delhi holy man said, "I'll go to Seora. I will see for myself if the high caste landowner-moneylender oppresses the outcaste tribal or not."

— Hanumanji said, "This is the townsman's bluster. If you go to see Seora you will stay in Munabar Chandela's house, there you'll be fed and served, and you'll see the suffering poor. I've seen many holy men like that."

— I'm not such a holy man.

— Where will you stay?

— I'll stay in the outcastes' slum in Seora. If the incident is true, I'll sit in prayer with that proprietor and those bonded workers. For seven days we will praise Rama. The name of Rama cleanses the soul. Gandhi took the name of Rama to the very end.

— Gandhi was truly a great soul, he called the outcastes God's children [harijan]. He also thought about their welfare. But his work was all wrong.

— How?

— He went to the infidel country England, and in Africa during the Boer War he also carried infidel corpses. Should one do such things?

— Is this all wrong?  
 — Sure it's wrong. He died so terribly because he made these mistakes. He did not get a house in old age, served by his son, cared for by his wife. Finally he died dreadfully.  
 — This you're not saying right. He tried to end the caste system and all these differences.  
 — The caste system and its differences are rules. You are taking the name of Rama the king of the Raghus, but didn't he kill Shambuk? Shambuk was a Shudra. He killed him after all. Caste differences, untouchability—these are God's rules. You can pray, you can praise Rama, but this will not change. Proprietor—bond laborer—caste difference. Everything will be as before. Delhi's rules will not work in Palamu.

— Then what is to be done?  
 — These untouchable tribals are great sinners. Give the money for a grand penance festival in my temple, everything will be all right.  
 — How?  
 — Well, first you have to raise the cry that the Seora bond laborers are mortal sinners and great sins are happening because of their sinfulness.  
 — Is that possible?  
 — Why not, trust me, everything can happen. If I set up a penance festival in Seora, then Munabar Chandela will raise and give money. The untouchables will surely bring rice and molasses, and the Ahirs—the dairy castes—will give milk and butter.

— But this is exploiting the poor.  
 — The untouchables' back will be broken. They will no longer say to the master, "You terrorize us." They will bear everything in silence. The strong oppresses, the weak suffers, this after all is the rule. Are you trying to overturn this working rule?  
 At this the Delhi holy man covered his ears. Then Munabar's son came to Seora Village with that holy man. The Delhi holy man did as he said. He stayed a week in Rajbi the washerwoman's yard. A marquee was set up.

Hearing all this Crook said, "What a lot of fun in the village, and I couldn't see a thing."  
 Jhari said, "Brother, it was all because of you. If you hadn't become Munabar's ox and pulled his cart, you wouldn't have been hurt. You were hurt, went to hospital, so word got around." Then hearing all the Delhi holy man sat in Seora village.

So for seven days Rama's name was sung under the marquee. The holy man sang, spun thread on a wheel, and explained good things to everyone. You are not untouchable. You, me, Munabar Chandela, are offspring of the same mother.

Hearing all this the washerwoman Rajbi said, "How can that be, Sadhuji [Mr. Holy Man]?"

— Yes, sister, quite true.  
 — Why, what happened?  
 — We are all offspring of the same mother.  
 — No Sadhuji, untrue untrue.  
 — Why?  
 — If the offspring of the same mother, we are all brothers and sisters, yes?  
 — Should be.  
 — But Munabar doesn't know that. Munabar's children in my room, Munabar's children in Mukami Dusadin's place as well, and all these boys are bonded labor. Tell me how this can be.  
 — Sister, not that kind of mother, Mother India.

— Who is that?

— Our country, India.

— This is our country?

— Of course.

— Oh Sadhuji, my place is Seora village. What do you call a country? I know *tahsil* [a pre-independence revenue-collecting unit], I know station, I don't know country. India is not the country.  
 — Hey, you are all independent India's free people, do you understand?

— No, Sadhuji.

Bhuneswar and the others look around and shut up. Jhari says to Rajbi, "Over the hill, you're old now, making like a tease. Listen to everything Sadhuji says. They will never understand what we say, and we will never understand what they say."

Rama's praise was sung for seven days. And all the villagers ate rice-and-lentils at Sadhuji's expense for seven days.

Meanwhile Munabar's son explained many things to his father: "Pa! It's not good that you are still using the old rules with the kamiyas."

— So you'll say. You are a government officer, I am a householder, a cattleman.

— Look, this man has come from Delhi. If the newspapers print stuff with your name and my name our name will be ruined.

- How?
- Listen, the Patna newspapers will bring out that the officer's father terrorizes his kamiyas. If some scoundrel raises questions in the State Assembly about this, then there will be an uproar. The greatest problem is *Father Bomfuller of the Mission*. He is collecting information about kamiyas, touring the district, do you understand? You understand nothing.
- Munabar is respectful toward his officer son, speaks in a soft voice.
- Son, who is Bomfuller?
- The *Mission Father*.
- What's that to me?
- How to explain? If he makes a report, everyone will accept it.
- Look! The land is forever. Offsuri is wage-work. I've never worked for a wage. You as an offsuri, do you live well? When your mother goes to the field with her mug, two maids go with her and pull her up when she's finished, she is so heavy. Your wife is thin as a rail, like the wind can blow her away.
- Pa, are these useful topics?
- I still drink and digest three quarts of milk. You can't even drink a quart. Well, you strayed with your mother's people and got learning, you've forgotten country ways. Your father did something to a kamiya, and you bring this Delhi Sadhuji to the village. Listen son! don't let the West Wind into your home. When that wind rises, you have to keep your windows shut.
- You won't understand.
- Munabar kept shaking his head. "You have to keep your windows shut when the West Wind rises. Otherwise straw and chaff blow in and destroy order." How will Kamaljit understand this? "Look son! When you were a little baby, India was not yet independent. I lived then in Ranchi. I lived in town, and traveled to the areas. I reclaimed jungle areas and gave the tribals wages in those areas. Then the police came from the station and took away Dudharam Misra. A young boy, his mother's darling, he went to fight the British."
- I've heard all this.
- So hear again. He came to the village, and brought in the West Wind! All kinds of killer thoughts came blowing in the wind like the straw blowing in.
- The West Wind entered the jungle district.

— Sure. The tribals started doing Satyagraha as well. Salt wages are not enough, give us money. Give us a share of the produce of the ground we till. There was a lot of trouble with that, I remember very clearly. What a West Wind, O god! It took a long time to bring the tribals under control. Bono Nagesia also came as the West Wind into this village, he's out and now the village is peaceful. Now you my son bring the West Wind into the village! Now let's see what happens. It's best to go by set rules. Rule breaking is not good.

— What will happen Pa? Sadhuji stayed seven days, Rama's praise was sung. You gave support, I gave support. Now there will be no more trouble.

Crook heard all this with great care. Then said, "Now I've heard it all, fellows. But what's the good for me? My body is broken up. Shall I be able to work like before? I am startled if a human shadow falls on the yard. I think that the boss has sent a trooper or a constable to catch me."

— Don't think so much.

— Thoughts come.

— Your wife is now doing worship like the bosses. She seems to have learned the gods.

Crook's wife said, "Why not? When I can weave I can sell. When I can't, I starve. Then I say, today I have to worship Samkatnarayan, the troubleshooting god, today I have to starve."

— What god is Samkatnarayan?

— Do I know? There's a new tax-collector at the market. He is organizing a worship-service for Samkatnarayan every Friday.

Bhuneswar said, "How much cash he's pulling in! Raising it at the market, money at the ceremony, the swine's looks have changed totally."

— Should we set up a worship ceremony?

Jhari is young, his way of talking is sharp. He beat his belly and said, "Yeah, great idea. Our bellies are called Samkatnarayan. Feed it. The gods will be pleased."

Bhuneswar said, "That's true too. What a pissant thing the Delhi Sadhuji did. He fed us a lot for seven days. We got used to eating full meals. Then he split. Now it takes time to lose the habit. Before it wasn't so hard to go hungry. Now it's very painful."

Jhari said, "He used to say Rama Rama, and he did a Rama-pissant thing. However, we ate a lot."

One day Samkatnarayan took human form and came to

Ganori Nagesia's shack. That brahman god, Hanuman Misra's relative. A shortish man, very strong, very dark. Iron-grey hair cut short, also a long tail of hair in back. No eyelids to speak of. Shining and piercing his glance.

— My name is Paramananda Mishir [a variant of Misra]. You are Ganori Nagesia? You were in hospital all this while?

— Yes, god, at your feet, god.

Not touching him Ganori bowed to the ground. Didn't ask the god to sit. He's nervous. Something is moving in his belly, sweat prickles his skin. Never has such a thing happened to him. Never has a Paramananda Mishir stood in the yard of a Crook Nagesia in Palamu district.

If it had happened even once before, then Crook Nagesia would have known what to do in such a situation. He doesn't know. So he leans on his stick, mutters "at your feet, god," stumbles down to bow, and then just stands.

### III

Paramananda Mishir did not sit down on the rush mat in Crook's shack. He said, "There's no fault in the earth as seat. The earth is everyone's mother. Our birth and our life are on this soil." He sat under the barren olive tree in the courtyard. He said, "Sit, I have to talk to you."

— No, god. I will be in the wrong.

— There will be no wrong.

— The boss will be angry.

— Your boss is Rajput. I am a brahman. What I say is right.

— It hurts me to sit on the ground.

— Sit on the stoop. Listen, Ganori. How many years have you been Munabar Singh Chandela's kamiya?

— A long time.

— How long?

— I can't reckon.

— Was Douloti born then?

— Yes, Douloti was tiny then.

— How old is she?

— When there was independence for you and the bosses, the boss fed everyone puffed bread and stuffed bread, had a big show, went to town. Douloti was born the year after that. The paddy was ripe then.

— How much did you take?

— Three hundred rupees.

— Did you give a thumbprint?

— Yes, god.

— Can you walk?

— Yes, god.

— Walk with me a bit?

— Where will I go?

— I have to talk.

Paramananda walked ahead, Crook behind. All the villagers watched amazed. Such a thing had never happened in this village, in the district of Palamu. A brahman is calling forth a Nagesia. Paramananda said, "Ganori! I will go with you to your master and repay the money."

— What did you say, god?

— Repay the money.

— I am Crook Nagesia, god, untouchable, very poor, god. I eat rice only on feast days.

— Hey! What happened?

— I never harmed you, god.

— What are you talking about?

— I am not worth your fun.

— I don't make fun.

— Then why are you wanting to give money? Three hundred rupees? Hey, after harvesting for a month the Parhaiyas had wanted three rupees wage, the boss shot them. Who gives whom three hundred rupees, god? This is not a joking matter.

— Listen fellow, I have more to say.

— What, god? If you give him money, I will be your kamiya, no? How? By what labor will I repay the loan? My body has become spoilt now.

— Eh! I see he doesn't understand.

— You are an outsider, and you will leave. How will I go to foreign parts with you? I don't have the courage to go away either. Only Bono Nagesia has the courage among us. He is not here, he has left.

Then Paramananda roared at him, "Idiot, pig, old goat! Who wants to make you kamiya? Do I believe in bonded labor?

I really dislike bonded labor

I am compassionate, most compassionate.

My forefathers left kamiyas.

I have freed them  
 I am compassionate after all, most compassionate  
 I have farm property in Joukhan village  
 I have given everything to my wife and children  
 I am compassionate, carrying money bags  
 I free kamiyas  
 In the present age the brahman is the liberator of the  
 untouchable  
 I am that brahman, Samkatnatayan."

Crook didn't understand anything. He wept himself into a state. Then what Paramananda said was most astonishing. No one has ever heard such a thing except in old mothers' tales. Paramananda said, "I have got down to this work as the god Narayana, I must have a goddess Lakshmi with me. I will marry your daughter Douloti."

Hearing this, Crook said, "O Rama, I'm caught by a madman"—and started to run with his crooked body.

How can he keep up running with Paramananda? These events of Crook's life are like stories after all. He caught up with Crook. Crook said, "Let me go, god, let me go home."

— Why you dumb beast?

Paramananda gripped Crook hard. Crook filled the sky with his screams, "Truth is being destroyed, the Law is being destroyed! This brahman, this god, is holding me, please! He must be plumb crazy."

— You ignorant fool, why are you screaming?

— Oh Rama, oh god!

Crook screamed loudly indeed. He had eaten well for some months at the hospital, his body was strong. And, he was most nervous at Paramananda's chatter. Fear for his life made his voice strong.

Both of them were shouting away, when a third voice shouted even more loudly, "Hey! What's this?" Munabar Chandela. Munabar never walks alone on the village paths before sundown. His status is hurt if people don't run before and behind him. After dark he walks alone. Munabar's people separated the two.

— What's up, Ganori?

— Boss! This god . . . Crook started sobbing loudly, "This god is saying, he'll end my bonded labor with money, he's saying, he'll marry Douloti."

— What?

— Yes.

Munabar then took a good look. After that, he made Crook totally nervous.

— It's Paramananda Misra from Joukhan, no? Releases fathers of daughters from bonded labor, marries the daughters.

Munabar roared with laughter, "Hey! What fun talk! Come come, god, come. You are the son-in-law of the village, let me give you the wherewithals, you brahman cook your meal clean [according to caste laws], be served. Will the marriage take place in my residence?"

Paramananda started chewing betel nuts with a loud noise.

He said nothing. Munabar said, "Crook, go home lad. I'll talk to the god."

Crook said, "I'll be off, boss."

— Go without fear. This god plays this game from village to village. He has so many wives, and he has built so many nice homes and kept them in such happiness.

Crook returned to his place.

Paramananda and Munabar must have talked at length. And he must have been served and fed at his house, since he didn't turn up at all in the afternoon. Late in the afternoon Munabar's man came to call Crook.

Munabar and Paramananda were sitting in the office-room. Munabar said without preamble, "This god has ended your bonded labor with the payment of three hundred rupees. You took three hundred rupees thirteen years ago. You don't have to hear how much it had become with the increase of interest. I could have made you work another thirteen years with no trouble at all.

But that I can't do, my body is made of compassion.

And! God has made my body and mind

With all the world's compassionate and kind cream-double cream and caramel scrapings

Each year on the day of Rama's celebration

I cannot not give a whole rupee to the poor,

I must, I must, a body made of compassion!

My body is made of compassion, otherwise just see,

Ganori Bhuyian from Seora village,

Yes, Yes, he too is a Ganori, he too is a Ganori—

Took five hundred rupees for his own wedding

From Joala Pandey

Oh dear, he's doing bonded labor for thirty-eight years Ganori

is now seventy-eight—

Bond-labor loans are the troops of blood-seedino



One rupee gives birth to thousands of rupees.  
 The debt won't be repaid—  
 Ganori will put that debt on his son's shoulders  
 And blow death's bugle—tara ra, tara ra, tara ra.

Do you know Pujari Bhuiyan from Kelkar Village?  
 Took seventy rupees from Bholu Sau  
 To fill his belly, burning up with belly-fire  
 Boom, that money is not repaid in twenty years  
 Will it be repaid in the coming twenty years?  
 Bond-labor loans are surely the troops of blood-seeding  
 One rupee gives birth to thousands of rupees  
 The debt won't be repaid—  
 Even Piyari's brother has become Bholu Sau's kamiya.  
 Tapeswar Manjhi from Simri Village is a Dusad by birth  
 Baram Pandit loaned him eighty rupees  
 Tapeswar was fifteen then  
 And when his father was sick Baram Pandit loaned him  
 money, boom!

For twenty-five years Tapeswar gives free bonded labor  
 Giving and giving—giving and giving—  
 Tapeswar's age? About forty.  
 Bond-labor loans are, yes, the troops of blood-seeding,  
 Increases by the thousands.  
 I could make you toil a much longer time  
 As long as you live, I can keep you as my kamiya.  
 Bond-labor loans never end  
 But, didn't I say it?  
 Did He make me with all the last drops  
 Of the world's compassionate and kind cream—double cream  
 and caramel scrapings?  
 I just can't be cruel and dispassionate.  
 In mango season I must give a mango to a beggar—  
 I throw in a bit of corn and millet with your water for your  
 breakfast and—  
 I find myself giving you water from the Panchayati well—  
 It is compassion and empathy that have brought me to this  
 pass—  
 If it were a market town—  
 They would name a street after me—a street.  
 But Crook! Listen to everything the god says. He is not an

ordinary man. Hanumanji is his relative; if you don't obey this man he'll be angry. And if Hanumanji is angry even the landed Rajputs are scared. And you only a Nagesia!"

Crook said, "Yes, sir."  
 What word, what he should listen to, he didn't think at all. He said "yes" to whatever he heard. Because if the Master says something the machine in Crook's head stops working out of fear. He hears the Master's bellows, but grasps nothing. To say "Yes Sir" to the proprietor is a very long-standing habit. Why every-one—the people in the office-room, Munabar, Paramananda—laughed loud as soon as he said "Yes Sir," this Crook didn't understand at all. He only saw that Paramananda carelessly took out a wad of bank notes and Munabar, counting them, said, "I'll get my wool jacket made now."

Inside Munabar's safe were many many labor bonds bound in red baize. Taking Crook's bond receipt he threw it in Crook's direction. And said, "What will you eat now?"

Crook held up his palm and inclined his head and thus explained his helplessness. "What will you eat now?" is not a question one puts to Crook Nagesias, this Munabar doesn't know. Crooks don't eat, they are used to not eating. Yet their hunger doesn't disappear, this is the problem.

And thus a strange fairy tale was created. How the brahman Paramananda tried to show compassion to Crook Nagesia the kamiya. And what compassion in Munabar Chandela. The kingdom of Heaven descended on this sinful earth, on this cursed jungle district Palamu. Where the human beings, who are Nagesia-Parhaia-Oraon, Munda, Bhuyian-Dusad-Ganju-Dhobi-Chamar by birth, are all people who are enslaved by their burning hunger at very low wages, for very little grain, by the so-called upper castes. And the sociologists travel around Palamu and write in their files, every sonofabitch is becoming kamiya because of weddings-funerals-religious ceremonies. That the peasant is becoming the Kulak's kamiya, this the sociologists avoid rather skillfully.

These savants want government support

The government wants the Kulak's support  
 Land-lender, this new agri-capitalist caste

This caste is created by the independent government of India  
 The government wants the support of the Kulak and the agri-capitalist

Because of nothing, nothing, nothing

Bhilai-Bokaro-Jamshedpur  
 Plowed land supplies tax-revenue  
 These are the king-emperors of that land.  
 And Kulak, agri-capitalist, the king-emperors  
 Want free labor, free land—

So they recruit kamiya-seokia-haroaha

One musn't know this, or write this, because—

Everything would have remained a fairy tale, but the conclusion of the fairy tale is life, bloody, pain-filled life.

So Paramananda took away Crook's fourteen-year-old daughter Douloti one day. Crook protested greatly. But Munabar said with menace, "Didn't he give you money? Didn't he make you free?"

— Why will I give my daughter, my lord?

— It's your great good luck that he said he'll marry your daughter.

— If he hadn't said anything but I'm taking her away to make her a kamiya?

Crook came back. Douloti understood nothing. When does a brahman marry a Nagesia girl? Bhuneswar's wife said, "I knew there was some problem the moment he gave cloth and flour."

All the women crowded into Douloti's house, the men were talking in the yard.

Everyone shook their heads repeatedly. No, no one had ever heard such a thing. There is some other thing here, some profound conspiracy of the Master society. They'll be greatly relieved to know what the conspiracy is, Crook will go to cut grass, Crook's wife will go to pick up the fallen grain.

Bhuneswar said, "Send news to your older son."

Crook shook his head. One of the many reasons he took the three hundred rupees was this son's wedding. He said, "Older or younger, I have the one son. Where is he? Does he ever ask for our news? He doesn't even live in Lathar any more, I don't know where he is."

— He says he'll marry, he won't keep caste. He has a grown son at home. What's up?

Of course Jhari said, "Jokhan is not that far. Where will he go with her? We'll certainly go get news."

Douloti and her mother were two stones clasping each other. The mother was running her hand gently and constantly over her daughter's body. A split broken hand. Running her fingers she was

weeping and humming, What is this, my mother, I never heard such a thing? The Boss-moneylender always takes away our daughters-in-law from field and barn. When does a brahman marry a daughter of ours? They take them to bed and that with the lamp snuffed out. It'll be a sin if they see the face. Marriage! This is a great wonder, my mother!

Douloti put on her whole cloth. Paramananda said, "You don't have to take your torn rags and remnants. I will buy you everything. Leave that stuff behind."

Leaving everything behind, Douloti left Seora village behind Paramananda. What on earth happened? Fairy tale.

Washerwoman Rajbi pulled on her water-pipe and said, "You can take a look at his eyes and see that the guy's a devil. We will surely know what his trick is."

Mukami Dusadin said, "Who knows what Douloti ate, what she rubbed on her body. Her looks were so lusty, that's why she caught his eye. When the bloom comes to a girl of our kind the vultures will surely fly overhead. I've seen so much."

#### IV

Douloti's legs hurt with walking. As much curiosity as fear. But she is a quiet girl. She sits under a tree and rests a bit. Paramananda had opened his bundle and given her a paper bag of molasses candy and sun-dried rice.

Douloti drank water at the tea-shop when she got to the bus route. Paramananda drank tea.

This is Douloti's first experience of going somewhere by bus. She became drowsy as she kept vomiting with the stink of diesel. Then they left Tohri bus junction and got off at a market town. Paramananda had undoubtedly been to that place many times. Since he seemed to have a room already rented in this very place, in Madhpura, for Douloti. He unlocked the door, and threw down a mat on the floor. He said, Lie down a bit. You'll feel better. Douloti lies down and immediately goes to sleep. She sleeps a lot. She awoke after dark. Paramananda said, "Go—take a piss there, wash your face and hands."

Douloti had never seen such an arrangement for urinating and defecating. A courtyard with a very high wall, in a corner a place for relieving yourself, that too surrounded by a tin wall. Not a kitchen, not a stoop. On one side of the yard a wall and in the

room rope and bucket. The room was middle-sized.

Douloti came back and sat down in the room. Paramananda has lit a paraffin lamp. He said, "I've kept food in a clay bowl in that corner, eat. Drink some water. Sleep again. I'll lock the door and go out for a bit."

Paramananda left. How closed, how pressing-in. In a big clay bowl some puffed bread-vegetables-sweet balls. Douloti's eyes were bursting with tears. Her father, her mother, had never eaten such good food. But of course you can no longer compare Douloti to them. Douloti is going to be the bride of a brahman god.

It's hard to understand this god's plans. Will he keep Douloti here after marriage? In this kind of room with brick walls all around and clay tiles on the roof? Douloti's own place is much better. You can see trees and sky if you stand at its door. The latrine is by the door. O how much better it is to "go" in the fields. When one of Douloti's uncles went to the field as a child, a tiger took him. Douloti has seen wolf, hyena, and fox. She has never seen a tiger.

When she was a child and Mother was cross, Mother would say, "Come, I'll put you in the tiger's hole."

Douloti's father has seen tigers many times. And what does great-uncle Bhuneswar say? He says, "Even if you haven't seen the tiger, the tiger has certainly seen you."

When she got up the next morning she realized that the god had slept in the bed as well. But he hadn't touched her. After a while a one-eyed man came. To talk to Paramananda.

— Got only one this time Mishirji?

— Yes.

— Someone's wife?

— No no, unmarried, and—Paramananda winked—still a virgin.

— What are you saying?

— Listen, I'm telling the truth.

— With you here she remained a virgin?

— What can I do, fellow? I've taken cash.

— Whose?

— Mr. Babu Latia's.

— Yes, yes, Latiaji has been ordering for some time, yes, untouchable girl wanted virgin wanted. True he spoke to me too, but a girl in full bloom, and yet still a virgin, how can one get everything? They are all married in childhood and as soon as they

are a little grown the man at home and the boss-moneylender outside—do they let them stay virgin? I was in a real bind.

— I heard that.

— Then Latiaji sought you out?

— Yes yes.

— What did you say?

— Look, I too am "in a bind," but I'm not the person who gives up, saying "I'm having trouble." The harder the job, the greater my stubbornness to do it. Staying on the lookout I found the real thing.

— Not all that eye-catching though.

— Let Latiaji's need be fulfilled. Rampiyari will make her eye-catching.

— What's the use of eye-catching?

— Latiaji's . . . the story of that girl . . .

— Who? Hey, why bring that up?

— What Latiaji does with those girls. Even an elephant would die to suffer such manhood.

— These are the Mahatma's children of God [harijan]. Hard-working people. They can lift a forty-pound bag of paddy.

— Well, see. You are a fortunate man.

— A male is a lion. He makes his own fortune. If I sit around, how will I eat?

— You have set up a great bond labor trade. You know where a kamiya has a virgin daughter in full bloom, which girl is a virgin. There will be a change of government and the police will get you.

— Who will get me brother? The police officer, the railway inspector, who can stay away from Rampiyari's house?

— That's true too.

— Now I must do a little shopping. I must buy some clothes for the girl. Such a waste of money. But there's Latiaji, there's the railway contractor babu, there are the Punjabis of the bus depot—must buy clothes, soap, hair oil.

— This too I really want to know.

— What?

— Will you take payment?

— Sure thing. A thousand times. My right.

— What pays for their clothing, food, cosmetics, medical help?

— What do you do?

— I go to Tohri, at the end of the month I make my reckon-

ings and take two rupees, one rupee, half a rupee from everyone, whatever they owe, that's it. Whatever is left over, that's theirs.

- They'll eat, pay the rent, everything?
- I pay the rent after all. They eat at their own expense.
- You have a cycle-rickshaw business in Dhanbad, you've kept to the same rules in this work too? But these are my bonded laborers and my slaves. The house is mine, the food costs are mine. If you can seduce your client into giving you the money for clothes and cosmetics, all the better. If not, borrow. And that loan you'll add to the principal? Is that what you're getting at?
- So should I give charity?
- Paramanandaji, you'll surely get the Padmasri.
- Yes? What is that?
- A rare thing.
- What?
- A government title. Talented people get it.
- Who knows about us, tell me? In this jungle area, procuring goods on foot and running a shop, how hard that is—how hard and painful it is, how can I make people understand? The government will surely know. And then they will make you Padmasri as well. Well, I must go. In Rama's name, Paramanandaji. God keep you.

- I'll visit you one day. I'll come and see you in Tohri.
- Do.

This conversation takes place in front of Douloti and she doesn't understand a bit of it, but some perhaps she grasps. What she doesn't understand makes her afraid, but also what she does.

The man leaves. Almost immediately a dreadful, hugely fat woman enters. She wears a printed sari and, Douloti is astonished to see, she is wearing anklets as well as shoes.

- At your feet, god.
- Come, Rampiyari.
- When will you leave?
- Late afternoon.
- It seemed like Kishanji had come?
- Yes yes. Bastard devil, he smells it out, and immediately comes along. Now that he's been here, I know what he'll do. As long as he sees the goods are drawing customers, he'll buzz like a dung-fly and try to spoil trade.
- Don't worry, I am here.
- I rely on you.

- So I'm off now. I'll go by the market.
- Go. And look here, don't clean me out with food bills. The market is bad, do you understand?

— Whatever you say. If you like I'll feed them air. One can get that free and without cost.

- Listen sweetie, that's not what I said.

— So how much more will I have to understand, tell me that? I am not seeing you for the first time today, and I've never heard you say the market is good. Even now a rupee's worth of squash and eggplants fill a small sack in Madhpura. So many people will eat, you won't buy five rupees' worth? Your look is such that you buy the calf, in five years she is an old cow, barren. And no care, no medicine in ill-health, so they die quick. Then you weep and wail, and say what a pity.

- Look, do what you think is right.

— How about what I told you?

- What?

— The nose ring?

— Oh ho! I forgot to bring that even this time.

— You haven't forgotten, why tell a lie? OK. Words lead to words, so I'm off. Go to Tohri and take a look at Kishanji's whorehouse. Brickbuilt rooms, two wells, rates off for those who have no work, a different enterprise.

- Let him be.

— And you know what he says! Now everybody does unine, in Dhanbad my cycle-rickshaw drivers do unine—so these people need a little comfort when work is over, they must have something in hand. If I don't think of this, they too will set up a unine.

— Yes, yes, everyone has made unines, extorted rights, now these people are left.

- I'm off, god.

— The Tohri whorehouse, the Dhanbad cycle-rickshaws, the Dhanbad house, are all his father-in-law's gift. He has no children, and therefore no compassion or kindness. His case is different.

Rampiyari really got up this time, she's so fat that it's very hard for her to get up. Douloti smiled and looked away. Rampiyari said, Smiling? Smile now. I'm getting so fat everyone laughs. My body is half water.

- Rampiyari left.

Paramananda went out. When he returned, he had a colored

tin box in his hand. Lowering the box on the floor he said, "Take a look."

— Yeh, cutthroat prices.  
 — Two new saris. One printed, one *silk* and cotton mixed. Underskirt, blouse, red dye for the feet, kohl, hair ribbon, comb and mirror, zinc bangle and anklet, bead necklace, glass earrings, dots for the forehead. One soap. One washcloth.

— All this is mine?  
 — Everything yours. Use this soap and have a bath. Wash out the cloth you're wearing. Put on this underskirt and this printed sari after your bath. When your hair dries oil it and dress it.

Much sorrow can be forgotten if so many new things are received. Douloti had her bath, dried her hair and then rubbed oil into her hair and braided it. She darkened her eyes, dotted her forehead.

A man brought in rice-and-vegetables, unsweetened yogurt. Eating her fill, Douloti thought that what was happening was all a dream. Rice is something to be eaten on feast days. At Karam Puja, at Sohrai, and at the Festival of Lights. Douloti's kind eats rice on these few days of the year. Rice is a luxury you get in dreams.

After she finished the rice, the warmth of the rice poured sleep all over her limbs. This is the last sleep of Douloti's life that will not be nightmare-ridden, but Douloti doesn't know that yet. Paramananda awakened her in the afternoon. "Not here, we'll have to go somewhere else."

— Where, god?  
 — To another place.  
 — By bus?  
 — No no, close by.

The man has given her food and clothing, some trinkets. Fed her a lot, yet hasn't touched her. Douloti will be married to him as well. So Douloti says as she walks with her tin box on her head, "Going for marriage?"

— Yes, yes, that's it.  
 — To another place?

Why does she chatter so much? She messed up my reckoning. I gave three hundred rupees to Munabar, fifty for her clothes et cetera? Or fifty-two? The box... how costly everything has become! Chattering away they reached a strange house, a long alleyway with a very high wall lined on one side by a row of

Rampiyari came forward, Let's go Douloti. I am walking in and out now since when.

Paramananda said, Go with her. She will dress you. Dress her nicely, hear?

Rampiyari sat her down in a room. Closed the door from inside. Then said, "Put down your box. Sit on the bed. Eh, dusty feet!"

Opened the door and took her to the wellside. Douloti washed her hands-feet-face. Then Rampiyari said, "You have taken a bath with soap, no?"

— I have.

— All the better. Came from home, wild smell in your body, why would the god be pleased?

Rampiyari sighed. Then said, "Take your hair down, I'll put it up nicely."

Her hair was gathered up in a knot, some white stuff was rubbed on her face, on her hands, and feet designs with red dye, finally that fine sari, fine blouse. After her toilette, Rampiyari gave a looking-glass in her hand. Douloti didn't know herself.

— Sit on the bed, drink this juice. Stay sitting. I'm closing the door.

— Don't shut it, I feel afraid.

— No, I'm not shutting it.

Still Rampiyari remained standing with the empty juice glass in her hand. Then she said suddenly, "Feel afraid. If you feel afraid, why did you come with him?"

Douloti didn't respond. Suddenly her blood seemed to tingle, then she felt weak. She lay down. What a big bed, what a soft mattress. Then the wedding will be here. The god must have gone to dress up as a bridegroom. Who knows how a man of such looks looks when he is dressed up as a bridegroom? Who will do the marrying? Will this Rampiyari sing the wedding songs? Does she really know the songs?

But her body is feeling dulled.

The door opened with a slam. Douloti wants to sit up in haste, but she can't. Who are these people?

A huge middle-aged man with sideburns. Paramananda with him. Three more men.

Paramananda said, "Take a look, Latiaji, village girl, Harijan, unmarried and is still a virgin."

— Virgin?

— See today, pay tomorrow. Everyone left. Latia closed the door. Then said, "Here, get up, take off your clothes."

Douloti tried to shout, fear choked her voice. The man pulled her up roughly. Then pulled off her sari. Trying to resist Douloti realized, her body was now very weak. Rampiyari had put something in her drink.

Douloti, Douloti the daughter of Ganori alias Crook Nagesia of Seora village seemed to look upon another Douloti, dressed up in a peacock-blue silk-cotton wedding sari, staring in such dread. Latia pulled off her sari, he has torn off her blouse. He has taken off his own top, is he going to be naked? Lips trembling, tears in her eyes, what is Douloti saying?

— No no lord, no no no lord, let me go lord—

Are the spectator Douloti and the tortured Douloti becoming one? \*

What is Latia doing now? What is this? The two Doulotis became one and a desperate girl's voice cracked out in terrible pain.

To keep his virility spirited and bestial, Latia takes *aswagandha* root at night, his sexual hunger is boundless. Douloti is bloodied many times all through the night. Finally her sobbing and entreaties could no longer be heard. But the "grunt grunt" of a rooting pig could be heard.

When Paramananda entered in the morning, Douloti was stretched out quite naked. Slack with no sleep... A completely naked Latia was sitting with a glass of tea in his hand. The door was open. Latia has a lot of money, he is a contractor. He runs up to Patna. This whorehouse is Rampiyari's house. There is no objection here to his sitting around naked. Here everybody fears him. Latia has behaved like this before. This way is natural for him.

Douloti was afraid of Latia's naturalness.

Paramananda has entered this room this way many a time. He has completed exchange with the rapist without glancing once at the violated, naked harijan woman's helpless body. This behavior is natural for him. \*

Douloti was afraid of Paramananda's naturalness.

Paramananda threw some betel nut into his mouth and said, "In the name of Rama, Latiaji, have you noticed what a cold wind is blowing since last night?"

— How will I get a feel of the cold, you fool? My body is hot with that native medicine. I will throw down even a she-elephant.

You are a scoundrel, you were destroying my manhood by feeding me roots and barks."

— Latiaji! Your manhood increases if you drink raw milk and the root of *aswagandha* at night.

— Let yours increase, motherfucker.

— Well, how was it? Didn't I give you the right goods?

— Yes, that you gave. Give me my shirt.

Latia threw a handful of bank notes at Paramananda. He said, "Tell Rampiyari, this girl is now mine. When I let her go she can take clients."

— Yes yes Latiaji, why not?

— Now send her to be cleaned up, have the room opened up. I'll sleep.

In unlimited boundless audacity Latia walked naked to sleep in the room reserved for the valued client. Paramananda took along his clothes.

Rampiyari entered. She sighed and said, "Get up, wrap up. Come have a bath. Your fathers! They blow me away. This animal says marriage, he'll marry a Dusad, Dhobi, Chamar, Parhaiya girl? Brahmans? Who burn harijans? They catch you to make you a kamiya... wrap up. I'll hold you. They catch you to make you a kamiya... now they'll eat the fruit of your work... why are you crying? Don't cry. They caught me one day too... come, hold me, walk. Later I'll teach you more. You won't be able to go out, you see. This is called bonded labor. I will teach you to live strategically like me. Come, won't you clean your teeth? Come."

Another girl, yet another girl—Rampiyari said, "Reoti, Somni. Look after this one. Let her have a bath, be clean, give her something to eat. I'm going to market. Latia being here means a lot of trouble. He'll eat meat and buttered flat bread."

Douloti said with great effort, "These are all whores?"

— Hey, you too are a whore now. Whore would be better. You are all that Paramananda's kamiya. \*

These are all Paramananda's kamiyas.

Douloti and Reoti and Somni

Field work, digging soil, cutting wells is work

This one doesn't do it, that one doesn't do it, the other one doesn't do it—

The boss has turned them into land \*

The boss plows and plows their land and raises the crop

They are all Paramananda's kamiya. \*

They are all some people's *maat*—  
 Near the foot of the Himalayas in Jaunnar-Bauar  
 They don't say *kamiya*, they are called *maat*  
 Tulsa and Bisla and Kamla  
 Kolta girls are some people's *maat*  
 Only field work and shoveling soil is work  
 This one doesn't do it, that one doesn't do it, the other doesn't  
 do it—  
 The boss has made them land  
 He plows and plows their bodies' land and raises a crop  
 They are all some people's *maat*.

## V

The harijan woman with the unwounded hymen does not remain a virgin after the first night, Latia's attraction for her is exhausted in a moment. In Douloti's case the attraction lasted three years.

In the very first month Douloti started retching. "Hey Rampiyari, give her medicine."

- Medicine?
  - Manhood increases with more care from the native doctor. And this broad seems even more fertile than Somni. She's made herself a belly. Dose her. Such kicks! everything will be spoilt.
  - Yes yes sir. But . . .
  - I know I know. I won't come for three or four days.
  - Give her a week off at least. Otherwise . . . we had such trouble with Kalabati. Giving Douloti medicine Rampiyari said, He's really taken by you.
  - Who?
  - Latiaji.
  - What has been taken?
  - His mind.
  - Mind?
- Douloti was most surprised. The lust-struck animal that digs and tears her every day, he has a mind?
- Yes yes. Otherwise whose belly hasn't he put two or three children into? To all the girls, to each and every one, yearly . . . he has a lot of strength. How much meat and butter he eats every day. He gave you a week off and Kalabati . . .
- What?

Rampiyari sighed and said, "He was much taken by Kalabati. She got a belly in two months. I dosed her. But the medicine was strong. On the third day passing blood like water. I ran to the medicine man. In the meantime Latia, dead drunk, entered Kalabati's room."

- Then?
- The girl died. The police came. Latiaji gave money and arranged everything.
- Died?
- Yes yes. Don't be afraid. Does everyone die?

Douloti said, "I'm not afraid."  
 Why should Douloti be afraid? If this is her life, she didn't choose this life. She didn't make the bondslavery system. People do not become *kamiyas* by choice.

In Andhra the people of Matangi, Jaggali, Malajangam, Mahar and other castes become Gothi. In Bihar Chamar, Nagesia, Pathaiya, Dusad become *Kamiya* or *Seekiya*. In Gujarat the Chalwaris, Naliyas, Thoris and others become Halpati. In Karnataka the low of birth become Jeetho, in Madhya Pradesh Haroyaha. In Orissa Gothi and in Rajasthan Sagri. The Chetty rayats of Tamil Nadu keep Bhumidases. In Uttar Pradesh the Bhumidas are called Maat or Khandit-Mundit or Sanjayat. The Bhumidases of the Laccadive Islands are Nadapu.

Different names in different regions.

The system is slavery.

The marginal, the harijan, the tribal is its sacrifice.

Who becomes a slave willingly? They do so under loan obligations. The landless agricultural worker or the small peasant becomes a slave. Not willingly, under loan pressure.

The social system that makes Crook Nagesia a *kamiya* is made by men. Therefore do Douloti, Somni, Reoti have to quench the hunger of male flesh. Otherwise Paramananda does not get money. Why should Douloti be afraid? She has understood now that this is natural. Now she has no fear, no sorrow, no desire. She might have died even with the medicine.

Douloti is shunted to Somni's room. Somni has aged a lot just at thirty. Now she has no clients. Occasionally someone from the village market. Even that just once in a long while. You have to get out if your earnings fall. Even in this life children are born. One gets out *with* them. But Somni is very intelligent. She knows she will go when her body is spent. So she has made herself use-



ful to Rampiyari in other ways.

Rampiyari is really bloated. Somni washes her dishes, cooks, washes her clothes, looks after her.

There are eleven women now. Each one is anxious to cook in her own way. But Paramananda does not approve. Rampiyari will cook and feed them.

Paramananda takes every bit of their earnings monthly. Doesn't give any money in the name of clothing, cosmetics, or medicine. Sometimes ten clients come daily as well. And in Madhpura there is a huge market twice a week, there are three fairs a year. At that time thirty clients enter daily in every woman's room.

The clients pay Rampiyari. Rampiyari counts out that money to the full to Paramananda. There cannot be a problem with the money. Paramananda is greatly cunning.

Rampiyari has spending money. She herself lends these women money for clothing or cosmetics. And she picks up the cash if there are extra clients.

Paramananda doesn't know this. His permanent residence is Madhpura. He says to the women, "Don't I know that human beings need clothing, cosmetics, the odd bit of betel leaf or tobacco? Borrow, borrow."

In the bondslavery trade, the bonded labor system, the recourse to loans is the general regulator.

If this were their homeplace, then the loan taken by the kamiya would have been added to the principal—the original loan that has made the man a kamiya.

Here too all the later loans are added to the principal, and the interest is compounded. The day the kamiya prostitute is evicted from this house, she starts repaying by begging or selling dried cow dung for fuel.

Douloti lay in a heap in Somni's room for seven days. Somni said, "Rampiyari too was a kamiya, but once she got a man to love."

— Here?

— Yes, yes here. Later that man got many votes and became a Mye-lay [MLA: Member of the Legislative Assembly], and ended Rampiyari's bonded labor account.

— Then?

— He gave Rampiyari money. Two hundred rupees! Rampiyari would have left with that money. But the god said, Stay. You look after this house.

— Where have you come from, Somni?

— They brought me from Barha village.

— Did they say they would marry you?

— Why should they? I was already married.

— Already married?

— Yes yes. And I have my man at home.

— How did you come?

— Was there another way? My man took two hundred rupees from him, to get land. Hoo, in a year it became four thousand rupees. Then the god said to my man, You won't be able to repay, you are a kamiya. Send your wife. Your debt will be repaid in five years, your wife will return home with money in hand. I kept my son with my husband and came here.

— And the boy?

— He is in Barha. The god has lots of land in Barha.

— How many children do you have here?

— Three.

Somni put her hand to her cheek and said, "See what a strange thing. I was married in childhood, and I stayed with my man for so long. I had only one son. And Latia made me the mother of three sons in a row."

— Those sons?

— They lie around in the marketplace. They beg. They don't let you live with your child, and clients come up to one month before birth. Then I can't for three months.

— Then?

— The god lends money.

— Doesn't he let you keep them?

— No no, would he? When I am burnt up, I go see them. Reoti's son too is Latia's son. And it was Latia's truck that hit him and crippled him. As a cripple he gets more begging. He got a shirt too.

— How long will you stay?

— Who knows. As long as it pleases the god.

— Then?

— Then I'll beg. There's nothing in my body anymore. Will I be able to work hard anymore? For four-five years thirty clients a day. I'll beg.

— Won't you return to your village?

— How will I return? My man has brought another wife and they are both the god's kamiya. If I go back, where will these boys

go? Why should my man rear Latia's sons? What would he feed them? Is there food in our land?

- No.
- Douloti shook her head. Then she said, "The townspeople eat a lot, many times."
- I want a lot to go to Barha.
- Go then.
- The god doesn't even feed us well. If I'd eaten well my body would have kept so much strength.
- Why did your man bring a wife?
- How could he have done without? There's housework. How can he do it alone after his own hard labor? And the son is what they call a halfwit. Not a sharp bright fellow.
- Doesn't the stepmother beat him?
- Oh sure, beats a lot.
- Somni frowned for a long time. Then she said, "Latia still likes you, I don't know for how long. The money he will give to Rampiyari. But he has a lot of money. He is a contractor man. Ask for a couple of rupees. Put a little aside from clients. Money is needed."

— Why?

— Otherwise you'll be like me.

Somni, thirty years old, laughed in the broken cackling voice of a seventy-year-old witch. And said, "The stepwife thrashes my man's son, the client's sons beg. I haven't a penny."

— You didn't put some aside?

— I used to, sure. I spent everything feeding Latia's boys. Now worse than a beggar.

Douloti closed her eyes. Lying in Somni's room she is sleepy all the time. She said in a drowsy voice, "Was there bondslavery before? Now that there are kamiyas everywhere?"

— The bosses keep kamiyas. And why not? The fields and gardens belong to them. Keep a kamiya, get all the work done for no more than a morning meal. The gormen [government] is theirs.

— Why is there so much shouting outside? Why is there a crowd?

— Who knows?

The empire of Rampiyari's usury is spread out beyond this house. She trots all over Madhpura and collects interest. Now she returned, put down her shopping and said, "A fighting crowd."

— What fight?

— Do I know?

Somni said, "Auntie, let's go and hear."

— Will you go?

— Why not? It's a circus.

— We'll cook up when we get back.

— Today is market day.

— Go then, let me rest a bit.

Somni returned most troubled from the meeting. "No no, this is not a good circus."

— What's the fight?

— Who knows? They are fighting some China.

— Whose fight?

— Someone called India, his. I didn't understand anything.

Rampiyari said, "Did you see Latia?"

— He is shouting the most.

— That is the contractors' fight. Come, make some tea. Have some yourselves, give me some.

— If there is a fight, I hear the prices will go up.

— Let them. Make some tea.

In the event Douloti gets more than seven days off. For Latia is the only man with many trucks. The regional Congress party leaders go around in trucks abusing the Chinese invasion of India. Latia is a highly trusted government contractor. All the bridges that he has built on the Kuruda, Seil, Kora, Rohini, the little rivers in the area, have collapsed about twice.

Latia leaves the scene of action with the money and finally another contractor builds the bridge.

By the same logic he builds roads and the office buildings of the Forestry Department. Nobody has yet been able to blame him for theft, or interfering with government funds.

A certain district magistrate said in desperation, "Why are you here in the jungle with such talents? Go to town." Latia had said, "What an idea! In the jungle area everything is profit. Tribal and outcaste labor is so cheap."

Such a Latia contributes a truck and gives a speech himself. Calls out, "Give whatever you have into this shawl."

— Why sir?

— Isn't there a war on?

— Where, I don't know.

— You will never know, bastard motherfucker. China has come to contaminate India's truth.

— Yes, yes? But where is China? Where again is India? Mye-lay or MLA says, "This country is India."

— No, no, Madhpura.

— What! Contradicting the Mye-lay Sir?

Latia jumps into the sea of people with his club in hand and the people run away in every direction.

Then Latia comes again to Douloti's room. Two other people are with him. Government *officers*. Latia doesn't get his contracts if he doesn't soak the government *officers* in oil. It's hard to please the *officers* in such forest areas. Not everybody drinks alcohol, not everyone wants to come to Rampiyari's house.

These two are young, not yet married.

Latia says, "Today I'll show you some real fun. You think all the fun is in town."

Special orders had been given for Douloti, Reoti, Gohumani. Paramananda came by in the morning and told them, "You must do what they ask. Not a two-rupee client. This one is Latiaji." There is meat and buttered flat bread, liquor has come from Ranchi. All three women have had to scrub themselves clean. Latia says, "Shit! Rampiyari?"

— Sir!

— What is this? Why is everything not just right?

— It will soon be, sir.

Rampiyari whispers, "Reoti and Gohumani are, sir, mothers of children. Shouldn't the gentlemen be a little drunk? Their bodies are a bit slack."

— That's true.

— They are not as fresh as Douloti.

— Give me a bottle.

Three women came and stood still after a big bottle was finished. They are quite naked. Reoti and Gohumani sat in the gentlemen's laps. Latia took Douloti in his lap, started kneading her and said, "They are harijans. They work hard, they keep their bodies fresh."

— Great, great!

— Lie down, lie down. Take a look at me.

Three naked women and three men in the raw. The god has ordered, "do what they say." Gohumani keeps getting burnt by cigarettes. The men eat their flesh in a crazed way. At one point the gentlemen fall asleep. Reoti and Gohumani get leave. Douloti doesn't. It goes on, keeps going on.

Towards morning Douloti says, "Sir!"

— Say.

— Will you . . . give me something separately?

— Why not? I will.

Latia gave her a rupee, but said in the morning, "Rampiyari! This Nagesia girl is getting clever. She wants money separately. Did you hear that?"

Rampiyari said with a displeased look, "What to do, sir? The town winds touch them."

— Paramananda is a sucking-fly. Doesn't give them anything.

— No no, sir, he lends them money for clothing, cosmetics, whatever they need.

— Lends them? Lends?

Latia laughed out loud. He said, "That's very clever. He'll take the money of the *kamiyas*' whoring-work, will not give a penny and what he lends will be added to the reckoning of the first loan. That's why your girls dry up like wood. But watch out! No bad stuff with Douloti."

— No no sir, how can I?

One day Latia gave her an entire five-rupee note.

Ordinarily he gives nothing more than small change. Douloti is saving up in a little box. She buries the box in the floor. Now the fair at the end of the first month of the year was at hand. This is the most popular fair in this area. At a certain time this entire area was in the hands of the Rajas of Naoratangarh. It was the Rajas who had established the fair. At one time a pair of swords would come in a palanquin as the Raja's representative. The swords would be put on a high platform. Every visitor to the fair would put in an honor-fee in a brass plate in front of the swords. The great king would gamble with that money at the Light Festival. The fair goes on for three days. These three days Paramananda raises a few rooms in the fairgrounds and brings forty clients on the average to the girls' rooms. At the time of the fair he scolds Somni.

Paramananda hasn't given food and upkeep, Latia has impregnated her time after time. Still was it correct of Somni to let her body get so chewed-up? A client gives even up to five rupees. If Somni were usable Paramananda could have made six hundred in three days. Paramananda said angrily, "Just nine girls are in use. Douloti now belongs to Latiaji. I won't get her, I won't get you. Look Somni, the hundred rupees that your man took is now a lot

in seven years. I will reckon it up. Repay the loan and get out."

Rampiyari said, "Huh, what a brain you have!"

— Do you alone have a brain?

— You have taken leave of all your sense and judgment in your craving for money. Tell me, have you thought about it at all? I'll be at the fair. Will Douloti be here alone? If Somni isn't in the house who will watch it?

— You will, now and then.

— I couldn't care less. I can't do it.

Douloti's spirits danced at the thought of seeing the fair.

Gohumani said, "Go see. In our day we saw too."

Gohumani's spirits are low. Her country cousin comes to see his boss in Madhpura once a month. He has brought news that the goat she had bought for her husband with the money begged from clients has died of snakebite. Why this cruelty of fate!

Gohumani wiped her eyes and said, "I am a kamiya-whore, I'll of course be kicked out when my carcass shrivels. Then, with a goat at home I would have sold kids, sold milk, I'd put a lot of hope in that."

Reoti said, "Why do they have fairs? They bring in client after client to me, don't even give me the time to have a drink of water."

Rampiyari will take them to the fair. An accident took place before they left. The woman Jhalo speaks very little. Quite a big sturdy woman with a strong bony frame.

Just before going Jhalo came and sat on the stoop, lit a tobacco leaf cigarette and said to Somni, "I want to go too. Take my flour ration, make up the lumps for bread making."

Rampiyari said, "What is this you're saying, Jhalo?"

— You heard me.

— I heard, but what does it mean?

Douloti realized that Rampiyari's voice was quite soft.

Even perhaps a bit of a wheedling tone.

— You don't know what it's about?

— That's between you and me.

— No, make a clean breast of it.

Somni now put on a silly face and said, "No Auntie! You know how much trouble the god will make if we're late. Why don't you say it quickly?"

Rampiyari heaved a few deep sighs. And said, "Right then. Let's go."

Jhalo is unforgiving. She said in a hard voice, "Own up before everyone that I know you. If things are not said openly with you—so, Gohumani, why are you silent?"

Gohumani said, "I open my mouth and get beaten up again?" Jhalo said, "Let 'em beat me? Let 'em take a try. I will sit in this room and cast a spell, and our so-called Auntie, that bloody buffalo, will not live three nights. She'll spit blood and die." Rampiyari spoke up in pain, "No no Jhalo. I'm owning up that I'm not owning up. Oh Rama! Why have you put me in such a bind? What's happening to me?"

Jhalo put poison in her voice and said, "You feel very bad, eh? And the fact that you pocket one or two client's money for so long from the fair? So you say 'Oh Rama'?"

— I'll break faith with the god?

— You break faith a hundred times from morning till night. Bloated cunt, stupid buffalo!

— "Oh Rama!"—Rampiyari was almost in tears. Her mountainous bulk started trembling with passion in her arms, her cheeks, her belly. Then she said, "Don't put the poison-arrow spell on me. I was not so fat, who did this to me with the poison-arrow? I swear now that in the three days of the fair five clients belong to Jhalo alone. That earning I don't want to know or take."

— Why?

— What is our fault?

— Why should we be left out?

Rampiyari was going to say something, but Kishanchand got in. He laughed and said, "Great stuff here! Are the kamiya whores making a *union*?"

Rampiyari smiled toothily, "Kishanbabu! Why are you here and not at the fair?"

— I just came for a cup of tea.

— Somni, give him a seat. Make him some tea. Come, girls. I am for you, you are for me, why make trouble for nothing? Why me? Why put me in trouble? I do so much for you.

Jhalo said, "Yes yes you do a lot. That's how Kalabati was murdered. When her father came, waited and waited and went back, you didn't give him a single rupee. You and your god, and who is who, that's all you know. Come now."

Kishan says, "Hey Jhalo? You never went to town, Paramananda didn't become the master, this warehouse became the factory. Rampiyari is Paramananda's overseer and you are all labor."

- Again that nonsense.
  - You'd know if you went to Dhanbad.
  - I know, now we are nine, give us a bit of spending money for the fair, we will mention your name.
  - Yes yes, say my name.
- Kishanbabu gave a rupee to everyone. Also to Rampiyari, Somni, and Douloti. Then he said, "At the fair I'll ride the merry-go-round with all of you."
- They went to the fair. Before going Rampiyari said, "Don't sit long Kishanbabu, god will be angry."
- No no, god is now on the way to the Padmasri, walking about in the fair, looking for girls.
  - I'm off.
- Kishan drank tea. Somni said, "What about that matter, sir?"
- What matter?
  - You said you'd put the boys in the *Mission*? In the *Mission*! Kishan thought something and then said, "Famine's on the way. Take the three boys and put them at the door of the *Mission*, that's it."
  - O dear! Won't they chase them off?
  - They don't chase off. They'll surely keep them.
- Kishan didn't say a word to Douloti. After he left Somni said, "Hoo! Who isn't afraid of Latia? He didn't say anything because Latia is your client. Now he doesn't take away girls from here. He tried before."
- Douloti said, "Take away? How? Can a kamiya woman leave?" Never.
- Why did Auntie accept Jhalo's word?
  - O dear! Jhalo knows spells. Knows how to do poison-arrow, knows how to get rid of pain-poison, she is a woman of quality.
  - Knowing all this a kamiya-whore?
  - Yes she is a kamiya-whore but Jhalo doesn't talk.
  - No, she also has a lot of brains. She came here and made medicine. She has had no children here, she has a husband at home and will arrange her daughter's marriage. So Jhalo saves money. She says one thing. My husband's kamiya. I am a kamiya, but I don't want my children to be kamiyas. And even Auntie is silenced by her.
  - Will your sons go to the *Mission*?
  - Who knows? I say, if they survive I'll make them god's kamiyas. At least they'll have food in the morning.

- Won't we see the fair?
- We'll go at some point.

In the event neither Somni nor Douloti could go. When the others returned from the fair then Somni and Douloti went to see the dismantled fair. There had been many shops, of which they saw nothing. In the broken-up fair Somni's sons were looking for food, grubbing around among the broken clay pots and Sal leaf cones of the tea-shops. Douloti said to Somni, "Buy them some sliced bread. Here is change. Let me look around a bit."

A wiry elderly man with a headband was drinking tea in a tea-shop. Seeing him the bottom of Douloti's chest gave a great shudder. Bono! Bono Nagesia!

- Uncle Bono!
- Douloti?
- Yes, Uncle Bono.

Douloti's tears flowed, she sobbed out loud. Not like a whore but like a country girl. If they come to the fair from their husband's house and see someone from their father's house the country girl gets her weeping done first. This is the rule. If you don't weep everyone will fault you—you're so happy in your husband's house that you don't think about your father's house? They cry by rote, but they also cry with emotion, and Douloti cried for emotion.

- Sit, calm yourself. I came to the fair and looked for you all over. You didn't come to see the fair?
- No uncle.
- I know everything. Your father came to Tohri to the hospital. I learnt everything from him.
- Is Father well? Is Mother well?
- As always. They are weaving mats, now they'll get a permit to gather wood. So it's been six months since you came.
- Yes uncle.
- Here look at Dhano.
- Oh my, look how Dhano has grown.
- He put up a shop at the fair. Betel leaf shop. Dhano now runs a betel leaf shop in Latehar.
- Is he married?
- Yes, he is married.
- What are you doing?
- Work, Douloti, I'm traveling with *Father Bomfuller*.
- You have entered the *Mission*, Uncle?

— No no. This *Father* is traveling constantly in Palamu and finding out where there are kamiya and seokias.

— Why? He wants to keep kamiyas?

— No, no, he'll ask gormen [the government] to stop the bondslavery system. And this is Mohan Srivastava. He is the schoolmaster in Tohri. He too is supporting the *Father*.

— What do you do?

— The kamiya knows the kamiya's score. And before I had left Seora I didn't know how large our kamiya society was. How can I tell you how many kamiyas there are in Chiroa, Chatakpur, Ramkanda, Daho, Palda, Chandoa, Banari? I saw everything touring with the *Father*. Oh, I didn't know before how large my society was.

— What is it that you do?

— I talk. The kamiyas are very afraid when they see a White, a gentleman—they fear what the boss will say. I talk, the White Man writes. Also I fetch water, I cook.

— What will come of this?

— Gormen will abolish bonded labor.

— Can that be?

— Let's see what happens. This I've told the White man. Sir! What will come of the gormen abolishing bonded labor? Without land, without food, hunger will drive the people of this society to become kamiyas again. The White shakes his head, says you're right. So it goes, let's see.

— The day bondslavery is over, the sun will rise in the West, and the rivers will flow against the current.

— I've spoken of you women too.

— O Bono Uncle, what have you said?

— Of the kamiya-whore trade.

— What good did that do?

Douloti said this lightly. She knows that Uncle Bono has taken up a new fancy and she is just keeping time with him. Does Uncle Bono know that there is a storm blowing in her chest because she's met someone she knows? Dhano has heard everything. Wasn't Douloti to be married to Dhano? If she'd stayed in Seora the marriage would surely have happened. Uncle Bono is a man of his own fancy. He is a kamiya but he certainly made a fool out of Munabar and escaped into a free life.

Ganori couldn't do it. He stumbled on his face when he tried to pull the cart at Munabar's command with the ox yoke on his

shoulders. His broken body gave him the name Crook. And Douloti has taken the yoke of Crook's bondslavery on her shoulders. Now Latia is her client, her body is tight. Then going down and down Douloti will be as skeletal as Somni. She will repay the bondslavery loan as a beggar.

But what is Uncle Bono saying?

— Your problems will be solved.

— What will happen?

— You'll be free.

Douloti shook her head. Said, "Uncle Bono, if a kamiya woman becomes a whore the boss makes a lot of profit. No clothing, no cosmetics, no medicine. You have to borrow for everything and the boss adds all the loans to the first loan. No whore can repay that debt in her lifetime."

— When the working years are over?

— They kick you out. Beg to pay interest. Who gives up such a profitable business?

— This must be stopped.

— Who will stop it? Big contractors, government officers, they all come. They all help the god.

— Still this is illegal.

— Then why do the lawmakers come?

Somni called her. Douloti said, "I must be going, Uncle. You don't go to Seora. If you see him in Tohri, give my father my news. Please do."

Mohan Srivastava said, "Sister, listen."

— Calling me, lord?

— Don't say "lord." Yes, I'm talking to you. Where do you live? Where is your house?

— Rampiyari's whorehouse. I must go, Uncle. Let me see you when you come again.

— Who is that woman? And those children?

— That is Somni, a kamiya-whore like me, those are her children, they don't let her keep them, so she has to come out and see them. Great suffering, oh my, great sorrow. Dhano, I must go. Come to the Shiva-festival fair, bring your wife.

Douloti left. Mohan Srivastava said, "A girl from your village, Bono?"

— Yes, Mohanji.

— At the village kamiyas of the bosses, and here too the whore will work and give the boss money.

— Worse than that.

Bono wiped his eyes. His eyes are bloodshot. He said, "You're a gentleman, a good man, will you still understand? The boss can grab our women's honor twice a day, virgin or wife or mother, he doesn't give a damn. Their children must be borne. And here they've brought kamiya women and made them whores. Who keeps them? A brahman. If the whore has a child it must wander the streets. And the whore must go on giving the boss money."

— Everything will end if bondslavery ends.

— Bondslavery will end.

— The struggle must go on.

Dhano said with profound conviction, "How can that be, Babuji? The boss-moneylender keeps kamiyas. Gormen will anger the boss-moneylender? Never will it anger them. Taking away our land by force they put us in such a state that we must borrow and become kamiyas. All that land the boss gets written in his own name. And the clerks and officers of the gormen give the boss-moneylender support in that move. As long as this goes on how can bonded labor be over?"

Dhano said, "Mohanji! You don't get a single seed from the arable land for your own belly, people become kamiyas for reason of hunger."

— No, no Dhano, we are doing this work. People become kamiyas because they borrow for weddings, funerals, festivals. It's written in the books.

Bono said, "That is both true and false. Yes, you see that Bhikhari Sudas borrows eighty rupees for a wedding and becomes Lalchand Baniya's kamiya. But weddings and festivals come and go in life. Who borrows for them? The person who borrows is without land, without resources. Why is there no land? Why is there not a cracked penny in the house?"

— Wait, what did you say?

— Only the person who has no land and not a cracked penny in the house borrows for a social function. You think I don't know? Didn't my father have an acre and a half of land? He only became a kamiya when Munabar took that land, and left bonded labor on my neck when he died. When we borrow, one hundred rupees become ten thousand rupees in one generation. Gormen doesn't know? You say doesn't know.

It must come to know.

— Look what you can do. You understand keeping accounts, you write accounts in numbers, but I see Douloti, a girl from our society, selling herself to give money to a brahman. Can't we bring her out?

— No, Bono. You have to do a lot of work for a long time to do that. First you have to end bondslavery.

Dhano said, "You can't end bondslavery this way. Rich people keep kamiyas and the gormen belongs to the rich. Who thinks about us?"

— No Dhano, gormen is everyone's.

— I hear that a lot from you, sir, but it's not true.

— If I go to Tohri, says Bono, I'll also tell Prasad Mahato of the Harijan Welfare Association.

— Prasad Mahato! He is a *Socialist*.

— Do I know that? He is himself a harijan, and a lot of work is done from their Association.

Dhano said, "And what can Prasad Mahato do at all, Father? There are whorehouses in Tohri."

— Where isn't there a red light district? But where else is there a system of catching kamiyas and making them whores?

Mohan Srivastava smiles patiently and says, "In Dehra Dun, in Uttarkashi. In Dehra Dun there is a trade also with Kolta tribal women. The women must be rescued, we must arrange for such occupations for them that they can support themselves and live. A lot of work for a lot of time is still left to be done."

— And bonded labor goes on in other states of the Union as well?

— Sure. It has different names in different areas.

Bono said, "That's why I no longer feel alone. Oh, the society of kamiyas is so large."

— Very large. If you call it a society, there is no accounting for the number of people in it.

## VI

Latia beat Douloti up a lot because she went to see the brocken fair. Whom Latia chooses for his very own must remain at home. No one must see her.

Paramananda also growled a lot. Is Madhpura a town? Just a market town. How much money do the people who come to whorehouses here spend? Latia pours handfuls of rupees. Angrily



Paramananda couldn't help saying, "He wanted a fresh uncut harijan cunt, and he has given one and a half thousand rupees in six months. You'll act out of line and send him off?"

— A thousand and a half?

Douloti was astounded. How much money is a thousand and a half? Somni said three hundred rupees could be repaid five times by it. A hundred rupees come ten times in thousand rupees.

Douloti lay down near Paramananda's feet. "God! your three hundred rupees have come through five times. Set me free then?" Paramananda had laughed. He had said, "Yes yes, you've seen the principal. But interest? I bought you clothes, those fifty-two rupees? My body is compassionate, your money has now increased by interest to two and a half thousand. And all my accounts are written down. When it's repaid in principal and interest, you will be freed."

— Deota, what do I know what you are calculating? Bondslavery loans are never repaid.

— Listen, you will be free when the time comes, I'll give Somni her leave now. Her loan is unpaid, but let it be.

Somni got her leave very suddenly. She didn't get it, she gave it to herself. At her seven-year-old son's death after a raging fever and puke full of large tape-worms, the five-year-old son and the three-and-a-half-year-old youngest sat down under the thatch of a shop in the market, but wouldn't get up at all. It was the oldest who had roamed the streets with them, who begged and fed them. And they got the starch at the rice *hotel* of course. They knew Somni much less. It was the oldest they knew.

Even after that Somni washed the dishes, cooked, washed Rampiyari's clothes. Then she took her own share of bread and fried veg in her waist-cloth. Dry-eyed.

— What are you doing? Where are you going?

Somni didn't answer a single question, didn't look back once. She did not look at the whorehouse where she rented out the bloom-time of her life to all the trader-contractors, starting from Latia. She shook her head, and took her leave. Somni walked out, and sat on the wayside with her boys like any other beggar. She walked into the society of the beggars, in the rush snacks by the bus route. Like any other beggar she came to beg one day at Rampiyari's whorehouse.

She came muttering, "Why doesn't famine come, famine? Can no one give me a clue when famine will come?"

Douloti remembered she had wanted to put her sons in the *Mission* during the famine.

Very strange, Paramananda didn't say anything to Somni. He could have said, "Give me your beggar's earnings." Didn't say. Why not, who knows? Bondslavery never ends. And Jhalo said, "This is good. Somni has shown the way."

Douloti remained useful to Latia for a good while after this. But one morning naked Latia started screaming. "Rampiyari! Hey Rampiyari! Call Mishir. Ask him to show me a new harijan girl. I am not having fun in Douloti any more. These goods are threadbare now."

Deeki Dusadin came. And Douloti was shifted to a small room. Jhalo said, "If you get a good client you're saved, otherwise ten-twenty clients a day, you'll become like us."

— Where do all these clients come from, Jhalo?

— New roads are being built around Madhpura, and the cement works going up near the river. There are a thousand contractors and workers there.

— Why do they all come here?

— They don't bring their wives, it's a wild area. Day and night they swallow booze and look for women.

Gohumani said, "Ask Auntie for medicine. Now you don't have Latiaji. The body hurts managing ten or twenty clients."

— "What hurts," Jhalo said.

— You won't understand.

— I understand neither pain nor hurt. The drunkard is best. He doesn't give much trouble.

Douloti is lucky. Paramananda himself brought Singhji, another contractor, and said, "Why should you go to Tohri if you want a good woman? To Kishan's whorehouse? Is all my stuff here chaff? I'll give you only fresh country girls."

Singhji said, "But used girls, no?"

— Why sir? If you come, she'll be for you. Look at this. Look at this well, take a look?

Singhji is not a ferocious animal like Latia. He came well dressed. He took Douloti on a jeep. He bought Douloti a ring within a few months.

— Why don't you wear the ring?

— They'll see if I wear it and Auntie will snatch it.

Gave her a sari, perfumed soap. He would give Rampiyari ten rupees before he entered the room, gave Douloti one or two

rupees as well. But he drank a lot, that's all.

An unexpected thing happened in the life of Douloti's crowd at this time. Paramananda went to his nephew's wedding in Jokhan and did not return.

Not only did he not return, he did not come back to Madhpura at all. He caught *cholera* and died.

It was the middle of the evening then. The women were finishing getting dressed in Rampiyari's whorehouse. Kishan came at such a time. With him a shaven-headed youth. Kishan said, "Rampiyari!"

— Yes, Kishanbabu.

— Come here, I have something to say.

Taking Rampiyari aside Kishan said, "Paramananda Mishir is dead, Rampiyari. This is his son, Bajinath Mishir. All three sons have inherited their father's landed property but this business Bajinath alone has inherited."

— The man died?

— Yes. And Bajinath is such a devil he shits on his father's shoulder. Talk to him. Then I will talk to you, I have things to say.

Rampiyari took Bajinath to his own room, and said, "Sit here, god."

— Now it's time for clients to come. I'll come tomorrow, during the day.

Bajinath went off busily. Kishan said, "You go, I'll be along. Rampiyari is my old acquaintance. I take a cup of tea when I come to see her."

Rampiyari made tea herself. Then she said, "The god passed along but he had said he'd give me a nose-ring and give me this house."

— He lied.

— This son is a swine?

— A devil, ruthless.

— What did you want to say?

— "If I . . . Deoki and Moti . . ." Kishan kept talking in a very low voice and what could Rampiyari do? He definitely wanted money. Kishan wants Deoki and Moti. Let him take them. Will he keep them as kamiya-whores? Buy them? "But you must make the exchange in secret, Kishanbabu, then don't come this way for six months. I know they'll stay well. What will you do with them? Pass them on outside, do what you think best. No no, not a crow will know. Where will you send them on? O dear. I didn't

know country girls were traded in such distant cities."

She heaved a great sigh. A little while later, in the great uproar at the fair of the full moon of the first month, Deoki Dusadin and Moti Parhaiya got lost, and people looked for them everywhere. Latia said, "Well, that rat Kishan was going around, he is certainly in this."

Moti and Deoki were not found, and Bajinath must have suspected something, for two days later he came and sat down on a stool. He said, "My father was a fool and a compassionate body. Being kind he was not able to make money. And never said a thing about etiquette and manners, but I am not my father. The boss remains a boss, and the servant stays a servant."

— Of course.

— Now I'll teach you. You will never sit down in front of me, You'll speak to me standing. Don't forget.

Rampiyari is a formidable woman. She stood up with her vast bulk. But her heap of fat was quivering with passion. Even Paramananda had not insulted her so. The women were nervous. The person who can insult Rampiyari will perhaps cut off their heads with his bare hands.

— Tell me their names, tell me who takes how many clients. Why doesn't the number of clients go up? Eh? Why doesn't it go up?

Rampiyari now felt she was with the girls. She is no longer of the boss's party.

— Bajinathji, it's hard to find good clients.

— Why?

— The food you give, their bodies dry up. They can't pull in clients.

— The feeding money will go down more, the number of clients will go up more. Body! Kamiya woman's body! If the body dries up she'll depart. Famine's on the way, is there any shortage of harijan kamiya women? And I'll keep the accounts. Your task is to bring clients, and to do housework. It's profitless to make a pet of a parrot. A body like an elephant, it's very hard to keep up with food money.

Within a month Bajinath brought in new girls. Many plans all around, the tribal-harijan areas are crowded with contractor, broker, *overseer*, *officer*, clerk. Very cheap *labor*, you can make poor girls disappear by very cheap tricks.

The women at Rampiyari's whorehouse were put in a system

of twenty to thirty clients by the clock. Pick up your cash fast. And when the body is empty?

Baijnath took Gohumani and Reoti to Jaukhan. He said, "Madhpura is a market town. There the client doesn't pay for such old cows. I am putting up rooms for them in the village by the brewery. Let them pull in clients at twelve annas, eight annas. My brothers will watch the trade."

Jhalo said, "In front of their husbands and children in Jokhan!"

Douloti said, "Their children?"

— What arrangements did Baijnathji make?

Rampiyari said, "What will he arrange? He'll sell them. Now I hear even children are bought."

Jhalo said, "Become a village whore, or become a beggar like Somni. Isn't that it? Tell me Auntie how we stay alive?"

Douloti said, "Who will stay alive?"

— I'm talking about myself. You are alive. You are most fortunate. Singhji comes. Latia is a pure animal. Yet Douloti, the body keeps if you have a single client.

— How long will it keep?

— Didn't your countryman tell you a lot of stuff? That bond-slavery will be over?

— Uncle Bono was our storyteller when we were little. He told a story.

— Story? A tale? A yarn?

Douloti, a kamiya-whore, leaned against the wall, closed her eyes with fatigue. She said in a voice filled with sleep, "A story, of course."

— What're you saying?

— Yes, like he said, they'll end bondslavery? Not a story? A beautiful tale. Bondslavery finished.

— The gentleman, the schoolmaster, he also told a story?

— Yes yes. Why shouldn't he? He too told a story.

— Your uncle's son?

— Dhano? No no, Dhano didn't tell a story. Uncle Bono is an old man, he spun a bit of a yarn. The gentleman understands books, not people, he too spun a bit. Dhano was looking at me.

— Bono Nagesia ran away, no?

— Yes yes.

— Then?

— Jhalo, what are you talking about? Uncle Bono ran away from bondslavery, did bondslavery end?

Rampiyari said, "How will it end? Paramanandaji told me that it is written in the great epics Ramayana and Mahabharata that ending bonded labor is against religion."

Jhalo said, "Why should it end? No land, not a handful of wheat, how will people eat without becoming bonded labor?"

— That is what Dhano said.

— You didn't see him again?

— Jhalo! How you talk? How should I see him again? He came to the fair on his travels, that's all. Will he come again? Uncle goes from land to land, he's forgotten about us.

Jhalo was going to say something, but Somni walked in with a stick. She leans on it now as she walks. Standing at the door she said, "Hey Ma! I'm hungry, give me something."

Jhalo said, "What's this now, Somni? Why are you calling us 'Ma'?"

Somni kept looking at them and said, "Give a little, Ma! I'm very hungry."

Rampiyari poured a cup of rice in her bowl with a cross face.

Somni said—"Long live Ma"—then said, "Is the famine here? You gave me a cup of rice? Famine?"

Jhalo said, "She's crazed."

Rampiyari said, "Is that it? Her head is quite clear. She will bring on the famine with her 'famine famine.' How is she alive?"

The girl called Paro talks a lot. She said, "Perhaps she eats better than what you give us to eat."

Rampiyari said, "Tell that to the boss."

Singhji was not for Douloti for long. In two years Singhji went elsewhere with a contract. At the time he gave Douloti ten rupees and told her many things.

— This is not good work, Douloti, you are a good girl, a country girl, go back home. I don't have much money with me.

— But you've given me money from time to time, why should you give me more?

— Why do you say this? That's why I say you're a very good girl. Whores do this work for the lust of money. You never lust after money.

— My lord, if the market whores have some freedom the kamiya-whore does not. The boss takes the cash.

— You are a very good girl.

- My lord, may I say something?  
 — Say.  
 — If you see Bono Nagesia on your tours, the old man travels with a White—my village uncle Bono. Will you ask him to come here once?  
 — I will.  
 Singhji gave her a new sari, soap, many more things. He said, "You gave me a lot of peace."  
 Latia wanted fun, Singhji got peace.  
 When Singhji left, Douloti was already twenty. The charm of her body, and the firmness of her face were not yet broken. Rampiyari said, "Let's look for a rich client for Douloti. You will get money, he will be happy."  
 Bajinath said, "How much will I get?"  
 — Easily three hundred rupees a month.  
 — And she will pull in ten-rupee clients for a year, ten a day. A hundred rupees daily means three thousand rupees monthly, where is the higher profit?  
 — Ten ten-rupee clients a day in this Madhpura? You can't get that, sir. That's why the god tried to get a good client who'd give a big monthly fee.  
 — There will surely be a bigger profit in what we get, and if we go by father's rules, I cannot carry on.  
 — Douloti will then turn into Somni.  
 — That chewed-up thing? Somni has become a beggar in ten years by father's rules. By my rule Douloti will become a beggar in five years. What's that to me?  
 — All right.  
 Rampiyari sighed and said, "The cow gives milk if she's fed. If the human daughter turns kamiya no meal, no water, put riders in the saddle and take the money."  
 — Your tongue is out of control.  
 — Yes Bajinathji, I can't go on. Let me go. I am not your kamiya.  
 — Go. I won't lose an eye if you go. Settle your accounts and go.  
 — You will settle accounts.  
 — Why?  
 — I have two hundred rupees in this business, don't you know?  
 — Where is it written?

- I'll show you. In front of a witness.  
 The bus depot accountant Nandalai read out the paper. Yes, Paramananda is taking two hundred rupees from Rampiyari. Rampiyari will get one rupee in a hundred from the profits.  
 Bajinath gave the two hundred rupees but not a part of the profits. He said, "Dad was a total idiot. To write down such a thing? Don't calculate profits, just leave. I'll set the *police* on you if you talk too much. I'll say you're stealing money and running out on me."  
 Rampiyari kept abusing Bajinath. She showed him the door as she abused him. Then she said, "I am going. I will take a house in Nahara before the month is out. I'll open a business. I knew he wouldn't give me money. How long have I been putting some aside from the profits?"  
 — Going, Auntie?  
 — Tell me what to do?  
 Rampiyari's departure is the end of a chapter. Then Bajinath came to live in the house.  
 And the number of clients goes up, up, and up in Douloti's room. Douloti starts drying up fast. Now Jhalo is transferred to the village. Bajinath tries to raise the interest money as fast as possible.  
 No matter how great the effort, how high the number of clients, the interest on a bond labor loan goes up and up. And one day, surprising everyone, Bono Nagesia comes along. With him Mohan Srivastava, Prasad Mahato, *Father Bomfuller*, Puranchand from the *Gandhi Mission*.  
 Bajinath Misra said, "Who gave you permission to come? This is my house."  
 Puranchand says, "Your name?"  
 — Hey who are you?  
 Prasad Mahato of the Harijan Association is a smart kid. He quickly brings out some Harijan Association forms printed in English and says, "We are government people."  
 — What do you want here?  
 Bomfuller growled out in Hindi, "We will ask the questions. And question these women. You leave."  
 — This is my house.  
 — The *police* will come if you oppose government work.  
 — What is this! What work can the government have in a whorehouse?

- This is not just a whorehouse, you have brought kamiya women here and turned them into whores.
- The boss can do what he likes with the person who becomes a bondslave. Yes or no?
- The government will end bondslavery.
- The big government *officers* in Palamu keep kamiyas and seokias. Who will stop bondslavery?
- I'll tell you, the big government. Delhi government.
- It can't be. Bondslavery is an ancient law. That is written in religious books.
- What book?
- I've heard.
- Prasad roared out, "That's enough, get out of here." Bomfuller said, "I think the man's a scoundrel. Take him to the police station on the jeep."
- No no, I'm going.
- Mohan Srivastava was looking all this time for a known face. But until Douloti spoke her own name even Bono Nagesia didn't know her. Douloti's appearance is so changed.
- Say, say your name.
- Douloti.
- Father's name?
- Ganori Nagesia.
- I have heard of you. They've kept you as kamiya for three hundred rupees?
- Not kamiya, kamiya-whore.
- Three hundred rupees?
- Three hundred and fifty-two rupees. God bought clothes for fifty-two rupees, he has added that sum.
- Was there any other loan?
- I sometimes got some money from clients, but I ate it sir. They feed you too little, your hunger doesn't go. And once I borrowed ten rupees to buy clothes. Once when I was sick . . . and for soap and hair oil . . . I had to borrow another forty.
- And all the money has been added to the first loan?
- That's the rule.
- This money hasn't been repaid?
- Bondslavery loan, sir.
- How much have you earned?
- Douloti started telling them the rates.
- I started to leave three hundred a month, and gave for three

years, yes gave for three years.

- Ten thousand eight hundred rupees!
- Singhji gave two hundred and fifty rupees monthly.
- How many years?
- Three years as well.
- Nine thousand rupees.
- And since then . . . well some days five men, some days ten and twenty at fair times—ten rupees each.
- This for how long?
- Two years have passed already.
- Look Prasad, look Mohan, at the reckoning. If on the average a hundred a month, a thousand rupees monthly, twelve thousand yearly, twenty-four thousand in two years? How is she alive?

Having bonded herself with three hundred rupees in 1962—how much has she raised by 1970? Over forty thousand.

Prasad said, "What is to be done?"

Father Bomfuller's fingers were shaking. He said, "The same history in the society of the Dehru Dun tribal women. They do this work in Delhi or Meerut or Paharpur."

— What is to be done?

— Don't get excited, Prasad. Let me take depositions from the other women? Don't get excited.

Mohan poked Prasad Mahato, "What are your political friends doing in Bihar?"

— They are shooting guns in Bihar to keep the honor of the harijan women in Bhojpur. They are not putting a fresh coat of clay on the *schoolyard*, painting a *map* of India with *chalk* dust, planting a flag and singing "May the flag remain high," like you.

— Is Palamu not in Bihar?

— Will fire remain in one place?

— Will you stop a bit?

— What is to be done? The other women will say the same thing. We will leave after hearing it all?

Father Bomfuller said, "I have started to make a survey of the *"Incidence of Bonded Labor"* in Palamu district on behalf of a committee of the central government. I personally think, that man is a criminal who deserves capital punishment. But that won't work. Even the government *officers* of Palamu district keep kamiyas and seokias. Perhaps they don't turn kamiya women into whores. But the goal of my work is to build a case for abolishing

the "bonded labor" system legally. On a regional basis. Let us not forget that. Yes, abolition."

Bono said, "Sir? What will they do by passing laws? Who will enforce them?"

Prasad said, "Government officers."

— The brahmans, the kayasthas, the Rajputs. No Prasadji, even if there is a law it will be behind the bosses and the moneylenders. Isn't this the problem?

Mohan said, "Let there be a law. If the law is not obeyed, there's the police. The police will look out."

Bono said, "This Mohanbabu you have said like a gentleman. Police never raise their guns toward the boss or the moneylender. The police kill us."

Prasad said, "We want the law! And we want organization. Not an organization like the Harijan Association or the Gandhi Mission."

At last Puranchand opened his mouth, "Try to think by way of peaceful means, Prasadji. You spoke of Bhojpur. But is it the way to a solution to take up arms to keep the honor of harijan women?"

Bono said, "Puranchandji? Is the honor of our women not honor? The boss lifts our wives and daughters, so you are saying 'Peace peace—Shanti Shanti.' If someone lifted daughter and wife from your family, would you have said 'Shanti'?"

— This doesn't happen in our families.

— Say that. If it had then you wouldn't have said "Shanti Shanti."

— I would have explained to the transgressor. I would have explained what a great sin it is to go against the moral law.

— Hey, you're a strange bird? You're explaining religion and by then he destroys the woman's honor? No no, this is very strange talk.

Prasad said, "We need organization. I work with the Harijan Association, and all I see is the harijans and tribals getting beaten. We need new organization. My Association cannot end the pain and the suffering of the tribals."

Father Bomfuller said, "The first job is to abolish this system by law. Then we need to make the law workable by the pressure of public opinion. We need organization to create public opinion. Then these freed kamiyas must have an Association to assure them a living. And, in the case of these women there must be social and economic rehabilitation."

Mohan said, "If there is a law."

Puranchand said, "If there is a law."

Prasad said, "Fire, there will be fire."

Bono said, "You will leave after hearing it all? You won't help these women? How long will it take to get the law passed? What will be their state by then?"

Bomfuller said, "This condition is the result of many years, Bono. Does the sin of long years go in a day?"

Douloti brought tea arranged on a tray. She said, "The boss says to take some tea."

Another woman's deposition was being taken. Douloti sat by Bono and started rubbing his feet softly with great sympathy. Uncle Bono alone knows how overwhelming the darkness of their life is. It is only Uncle Bono's breast that's bursting with an equal pain.

Douloti's fingers said, Why grieve, Uncle Bono? Bondslavery loan is never repaid. A three hundred rupee loan becomes infinite in eight years. The boss has raised more than forty thousand rupees wringing this body of mine. Still I owe. There will be a loan as long as my body is consumable. Then I'll leave as a beggar. Somni has become a beggar and she says ceaselessly, Is famine here? Famine?

Don't grieve, Uncle Bono. Why don't you rather tell me those things silently just as I am speaking to you in silence? Let the gentlemen twitter this way. Those words of yours will be much more precious.

Remember that banyan tree in Seora village? Speak of it. I swung myself on its branches when I went to graze the goats. Father didn't take me to the Chhat festival fair. I had a sore on my leg. You took me on your shoulders.

When winter came to the Nagesia neighborhood we would sit by the fire and mother would put the little balls of flour into the fire. How sweet the smell of warm flour seemed to me. At night you beat on cans, made a great uproar to chase away tigers.

Then I didn't know, Bono Uncle, that the world had so much liquor, that it held Bajinath, that it had so many clients. I lost those days long ago. I get all of it back when I see you. You yourself don't know how much you give me.

Bono said, "Your hands are so hot?"

— They stay hot.

— Do you get fever?

— Maybe.

Now Douloti untied the knot at one end of her cloth and took out a rupee. She said, "Uncle Bono? Have a little something to eat with this, yes?"

— Money? You gave me money?

— Yes, Uncle.

— My little mother, you gave me money? Gave me money?"

Bono Nagesia wept out loud in lament, "You gave me money!"

Douloti said, with affection, like a mother, "Not to cry, Uncle, why do you cry? Don't cry. Should one cry?"

Prasad shook his head hard and said, "There will be a fire."

Bono kept shaking his head, "Who will light that fire, Prasadji? There is no one to light the fire. If there was, would the kamiya society be so large in Palamu? There are people for passing laws, there are people to ride jeeps, but no one to light the fire. Can't you see the kamiya society is growing?"

## VII

Once Bono Nagesia had thought that Mohan Srivastava and Father Bomfuller were his igniters. But Mohan Srivastava with all his sympathy for harijan and tribal kamiya-seokias, remained *schoolmaster* at the Basic Primary School in Bira village, Tohri Block. His faith in the law, in *officers*, in the *police*, remained unshaken. But in the matter of Prasad Mahato he remained faithful.

So when Prasad started working underground in 1971 after rounding the Palamu Bhumidas Freedom Party, Mohan did not inform the *police*. He would have received a reward if he had done so.

The object of this account is not Prasad's quick transformation. Just as its object is not Bono Nagesia's joining Prasad's party. Bono didn't value Prasad so much before. But the day Prasad, the son of a harijan, left the *Gandhi Mission* and the Harijan Association and joined the Liberation Party, Bono searched him out and mingled with him. He said, "Dhano runs a betel-nut shop, he bought his mother a buffalo! What do I do? So I came to you, got it?"

— There will be no law, Prasadji, but you must explain things to the kamiya-seokia.

— What?

— This rule is the rule of slavery, of bondage.

— What happened to our white friend?

— He went to Delhi. With a hey, phoosh.

Bomfuller's survey report reached Delhi, and was imprisoned in a *file*.

Bono had said, "We are making a claim for the landless laborers' wage, why are we making it?"

Prasad's eyes were grey with memory. He said, "The person with little land is also a kamiya-seokia. And so is the farmworker. The government has laws for farmworkers. But the Labor Department of the state government had never implemented them."

What is the net result of this, can you see?

— If they had been paid at the government rate perhaps they would not have had to become kamiya. Isn't that right? Say.

— Quite right. So you see there's no solution even if there is a law.

— The law is giving you this, so it is your right. Just as I can say this when I go among the farmworkers, if there is the other law I can say bonded labor is illegal, don't do it. Can you help the poor by passing laws? Never. We can fight by quoting the law.

— I am old.

— Old is good. An old man like you.

— A fight for the law, the *police* are there too.

— This is seventy-one. The *police* are everywhere.

Everywhere there were *police*, *military*, *paramilitary*.

— Farmworkers! Unite on the demand of government wages. Otherwise you'll become kamiyas.

The farmworkers were stopping bullets when they demanded government wages, the corpses of landed farmers were also falling.

Douloti didn't know this news.

In this way, taking clients, one day Douloti saw that her rate had dropped to one rupee.

One can get a client for a rupee. But no one wants to go to Douloti's room.

Bajjnath says, "What's the matter with you?"

— What do I know, Boss?

— What have you smeared on your face? Red dye?

— No boss. There are these red swellings all over the place. I can't take clients. Fiery hot inside the passage. Burns me up to take a piss.

Bajjnath's face darkened. He said, "Go to the room on the



other side of the courtyard. Here's some ointment, use it. If it doesn't help, go to the hospital."

— Where is there a hospital here, Boss?

— Go to Tohri.

— How? I can't walk.

— Go by *bus*. Go as you can.

— I'll go.

— Come back when you are cured. Why are you coughing?

— The cough gets me all the time, Boss.

— Go, go to that room.

Bajinath called Harramia and said, "Give her food in a clay dish, and throw it away without holding it tight."

— Why Boss?

— She's got a bad disease.

Fuel—dried cow dung patties and coal—is stored in one corner of the room on the other side of the courtyard. Douloti made room for herself on the side and lay down. Harramia left food on a clay dish and water in a clay cup. Douloti said, "Take this rupee note. To do what?"

Douloti said with closed eyes, "Bring me a candle and matches. A slice of bread and a bit of sugar. I don't feel like eating flat bread and lentils."

— You'll spend everything?

— What do I have! You don't have to give me back the change. Buy me a slice of bread tomorrow.

— Haven't you saved up anything?

Douloti smiled weakly and showed her fever-hot belly. And said, "Dear, this traitor ate up everything."

Douloti couldn't eat the sliced bread. Even after this, the relief of not having to take a client seemed to bring her a consuming fever.

Not as a beggar like Somni, not to become a village-prostitute like Jhalo, but destitute in quite another way, Douloti left the whorehouse. She went to market and sold her last resource, the ring that Singhji had given her. A ring made of gold, she got fifteen rupees for it.

Then she somehow got on the *bus* to Tohri and sat down.

Sravan—the fourth month of the year—July-August. Broken clouds in the sky. The rains haven't come this year. She put her bundle in her lap and rested her head against the window.

Oh how fast the *bus* does go. Villages like Seora are running

backwards on both sides from time to time. Two shopkeepers are sitting beside her and talking non-stop.

— Brother, I am dying of *police* trouble.

— You're quite right. Here's some betel-nut.

— The *police* want money all the time.

— Arrey, *Emergency*, *Emergency*, they've put down *police* depots everywhere for the *Emergency*.

— That's what I'm saying. Do I have a son? Is he grabbing guns? So why should I give three and four rupees every day for the *Emergency* police?

— We are nothing but small shopkeepers.

— No savings, brother, I'll die if I have to give hundred two hundred rupees a month.

— Where was this *Emergency*?

— Who knows? The *police* can't stop a riot. The *police* only know how to terrorize poor shopkeepers and the village market-folk.

— I'd never seen so many *police* in the villages and the village markets of Palamu.

— Arrey, we don't know police stations. There is no law-breaking here, we don't have to go to the *police*.

— We're not having to go. The *police* are coming.

Douloti understood some and didn't understand some.

Everyone got down at Banka and had tea at the shop. Douloti closed her eyes.

She got down at Tohri and went to hospital shaking. Some dogs are roaming the hospital veranda in the late afternoon light. Her body couldn't bear any more when she reached there. She lay down with her bundle under her head.

The sweeper women took her inside from the hospital veranda. They understood at first glance that this was a whore. The sweeper women laid her in bed properly and looked at each other. One kept her eye on the door. Another took out the money tied in a handkerchief by putting her hand with practiced skill inside the blouse. Then they went to call the doctor. Douloti stayed in hospital about four days, unconscious with fever. The doctor said, "She's come from Madhpura to Tohri? How did she come? Amazing."

The nurse turned up her lip as well. The body hollow with tuberculosis, the sores of venereal disease all over her frame, oozing evil-smelling pus, the whores come to hospital only to die.

Still there are the hospital rules. When her consciousness returned after about four days Douloti understood she was in hospital.

The doctor said, What is your name?

— Douloti Nagesia.

— How old are you?

— I don't know, lord.

The doctor said, "This is a bother, doesn't know her age."

— I was born the year after independence.

Douloti smiled in a timid way like any other country woman.

The human smile on the face of the unknown skeleton had the innocence of a field of grain. The doctor was surprised.

— Twenty-seven? Just twenty-seven? I had thought ...

— That'll be it, lord.

— What do you do?

— Kamiya-whore, lord. Baijnath Mishir's.

— I see! Now listen, my dear, this place can't treat you. You have to go to the hospital in Mandar.

— No treatment here?

— No, we don't have the facilities.

— Where are they, lord?

— You'll have to go by bus. I'll write it down, take the paper.

— By bus? I have no money, lord.

— Not even bus fare?

— I had ... someone took it.

— What will you do here? See if they let you travel free sitting on the floor of the bus.

— Lord.

— What?

— I won't live, isn't it?

— See, go to Mandar and see.

Douloti closed her eyes. And said, "I'll go tomorrow."

The next day Douloti left the hospital gates shaking. If Baijnath had let go when a little health was left! Then she could have raised the fare with whoring. Douloti didn't get leave earlier. And now! Something is going down, finishing her body. Well, and how did she get up and take clients a few days ago in Madhpura? For fear of Baijnathji.

All day she sat under a tree, in the shade. No. No use going to Mandar any more. Better to go to Seora. Father's there, mother's there. Seora is not even that far from Tohri. She will go to

Seora. Everything is cool at night. She won't be tired if she walks slow. There is after all a way. A broad unpaved road for oxcarts. In the late afternoon Douloti asked for some water at the food shop. Then she started step by slow step. She had never thought she would get to go to Seora again.

The smell of catkins by the wayside, around the necks of cattle the homcoming bells are chiming. Gradually the fireflies flew in the dark, the stars came out in the sky! People had lit a fire, the smoke was rising.

Walking on, walking on dragging her feet, Douloti came to the front of a large hut. A very big hut, close to Tohri. Douloti felt as she stepped in the front yard that it was very carefully clay-washed. And as she groped to the middle of the yard, Douloti realized this as well, that she would no longer get to Seora. Pain is climbing her entire chest, upward, upward.

Douloti lay down. The pain became cough, the cough became blood, Douloti closed her eyes.

In the morning at six, Mohan Srivastava, the master at the Basic Primary School in Bira village of Tohri Block, heard an uproar as he was fixing the Indian tricolor on a bamboo pole.

He came out with the flag in his hand.

Quite a few people have crowded around the map of India that had been carefully drawn, first by cutting the outline and then by pouring liquid chalk into it. Today is Independence Day, the first day of the month of Bhadra. Children come to raise the flag and elders come to see the fun. It is they who are standing crowded together, pointing with their fingers, speaking fearfully, pausing often.

Mohan Srivastava came down from the room and then, looking front, he closed his eyes. His body jerked again and again, as if his arms and legs were tied and a machine-gun was being emptied into him.

Filling the entire Indian peninsula from the oceans to the Himalayas, here lies bonded labor spread-eagled, kamiya-whore Douloti Nagesia's tormented corpse, putrefied with venerable disease, having vomited up all the blood in its desiccated lungs.

Today, on the fifteenth of August, Douloti has left no room at all in the India of people like Mohan for planting the standard of the Independence flag. What will Mohan do now? Douloti is all over India.