In the Moon-Bazar

by Patricia Walton Hill

Pat Hill in Dacca,
circa 1964

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Materials collected by Mary Frances Dunham
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MANUSCRIPTS OF PATRICIA WALTON HILL

(Correspondence to be sent to:

Mrs. Ralph O. Hill
c/o Lyon Assoc. Inc.
P.O. Box PA-179
Port Area, Manila
Philippines

unless a new address has been given.)

SHORT PIECES

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Saigon Scene 10 pp. and 3 pp. of recipes

IN THE MOON-BAZAR 243 pp.

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IN THE MOON-BAZAR

Patricia Walton Hill

FOREWORD

We went to live in East Bengal in 1963. Many foreigners there went into cultural shock on arrival and stayed, checking off the calendar days until they could escape into a more familiar world. Others, like us, succumbed easily to Bengal, and sometimes forgot how long we had been there or when it was time to go home.

During the five years we stayed there, we made periodic visits to the Occident to visit relatives and friends, and to stock up on provisions. (We left Bengal a little uneasily at these times, afraid of missing something, and we usually did.) The people we met in the west were puzzled. They saw us plunge into the shops and markets, greedy for foodstuffs and hardware we had been lacking. They read in newspapers about the cyclones, floods, communal riots, famines and wars in East Bengal. Yet they saw the enthusiasm with which we always returned to it.

"Why," they asked often, "do you want to live out there?"

Why indeed? We could not find an answer both brief and convincing. It would, it seemed, take a book to explain.

We left a few years before the terrible convulsions of 1971, which resulted in East Bengal's secession from Pakistan. When we lived there, East Bengal was East Pakistan. Before that it was part of British India. Today it is Bangladesh. But throughout time and political change, it has always been to the Bengali Shonar Bangla, Golden Bengal, and Land of the Bengali.

Chapter One
TRANSITION

Outside on the wet black runway, the plane stood, an important-looking beast, blinking its lights while crates of baby chickens were tucked into its belly. In San Francisco's misty pre-dawn, indistinct figures in overalls bustled about, grooming. In the bare waiting room Anthony, eighteen months old, slept on my lap; Christopher, who was nine, leaned against me, drowsy and silent. Two young Filipino women arrived, each with an infant and a cluster of family who fussed and hovered in anxiety and delight. We really did seem to be on our way to Asia, where my husband had been waiting in Dacca for us to join him.

At last the plane was ready to receive us. The Filipino woman beside me put away her knitting. She was a pediatrician, she explained as she helped me gather my bundles and get the

children onto the plane; her name was Ida Adicer, and her husband was on his way from the States, in a Philippine Air Force plane, to meet her in Manila. Our jet roared and flexed its muscles and lifted, and we were above the Pacific in the great soft darkness. The stewardess spread blankets over the boys and they slept. I looked out, impatient for daylight, impatient to look around the earth's curve ahead to the other side of the world. Then I fell asleep.

At Honolulu we stepped out into the warm silky air, and Ida and I took the children into the terminal for an orange drink. We bought newspapers, and watched a party of Americans leave for San Francisco in flowered shirts and ropes of fragrant blossoms. Christopher bought postcards and a plastic lei. Then we were aboard again, and pointed into the sky.

From Honolulu to Manila, time and space lose all the familiar dimensions. We were suspended in a blue wash, where heaven and sea blurred and ran together. A streak of deeper blue, a fluffy island of cloud, a brush stroke of violet or emerald, made the only punctuation in our universe. Time was pulled and stretched like an elastic ribbon, so that it took hours to get from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. After lunch we were served an endless succession of small sandwiches, cakes, tea, and punch, because the dinner hour lay so far ahead on that

distended day. It was Thursday for a few hours; we could not be sure where Friday began--and would it ever draw to a decent end? The sun stood paralyzed in the blueness. We talked about the time, checking our watches, asking questions, as people do about weather that has taken a bizarre turn. Yesterday and tomorrow were fictional, and geography ephemeral. I found Ida Adicer knitting and smoking in a seat corner with a resigned air. "I have ask' three times in this last hour how long till Manila, an' every time they tell me four hours. On the way to the States it was very dull--night time all the way, an' I get tired of sleeping."

And then, after the long sunny undefined stretch from the chill damp March morning in San Francisco, we stepped out into Manila, and found ourselves at three o'clock in a bright afternoon, with heat rolling up at us from the pavement. The children had slept in odd snatches across the time changes and date line, and dinner was a fleck in the distant future. After Customs formalities, we rode past the fringed palm trees, past shining Manila Bay, and the great dark humps of Bataan and Corregidor, to the hotel.

In Manila, they say, you stand at the edge of the Orient. Our hotel room was clean and dim, with two bed-couches, a baby crib, and bamboo blinds. The children took off their shoes and

ran around on the cool linoleum. We sent for limeades, and a plump smiling girl came to offer baby-sitting or guided tours. We had passed into that world where personal service, which has atrophied in the West, is paramount. The baby fell asleep heavily, unwashed and unfed. Christopher's eyes were faded with fatigue.

We had just nodded our way through a mediocre meal in the main dining room when Ida and her husband Vicente arrived with four of their friends. Christopher retired, and I went with the Adicer party to the Chinese dining room upstairs (of which we had been unaware), where I joined them in a complete and superb Chinese dinner. Afterward they drove me out to see the city. The next morning they were back to take us shopping, and to lunch, and then to the airport. I never knew how they found the energy and spirit to lavish tireless hospitality on comparative strangers; the Adicers had had a long journey too. We were in Manila for thirty-six hours. Christopher and I cherish a radiant impression of hot scented towels, exquisite food, crowded streets, clear brown faces, glorious gardens, and a remarkably gentle, cordial people.

From Manila we changed to another airline. Light faces were replaced by brown Mongolian faces; the voice on the loudspeaker repeated its messages in French and a tonal language. I took

the children into the coffee shop at the Saigon airport, a dreary place full of unwashed tables and flies, for a soft drink. They slept through the Rangoon stop.

The sun sank brilliantly into the clouds beneath us. It was dark when we landed at the Calcutta airport. A man came on board promptly and hurried down the aisle, spraying the interior with something that smelled like disinfectant. Thus rendered harmless, we were released from the plane and driven in a bus across the field to the terminal, through a mild wind.

The waiting-room outside Customs is a no-man's-land, an area beyond the borders, where all incoming passengers must nervously await the inspection ahead, and all outgoing passengers emerge from the ordeal to wait for the next plane. I do not understand why these rooms should be, everywhere, so brutally bleak, colorless, and uncomfortable. I sat with the children and thought about Ellis Island while an SAS girl tried to expedite my luggage and papers. When it was my turn to stand in line with my passport, I could see Ralph waiting beyond the barrier, among the dark faces and turbans. It seemed a long time before I was cleared and my papers were all stamped; the coolies swarmed away with my luggage, and I passed through the gate into India.

The drive from Dum-Dum Airport to the Grand Hotel regularly sent foreigners into shock. (I hear that they have a new route now.) Our car sprang ahead, down the middle of the road, among buses and hand-pulled rickshaws and taxis and pedestrians and wandering cattle. The road was lined with tiny open-fronted grass or bamboo shops, scarcely more than booths. At night, oil lamps flickered yellow light over the small brown men who sat inside among their wares, cloth and rice and mustard oil and cigarettes and tea. Less affluent wallahs were in business on the roadside, selling cooked sweets or hot chapattis from low charcoal stoves. Everywhere, the automobile lights fell on people. Men in white cotton dhotis, draped like full trousers. Men in lunghis, tubes of colored cotton wrapped like skirts and knotted at the waist. Women in saris. Children in rags, or naked. Men hawking or spitting, blowing their noses on their fingers, or squatting by the road, back to traffic, to relieve themselves. Men in the turbans and netted beards of the Sikhs. People walking, people squatting, people lying in doorways or among the dirt and refuse of the street.

Many westerners have told me since that during this ride, when they were new in Asia, their confidence faltered and even collapsed, and only weariness kept them from turning back at once to the world of pre-fab housing and cellophane wrappers. Some travellers held this to be the most depressing route in Asia.

It looked to me very much as books and documentary films had indicated, and in my numbness I could feel only the wonder and enormous satisfaction of having gotten there at last.

The Grand Hotel in Calcutta is a period piece, an enormous building surrounding a large courtyard. "It's probably the only hotel in the world where you have to change trains to get to your room," Ralph sighed. From the bearded doorman, in his gold braid and tall white turban glorified by a fan, a punkah, to any bedroom within, is a long day's safari. One tramps through miles of corridor, with a fifteen-second ride in a lift along the way. I was never, then or later, able to find my way unassisted. Once, many months after our first visit, we met a small band of American ladies in straw hats and cotton print dresses, toiling up the stairs and around the halls, carrying bundles labelled Kashmir Shop and Constantine's and Japan Air Lines flight bags, panting and dazed, asking directions anxiously from passing bearers and coolies. I thought it shocking that they had been sent out from the front desk without a guide or a box lunch. The dining room at the Grand has a ceiling two stories high, and potted palms and heavy red curtains and tall mirrors which surely have not been disturbed since Victoria's reign. Everywhere are bearers, soft-footed and dusky, with tarnished white coats and punkah turbans. The halls were permeated

with an odor which I came to identify as the smell of Calcutta: a compound of cocoanut oil and dusty carpets, of teak wood and humidity and furniture polish, of curry masala spices, and--not unpleasantly--of humanity.

We got into Calcutta on Saturday night, and Sunday was Holi, which is described in Fodor's Guide as "a saturnalia at the vernal equinox, celebrated with the squirting or throwing of red or yellow powder." Shops and bars and offices were closed, and Chowringee Road was dense with people, some of whose clothes were indeed stained red or yellow.

We had to wait over the weekend so that Ralph could go to the police station and argue about whether the days permitted on his visa should begin on the day it was issued or the day after. This grave legal matter kept him at the police thana for the entire morning on Monday, caught in the web of petty officialdom. Here one confronts the famous Indian babu, a clerk who can read and write, and who has got a desk and perhaps a stamp with which he can stamp innumerable papers, a reliable sign of power. He has got some education; he may be Matric., meaning that he has graduated from the tenth year in school, or he may even be B. A. Somehow his training has successfully destroyed any human impulses toward initiative, logic, or original thought. He believes that in advanced countries,

records are kept, and so he carries forward the light of culture by keeping records--endless, often pointless records--in the conviction that the more complicated the procedure, and the slower the performance, the more sophisticated the whole structure must be. Enamored of the mechanics, he has no idea of, or interest in, the purpose and function of the system. His fulfillment consists in impressing the public by his great mystery: how can one take so long to do so little?

On Monday afternoon we rushed from Calcutta to the airport. We stood in Customs in the thick moist heat, while Anthony cried and people milled and pressed about us, and the Customs babu carefully read each word of each passport and visa, peered about to be sure that we were all present, and pottered around to find huge books in which he slowly wrote many irrelevant statistics about us. A young American woman with a fresh complexion and bright eyes fed sourballs to the children, which made them sticky and contented and stopped the baby's crying. Her name was Jane Greenough, and I was delighted to learn that she lived in Dacca. She and her husband, Bucky, a doctor at the SEATO Cholera Laboratory, were returning from a holiday in the cool rugged heights of Darjeeling.

We ran to scramble aboard the plane, which was about to leave without us, and took off directly in the face of the

season's first quick, wild storm. The plane rocked and rose and dropped and pitched in the rain, and we were all limp and trembling when we landed at the Dacca Airport forty-five minutes later.

More gray walls and hard benches, more forms to fill out, and then we were out in the warm streaming night. A Citroen, that malicious French joke, waited for us, and we drove through the straight heavy downpour toward town. The headlights brushed over bobbing black umbrellas, dripping lunghis, squatting shadows, scurrying little dark figures everywhere. "What," my husband wondered, "do you suppose God will ever do with all these people?"

Twin lamps burned on our own gateposts. Our own chawkidor, night guard, ran to open the gate for us; and in the carport beside the square house, four beaming faces waited for us. The tiny black ayah took our plump, protesting baby and bore him off to be washed. The cook, imposing in his clean white shirt and freshly combed hair, bustled away to the kitchen where dinner was being kept warm. The table was laid and waiting, and the bearer and helper took our luggage in and began to make up the beds with the sheets I had brought. And so we had come home in Bengal and it had begun to take possession of us.

Chapter Two

FOUNDATIONS OF OUR WORLD

When the British divided and left the Indian subcontinent in 1947, Pakistan was defined, on a religious basis, as two distinct predominantly Muslim provinces which were separated by more than a thousand miles of Indian territory. West Pakistan (now Pakistan) stretches large and arid between Iran and Afghanistan on the west and India on the east. Urdu is its lingua franca. The province which was then East Pakistan, small and damp, lies almost entirely enclosed by an arm of eastern India, except for a brief strip of inhospitable Burmese border on the southeast, and the Bay of Bengal to the south. Its language and culture are Bengali. East Bengal is as flat as a rug, fringed on its northern and eastern borders by vestigial hills, and embroidered everywhere with water—rivers, tanks, ponds, lakes, khals.

In March, the cool clear winter season is past, the monsoon rains have not started, and there is only the harsh dusty heat.

Ralph had taken a house in Dhanmandi, the newest suburb of an ancient, as ugly and expensive as most of its kind. Trees and flowers and leaves had been erased hastily to make room for the whitewashed brick-and-mortar houses, set in rectangular compounds of knobby brown earth, bound by thick white walls. It never became cheaper, but gradually the ugliness declined. With the warmth and rain, occupied compounds are decently clad in leaves and grass within a year.

We woke in the morning to see a landscape drawn with a ruler. The eye moved up from the straight road that lay before our gate to the parallel lines of the compound walls, the telephone wired, the flat roofs, and beyond to the level horizon. An occasional tree raised a flattened top on a skinny trunk like a large thumb tack. Construction was a chronic, unhurried process, and great piles of red brick lined the roads and bordered the empty lots. Houses bristled with clumsy reinforcement bars even while blackish patches of mildew spread across the walls, so that they looked at once unfinished and aged.

The population began to stir early, and as the rickshaws and bullock carts and trucks appeared, dust rose like a powder-dry fog, red dust and gray dust and yellow dust. Through its cloud we watched the figures of Bengal pass our compound.

Citroens and Fiats and Morris Minors, and sometimes an American car, too large for the roads but commanding respect from local drivers, to whom right-of-way was established by size. Scrawny cows and goats wandering in to nibble the flowers. Wild-looking pi dogs eating garbage outside the gate. School girls in shalwar-camise and fluttering dupattas. Children with great dark eyes and little clothing.

The Bengali is characteristically slight of build, with small bones and dark skin; rounded features, soft black eyes, and wavy black hair. Before us, along Satmasjid Road, moved Bengalis in lunghis and bare feet; orthodox old Muslims in long white gowns and prayer caps and wispy beards; men in white trousers and shirts; men in white cotton pyjamas; Punjabis and Pathans from the West wing in tall turbans. Women were not a common sight on city streets in East Pakistan, but sometimes we saw one walk by in a white or dark work sari, or in a burqa, that pyramid-shaped, tentlike garment worn in public by Muslim women who live in the seclusion of purdah. The traditional burqa there is black, with net-covered eyeslits for minimal visibility. The newer ones had separate face veils which could be lifted when it seemed prudent; and I have once or twice been dazzled to see a burqa of sunny yellow or baby blue go floating by like a whimsical shade.

Outside our gate, for many days, a laborer squatted, shirtless, upon a pile of brick. The umbrella which sheltered him from the sun had faded from black to mushroom gray. From daybreak to nightfall he pounded, breaking bricks into small dull red bits. Later these would be used to seal the roof of a new house. One day the tenants might be astonished to find a troop of small boys, maybe six or seven years old, squatting on the roof. A fiddler stood among them, playing a tune to which the children alternately sang a line in high young voices, and beat a line rhythmically, pounding ground brick into the tar for insulation. An older resident told me that the songs are usually obscene. A few larger boys, perhaps ten or eleven years old, acted as overseers, cuffing the little workers who got out of line or rhythm. It was an extraordinary sight, at the same time gay and appalling.

Our house was not quite finished when we moved into it, nor was our furniture. The area was new--ten years before it had been jungle and paddy field--and so were the bands of foreigners who arrived and searched desperately for <u>pukka</u> housing. The builder never seemed to have enough capital to finish the structure until he had leased it and gotten his year-and-a-half rent in advance. Furniture was not built until it was ordered and partly paid for; then the carpenter <u>mistri</u>

set upon a fresh supply of uncured teak and produced furniture. The immature wood tended to split at an early age, and the workmanship was crude. Still, it was truly impressive when you saw the factory--a kutcha hut or a backyard, perhaps graced by a sign like "STAR FURNITURE COMPANY". I have watched, on our veranda, a Hindu wood mistri turn out a very respectable, solid cabinet, using a chisel, a hammer, a file, a small saw, and his fingers and toes.

The first western sensibility to be adapted was the taste for privacy. For the first month, our compound swarmed, indoors and out, with strange little brown men, sanding door frames, whitewashing walls, tacking electric wires in uneven lines from every corner, carrying stupendous stacks of bricks on their heads, sawing and hammering, stitching fabric. Slowly slowly an ugly chair and a sofa appeared in grimy muslin underwear, and an oversized table, and the great bulky wardrobes called "almiras". Screened frames were fitted into the windows and around the veranda. The heat thickened and shimmered.

The sun burned in a baked blue dome, a crow screamed from the garden wall and another complained from a telephone wire. In the field opposite, two women worked, dark and fluid, one in a green sari, one in blue, peacock-colored. A pottery wallah minced by with a dancing gait, balancing a large basket on his

thick hair and a folded towel. Inside our compound wall, workmen with dusty skins and plaid lunghis nailed screens and set bricks and sanded the teak bones of our furniture. Flies hung heavy and insolent at the screens, though the house reeked of insecticide; and the ceiling fans whispered on and on.

Projects in Bengal tend to trail off into nothingness. One day the mistris came late and accomplished little; the next day they came later and did less; and then they didn't come at all until, after two or three days, we turned our flagging attention to the half-painted door or the empty window frame, and sent scouts out to find them, to berate their supervisor, and to try to lure them back.

After the first sustained excitement, we were aware of the dust, the eye infections, the children's feverish diarrheas, the delays and irritations. Then they, too, evaporated before our wandering interest.

Early in April, everything was either relatively finished, or we had languidly given it up. The mistris had trickled away. The tailoring dirzis had come with their sewing machines and covered the sofa and curtained the windows, so that one could get up in the morning without meeting an interested brown face pressed against the pane. We were alone at last--my husband and I, our two sons, the cook, the bearer, the helper, the ayah, and the part-time mali (gardener).

Our first cook, Hossain, told us that he was half-Burmese, and therefore not a thief like the Bengali cooks. We found him well-groomed, alert, and clever, and we admired his production of edible meals on two uncertain kerosene plates. By mid-April we had learned that he bullied the other servants, his cooking was greasy and repetitive, and he habituatlly stood at the end of the table throughout our meals, grinning and butting into our conversations. So we were happy and relieved to discover that he stole far more food than he served us--he became quite stingy with our own table--and we were able to pitch him out without remorse. We endured another ten-day trial with another offensive face and open palm until Abdul mercifully reported that his old mother was sick in the village and he had to leave in fifteen minutes. He knew that we knew he lied, but we urged him off, and he went to another job which offered ten rupees more a month, where a new memsahib suffered him for six months before she realized that you could, without injustice, dispatch a servant because his presence was simply intolerable.

I remembered meeting a woman during my first week in Dacca who told me that her entire staff was Buddhist. "The Bengali Buddhists are clean," she said, "and usually honest, and they're nice to my animals. And they're the best cooks in the subcontinent." This endorsement began to glow in my memory, and I mentioned it to Jane Greenough, who told her neighbor, who told her Buddhist

cook. Two days later Saileshwar Barua came to our door with a sheaf of references which covered twenty-five years in tire and the width of the subcontinent in space, though he was in his early forties. When I had read them, I said, "Very well, come tomorrow and we'll try it for a couple of weeks and see how we like it."

My use of "we" was meant to include him, but lest there be any misunderstanding, he said, stroking his hair diffidently, "And--how I like it."

During his first week with us, he came out of the kitchen only to tell me that the stove was inadequate, the kitchen a poor one, and the servants' quarters of inferior quality. It was all quite true, but there was nothing I could do about it, so that I was both annoyed and frustrated. I thought, When the two weeks are up.... One day I tired of contriving chilly rebuttals, and I told him to go away and stop complaining. He went back to the kitchen, grinning, and stopped complaining. The quality of our cuisine had soared while our costs had shrunk substantially. Ralph was favorably disposed toward the new cook because, in refreshing contrast to his predecessors, he was rarely visible or audible. By the end of the month, we found that we rather liked him. Evidently we had met his standards, too, despite our shabby equipment, for he stayed.

In the days of Hossain, the house was periodically shaken by a sudden explosion of shrill Bengali from the pantry. The first time I waited apprehensively; a door of my room flew open to admit a spluttering cook, fists clenched, his eyes bright marbles in jaundiced whites. "Madame, he is not take order! I tell to him like brother, I say 'My dear friend, you must do this'--"

Through the door behind me the bearer, Nural Islam, appeared, arms full of clean linen, lips tremulous, eyes bitter; and Hossain cried virtuously, "I come to tell you this in front of his face, so he will not say I do this behind his back. Six-thirty he come to serve breakfast. Clean up. I tell to him this. Dust rooms," pointing to a list of duties which I observed uneasily had been signed by me. My heart sank.

The bearer looked sullen. "I take my orders from Memsahib, Sahib, nobody else. I work for them."

The cook's bulging eyes appealed to me for wisdom and righteousness. I cleared my throat in a determined effort to meet my obligations. Where oh where was Sahib with his personnel policies?

"Madame, he work in hotel, never in house, he know nothing."

"Madame, <u>he</u> work every place--one month here, two month other place--I work for Sahib in hotel, he hire me long before--"

I clicked my tongue and tried to look calm and sensible. "I'll have to take this up with Sahib." My heart warmed toward Taijuddin, the helper, who couldn't speak English and, indeed, scarcely spoke at all.

After a week of these hostilities, we lwt Nural Islam go. Ralph met him at six in the morning on the veranda to dismiss him, while I waited behind the door with my cowardly heart in my throat.

"Was it very hard?" I asked Ralph afterward.

"It always is," he said wearily. After that I took care of any necessary domestic firing myself. It never got any easier.

Then came Faisul, and Hossain crying to me, "He is always make trouble--I told that Faisul, you not bring friend here, drink tea, drink juice--he tell me--me--to make tea for his friend! He say, 'Make food for my friend'. This man must go! I say, 'Who you talk to? You think I am cook like other cooks to use Memsahib's food?'" Hossain's voice choked with outrage, which I am sure was genuine. His own profits would have been reduced if anyone else stole any of our food. Already he left us just enough to keep us from hunger and open rebellion.

So Faisul went, and we promoted Taijuddin from hamal, helper, to bearer. The ayah grumbled about the cook, and the hamal bickered with the ayah, and Christopher quarrelled with

all of them. Accusation and malediction crackled in the air, until we sent Hossain to outer darkness.

With the reign of Saileshwar, some harmony settled over the household. He brought intelligence, common sense, and faith in his own superiority; the rest of the staff fell into line. When someone provoked his anger, he responded with a controlled eruption of furious Bengali and blazing eyes, before which the others subsided in nervous silence, and I stayed out of the way. He handled these conflicts himself and did not complain to me about another servant; the others seemed content under his authority. The vulgar arrogance which, after the first obsequious bow, had found such natural expression in Hossain, was beneath Saileshwar's dignity.

I was a little annoyed when he declined to use our former cook's uniforms, and somewhat amused when he sent his new ones back to the tailor because the pockets were incorrect. Then he moved into our servants' quarters. He left in the middle of the night and next morning he told me that he had been driven out by bedbugs. When investigation proved that the beds were, in truth, infested, and the bearer and harmal had slept among the bugs for two weeks without reporting it, we began to take his sensitivity more seriously. If he had the shortcomings of aristocracy--vanity, laziness, and a stubborn habit of delegating

mundane tasks to inferiors--he also had certain regal virtues: wit, taste, and a capacity for Rising Above Things. He and Ralph regarded each other respectfully from a distance. He had his only power struggle with me; we feinted, jousted, argued, and laid ambushes for months. Eventually we discovered that both of us privately thought it was ridiculous.

Our ayah was a small Bengali Baptist whose name seemed to be Kripa da Costa. I think "Kripa" must have evolved through a child's mispronunciation of some other name, but that is what she remained. She was something less than five feet tall, tough, loyal, aggressive, honest, emotional, and practical. With her hair combed back smoothly and her face in round-eyed repose, she looked like a black cherub. When she laughed or talked--which she mostly did--she had a shrill voice and her little face wrinkled up like a monkey's, showing one brown tooth in front among the white ones. She scrubbed and dressed and fed Anthony like a proper nanny, directing and scolding. She giggled and made faces and scrambled about on the floor with him like another child. Her long hair was braided with black cloth and heavily greased--I could smell the cocoanut oil on the baby's skin after she had gone home. She helped in the kitchen at mealtime, and I liked to watch her peel potatoes,

squatting under the sink, holding the knife handle firmly between her toes, blade up, and deftly turning the potato against it while the skin curled off rapidly.

The third enduring element in our household was Akel Khan, the Pathan chawkidor who guarded our house at night. He came from a village in the rugged section north of Peshawar, in West Pakistan, along with many friends, cousin-brothers, and clansmen. Most of them came to East Pakistan as chawkidors, soldiers, or money-lenders. The privileged educated classes came as army officers, administrators, or business men and industrialists. They were generally large men with strong, rather Middle Eastern faces and light brown skin. A Pathan at Ralph's office ran a kind of employment bureau, and regularly brought in newly arrived Pathans to ask my husband to employ them. They would first go to a Public Stenographer who sat in a wooden stall with a typewriter and turned their verbal message into a kind of English. The finished product was brought to the office. The letters described their courage, fidelity, and dependability, and implored the Sahib in his infinite honor and kindliness to find work for a poor man. The applicant would stand with his agent, saluting smartly, and trying to look proud yet humble, trustworthy but fierce, while the letter was

being read. One day a platoon of them arrived. Sahib heard out its references and then explained to the interpreter that while he was grateful to them for coming, and confident of their worthiness, there were no jobs available at present. While this was being repeated lengthily in Pushtu, he studied the men before him, and as they smiled and chuckled, he beamed at them in spontaneous response. He was disconcerted when all of the happy faces fell suddenly--the interpreter having reached the part about no jobs--and left him grinning alone.

Moreover, Ralph complained later, even a scolding lost its edge if he had to stand, trying to look expressive, while its translation went on and on.

Our Khan was about five-feet-two, and he had a pointed face like an elf's with an engaging three-cornered smile. But he had dense black eyebrows and a curved nose, and could look quite dangerous if you hadn't heard him giggle. One night when I was new in residence, and was trying to sneak into my own kitchen from the veranda, he appeared silently at the corner of the house, scowling, hand on knife. I identified myself as rapidly as I could, and felt reassured that he seemed to be on my side. It always cheered us to turn in at our gate in the evening and see him run to open it, smiling radiantly and toucing his forehead in salaam; or to glance out in the night and see him at the gate, arms folded atop it, his great Pathan shirt billowing behind him.

Many Pathans took a scornful view of the Bengali--it was said that they were hired as night guards in Dacca because of their good-natured willingness to slit a Bengali throat if the need arose. So they stayed with their own. Akel joined in the daily perpetual caucuses with all the other Pathan guards in Dhanmandi, but he was adaptable. He gossiped with Saileshwar in the kitchen while his thermos jog was being filled with sweet hot tea, or with Kripa when she sat on the steps with Anthony in the warm evenings. His native tongue was Pushtu, but he knew some Urdu, which was widely understood in East Bengal; and he gradually spoke some Bengali. I was happy about his cultural flexibility; I knew a household where the Pathan chawkidor had offered to knife the Bengali servants if they rattled pans in the kitchen while he was sleeping in the garage. And you don't want that sort of thing around the compound.

Akel's village did not entirely lack activity. One evening during our first few months, he presented to us the following telegram:

"NOORAFZAL SHOT BY DUDDAS BROTHERS AND AJABKHAS NEWPHEW (sic)"

ZAFARWALI

Akel wanted to borrow fifty rupees, as the Dacca Pathans were taking up a collection to send one of their number back to the village. Someone had to take care of the deceased's property and the widow, they explained. "But in fact," Ralph reflected, "we've probably helped finance another murder in the Northwest Frontier."

Akel himself was amiable, though. When he began to wear a Bengali _lunghi_ for his nap and bath in the daytime, I thought it quite practical. I was distressed to see him mount guard one night wearing western pants and shirt. "He looks like a Navajo dude," Ralph said. The evening he appeared in a Burmah Shell cap, I went directly to the kitchen to register my protest with the congregation there.

"I don't ask that he be clean, or honest, or even brave," I said untruthfully. "Only picturesque. Other Pathans wear turbans, _this_ high, and curly beards, and sashes, and--" I was still talking when Kripa nipped out to deliver my grievance to its object. She returned to report that Khan said that those turbans, _pugrees_, were Punjabi, not Pathan, and besides they made his head ache.

But the next night as we drove in, he met us, smiling, in light flowing pajama, with a scarlet flower tucked behind his ear.

The baby taxi was a squat three-wheeled vehicle with a canvas top, and celluloid side flaps which were put down on rainy days. They darted and swerved through traffic with roar and rattle, and unless the motor broke down or it ran out of petrol, they got you there faster than a rickshaw, but not as pleasantly.

We never saw a hand-drawn rickshaw in East Bengal, as we did in Calcutta in West Bengal. Our cycle rickshaw was a two-wheeled carriage mounted behind a single wheel. The seat was narrow; it held two people nicely if they were not very big. It slanted forward and was covered with very slick plastic, deisgned to pitch the passenger out onto the road at a sudden stop. A doll-sized canopy arched overhead, too low to permit the average person to sit straight, but it could be pushed back on a fair day, exposing the occupant to a gentle breeze. A lust for color and glitter expressed itself uninhibitedly in this rickshaw. The canopy, the seat, the outside, all were covered by bright dirty plastic--wild pink roses, or orange on lilac; royal blue fringes; gilt rosettes; paintings of romantic scenes or oriental movie queens; spangles, stars, any and every gaudy splendor the heart could long for.

In the first days I would crouch under the canopy, peeping out in terror. I had perforce to stare at the rickshaw wallah's

Chapter Three

THE FACE OF THE CITY

There were few telephones in Dacca, and their owners found them of uncertain advantage. They were apt to admit calls from people who wanted you to serve on committees, and to offer silence or busy signals when you wanted to invite friends for cocktails. My own rapport with telephones has never been quite easy, and I was pleased to find myself without one. For routine communications, a note was sent with a bearer. If you were out, the note awaited your return. If you were in, the other-house bearer had tea and gossiped in the kitchen with your own servants while you framed a thoughtful reply. A painless, civilized system.

Obviously, some occasions required your personal presence--a party, a chest X-ray, a tour of the city. Until or unless you had a private car, you found an indigenous means of transport. These were all colorful and dangerous.

thin back--at the great holes in his soiled T-shirt, clinging with sweat, at his bare dusty feet pumping away on the pedals below his lunghi--and try not to look as guilty as I felt. Dust rose in choking clouds as we went, bouncing and bumping, over rutted dirt roads and broken brick, dodging geese and goats, ducking between buses and trucks, narrowly missing gnarled crones and naked children, the cycle bell ting-tinging a steady warning. I sat in a state of alert paralysis while we plunged out onto the road shoulder to pass a bullock cart, or sneaked between a bulging green city bus and one of the great public carriers referred to in the local press as "killer trucks."

Later I learned to put the top back and enjoy the ride, when the traffic was light. I was always more relaxed on the katcha roads, coping with pedestrians and poultry, than challenging the madly-driven motors on the pukka roads.

I think that pukka and katcha must be the first native words to be learned by foreigners in Bengal, as everything is one or the other, with little gradation in between. "Pukka" means good, right, proper, solid, authentic, ripe, etc. "Katcha" is the opposite. This is the world of the Three Little Pigs; the first two pigs built katcha houses of straw and sticks, and the wolf blew them down, while the third pig was safe in his pukka house. Bamboo and mud huts are katcha,

brick houses are pukka; dirt roads are katcha, paved roads are pukka; ripe fruit is pukka, and so are leather shoes.

Most of the people of East Bengal spent their entire lives among the katcha. Cyclone after flood after riot, the katcha houses were destroyed, while the pukka houses stood snugly.

The original nucleus of Dacca was a katcha Hindu village on the bank of the Buriganga River, and it remained the core of the Old Town. Its pinched tangled streets and teeming bazaars bore the ancient names: Tanti Bazaar of the weavers, Sankhari Bazaar of the conchshell cutters, Kumartoli of the potters. Into the mid-twentieth century, the Hindus remained the craftsmen of gold, silver, clay, wood, cloth, and paint in East Bengal.

Early in the seventeenth century, a government seat was established at Dacca under the Mughul empire, and the city spread north along the river. In that area a few structures survived from the Mughul period--Lalbagh Fort, Choto Katra, Bara Katra--but in general the old buildings had succumbed to the climate and neglect.

Then the Europeans began to arrive, coming up from the Bay of Bengal to trade. They set up factories and warehouses,

and established Christian missions. From that period we had names like English Road and Arminitola, and the beautiful old Armenian Church. The venerable tombstones in this churchyard, and in the Christian cemetery in the Old Town, were engraved with touching legends. You found, for example, the epitaphs of a mother and her children grouped together, all victims of smallpox within a week's time; or a young Englishman who died of cholera a few months after his arrival in Bengal.

In British India, Dacca was obscured by the importance of Hindu-dominated Calcutta in West Bengal. The Muslim aristocracy resented this, and in 1905, to appease them, the British partitioned Bengal, with Calcutta supreme in the western province, and Dacca restored to the status of a capital in the eastern province. Brick buildings were raised to house the offices and personnel of a capital city. But six years later the partition was annulled. Calcutta again became the capital of all Bengal, and the buildings in Dacca were used for the new university, in a section of the city called Ramna. The old villas and gardens were there too, and the blunt red brick was softened by great trees and abundant vines.

The newest areas were Motijheel, with its banks and trade houses and business offices, and Jinnah Avenue, with its shops; and of course Dhanmandi, where many foreigners and prosperous Bengalis and West Pakistanis lived.

A81 (57) New Market

We shopped regularly at New Market, on the corner of Mirpur Road where the university area met the boundaries of Dhanmandi. The market was formed by two large triangles, one within the other, each lined with small pukka shops and a covered concrete walk. Most of the shops were open in front, and the wares spilled out onto the walk. You passed the fluttering saris, the bright silks and cottons, the neon-pink and chartreuse plastic bags and bottles, the tin pots and pans, the painted trays, the paper flowers, the small kerosene burners, the glittering bangles and glossy ribbons. There were shops where you bought medicine, and a man lounged there with a stethoscope around his neck who would diagnose and prescribe for you. In the far corner were the stalls where you could find books and magazines in Urdu or Bengali or English. The inner square contained the pillow and mattress shops, in front of which men sat at their sewing machines, stitching covers to order. Boiled milky tea and glutinous sweets were sold at the tea shops there, and a boy squatted on the sidewalk washing dishes.

Outside the market the beggars gathered; legless men; women in ragged saris or patched faded burqas carrying limp babies; blind, pock-marked children; and cripples who shook withered limbs at people passing by. And everywhere the murmur followed: "Baksheesh, Memsahib...Baksheesh...." There were

the lively little urchins who ran after you and surrounded you, jumping and shouting. "Coolie? Coolie? Chawkidor?" For a few annas they would watch your car or carry your bundles. Failing to make a business deal, they sometimes followed out of simple curiosity, to stare.

Staring is a popular pastime in Bengal. It doesn't cost money and there is no cultural aversion to it. Large pale foreigners were always somewhat conspicuous, and one did not have to venture far out of town to become a striking novelty. A western woman in the Old Town, or outside Dacca, attracted an audience at once. If she stopped at a shop, they crowded in behind her, discussing her clothes, her complexion, her selection, her money, her character, and who knows what else. Waiting for a train or boat, the foreigner became the center of a dense ring and its unanimous gaze, as direct, unblinking, and unsmiling as a child's stare.

Just beyond the pukka wall' enclosure was the food market, where all the cooks of Dhanmandi shopped and exchanged news items in the mornings. Bengali husbands did the marketing here too, and, rarely, their wives. Under a huge corrugated iron roof, low wooden tables stretched end to end, with narrow aisles. The sellers squatted or sat cross-legged on the tables among the goods. You passed piles of green beans, aged black

tamarind pulp, yellow cucumber, purple eggplant, dark-red curly spinach, green limes, golden-brown pineapple. Another aisle was furnished in subdued tones, with small beige potatoes, amber-skinned onions, silver-gray garlic, golden knobs of turmeric and ginger, tiny hard betel nuts. In the next building, round baskets were heaped with dal (lentils), pink and yellow and green, and with rice, brown and white. Coarse sugar was sold from large dirty jute bags. In the dim dusty stalls to the rear, one found the crude wooden platters which looked as if they had been carved with a spoon, the small clay or tin lamps, the bamboo fishing baskets, and the graceful dark clay water jugs. When I bought these items and took them home, my servants raised their eyebrows, and slowly my artefacts drifted into corners, under cobwebs and out of sight.

In the poultry market, the chickens clucked miserably in their cages, where they were pinched and poked by all the cooks before they were carried off by their feet to be slaughtered in someone's compound. The fish and prawns likewise were borne off flopping and wiggling, and it was exciting in the kitchen when the cook came home with his lively produce. Only the meat was dead-on-arrival. Strolling through the meat market, with its vendors squatting among the blood and dirt and flies, one

marvelled that the country could be afflicted with overpopulation. Still, the beef and mutton were delicious when a skilful cook had selected and prepared them. (Pork was not sold in the market because of the Muslim prohibition against it, but was brought stealthily by the Christian pork wallah to the house, still warm, with black-bristled skin on it.)

Around the periphery of the bazaar, vendors sat under faded black umbrellas, offering bananas, pink-fleshed jambura fruit, hairy cocoanuts, and the sticky brown sugar called gur. "Memsahib! You try! Here--here!" extending a slice of papaya on a filthy knife. There was always a pan stand, selling the bright green leaf, smeared with white lime and wrapped around a few betel nuts and spices, which Bengalis chew and love. It has a pleasantly anaesthetic effect on the mouth lining, stains the teeth, and is spat out, leaving red splashes all over the country. Small stalls displayed cheap lunghis and saris and gamsas in colorful stacks; cigarettes; black braided cotton for ladies' hair; playing cards. At night the oil lamps made round patches of light, and charcoal stoves were set up on the sidewalk to cook and sell the flat discs of bread called chapattis, or paratta.

The Bengali diet is based on rice, mustard oil, and salt. It includes dal and ata, the wheat flour. Among the poor, it is a thin fare. Hand-milling of rice saved food value somewhat. The husks were broken by pounding with a wooden peg, a dekki; then the rice was shaken in woven bamboo trays to sift the chaff. This was still the common method of husking rice. In villages where machine-milling had been introduced, symptoms of beri-beri had been reported. Most of the people had little to supplement the rice, and for many there was not enough of that.

Over the rice goes the masala sauce, bright orange and very hotly seasoned. A great deal of time went into this. Most of the morning, in our houses, one servant or another was crouched on the kitchen floor over the curry stone, with a stone roller. Here the spices--turmeric, garlic, coriander, cumin seed, ginger root, and the fiery chillies—were ground, with a little water, to a thick paste. Mustard oil was heated in a pan, and onions and more chillies were tossed in, producing a powerful, acrid odor and much coughing and tears. Eventually all these met in company with potatoes and spinach, okra, pumpkin, cucumber, maybe fish heads or mutton, whatever was available, in their completed curry sauce.

The average Bengali did not get a highly nutritive diet. The city day laborer might do his day's work on a chapatti

and a cup of tea, with perhaps a plate of rice at the end of the day. The rural poor ate rice and dal once or twice a day, depending upon their incomes. They were rather better off than the city poor, for they could raise a bit of okra or spinach, and keep a chicken; and the country hut would have a white pumpkin vine growing over the roof. "And village people sometime' help each to other," Saileshwar said, "but in city nobody anything care."

When he can afford it, the Bengali adds meat, eggs, and fish to his diet. Bengali people love their fish, and when it is scarce in the market, they suffer. I never understood why, with such an abundance of water, East Bengal should have had occasional fish shortages. I was told variously that the fish was being black-marketed in Calcutta; that fish was scarce because everybody eats it; and that fishermen could not fish in the seasons of high wind and water. Perhaps they were all true.

Everything seemed ill-nourished in East Pakistan. The cows were gaunt and their milk supply minimal and thin; the chickens were small and so were their eggs; the land was farmed by primitive methods and its yield was inadequate; vegetables were scrawny in the winter and almost disappeared in the summer.

Doctors told me that the gastric ulcer incidence was high in East Bengal. They attributed it in part to the habit of pouring chilli-hot curries into an empty stomach. They also pointed out that, for the average Bengali, simple survival was a continual struggle, involving the tension and anxiety we usually associate with high-level administration and sophisticated societies. The simple life is not, after all, necessarily carefree.

Chapter Four

THE VILLAGE

The surface of East Bengal was closely sprinkled with villages, the constant timeless unit of rural life. Transportation from one village or town to another depended upon an uncertain sequence of country boats, trains, ferries, launches, and buses. If we set out for a village at any distance, it was not advisable to make precise appointments for the day of our expected return, but to accept in advance that the train would be late, or the bridge washed out, or the launch would break down, or the bus would be wrecked, or the ferry schedule changed. If it rained, everything would be delayed. Bengali people cherish rain for its blessing upon the crops, but do not like their persons exposed to it.

A few weeks after we came to East Bengal, I went with one of the college sisters to Toomileah, one of the Christian villages around the mission north of Dacca. For this, it was necessary

to be at Tejgaon station near Dhanmandi at five-thirty or six in the morning, in case the train should leave on time. The station was a wooden hut with a long porch which, early in the morning, was full of sleeping people. Later somebody opened the stand where tea and pan were sold, and the flies gathered on the soft drink bottles, and the platform was covered with men, smoking and chewing and staring.

You could travel Third Class or Inter Class, where there was a long wooden bench against each side and another running down the middle; or Second or First Class, where there were two leather-covered benches designed to hold six people, and two luggage racks overhead. The trick in First and Second was to find an unoccupied carriage, quickly fill it with your own party, and bar the door so nobody else could come in. Otherwise you might find yourself caught in a tight herd, and your own servants and children riding in the luggage rack. (The children enjoyed that but the servants didn't.)

We climbed into the Inter car, where one side bench was packed should-to-shoulder with men. On the nearly empty middle bench, a gentleman in rumple European clothes and spectacles got up, looked around nervously, and reached over to the other side bench to shake an inert bundle of rags. It finally stirred and uncoiled to reveal an emaciated fellow with bleary eyes,

who shuffled off into a corner. The three women with us took his place, and Sister and I planted ourselves on the middle bench beside the western-clad sahib, who sank behind his newspaper. Sister glanced at him with satisfaction.

"He wanted to keep this bench for himself," she said.

The train moved slowly, roughly, past the neat block of army barracks at Dacca Cantonment, past the long string of huts--grass, tin, and rag--that fringed the edges of the city. And then we were looking out over the paddy fields and the groves of palm trees. In the late March heat, the fields were khaki-colored and dry.

Sister sighed. "We ought to have some storms now. We've only had one so far this year. If we don't get rain, they can't plant, and if they don't plant pretty soon, the rice won't be high enough to survive the monsoon rains in June. <u>There's</u> a good field," she pointed out. A long strip of green rice rippled along the edge of a canal, a fresh border against the parched field beyond.

At Tongi station a blind beggar came aboard and picked his way among us, one filthy hand extended, the other clutching his stick. A plump Bengali gave him a coin, and he went to the other end of the car and sang a chant of thanksgiving to Allah.

We passed Pubail station and got off at Arikhola, another wooden hut station flanked by a bamboo teashop. Sister led the way along the tracks and turned off onto a narrow raised aisle between paddy fields. The countryside was dotted with knobs of land, feathered with palm trees, where the houses are built. Ahead of us, as our path turned, a bullock hauled wood, while a dark barefoot figure with an orange towel on its head walked beside the beast and hit it with a stick now and then--not viciously, or even energetically, but with an air of mild habit. Bamboo trees grew in clumps and rose, slender and curving, like the pattern on a plate. The scene was painted with creams and pale greens and the delicate lines of certain oriental water colors.

We went over an arched wooden bridge and our path wound past a small patch of jungle to the gate of a large shady compound. Two little Bengali nuns in white habits came out to meet us, hands held out, coffee-brown eyes shy and happy. Sister greeted them in Bengali as we entered, bending toward one and then the other, towering over them at 5'10". More nuns waited in the garden, and a formation of girl students in bright saris handed each of us a bouquet of flowers and sang "Happy welcome to you...."

The convent was a light two-storied building surrounded by a broad lawn and pastoral silence. I have noticed many times since how a convent compound makes a tidy patch of order on a casual landscape. Our breakfast waited for us in a small wing room, where cotton curtains hung and stirred in the breeze at the doors. The eggs, carefully poached for our western palates, had grown cold because our train was late. There were toast and marmalade and coffee. Heavenly coffee--that same train was always scheduled to leave so early that nobody had time for coffee beforehand.

As we finished greedily, Sister Agnes' face peeped around the curtain. Would we like to see the chapel? Of course. Would the ladies like to wash first? Oh, please. Up the stairs, too narrow for our long feet. In a plain room with two or three beds, we found two ewers of water, two basins, soap in a dish, and clean faded towels. We washed off our dust and Sister came to lead us away.

The chapel was not quite finished, but its walls were plastered, and squares of bright red and blue glass filled the windows. We met the two mission priests: one from Iowa, who had been there for years, and another newly arrived from Boston, who was practicing his Bengali at the Toomileah mission.

We took a short walk through the trees to visit Shandra, a graduate of the sisters' orphanage, and a new bride. The village bari (home) is typically composed of a group of single huts--perhaps a room where the father and mother and younger children sleep, another for a son and his wife, another for a grandmother and more children. At least one of the children always carries a baby astride the hip. As the family grows, the "extended" or "joint" bari develops. There is a shared cook-hut, often a thatched roof on bamboo poles, where the family meals are preapred over low mud or iron stoves. Someone is usually occupied with the preparation of rice, which is paddy in the field, dhan in the storage bin, chaul after milling, and bhat in the cooking pot.

Shandra was out when we arrived, but she was sent for, and hurried home, holding the end of her sari over her face and peeking out at Sister in a continuous agony of pleasure and embarrassment. The bari had jute walls covered with cow dung. In the central clearing, more cow dung was being dried for fuel. Shandra showed us the hut she shared with her new husband. It was cool, dark, and bare, and the mud floor was neatly swept. A few colored holy cards, calendar pictures, and a rosary were hung together on one wall.

In a hut across from Shandra's, her mother-in-law smiled at us from the doorway. Low cane stools were fetched to the front step and we sat and drank tea while the village women and children gathered to look at us. A few of the children were bold enough to grin when we spoke to them; the rest collapsed, writhing with excitement, behind their mothers.

The villages in this area were relatively prosperous. Many of the men worked in Dacca as cooks or bearers or malis, and came home once or twice a month. If they were well-connected and/or well qualified, they worked for Americans or other foreigners who paid higher salaries than the local people. Education was available for their children at the Catholic missions near them, and some of the Sisters ran a medical dispensary. The men who stayed in the villages tended the fields, and did a little fishing with nets or bamboo fish traps.

If you went to that village country after the rains, you saw it laid out in squares of vivid green, each framed with a brown aisle of footpath. The farmers irrigated by hand until the water was too low in the rivers, as it was in April or May. Then they waited and prayed for rain.

During the monsoon rains, when the whole country was flooded, you got off at Pubail station and walked a short muddy distance to the river. The country boats waited there

to take you to any village in the neighborhood. The country boat is a wooden vessel with a round bottom, often covered by a bamboo cowl. The madjii (boatman) sits at one end and poles it along with a length of bamboo, or if the water is very deep, he uses an oar. When the province was covered with water, the boats moved everywhere, carrying passengers or wood or vegetables. You found yourself floating on a shallow lake over a field where you had walked a few months before. The water near the edges was beige and opaque, but in the middle it was like black crystal, with a shimmering greenish cast from the rice stalks growing and waving below. Mauve water hyacinths were scattered across the surface, sometimes bankes thickly as if they grew in a garden plot.

At times like that it was possible to bask in the serenity, and to forget for a few minutes the plague of poverty which saturated the picturesque country.

Many villages remained caught within the spreading web of the city, too. Behind the pukka houses on Satmasjid Road lay a crooked string of mud huts with broken bits of pottery pressed into the walls, where Hindu kamars made water jugs and cooking vessels as they had been made for centuries, and here and there a goldsmith crouched over his work. At one end, in Rayer Bazaar, a Kali temple housed a startling image of the goddess of

destruction. A kiln and potter's wheel had been set up beside it, with a young man from a local industrial design school to help develop modern forms of pottery. Glazed teapots and vases were stacked high on the porch, and he showed with pride the new clay fruit and vegetables, convincingly painted.

Houses and shops were crowded into the area around the temple, and Kripa lived there. She was rare among Bengalis in that she never went back to her native village in Barisal district and frankly hated country living; but she had a steady succession of relatives from there staying at her city compound. She had married a Christian cook named Augustine, and we went to their house for breakfast on our first Easter in Dacca, which also happened to be Christopher's birthday.

We drove down a long rutted lane of broken brick and red dust, past new apartment houses still under construction, and stopped before a high gray cement wall with a large wooden gate topped by a cross. Inside, a thatched roof on bamboo poles sheltered a gaunt cow, and its calf chewed at a cone of dried grass. Across the clay yard stood Kripa's house, with a small screened porch and a single room, cement-floored. It had a roof of corrugated tin and the walls were covered with pictures from newspapers and magazines. A low unpainted wooden table and an

unstable wooden bed, two of its legs propped up with bricks, furnished the room. The dim interior was cooled by an electric fan which they placed near us. We sat on the porch while Augustine served us doughnuts and cookies. There were a cake with Happy Easter on it, and two green sugar Easter eggs with pink and yellow flowers. Ice cubes appeared from a plastic bag; Kripa had brought a thermos full of boiled water from our own house.

Two tall boys appeared from somewhere, and Kripa pointed to the bigger one. "Sahib, you say you help this boy catch job. He watchman, I think." The boy stood very straight and said, "I am strong." The other one, Kripa thought, would be a good mali.

"You help me, I think," she said earnestly. "We ten people living here, and two of us only have job."

Sahib smiled encouragingly and told them to come to his office. They stood respectfully while they were being discussed, with the expressionless faces of people listening to an incomprehensible language.

When we rose to leave, Kripa leaned her cheek against her shoulder with the arch grin I recognized easily and said, "You want me to come with you now?" Of course I did. We had agreed earlier, at her request, that she take the previous Friday off

instead of Sunday, and I had accordingly depended on her services for Sunday afternoon. But Ralph said,"Oh, let her stay, Pat. Can't you see she wants to?"

So she had the day off, and I was cross with myself for submitting to unfair pressure.

The next day she asked us to loan her four hundred rupees to build one small pukka room on her compound. We pondered over this a bit. She had been with us for only a month. Since it is notoriously difficult to fire somebody who owes you a lot of money, some servants tended to become very relaxed about their work as soon as they had borrowed enough money.

But we loaned her four hundred rupees. Her work did not relax at all, and she conscientiously, gradually, repaid the money. She told me once that her mother had taught her to ask for whatever she wanted. "And then if they not give, never mind. You not anything steal, you not talking lie." She minded her mother. She was honest, and she would ask for your scalp if she thought she could use it.

I fumed from time to time about this grasping quality. But when we watched her ambition and her struggle, against absurd odds, to make a decent home, to send her children to school, to sink a new well because the old one gave too little water, to build another room on the compound for the Baptist

meetings, it was hard to sustain a healthy resentment. She used her poverty shamelessly to wring sympathy and assistance from us. She worked hard and loyally. During the two years she was with us, she got her new well, built two or three new rooms on her compound with high cement floors (Rayer Bazaar always flooded during the monsoon rains), added a stout sign on her gate reading "All-in-One-Baptist-Church", and kept two children in school. They were actually her brother's children, but she had adopted them, because he had five children and poor health. Later she brought his wife, and the other children, from the village. She trained the sister-in-law, Shudah, in ayah work at our house, and after four months we found a job for Shudah.

So we felt that the foreign aid Krioa extracted was a successful investment.

Chapter Five

THE STAFF OF LIFE

Everywhere in the world, foreign residents relieve their tensions by complaining about the local residents; and tensions were endemic in East Bengal. To a friend engaged in this popular exercise, Dan once said, "How can you? Look at Wohab--at Philip--how loveable--"

"But they're different," his friend said impatiently. "They're your servants."

"And that," Dan explained later, "is the difference in point of view. Most people think of Bengalis, and their own servants, as separate and different; whereas we project our feeling about our servants toward all Bengal."

Among the foreigners who were held by a persistent irrational affection for Bengal, the deepest attachments were often toward their domestic staffs. When I first arrived, Ralph told me of another American who had hired a new cook with the warning, "Me sick, you fired." Ralph added wistfully, "I'd like to have

a better relationship than that." And, in fact, the servant-master relationship seemed to form the structural support of domestic happiness, or the lack of it. This was just as true among families who did not recognize it consciously. When trouble struck, as sooner or later it must in every household, they were stunned and bewildered. A friend or acquaintance would suddenly burst into the house, fling herself into a chair, and choke out her story. The cook had bought a piece of land and retired, or a beloved bearer had left without any identifiable reason; or the hamal upon whom they all depended had been dabbling in larceny; or too many cooks had spoiled the ayah. From that moment she was inconsolable, wandering about her daily rounds distractedly, eyes glazed. She could think of nothing else. She tried other candidates with growing panic until, at last, a satisfactory replacement had been found and life had returned to normal. (If her feverish search was unsuccessful, bitter resignation set in and a permanent scar was formed.)

When a memsahib had found, after much suffering, a servant whom she could love and cherish, the transformation was beautiful to behold. During a social visit she might glance at her watch, a tender glow spreading across her face, and spring up, saying,

"I can't stay another minute--dinner will be ready, and Nicholas (or Ali or Jotish) will be furious if we're late. He's making his kabobs (or chocolate souffle or Chicken Kiev)--have you ever tasted his kabobs (or chocolate souffle or Chicken Kiev)? No? You must come over one evening...."

Stratification of class and division of labor are very strong traditions on the subcontinent. Ordinarily a man who has got some book learning will not turn his hand to manual labor, and if he has got a desk and title of his own, he will call a peon to carry his pencil for him. In the household, a man was a cook _or_ a bearer _or_ a _hamal_ _or_ a _mali_. These distinct lines were breaking down a little, and you could find a cook-bearer or a _mali_-sweeper. The prospect was cheerless for any memsahib seeking a cook who would weed the garden or an ayah who could drive the car.

Westerners, with their reverence for economy, speed, and compactness, were baffled and maddened by this. They forgot the specialization they faced at home, from trade unions to medical care. There must be few foreign families who came to East Bengal in which, at one time or another, master or madame did not pounce in a fury upon mop bucket or garbage pail, crying, "See! _I'm_ not too good to clean floors!" or "_I_ am not ashamed to empty the garbage!" Another speech that

seemed to give therapeutic relief was the description of memsahib's triumphant past, in her native land, in which she was cook-ayah-mali-sweeper-bearer-driver. People who had recently come from Hong Kong or Paraguay were inclined to mention the little brown treasure who mended dusted washed cooked ironed and gardened from dawn till midnight, faithful and tireless. There may have been truth in all of this, but it was quite irrelevant.

The Bengali servant listened to these informative lectures more or less politely. If he had worked in enough western households, he knew the syndrome. It never moved him discernibly, and he had reason. The ways of Hartford or Saigon were not his ways, and he must live, after all, in his own society, by its rules. He was concerned about his reputation among his own people. Then, too, if one man covered two kinds of work, he was causing unemployment for another man. Neither their diet nor their climate, incidentally, had been designed for energy or endurance. Westerners sometimes forgot how exhausting that multi-faceted life of an American housewife can be; and I don't imagine many American executives would leap at a job in which their duties were to include bridge design and licking all the postage stamps, (though even fewer would postpone mailing a letter to wait for someone else to stick a stamp on it.)

I came to regard it as tactless to tell a man who has spent 25 or 30 years in becoming a professional cook that you did all that yourself with no training and little effort. It wasn't quite true, either. Each of those little tasks was considerably slower and more laborious to accomplish in Bengal than it was in Los Angeles or Edinburth.

These were among the reasons that small families of imported people found themselves with platoons of servants. Sometimes new arrivals protested. ("It's ridiculous--why do we have to have four servants to take care of two of us?") Some of them even rebelled, and spent a miserable tour of duty trying to evade the system. In seeking for one servant who could do everything, they might flounder through a number who could not do anything very well.

Some foreigners were made nervous by the extra presences, too, complaining either that they were too noisy or too stealthy.

But the letters written back to survivors by memsahibs who had returned to the New World were often pitiful.

Eventually most households seemed to settle down with a kind of communal personality, in which servants and masters had come, be adaptation or selection, to fit each other. By mid-May, the tone of our household was dominated by Saileshwar and animated by Kripa. We were profoundly grateful to have permanency in the two vital posts, though we were occasionally disturbed by turnover in the other ranks.

We seemed to have the most difficulty in stabilizing the helper and the mali. At first our garden was tended by Dilu, a handsome boy with walnut-dark skin and very white teeth. He worked for another master, but earned extra money by coming to work for us for a couple of hours a day. He would bring clumps of grass, pound a spot of the dry earth until it was well shattered, set the grass clump on it, and press a bit of earth around the roots. And it grew, and spread. Flower beds appeared along the walls, interrupted here and there by an unexpected leafy vine, which turned out to be sag, a kind of spinach, for the servants' curry.

Gradually Dilu's performance declined. Weeds flourished and flowers died of thirst; so we had to let him go. Our compound at that time seemed too small for a full-time mali, so we tried to broaden the rather ill-defined duties of our current hamal, Majit, to include a bit of gardening. But as he did progressively less and less with both house and garden, we dismissed him and cast about again.

Pat and Ted Owens had a Hindu mali-houseboy to whom they were devoted. He had a gentle disposition and a sweet smile. He cleaned the house and served at parties, and he was tender with the children and Pat's animal kingdom--cats, goats, chickens, geese--though they were often in conflict with his garden.

He would bring a broken flower to Pat, cradling it in his arms, weeping for its demise. I asked Madan to send me someone like himself, and he sent a Muslim boy who worked for us for one day.

During that day, there was a cool silence from the kitchen; and once, when I left the sewing kit on the table, Kripa snatched it away and locked it up, muttering something about all people not being alike.

In the evening, Kripa took me aside. "Cook he tell me, you talk with Madame. Madame she soft in her mind, she everybody trusting. That new boy come from Noakhali, everybody know all Noakhali people thieves. He steal something in house, trouble for everybody."

I went to Saileshwar. "Look here, you may be quite right, but how can I dismiss him just because he's from Noakhali? If nobody will hire a man on account of his native village, he has to steal to live. You'll have to think of something else."

Next morning, Saileshwar brought the new boy to me and explained that this boy wanted to work mali hours, and go home at dusk, instead of houseboy hours, which went on until after our dinner. Therefore, we all three agreed, we could not use each other. The Noakhali boy was gracefully released. I saluted Saileshwar's ingenuity. And I never decided to my satisfaction exactly what was meant by "soft in her mind."

Stephen came next as hamal. (We didn't use the term "sweeper" because of its connotation as the Hindu untouchable caste, which made hopeful boys shy away from it.) Sister Carmen sent Stephen to us from the orphanage. "I hope he'll work out, Mrs. Hill. His family is terribly poor." When he came to be interviewed, he had an allergy or an eye infection or something, and seemed to be convulsed with laughter or tears throughout the conversation. So we told him to come back when he was less swollen.

He came back in due time. He looked like a very dark Jerry Lewis, with great eye whites and an immense smile. He preferred song and dance to housework, but since Fate had sent him to us instead of the Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts, we tried to make a domestic of him. He was a Catholic, and he brought to his religion the same devout mindlessness as to everything else. He would stop mopping and lean on the mop to gaze in solemn rapture at the Catholic calendar over my desk; and if I should happen to be there working, he would murmur something like, "See, Memsahib, today is St. So-and-So's Day." Then he could croon on through a litany of saints' names until I reminded him of the dusty floors. When a priest or nun came to visit, Stephen danced wildly at all the doors and windows of the room throughout the call, eyes rolling, grinning hugely, his long slender fingers playing with the crucifix he wore.

He lay in wait to spring at them with conversation, pouring out his name, village, parish priest, church, school, and the details of his religious history from baptism to altar boyhood, until I rescued them. One day the Bishop of Chittagong, a beautiful patriarchal figure with deep intelligent eyes and a full beard, came to the house, and I was afraid Stephen would go into ecstatic levitation and have to be shot down from midair.

Kripa and Saileshwar were literate in Bengali and to some extent in English, and Stephen in Bengali. Taijuddin was the only one in the house who couldn't read or write anything. I made some attempt to teach him, but I had to concede that he was not college material. In the long run, in fact, it was easier for me to learn Bengali than to improve his English comprehension. But he worked hard; and since Saileshwar had a bright mind, and Kripa had practical common sense, and they both spoke adequate English, we got along nicely with that staff for many months.

The trouble was that we became more and more dependent upon Saileshwar's judgmemt, information, and interpretation. If he went to market on Sunday, when Kripa was having her day off, we had nobody who could cope with stray wallahs, or answer the door and take English-speaking messages, or be trusted to

watch the children, or advise us on local conditions. He was, in time, persuaded to market only two or three times a week instead of daily--actually I bribed him by telling him to take a rickshaw instead of a bus.

Taijuddin came from Toomileah, and Stephen from another village near there; they took their accumulated leave and went home every month or two. Saileshwar, like all the other Baruas, came from a village in the area of Chittagong, the port town on the Bay of Bengal. ("Barua" is a title which distinguishes the Bengali Buddhist; they all carry this, and use it as a surname when the need arises.) The journey from Dacca was an involved and laborious one, so he went to his village only a few times a year. This was altogether delightful during the months between, for we had a cook seven days a week, and I felt smug when I heard a memsahib mourning because her cook was away for the weekend. There was always, however, that dreadful day of reckoning when he <u>did</u> go home, and we would find that his days of leave had mounted to an appalling collection. Then we faced a week or two of alternatives: eat Taijuddin's fare or hire a substitute cook.

I certainly couldn't do the cooking myself in those days. The kitchen was a tiny cell with gray plaster walls, a small grilled window, and a screen door that opened onto our draining

gutter and a mildewed compound wall. A two-plate kerosene stove sat unsteadily on a wooden crate, where it leaked and dripped and had to be carried out in flames two or three times a week. When I had set the kitchen on fire twice by myself, trying to make a cup of tea while the servants were resting, they began to leave a thermos of tea for me when they went off duty. Moreover, I was not prepared to proceed to roast chicken from a feathered fowl freshly slain by the chawkidor.

We came, however, to have a wide acquaintance with other cooks. One evening when we were having a dinner party, I was a little startled to find the kitchen swarming with strange people.

"Saileshwar, who--?"

"Baruas, Madame, my friends. Much work. They come help."

"Well--did they wash their hands properly?"

Saileshwar gave me his Look--the expression of one who is patiently addressing the village idiot.

"Madame, they're cooks."

Later, when I questioned him more closely about his past, he told me that the first viceroys of the British raj had brought French cooks to India with them. These chefs then trained native cooks, he said, and added that a goodly number of the star pupils turned out to be Baruas. The French chefs eventually disappeared, and for two hundred years the best of these native cooks had presided in many of the kitchens of

great British houses all over the subcontinent. Saileshwar's father had died in the service of a distinguished British officer in Rawalpindi. Saileshwar himself had worked in Delhi, Peshawar and Kabul. Like many others, he had come back to East Pakistan after partition because it had become too awkward, from the West wing, to visit his family in Chittagong. His British master of twelve years had gone back to England, and the new masters were American or other foreigners. A new way of life had begun.

"British time, they have chief cook, second cook, third cook, kitchen boy, like that. When chief cook retire, everybody move up one place and we bring another boy from village for kitchen boy. British time," he added pointedly, "if they have ten guests, then ten cook in kitchen too."

After our dinner party, Ralph offered five rupees to each of the assistants, who put their hands behind their backs and smiled. One of them, a bearer, said, "No, we not want. This is our brother. We help him." Then, like an afterthought, "Maybe some day we looking for job, you help us."

And from that softly dropped remark, we were led tactfully into their service. Sometime, much later, I woke to find myself tracking down new foreign arrivals to persuade them that they were understaffed, and going to parties for the primary purpose

of watching for memsahibs who had just fired a cook or were planning to do so. I read innumerable chits, those precious letters of reference which give the history of a man's working life; I learned to pronounce most of their names; I heard about their villages and their children. By the time I realized that I was a career agent, and they had decided to take the extra money after all, they had engaged my interest irrevocably.

I was not alone in my bondage. Mary Frances and Dan Dunham ran a similar operation on the other side of town. They lived on Siddeswari Road in a Bengali-style villa, a string of rooms surrounding a pleasant courtyard, and were regarded as the Left Bank element among the Americans. Their servants were of a different mold from ours, too. Their uniforms were lunghis, white shirts and bare feet, which would have provoked instant rebellion in our bourgeois ranks. They slept in the garage because there were no servants' quarters, and they spoke only Bengali.

It was naturally more difficult for the Dunhams to find jobs for their servants' relatives, who didn't speak English, and Dan often wound up adding them to their own payroll. They started with Wohab, their long thin Muslim bearer. They hired his indigent cousin as mali, a short homely cheerful man whose knowledge of gardening was limited to watering the lawn with

a hose. Dan had cultivated a beautiful garden within the bamboo walls of their compound, a wild assortment of leafy shrubs around the front and flowering bushes in the rear, where a frangipani tree hung over the courtyard. Anxious for its welfare, they found Mali another job as chawkidor, but he refused it, preferring to stay with them. At last they rescued the garden by bringing Mali indoors and teaching him to serve. They preserved the Old World custom of calling their servants "Mali" and "Cook" instead of by their names, and it gave one rather a start: "What will you have to drink? Oh, Ma-li! Ak Daiquiri ano!" The effect was even more striking the year they grew attached to a laborer who had come to sand the teak furniture and added him to the household staff. "Oh La-bor!"

Wohab's brother Mohun came from the village to work as a helper under Wohab's tutelage. His perpetual smile was bracketed by enormous dimples, and his hair fell to his shoulders in abundant curls. When Dan suggested a haircut, Mohun was reluctant until Dan pointed out that he was to work in foreign houses, he would have to be shorn. Mohun yielded. His father had assured him that if he never cut his hair he would go straight to heaven when he died, but the prospect of employment with foreign gentlemen was a more immediate and therefore weightier inducement.

"I didn't realize until then," Dan explained regretfully, "that he had never cut his hair. After all, if it never got any longer than that, it wasn't bad--I'd had visions of ringlets hanging to his ankles. So I tried to talk him out of the haircut. I got out an encyclopedia and showed him pictures of Sir Walter Raleigh and King Arthur's crowd. But it was too late. He insisted on the clipping."

They enjoyed his presence while it lasted, but eventually he fell into conflect with the mild-mannered cook and they had to let him go. They placed him in the Dhanmandi home of a family of Bible Belt Christians. In a few days he grew melancholy with homesickness, and they had to repatriate him to Siddeswari Road. Later they sent him to his village, where he became a happy vegetable vendor.

Pat Owens' household was ruled by her ayah. Regina was a Catholic from Toomileah, with a perfectly round face and sparkling black eyes and an extensive web of brothers and sisters and cousins and aunties, with which Pat was deftly enclosed. When she couldn't find a job for Regina's younger sister Zita, Pat hired her a second ayah until something more permanent could be found for her. She remained part of the household until the day Pat left East Bengal. Regina was short and plump, with a very straight back and a strong mind. Zita was even shorter, and thin, and shy, and she limped. They both smiled all the time.

"Two ayahs?" I wondered. "But your boys are rather too large for ayahs, and even Trish--of course you need an ayah to chaperon her when you're out--but two?"

"Those ayahs are for me," Pat said firmly. "They're dears."

Regina's was a nice family, with a number of respectable ayahs and cooks and bearers, as well as a clergyman. Like all families, of course, it had its weak elements. One day Regina brought in a little woman in a sari, who spoke no English, and introduced her to Pat. "This my auntie. She ayah, she say you catch job for her." And having done her family duty, she added, "She very bad woman."

The ayahs had their own union rules which they operated among themselves, somewhat complicated by their rivalries and intrigues. (And there were Baptist and Catholic factions; almost all of them were Christian.) If an ayah had been out of work longer than the others, for example, she might have a priority on the next opening. Some households had a bad name among the ayahs, perhaps because the family had changed servants too often, or because their cook or bearer was a trouble-maker. Once, when Pat had placed three ayahs at various houses, she was incensed to find that the ayahs had privately reshuffled the jobs according to their own system, and each memsahib was baffled to find that the ayah who appeared at

her house for duty was not the one she had hired. "When they start playing musical houses," Pat moaned, "it slips their minds completely that the memsahibs having anything to say about it, at all."

The Owens' cook-bearer was a Muslim named Akbar. He had been a bearer until, while working for Jane Greenough, he had been pressed into the cooking department. He was a permanent fixture in the Owens house, and so, of course, was Madan the mali. The helper-bearer categories were filled more fluidly by a succession of Regina's or Akbar's relatives.

Madan never seemed to be looking for jobs for people. On the contrary, he was always being urged to find a mali like himself for somebody. He did, at last, send us a Hindu named Ganesh, who was not exactly like Madan--in fact, the only resemblance was their religious community and their caste within it--but who stayed with us for some time.

And so, toward the end of the summer, the personality of our world had been established.

Chapter Six

THE TEXTURE OF LIFE

If you asked a Bengali in Dacca where he stayed, he would give you his city address. But if you asked him where he lived, he would name his village, that village where he was born, and where all of his paternal ancestors within memory or legend had been born. Its customs and relationships formed the snug fabric into which he had been inextricably woven. From the religious caste, feuds, history, prejudices, scandals, and superstitions of that village were evolved the niyom--the rules and regulations--which were designed to govern and direct his life. It made no difference how long he had lived elsewhere; any other abode remained a basha, a temporary dwelling.

"When one of our people asks for permission to go to his village for some special reason," a Sister told me, "we ask first if it's the niyom. If it is, we don't waste time arguing. He has to do it, no matter what happens."

His religious community dictated a dizzying inventory of details.

On my first shopping trip to Calcutta, I was buying saris and lunghis and cotton for our servants, who, like most East Pakistanis, loved Indian fabrics. I was undecided about the color of a sari for Taijuddin's wife. The shopkeeper, sitting cross-legged on the floor in front of me, asked abruptly, "Is this for Musselman?"

"Yes, he's a Muslim."

"Then he like this color." He slapped a geranium-pink sari. I was slow to grasp the relevance.

"All Muslims like that color?"

"All Muslims," he said firmly. "This color and green."

"Well...what colors do Buddhists like?"

"Pale colors and gray."

Since my Buddhist cook had requested shirt cotton in gray or any pale color, I took the man's advice, ill-founded as it seemed. I always found it a sound shopping guide. For Hindus I would buy orange or purple.

The Muslim vocabulary was sprinkled with Urdu or Arabic words, while the other communities preferred Hindi or Bengali terms. The Muslim greeted you with "Salaam Aleikum"; the others said "Namaskar". They often used different words for such basics as "water" and "bath".

The dhoti was considered a Hindu costume. East Bengalis have told me that before partition the dhoti was worn by all communities there, but that in the Islamic state, the lunghi was considered safer and less conspicuous. The tika, a red dot painted above the nose on a girl's forehead, had a Hindu origin. Muslim women sometimes used the tika in East Pakistan because it was decorative, but the practice provoked irritable letters To The Editor in the local newspaper.

Perhaps the most obvious difference concerned their eating habits. The Hindus followed an incredibly complicated pattern, involving caste, and cooking utensils, and the sanctity of cows. The Muslims would have nothing to do with pork. The Buddhists had no dietary prohibitions, strictly speaking, but generally did not eat beef in East Bengal. The Christians liked to eat everything and preferred not to share the others' restrictions. This discouraged friendly gatherings around a common board, and in a household of mixed servants might result in two or three meals in preparation at one time. In Hindu Calcutta, westernized restaurants offered muttonburgers and chickenburgers; huge signs above piggery shops advertised pork, bacon, ham and sausage. Cows roamed the streets and sidewalks of Calcutta, grazed from vegetable stands in the market, and slept and died in the roads.

In Muslim Pakistan, a few miles away, pork had to be raised and peddled surreptitiously. At the sacrificial Eid holiday, cows were slaughtered and butchered, bloodily and roughly, along the public roadsides. Sometimes it seemed that the Hindus and Muslims had literally driven each other to a frenzy by their cuisines.

"The Muslims," a Buddhist explained, "don't want us in their mosques because we're kaphur (infidels). We're welcome in the Hindu temples, but before you go in, you have to go through so much ritual about washing everything that it isn't worth the bother."

My husband declared solemnly, "Every faith should have written into its creed the absolute separation of Bacteria and Religion."

Of course there are serious theological dissensions, as well as historical resentments dating back to the Muslim conquest of India. Islam is sternly monotheistic. Hinduism is populated by thousands of gods and goddesses. Islam denounces other faiths as false. Orthodox Hindu practice is wrapped in a chain mail cloak of prohibitions and commandments which prevent familiar association with non-Hindus, or with different castes among themselves. Islam frowns on artificial representation of the human form. Hindu icons, paintings and sculpture abound in human forms, often highly erotic.

But the common people in either society are not deeply stirred by esoteric divisions. When they abandon themselves to internecine savagery, the immediate causes are probably more economic than theological--a land boundary dispute, or competition for jobs; and there are fancied or real slights or insults. Then the angry passions are polarized around the rival teams; and the tika, the dhoti, the burqa, the lunghi, the beef and the pork, the Salaam and the Namaskar, become festering symbols of communal resentment.

East Bengal was, of course, predominantly Muslim. Islam's militant authority always seemed to sit incongruously upon the Bengali temperament, rather as if Calvinism had conquered couthern Italy. Foreigners often remarked that the East Bengali was sullen, and it is true that one could walk for several blocks in Dacca without seeing a smile. An American social worker commented on this: "Day after day the Bengali faces catastrophes that would have most of us flattened under the mud. Cyclones, floods, drought, famine, cholera, smallpox, hunger--exploited and cheated and bullied--and what's happened? They've stopped smiling."

Yet at close range, in our homes or their villages, laughter and vitality could emerge. Bengalis often showed a genius for mimicry and a keen humor. I always felt that their lives and culture would brighten and bloom under the influence of a good native cheese and a sincere red table wine.

Regina invited the Owens family and servants, and ours, to her bari in Toomileah for the Passion Play on Easter Day. Christopher and I went, with Saileshwar, Ganesh our mali, and Stephen our hamal. The Owens went with their troops, taking along a bewildered man who was visiting from Washington. The journey was complicated by the cow that Pat had bought for Regina as a hostess gift. It developed that the train had no freight facilities for the beast, and we all had to catch the early train from the Old City and smuggle the cow into the Third Class compartment with us.

The cow had already escaped from Pat's station wagon in our front garden and had to be wrestled back into the car by Madan and Akel Khan. For the hour-and-a-half trip to Arikhola station, Saileshwar and Akbar held her fore and aft between the compartment doors. Everybody seemed to find it entertaining, including two or three other Bengali passengers, who sat on the benches, grinning and picking their toenails. I wasn't sure of our own reaction if a crowd of Bengalis had loaded an awkward, untidy animal onto a passenger car in which we were travelling, and I thought our fellow passengers very tolerant.

Pat's household parted from mine at Arikhola station. We were to go to Mass and visit Stephen's bari in Rangamatia, in the opposite direction, and join them at Regina's house later.

After Mass, Christopher and I had lunch at the Mission, and spent the early afternoon listening to Father's recorded bird calls, and fixing a grab bag of funny presents for the Bengali Sisters' Easter party.

My servants had gone on to Stephen's house, and as they did not reappear, we went to find them, guided by a village boy. The da Costa hospitality had included rice wine. Saileshwar was sleeping it off inside a hut, but Ganesh sat on the veranda, red-eyed and wobbly, offering me a little refreshment from the bottle in his hand. Saileshwar stumbled out drowsily, Stephen's family collected around us, nobody seemed to be in a hurry, and I kept insisting that we must get started if we were to reach Toomileah before dark. Saileshwar muttered that it was looking like rain, and I snarled that if he had reported after his lunch as he should have done, we would already be there. At last I dragged them off in a straggly file, and we were half-way across the nearest field when a hailstorm broke over us.

One of the boys held an umbrella over me as we stood waiting for the tempest to subside. I took some grim satisfaction in Saileshwar's discomfort, watching the icy lumps bounce against his head. When it had cleared up, we were taken back to Stephen's house, where all the women gathered around us, one drying my hair, another rubbing my feet with a towel, all of them clucking

and laughing. Among them I recognized Stephen's sister Rosie, which may have accounted for Saileshwar's reluctance to move. I had met Rosie. Stephen brought her around to me at intervals in Dacca, seeking ayah work for her. She was a buxom girl with soft heavy hair blowing loosely around her shoulders. Her ayah experience seemed sketchy, and she had a distracting habit of leaning back against the door frame, back arched and hips swaying, rolling her eyes at the cook or the bearer as they passed, while I was trying to interview her. I felt sorry for any household that ever hired Rosie.

They sent with us as a guide a young brother-in-law, who wanted me to find a job for him in Dacca. Fortunately he was considerably brighter than Stephen. But darkness fell suddenly and we took a wrong turn. The blackness of a clouded night in Bengal is a massive, seamless hood. The aisle between the rice fields was wet, and very slick after the storm. Saileshwar walked ahead carrying a hand torch, followed by Christopher. Our drunken mali reeled along behind me, his feet slipping and sliding in a pair of unfamiliar shoes that were too large for him. He clutched at my hand occasionally, ostensibly to keep me steady on the path. At last, of course, he fell into the sticky field and had to be resurrected from the mud. "What," I found myself wondering, "am I doing in the middle of a rice field in Asia with...?"

When we seemed to have wandered halfway across eternity, we heard the sound of drums through the mute night, and presently we saw the light of Regina's compound. A young man with a lantern came to meet us and lead us to the party.

Regina had built a new hut for her guests, a sturdy mud-walled room with windows on three sides to catch the breeze. Pat and the children were seated in chairs on its porch. Under the big square shamyana, a canopy, the Passion Play was in progress, surrounded by a sea of Bengali spectators. Regina's smile was radiant in her round face; gold hoops glistened in her ears.

Saileshwar found a place happily among the audience on the ground, and Christopher and I joined the group on the porch. So did Ganesh. He attached himself to a chair, and whenever one of his hosts tried quietly to persuade him to move into the tourist section, he bellowed that he was as good as anybody. The women who crouched in the cook hut, beaming and sweating, sent plates of food to us, and Regina's brother Joseph, who was a cook-bearer in Dacca, fixed drinks for us from Pat's supply kit.

The drama lasted until midnight. Like the other guests, we ate, drank, talked, and took naps. The children fell asleep. The performance was imaginative and moving. There was the Christ, his face painted white, wearing his crown of thorns, carrying his cross, suffering the Temptation and Crucifixation. There were winged angels and prancing devils; and in the midst

of the tragedy one of the demons, in a gray wool Catholic Relief skirt, twitched his tail wickedly and pulled faces at the audience over his shoulder. Mary knelt in her sari and wept. Tablas beat the background rhythm and a violin wailed.

Watching the whole scene, actors and spectators, I thought, "So they are really like this, too, this is how they could be. If...."

Pat and I were enchanted. Later we asked one of the American priests why they had never mentioned this custom to us.

"It never occurred to us you'd want to know," he said, scratching his head. "Usually we have to sit through 'em in a hot school room and they start the story with the creation of the world, and it lasts for about eight hours." We could see how the weight of his reverend status could have crushed the charm of the presentation.

The cinema halls in Dacca were always filled. Bengalis took pride, too, in their traditional music and dance, which ranged from very folk to classical. (Perhaps these arts were cultivated more than others because they do not require material supplies, such as canvas and paint or stone.) People flocked enthusiastically to the melas (fairs) which were held now and then; and their religious holidays, Muslim Eid or Hindu pujas, were as gala as they could make them. Village dramas were popular, usually tragedies from Bengali history, or religious tragedies.

In British India, the Muslims had fallen behind the Hindus in the competition for education and status. Some historians suggest that it was because they rejected the imported Western education, resenting the loss of India's Moghul empire, and turned their cultural face toward the Muslim world and the Arabic alphabet. With the establishment of Pakistan, they found themselves in power, in an independent Muslim state, after long frustration. Hindus, Christians, and Buddhists—villagers, students, servants, and professional classes--lived in fear of that power in East Pakistan.

"Is not so bad in town, madame," a servant explained. "But in village, if anything trouble, some arguing about land or money, Muslim say 'This is our country, you better not make fight.' Before partition, they afraid to do like that."

An accountant, who held a responsible position in his office, told me: "I ran for a political post in my village once. My friends told me not to do it. 'We're a minority,' they said. But I said, 'This is our country too,' and I did it. When the votes began to come in for me, a band of Muslim goondas came out with sticks and knives, and we ran and hid in the swamp, my friends and I. I will not try again."

The minority villagers kept their position always in mind.

"We don't like to start any kind of business in village. If our people open some shop, selling something, one night goondas coming, stealing everything. Then police say, 'Oh, that Hindu shop.' Then they don't do anything. If we are Hindu or Christian or Buddhist, who cares what happens to us? Any Muslim can make trouble with us if he want, and nobody bother him with law."

Employment at any level was difficult to get in East Pakistan without personal influence, and many people came to us, the foreigners, for help. Once when I asked my husband if there might be a job in his office for a young Buddhist college graduate, he shook his head. "I'd like to hire him. The two we've hired are doing good work. But another Pakistani in the office has passed the word on to me that there are Muslims who need these jobs. That means if I bring in another man from any minority group, there will be trouble for all of them."

A person's name indicated clearly his or her religious community. The Muslims were Abdul or Ali or Sayed, Rahman or Ahmed. The Christians, Protestant or Catholic, were named Maria, Anthony, Regina, Philip; da Costa, da Silva, or Rosario. The Hindu names were indigenous and musical: Krishna, Abinash, Ananda, Rani. Often they were accompanied by caste titles, as in Ganesh Mali. Bengali Buddhists had Hindu names followed

by the title "Barua"--except their priests, who changed titles when they entered monastic life.

A Bengali child was given a proper name at birth; then he acquired a dak-nam, a "calling name", which was used thereafter until he was to be married or wanted to get a job or a license or go to college and needed an official name. Sometimes nobody could remember the proper name, and official registers--if any--had to be consulted. In a family, juniors were usually addressed by their dak-nams and seniors by their relationships--"Dada" for an older brother, "Mama" for a maternal uncle, "Chacha" for a paternal uncle, etc. Cousins were referred to as "cousin brothers" and "cousin sisters."

By any European standard, the Bengali attitude toward names was strikingly indifferent. A Westerner might be offended if his name was misspelled; a Bengali paid little attention if you got the wrong name altogether. Caste, communal, or family titles were more significant; it was primarily in these relationships that personal merit was recognized.

The family bonds in Bangal did not exist essentially for cozy companionship. Even affection was somewhat incidental, though naturally it was pleasant when it occurred, as it very often did. In very traditional families, a wife did not pronounce her husband's name, and their conversation together--

as in many other places--was limited to domestic or family affairs. For sociability, the husband visited with other men, and his wife stayed out of sight, gossiping with other women. On major occasions, such as weddings, the men dined separately from the women. A father did not play with his children past their infancy, lest familiarity weaken authority. A younger brother maintained a respectful reserve in the presence of an older brother. An older brother must keep his distance from his younger brother's wife. The phenomenon of a whole family gathering to laugh and chatter and argue together was a totally alien concept. The tight family ties served as tribal protection against outsiders. Brothers might spend their lives plotting against each other within their own circle, but one brother was expected to do everything he could to find a job for the other, and to fight beside him against all non-family. Thus, while the more sophisticated might grumble about nepotism in public office, it was widely understood that a politician's first obligation was not to his country but to his kin.

Children were born and reared for the benefit of their parents and their society. When a son was old enough to work, he was expected to contribute to the support of his parents according to their needs. In poor families, the working life started in early childhood. If he was the eldest, a boy might

have to take the responsibility for the younger children as well. If he evaded it, the younger children might go hungry, because the parents had made no other provision.

Marriages were arranged with an eye to the same interests. When a boy's mother needed a daughter-in-law to help her with the housework, a marriage was arranged for her oldest son. The family chose the bride and the wedding date, and negotiated the terms. Village custom defined the ritual and the wedding feast, often financially ruinous. The bride and groom had little or nothing to say about it; they could make decisions when <u>their</u> children were to be married off.

Prospective mates were selected with consideration for family status, money, land, education, and health. A fair complexion was advantageous, too. This was by no means confined to the rural or the humble, though the general pattern was modified variously in the more modern families.

"The spiritual East!" my Indian friend sighed. "You have never seen the bared teeth of materialism until you have watched two rich Punjabi families negotiating a marriage contract."

Two samples from the Matrimonial column of the local daily give an idea of the qualities which an eligible boy sought in a wife.

> A well-qualified youngman comes from a good middle class family of West Bengal and having a family tradition of nobility and gentility wants to marry. The bride must also be from West Bengal's originality, of the same category of family, beautiful and fair complexioned, moderately well qualified and whose mother tongue must be BENGALI. For detail write to....
>
> If anyone wishes marriage relation with a meritorious Engineering student by bearing his educational expanses (sic) may seek Zulfiker Ali, c/o....

Sons and daughters are married in the order of their seniority. A young high school teacher was talking to us once about some of his college classmates whose academic careers had been cut short by a summons to come home and get married.

"How was it you were spared this long?" I asked.

He laughed. "My older brother is a cook, and he got married. So my mother and father had a girl to look after them, and I was able to finish school."

The control of property rights, of course, was a substantial factor. The customs and legalities were unbelievably complex, particularly since women's inheritance rights, never very strong, varied from one community to another. The pattern was further convoluted by the niyom concerning consanguinity, rules which, again, were not the same among all communities.

Another reason for hastening a son's marriage was the fear that he might wander into unrighteous paths. If he had a salary, he might be tempted to squander it on his own amusements--possibly unwholesome ones--instead of bringing the money home to his family. There was no concern about waiting for his judgment to mature, as it was not involved in the choice of his mate anyway. The marriage per se was intended to settle him down, bind him firmly to his village and his obligations, provide sexual satisfaction, and produce children to take care of him in turn.

Thus a young man often took on the responsibilities of wife and children while he was still supporting the preceding generation. This added weight to the odds against his advancement in any direction, but it was the accepted way, and the aging parents too often had no other security. Sometimes the bridegroom was eager for the match; others were reluctant about the arrangements; it made little difference. Every social and moral pressure was brought upon him. If he protested, he did not even get much sympathy from his peers.

Girls were married at an early age for several reasons. There was a natural anxiety to see a daughter settled, and her economic future secured. As she passed the first bloom of adolescence, she became increasingly unmarriageable, and it

could be difficult to find a good husband for her, especially if she was short of education and gold. An important motive was the protection of her chastity. A smear on her reputation would be disastrous for her matrimonial chances, and it was considered prudent to have a legitimate means of fulfillment at hand when the instinct was ready. Then, too, there was not much to occupy or entertain a village girl. She was likely to have little or no education, and no access to books or radios. Her freedom to move about or mix with other young people was very limited. She could look forward only to a husband and children of her own. Among those I knew, a girl's contentment in living with and working for her mother-in-law seemed no more euphoric than one would expect in any society. But both parties expected it, and the alternative--to stay at home, a husbandless burden--was an unthinkable fate.

Public opinion ruled and controlled, as it had always done, and there was no aspect of private life that the village did not make its business. Deviation was punished by ostracism. For those who conformed to them, as most did, these nivom afforded a kind of protection; they demanded, and permitted, a minimum of personal decisions. For those who disobeyed, the penalties were harsh; a community's instinct to preserve its structure is a potent one. If a girl was judged guilty of carnal sin, the example must be made strong enough to frighten

other girls away from temptation. No allowance could be made for her youth or inexperience. If a boy was permitted to reject or postpone a marriage his family had arranged, other boys in the village might rebel, too. If one family resisted giving the village a feast on the occasion of a wedding, who knows how many might try to escape such an expense? If the boys began to marry outsiders, where would the local girls find husbands?

The individual was sacrificed relentlessly for the group integrity. In serious cases the offender's whole family shared his dishonor; his descendants might be marked as "bad seed" and "respectable" families would not give their daughters and sons to them. A child's compassion for his family was an extra weapon to enforce submission to the group will.

Chapter Seven
POWER AND FEAR

The Bengali had to constantly keep in mind the dangers which loomed over him, the dread shadows of those who had power to do him harm. There were so many of them.

"If you don't have power," a tradesman explained, "you cannot do anything. If you have money, or if you have some education, then other people are a little 'fraid to give you trouble. If you don't have either one, nobody care what you say, what happen to you; they think you not human."

Wealth, of course, always speaks for itself, the more of it the louder. In education, the first step toward status was Matriculation, graduation from the tenth school year. After that, two years of college could lead to the Intermediate Degree, and two more years were required for a Bachelor's Degree. The completion of each arduous step was punctuated by the Examination, and the rewards of the preceding years depended entirely upon the results. There were no other criteria--homework, class performance, frequent minor examinations--

to balance against it. Information was poured from textbooks upon students like syrup upon pancakes. They must repeat this information, in the examinations, exactly as they received it. Not surprisingly, they often found it necessary to hire tutors outside of class to help them prepare for the test.

For most of the people in East Pakistan, an education meant a great deal of sacrifice. Books were expensive for them; classrooms were crowded, and teachers poorly paid.

There were not enough jobs to accomodate all of the graduates, and sometimes there was little to show for the years of effort except an aversion to manual labor. It was impressive that, in spite of the obstacles, so many Bengalis did strive to give their children as much formal education as possible. We saw servants, tailors, carpenters, and farmers straining to put their sons or brothers through school. The fathers, or older brothers, who urged and paid for these feats were usually ambitious people who had been quite unable, for economic and family reasons, to attend school themselves. They were acutely aware of the need for some means of self-preservation.

As a man progressed through these academic ranks, he became increasingly able to command respect and to survive in his society. His village might pay attention to him when he spoke. Other people were less inclined to bully him, for he might know someone influential enough to hurt them. If he

was lucky, his degree could even open the way to a civil service post or some other dependable career.

Between the powerful few, and the millions without money or status, there was no contact. Between the sahib in his suit, tie, and shoes, and the barefoot man in a lunghi, lay a gulf of hatred and contempt. Too often, those who managed to climb out of the weighty futility to a petty official position brought with them no compassion for the others, only an intense consciousness that Fate had presented them with a chance to make themselves secure. To do so, they would steal public funds, abuse the weak, and extort bribes from the poor. A common example was the policeman who bowed deferentially to the well-padded sahib in his private car, but squeezed five rupees from the poor rickshaw wallah with threats of "trouble", and helped himself to cigarettes in the small shops without paying.

Theft and robbery are endemic in a country where most of the people are hungry most of the time. Foreigners were often reluctant to call the police in such cases, however, as their conditioned reflex was to arrest the servants. But Dan felt justified in summoning the law when lunghis and a radio and other items were taken from their servants' quarters.

"And they kept insisting," he related, "on taking the servants to the station for questioning. And I kept pointing out that it was servants who had been robbed."

"That wouldn't matter," I said. "They don't care who did it, only who can be safely blamed."

The Dunhams always refused to have a chawkidor to guard the house at night--I believe they thought it ostentatious--and they had a regular and interesting succession of Night Visitors. The first burglar came when they were fairly new in Dacca. Mary Frances, roused by an unfamiliar noise, met the fellow emerging from their godown at two o'clock in the morning. Dan woke a few minutes later to find his wife standing in the courtyard conversing with a strange man, and hastily took over the situation. Communication was limited; the burglar spoke no English and the Dunhams were not yet fluent in Bengali. Dan decided to take his burglar to the police station, and took a firm grip on his wrist. He was shocked to feel the man's arm, thin and brittle as a dry twig between his own fingers. As they walked down Siddeswari Road, the man pleaded with him. He managed to point out that the Dunham house was unusually easy to rob, and to suggest that Dan should hire him as a chawkidor instead of sending him to jail. Dan, feeling larger and more brutal at every step, did not in fact hire him, but he loosened his hold enough to allow his prisoner to escape.

One of their thieves got away with nothing but a few towels. It was obvious that the poor man had climbed in through the open bathroom window--a wooden shutter opening onto a field next door--and had been unable to get any farther. I could sympathize with him; I had once pulled a towel peg off the door trying to get out of that bathroom, which had no inner doorknob.

Another, luckier group came on Christmas night and took everything under the tree. (Their loot was lessened by the earlier visit of a prominent Pakistani poet, with his family. The daughter had a streak of larceny, and the gold offerings departed with her.) An English woman, Miss Emerson, was staying with the Dunhams at the time. "I heard them out there," she informed her host the next morning, "but they made so much noise that I thought they were a lot of drunken Americans."

Christopher's bicycle was stolen from our compound one day, and we had no hope of recovering it. Soon afterward, however, Ralph and I came home from a cocktail party to find a tableau on our veranda. The culprit, a skinny little fellow in a lunghi and a ragged shirt, looked at us with a nervous smile and then stared at his feet. He was surrounded by Abinash, our bearer, and two other men, who kept a bicycle shop in the Old Town. When the thief had come in to offer

the cycle for sale at a suspiciously low price, the shopkeepers had called the police. A "detective" had brought them all to our house and, finding the Sahib out, had gone away, leaving word that he would return.

When the "detective" came back, he insisted that the Sahib must come with them to the police station. Ralph went, taking Abinash, and came home several hours later.

"There was this room with a desk and a light bulb hanging over it," he said bleakly. "And one man in uniform. And three or four others--plainclothesmen, I guess--and a few more just sitting around watching, and a couple of other prisoners. The policemen were questioning them, and every once in a while they'd whack one of them."

"Our thief too? They hit him?"

"Oh yes. Then they wanted me to prefer charges and I said no. The officer was put out about that and said that the man was a criminal and had to be punished. I said never mind, I only wanted the bicycle back. Then he said something about 'How are these detectives to get their reward?' So I said I'd write a letter commending their performance, which didn't go over very well, and I took the bike and left. They're keeping the man in jail overnight anyway. Maybe they'll wring a little baksheesh out of him."

The ordinary man in Bengal did not expect equality in justice. Some did not know precisely what it was. Those who had worked for the British people, before independence, sometimes spoke bitterly of their present lot.

"British maybe bad for rich people, but good for working man. British time, if somebody break in our house and steal, or cheating with land, or beating people, we can go to police station, tell big officer, they quickly come and doing something about it. Now, if big man does bad thing, he pay baksheesh, poor man go in jail.

"When rich man in suit and tie go for driving license, to drive his own car, policeman call him in office, 'Come in, come in, sit down,' give him tea, maybe forget to ask if he know how to drive car. If poor man, like professional driver, go for license, they tell him to stand outside and wait, they very busy, will call him. Maybe they call him, maybe forget. Officer sit down, drink tea, gossip; twelve o'clock they close office and go home, tell driver to come next week. How can working man go there week by week and wait all day?"

And from another: "They say we have too many people, and that's right. They advise,use birth control. Then if man go to take his wife for plastic coil, he have to take permission from union council, and union council have to ask district

magistrate, and district magistrate have to see governor, and governor check with President Ayub.... Then that man have to pay baksheesh anyway to get care for his wife. Who going to do that? And moulvi in village telling all Muslims, 'Birth control very sin, you have children, Allah send them, Allah feed them.' They need to control that moulvi."

"They say 'Oh--oh--o, is famine!' They send rice ration for poor people, low price. Then that man who hand out rice in village give maybe half-ration, mark full ration in his account book, and sell other half in black market."

Since formal education was not available to the majority, it was not unusual to find people with high native intelligence working at menial jobs or trades. If they had too little land, or a crop failed, they were likely to try to find a job outside. Those who came to the city were exposed to more political and social stimulation than the village offered. The problems of their land and villages were always with them, however.

For most of the population, the availability of rice was a major preoccupation; the fear of hunger blotted out the rest of the landscape. Agriculture was the substance of life. Everything else was garnish.

"First we need food. Then after that, government can think about making automobile and rocket. But they take good

rice land to make big building for show. They make Second Capital building and they put it where before was government farm. They build pukka road from airport to President's house so his foreign guests can see progress. And they make Atomic Research Building. Atomic Research! We need food! We need tube well and school building!

"We need something protection from cyclone. We need irrigation and drainage, control water so it helps farmer. If they put one big farm in each district and show people how to plant and irrigate and fertilize, then people can watch for one, two years and see how it makes better crops; then that big farmer can give advice and people will listen. But where do you see anything like that? Look at the newspapers! Governor says, 'Use this, use that,' but who listen to him? He doesn't know anything about farming and he doesn't care about farmer, he just sits in his house and does politics and says what the President tells him to say.

"When bugs come and eat crops, they say, 'We will send medicine to kill the bugs, we spray it from airplane. But this medicine is poison, don't feed those things to cattle for fifteen days, and everybody have to take enough water to last fifteen days and put in some safe place.' People can save water, but how will people feed cows and goats for fifteen days?

"Newspaper and radio say 'You cannot eat rice all the time, better to learn to eat wheat and potatoes,' hmmm? But how shall we get wheat? Some foreign country send it. And maybe they can send it regularly and maybe not. And after it gets to East Pakistan, maybe we get it and maybe not. What they need to do is show people how to raise wheat, raise more potatoes, so we can feed ourselves. But they never do that, so it is just a lot of talk about learning to eat wheat and potatoes. Foreigners come in to give advice about farming, but they give advice to government, and they don't realize it stops there, never gets to farmer.

"President says, 'Now everybody eating three meals a day; if you go without one meal every day or few times a week, we can feed so many poor people.' How shall we do that? He doesn't know that most people in East Pakistan never get three meals in one day. Maybe two, maybe one, maybe every other day.

"If one food not available, then we need to have another thing. If rice too expensive, we have to get wheat or vegetable or fish or something. If everything cost too much, how can people live? But they only give advice: 'Eat bread, eat chicken, eat egg...'" The speaker snorted. "If I have eight egg, I cannot eat them. I have to sell egg and buy two seer of rice instead. Eight egg not making one meal for my family; with two seer rice, can make all belly full one time. With fruit

is the same way; some people never taste it, except maybe a half-rotten banana. Some people cannot buy tea or mustard oil, just eat rice with salt and chillis. Then government cry, 'Oooh, these village Bengalis, we cannot teach them anything, they won't change!"

"Merchant tell jute farmer, 'We give this much price for jute, no more.' Very low price. Government not control anything with merchant. That farmer, when waiting for jute to grow, he have to spend money; if his wife have a little gold, maybe he sell that, maybe some land too. Merchant not have trouble, he have money to feed his family, he can wait.

"When is plenty of rice, and price is low, merchant buy all rice and put in godown. Then they cry, 'No rice! Crop fail! Then they wait. And when price of rice is three-four rupees higher, then godowns open, rice come again in market. But poor man cannot afford it. That time his family get maybe one meal in day, not too big. If before that he eating second or third grade rice, now he eat fourth grade. That means old rice, with little stones or rice skin mixed in, not very healthy. Or maybe just eating sweet potatoes with some salt.

"Bengal can be very good for fishing if development. But what they doing? Fisherman not have pukka boat, he have to go out in Bay of Bengal in little boat. He cannot come in quickly, he have to dry fish so it won't spoil. If cyclone coming,

fisherman die. Government need to plant fish in tank and river, take care and show to people, then more easy for us. Village people cannot do these things alone; they don't have enough money and sometimes they don't know how, too. But government do nothing, only exporting fish to get foreign exchange when we don't have enough to eat. Then they say 'No fish available! Fishermen not working, too much bad weather, oh-o-ho!"

Farming meant two rice harvests a year if fate was kind. It meant a vegetable crop in the winter season--chillis, spinach, white pumpkin, mustard seed, potatoes, onions, bringals, tomatoes, tobacco. If a man reaped a decent amount of rice, his family could eat regularly, clean hand-milled rice, no matter what games were played with the market. If he didn't, he was again the victim. The difference depended a great deal upon things beyond his control. The first vital element is land, always a precious commodity and growing more urgently so with each generation, as the land is repeatedly subdivided among the heirs. A high number of the population, at any given time, will be involved in a civil court case over property.

"If you have some rice land is better," our bearer said, "you can stay alive. But at least you have to have house land, so you have a place to starve, not die in the street."

A farmer is, of course, always dependent upon the weather, too. Rain, drought, flood, and cyclone hang precariously over his livelihood. Success depends upon hard work, and that is directly influenced by his health, and that of his wife and children. Animals are important, cows and oxen and chickens. He had no machinery in East Pakistan; if he had, maintenance would have been impossible. His subsistence was marginal; he was afraid to take chances with new methods.

Fear was intrinsic in the climate of life for the East Bengali. He was always threatened by natural calamity, sickness, death, old age, poverty, abuse by the powerful, disapproval by his peers. Religious leaders might warn him that he wages of sin are bad luck--loss of a job, or a child, or his land. An astrologer sometimes illustrated the dangers ahead. A robust trade went on in amulets and spells, which gave a gratifying sense of power, conferring the ability to win a fight or seduce a maiden. In his helplessness, the Bengali relied heavily on luck. There was always just the possibility that it might turn in his favor.

Chapter Eight

EAST WING AND WEST WING

The marriage of East and West Pakistan was a union of staggering incompatability, marked by a profound scorn on the West Side and bitter resentment on the East. The capital of the country was in Islamabad, in the West wing; Dacca, in the East, was designated "Second Capital". The Governor of East Pakistan was appointed by the President (who had always been a West Pakistani), so that "government", to the Bengali, was synonymous with "central government", which meant Islamabad.

Pakistan was created by detaching from British India those areas in which the population was predominantly Muslim. The East wing was separated from the West wing not only by vast physical distance but by language, alphabet, and culture. Religion was the only thing they had in common, and they were not in full agreement about that.

The date of the Eid festival, for example, was fixed by the sighting of the new moon at the end of Ramadan, the fast. The sighting of the new moon was announced from West Pakistan, and each year was celebrated amid confusion in East Pakistan, where some Bengali Muslims accepted the West's date, and others refused. "Why should the holiday in Bengal be set by the moon in Islamabad?" they said, and they celebrated the next day.

A Bengali Muslim engineer told us in a voice unsteady with anger, "West Pakistanis say that Bengali is an Indian language, a Hindu language, and therefore un-Islamic. They say that we should use Urdu instead. Urdu! Bengali is an old and cultivated language with a long literary tradition. Urdu was made up by barbarian invaders, a mixture of Hindi and Arabic and Persian. It has no real history or antiquity. What kind of a language is that? Now they tell us that we must stop our music and our dance, they want to prohibit it by law, because they say it is un-Islamic. Music and dance are part of us, our Bengali life and culture."

For many months, the local newspaper was flooded with letters like this:

> Congratulations on our timely editorial "FAREWELL TO FINE ARTS." Allow me please to express my feelings on the issue through the columns of your esteemed daily.
>
> I have been observing with utter dismay and frustration the mode in which some people are endorsing the action of the West Pakistan Government in banning dances and music in Schools and Colleges and advocating the same course for the educational Institutions in this Wing too.
>
> Participation in dances and music by the girl students has been banned by the West Pakistan Government. The reason behind this is that dances and music lead to immoral activities etc. etc. (!)

> Dances and music are the two principal items of fine arts. And culture of fine arts is essential for moulding a healthy and happy life--individual as well as social. Instead of encouraging immoral activities, culture of dances and music and other items of fine arts puts a natural check to it. It has also been seen that when cultural activities are stopped, the minds of young people seek recreation in some abnormal and anti-social ways. We don't know if the learned advocates of "ban-dance-and-music" slogan want to turn each and every Pakistani man and woman into fanatical puritans. I think they are suffering from some sort of complex and mental disease.
>
> Lovers of dance and fine arts should unite and give a bold check to this uncouth attempt of some mentally diseased and out-of-date people.
>
> KAMAL AHMED, Chittagong

Language, the intimate vehicle of culture, was a painfully inflamed issue in East Pakistan, as language usually wherever the native tongue is threatened or disparaged.

Urdu had a certain prestige value as the court language of the conquerors who poured into India from Central Asia; its relationship to Arabic and Persian gave it additional value among Muslims. Among the ruling classes in East Pakistan, there were many West Pakistanis who professed to understand no Bengali at all, though everyone else regarded this as an affectation. Bengalis, on the other hand, seemed to acquire Urdu and Hindi whenever they were exposed to it.

"But of course they <u>have</u> to!" a Punjabi woman explained. "After all, <u>who</u> speaks Bengali?"

From time to time, Bengali students demonstrated against the imposition of Urdu. Their indignation often expanded to protest against English as well. This was understandable. Many privileges, particularly government jobs, were reserved for those who knew English well, while adequate English lessons were not widely available. Nevertheless, English was the only language common to both wings, and upon it depended Pakistan's communication with the rest of the world.

During an anti-Urdu demonstration some years before, the police fired upon the students, killing one boy. The anniversary was still observed in Dacca as "Shaheed Din" (Martyr's Day). Its meaning was frequently obscured by the absurdity of its expression, such as throwing stones or bricks at cars wearing English-language license plates. For two or three days annually, we all had to cover our original plates with paper ones, written in Bengali.

"Government doesn't need to shoot children. That's why students can't demonstrate against government, government not allow," Abinash, our bearer, said. He was putting his younger brother through college.

"But maybe the police firing was their own idea."

He clicked his tongue impatiently. "Without government order, police don't fire. Our student too afraid to make noise against government. So many come from family not very rich, not much power. If they get in trouble with government, then they won't get good job, maybe go in jail."

"But the students do strike, constantly," I argued. "They throw stones at USIS and they strike for fewer classes and for easier examinations and--"

He grinned. "Government not mind that. Maybe government tell them--not openly, but some way--to stone USIS. But the students don't make strike against government."

The most urgent antagonism involved the joint economy. Jute was the chief national export and source of foreign exchange; and jute was a product of East Pakistan.

"But where is most of the money spent? West Pakistan. Who gets first cut out of foreign aid? West Pakistan. They have more land, we have more people and resources, and they still concentrate on development of their own province."

West Pakistan's unofficial but consistent reply to this was that the Bengalis were not capable enough or honest enough to use the funds properly.

"The basis for their decisions in Islamabad," a Bengali educator told us, "is contempt for Bengal, pure and simple."

When we were visiting Lahore, I spoke to a Punjabi about the rather curious fact that we would have to go through Customs inspection when we returned to the East wing. We had been told that we could not transport gold or automobile parts in that direction. "Why?" I wondered.

He laughed. "It seems that the Bengali is more addicted to smuggling than other people. It's his nature, I don't know why."

At home in the East wing, this explanation struck sparks when I mentioned it.

"What means that?" Abinash demanded. "Where would East Pakistani smuggle gold to? From here to India? Gold is cheaper in India, and better, too. Why smuggle gold to India? They say Bengali smuggle--what about Lindi Kotal up by the Afghan border in West Pakistan? Everything smuggled there."

I remembered being stopped for Customs check between Lindi Kotal and Peshawar in the Northwest, a pointless gesture to be sure, as the smuggled goods bought in Lindi Kotal were delivered clandestinely by runners to Peshawar.

"Oh no," he went on, "the reason they have Customs check here is because things are cheaper in West Pakistan. Here we have to pay more for everything. Plenty of oranges and grapes and apples and vegetables there, everybody can eat; here we never see those kind of thing, except rich people. Same country, but there they keep prices low for themselves. Where else do people have to go through Customs in their own country from one part to another? We have paper mill here, but here paper is more expensive than in West wing." He had never been in West Pakistan, but the grape vine was long and fruitful.

Our Punjabi friend in Lahore touched upon the subject of employment, a perpetual fount of animosity. "I was formerly Director of Railways in East Pakistan. But the Bengalis cried

until they got a Bengali in that position, so I was transferred here. You're probably familiar," he added drily, "with the deplorable condition of their railways now."

And from the Bengali:

"Why they send West Pakistani here to be head of every department of government? We don't need them. We need jobs. British time, they always put one British officer in charge of everything. That's all right, we were a colony in the Empire. But we are not a colony of West Pakistan. We are supposed to be equal.

"They send engineer here from West Pakistan. You ask them why and they tell you 'Oh, Bengali not have any engineer, Bengali very foolish people.' But they don't tell you that in East Pakistan is one engineering college for about five or six crore people, and six engineering college in West Pakistan for four or five crore people."

A Bengali driver developed the theme further.

"One paper mill they build in East Pakistan, madame. That means jobs for people. But what people? They bring Pathans from West wing. Government give them work in paper mill. How can Bengali find job then? Few years after partition, Bengali making big fight with Pathan at mill. They throw so many Pathan in river there. Pathan cannot swim.

"And so many Muslim refugees come in from India, very poor people. Many Bihari people. When they come here they don't

have anything. Government giving job for them too, in jute mill, and build pukka housing for them, and more trouble for Bengal. We have so many people here without job, without house. Those Bihari always making fight, too, killing Hindu, or burning Hindu house and take away their women."

East Pakistanis resented their lack of representation in their government; the Governor of the province was regarded as merely an extension of presidential power.

"They say this is a republic? How can they call it republic? Everything controlled by one hand, President Ayub Khan's. East Pakistan governor does what President tells him. We had before one good governor, Azam Khan. West Pakistani man, but very good for Bengali people. When food in short supply, he told merchant they cannot put price too high for poor people to eat. When cyclone come, he going himself to see what happen, to see those people really get help. All Bengali like him too much. So they took him away and put another governor. Now we get nothing, only big words. They don't let Azam Khan say anything, either. Now he wears muzzle.

"Republic? Then how can they put one editor in jail for years because he criticizes the government in his newspaper? And what about Sheikh Rahman, head of the Awami League? He is always in jail, so we have no opposition party, only the single party in control. I cannot see any difference between this and Soviet Russia.

"Now we cannot do anything without government. In the village, if we want to give even one drama or festival, we have to take permission. That means four anna for peon, eight anna for clerk, and this and that...."

The foreign policy which emanated from the national capital did not always faithfully reflect Bengali sentiment either. Though the government-controlled press could influence public opinion on some issues, Bengalis were not always cooperative.

"Kashmir! Government make a lot noise, make trouble with India about Kashmir. Maybe that's so we won't notice we're hungry. What do we Bengalis care about Kashmir? They have more Muslims in West Bengal in India than in Kashmir. And anyway, not all Pakistanis are Muslim. Why don't they worry about Pakistani Muslims making trouble with Pakistani Hindus? Instead of crying about Kashmir! When trouble with India, is hard for all Bengalis. We have relatives in Calcutta. Now we cannot see each other, and so difficult to send money to wives and mothers. And West Bengal has so many things we need here--fruit and vegetables all year, and good cloth, but we can never get them now."

The Bengali view of the People's Republic of China was less than clear-cut. The Pakistan government earnestly courted their Chinese neighbors, and the visit of a Chinese official was an occasion for extravagant display of friendship. A road

whose construction had dawdled along for two years was completed in the single week before a prominent Chinese arrived. Mirpur Road, which ran from the airport to the President's house, was strung with Pakistani and Chinese flags, and archways bearing such mottoes as "Pak-Chini ANITY (sic) ZINDABAD." Cultural groups presented local songs and dances for the dignitaries in performances which were closed to the general public but were described rapturously in the Pakistani press.

When Chou En Lai was arriving, we drove to Mirpur Road for a glimpse of him. The road was lined on either side with a thick wall of people--lunghis, saris, burqas, white cottons, and babes in arms. We hesitated to thrust our pale faces prominently among them; a crowd in Bengal is always of uncertain tenor. We asked my Bengali tutor, who was with us, to take our camera and try to catch a snapshot of the Personage while we waited behind the lines.

He was back in a few minutes, laughing. "The government coaxed in hundreds of people from the villages, bringing them with free train rides, and the poor things have been waiting and waiting to see the Chinese guest. Chou En Lai just went by at a hundred miles an hour, in a closed car with curtains drawn over the windows, and now the crowd is cursing him."

The newspapers next day reported that eager Pakistanis "from all walks of life" had rushed by the thousands to welcome the great leader, spontaneously cheering and waving.

The subject came up while Pat Owens and I were visiting Akbar, her Muslim cook, in his village. We sat at a table in front of our guest hut, sipping drinks under a saffron moon in a blue tissue sky. Akbar stood beside us with Madan the mali, arms folded thoughtfully. When the news was over, Akbar said, "I think East Pakistan maybe not last very long. Somebody take it, I think. Maybe China."

We speculated about the prospects. "If the Chinese come," Pat said, "they will need rice, not people. They might take the rice and throw the people away."

"Oh, I know, madame. Chinese very hungry." He reflected a moment. "When I working in Calcutta, British time, people say Chinese eat other people."

Startled, we laughed. "Akbar! Surely not!" "I've never heard of--I don't think--"

He smiled with us, but he was not swayed. "Yes, madame, they say Chinese eating Indian children." Madan nodded agreemant.

"We not want Chinese here," Akbar said quietly, and went away to bring our dinner.

Often, if the topic presented itself, Bengalis shrugged. "That's government politics. What do we want with the Chinese Communists?"

One Bengali who had studied in America estimated that popular opinion in East Pakistan might be pro-Communist.

"After all," he said, "what can our people think? They only know what they read or hear via our media: that America is bombing Vietnamese peasants and bullying Negroes; that in China and Russia, there are no poor, everybody is equal. Our high officials go to Peking and come back spouting admiration for Chinese industry and agriculture. What they <u>really</u> admire is the Chinese leaders' standard of living and their power. He mentioned the son of a certain wealthy Pakistani industrialist. "When that boy came back from a visit to Peking, he said, 'China is doing very well. Their officials' sons have sports cars just like ours.'

"We Bengalis are not easily misled on issues within our range of vision--Kashmir, disparity, famine--but how could most of us get any rational perspective on China and America? Who explains what a democracy actually is? Our government has borrowed all the labels--'President', 'National Assembly', 'elections', 'union councils'. But in fact the country is run by a despot and his henchmen. No freedom of the press; religious freedom is largely theoretical; and while we can freely assemble to praise the President or Mao-Tse-tung, or condemn cyclones, we cannot assemble to protest any government policy."

Student protest was common enough in its limited way, but it was not easy to evaluate the depth of feeling or meaning.

"Well, the students have been on strike for three days," Dan announced, returning from the Engineering College one afternoon. "They spent the first morning putting up anti-American signs on all the walls, but they used local cellophane

tape, and of course the signs were hanging at half-mast within hours, and there they flapped. The halls looked so frightful that today I couldn't stand it any more. I took some pukka American tape and taped all the loose corners neatly in place. And two of the same students stood watching me, and at last one of them said respectfully, 'You are a good sport, sir.'"

"Disparity" was the Bengali diagnosis of their problems; "autonomy", partial or complete, was the cure they prescribed. Any suggestion of "autonomy"--or "parity"--was regarded by the central government as sedition; but it was a passion that burned ominously under every seething issue.

West Pakistanis pointed out that Bengal has always been a rebellious province: emotional, crafty, volatile, uncoordinated, and difficult to govern. Bengal, they emphasized, was incapable of self-rule. (One foreign observer, after many years in both provinces, had concluded that the Bengalis were more clever but the West Pakistanis were better organized.)

Not all Bengalis disagreed completely with the West wing. "They must get very tired of us," a young engineer remarked. "We say that God runs East Pakistan because nobody else does."

"We all cheat so," a Bengali contractor sighed regretfully. It's no wonder that our lower classes aren't more honest when they watch the rest of us stealing all the time."

Others, less resigned, suggested: "If we are so much trouble for the West wing, why don't they let us go? We would show them in twenty years who can make more progress."

Chapter Nine

MONSOON

In April and May, East Pakistan waited tautly for the monsoon rains as the temperature climbed. Sometimes a quick storm brought a brief ease, with little hot curly wires of lightning and then a sudden pointless illumination of the sky, barking thunder, and the wind blowing rain through the screens. Presently a wedge of wholesome sky appeared through a rent in the gray cotton cloud, and the storm was finished.

Early in May, before we had air-conditioning, it was too hot to sleep after five in the morning, and I would wander to the veranda hoping to catch a breeze. At that hour, the sun sat like a ripe egg yolk over a slab of roof. The scent was fading from the Queen-of-the-Night blossoms, and the chawkidor nodded in his cane chair. A lone man in a plaid lunghi stood in the road and scratched himself; a boy appeared leading a horse, and a wallah danced by with a head basket; more and more came. By 5:30 Satmasjid Road was alive with foot traffic, all silent, thonged or barefoot. Sometimes there was a freshness, almost a breath of wind, on the air, but the day was already warm and damp. Only the birds were audible.

Later in the day, I could only sit, gasping and wilted, and watch the laborers in the street--climbing telephone poles, spreading hot tar on the roadbed, carrying bulky stacks of brick on their heads. They moved slowly; I marvelled that they moved at all. A single kite might fly up from a field, dark and pointed against the sky above the lacy branches of the krishnachura tree. The neighborhood tank was still, opaque, gray-green. There the dhobis washed clothes, and people gathered to wash themselves and their cows and water buffalo. On very hot days the surface was stippled with brown shoulders and black heads.

The most difficult feature of this season was the tension, which built up steadily toward explosion. Problems--servant, domestic, and health--all reached their crises, and people were fired, or quit, or got divorces, or got sick. I can't believe it was merely the heat, for air-conditioning didn't relieve it, but some subtler atmospheric quality which scrambled brains and shredded nerves.

On June 7 the wind changed, and the rain fell, not in drops but in streams and sheets. A low wet gray sky hung over a low wet gray earth. Gray water stood six inches deep in the compound. Wind drove rain through the clothes and tore umbrellas from clinging hands. Kripa said it was the monsoon, and somebody at Ralph's office said it was the tail end of a hurricane in Calcutta.

Whatever it was, it changed our world from a flat pan of baked earth and brassy light and dust to a basin of cloud and water. Black umbrellas bloomed everywhere. Bottle caps and banana peels rose from swelling gutters and floated through the yard. Drains were clogged, roofs leaked, our whitewashed walls were darkly streaked. Water flooded the servants' quarters, and one morning I saw one of their shoes sailing past the kitchen door. Rain came through the big window in the dining room--though it was closed--and the cloth lining of the new bamboo bled green onto the bamboo, the walls, the floor. Blackish patches appeared and spread on faithless ceilings. We watched with gloomy interest and wondered What To Do.

We sent for the landlord's cousin brother, who was his agent while the landlord was in America--studying/structural engineering.

The cousin brother was of the slight boneless type, with liquid black eyes that said nothing and a strenuous stubborn smile. He leaned on his furled umbrella while we pointed out the untenable defects in the structure, and inclined his head repeatedly toward his shoulder in the Bengali gesture of assent. And simply did nothing. Threatened with legal action, he looked at us with puppy's eyes or shifted his gaze uneasily. It became evident that he had no intention of squandering his important brother's money on waterproofing servants' quarters. After arduous harassment, we got an electric outlet and a bit of putty at the window. We decided to look for another house.

Meanwhile, sheets and towels were draped over all the furniture to dry. Anthony's skin was so clammy that he would have slipped through our fingers if his heat rash had not provided a grippable surface. An air conditioner arrived at last; and when it had been triumphantly hoisted into place, and its bent fans straightened so that it stopped yelling and roared evenly, the electric power went off. The master brushed his teeth by candlelight, mumbling something about "these poor little people."

After a rain, we could hear the tik-tikis, the tiny lizards with surprisingly loud voices, rather like metal striking glass. Clouds massed in the sky--charcoal and dove and cream and mauve, pyramids and columns of cloud, freshly combed cloud, pillows and suds and cones, subdued in color by extravagant in shape and texture.

Every time I walked into the kitchen, I renewed my resolve to find another place to live. In that close room, with its single window, they could not even use the fan because it blew the kerosene flame out. Sweat rolled steadily from the brown faces. Steam rose from the boiling rice, mustard oil spluttered in the frying pan, and there was always the smell of masala spices, and, faintly, kerosene. Sometimes an anxious chicken crouched behind the door, cackling wildly when approached. The day's marketing would be spread out--a bunch of blue spinach, a few potatoes, a spray of green coriander leaf.

At best, the market did not offer a liberal choice. Many delicacies we never saw at all: sweet bell peppers, avocadoes, artichokes, mushrooms, fresh safe dairy products, to name a few. Apples and oranges imported from the West wing were shockingly expensive. As the monsoon rains approached, the local stocks dwindled. By mid-May green beans, spinach, lettuce, tomatoes and crayfish had disappeared. Fish was in irregular supply. A long prospect of eggplant, okra, and white pumpkin lay ahead.

"Madame, what you like for dinner? On Monday is no beef in market. Maybe also no mutton." Pause. "You like chicken?"

But we had, in season, an abundance of papaya, pineapple and mango, and fresh flowers filled our pottery jars daily.

From the air, in July, the province looked like a lake dotted with islands. One day we hired, at nearby Mirpur Bridge, two country boats with their madjiis (boatmen), and drifted through the afternoon across the flooded fields. The rain had transformed the scene as magically as a heavy snow storm can turn a northern town to white diamond overnight.

Patches of lavender water hyacinth glided past, and other country boats, heaped with eggplant and rice and leaves and bamboo. On the hillocks, villagers clustered at the edge of the water to stare--women in faded saris and red Hindu tika dots, bare brown children, old men with long tangled hair.

"You'd think we were a thousand miles from civilization," Dan murmured. "Actually it's about seven thousand."

We tied the boat at a banyan tree while we swam and ate our sandwiches; they said it was a sacred Hindu tree, with red symbols painted on the submerged part of the trunk. The madjiis smoked, and the village boys came out in their boats to join us, first to watch closely, then to swarm up the tree and into the water, laughing and splashing. Wohab, with his swarthy shoulders and wet black hair sticking out of the water and a bunch of green leaves in his hand, looked like a four-color ad for a South Pacific island.

We stopped at a village hat, the weekly bazaar, where rice and fish heads, betel nut and cigarettes, were sold. We bought sugar cane and a few shopworn bananas, and then headed our ark back to the bridge, drowsy and comfortable. Our madjii, pictorial in his green lunghi and a broad bamboo hat, put up the sail. The other boatman poled and sang all the way.

In the villages the rains brought relief and suffering. The rice grew, and that sustained life. The footpaths softened to mire, the children were in constant danger of drowning, and rising waters licked away at the mud foundations and sometimes crept into the low-lying houses. Thatched roofs leaked. Many houses had been damaged by storms in April and May, and if they could not be repaired before the rains started, for lack of time or money, they had to wait until the rains had finished.

Pat Owens and I decided to see something of the province. Her husband was with AID, and they had been transferred to Dacca from Karachi. She decreed that the West wing's shalwar-camise was the ideal garment for genteel ladies travelling by rickshaw and country boat: full trousers, tapered at the ankle, with a knee-length top. The dupatta, a long scarf, was draped modestly across the chest with its ends floating back over the shoulders. Since I had none of these, I asked Saileshwar to bring a dirzi to make them for me. Small tailor shops were everywhere in Dacca; you could take cloth to them, with a picture or garment to be copied. But they were inconvenient. There seemed to be no time limit on their production, and mistakes were discovered too late to be corrected. If you had the dirzi in your own house, he had little to do except drink tea, gossip, and work on your clothing until it was finished. And you could assure yourself that he did not hand your length of treasured Thai silk to a younger brother for cutting practice.

Saileshwar brought A.K. Barua, a tall plump man who worked for us off and on for a couple of years. But between substantial prices and cloth remnants, he prospered enough to enable him to retire to his village for half the year, and when he disappeared in the direction of Chittagong, we had to experiment with very assorted others.

But he was clever and worked quickly. A dirzi in the house had a certain restricting effect; one had to be within calling distance for fittings, and to keep materials and pictures ready to be fed into his waiting fingers when he had completed an item. A. K. sat cross-legged in the middle of the house, taking a neighborly interest in all that went on, and keeping his composure when Anthony squatted among the scraps and pins to play with his scissors and his sewing machine.

When my costume was ready, the rains had stopped and the water was high in the rivers. It was an excellent time for boat travel.

Chapter Ten

JUNGLE TOUR

Pat and I persuaded Hugh Murphy, the young man who represented Catholic Relief Services in East Pakistan, to take us with him on a visit to the Catholic missions in the southwest, near the Bay of Bengal. Ted Owens and Ralph came to see us aboard the night mail launch at Naranganj, the river town where Rumer and Jon Godden had lived as children.

The lower deck was packed densely with huddled figures. We climbed the narrow steps to First Class, a bare room with a stark light bulb, a scarred dining table and chairs, and benches around the walls. Several tiny sleeping cabins and a bathroom opened from the dining room; a cook scurried out of the galley, fumbling into a dirty apron. "It's always the way," Hugh said. "All the <u>real</u> people are down in Tourist, all the fun parties....It'll be dull up here, dressing for dinner and listening to the bores at the Captain's table."

We sailed away in the starless night, and the land was a blotted black border against the darkly clouded sky. The wind blew the water into high hissing waves, and the ship's lantern

scattered sequins of light over them. Our launch pitched and rocked, and a heavy rattling rain began to fall. A few hours out of Naranganj, we tied up at Chandpur for the night to wait out the storm.

Next morning the river was rolling and glittering peacefully. A cyclone, blowing in from the Bay, had struck Barisol during the night. Large kerosene tins floated on the water, indicating an overturned craft. Somewhere on the river, too, a launch had capsized, spilling the passengers from the overcrowded lower deck into the water.

The fishermen were exceptionally defenseless when a cyclone hit; often they were out in light boats beyond the aid of storm signals. The off-shore islands were assaulted repeatedly, year after year. In the villages, crops were ruined and roofs were torn away and bamboo walls were flattened. People and livestock were drowned, or killed by falling trees and collapsing houses and flying tin roofs. The statistics on these disasters were inexact.

On the day's journey from Chandpur to Barisol, we sat on the deck in the warm clear day with the wind rippling against our faces. Boats passed: sail boats, rowboats, broad country boats, long narrow fishing boats, bulky launches. The country lay on either side, green and cheerful in the sunlight.

"It's hard to believe," Pat sighed, "that under every leaf out there lives a family."

The cyclone had disrupted the electric power, and Barisol town was very dark when we reached the port that evening. We groped our way toward the headlights of the waiting car which took us to the local mission compound. Over a hospitable tea, we wondered if we should call our families. "Don't worry about that," the priest said comfortingly. "The telephones are all dead."

We all went to see Brother Baptist's grammar school the next morning. Broken trees and houses lined our rickshaw route. The bamboo walls of Brother's classroom had been blown down, and he gathered some of his little pupils in another room to sing for us and play the harmonium. Sweat poured from our faces, and the color from our paper malas (flower garlands) ran and stained us pink and green and purple. Pat and I appreciatively took the garlands with us, and later Hugh grumbled,"You were supposed to give them back so they can use them again." He was cross with us anyway because, being a conservative boy, he didn't approve of our shalwar-camise and always referred to them as our "funny clothes." American ladies, he felt, should wear their own native costumes. (I have always believed that it is very American to appropriate whatever appeals to you in your travels, as long as it is adoption and not outright theft, of course.)

When we left Barisol town, our route turned rural. We took the country bus to Gournadi mission, our next stop. The First Class passengers (both of them) sat up in front with the

driver. The Second Class passengers (we, among others) sat in a cage behind First, with wooden bars enclosing their compartment. One of us sat by turns on the suitcase by the window, clutching its bars for stability, and the other two huddles against the suitcase to make room for extra passengers who were thrust in after us. Behind us, Third Class was filled like a chicken coop. The driver climbed up and found the ignition key; someone ran around in front and cranked the bus; and we began to move.

Four rivers lay across our path. At each crossing, all of the passengers descended while the bus drove onto a wooden raft; we gathered on the edges of the raft to ride to the other side, where we sprang ashore and chased the bus down the road. When everybody was stowed in, we proceeded again, the great bulbous bus horn honking, goats, ducks and children scattering in our path.

We would have missed our stop at Gaurnadi altogether if the passengers in back had not clamored at us when they sighted three Sisters in white habits and veils running down the long path from the convent, waving frantically.

The Dutch nuns installed Pat and me in their guest house, a comfortable square whitewashed room with two wooden beds and a water basin and pitcher. Hugh came over from the priests' compound for supper, and the Sisters set out a banquet for us on a table under the broad old trees. Besides rice and curry,

they served, to our dismay, delicacies when had been sent or given them, such as tinned meat and cheese, which they could not readily replace.

We took our baths with buckets of water and a tin cup in the sturdy little mud bath house, and walked through the black shadows across the lawn to our guest room. At nine o'clock we put the oil lanterns outside the door and Sister took them away for the night.

It was our first journey in the Bengal countryside, and we were awkward with everything. I carefully trapped a few mosquitoes inside the net with me, and in the dark could do nothing about it. I had been frightened witless by something--a large worm or a small snake--which crawled out of the drain while I was bathing by the timid lantern light. Pat thumped around on the wooden bed, trying to find a comfortable posture, and we listened to the jackals cry from the jungle. We talked for a long time, fanning ourselves, feeling pleasantly alive.

In the morning we walked to the priests' compound. The schoolhouse there was a bamboo building with a mud foundation, too small for the number of pupils--an annex was being planned. The rain had washed away part of the foundation, and the children were mixing mud and cow dung with water to repair the damage. They did this about once a week in the dry season, and three times a week in the wet season.

The Sisters loaned us their country boat to get to Narikelbari, with two of their servants as our boatmen. We took with us the breadbox which served as communication media between convents in the area; the Sisters put notes in it and sent it to each other by boat. Theirs was a fine boat with its midsection enclosed by a small wooden cabin, enough space for three of us to stretch out on the straw mat or sit cross-legged playing cards. They had packed a lunch for us, and we found that it held the rest of their delicatessen--tinned biscuits, salami and cheese. We ate it, drinking tea made by the boatmen over an oil flame on the prow. Later we would send a gift box to the Sisters, in the resigned certainty that they would tuck it away to serve to other itinerant guests while they went on eating egg curry.

Our craft was poled across the flooded paddy fields, with long green rice stalks whispering at our windows and clumps of blossoms swirling by. This was storybook jungle: feathery palms, tall thin betel trees and short fat coconut trees, grass huts and pastel colors. People peered into the windows at us as they passed. As I was reclining across the width of the cabin, I did not quite fit, and my feet stuck out of the window. I felt like Alice in Wonderland after she had taken the growing pill. A man in a plaid lunghi trudged beside us on a footpath for several miles, staring earnestly into my eyes, one hand holding his black umbrella aloft and the other clutching a length of sugar cane which he chewed steadily. His bare feet stumbled once in a while, but he never looked away.

We came to the ghat at Narikelbari in the late afternoon. The Canadian Sisters met us there, a cluster of animated figures with rosy faces framed in white, beaming and waving from the bank. They led us through the topaz light and green shadows across the compound to their house. Hugh went on to the gentlemen's quarters beyond.

"We were afraid the cyclone might have held you up along the way," they told us, showing us into their big well-scrubbed kitchen. "We're so glad you could come--not many people get out here. Here, tea will be ready in a minute."

We sat around their table, and Pat and I began to sort out the individual faces.

"I'm sorry we haven't got any beer to offer you," Sister Damien said merrily. She was the short roundish one, busy at the tea kettle. "Just ran out of it. Well, we have to have our jokes. Oh, we do love to have guests. Last year's cyclone, we had Mrs. O'Donnell here. You know her? The Consul-general's wife in Dacca? She couldn't leave for a few days, of course, the cyclone stopped everything, and her husband was having a fit, not having heard from her."

"Poor man," Mother Paul sighed. "He was looking all over the district for her, and she was sitting here happily playing cards in our kitchen." She had a thin, thoughtful face with high cheekbones. Sister Evelyn was the little one with the lively black eyes; and there was another, newly arrived, with

pale eyebrows and a ruddy complexion, who said nothing, but listened uncertainly to the patter that fell like hailstones around her.

After tea, Sister Damien showed us around the mission.

"This is the dispensary here. It's a new building--the old one was blown down last year--and we're so pleased with it. We have a few hospital beds, but anything serious we send down to Barisol. I'm a nurse, we don't have a doctor here. I've been here seventeen years. Nowadays the new missionaries study Bengali at the Oriental Institute in Barisol, but when I came they didn't have such a thing, and I learned my Bengali in the dispensary, listening to the patients describe their symptoms. I was always whispering to the Superior, 'Sister, what does that word mean?' And she'd say 'cough' or 'blood' or whatever. I was scared foolish. I learned Bengali, all right, but I still speak village Bengali. Now, we train a few girls here in basic nursing, and we give some instruction in the village, like how to clean the house before childbirth. They don't have soap, so we use ashes and leaves. And they come here for post-partum care and well-baby clinic."

The priests ran the school next door, and had started a cooperative union.

"At sowing time we all go out and plant together, boys and teachers. At harvest time we cut the paddy together. Rice is cheap then, and what isn't needed immediately is kept in

in the go-down. Than when rice is expensive in the market, the people can buy it at a low price from their community go-down. We try to get them to put a few rupees regularly into the savings plan, and then they can borrow from it when they have to. That keeps them out of the hands of the money-lenders and their outrageous interest rates. Once the money lender gets hold of a man, he can never get out of debt, or his children after him, either."

"Don't the schoolboys object to doing farm work?"

"Oh, they didn't like it at first. Or their parents. They said 'Why send our sons to school if they're going to do common labor with their hands?' But they saw their teachers doing it, and slowly slowly they got used to the idea. We have a little co-op shop here too, and the boys run it themselves.

"When we started this cooperative, the village people said 'The old priest always gave us rice when we were hungry, why don't you?' And we said 'The Fathers have been giving you rice for a hundred years and you're still poor. Now we'll try to show you how to take care of yourselves.' We can't educate the parents actually, but we hope that these boys will do it for us in their own villages. When a situation comes up, a boy can say, 'At school we did it this way, and it worked;' and he can show them how to organize it, and they'll listen to him because he's educated, and he's one of them."

In the evening we sat outside with the Sisters under the calm sky. Sister Damien played old spirituals on her guitar and the Sisters sang.

"Oh, you should hear the Bishop of Chittagong! How he can play the guitar! He sends one boy from each mission village to a music school in Chittagong every year to study. He's afraid the old Bengali music will disappear, he wants to cultivate it and keep it alive. They learn Indian music, and how to play tablas and citar."

The mission was almost an island after the rains, and from the black fringe of jungle across the water came the rhythmic thump of Hindu drums, and occasionally an oil lamp flickered distantly. Durga Puja time was drawing near.

"The villages around here are all kinds--Muslim and Hindu and Christian. Usually they get on all right. A few years ago they got into a communal fight, though--it was terrible. They didn't bother us here at the mission, they seemed to respect us as neutral territory. So they brought the wounded in here--d'you remember that burned Hindu boy they threw in boiling water, Sister? We treated his burns, and then the men came from the Muslim village and demanded that we release him to them. Oh Lord! In the end they let Father mediate between them, and it finally quieted down."

We were quickly tranquillized by the cadence of mission life. We ate well, slept well, and wandered at leisure through

their classes and clinics and countryside. Father Peter took us to visit Joseph, one of the school teachers in the nearest village. We sat in his neatly swept bamboo hut, drinking tea and eating sweets, while Father shared a hookah pipe with Joseph, and the women and children peeked at us around the edge of the door. These were of the flock our friends tended. And in the evening, when they had finished their work, we talked with the Sisters.

One night Mother Paul and I sat up late at the kitchen table, and she talked about their people.

"We got a mission box from Catholic Relief, you know, and we passed the clothing out on Christmas Eve. And mon Dieu, we nearly collapsed when we saw them arriving for Midnight Mass! Some of them were dressed in the suits of long underwear only, and very pleased with themselves, because they were warm. It was so hard to keep the face straight." Then her slender sensitive face sobered. "We have to laugh, sometimes, Mrs. Hill, or we should cry, and that does no good. How can we laugh at these poor people really? They are so poor around here. So many families never have more than one meal a day. Floods, cyclones, crop failure, cold, hunger, heat, cholera, smallpox....What can they do? We have a cholera epidemic during the monsoon rains, and they have no place to bury their dead except in the water. Think what this does to the water supply, where they must drink and bathe. Even if they know they should boil the water, they cannot afford the fuel.

"And then a crop fails. Last time when the rains were late a man came to me and said 'Mother, I must arrange a marriage for my daughter.' So I looked up her baptismal record and I told him, 'But you cannot let her marry this year, she is only 13, by Church law she must be 14.' And his eyes filled with tears and he said, 'Mother, please change the record. I have no rice and I can't feed her; she must get married.'"

The evening before we left, they had a Function, as East Bengalis referred to any social or cultural event, in our honor. We sat on a row of chairs in the schoolhouse, and the villagers placed garlands around our necks and seated themselves on chairs facing us to present their musical program.

"I don't know why they sit like that," Sister whispered mournfully. "They always sit on the floor--this way they look so unnatural." Eventually they did abandon the chairs and made themselves comfortable while they played their drums and string instruments and sang. I nudged Pat.

"How lovely--these are real flowers in the malas."

"And those are real bugs crawling off them," she hissed, slapping stealthily at her clavicle.

The Sisters thought it absurd of us to leave Narikelbari so soon. "After all, it's a long trip," they protested.

"I hate to go," I said. I quite agreed with them. "But my husband expected me back yesterday and he'll be worried."

They stared at me, shocked. "But your husband surely knows," Mother Paul cried, "that you can never return from

anyplace on schedule in Bengal! Why, when any of us leave the mission to travel, we only say, 'Goodbye, we'll see you when we get back.'

In time I came to know that the realistic philosophy we found everywhere among these missionaries was highly infectious, and rightly so.

But that day Hugh and Pat and I agreed to start home. At Gaurnadi they told us that the bridge had washed out, so we caught the early launch instead of the bus. We would have missed the launch, but a kindly Bengali, who passed us on the path and reached the ghat first, told the captain to wait for us.

We sat in First Class, a wooden bench running along the walls of the upper deck cabin. We tried clumsily to play three-handed bridge, but the other passengers gathered outside at the opposite window to watch in such quantity that the boat began to tip dangerously. At last we gave it up.

In Barisol we were just able to get space on the night mail steamer to Dacca. Jute moths swarmed in through the portholes and covered everything in the cabin with the irritating dust from their wings. The air was hot and heavy. We lay scratching and writhing; sleep was impossible.

"Just when you think you're seeing Bengal---" Pat stopped helplessly, then tried again. "You look at it one day and it's a Little Black Sambo country with bright green palms and black umbrellas and purple waistcoats, where people forever chase

each other around the coconut tree trying to snatch the bucket of ghee. You blink and look again, and it's coughing and spitting and betel juice, and leprous beggars and children with shrivelled legs and rickety chests; look again and it's the crafty Bengali folktale, full of glossy-haired scoundrels and moulavis with grubby prayer caps and henna in their beards."

We both knew there was more to it. When I wandered into my house at last, only two days late, Kripa clung to me and wept; she thought we had been drowned in the cyclone. Saileshwar grinned and brought a gin and lime, and the bearer took my laundry and bedroll away to be cleaned. Yes, I thought, and if we look closely, it's another image in the glass to confuse us. It's Kripa and Regina and Saileshwar and Akbar and all those others, with common sense and humor and dignity, working, maybe cheating a little, maybe not, to buy a bit of land and educate their children and build their <u>baris</u>, and somehow, in spite of everything, surviving.

Chapter Eleven

THE FOREIGN COMMUNITY

Before Independence and Partition, foreigners came to Bengal who worked and built their lives there. Most of them were British or Scottish. They administered government, and tea plantations or shipping firms. Many of them loved the country and belonged to it. Some succumbed to the climate and disease and were buried in Bengal. Some married Indians and produced the distinct cultural group called Anglo-Indian. (An older meaning of the term refers to the British who lived for a long time in India, as did the family of John Masters, author of Bhawani Junction, for example.) Others retired and went back to England, to surround themselves with their brass and rugs and carved idols, and to bore their friends with their reminiscences of life in the East. We considered often the anguish with which the latter group must have left the sub-continent when it was no longer their country. Mary Frances and I came to envision ourselves, some distant day, sitting in lounges of old brownstone clubs, clutching at any victims who might listen to tales of Our Time.

The foreign community had become, in modern East Bengal, a more mobile tribe, weaving its own designs which may some day strike historians as quaint. Few people wanted to link themselves

seriously to a country in which they could own nothing permament, and from which they could be expelled at any political whim.

The new foreigners came for limited periods of time, usually in connection with a large agency or mission. There were the Official People, the staffs of diplomatic missions and information services. The Unofficial People came, as we had, with private companies, or with agencies like CARE or church relief services or the Ford Foundation. AID people, also Official, were posted there to supervise the use of funds (and obstruct misuse of same, as one Bengali put it), and with them were some American university consultant groups.

Exceptions to this shifting pattern were found among the Christian missionaries, and a few survivors from the British Empire. Some of the more settled residents were "in jute" or "in shipping", and an occasional Scot came down from the tea plantations of Sylhet for a gold tournament, or the Queen's Birthday. Local firms had passed into Pakistani ownership, but the British were often retained as management. These long-term residents seemed to have a slightly-larger-than-life quality, an exaggeration of national characteristics which is often seen in expatriates who resist absorption by an alien milieu, even while they form an organic attachment to it.

James Bassett and Angus Hume had been in Bengal since some undefined pre-Independence date. It was difficult to imagine

either man in any other background. James was our physician. Sooner or later he saw all but the most indestructible of the foreigners, as well as a considerable number of Pakistani patients. He attended his office six days a week and played golf on Sundays, and was a popular figure at social functions. He was cynical, urbane, cheerful and unflappable. He would, moreover, permit you to discuss your symptoms and pathology and to offer your own opinion of them--a congenial custom long since banished from Western medical cults.

Angus was "in shipping". He had light blue eyes and a sincere mustache which he stroked and tugged as he talked. He had, at one time, been married to a Chawkma princess from the Chittagong Hills, and her brother Tri Dev, the raja, stayed with Angus when he was in Dacca. They enlivened the cavalier set which crashed from party to party on Saturday night, and collected in the Dacca Club bar on Sunday mornings. It was Angus who, driving home from a party in the small hours, noticed the Chinese flags strung up along the road to welcome a Chinese delegation, and decided that he needed one. The road was empty, but by the time he reached the top of the telephone pole, a large flock of Bengalis had materialized to watch him. Two policemen gazed up at him sternly, and he heard mutters of "American spy." "I'm not an American spy," he roared, "I'm an English spy." After which he sat in the police station until morning, when a friend effected his release.

Colin Metcalf, another neighbor who was "in jute", one evening followed a benign impulse to row across our little lake to the Russian diplomatic residence and invite its occupants for cocktails next day. They didn't come, but he was able to report the presence of a tres formidable lady commissar and a general chill in the reception.

Evidently the USSR crowd did not find this larky Colonial decadence as charming as we of the Western bloc did. Some months after we had left Dacca, the new American tenants of our house were startled by the sudden looming in their parlor of a huge stranger who bellowed, without preamble, "Where the hell are the Hills?" After which, the hostess wrote, Colin spent the evening with them and was a great success.

The Catholic missions formed another stable factor. There were Canadian orders scattered across the southern districts, French and Italians in the north; and the American order maintained schools, universities, and an orphanage in Dacca district. Australian Baptists ran a hospital in the Garo Hills, and there was a Baptist school in Barisol; and the Anglican church in the Old City was conducted by foreign clergymen. But we knew the Catholic clan best, for they were widely and deeply involved in local life, city and country, and our paths crossed often. An order of Medical Sisters managed Holy Family Hospital, upon which we felt our lives might depend; and sometimes they did.

"But," Sister Superior pointed out on occasion, "our primary mission is to help the Bengalis, and the foreigners get no preference." It took a firm hand to maintain proper hospital standards in Bengal.

The Holy Cross Fathers were the pilots at Notre Dame College, where Father Bill Graham and Father Dick Timm took turns acting as Principal of the College and spiritual Superior of the Order. "Separation of Church and State," they explained. The College was a source of joy and woe to its priests. They loved their work, but they were plagued, as time went on, by student strikes and occasional violence. Perversely enough, the Bengali students coveted the respected Notre Dame degree, and constantly fought to dilute its respectability with their demands. (Eventually one student delegation insisted that all students must receive passing grades, regardless of performance.) The fiercer strikes, they knew, were usually incited by off-campus factions, which made them harder to cope with. Our various doors around the foreign community wore welcome mats for them when they needed to get away from it all, and a white-robed figure strolling with a prayer-book before dinner added a pleasantly monastic touch to the garden.

The Sisters at Holy Cross College had much less trouble with their student body, but they also had less mobility, so we didn't often see them unless we made visits there.

At St. Joseph's trade school in the Old City, Brother Matthew had labored for long years to teach Bengali boys the arts of carpentery and mechanics. When any of our equipment broke down, it was taken there for repair. "We're trying specially to train Christian boys in a trade. Most of them here are poor, and being a Christian is a disadvantage in getting a job, you know. But it seems like it takes three generations to learn a craft in Bengal. The best carpenters are still the Hindus, the ones who're born into that caste and learn how to hold a hammer before they can walk."

They were hampered, of course, by lack of replacement parts, and Brother Matthew had become adept at improvising them from bits and pieces. "The Bengali phrase we've found most useful," he said mildly, "is 'Nai Mama chay, kanna Mama bhollo,' 'A one-eyed maternal uncle is better than none.'"

It was amusing to compare this scene with the missionaries of W. Somerset Maugham's prose, those pathetic grim puritans striving to force clothing and austere piety upon carefree natives. I asked Sister Carmen about conversions.

"We don't <u>want</u> converts," she said emphatically. "In the first place, the government would kick us out if they saw Muslims turning Christian. Besides, some Muslim boys turn Christian just long enough to marry a Christian girl, then he goes back and she has to live his way, in <u>purdah</u> and sometimes polygamy, and it's really sad. And there've been cases where a convert was killed by his own family for defecting. No, we discourage conversion.

We're here to do as we've been bidden, taking care of the sick and the poor and the widows and orphans; and we try to help the Christian community help itself, to survive."

Dan and Mary Frances had come to East Pakistan two years before we arrived, and we finally left in the same month, so that for us they were a permanent condition of life in Dacca. Dan was an architect, and when he changed from an Unofficial position with a private firm to an Official one teaching at the Engineering College under an AID contract, they declined to move from the bohemian comfort of Siddeswari Road to more orthodox AID housing. They had no school-age children, and hence no compelling reason to live in Dhanmondi, which they looked upon as hopeless Suburbia. Resisting all pressures, they stayed on at Hafiz Villa, wedged among a katcha tea shop, a vacant lot, and their landlord's house, an untidy ruin swarming with women, babies, and tattered animals. Hugh Murphy lived and worked in the crumbling Catholic Relief house a few doors away, and a sprinkling of Peace Corps staff along the road completed the Left Bank settlement of our community.

A certain wariness existed between the Official and Unofficial American communities, partly because of a few privileges enjoyed by the Official. Their housing and furniture were provided by the U. S. government. They could buy, at the Commissary, liquor and cigarettes and imported foodstuffs and paper towels, and could have scarce items imported duty-free by APO mail. Few of the Unofficial people actually resented these facilities,

but some pangs of wistful envy were inevitable. This made the Official people rather sensitive, especially as they were constantly threatened and warned by their own consulate about the frightful hazards of sharing their benefits. The Pakistan government, they were reminded, could revoke the concessions if they suspected they were being misused. Of course, a good many of the coveted items found their way into the black market anyway, via theft, where Unofficial people bought them at triple prices. But, it was observed, most Unofficial Americans enjoyed tax exemptions which most Official Americans did not.

Official foreigners had their own crosses to bear. Some wondered if the husband's salary was meant to hire twenty-four-hour availability of the entire family. The wife of a department head might call a junior official's wife to tell her to serve on a committee, or to give a luncheon for thirty people--guest list supplied--and personal plans often had to be pushed aside accordingly. Pressure was exerted upon wives who backed away from group projects and meetings. Those whose husbands were on temporary assignments might take it less seriously, but the wives of career government men could be intimidated. (I knew at least two who carefully stayed out of town as much as possible.)

Official foreign families, especially those in "representational" positions, were naturally expected to entertain official Pakistanis. This presented special tribulations. If half the guest list for a reception was Pakistani, it was impossible to estimate how many people would actually attend.

The RSVP was consistently ignored. Most Pakistani gentlemen would not bring their wives to social affairs, but some of them would, and who could guess the percentage? Or, if the local government was having an anti-American mood, all of them might stay away without notice, while hors-d'oeuvre wilted. It was not surprising that the foreigners who dealt regularly with official Pakistanis were sometimes less sympathetic toward the native society than those whose contacts were among the various working classes or students.

Another challenge was the seasonal trek of visitors from America and Europe--officials or administrators from the Home Offices. They came during the short beautiful winter, avoiding the heat, rain, dust, and cyclones, and arriving at a time when fresh fruit and vegetables could be gotten at the market. As one U.N. wife said, "They would rather be in Dacca in January or February than in Washington or Paris or London." The colony in Dacca exploited all available resources to treat the visitors well, sending their cooks to the Old City at dawn to buy the large tender crayfish, hiring extra servants for the parties, and splurging on delicacies. Like frontier settlers, they extended themselves in hospitality, knowing that the traveller could not easily make himself comfortable in local hotels, restaurants, theaters and public transport. Their reward was sometimes embittering.

"Well," we heard an honored guest remark to her exhuasted hostess, "you people do live well out here. Why do they call it a hardship post?" This was another sore point with U.S. government employees, who generally received an extra allowance for being posted in an area denoted by Washington as "hardship". Indeed, one satisfied guest is said to have had this allowance reduced when he got back to Washington.

"You do it all wrong," I said to my fuming friend afterward. "Give them goat meat, powdered milk, and all the white pumpkin they can eat. Take them on a rickshaw tour of the Old City."

"If only," she growled, "one of them would get a toothache and suddenly need smooth dentistry; or some rare virus, so he had to hold his breath until an iron lung could be flown in."

But we never had enough of the guests we longed for, friends and relatives from far-flung places. Dacca was not a place to be handily visited en route to anyplace else.

The foreign colony was small enough to be neighborly, but large and scattered enough to offer a spectrum of choice, as well as escape routes when claustrophobia threatened. We had no embassies, because Dacca was only a provincial capital. We had an assortment of consulates, and the United Nations groups; and their staffs fraternized a good deal, excepting the representatives of the People's Republic of China. The Red Chinese were conspicuously aloof in our friendly society, and must have lived lives of awesome loneliness. They were occasionally

glimpsed, in expressionless profile, whipping past in a long black car or marching stonily through the lobby of the Hotel Shabagh. They rented, for home and office, a large house in Dhanmandi, and immediately added two feet in height to the compound wall.

"What," we all wondered, "do they do in there?"

They showed outdoor movies, for one thing. The back of their compound met the back of the Pickwick house compound, where two American families lived. The family and servants in the upper flat could sit on their own veranda and enjoy stirring pictures of Great Leaps Forward. Little else could be observed behind the high walls, and sometimes we toyed with schemes for penetrating their solitude. Ralph suggested that Anthony might knock on their door and ask to use the bathroom. I begged Saileshwar to approach their kitchen and borrow a cup of noodles or an old bird's nest, but he seemed reluctant to test their love of the proletariat so directly.

"They not keeping Bengali servant, madame," he hedged. "I think bringing own servant from China." This was unconfirmed.

Certainly they did not project a very heart-warming image. Contrasted with the Americans' near-hysterical preoccupation with Imagery, the Chinese contempt for public opinion was intriguing.

One afternoon Scott Rutherford, who lived downstairs in Pickwick House, was playing football with his young sons in their rear garden when the ball went astray and fell into the

Chinese compound. Scott regarded the wall and struggled briefly with indecision before he climbed it. He had reached the top when he saw the Chinese gentleman, in a well-tailored Western suit, tapping his foot and watching the football roll toward him--"as if it were ticking." Scott crouched on the wall, feeling absurd, making appeasing grimaces and trying to explain. The Chinese gentleman, wordless and unsmiling, picked up the football and hurled it past Scott's head. Then he brushed his hands together and stomped indoors.

"And thus," Dee Rutherford sighed, "the curtain fell on our diplomatic efforts."

The Dacca Club was the sorry resort of the athletic. The main building, sagging and mildewed, contained a bare dining room and a gloomy bar with brown paint and tired leather chairs. Another building housed the squash courts, and there were a few tennis courts outside. The swimming pool was covered by a roof which kept it in perpetual shadow, and the plumbing in the dressing rooms leaked. Our physician said cheerfully that his livelihood was assured as long as people swam there; but as long as it had no competition, people did swim there, and resigned themselves to ear, nose and throat infections.

Foreign children had their own peculiar problems. The older ones rebelled at unaccustomed restrictions. Chronic arguments rose and fell around the merits of short skirts,

jeans, and bikinis, and daughters were often sent away to boarding schools to relieve the situation. Boys had to be nagged about the dangers of getting into fights, or teasing workmen on the roads, or prowling around empty houses. From time to time they experimented with more deliberate forms of provocation, such as hurling cherry bombs into passing rickshaws. Edgy parents were inclined to react strongly to misdemeanors.

We had an American School in Dhanmandi, which served well enough for the younger children, but had more difficulty with the older ones, who needed more sophisticated laboratory equipment, extracurricular activity, etc., while the class enrollment shrank in the higher grades. There were a couple of Cambridge Standard schools maintained by Catholic Sisters and priests or Brothers. We were not encouraged to send our own children there. They had more applications than they could accept; and their first aim was to serve the native community. The Brothers felt, too, that a lone foreign boy in a class would be too conspicuous for his own good, whether the others deferred to him or tormented him. Mrs. Coventry, an English woman whose family had been in Bengal for several generations, conducted an excellent school with a well-mixed enrollment of Pakistanis and various foreigners. But boys could attend Farmview only through the fifth grade.

Summer holidays hung heavily over these children. Tennis or riding lessons came to naught; the master failed to appear, or it rained, or the Dacca Club courts were too crowded.

Their foreign contemporaries were often on home leave or other holidays. And they found a cultural bar among East Pakistanis from the age of puberty, a problem shared by young foreign men and women who lived there on single status. Respectable Bengali girls were rarely allowed in mixed society; often their marriages had already been arranged, and they were sheltered awaiting the wedding. The boys, also often betrothed early, were apt to misunderstand the casual Western girl.

Christopher was nine years old when we came to Dacca, and he had to wade through all of these adversities in the next few years. Anthony was eighteen months old when we arrived, and for him it was a thoroughly delightful childhood. He circulated freely around the house, passing from the range of one watchful eye to another. He played and fought with Kripa, helped the bearer polish shoes or dust, got under Saileshwar's feet in the kitchen, turned the hose on the mali and ran off with his hoe, and wrestled with Akel Khan when he came on duty in the evening. Someone always had time for him. He stopped speaking altogether for the first several months, pondering the two languages raining upon him. Then he began to speak both. He ate rice as finger-food with Bengali skill, and somehow avoided most of the diseases which plagued his elders. Our compound was his universe, abundant and benign.

Older children sometimes struck lordly attitudes in the presence of servants. It feels rather grand to be able, at the

age of twelve or fourteen, to tell an adult to pick up your socks. Outraged American parents sometimes had to take suppressive measures against this.

For those foreigners who lacked commissary or diplomatic privileges, Whispering Fellow was an important institution. We didn't know his real name. He had a small general store in which he sold imported and/or contraband wares. He was a large man with heavy-lidded eyes, a very soft voice, and a lazy smile, and he wore a Punjabi shirt of fine white cotton. His younger brother was slight of build, and wore crisp sport shirts and a cheerful grin. A picture of the Aga Khan hung above the counter in their shop. We thought they were originally from Sind or the Punjab, possibly via Africa.

"Smuggling in Portuguese West Africa," Fellow murmured to us, "is discouraged. The first time they break the right hand." His fingers described a hammer blow. "The second time, the left hand. The third time---"

"Never mind," I said quickly, gathering my groceries for flight.

"Can't you just see him," my companion said later, "in Damascus or Budapest, whispering 'Call me Sam'?"

His operation ran so smoothly that we were shocked one day to learn that the police had closed his place. When it opened again, he explained with a shrug. "The police wanted

a higher percentage, and I couldn't give it and still make a profit. I am a business man, after all."

The foreign women occupied themselves in various ways. Ladies' morning coffee parties bloomed everywhere. Some of them were devoted to bridge. In my early days there I attended a bridge luncheon and found myself at a table with three women who had lived overseas for ten or fifteen years, playing bridge three or four times a week. I had not played cards for years. It was a trying afternoon for all of us, and I withdrew from bridge circles hastily.

Some joined the Women's Volunteer Association, a club organized by Pakistani women for benevolent works, such as supervising adult education centers, serving free milk at Dacca Hospital, and collecting for cyclone relief. The W.V.A. could absorb a good deal of time if permitted. Ideas were presented and committees enthusiastically chosen. But as the first fine rapture evaporated before the required work, so did the multitude, and a few foreign members and a small nucleus of enterprising begums found themselves stumbling, heavy-laden, across the finish line with a project. W.V.A.'s intense rival, the All-Pakistan Women's Association, did not admit foreign members, but made up for the deficiency by organizing Friends of APWA.

A minority of the foreign women would not relinquish their domain to the servants, and immersed themselves in domesticity. Others abandoned themselves to shopping, which could be a fairly full-time devotion for anyone determined to have

elusive items--maraschino cherries, Bacardi rum, or a scarce brand of cigarettes--or for anyone engaged in interior decoration. It wasn't an easy job.

A few women took jobs, usually in teaching, or did volunteer work. Jane Greenough donated several afternoons a week to the office at Holy Family Hospital, for example. Mary Frances was continually being drafted to teach French at the Alliance Francaise, or to give lectures at the Bulbul Academy of Arts, or to play the organ at St. Thomas' Church, or assist with the Holy Cross College operetta. When she was not being drawn into such enterprises by external forces, she was inventing them herself to fit some public need--of which there was no lack. She was so hopelessly conscientious that every task she undertook swelled to cosmic proportions. If she touched a pamphlet, it grew up to be a book.

In an underdeveloped country, no talent or skill is so feeble that it cannot be utilized someplace. For a while I taught English at the Sisters' orphanage, to a small class of girls aged twelve to sixteen. They had graduated from the childish frocks to saris; their long black hair was braided, or fell loose and tangled over their shoulders. Between bashful laughter and ducking of heads, they practiced their school English with me, friendly and curious.

At the orphanage, the whitewashed buildings, bordered by cool breezeways, were set in an ample compound and bound to

the earth by abundant leaves and flowers. Enormous trees rose from the neat lawns--jackfruit and date palm and frangipani. A high wall protected them from the men who came to stare at the girls and shout at them lewdly. The orphanage kept cows and chickens, and a large garden supplied their vegetables. There were about 145 children in residence.

In East Pakistan, a child was considered an orphan if the father was dead.

"The mother has no way to support them," Sister explained. "A widow has such a hard time here, Mrs. Hill. She lives with her husband's family, and they resent her because the wage earner is gone, and she and her children are just that many more mouths to feed. Sometimes they make her life miserable. But she hasn't anyplace else to go, and she has to stay and try to hold onto the land, if there is any, for her children. We find jobs for a few of them at the hospital, or here, but most of them have no way to support themselves. We hate to see them take jobs as ayahs because they seem to go bad. It's not easy from any direction."

The boys were sent back to their villages when they were about twelve years old, but the girls were kept on until they were sixteen. It was sometimes left to the Sisters to arrange a marriage if the relatives at home had not done so.

"Did you ever think when you entered the convent," Ralph asked, "that you would spend so much time looking for a husband?"

"Husband?" Sister F. Bernard groaned profoundly. "Husbands! Lots of them! We search, we pray for them, we write to the priests in the villages beseeching them to find husbands for these girls. Finally they bring a boy in, and he looks the girls over and chooses one--it's awful. Do you remember Theresa, Sister? She was so sweet, Mr. Hill, and quite pretty, but a little dark, and that counts a lot against them. We had one boy here making up his mind about her. We could see he was wavering, so Sister dashed out and offered one of our cows as part of the bargain. That made up his mind, and he married Theresa. And do you know, they're the happiest little couple!"

In a city swarming with sickly underfed children, it was a delight to drive into the orphanage compound and see the wide smiles and husky little bodies. "Mem's coming, Sister, Mem's coming!" They ran to open the gate for us, shouting "Good morning!" or "Bye-bye!"

They slept in clean cheerful dormitories, four or five small ones sharing a bed crosswise. "They sleep in bundles in the villages," Sister said. "If we try to put 'em in a bed alone, they're scared."

The children were raised in the Bengali manner for easy reabsorption into their villages. Their diet was better than that of the average village child, however. Besides an

adequate amount of rice and curry, they ate vegetables and milk and eggs or meat or fish regularly. The Sisters had gotten a sewing machine, and some of the older girls made simple dresses and shirts and pants for the younger children, and blouses and petticoats for themselves. Those who showed promise were encouraged to enter Holy Cross, the girls' college across the road from the orphanage, or to go into nurses' training at Holy Family Hospital. (They were always woefully short of nursing students at the hospital. A society which traditionally secludes its women looks suspiciously upon nursing as a profession.) The boys might find a chance for further education at St. Joseph's Trade or High School, or at Notre Dame College. The colleges and the high schools, unlike the regular village mission schools, held classes in English medium. Government officials who publicly denounced the corrupting effect of foreign missionaries on young Muslim minds spared no effort to enroll their own children in those same schools.

The foreigners in East Pakistan were usually residents. Though transients came and went for business reasons, or occasionally to visit relatives, genuine tourists were collector's items. Dan, who probed unsuspected corners of the city in pursuit of his projects, once found a pair of American women, visiting from West Pakistan, floundering in futility at the East Pakistan Tourist Bureau, which may very well have never

seen a tourist. (He brought them home to Mary Frances for refreshments and guidance.) And again, he discovered an Australian girl who was hitch-hiking around the world.

I cannot remember seeing anything else resembling tourism in East Pakistan until after the Indo-Pakistan war, when the Dacca-Intercontinental Hotal opened and the Thai Airlines flights began. Then transit passengers were whisked from airport to hotel and kept safely insulated in its protective compound until departure time, though two or three of Dacca's most colorful beggars hung hopefully around the gates.

The Tourist Bureau cherished its dreams, however. The Rawalpindi office issued an engaging book titled Tourist Guide to East Pakistan. The first paragraph established the optimistic tone:

> REACHING EAST PAKISTAN: If you are contemplating to visit this land of rivers and greenery, you will find it extremely simple and easy; because East Pakistan is well-linked to all parts of the world by frequent Air and Steamer services.

There actually were flights in and out of Dacca, and freighters did come into Chittagong port, though sometimes they could not find a berth and had to go on to another port. At that time, however, one could not go to Bangkok or Hong Kong from Dacca without a rather elaborate route through Calcutta. And there were other features which might baffle the traveller embarking upon this journey. For example, Pakistan, like so

many young countries with proud new airlines, was quite insistent that people use her airline. We were in Rome when we first applied for our Pakistani visas and tried to extract them from their embassy. Delays occurred; complications multiplied; and the embassy asked us regularly if we had purchased our PIA tickets. At intervals, the Rome office of Pakistan International Airways called us to offer their services. The visas were issued reluctantly after we had convinced them that we were, in fact, leaving Rome by automobile. A tourist with a pressing schedule might grow discouraged by this kind of thing.

The second chapter of the Tourist Guide opened with a reminder that once there was a tourist.

> "O the joy of returning to the voluptuous atmosphere of the tropics....a very beautiful and picturesque country (EAST PAKISTAN) with a wealth of lush vegetation, very exotic and colorful." - Jeo Ceuvorst "Journal Des Voyages." East Pakistan with enchanting natural but artful scenery casts her spell around you even while you are still approaching her....East Pakistan would be a living memory which must reflect on your inward eye even if you recollect her after a pretty long time of your visit.

There was also a Chinese tourist, "Hseum Tsung, the world famed ancient Chinese Traveller," who passed through Bengal several centuries back and is mentioned frequently in travel brochures.

The history of tourism in East Pakistan was completed with a more recent quotation:

> "I am taking only a few of your (East Pakistani) innumerable varieties of handicrafts and very fine hand-woven cotton and silk textile in order to decorate my Drawing Hall at California"--thus remarked a tourist.

At least once a year our local newspapers wondered publicly why East Pakistan had not developed its tourist resources. It reminded the province that it had much to offer--the Sunderbans, Cox's Bazaar, the Chittagong Hill Tracts. We can report from experience that the latter two places were attractive, but one needed the time and stamina to drift upon capricious arrangements. We were never quite able to get to the Sunderbans, of which our Tourist Guide exulted:

> "Human being living in towns and villages can not imagine the existence of such an uninhabited beautiful regions as the Sunderbans where nature had, yet today, exclusive dominion. Your every step is an advanture (sic) admist (sic) tropical forests, innumerable creeks and islands full of wild animals. The thrill and wonder of nature.... So it is a rare opportunity for you to visit Sunderbans.

Rare indeed. Few foreign residents, in fact, managed to wade through the mire of government permits, elusive transport, seasonal disruptions, and uncertain food and lodging, to enjoy the glories of this fabulous jungle.

The foreign community included people from many sorts of background and of varied intellectual shades, all coming to terms (or failing to do so) with the environment in which they found themselves. Americans had become very self-conscious

about the impressions they made abroad, and it was interesting to compare them with other national groups in Bengal.

On the whole, it seemed to me that the Americans lived abroad at least as gracefully as any of them. The United States has a history of mobility, and its people accept change more easily than citizens inhibited by centuries of immutable custom. East Pakistan, bound in its own tortuous and congested skein of inflexible tradition, presented a critical testing ground for its foreign community. The Empire-era British had developed their own distinctive adaptation, an interesting amalgam of internal commitment and external aloofness. Germans brought their native rigid standards, and sometimes shattered before Bengali laissez-faire. Canadians who came with a private firm clung to each other and radiated anxiety and resentment. (But most of the women in this group spoke only French, which put them at a dreadful disadvantage; and some of the families had to live for months in the Hotel Shahbagh's gloom before housing was found for them, not an auspicious introduction to the East.) Among the French, the natural sense of superiority reached the threshold of pain. And Orientals from the Far East recoiled from the disorder which surrounded them. (In their countries, vegetables were planted in tidy rows.) A group of embittered students from Africa told us that when the local community discovered that they were not only black but also Christian, they were shoved to the end of the line everywhere. The

determined seclusion of the Russians and Chinese made it hard to guess how well they might be adjusting.

The East Pakistani attitude toward foreigners was, characteristically, ambiguous. One might find genuine personal friendliness laced with nationalist hostility. The ruling class blew hot and cold toward foreigners, particularly Americans, in accordance with government policy and their own day-to-day interests. Working people at every level, however, preferred almost any foreign group to their own people, who were not too kindly toward subordinates, and jobs in foreign offices and households were prized.

The contradiction was illustrated by the student demonstrator who bore down upon an American car, howling "Yankee Go Home", then thrust his head through the open window to add, "And take me with you." I do not know if he had invented this line, but the sentiment was entirely appropriate.

Chapter Twelve

THE CHITTAGONG HILLS

The Chittagong Hill Tracts lay along the southeast border of East Pakistan, beside Assam and Burma. They were inhabited by tribal peoples whose history was somewhat unclear. They were widely assumed to be aboriginal inhabitants of the hills, or to have migrated from the Arakan Hills in Burma. Their cultures were quite distinct from that of the plains Bengali.

Our Tourist Guide writer emphasized this difference in his incomparable prose. Of East Pakistani "Manners and Customs", he explains:

> ....Here bond of social customs and traditions is more forceful than even law. Walking hand in hand with beloved or kissing or wearing of thin and half dress is considered as acts of public annoyance and the persons concerned are disliked.... East Pakistanis are reserve in habit. So a garrulant cannot expect high estimation from them. Talking with much gesture, posture and movement of eyes, hands, and body is considered without gravity and hence less importance given.... Women are too much modest, and can even sacrifice lives to retain their traditional sacred modesty....

.... As for clothing the rural people, who absolutely depend on agriculture and cottage industry, generally put on Lungi (a handloom cloth) and shirt, and the urban people mostly wear trouser like pajama and shirt. But fullpant, shirt, coat, neck-tie, etc. which although does not suit the climate are commonly used as international dress by the literate class of people. For the women 'Sari' is the only dress. (all sic.)

Contrasted with this sober and respectable society, the natives of the Hill Tracts were described with some flourish:

TRIBAL PEOPLE
A Special Attraction

The Moghs are mostly of Arakaneese origin, and depend on their women who are very laborious.... They are very neat and religious but fond of dancing called as "Poey and Pankoo."..... The Murangs are most attractive and proportionate in body. They all live in the higher reaches of the hilly forest, far away from habitation and civilization. The males have long hairs tied in pony-tail style and wear red flowers in their ear-lobes. They are tall and expert in hill climbing. The unmarried males paint their foreheads, cheeks and lips with red paints and idle their time in playing plaintive bamboo flutes, peculiar in make and notes. Their females are short and sturdy and work whole day for their males. Scanty of clothes they wear, a coin piece hung from waist dropping about afoot in front and practically nothing in the back. Great warriors as they are most hospitable and amiable to visitors.

INTOXICATED DANCE

.... In foggy moonlit nights they drink rice wine (jungle juju) and dance with girls in circles.... They marry by eloping away from their houses.

The Hill Tracts clearly offered an inviting change from the flat surfaces and restrained social climate of Dacca. Pat Owens and I set out to see them in November. John Wilson, an American college boy who was staying with his parents in Dacca, went with us. We took Saileshwar, not only to preside over our food and water supply, but in the hope that he might help us communicate with the hill people. This was not because of any basic relationship between the tribal people and Saileshwar's. The Bengali Baruas seemed to be a remnant of Buddhist India, pushed across the Gangetic plains to that corner of the subcontinent where they lived in the villages around Chittagong, the port town. Buddhism, absorbed by Hinduism and attacked by Islam, atrophied throughout the subcontinent while it spread throughout the Far East; but its remaining wisps are said to be a relatively pure original form of Theravada Buddhism. The Buddhism of the hill tribes, however, was liberally diluted with animism and flavored with tribal custom. Our reliance was chiefly upon some faint linguistic resemblance. The Chittagong dialect of Bengali was so highly infused with other elements that it was almost incomprehensible to other Bengalis, and we hoped that from sheer proximity, the hill people would be more likely to understand Saileshwar's Chittagong Bengali than any other language at our disposal.

We took sleeping bags and sweaters and tinned food and gin, and hoped we would be able to buy some rice and perhaps meat as we travelled. For gifts en route, we took tea and scarves and bangles.

"The Peace Corps fellows who went last year said to take mirrors and shiny beads," Pat muttered, avoiding my eye, "but I just can't."

We flew to Chittagong early in a clear morning, and we were met by a jeep. Abdul, the driver, said that he had never been into the hills, but he cheerfully turned the jeep south-east and asked directions to Banderban from random pedestrians along the way. The road began to rise and wind, and the green rice fields gave way to steep slopes covered with bright green jungle--shrubs, creepers, plants, banana trees; bamboo and teak and cane. The jeep forded three streams, and got its rear wheels stuck as it climbed out of the fourth. Abdul spun the wheels desperately, deaf to John's protests, and the jeep sank deeper into the mud. A few Bengali men gathered, stared, tucked up their lunghis, discussed the situation, and began to scrape at the mud with pieces of wood and rock.

The jeep eventually struggled out of the mud and we drove away while our collected audience lined up on either side to watch our triumph. Abdul's spirit was broken, and he mumbled morosely all the way to Banderban. He was close to tears at the prospect of driving back alone over that frightful road,

and urged us to let him stay with us, in case we had further need of the jeep. But Pat sent him off ruthlessly.

For administrative purposes, the Hill Tracts were divided into three subdivisions, with an S. D. officer in charge of each, and a Deputy Commissioner at Rangamati. For tribal purposes, it was divided into three Circles--the Chakma, the Mong, and the Bohmong, each with its own Chief or Raja.

Banderban town was the headquarters of the Bohmong Circle, which covers the southern Hill Tracts. We had been advised to see the Bohmong chief about guides and directions. Our first target, however, was that ever-dependable refuge, the local Catholic mission.

In Banderban we had left behind the world of saris and burqas, of wavy black hair and Dravidian features and mud huts. We were in a village of bamboo houses built on stilts. Women in bright lunghis and short blouses stood, holding their babies, to watch us pass. The faces were bronze, with wide slightly tilted dark eyes and straight black hair, neatly bound.

"Hilly people," Saileshwar observed with interest. Though they were practically neighbors, few Chittagong Bengalis ever bothered to go into the Hill Tracts.

It was noon, with a warm sun, when we climbed the path to the house of the Holy Cross Fathers, a sturdy two-story

bamboo structure, one room deep, with verandas running along both sides. Father L'Abbe met us in the doorway, beaming cordially. He rather reminded me of a French-Canadian Groucho Marx. He led us up the wooden staircase and along the upper veranda, striding ahead of us in his khaki walking shorts, waving a large cigar, weaving in and out of the rooms from one veranda to the other, airily stepping over high doorsills, explaining everything in fluent animated English, pointing out available guest rooms, and eventually coming to light on porch chairs on a rear veranda. Father German joined us there and we discussed our plans.

Our choices from Banderban were to climb the Chimbuk range and see the Moro villages, or to head for Boga Lake by country boat and walk through the Mogh-Tripera-Khumi country.

Tourist Guide speaks hopefully of the "most desired place, Chimbuk, 17 miles south of Banderban, accessible at present only through the meandering foot tracts (but comfortably jeepable) of the tribesmen.... Chimbuk is on the way of development into the best Summer Resort in East Pakistan." This was sanguine in its innocent disregard of the transport problem. Unless you had a jeep at your disposal, the "meandering foot tracts" were your sole recourse. There was no rent-a-car service. On the other hand, the Guide's description of the Moros was tempting.

> The light of modern complex civilization seems to have not reached to them. With bare bodies, except half-yard cloth hanging from waist, both male and female work together hard to produce their livelihood. To the idea of Naturalists and Sociologists, they are really Natural Being in the true sense of the terms: so simple, so honest and unhesitant.

Pat wanted to go some place where no one else had been, and I, much as I longed to see those Chimbuk Moros before their villages became the best Summer Resort, was prepared to support the least arduous route. Over a hot egg curry, we voted for Boga Lake.

An official from the local thana wandered through to ask for our passports, which we didn't have, or their numbers, which we couldn't remember. One did not move lightly about East Pakistan without advising the concerned authorities.

"When you get back into Androman Para," Father L'Abbe said briskly, "you will find Father George. He is the only missionary there and sometimes he forgets to come out. It is not good to stay in there too long. You will bring him back with you," and he dashed off to write a letter to Father George.

A man was sent off to make terms with the madjiis for our country boat. We should get coolies at each village to take us to the next, who would also act as guides, and our

contacts with local headmen would be eased if we consulted the Bohmong Chief. We repacked our gear, and then walked down the path to the house of the Chief.

I was never certain whether our call was a courtesy, or a plea for influence, or if it was necessary for the Chief to know who was walking about in his hills. We left our shoes at the doorway of high cool house and walked down a long room to a small group of chairs and a coffee table. A strip of worn red carpet ran along one side of the room, and printed cotton curtains fluttered at the windows. After fifteen minutes or more, a little figure appeared at the far door and came toward us, a brown wrinkled face smiled gently, and the Chief was with us. He sat down and folded his hands; a man in khaki uniform brought tea and sweet biscuits; and we told the chief what we had in mind.

He nodded and smiled and told us, in careful English, the legend of Boga Lake--perhaps the third version we had heard since we had started, and I can't remember any of them--pausing to shake with mirth at the idea of sea monsters and to remind us that his people were very superstitious. Unfortunately, he regretted that he could not send a guide with us, for all of his men were just then dispersed about the villages, inviting people to a mela (fair) to be held in Banderban town next month, when there would be tribal

music and dancing and great feasting. He added, with a modest twinkle, that they would bring their annual tribute to him a Chief of the tribe.

However, if we would go to the Headman in Ruma Bazaar and tell him that the Bohmong chief had sent us, he would see that we had reliable guides. (Each mouza, a group of villages within a subdivision, was presided over by a Headman. The leader of an individual village was called the karbari.)

We rose, thanked him at oriental length, and went back to the mission. The boatmen had been arranged; we could leave anytime before midnight, and for 30 rupees they would bring us to Ruma Bazaar by ten o'clock in the morning. By lantern light, repacking proceeded. Saileshwar coped with tins and rice and thermoses. We put everything superfluous in a suitcase to be left at the mission. Conversation rang along the veranda.

"Will it be safe to travel at night?" Pat asked. Father L'Abbe's eyes widened.

"But of course! Why not? Entirely safe!"

"But at Narikelbari, Mother Paul said we mustn't leave by night because--"

He rolled his eyes and clucked his tongue. "Oh, Barisol side! That country is full of dacoits, but here we have no bandits. No, you will be perfectly safe, I assure you."

In the midst of it the khaki-clad man arrived from the Bohmong Chief and was lost in long conversation with Father L'Abbe. He had come to report that the Headman would not be in Ruma Bazaar when we got there, because he had just arrived in Banderban. Very well, if we insisted on going anyway, we could see the council head there, or Saileshwar could find coolies readily in the bazaar, or we could ask at the police thana. Coolies were vital, not only to help us carry our gear, but to guide us from one village to the next.

We went down the rocky, vertical path to the river at about seven o'clock, assisted by priests with lanterns and flashlights, and small boys carrying our bundles on their heads. The country boat was waiting, with a madjii at each end. We slipped off our thongs and left them on the bow as we crawled under the bamboo hood.

There was enough room on the rough floor of the boat for two sleeping bags lengthwise under the hood. Pat and I stretched out on those, with Saileshwar curled uncomfortably on the stern at the madjii's feet, and John in the correspondingly cramped position on the bow. In the stern, the boatman sang all night, pausing now and then to shout at a passing boat. In the bow, the other boatman made a dim silhouette against a moonless sky. The kerosene lantern glowed and thumped against the bamboo cowl. From where we lay we could see, framed by the hood's arch, passing slices of steep black jungle on both sides of the river.

The sky was pale as a mushroom when we woke in the early morning, and the air was cold. We were floating between sharply sloped hills, dense with shiny greens, dark greens, shaggy greens, rising from the muddy banks where little figures still moved or stood and stared. Saileshwar crouched in the bow, shivering in his jacket, and lit a wood fire under the country stove, a tiny three-legged metal plate. He fried eggs and heated a tin of sausage and we ate it with bread and butter and drank fresh hot tea, and were transported with gourmet pleasure.

The madjiis began to scramble to and fro overhead, along the bamboo cowl, with a sound like rather heavy mice in the attic. They boiled their tea and rice, and jumped into the river to wash and change their lunghis. The singing madjii, back at his pole, amused himself by shouting out Dacca bus stops: "New Market, Sadarghat, Gulistan--" between snatches of song. We washed our faces in the river, and as the sun climbed, we took off our sweaters and socks. Saileshwar drank his tea and washed the dishes in the river, and the boatmen took the clay hookah off the wall and shared a smoke. In the midst of all this happy household bustle, we reached Ruma Bazaar.

The river widened here, and on one shore a patch of jungle had been cleared to leave a bare dusty plateau. Our boat edged to its base. The natives collected to watch while

we crawled forth, retrieved our thongs, and stepped onto the muddy bank. Our gear was collected beside us and the madjiis paid. Saileshwar and I climbed the steep path to the bazaar to look for coolies while Pat and John stood guard.

Ruma Bazaar was the market place where the villagers came from the surrounding hills to trade vegetables and rice and tea and cloth and dried fish, and to buy the metal and pottery made and sold there by the plains people. The shops were gathered around a central open square, displaying biscuits, tea, mustard oil, glittering bangles, stacks of lunghis, and paper flowers. Baskets in front were heaped with red chillies, rice, garlic and dried fish. We strolled along until a group of men had gathered to view the outlanders. After a noisy group discussion, Saileshwar engaged three coolies. We took them to our beachhead and they looked at our gear and said that they had to eat lunch first.

John stayed with the gear, Saileshwar disappeared into the market place, and Pat and I wandered the market square, waiting for our coolies to return. And there Mr. Chowdhury happened to us.

I don't know which of us was more astonished. We surely looked extraordinary in the setting. But the Bengali gentleman was something of an apparition too in his long-sleeved white shirt, necktie, and dark trousers, with his oily hair and counterfeit smile: a dubious specimen of what the Tourist Guide called "our literate class."

"Is it that you require some assistance?" He was from Sylhet, a northern district, and had spent two years in Dacca studying Health & Sanitation. He was now the H & S Officer for these unfortunate people.

We looked at him doubtfully, and then Pat poured forth our tale. We were without guides, we did not know how long it might take us to reach the next village, and we were most anxious to get coolies immediately so that we could reach Boga Para before dark. We were losing confidence that our coolies would ever return after their lunch; they might take siestas, or change their minds.

He invited us to come to his office for tea.

Pat repeated our urgent need to be on our way. We had had tea, and we were short of time. He listened intently, eyes wide, head cocked thoughtfully, finally grinned again, and enunciated a floral summary of her plea to prove his perfect comprehension. He finished triumphantly with his opinion that if we left at three in the afternoon, we could reach our destination without difficulty. He invited us to have tea.

We sat helplessly in his office, a small dirty bamboo room, staring at the charts and graphs on the wall lettered with such labels as "Number of Parsons (sic) Dead of Cholera in 1962." Many Mqghs came to the door, and when we reminded Mr. Chowdhury of our coolie problem, he talked idly with them in a dialect we did not recognize. They looked sullen and went away, and he stretched his lips over his teeth at us and explained that this Christian or that Buddhist had wanted 35 rupees to take us to the next village. The price was absurdly

high, and we waited on. We drank tea. He showed us maps of his jurisdiction and told us of the terrible unenlightenment in this dark corner of East Pakistan. After three hours of his solicitude, we had lost every Mogh coolie in Ruma Bazaar. Mr. Chowdhury happened to have two Muslim coolies who would go with us for a reasonable fee. We had been cautioned against taking Muslims into the tribal country, but we accepted.

The coolies fastened most of our gear to the ends of the two poles, which they slung across their shoulders, and set off at a trot. We followed with our canteens and small bags, and John carried two bedrolls as well. Through the bazaar area, past the rear shops, Mr. Chowdhury followed us in his leather shoes to the last dry spot, murmuring cliches and grinning.

"If he comes another step," I told Pat, "I'll slug him with my canteen."

She said, "Remember the Image."

John maintained the poised detachment with which he distinguished himself throughout the entire expedition. Saileshwar's eyes sparkled, but he was silent.

We had first to cross a hill. For an hour we scrambled up the rugged vertical path. Pat and I had not hiked in many moons, and for us it was an agonizing ascent with flushed faces, pounding hearts, aching lungs, and painful muscles.

John took the climb easily; he was twenty years old and in splendid shape from rambling the subcontinent and Scottish dancing. He had ample breath left to make alert observations--"Look at that worm, it's iridescent green with a touch of blue!"--and when we stopped to rest and sip warm water from the canteen, he made notes on a small pad about what to remember for the next trip ("no women") or practiced a few Highland fling steps for the St. Andrew's Day Ball. I was genuinely worried about Saileshwar. He was not heartily built, and his life in our kitchen was not an athletic one. He smiled courageously, but his eyes had a stunned look; and when I asked him about the treks in his life, he said, "I never in my life do trip like this." Field trips with former masters in western India had been by jeep, and in this province by launch. This was disturbing. What if he had a heart attack? What if he quit and went to look for a more sensible memsahib?

Long after I had decided that the next step would be my last, we reached the top and began a short steep descent. We began to see spots of jhum cultivation, the common method of planting among the hill people. The hill was cleared of vegetation and the chopped trees and bushes were dried in the sun and then burned before the rains began. The first rains softened the soil, and a mixture of seeds were planted: rice, cotton, maize, pumpkin, melon, and yam, deposited in small holes in the ground. The ashes fertilized the soil and

and the monsoon rains watered it. That day the slopes were ripe with cotton and rice and tobacco.

Before us spread hill after hill, smothered with jungle. We went down until we reached a stream, a running ribbon of water. I splashed it recklessy over my steamy mop of hair. "Not good, too hot then too cold," Saileshwar warned, but the cool wetness was irresistible. We dipped our canteens in the stream to lower their temperatures.

That afternoon we followed the shallow stream, crossing it some fifteen times to find the narrow wet footpaths that appeared and disappeared on either side. The rocks were slippery underfoot, but the water was only occasionally knee-high, and a comfort to our sore hot feet. We walked between walls of riotous greenery, and sometimes we found pale wild orchid blossoms on the path, and holes where wild pigs rooted at night. Occasionally we passed tribal people, clad in loin cloths, bearing large baskets by a strap worn across the fore-head. They regarded us with mild curiousity, and we sometimes asked them how far it was to Boga Para, the Mogh village where we hoped to find shelter in the Headman's hut. But the replies were vague, and we never had any precise figures on the dis-tances we covered in the hills. Nobody had ever checked the mileage, and the time-unit measure was vastly different between us and the hill people. We bought coconut milk in bamboo tubes

from a passing vendor, and sat sipping and gasping for breath while we watched the hill people trip serenely past us.

Some time past midafternoon, Saileshwar stopped and spoke with the coolies, then pointed up toward a group of huts on the opposite hill, in a clearing. "Coolie say that Headman's house. Say Headman not home."

We said naturally he was not home. We had observed that it was a restless week among the Headmen, and would Saileshwar go up and see if the Headman's wife had any suggestions about whom we might see instead? He went, and we sat at the edge of the stream and drank tea from the thermos, the late sun soft on our backs. He brought back the report that there would be a karbari's house in the village itself, a little farther along.

We came to Boga Para village in the last strength of the afternoon light. The rows of bamboo huts on their stilts stood back from the river on a gentle slope, and beneath them the sows fed their litters. The dogs frisked between them and sniffed questioningly as we approached. Near a bamboo-fenced scraggly bean patch, a few of the villagers gathered around us--withered ancients, leather-skinned men in loin cloths, a handful of women and children. The karbari's daughter was a tall young woman with fine Burmese features. She wore a brilliant striped pink lunghi and a short jacket. A cigarette rested between her lips, and a chubby smiling

baby in a bright headscarf rode on her hip. They studied us thoughtfully; indeed, we must have been a picturesque party, Pat and I with our sunburned faces and moist wrinkled cotton blouses, and John and Saileshwar with handkerchiefs tied around their heads. After a little conversation, they said that the karbari was out, but we could stay in his house.

We climbed the thick notched pole to the hut, a single room with a grass roof supported by four bamboo columns. In one corner a little cradle was suspended from the roof, and the karbari's daughter put her baby in it. The country stove stood in another corner, a tripod metal ring over a small clay platform. Saileshwar said that the stove was for guests; the family cooking was done in a separate hut or outdoors. A picture of the Buddha with flowers set before it occupied a third corner. In the fourth corner, near the door, our hand-picked coolies dropped our gear, after which they overcharged us and left.

This corner was the guest room. From its window, a square hole cut in the wall, we could see a young woman working the dekki outside, occasionally taking turns with a couple of small boys. They pumped with their feet, and the block at the other end pounded the rice paddy, knocking the husk from the kernel. An old woman with an immobile face scooped the paddy out of the hole and shook it in the woven sifter.

We took a few clothes to the river to wash them. I never had success with beating clothes on the rocks. The water at the edge was tea-colored and still, and the rocks left mossy stains instead of removing dirt. From the bank we could see the women coming home from the jhum fields with baskets of raw cotton strapped to their foreheads, walking with curved backs along the wet sandy banks. Across the river the round rough hump of hill turned deeper green. The sun dropped; the sky thinned to parchment; lighted to an even butterscotch radiance, turned apricot briefly, faded to opal, and darkened--ash-gray, slate, charcoal. The shadows under the huts stretched and spread upward till they filled the village. Fires glowed here and there in front of the huts where the evening rice was being cooked.

In the hut, thumb-sized tin tubes with cotton wicks in kerosene were being lighted. Saileshwar made a wood fire in the stove, boiled water, and heated hash. We sat on the floor in our corner and ate while the villagers assembled to squat around the room and watch us. The karbari arrived, a tall bearded man with a gamsa wrapped around his head. He shook hands with each of us, listened and nodded while Saileshwar explained our presence, and smoked his clay pipe. We offered to buy some rice wine from them and present it to them as our gift.

Rupees were passed about with a soft murmur of patois, and in a few minutes two bottles of pale liquid were fetched

and served among them. They gave us a little of it in our tea cups, but it tasted as if they might have made it fifteen minutes ago, and we had to pour ours stealthily out of the window. Pat and I brushed our teeth and combed our hair and put on lipstick, a performance with infallible audience appeal. Our hosts watched, absorbed, brows puckered with concentration, and discussed among themselves these curious rites.

The Moghs loaned us thick cotton cloths, handsomely striped, to put under our bedrolls. We laid the bedrolls out and sat on them, watching the brown faces soften and smile over the wine in the light of the small flames. They talked with each other in Mogh and with Saileshwar in, I gathered, a mixture. He told me later that he could understand nothing of the tribal languages, and all of his communication with the tribal people was limited to their knowledge of Chittagong Bengali, which lessened progressively as we moved into the hills. They were evidently able to ask questions about us that evening, glancing toward us and nodding gravely over the answers. We were never able to establish definitely the content of questions or answers, but certainly some of them involved who we were, and where were our husbands and what did they do, and why were we here without them, and so on. We smiled and nodded drowsily. John slumped and fell asleep, and Pat and I smiled apologetically at the group and fell asleep too, leaving Saileshwar to carry on with the amenities.

When we woke in the night, the lamps were dark, and we could hear a baby cry, and in another a hoarse cough and spit, and someone else creaking across to the door. There were probably seven or ten other people sharing the room, but they were moving about so steadily all night that we were never able to get an accurate census. In the first wan light an old woman crouched over the stove, poking wood into a flame among the cold ashes. Cocks crew everywhere, and hens rustled on the bamboo veranda outside. A pretty child sat on the step, picking lice from her hair.

Saileshwar made tea and chapatties while we packed, and after breakfast we washed at the river. In the clear morning air, the Moghs watched us casually, and collected loosely around as our new coolies loaded our gear into their baskets and strapped them to their heads. Saileshwar said the karbari was very hospitable, and asked us to stop with them on our way back.

We noted throughout the Hill Tracts that, although our presence was a far more unusual event than on the plains, the tribal people never displayed the intense, crowding curiosity that we always met in Bengali villages, only a friendly interest.

We left about nine o'clock, walking in the stream for a short way before we began to climb hills again. The first hill was another brutal effort up a steep stony trail with the slightest of footholds. I began to reflect grimly that

we might as well have toiled up to Chimbuk to see the Natural Being and the panoramic view. When the coolies said that there were four more hills between us and Andromán, Pat and I sat down and seriously talked about going back to Bogo Para, flinging ourselves upon the Mogh hospitality, and send John on with the coolies to deliver the priest's note. Rather to my bewilderment, it was Saileshwar who persuaded us to go on. He said it would be too bad to come so far without reaching Boga Lake as we had planned. Moreover, he thought the hills ahead were not so steep, we could make it. I thought that if he could, we must. We drank water with lime juice and salt and set off again.

The rest of the climb was easier--up and down, winding over hills. The foliage was still wet with dew, and we stopped once in a while to pick the tiny slimy leeches from our feet and legs. The jungle grew heavier, and the narrow trails were slippery with mud because the sun never penetrated the solid foliage long enough to dry the earth, though it scattered the path with green and gold patterns of light. We could see valleys and hills spread out below us. On our right, the jungled hill was a vertical wall; on our left, the ground dropped away abruptly, but it was so heavily covered with trees and vines that we could not see how far it went down. Sometimes we heard a monkey chattering, but we never caught sight of one.

In the afternoon the jungle thinned out again, and the hills were burned yellow. Upon one of them we came to a Tripura village. There were only a few huts, and the people clustered around us quickly, smiling. The women wore broad bibs of beads and earrings that pierced the ears top and bottom with tubes as thick as a nickel. Both men and women wore short skirts of a thick cotton weave in strong dark colors. The Tripuras were pleasant and talkative. They knew the Burra Father in the next village, and they shook our hands and asked if we had any medicine for the feverish baby who was listlessly feeding at his mother's breast. We broke off a small piece of aspirin for him, afraid to leave more lest they give it all at once. A village elder gave us a bunch of very ripe bananas, sticky with ants, as we left. They all smiled and waved as we started the last descent into Androman village, a handful of huts strewn along the bottom of a narrow vale.

A long flight of steps had been carved into the mud of the opposite hillside, and the Burra Father's house stood on its stilts at the top of them. We forced our muscles to the last strain and slowly climbed the steps, while the village children scampered up and down past us, and the coolies plodded calmly ahead, gnarled little men with bulging veins and heavy burdens.

The Burra Father wasn't in--didn't anyone ever stay home in these hills?--but his house was full of village men and

and boys, swarming around with our luggage or simply squatting to look at us with wide opaque eyes; they spat often between the bamboo strips of the floor. Some of them carried babies in long scarves across the father's chest.

Father George Laprade's house was divided into rooms by grass partitions, with holes cut in the bamboo mat walls for doors and windows. Village boys usually cooked his meals, and on a dark smoky shelf above the kitchen stove, goat meat was strung on a wooden skewer for Father's dinner. One young boy followed us everywhere. His long hair was wrapped in a knot at the back of his head, and he had an engaging smile. By the time he had stayed with us all the way back to Ruma Bazaar, we found that we had gotten rather attached to him, though his resonant cough-and-spit just behind us wore on our nerves.

We washed with water from large clay jugs, and shook out our clothing, and Pat and I spread our bedrolls on the floor of the rear room. Then Father George arrived. He was a slender, agile young man in a lunghi and a T-shirt that said "California the Golden State". We remarked upon the label, and he looked at it as if he hadn't noticed it before. He supposed it had come from a church relief bundle. He had bright blue eyes and fierce black eyebrows and a rough crew-cut, administered by one of the village boys. He was not surprised to find us there. He had been visiting another village since yesterday, and gossip had reached him that a party of foreigners was on its way to visit him.

Father talked rapidly, peering into a small hand mirror while he shaved, or pattering back and forth with a clutch of Tripura children behind him. He had been in East Pakistan for three years, in Andromán for one.

"There aren't any Christians in this area. Oh, some places they'll say they're Christians, but they don't have a clue what it means. Some fireball has been through the village askin' 'em if they want to be Christian and writing their names on a list, that's all. Most of 'em say they're Buddhist, but they're more like animists really." His exclusive aim for the time being was to learn the language, the people and the culture. He could speak with them now; he lived Hill style as they did. He ate a strictly local diet, which was not particularly well-balanced, involving a great of rice, a bit of dried fish, occasional rats or lizards or snakes, and chickens, long green beans and white pumpkin. Still, it could have been worse.

Father went to the chapel hut next door to say Mass. A village man brought a gift of two live chickens. The little boy killed one of them for Saileshwar to cook (he had found worms in the goat meat and had thrown it away) and the other hen fluffed its feathers and scratched in the kitchen corner. When Father returned, we all sat on the tiny veranda and watched the sun settle. The village men crouched around us.

Where were the women? we wondered. "Working in the field," Father said. "These men don't do much work."

Later the women came, wearing brief skirts and enormous collars of beads and silver earrings. The jewellry was not tribal work, but was bought for substantial prices from Bengali traders, who sold them in jungle bazaars.

"There's nothing much the people here can buy, even if they make some money from their crops. They couldn't buy better food, because meat is scarce. This season the jhum crops were poor, and rice and vegetables were short."

Father had a small school there for the village boys--"a school of sorts", he said. He was trying to teach them Bengali, for surely the plains people would be moving into the hills, and the hill people would simply die out if they had no means to cope with the new culture. They needed a language that could be written, and that would establish contact with the other people of East Pakistan. Even now their survival was precarious. Their approach to agriculture was inefficient and wasteful, but it was all they knew. They worked an area until it was worn out and then moved on. "That's why it's so hard to get an accurate map of the place," he said. "The villages shift around. And every time they change the karbari they change the name of the village." Now they were squeezed, partly because of increased population and partly because some of the land had been set aside as forest preserve.

Inside, we sat on the floor and ate our rice and chicken by lamplight. The villagers vanished to eat their dinners, and then they were back, drifting into the corners.

"That's the only hard part, really," Father said thoughtfully. "The lack of privacy. Just never being alone."

"Would it help if you put up doors that could close?"

"Oh, they wouldn't like that."

He read Father L'Abbe's letter. "He's right, of course. I can always tell when it's time for me to get out for a while. I can't sleep at night. Of course last night I couldn't sleep anyway because I was staying with a family and all the kids kept crawling over me. They all had tuberculosis, poor things."

Pat said, "It occurred to me when we came through that Tripura village over there, that we might spend the night with them and come to Andromán in the morning."

"Probably as well you didn't," he said carelessly. "They have a lot of leprosy."

John went to his bedroll in the front bedroom. Saileshwar tried to sleep in the kitchen, where the surviving chicken still clucked and stirred. Father joined the village men in the living room, and they sat talking most of the night around the lamp. Pat and I retired to the rear room. We listened to the hen fussing in the kitchen, the murmur of Tripura tongue, the sow grunting and shuffling with her litter under the floor. We watched the yellow designs flicker on the dark ceiling from the oil lamp. And finally we slept.

It was cold at night. Even inside our warm bedrolls we wore sweaters. When we woke, very early, we could see the village people standing around their small fires in the vale. Father said they slept until it was too cold, about two o'clock in the morning, and then they squatted around the fire for the rest of the night.

That day we walked to the Khumi village in a couple of hours. After two days of trekking, our muscles took it more easily. The Headman welcomed us in his home and then showed us to the guest hut, a broad raised room against the hill behind his house. We spread our bedrolls on the bamboo floor and Pat and I stretched out to rest. The men departed to complete the expedition to Boga Lake, which lay at the foot of a steep slope beyond. It was quite still. From time to time an old woman climbed the ladder to peek at us, but nobody came in. The doorway framed a rectangle of hill and sky.

When the men returned, they reported that Boga Lake, of romantic myth, was a large pond of stagnant brown water with a revolting smell.

After our evening meal the guests began to arrive, looming silently above the door sill and slipping in to fill the corners like shadows. Saileshwar was bent over the country stove, his back to the room. I whispered to him, "Our guests need tea."

"How many?"

"Look."

He glanced over his shoulder and his eyes grew large. "My God! Thirty cups of tea!"

When the wall was banked with the dark shapes, the Headman joined us, carrying a gramaphone which had been given him years ago by a Baptist missionary. He wound it up, and we all listened to the familiar old Protestant hymns. The gramophone's voice, hoarse and scratchy, sang wonderfully in the bamboo hut. The Headman sucked his cigar, and in the pale lantern light his round eyes rolled from side to side, glowing triumphantly.

Afterward he told us, through Father's translation, that he had seen a white man once or twice before. There had been one, he recalled, with a big nose--such a nose it was! He laughed at the memory. He had heard of some Germans who had been in the Hills a few years back--a couple and their two-year-old child--but he hadn't seen them.

"You can never go anyplace in this whole world," Pat said with resignation, "that a German hasn't been there before you. Or an Austrian." She opened a discussion on native cloth and our desire to buy a few pieces.

The Headman smoked on, eyes still rolling, while Father translated. They discussed prices so disjointedly that Pat discovered she was raising instead of lowering them. Then he sent for his wife, who came to the doorway and scowled as her husband spoke. She had woven enough skirts for her own use, it took a long time to make them, and she had none to spare. But our collective greed prevailed, and at last

she brought, reluctantly, two short tubes of heavy hand-loomed cloth, and we bought them.

When we began to droop, Father took all of the Khumis to the Headman's hut and talked with them far into the night.

The next morning we walked back to Andromán. The village boys had employed themselves with research in our absence. They had taken apart Pat's brassieres, which she had washed and left to dry in our room, and had been unable to put them back together again. They had slept in Father's bedroll and left it infested with bedbugs.

We ate lunch, packed our gear, and went on to Boga Para. Pat and I found our capacity for climbing much improved on the return trip; it seemed almost a pity to go back to the plains and lose our muscular gains. When we reached the Headman's hut, he sent for Mogh music men, who tramped over from another village to sing and dance for us. They created a lamplit stage in a bare space before one of the huts, laughing and scuffling as they worked. We sat around the stage in sweaters to watch the performance; Saileshwar stood wrapped in a Mogh blanket, with only his face and a hilly cigar visible. It was a gay and vigorous dance, with thumping drums and glittering costumes. We didn't notice any of the pagan debauchery at which the Tourist Guide had broadly hinted; perhaps the weather was too cold.

It was late when the party ended, and we crept thankfully to our rest. The large bin in the Headman's hut had been filled with fluffy newly-gathered cotton, and the men slept there. "Leprosy, TB, bedbugs, why not boll weevil?" Father sighed as he sank out of sight.

When we were boarding our boat in Ruma Bazaar next day, Mr. Chowdhury came mincing down the path to see us. We presented him to Father George, who delivered a brisk, blunt lecture to him on the evils of cheating and abusing helpless foreigners. Mr. Chowdhury's unnatural smile persisted and his eyes glittered throughout the rebuke. At its conclusion, he asked if he might ride with us to Banderban in our boat. Father cast his eyes upward in despair. "No," he said, "you can't."

The trip home was a familiar odyssey: waiting for three hours in Bandarban for a bus that never left, a desperate long drive with poor Father German to catch another, a bridge that had closed for the night, a country boat across the dark river, another tardy bus, and finally a public telephone in downtown Chittagong. A local AID employee rescued us and brought us to the Staff House, where the bearer showed us to our room.

"Room!" Pat shrieked. "We've got to have <u>two</u> rooms!" She pointed at John. "He certainly can't share <u>ours</u>!"

So adjustable are our folk ways.

Chapter Thirteen

ROAD THIRTEEN

Late in the summer of 1963, we moved into a new house, larger and more comfortable, on Road Thirteen. Like most of the houses in the neighborhood, it belonged to a lawyer who had been a minister in the Government. Expensive pieces of property seemed to be a minimal reward for public service. We had been looking longingly at the house for many weeks. Ralph had gone there to see the ex-minister, whom he found taking a nap in his lunghi. The house was furnished with an oil lamp and a quilt in the bedroom, a pile of refuse in the kitchen, and spiders the size of baby squid in the bathrooms. It was a promising building, though, and after consultations with our firm, and our government agency EPWAPDA, the year's rent was advanced and the wiring and the plumbing were finished.

At last we had a generous compound with ample space for a garden in front. We were delighted with it. In the rear, the ground sloped a few feet to Dhanmandi Lake. Ganesh was new with us than, and like most of our malis, he showed a burst of brilliance in the first month or two before languor set in. His memorable contribution was a rash of rose bushes which

produced superb blossoms, regularly and often, everywhere in the compound. White ginger flowers scented the compound by day, and the night air was blessed with rani-ratri, queen-of-the-night. At the magic touch of a subsequent mali, croton leaves grew wildly in flame red or green edged in yellow. The frangipani trees, started from cuttings donated by the orphanage, unfurled waxy pink and yellow blossoms. Leaves sprouted everywhere--bright green leaves, leaves flecked with red and white like paint drops, dark glossy leaves. (The leaves near the house actually were dripping with paint, where the mistris had casually whitewashed the outside walls.) The canna lilies stood tall and scarlet against the white compound wall. We had banana and papaya trees planted along each wall separating us from the neighbors.

By some stroke of oriental witchcraft, it happened that no matter where the original seeds or cuttings came from, the blossoms were inclined to burst forth in the mali's favorite color, which was either orange or purple. It wasn't too bad when a mali was in an orange season. Bill and Cathryn Maillefert had an orange-mali for a long time, and their garden was a symphony of golds and pale peaches and hot citrus tones. But we had two purple-malis in a row, and it was mournful to face a compound furnished in shades from cerise to violet. I hungered for simple clear blues and reds, but it would have demanded more vigilance--and perhaps ruthlessness--than I could ever maintain.

Our lake was an artificial one, but it wound and sprawled through Dhanmandi quite unaffectedly. Long narrow fishing boats floated past like dark pea pods, sometimes in tandem. Occasionally a motor boat churned across the surface. From our veranda, the view included a miniature island with a tiny pillared white pavilion. Its purpose remained a mystery to us; we saw it in use only once--during election time, I believe, for a political rally.

While we were still settling in, our new neighbor came to call, a young Bengali begum memsahib in a green chiffon sari and gold jewellry.

"I am Mrs. Amin A---," she began. "We live next door and we are so happy to have you in this house. Please call me Shamima." She sketched in the details of her background for me. "My family owns a great deal of property on Jinnah Avenue--you know the street where all the good shops are? My father is ambassador to ----. He has been in the Pakistan diplomatic service since I was a child. I went to school in Switzerland and England and Italy."

As our tea was served, she moved warmly upon another topic. "Mrs. Hill, the only thing we have against you Americans is that you pay your servants too much. We cannot pay such salaries, we are Pakistanis, we are poor." She stirred her tea agitatedly, and half a dozen gold bracelets jangled. "Only a few weeks ago the boy who worked for me left--he had been with me for four years, I had trained him. I was paying

him forty rupees a month, and he went to an American family for sixty rupees." (At that time, we were paying between niney and two hundred rupees for a good servant, according to his merits.) "Now you know, Mrs. Hill," she said appealingly, "these poor people can't afford to overlook that difference in salary, and it was wrong of that family to tempt him."

Before I had quite rallied from that lash of logic, she was presenting another grievance.

"Besides, you people give them days off regularly. Now we can't do that. We have so many relatives, we never know when they may come to visit, and our servants must be there. Of course we give them some time off when we're away on holiday or something. I am really very good to my servants."

She was, I'm afraid, not entirely atypical among the privileged classes. I often discussed this sort of thing with our close friend Sheroo Rusby. Her husband, Paul, was American, but Sheroo was a Parsi from Bombay who had grown up in a well-staffed Indian household. As we found ourselves regularly in agreement on our personnel policies, I felt that my own could not be dismissed as the blunders of an uninformed alien. Sheroo fairly gnashed her teeth when the subject came up, and her brown eyes snapped. It is indicative of the contrast that Sheroo always addressed her own servants with the polite "Apni", and was outraged to hear a Dacca memsahib speak to them with the familiar "Tumi".

The begums of this cast were startlingly blunt.

"How much do you pay your cook?" was a popular ice-breaker when they met a foreign woman. I was usually too disconcerted to be evasive, and sometimes I told them. The eyes gleamed. "And how much does he steal?"

"He doesn't have to steal," I snarled at last, "we pay him a salary."

For one thing, we were not working with precisely the same definition of "stealing". They looked at it this way: when their husbands took bribes, or adulterated the cement to fatten the profits on a construction contract, that was business acumen. When a servant paid four annas for something in the market and charged his employer five annas, that was theft. (This comforting dual standard had its adherents among some foreigners too.) Our own school of thought made a distinction between a servant who padded the expense account a little and one who committed grand larceny. The former would slip your onion into his curry and make a modest commission on the marketing money. We believed it better to ignore this. The latter would sell your liquor, steal your camera, and triple the bazaar prices. We did not ignore it.

Cathryn Maillefert suggested that we should reply to the salary questions with either "Ten rupees a month" or "Two thousand rupees a month."

"Or," Dee Rutherford said, "try 'I don't pay him; he pays me.'"

No doubt our attitudes shocked them as much as theirs astonished us. It was common practice for a Bengali housewife to lock each and every room in the house when she went out, and great bundles of keys jangled from rings worn at the waist. This did not necessarily protect anyone from theft. A wily servant might have a duplicate key made, for example; and he had the satisfaction of saying, "But memsahib, how could I steal it? That room always locked and you have key." Few of our community locked up anything except the go-down where the valuable stocks of food and liquor were stored--lock, stock and barrel, you see. Even so, oneenterprising cook used a screwdriver in his self-help program, removing the whole sturdy lock from the door and neatly replacing it afterward.

A proud begum or her daughter might share a rickshaw with a servant, letting the servant sit on the narrow foot-board beside her feet, which must have required the attributes of a human postage stamp. During our school-car-pool days, the small son of a Pakistani sahib refused to ride in the front seat beside the driver. Our Fiat, however, was crowded, and I gave him no choice. I also insisted that he carry his own lunch pail, as the other children did, instead of handing it to our bearer.

Our indulgence with the servants was not our only crime against society.

"Really, I have been looking for another house for months, you know--and how many landlords have said to me, 'I don't rent to Pakistanis'? Can you imagine how dreadful, in our own country? If only you Americans would not pay these fantastic rents!" This was a Punjabi woman whose family had lived and prospered in Dacca since Independence, and spoke no Bengali.

"Nazma," I said, "our rent is agreed upon and paid by a Pakistan government agency to a Pakistani landlord. No doubt it's too much; there's baksheesh to be paid, after all. But it's quite out of our hands."

"And we," Sheroo inserted coldly, "pay our own rent. Do you suppose we enjoy paying extortionate rentals? Nobody likes to pay more than they have to. But we have to deal with Pakistani landlords too."

"Do you really, Sheroo?" Nazma's eyebrows lifted. "Oh then I beg you, please do refuse to pay more than a fair price!"

It was not merely superiority which this type felt toward our servants, but an active animosity. I had never realized the meaning of "class war" until I saw the scorn and hatred with which their contempt was reciprocated. The older servants recalled the days of the British Raj, when a servant in the household of a British officer could turn "people like that" away from the door, or keep them waiting in a vestibule.

"They not really gentleman, lady," our cook sniffed. "They wear silk sari and gold and ride in big car, and sahib

wear suit, tie, sometimes go foreign university. They thinking, oh-ho-ho, very big sahib and memsahib. But they not know how to treat people.

"This kind of people, madame, they hire servant very cheap, no training, no any anything. Then one day that servant gone, he take money or gold or liquor and go 'way."

"Those people make servant wear old clothes, lunghi, torn shirt, eat rice and dal and maybe some vegetable but no egg or meat; sleep on floor. They always speaking very hard with servant."

The consideration of the lofty toward the lowly was clearly expressed in the servants' quarters provided by our landlords. With rare exceptions, they were tiny, dark and damp, with poor ventilation, no window screens, and little pretense at sanitation. Whever foreigners moved in, mistris could be seen renovating the servants' quarters. Garages were converted to make adequate space. Window screens were sometimes nailed into place to foil mosquitoes. Plumbing might be introduced or improved. The kitchens, where it was assumed that only the servants would be working, were often miserable. We had to enlarge ours by knocking out two walls which defended the storage area and the pantry.

"They think servant not human," my bearer observed grimly. "Just can live like animal."

It may be deduced that our relationship with the A---s was never a sympathetic one. But it was civil enough, and they added new dimensions to our perspective, and sometimes color to our conversation. We loved Road Thirteen. Paul and Sheroo were there, and the Greenoughs moved in up the street, near the bridge.

Jane Greenough, beloved mother of four children, died of a malignant brain tumor in the fall of 1964. When her husband and children went away, the Rutherfords moved into the house. I dreaded entering the rooms where Jane had lived; but when I did, the Rutherford personality had impressed itself so pleasantly and totally that it seemed to another house, where no painful reminder lingered.

The house on our other side was interminably under construction. Farther down, toward the corner with the ancient mosque and a Bengali teashop, lived a lively Irish-British family, in jute, and an American consulate family. Pakistanis lived in all of the other houses, which included the homes of a retired judge and two physicians, and a small brothel.

We stayed on Road Thirteen as long as we were in Dacca, though we changed houses once.

When we were comfortably established in our new home, it was time to focus upon the approach of Christmas. We had planned, with the Owens, to inaugurate the season with a black tie spaghetti supper. On the morning of the chosen date, Pat

Owens tore into our front hall, and I stumbled out sleepily with a toothbrush clenched between my teeth.

"The President is dead!" she shouted, and then, seeing my blankness, "John Kennedy is dead! He's been shot!"

Later we read of the reaction around the world and recognized how it reflected our own. The world marvelled at the man's capacity for communicating his humanity as well as his energy and hope, so that total strangers felt his death as a personal tragedy, and wept for him, his family, and themselves.

The American community in Dacca was like a family shaken by sudden death. Work stopped, except at the consulate, where activity accelerated as details had to be coped with. Our own first task was to notify our guest list that our supper party was cancelled. They hardly noticed; it was already forgotten. The consulate announced a month's official mourning period. Pakistanis and other foreigners called to express their sympathy and horror. Americans collected in small close groups to comfort each other, feeling very vulnerable and far from our source. We talked together in subdued voices, and waited for news from home, for the Voice of America and BBC broadcasts, and the newspapers. And we heard of Oswald's assassination with a numbing incredulity. Slowly people began to rouse themselves, looking around, trying to remember what they were doing. Meanwhile, the skies cleared, the temperature sank, the poinsettia in the garden reddened, and one day we realized that, anyway, it was time for Christmas.

Chapter Fourteen

THE HOLIDAYS

Christmas in East Pakistan arrived modestly, without street corner Santas or excited television messages or newspaper reminders about shopping days. In a Muslim country where tne largest minority group was Hindu, Christian holidays did not attract too much attention. Fortunately, offices closed on December 25th to mark the birthday of the nation's founder, Mr. Jinnah.

The first year Kripa and Ganesh, the mali, built a little crèche for the table, with a grass roof supported by bamboo sticks. Saileshwar covered its roof with shredded red and green paper, and tried to populate it with such figurines as he could find around the house--a snowman, a clown, a small clay statue. Stephen, our pious Christian sweeper, hung paper stars and wooden angels everywhere, murmuring "Khub sundar, memsahib" ("Very beautiful") as he floated around the house. One night the electric power went off, as it did from time to time. While the cook and bearer were filling lamps and trimming wicks, I wandered toward the veranda with Anthony in my arms. I met Stephen coming down the hall with a lighted candle in one hand and his broom in the other. His eyes were raised heavenward as he sang

"Adestes Fideles" in Bengali. Who, I wondered helplessly, would trade this winning vision for a vacuum cleaner?

In the absence of department stores vending masses of trimmings, celebrants improvised, and personalities asserted themselves. The Greenoughs, who were actively interested in inter-cultural affairs (e.g. reading Tagore in the original), had a carpenter mistri build a wooden tree that looked like a clothes tree and garnished it with indigenous baubles. The Mailleferts carried with them everywhere the aura of Westport, Connecticut, and their house was decked out in a cosmopolitan collection of subtle lights, golden-winged angels, spun glass, and elegant carvings.

A week before Christmas, I told Pat Owens and Mary Frances to send their servants along to help my servants deck our halls with something seasonal. Our household prepared tea and pan and cigarettes and cookies. Kripa had brought hundreds of colored tissue paper squares with a cut-out design proclaiming "Merry Christmas" in English and "Big Day" in Bengali, which were pasted on all the window panes and strung along the walls.

Pat's ayah Regina had a theatrical flair. She and Kripa and a few ayah friends occupied the big veranda, where they played tambourines and danced with ankle bells. They took turns dressing up in lunghis and false mustaches, wearing a plastic laundry bag for a hat, and strolled with trays calling "Cigarettes, flowers, betel nut...." Ganesh abandoned the garden to play the khol drum.

The Dunhams' cook and bearer arrived late upon this hedonistic scene and stared in disbelief. Their master was an artist, and the homemade decorations over on Siddeswari Road were brilliantly devised. Little had been accomplished by our merry workers except miles of red, green and purple paper chains. The Dunham servants later reported to Dan that they thought they could do something better than the Hill house production, and indeed they did.

They thought our creche was a good idea, though poorly executed, and decided to make one secretly as a surprise for Mr. and Mrs. Dunham. When they presented it on Christmas Day, their superiority was manifest. Their stable had walls, covered with roses, and windows with bars made of match sticks, and a front porch, and paper Pakistani flags, and flower pots. It was truly lovely. They had painted a glittered sign over the door, in Bengali, which was meant to say "Our Big Day" but due to a blithe spelling error read "Day of Wine".

The next year we struck back. The Sisters at the orphanage had a life-size creche in their garden, and we resolved to have one too. Kripa and Saileshwar and I drove out to the brick fields and brought back a bucket of wet clay. I thought we should add other ingredients, recommended by the Sisters. The cook and ayah opposed it. She settled the conflict by proceeding with the work as she saw fit. Kripa and Ruplal, who was our mali at that time, built bodies for the Holy

Family with bamboo poles and straw, shaped heads from the clay, and dressed them in old lunghis and scarves. When the heavy work was finished, Saileshwar slipped out one crisp afternoon and touched up the Infant's face with yellow paint and almond eyes so that it looked like a popular version of the baby Buddha.

In mid-project, Ruplal threatened to quit. He said that he could not work there because nobody loved him. I assured him that Sahib and I loved him, but he told me, with tears in his eyes, that the cook and bearer did not. When I asked the cook why he didn't love the mali, he exploded. I was afraid that I might have to build the stable myself. But tempers cooled, and Ruplal set a split bamboo roof on four poles. We established our Holy Family there with an oil lantern that shone on the lake at night. We had the creche each year thereafter.

The Dunhams had open house every Christmas Day for all the Bengalis in Dan's department at the college. Their house was gloriously adorned, with a real tree in the parlor and a handsome buffet luncheon in the courtyard. I wondered how they managed the sensitivities involved in mixing guests of different stations in life; but Dan said that they segregated themselves into homogeneous social groups which ignored each other and no one seemed to mind.

"But the sweepers! The Hindu sweepers always come at 9:00 in the morning. At first I tried to explain to them each year that open house started at 3:00 in the afternoon. But they looked at everything, and took their presents, and the next year they came back at 9:00. Then I discovered that they knew they mustn't be there when the other guests came, on account of their harijan caste. So now we just put some food out in the morning and let them come."

In Dhanmandi, we always had Stanley and his carollers. Stanley was a Christian Bengali who worked in Maintenance at EPWAPDA, and on Christmas Eve he brought a troop of boys and girls from his village, painted and costumed. Some time after dark, we would hear the shouts and the drums in the garden, and our household would stream out into the keen evening air to watch. They danced in a circle, singing and stomping and clapping, while Stanley played the harmonium. One couple stood very still in the center; the girl was small, and her face painted white. They were Mary and Joseph, and a tall angel with enormous paper wings stood guard behind them. When it was all over, we applauded, and Ralph gave Stanley our donation. Stanley always counted the money at once and announced the sum to his group, to assure everyone that he was not cheating with the funds, which he said were to be spent on an annual party for the participants.

Afterward we gave presents to the servants, and they presented us with malas, the flower garlands which had been made in the afternoon, ginger flowers and bel blossoms and roses. Later we drove across the city, through the still dark streets, to Midnight Mass.

The children opened their Christmas stockings on the morning of December 25th. Anthony had never gotten a very clear concept of Santa Claus; Christopher's faith had been blurred when he was nine, during the course of an Italian Advent and a Christmas celebration aboard a Dutch liner with St. Nicholas and Black Peter. This did not at all dim their greedy enthusiasm, and their assault upon their gifts was an inspiring exhibition of Yankee enterprise.

Presents were not as abundant as for Christmases in America. We had to forbid our families to send anything, because even if the package arrived without being lost, stolen, or shattered, the extravagant customs duties were prohibitive. There were few ordinary toys available. Anthony found his stocking filled yearly with Red Chinese tools--hammers, saws and chisels--which happily satisfied him until he learned to read. Christopher received books and lunghis. (He had adopted the lunghi as his sleeping costume, and it was something of a conversation piece when he went to the States as a boarding student several years later.)

My first birthday there illustrated the smart ingenuity which bloomed when conventional facilities were lacking.

Pat somehow learned, at four in the afternoon, that it was my birthday. At five o'clock I was sitting on the veranda with Ralph waiting for our Bengali tutor when Pat arrived with a station wagon full of two ayahs, Madan, Akbar, and her own and the neighbor's children. They poured onto the veranda singing "Happy Birthday" to the accompaniment of drums. They had brought for me a mason jar full of gimlets, a plastic fly swatter shaped like a sunflower, with a hand-written verse attached: "Gardens are sweet, gardens are true, Dacca has flies and so do you", and a papaya wrapped in purple paper, and a four-color party hat which Regina had manufactured hastily from Christmas streamers. Everybody stopped what they were doing to celebrate the occasion, and I do not know what our tutor made of the spectacle when he arrived. Christopher had already made a trip to the corner shop, and he gave me a bottle of hair oil whose label promised me "lovely silky black hair", and declared that it "arrests boldness" (sic) and "cools brain". I tried it for a couple of days, and while my boldness was not visibly arrested, I did observe the appearance of suspicious soot-colored streaks in my fair hair.

Nomads like us did not have time to wait four hundred years to accept a tradition as settled natives did. One year the Rutherfords celebrated Twelfth Night by inviting a few of us to bring our Christmas greenery and burn it in the Rutherford garden. We drank hot punch by the firelight, ate an excellent

supper, and enjoyed it so thoroughly that we stamped it a tradition at once and compelled them to repeat it every year.

Our consulate sensibly changed the Independence Day picnic to a date in January, as the usual date was always attended by monsoon rains. The American community scarcely stumbled in moving the Fourth of July, resplendent with fireworks, into mid-winter and embracing it as traditional.

Life in Bengal, for the foreigner who became personally involved, was a highly distilled potion. Time was telescoped, awareness heightened, and experience compressed, so that one seemed, in retrospect, to have lived there for a decade when the calendar recorded a year. A servant who had been with you for two years was regarded as an old family retainer. In three years, you had seen so many people come and go, some of them close friends, and so many births, marriages, and deaths, among foreigners and Bengalis, that you felt as if you had lived there for generations. And so Christmas in Bengal became infused, for many of us, with a special nostalgia as real and persistent as that associated with sleigh bells and the smell of fresh pine trees.

Chapter Fifteen

AT THE BORDER

The day after our first Christmas in Dacca, Christopher and I went to Baromari in the Garo Hills with another American woman, Rosemary Taylor, her son, and his friend.

The Garo Hills stretched east-west along the northern edge of East Pakistan. From the Indo-Pakistani border you could look across the hills of Assam, and if the air was clear, you could see the Himalayas rising in jagged snow-brushed blue cones, higher and higher into the distance. The Garo people had the Mongolian features and sepia skins of the hill tribes, and they smiled easily.

The Baromari mission was a mile and a half south of the border. Sister Emmanuel, a French doctor, kept a little hospital there, made up of a tuberculosis ward, a general ward, a delivery room, and a small surgery and dispensary, contained in separate long low buildings.

Two French nurses, Sister Agnes and Sister Pascal, worked with her. A third, Sister Therese, had been in the East for more than fifty years. She was then eighty years old, small and shrunken in her white cotton habit. She had gotten quite vague within the preceding few months, but she refused to leave the mission for a less rural convent, though there was a mission hospital in Mymensingh, the nearest town.

"And anyway," Sister Emmanuel confided, "we have been together so long--who else would know exactly what she wants? And where else could she know exactly where everything is?"

Sister Therese spent her days in the kitchen and garden, where she worked contentedly without the strenuous demands of routine ward duty.

The Garos were traditionally animists, with an ill-defined sprinkling of Hinduism. When Sisters Emmanuel and Therese came to Baromari, the local Garos were head-hunters.

"We come each with one knife, bedroll, and spoon," Sister Emmanuel recalled dreamily. "We have to put up one tent because of the mosquitoes. Then slowly slowly we have make friends with the people." The state of their heads indicated that the native hunters did not chop indiscriminately, though their criteria for prey were unclear.

When we first saw Baromari, a substantial Christian Garo population surrounded it, and there was another Christian group farther south, near the Baptist hospital.

Father Marks, the American priest who had been in Baromari for many years too, had worked with the Garos to improve their farm production. He had taught them how to make bricks with a wooden mold and a home-made oven, and the mission buildings had been constructed from such bricks. Father was from mid-western America, and the practical folkways of his people had come with him to the Garo Hills, where he stolidly applied them.

He had installed the water system at the hospital, and the electric generator.

The Sisters had trained a staff of Garos to assist them at the hospital, and Father had trained several of the men in plant maintenance. One of them, Robert, was a driver and general aide for the hospital. The Sisters depended upon him a great deal, because he was bright, resourceful, and trustworthy.

Baromari was accessible only in the dry months, and our visits had to be scheduled accordingly. That December day, we took the morning train to Mymensingh town.

A man from Mr. Taylor's office, who had been sent with us to the station in Dacca, put us into a railway compartment and went off to buy our tickets. The train departed before he came back, and we wondered uneasily how we were to manage without proper passage. However, at the next station, miles away, an unidentified hand reached in through the window of our crowded compartment and gave us the missing tickets. Before I left Bengal, I came to accept such mysteries as the normal order of things, but at the time we were all rather awed. I never learned how it was accomplished.

From Mymensingh, a car drove us through the villages and bazaars of the flat land, across the rivers by ferry, and up into the hills. The mission stood in a clearing among

rice fields and jungle. In the summer months, they were quite isolated, for the rain obliterated the road.

Our boys were greeted warmly, and turned over to Philip, the mission's young ward. Philip's mother had been the second wife of a Hindu zamindar who put her out of his house when she became pregnant. The Sisters took her in, and when she died, soon after Philip was born, they raised the child. He was sent to board at the Christian boys' school, some miles away. During the holidays he came to stay with the priest at Baromari; the mission was his home. When we were there, he was about thirteen years old, a bright handsome boy. With Philip to guide them, our boys ran along the paths and swam in the river and explored the jungle all day. We saw them at meals and at bedtime.

We stayed in rooms adjoining the dispensary. The nights were calm and cold; we slept deeply under quilts on the high, narrow beds. When we woke in the morning, we heard the sounds of the dispensary, and we could see the Garo nurses, neat and smiling, moving about the compound. The Sisters were already at work, changing bandages, giving medicine and advice. The patients waited in line, squatting in the sunshine outside the door.

"Is <u>terrible</u>," Sister Emmanuel told us, nodding toward a man with sunken eyes and a sick baby in his arms. "He had a

fever, the village medicine man give him something to cure it, and the whole family take the medicine. His wife and two children die, only he and the baby are alive, and they are ill."

Sister Emmanuel came from a village in the Haut Pyrenees. She had dark brilliant eyes and fine strong features. She had been captured twice by the Nazis in France during World War II, and her face still bore the scars of their efforts at persuasion. Her vitality was phenomenal, as it had to be to carry out her formidable schedule.

Each hospital building stood on a hill by itself. The arrangement made hospital rounds an athletic exercise, and a visiting layman once pointed out dourly that it would be easier to install such practicalities as water pipes if the hospital were not scattered over half the Himalaya foothills. But Sister explained to us happily, "Is like a Swiss chalet. The poor patient, it is so nice for him to see the beautiful view." The wards were plain, clean and light. Food was brought and cooked by the patients' relatives.

Sister fought a running battle with the East Pakistani military personnel who were stationed near the border. Baromari was rather remote, and she suspected that the soldiers were not as carefully supervised as they might be elsewhere.

"For example," she told us at the supper table, "we have here one day this mad dog. Everybody is very frightened for the rabies, and this dog was trying to bite the people. So Father shoot the dog.

"In a little while the soldiers come in a big truck. One officer say, 'We hear one shot, who have shoot the gun?' We explain to him, and he say it is illegal to have the gun, they must take Father to jail. I tell them they cannot take Father now, he is saying Mass. They wait. When that is finish, I say if they take Father to jail they will have to take me too. So they wait while I get ready. Then I explain that I am a nun, the rules of my order will not permit me to go anyplace without another Sister. So they have to wait while Sister Agnes gets ready. At last we all get in the big truck and they take us to headquarters. There I talk with one big officer, he is a sensible man and he understand everything. He is very angry with the little officer who have bring us there--(the last I hear of <u>that</u> one, he is shining shoes in Mymensingh.) And the big officer have the soldiers bring us back. So our whole day is wasted with this foolishness."

"The military", as she called them, were not the only threat to peace in the neighborhood. "Still we have the trouble with head-hunters from Assam side," Sister said regretfully. "When a big man dies in their villages they like to put human heads on top of poles around the house so his soul will have someplace to rest. Sometimes they come to our villages and take people away, poor creatures. Not often, but sometimes."

During a later visit to Baromari, Sister introduced us to a convert who had been a head-hunter in his pre-Christian days. He was a merry old man, and at her request, he showed us the long knife he had used in his youth and brandished it proudly. We wanted to buy it, of course. He replied that it was quite old, the blade was nicked and worn; he would get new ones for us the next time somebody went to the bazaar in Assam. (Since partition, it had been illegal for the people to cross the border into Assam. But they continued to trade at the bazaars where their forefathers had traded, regardless of political borders, whenever they could outmaneuver the border guards.) We pleaded that we preferred the used one--its condition was no disadvantage for our purposes. But he was stubborn about it; no doubt it had sentimental associations. We knew, though, that if we didn't get a head-hunting knife that day, we never would. And we never did.

A hungry leopard came occasionally, too, and attacked the cattle, or even the village people. The villagers would come to the mission for help, and Father would go out and shoot the beast. Later, when the foreign priests had been removed from the border areas by the government, Sister dealt with the marauders in her own way. "I take this head of a dead cow and I mix many many sleeping pills with the brains. The tiger or leopard come and eat." She beamed benignly. "He just go to sleep and never wake up."

Before we left East Pakistan, she gave us the hide of one of her victims. When it was tanned and lay on the floor, it bore little resemblance to those tiger skins with glaring glass eyes and fierce teeth. The eyes were closed, and it had a sweet expression, like a tiger drawn tenderly at a Walt Disney studio.

Monkeys were a constant nuisance. They stole the coconuts and bananas, and the vegetables from the garden. If they were pursued, they mocked the hunter from the trees, and at a signal from their own look-out, disappeared into the jungle.

"So you see," Sister concluded, "it's just like the name, it's always the baro mari, the big fight, about something. But really, we could not live away from this place. It gets in the blood."

Afterward we were grateful to have seen Baromari during that Christmas season, because there were changes before we were able to visit the mission again. Within a few weeks after we returned to Dacca, the chronic Hindu-Muslim antagonism exploded through Bengal in violence; and one night late in January the Christian Garos, another terrified minority group, fled across the border into Assam.

Chapter Sixteen

COMMUNAL TERROR

Hindu-Muslim violence broke out in January.

Hints of trouble fell upon us rather unnoticed, like the random drops of rain before a deluge. On Sunday the Pakistan Observer, our English-language daily, reported that Muslims were being physically attacked by Hindus in West Bengal, India. We did not focus too closely on this because such items were common fare in the local papers.

Monday afternoon, some travellers arrived in Dacca who had seen, from the Dum Dum airport, flames over certain sections of Calcutta. Somebody else speculated about the possibility of retaliation against Hindus in East Bengal. (Later, each side accused the other of having started it.)

Our Hindu mali, Ganesh, was in our kitchen early on Tuesday morning, a wool scarf around his head, eyes bright in his dark face, a mug of tea steaming in his hand. He was telling our household servants about the murder of a Hindu in his neighborhood, near Elephant Road. They listened soberly.

Ralph and I discussed this development with the Owenses. We had planned a holiday together in Cox's Bazaar, by the Bay of Bengal. Saileshwar and Akbar were to leave on the Tuesday

evening train for Chittagong; Pat Owens and I were to fly down the next morning with ayahs and children to meet the cooks and proceed to the beach cottage. Tuesday afternoon we talked it over with our servants, and consulted our consulate; everybody agreed that it seemed reasonable to go ahead.

Madan, the Owens' Hindu mali, phoned them early Tuesday evening, stammering with terror. He and his family had been threatened, he said. We could not get much detail, but their fear was strong and real. Pat and Ted went to fetch Madan and his family from their Dacca bari; they installed them in the Owens' garage. We all talked some more. As Ted said, we knew nothing now that we had not known four hours earlier, except that Madan and his people were, rightly or not, badly alarmed. But we decided to postpone Cox's Bazaar.

Wednesday morning, the streets were calm, and the kites circled as usual against a dull gray sky. Hammers rang against brick on the corner lot, wallahs went by with baskets on their heads, and servants in whites cycled past. I took Christopher to school, and on the way back I stopped at the Owens' house. Their Hindus had huddled silently all night in the garage. Madan's chin trembled as he told us stories they had heard of hostilities in various bazaars around the city.

I drove home and found Kripa and Saileshwar at the garden wall, listening intently to the neighbors' mali. I stood with them for a few minutes; more ominous tales.

Our Ganesh had not come to work that morning. "Shall I go and look for him? Does anybody know where he lives?"

Apparently ignoring my questions, they conversed again. Then they abruptly informed me that Saileshwar would go with me, and the next-door mali would come along to guide us to Ganesh's house.

Far down on Elephant Road, we turned into a narrow rutted lane--on which, people told us, "Cars can't go", but the Fiat 500 did. We stopped in the backyard of a local school. Among those who gathered around the car was a boy with Ganesh's face, but younger. Saileshwar talked with him, and he disappeared among a cluster of huts. When he came back, he reported that Ganesh said they were safe where they were; they had a Muslim neighbor who would protect them.

We took the next-door mali home, collected Kripa and Anthony, and went to New Market. As on any morning, Saileshwar vanished into the food market and was gone for ages, leaving us waiting in the car while the beggar children formed a close thicket around us.

When we reached our house again, Ganesh's brother opened our gate. Whatever had changed their minds, Ganesh had moved his family into our compound. Ten women and children were sitting in the cook's tiny room--he had been moved into the garage--and four smiling boys were working in our garden.

On Wednesday afternoon we began to distinguish, against the colorless sky, dark pillars of smoke above Rayer Bazaar, the Hindu pottery village on the other side of Satmasjid Road. We watched helplessly all afternoon while the gray smoke rose and spread and blended into clouds.

The newspapers and Dacca radio assured us that Peace and Amity prevailed throughout East Pakistan. I took Ganesh back to get his family possessions from their huts. He loaded into my car two tiny painted tin trunks, and a cotton gamsa tied to hold the brass cooking pots. He promised to follow later, and I drove home.

When the servants and I stood on the roof in the early dusk, searching the horizon for smoke, we saw other spectators gathering on the rooftops around us.

We were to go with Scott and Dee Rutherford to the Chinese restaurant that evening. We drove a few unlighted blocks to suggest that we put it off till another time, as we had fourteen Hindus on the compound and thought it better to stay home.

Scott asked if they could borrow a few Hindus. "Everybody in Dhanmandi has Hindus hidden on their compounds, and we don't know any," he complained. "We feel awfully Out."

By Thursday the fear had thickened like a sauce, heavily seasoned with rumor. Some of the stories were of doubtful parentage, others obviously well-founded. Reliable witnesses

reported that truckloads of dead, wounded and mutilated had arrived at Dacca Medical Hospital in the night. Foreigners--doctors, nurses, Peace Corps--who had gone there and offered their services, had been suddenly dismissed and told not to return until further notice.

Calcutta Radio was describing the horrors of the massacre in East Pakistan, and expressing its satisfaction that such things were not going on in India. Radio Pakistan reported the carnage in India, and glowed with virtue because such barbarism had been avoided in Pakistan.

People who lived on Satmasjid Road told us about the live cinders that floated onto their roofs during the night from the burning huts of the village behind them. Shrieks and howls had kept their children awake; some of them had nightmares long afterward.

Every morning our servants, intent and grave, gathered to listen to the news broadcasts on the radio. Each of them belonged to a minority group; even those who were not Hindu might easily find themselves caught in the conflagration. In many minds, Buddhists were closely associated with Hindus; our Baruas worried about what was happening to their own people in their distant villages. I urged Kripa to bring her old mother and the children to our house. She looked out of the doorway, doubtful and uneasy. At last she said reluctantly, "I not afraid--only--we are only Christian family that street."

"Then you stay here--why not?"

"Madam, I buy food for my cow few day ago--all dry grass. If they something fire throwing in my place, all my bari burn down. If we there, we can put water, stop fire."

So my husband drove her down the rough, twisted lane to her house in Rayer Bazaar. I intended to go and pick her up with the car the next morning, but while I was feeding Anthony his breakfast, I heard her talking to the other servants in the kitchen, and I joined them.

"Madam," she said earnestly, "the Bengali Muslims not so bad. Men who make trouble are Bihari men."

Barua nodded. "So many Muslim refugees coming from Bihar in India. Many coming partition time when very bad riot over all India. They very rude men, always make big fight."

We were to hear this in more detail, from many sources, ever afterward. The resentment against the non-Bengali seemed deeper and more durable than between religious factions. Among the countless Muslims who had sought refuge in East Bengal during the epic inter-communal slaughter at the time of partition, many had come from Bihar state in India. We often heard the term "Bihari" used loosely to refer to any Muslim refugee. And the Bihari was to figure, years later, in the horrors that surrounded the birth of Bangladesh.

I asked Kripa how the night had gone in her neighborhood.

"Nobody bother us, madam, but my cow food very easy burning, so I make full all water barrel. But not quiet last night--hear much shouting, all night. This morning I pass this masjid on our corner. Men telling how one Bengali Musselman killed last night when he telling Bihari men to stop killing, stop burning. Now Bengali Muslim men talking angry about Bihari. Maybe better for us now."

The Hindu women and children still squatted in the small room behind our garage. Ten of them took incredibly little space.

The weather was cool and clear, with blue skies. The streets of Dhanmandi lay serene, almost lifeless, in the pale gold daylight. We continued on rumor, because there was no other source of information. Newspapers and radio, under government restriction, did not acknowledge the existence of communal "trouble".

Occasionally, as the day declined, we climbed the steps to our flat roof to look over the scene, and stood there staring at a banner of hot orange flame or a curl of fresh smoke. From our house, Rayer Bazaar was the only Hindu village within view. We knew its clusters of mud huts, the kilns, the Kali temple. Christopher had often wandered through there with his bicycle, and we had prowled around, watching the potters and gold craftsmen bent over their work, talking with them, and buying pottery.

After sunset, we drove through the empty streets to exchange reports with friends. We sat together in their bright cool living-room, drinking highballs, and spread our terrors

out to examine them. We were all afraid. The government's flinty refusal to recognize the macabre events or to take action against them put the days and nights ahead in an eerie light.

Details were being filled in now, with concrete reports from dependable observers. Some had been to Demrah, the Hindu weaving village across the river, where we had taken the children a week before. We hadeaten lunch at the foot of an abandoned Hindu mondir. We had talked comfortably with the Muslim family who lived in a nearby hut. We had been delighted by the bright threads and cottons that were spread to dry, like strokes of paint, everywhere--strong pinks and reds and greens and blues and purples, embroidering the flat green countryside. We had told each other that we would come back next week, take some pictures, buy cloth, watch the looms at work. Now we heard that the area was a charred ruin; the inhabitants had been massacred or had run away. At Naranganj, where the jute mills stood, others had seen the river clogged with corpses.

That night Pat moved her resident Hindus from the garage into the house, in case intruders should come over the wall.

"I haven't told the neighbors' servants that we have Hindus on our compound," she confided. "It might worry them."

Ted said drily, "I have an idea that if you went to New Market and asked a few people, 'Which houses in Dhanmandi are concealing Hindus?', you would get a complete inventory."

We went home and tucked the Hindu families into their room. We exhorted our Pathan chawkidor briskly, conducted Kripa to her own door, locked our gates, and warned everybody to stay in the compound. The tumor of fear went on growing in my throat, and I kept watch until midnight as an auxiliary to Akel, which must have given him insomnia.

On Friday morning, the English school declared a holiday, as it always sensibly did in times of crisis. The thin new moon had appeared, and the holy month of Ramadan, the month of penance and fasting for Muslims, had begun. The daily newspapers were full of beauty hints and reports of land reclamation. Aside from its obvious dangers, government control of the press invariably produces the ludicrous.

Foreigners along Satmasjid Road sat numbly on their roofs at night and watched the advance of mobs from Mohammenpur, one of the government-built Muslim refugee colonies, with torches and sharpened sticks and clubs and knives. They watched the torches put to the thatched roofs. Sometimes they saw the dark figures dart out of a house and run to disappear in the shadows, and the dim predatory shapes following them. In the morning, the victors could be seen marching in file out of the area, leading stolen cows and carrying large bundles of booty on their heads.

"It would be better if they kill quick," a Hindu said grimly, "than to half-kill--grab women, steal cow, burn house, leave man half-alive."

Jane and Pat came to have lunch with me. Jane was determinedly composed, voting against hysteria. Pat was too agitated to eat. My stomach revolved uncertainly. I had begun to wonder what, in actual fact, we would be able to do for our Hindu guests if somebody came for them.

That afternoon we told the servants to bring the women and children to our veranda to give them some relief from their confinement. I shivered when I saw them move across the compound, small pretty girls in colored saris and children like miniatures. They were scattered, playing, on the back veranda when Ralph barked, "Get the Hindus out of sight." An Army truck had stopped in front of the house, collecting Hindus to take them to a government refugee camp. It was confusing and frightening; there had been no previous sign of government protection, and we didn't know what this new gesture meant. The Hindu servants from the compound next door went away in the truck. Ganesh refused. His people wanted to stay where they were. He did not trust the Army.

Unable to sit still, I went across the street to talk to Sheroo Rusby. I wanted advice and moral support.

"What can we do? I haven't had much experience in this kind of thing. What happens?"

She looked at me steadily. "We wait and see. That's all we can do. I have an Indian passport and my compound is full of Hindus. All we can do is keep them out of sight and do the best we can."

So there we were. I crossed the street to our compound and discovered that nobody had unlocked the bedroom door to let the Hindus out. They didn't seem to have noticed, though. They were still playing solemnly with the little cars and crayons and paper that Anthony had provided.

At the Sisters' orphanage in Tejgaon Industrial Area, the Sisters told me that everything had been quiet during the night. "But so many people were killed in the village behind us," one of them added. "One Christian woman was coming to work here this morning; she came through the bazaar, and the goondas tried to choke her. They said she was Hindu. She talked them out of it, but she was so scared; when she got here her eyes were sticking out. Over that wall behind us is a Bihari village."

Trains were stopped by a pull of the emergency chain, and promptly boarded by armed goondas. A Christian boy, one who often came to our house, stammered out a description of the stabbing to death of every Hindu in his train compartment. He had been spared because a Muslim boy beside him convinced the assassins that he was not a Hindu. He often jerked awake at night, damp with terror at the memory of the scene.

A Buddhist cook who lived in Rayer Bazaar had been rescued by the Muslim bearer of the household in which he served. The Muslim boy pushed through the mob, stomped into the cook's house, insisted that the Buddhist was his "auntie", and took him and his family to safe quarters in the American sahib's compound.

We heard, too, of a Muslim woman of an upper-class Dhanmandi family, living quietly in purdah, who caught sight of a Hindu woman running past her house pursued by a pack of goondas. The Muslim memsahib snatched the poor creature from the street and sent her into the house. Then she took out a shotgun and held off the ungly bunch pressing against the gates.

"There is a curious thing," a Holy Family doctor told me. "We're standing by with an ambulance to go wherever we hear there has been an attack and try to help the wounded. But by the time we get there, within minutes, the bodies have disappeared. We know there have been killings, we treat the survivors, but somehow the dead have been gotten out of sight."

An American who always took his dogs out early to walk had found, at five o'clock in the morning, two dead bodies on the bridge near his house. But when the school bus came to pick up his children a couple of hours later, the corpses had disappeared.

One family in our neighborhood told us that they wouldn't harbor Hindus on their compound because their Muslim servants were afraid it would invite trouble; and Dee said that their

bearer got such a nasty gleam in his eye when Hindus were mentioned that she suspected him of joining the warpath squad in his off-duty hours. A few scattered situations like this enriched the climate of mistrust.

"But," Pat said wonderingly, "you know all those workmen who are pounding and hammering in the lot across our street? I've been keeping an eye on them--I think they're Biharis. But today Akbar told me that they have Hindus hidden among the brick piles over there." She sighed. "Presumably for protection and not dissection."

We went back to the orphanage on Friday. The Sisters were poised but tense. Goondas in the village behind them had threatened to attack the orphanage. I offered to send our Pathan chawkidor to guard their compound at night, but they felt that his presence would be a conspicuous provocation. The Sisters were acutely aware of the hostility toward West Pakistanis. They posted their own Christian Bengali malis on the walls with clubs and spades, and instructed the children and girls to lock the doors and keep quiet. And they waited.

Friday evening Pat stopped by to see us. I wanted to go to her house and use their telephone. As she and I came out of our front door, Akel Khan, our night guard, emerged from the garage. He was so swaddled in wraps that we could see only the half-closed eyes under the shaggy brows and a

luminous pink nose. His head drooped gently to one side, and every line of his face, as he unveiled it, swept downward in a sketch of pain and mortality.

My God," said Pat, "what's the matter with Akel?"

"Don't ask." I tried to make a break for the car but she grabbed my arm.

"Oh Patricia, he's sick," she said, "and nothing was ever sicker than a sick Pathan."

"I know. He has a cold, I've been through it before, but I simply can't rock him to sleep tonight. Unless I use real rocks."

He bore down upon us purposefully, and I gave up. Pat made concerned noises over him while I went back to tell the cook to give Akel some aspirin and strong sweet tea. Then I dragged her off to make my phone call.

When I came back two hours later, our compound was unguarded. "Where's Khan?"

"He in bed. He sick."

Saileshwar watched mildly for a few seconds while I bounced about like a hailstone and uttered cries of rage and annihilation. Then he said, "Ganesh say he watch."

"That's what we need," I gasped. "The town full of bloodthirsty bandits, our compound full of prey, and a Hindu mali marching around to advertise it."

Saileshwar smiled and shrugged. "Ganesh say if you want, he watch."

"Well I don't want. Go dig that unspeakable Pathan out of bed and tell him to get out there and guard."

Saileshwar retreated with dignity to the garage, and was back in ten minutes to tell me that he would watch until midnight while Khan got a little rest. I agreed, having no choice, and stayed to help him watch. We took turns circling the house and running up to the roof. But I warned that the next day Akel was to stay home in the garage and sleep instead of tearing around on wild caucuses; otherwise we would have a private lynching party.

We trusted Akel as far as the Hindus were concerned, though. Some other Pathan guards around town were regarded dubiously. At that time, too, a katcha tea shop had been put up on a vacant lot near us, and its proprietor reportedly joined the hunting set after his tea stall closed in the evening.

That night the temperature dropped sharply. The compound of the thana, the police station behind the orphanage, had been filled with Hindu refugees, and the women and children began to cry because they were cold. The malis who guarded the orphanage made frequent reports to Sister Superior during the night.

"Oh, Sister, there are Muslim looters walking past the thana carrying the Hindus' stolen stuff on their heads!"

"We just chased a man away, he was trying to get over our wall!"

"Oh Sister, they're taking all the Hindus out of there to let the Muslims kill them!"

They were mistaken about the last one. The Hindus were being moved to the industrial school building for shelter from the cold. A young Muslim journalist came to the college in the middle of the night and asked the Sisters if they could take in about five hundred refugees. His own newspaper was not allowed to report anything about the situation, but he was working long hours to aid the victims.

When Pat and I drove into the Holy Cross College compound the next morning, the whole place was churning with activity. Along one wall, the refugees were busy; each family was digging a hole in which they could burn wood for cooking. Bundles of their clothing and pots and pans lined the veranda. The Sisters had organized the new tenants to clean the compound and verandas, and the floors were being swabbed with disinfectant. One purpose was to keep the refugees occupied, and the other was to prevent epidemics. The SEATO Cholera Hospital was already congested with patients from government refugee camps.

By now the Governor had returned from West Pakistan and he assured the public that the minority groups were quite safe and could depend upon the government for protection. Military

personnel were posted around the city, and curfews were imposed. The Governor stated that Pakistani officials were very happy that the Muslims of East Pakistan had shown true brotherhood and great restraint despite severe provocation from West Bengal.

It was, in truth, a time of terrible anxiety for the many Muslims in East Pakistan who had relatives across the border. They read and heard daily about murderous attacks in Calcutta and towns and villages in the area; and under the circumstances, they could not find out what was happening to their own people.

Since it was not publicly admitted that Hindus were being persecuted, the existence of the refugees on the campus was not advertised. Money and clothing and rice were donated privately, and a few days later the government began to send in rice rations. I went with another American nurse, Maxine Burns, to pass out medications every morning. We set up a table in the sunny courtyard and put out bottles and syringes and pills which the hospital Sisters had sent. Our patients came, shy and sometimes smiling, and told us of coughs and hight fevers and diarrheas, and we gave them aspirin and sulfa and cough syrup and soda mints. We had only one injury to treat--a head wound on a baby whose grandmother had been stabbed to death while she was holding the infant. The baby's father was the dhobi who had always done the Sisters' laundry; he had been killed in that raid too. His wife sat on the veranda with

her sari drawn over her face and wept. She was never sane afterward.

Krishna, a handsome little boy of about twelve, followed us around the camp, interested and curious. His parents had sent him away from his village with neighbors and had promised to follow. They never came, and we heard that another family, remote relatives, eventually took him in. Jane Greenough ran errands around the city in her car. She took one child to the hospital daily for rabies shots (she called him Dog Bite); and drove a dhobi to his house to get his tub so he could start working, and then a mistri to find tools, and so on.

During that week one baby was born among the group, and the mother was hurried to the hospital in the night. Another baby died, apparently from asphyxiation as its mother tried to keep it warm while she slept.

At another mission compound in the Old City, they had seventy or so among their refugees who had been wounded. One morning Maxine and I went with a Sister doctor, in an ambulance, to check injuries and change dressings. The streets had been still and vacant for some time except for military patrols, but now the curfew had been lifted for a few hours so that people could get out to shop for food. The rubble had been cleared and the burned-out shops had been covered by cloth or boards.

In the big compound, refugees wandered everywhere, like a crowd at a county fair. A Brother took us into a large dim

room where the patients crouched or lay against the walls on all sides. We set up a table and spread out our instruments and supplies, and they began to come forward.

This lot had been hit harder than most of those at the college; maybe they had had less warning. Their faces were blank with shock, the eyes dull. When we smiled there was no response, only a dark frightened stare. For the most part we had to deal with head wounds, rough gashes, sticky with blood and tincture of benzoine from first-aid treatment the week before. We found a couple of untreated broken hands and one with half a finger missing; probably the victims had reached up to protect their heads. For two or three hours we cleaned and swabbed and poured sulfa powder, took out stitches, clipped and tied, aided by a dazed Hindu doctor who had lost his family within the past week. We marvelled that the skulls had not been shattered. The old people and the children looked so frail.

We had packed up to leave when a young man in a neat European suit and spectacles stopped me. "Please excuse me, Sister"--my bulky surgery gown looked like a habit--"but my wife entered your hospital on Thursday of last week to give birth, and I would be most grateful if you could tell me if there has been issue, and if it is a boy or a girl."

This request shot a beam of warmth into the grisly afternoon. He fumbled for a piece of paper to write the name and

ward number of his wife. I told him that I would certainly check at the hospital and have them notify him.

"A thousand thanks, Sister," he said gently. "In the books of God your name will be written in gold that you have come to help us." Moisture glistened behind the spectacles and his strenuous English became a little incoherent. He stood very straight and controlled himself firmly. "We have lived forever here, my father and my grandfather. Now it is no longer our country. We have been refused and we have been attacked; and the government does not protect us." His voice trembled, and we said goodbye and God bless, and he walked away quickly. Later we were able to send word to him that he had a son, and mother and child were well.

The front page of the morning paper said "Citizens Exasperated." The text suggested that the mischievous elements had gone a bit too far with their pranks for the peace-loving people of East Pakistan. These "miscreants" were disturbing "persons of all communities." Letters to the Editor, mooting weighty questinns of the day, questioned the propriety of Bengali Muslim women wearing the West Pakistani shalwar-camise, and complained that foreigners who smoked in public during Ramazan were causing anguish for fasting Muslims.

Once I took Saileshwar with me to the college compound, and he wandered around talking with the families camped there. Afterwards he said, "Now they all want to go to India, stay there. They never feel safe here again--how can?"

Madan's family sat on mutely at the Owens' house. Our Hindus were rather livelier, and at night there was a great cacophony of clanging brass pots, babies crying, rapid Bengali-Hindi conversation, and occasionally a burst of laughter. One mid-morning Akel came growling and scowling out of the garage like an irritated bear cub, yards of grubby gamsa wrapped about his head, and shrouded in a cotton blanket. From a spate of Pushtu, Urdu, and one air-chopping hand, we gleaned that he couldn't get any sleep because our house guests made such a racket. I murmured something about troubled times and escaped into the house.

Slowly things seemed to quiet down, while patrols and curfews continued in "troubled areas."

"But," a Bengali friend observed, "you will notice that the government didn't step in at the beginning. Only when they thought that the action might shift from killing Hindus to a fight between Bengali Muslims and non-Bengali Muslims. Then they really got worried."

Frantic Muslim families kept on trying to find out whether their West Bengali relatives had survived the communal ferocity in Hindu India.

Chapter Seventeen

AFTERMATH

Kripa stayed at our house for a week. Her house was in a very strict curfew area, and it was difficult for her to get in and out. Ganesh's brothers grew restless in their confinement, but they were kept within the compound until stability seemed assured. To give them a break from the monotony, Ralph called all the boys and men into the living room one evening. We brought out the drums and bells, and taped their music, singing and playing for an hour or two. Some of the small children came in, and fell asleep during the program. The Hindu women gathered outside the window to peek at the spectacle, but would come no closer.

Cold weather was a problem that week too; I wanted to put a charcoal burner in their room, but Saileshwar rightly insisted that it would be dangerous. So we hunted around for tablecloths, towels, sweaters, anything to wrap around them at night. Ganesh's brother wore a bright enormous beach towel as a shawl all the time. It was very becoming.

"How do they keep warm when they're in their own house?" I asked Saileshwar.

"Not keep very warm. What to do?" He reflected a moment. "Madam, that rice we bring, that finish now." (When the extra

people had moved into our compound, we had stocked the household with maunds of rice.)

"Well, buy some more."

"Ganesh say, you taking money from his salary for that rice?"

"No. Why?"

"Because if you take from him that money, he say not buy any more rice."

"Not buy more?" I was puzzled. "What do they do at home? They have to eat."

He smiled at my ignorance.

"Madam, only Ganesh have job in his family, and I think one uncle has job, he make forty rupees a month. They not always eat every day."

One day the refugees in the Holy Cross College compound left, encouraged by the government and military authorities, and went back to their villages. That same day, a tiny old Hindu man came to our compound to fetch his daughter-in-law and his two grandchildren and take them home to Naranganj. The three had come to Dacca for a puja, and were stranded when the riots began. They said goodbye and many thanks and blessings. The old man held his palms together at his forehead, and bowed deeply to touch my feet in a traditional gesture. Then they set off down the street, carrying small bundles of clothing.

Outside the Indian High Commission, the road was lined with Hindus, squatting flank to flank, waiting for permits to go to India. Sometimes they brought food and stayed all day, waiting. Ganesh had gotten his application papers. I told him that the newspaper said there was no reason for Hindus to leave Pakistan; the government would protect them. He smiled and said, "Sometimes."

For a long time we were piecing fragments together, trying to get a picture of what had happened. Apparently the East Bengal riots had started in the cotton or jute mills. The real killers had turned on the Hindus and murdered in quantity. The Hindus ran, some north to the Christian missions and some to the West. Some were caught and killed; others ran for miles to safety. Some were taken in and protected by Muslims; others were turned away, of course, as taking them in was a risky business. More than two thousand arrived at the mission compound at Nagori. Whatever they had tried to bring with them was stolen as they fled, often the clothes they were wearing. One woman died of heart failure a few minutes after she reached the Nagori compound.

They had to be fed and clothed. The weather was brisk. There had been no fighting in the immediate area, where the population was mostly Hindu and Christian. Brother Robert and Hugh Murphy shuttled back and forth between Nagori and Dacca, buying <u>lunghis</u> and saris and rice.

When the killers were turned back eventually along the way by police firing, they retraced their route, looting and burning. Local goondas joined them in each area. When Brother Robert went through the Hindu villages later with a view to resettling his refugees, he found that they had nothing to return to except bare ground. Their houses had been burned and their crops stolen or destroyed. Their cows and clothing and tools were gone. Dead bodies had been thrown into the river, or hastily buried.

We heard that in Mymensingh the revelry had been promptly checked by authorities who told the police that there would be promotions if no belligerent incidents occurred, and demotions all round if they did. A man from Chittagong told us that an official in their district had forestalled trouble by rounding up known goondas and confiscating their weapons at the first warning rumor.

In other areas the police were said to have looked on passively because they had no orders; or they were afraid to interfere with the mobs. Similar reports came from Calcutta.

"Some of these Hindus showed a lot of courage," one of the Sisters said later. "They stood up and fought back. Some of our Christians helped 'em, too. I was actually kind of surprised."

One day Ganesh told me that they would like to go home. He looked worn and strained, but the eyes sparkled and he smiled.

As we were bidding them farewell, Ralph's Bihari barber cycled into the yard. He looked at the Hindus with distaste. I explained their presence.

"Nobody would bother them," he said contemptuously. "They are very low-caste Hindus." I tried to keep in mind that he might have some very ugly memories from the communal holocaust at the time of partition; but I was never really able to regard him without prejudice after that.

Things seemed as peaceful as they were likely to be, and Dacca was still well-furnished with military. Ganesh tucked the painted trunk and the brass pots into our car; a baby taxi was summoned to take the surplus people, and they left.

Bulletins continued to dribble in. Late in January we were startled to read a denouncement of the "false and malicious canard that the Garo Christians were leaving Pakistan." A few days later the papers announced triumphantly that the Garos who had gone to India were coming back. This was followed by a daily indictment of the Indian government because it would not allow the Garo Christians to return to Pakistan after having lured them across the border.

At this time one American woman immortalized herself by remarking, at a party, that she kept hearing that the Garos were leaving, but she hadn't met them and didn't know "whether they were with the diplomatic or a private firm."

Some of the Garos who did return said that, in fact, the Indian refugee camp had tried to prevent their return, presumably because their exodus from Pakistan was useful for propaganda. We learned later, too, that they had been prompted to run away from home in the first place by threats from soldiers at the nearby East Pakistani military camp.

Mr. Z. A. Bhutto, then the Pakistan Foreign Minister, set out for the United Nations to protest against Indian brutality to Muslims. An American news magazine confidently reported that there had been some communal trouble in Dacca, and that by the previous weekend, fifty Hindus had been killed. We wondered, not for the first time in Bengal, where the fourth estate of our own democratic society kept itself to collect such remarkable statistics; though a later issue did concede that the count was considerably higher. The local press continued to print stories quite unrelated to reality, and on January 28, a Bengali publisher took his case to the High Court to challenge the government's right to censor and suppress news.

The Pakistan government did not want publicity about the persecution of Hindus in East Bengal, but they were even more anxious to muffle any suggestion that Christians or Buddhists might be in danger. After all, Hindus were mostly to be found in India and Indian colonies, and they were unfriendly anyway; but it might embarrass foreign relations if Christian or Buddhist

countries thought that Pakistanis of their own sects were suffering. Hindu priests were reported by the Dacca press to be happy and comfortable in Chittagong. ("Why?" our cook asked when he read it.) A Buddhist priest announced on Radio Dacca that his people were happy and secure among their Muslim neighbors. A Christian clergyman was quoted in print as saying that there was absolutely no trouble between Muslims and minority groups in East Pakistan. He told us afterwards, "I think I did say that. But I said it two years ago."

On January 16, Father Richard Novak, a young priest from Notre Dame College, had gone to Naranganj to look for the family of a Hindu nurse at Holy Family Hospital. He never returned. A few weeks later his bicycle and watch were found in the house of a Naranganj goonda, and the government accused five men. It was generally believed that the murder had no particular religious basis. Avarice as well as personal grudges are often satisfied during the reign of mob violence, and the bicycle and watch must have seemed sufficient reason for a young man's murder.

Meanwhile, Muslim refugees were pouring in from India. As we began to move around the city again, we saw women with bleak eyes squatting on the sidewalk outside the markets, with small children lying listlessly in their laps or sleeping beside them. Sometimes they had a cotton blanket or a cooking

pot; they ate and slept there. They came into the border areas from West Bengal and Assam, and stayed wherever they could find a space.

A Bengali friend said grimly, "And now you see the seeds being sown for the next riots. East Pakistan has much less land and so many more people than the West Wing. If the government gives these refugees homes and jobs, when Bengalis don't have enough for themselves, how can we live? Or if the government doesn't take care of the refugees, they have to steal or join the beggar population. This means more people hungry here, more people angry.... Why don't they take them to West Pakistan?"

The Pakistan government tried to discourage the minority groups from leaving the country, as it could stimulate a larger tide of Indian Muslims to flood into Pakistan. Since there were many more Muslim Indians than there were Hindu Pakistanis, such an exchange would impose a heavy burden on the dense population of Pakistan.

Therefore, new regulations restricted the right of any member of a minority group to buy or sell land. Departing refugees were forbidden to take gold or jewels with them. Most Bengalis kept their savings, if any, in land or gold. Pieces of old family jewellery, brass and icons began to show up in the shops of the Old City. Those who left were carefully searched. Some of them bribed border guards and walked across the border illegally. Most of them, however, had no means of buying land or living when they reached India.

So, after some time, many who were unable to find jobs there had to return to East Pakistan. The riots were over for the moment; their natural legacy of despair and hatred festered on. Madan was shepherded to Calcutta with his family, and he found a job with friends of ours. They found him a different boy from the cheerful mali-helper who had been prized by the Owenses. They said he brooded and cried a lot. He drifted back from India, and he had indeed changed. Once a model employee, he began to wander ineffectually from job to job.

Ganesh too declined. He didn't go to India, but he came to work more infrequently, often rather drunk, and finally quit coming altogether. Our next mali introduced himself as Faizuddin and wore a beard. Only when a nosy passerby recognized him--"Don't I know you from Rayer Bazaar?"--within Saileshwar's hearing did he confess sheepishly that he was a Hindu passing as Muslim. After his cover was blown, he shaved off the beard and answered to his real name, Ruplal.

These were all poor people of humble caste, whose lives were precarious at best, and the cruel trauma of that year had left them badly unstrung. They had no reason, either, to believe that it would not happen again. The next similar attack we heard of came by official order, when Yahya Khan's invading army in 1971 labelled the Hindus of East Pakistan as "Indian agents" and suitable for extinction.

Materials collected by Mary Frances Dunham
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